

Lessons on Financial Management and Biblical Stewardship: One Consultant's Overview on Two Popular Studies

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A colleague, friend and excellent generosity strategist recently shared his thoughts with me on constructing a teaching and discipling focus on biblical stewardship and financial management for your church. While there are many excellent and effective studies, his thoughts center around two popular ministries – Crown Financial Ministries and Dave Ramsey's Financial Peace University. I pray this gives you food for thought in continuing to offer stewardship education for your people.

Additionally, I'd love to hear what you have found to be effective in teaching your people what the Bible says about living a life of generosity. Tell me your stories!

Crown Financial Ministries (www.crown.org) *Managing Our Finances God's Way* is a 7-week course, video led. Workbooks are \$17 (materials for the array of studies from Crown range in cost from a \$2.50 adult student handout to \$55 for one of the couples' studies). The content for the *Managing Our Finances* study includes contributions from Rick Warren, Chip Ingram, Ron Blue, Howard Dayton and Chuck Bentley -- strong leaders and teachers. It will approach the topic from a stronger biblical perspective, more so than FPU. (Remember, FPU was originally designed to be taught in secular settings.)

- Crown offers numerous courses of varying length. An excellent comparison chart of all Crown study offerings can be found here:
<http://www.crown.org/ForChurch/ChurchManualPDFs/TSolutionsChart-200708.pdf>.
- If the church wants to consider Crown, there should be a local Crown coordinator they could contact for support.
- Encourage people to explore the availability for 1:1 personal counseling for those participants who desire help to get their budget in line.

Dave Ramsey's Financial Peace University (www.daveramsey.com/fpu) FPU is a 13-week course, video led all by Dave Ramsey. Each participant needs a kit costing \$95. It is well done with more of a logical/management focus. Ramsey teaches in one of the early lessons how to budget and puts 10 percent to the church on line one of the budget, with additional Biblical perspective coming in lesson 13.

- Due to the 13-week length of the course, you may see a decline in attendance by the time you get to lesson 13, and therefore miss the biblical component.
- Consider changing the lesson order (some churches have done this with success). Put lesson 13 after lesson 6 (there are six lessons related to what Dave Ramsey calls Baby Steps). People will usually hang in there through lesson 6; however, after lesson 6, Ramsey begins to explore retirement, investing, life insurance, etc. and people start to opt out because they got what they were looking for in the first six lessons regarding how to get out of debt. Moving lesson 13 up might help the church get those folks in the stewardship study before they depart.

A Plan to Consider: For the church who really wants to do this well, offer two studies per year – FPU in one season, then Crown or similar study in another season.

Why? The Crown studies are excellent at the heart issues of giving. But they are light on the "get your financial house in order" stuff. FPU is excellent at the "get your financial house in order" content, but light on the heart issues of giving.

So if the church offers Crown, you generate interest in being a stronger giver, but then have participants frustrated because they have little to no margin in their budget to start giving. FPU motivates you to get out of debt and create margin, but doesn't do enough to teach Biblical stewardship and how to use that margin to be a more generous giver.

Is a 13-week course a tough sell for you? FPU has also been used by some churches as a 7-week course. They do the lessons as mentioned above. Then at the conclusion of the seventh week they talk about the other 6 lessons and ask how many want to continue, and a higher percentage have been attending through to the end. They've found the 13-week commitment to be a tough sell and this approach has garnered larger classes.