**Marriage Essentials**

**The Top 9½ Marriage Busters**

How to avoid them and build a lasting, fruitful marriage

**Buster No. 7: Dollar Drama**

**Part 3 –Seven tendencies that affect how you manage money as a couple**

Paul and Teri Reisser – February 25, 2024

**Some basic principles:**

1. God owns it all.
2. The Bible has a lot to say about money – an estimated 2,000 verses deal in one way or another with finances.

**Some specific observations about money and marriage:**

1. Money involves, touches, and pulls on just about *every* area of life and marriage. It is thus very important (but sadly uncommon) for husbands and wives to understand their own -- and their spouse’s -- emotions and attitudes about money. Doing so promotes “knowing and being known,” which in turn leads to compassion for the other person’s concerns and (inevitable) mistakes in this area. Your concepts about money originate from:
   1. Your family of origin – what was normal in terms of resources and attitudes
   2. Your self-concept – sense of competence, safety, value
   3. Your values – what your spirituality/morality dictates
2. Husbands and wives will **always** have differences of opinions, attitude, and understanding about how their money should be made and spent, just as they will have differences of opinion about work, raising children, other family members, etc. However, these *differences* can complement each other, and if handled correctly can help both of you grow in this area.

**Some common tendencies, themes and variations in these differences:**

* Common differences between men and women regarding money:
  + Men – money is often a way of “keeping score.” (“Am I a success?”)
  + Women – money is often tied to their sense of security.
* In ***The Five Money Personalities****,* Taylor and Megan Kovar describe the following distinct ways of thinking about and dealing with money. (We reviewed these in detail last time – see our handout from February 11, 2023.) They are:
* **Savers**
* **Security seekers**
* **Spenders**
* **Risk takers**
* **Flyers**
* In her book ***Know Yourself, Know Your Money*** (Ramsey Press, 2020), Rachel Cruze (daughter of Dave Ramsey) describes **seven** ***money tendencies*** that she has observed in conversations with thousands of people over the past decade. We have adapted the following material from her book, with a few additions and comments of our own.

Before we list them, a few notes:

* + Each of these tendencies represents a spectrum of attitude and behavior toward handling money – or to use another phrase, “how we are wired.”
  + None of these are “good” or “bad” as such, though extremes of any tendency can lead to conflict or even chaos.
  + Also, none of these are “either” / “or” categories. We may lean one way in one situation and the other way in a different situation. We may also shift on a particular spectrum with the passage of time.
  + These tendencies may arise from genetics, our unique personalities, experiences early or later in life, our commitments (or lack thereof) to God and others, and so on.
  + We will point out some overlays and overlaps between the five money personalities described by Taylor and Megan Kovar in their book (*The Five Money Personalities,* which we reviewed in our last session) and the seven money tendencies outlined by Rachel Cruze in hers.
  + ***What’s the point of looking at this?***  Understanding our own money tendencies, and that of our spouse, can improve communication and cooperation in managing finances and making progress toward goals in this important arena.
  + Bottom line: ***Study your partner*!** Be curious. Never assume you know everything about him or her. And don’t assume that what you think you understand now will never change. *It will!* (In 2009, Paul and Teri wrote an entire book about this: *Your Spouse Isn’t the Person You Married.*)

1. **Saver or spender**

We already reviewed spenders and savers as two of the Kovars’ five money personalities, though Cruze’s description of the saver tendency sounds more like the Kovars’ security seeker personality: One who wants a goodly supply of money stored away for emergencies, rainy days and retirement. Cruze’s spender tendency is similar to the Kovars’ spender money personality. However, the saver and spender money personalities also lean more toward Cruze’s description of the Nerd vs. Free Spirit tendencies (see below). Confusing? Sorry about that! This will become clearer if you review the notes from our Marriage Essentials session on February 11.

1. **Nerd or free spirit**

Dave Ramsey famously introduced the nerd vs. free spirit concept years ago, describing the nerd as the person who is better at keeping track of money, loves multi-level spreadsheets, is more likely to develop a budget (i.e., give every dollar a name and an assignment) and is intent on sticking to it.  The free spirit resists getting bogged down in the details and perceived limitations of a budget.  Usually, but not always, a nerd is more of a saver and a free spirit is more of a spender. (The free spirit in many ways resembles the Kovars’ flyer personality type.) And often, but not always, nerds are attracted to and marry free spirits, and vice versa.

You also might be a nerd if:

* You read the instruction manual before using any new product.
* Punctuality is very important to you. (You may be prone to abandoning the Fruits of the Spirit if family members are causing you to be late for church.)
* You fold your socks and underwear neatly in your drawer.
* You read the introduction and acknowledgements in a book before you read Chapter 1.
* Your tax returns are prepared and submitted well before April 15.

Positive aspects of nerdism:

* You are likely to be proactive with budgets and intentional about deciding where your money goes.
* You are likely to make progress with your financial goals more quickly, because you create a plan and want to stick to it.
* You are focused, and on top of money details and decisions.
* You and your family are less likely to experience the stresses of financial mistakes and avoidable “emergencies.” (“Who knew? Kids grow out of their clothes! Tires wear out! Christmas comes in December! These are emergencies!”)

Potentially negative aspects of nerdism:

* You can become legalistic, living and dying by the rules of the budget.
* You can wear out yourself and your family, and become a joy-killer, in your determination to adhere to these rules.
* You can lack grace – for your spouse, your kids, or yourself – when money mistakes are made.
* In other words, you can become an uptight royal pain.

You might be a free spirit if:

* Instruction manuals for new products go in the trash with the packaging. (“I can always find something on YouTube that shows how this works!”)
* You’re fine with “fashionably late.”
* You skip all that stuff at the beginning of a book.
* Tax day is when?
* The word “budget” (like its sibling word “diet”) carries all of the appeal of a jail sentence: confining, restrictive, joy-killing.

Positive aspects of free spirits:

* You know how to enjoy life, and if married to a nerd can help your spouse avoid a life of utter boredom.
* You are prone to live in the moment, to be “fully present,”rather than constantly thinking about “what I need to do next.”
* You’re less likely to stress over money or life in general. “It will all work out.”
* You can help a nerd spouse keep the big picture in mind: “Why are we doing the budget? What will it do for us?”

Potentially negative aspects of being a free spirit:

* You can be disorganized or even careless about financial details, bills, due-dates and deadlines, which can cost thousands of dollars if missed.
* You can overlook tasks such as obtaining life or other forms of insurance that defend you against major losses.
* You tend to avoid what can feel like the unsettling task of writing a will or establishing a family trust for the benefit of loved ones when you pass. (It happens to everyone…)
* You may wake up years or decades from now and wonder “Where did all of my money go??”

Note: The nerd or free spirit tendencies can vary in different areas of life. For example, Paul trends toward being a free spirit (or flyer) in finances, but he is a nerd when planning travel or even an afternoon outing.

**Table Discussion:** (You knew this was coming)

1. Introduce yourselves. (How long married, kids, dogs, relevant info)
2. Looking at the saver/spender and the nerd/free spirit tendencies, where do feel you land on each of these?
3. How similar or different are you and your spouse on each of these tendencies?
4. How have your similarities or differences in these two areas affected your handling of money, and your marriage in general?
5. **Experiences or Things**

Would you rather spend money – especially whatever is in your “fun” or “gifts” budget category – on travel, a concert, a night at the movies, a spa day, or a meal at a nice restaurant? Or would you rather spend it on clothes, new shoes, furnishings / decorations for your home, or shiny things at the Apple Store or Best Buy? Notes on this one:

* Like the others, there is no “right” or “wrong” tendency here.
* It is not unusual for this tendency to shift over the course of your life and marriage. Teri and I are trying to get rid of stuff after nearly 49 years of marriage – one of her love languages is a dumpster – and so nearly all of our gifts to one another are experiences.
* It is *really* helpful and wise to have ongoing communication with each other about where you are on this spectrum, for the sake of your financial planning, gift-giving and general enjoyment of life.
* It is *really really* important not to tease, nag or otherwise harass your spouse about his or her preferences here. Listen, learn, make appropriate compromises where necessary and appreciate your differences in this area.

1. **Quality or Quantity**

Would you rather pay more for one high-quality item (“It’s better made and will last longer”) or buy several less expensive lower-quality items (“I like the variety!”)?

Variation: Costco vs. Vons. Would you rather buy a large quantity of a product you anticipate using and thus have a stash in reserve, or spend less for a smaller amount but have to return more often to the store to buy it?

Positive aspects of the quality tendency:

* You are more likely to do your research and plan your purchases, and less likely to buy on impulse.
* What you buy is more likely to last.
* You’re more likely to take better care of your purchases.

Potentially negative aspects of the quality tendency:

* Where does the quest for quality end and the desire for name-brand / high-end status begin? Are you trying to impress others with the labels on your stuff – and paying dearly for those labels -- rather than being content with excellent performance from a lesser-known, and less expensive, brand?
* You may be at risk for adopting the “Gaston” mindset – “I deserve the best!” – and the pride that can accompany it.

Positive aspects of quantity tendency:

* You are likely to be a great bargain shopper.
* You enjoy the possibilities and creativity that can come with having a lot of options.
* If you are wise in buying consumables in quantity, you can save money in the long run.

Potentially negative aspects of the quantity tendency:

* You may be pursuing a high or buzz that comes from making a purchase, rather than buying what you or your family really need or use.
* Your home may be become cluttered with all of the stuff you have ordered or brought home.
* Every trip to Costco can become an episode of the “$700 Club” because of impulse purchases that seem at first glance like great deals.
* You may buy larger quantities of consumables (especially food) that are never used or have to be thrown away.

**Table Discussion No. 2:**

1. Looking at the experiences/things and the quality/quantity tendencies, where do feel you land on each of these?
2. How similar or different are you and your spouse on each of these tendencies?
3. How have your similarities or differences in these two areas affected your handling of money, and your marriage in general?
4. **Safety or Status**

Basic question: Do you see money as providing safety and peace of mind, or as a way of keeping score, a measure of personal achievement? Note: The safety tendency has a lot of similarities to the security seeker personality, and the status tendency may include some characteristics of the risk taker personality.

Positive aspects of the safety tendency: You are more likely to…

* Be careful and intentional about your use of money, in order to be able (as much as humanly possible) to deal with whatever curve balls life throws at you.
* Have a budget and know you can cover your expenses.
* Build an emergency fund of 3 to 6 months of expenses in case you lose your job or other source of income.
* Think through the potential consequences and risks of your decisions and thus act prudently.
* Purchase and maintain insurance to cover potential losses: life, health, home, auto, long-term care, liability.

Potentially negative aspects of the safety tendency:

* You are more likely to make decisions based on fear and risk reduction than on other worthwhile considerations.
* You may over-insure yourself. You really don’t need to buy that extra (and usually not cost-effective) insurance to protect your various purchases, or insurance for elephant stampedes, lightning strikes or alien abductions.
* You may find yourself leaning more on your finances and insurance for peace of mind, rather than on God.

Positive aspects of the status tendency:

* You may see your financial achievement as an asset to manage responsibly and a resource to bless others.
* In this regard, you may be in a position to support ministries and worthwhile projects at a level that would not be possible with lesser resources.

Potentially negative aspects of the status tendency: You are at risk for…

* Basing your worth and identity on your financial statement.
* Surrounding yourself with expensive stuff and purchasing lavish experiences as proof of your success.
* Shifting from intentionality regarding your definition of success to absorbing what other people, and the culture at large, think and say about it. (In other words, “…spending what you don’t have to buy what you don’t want to impress people you don’t care about.”)
* Cultivating smugness and pride over your financial accomplishments, and lowering your resistance to looking down on those who have not done as well in this area.

“The truth is that money is just a magnifying glass: It makes you more of whoever you are. If you are kind and generous, you’ll be even more kind and generous with money. If you are rude and self-centered, you’ll be even more rude and self-centered with money. Money is just a tool and has nothing to do with your identity.” Rachel Cruze, *Know Yourself, Know Your Money, pp. 53-54.*

1. **Abundance or scarcity**

This is the glass-half-full vs. glass-half-empty dichotomy. The person with the abundance tendency believes there will be more opportunities, more options and more money, and in the face of challenges believes “It will all work out.” He or she shares much in common with the risk-taker personality. The person with the scarcity tendency makes decisions based on a mindset that resources are limited (or likely to decrease), and makes decisions accordingly. He or she has some characteristics that overlap with the security-seeker personality.

Positive aspects of the abundance tendency:

* You are willing to do things others might not do, and to take risks.
* You have a high tolerance for change.
* You tend to be more generous, believing that there will always be ways to make more money.

Potentially negative aspects of the abundance tendency:

* Your optimism – which can also feel like big faith in God -- may overtake wisdom (including biblical wisdom) in making financial decisions.
* You may not count the cost(s) of a financial decision before you proceed.

Positive aspects of the scarcity tendency:

* You tend to play it safe with money.
* You are at less risk for being wasteful with money, since you see it as a limited resource.
* You are more likely to prepare and count the cost before making a financial decision.
* You may be more objective and realistic about financial opportunities.

Potentially negative aspects of the scarcity tendency:

* Your scarcity mindset may include a belief that God can’t or won’t provide, and that there are limits to His goodness or ability.
* Like the person with a safety tendency, you may make financial decisions (including avoiding opportunities that might move your life forward) based more on fear than facts.
* You may have difficulty giving away things you no longer use or need because you “might” need one or more of them someday. You are thus at risk for living in a cluttered (and usually disorganized) environment. Note: *Hoarding*, which would appear to be an extreme form of this tendency, is in fact a mental disorder that is extremely resistant to change.
* You may also be reluctant to follow biblical directives to share your financial resources because of fear that you may be caught short in the future.

1. **Spontaneous giving or planned giving**

Do you give spontaneously, in the moment, or do you plan most or all of your giving?

Positive aspects of the spontaneous giving tendency:

* You feel free to respond to a need on the spot, with both heart and open hand.
* You are able to experience both the joy of the recipient and your own joy in meeting a need and seeing his or her response.
* You are duplicating, in your own way, a pattern in Jesus’ life of stopping to help people while on his way to another destination. (See, for example, his healing the woman who touched him while he was on his way to see Jairus’ critically ill daughter. Mark 5:24-34)

Potentially negative aspects of the spontaneous giving tendency:

* If you haven’t done some (or any) homework on the destination of your spontaneous gift, you may send your money in a direction that is ineffective.
* Making a substantial spontaneous gift without consulting your spouse could potentially torpedo your budget and cause unnecessary turbulence at home.

Positive aspects of the planned giving tendency:

* You take your resources, and where they will be directed, very seriously.
* You avoid giving to individuals or organizations you haven’t researched.
* Once you have decided to donate, you are likely to stay committed to supporting that person or organization, though you also reserve the right to review the effectiveness of their work.

Potentially negative aspects of the planned giving tendency:

* You may miss opportunities to bless someone with an immediate need, and in so doing ignore a nudge from God.
* You can become frustrated with and critical of a spouse who makes spontaneous donations to people or causes you feel are unworthy of your support.
* Likewise, a spontaneous giver spouse may be annoyed or disappointed when you stick to your planned giving guns and bypass someone in need. (“Bah, humbug, Mr. Scrooge…”)

As noted with these money tendencies, there is no right or wrong here. Rachel Cruze’s approach to spontaneous vs. planned giving – and we second the motion -- is to do some of each. By all means talk about, research, plan for and budget your giving – and in your budget include an agreed-upon amount for spontaneous giving.

**Table Discussion No. 3:** (Did anyone notice a pattern here?)

1. Looking at the safety/status, abundance/scarcity and the spontaneous/planned giving tendencies, where do feel you land on each of these?
2. How similar or different are you and your spouse on each of these tendencies?
3. How have your similarities or differences in these two areas affected your handling of money, and your marriage in general?

**Coming next time:** A closer look at your ***money classrooms*** – the environments in which you grew up and what they taught you about finances. Plus, a wrap-up summary about managing money well as a couple.

**Homework:** If you didn’t do the homework from last time, look at the questions on the five money personalities at the end of the February 11 notes and spend some time with them as a couple.

**Upcoming Marriage Essentials dates:** March 10 and 24, April 7 and 21, May 5 and 19, June 9 and 23.