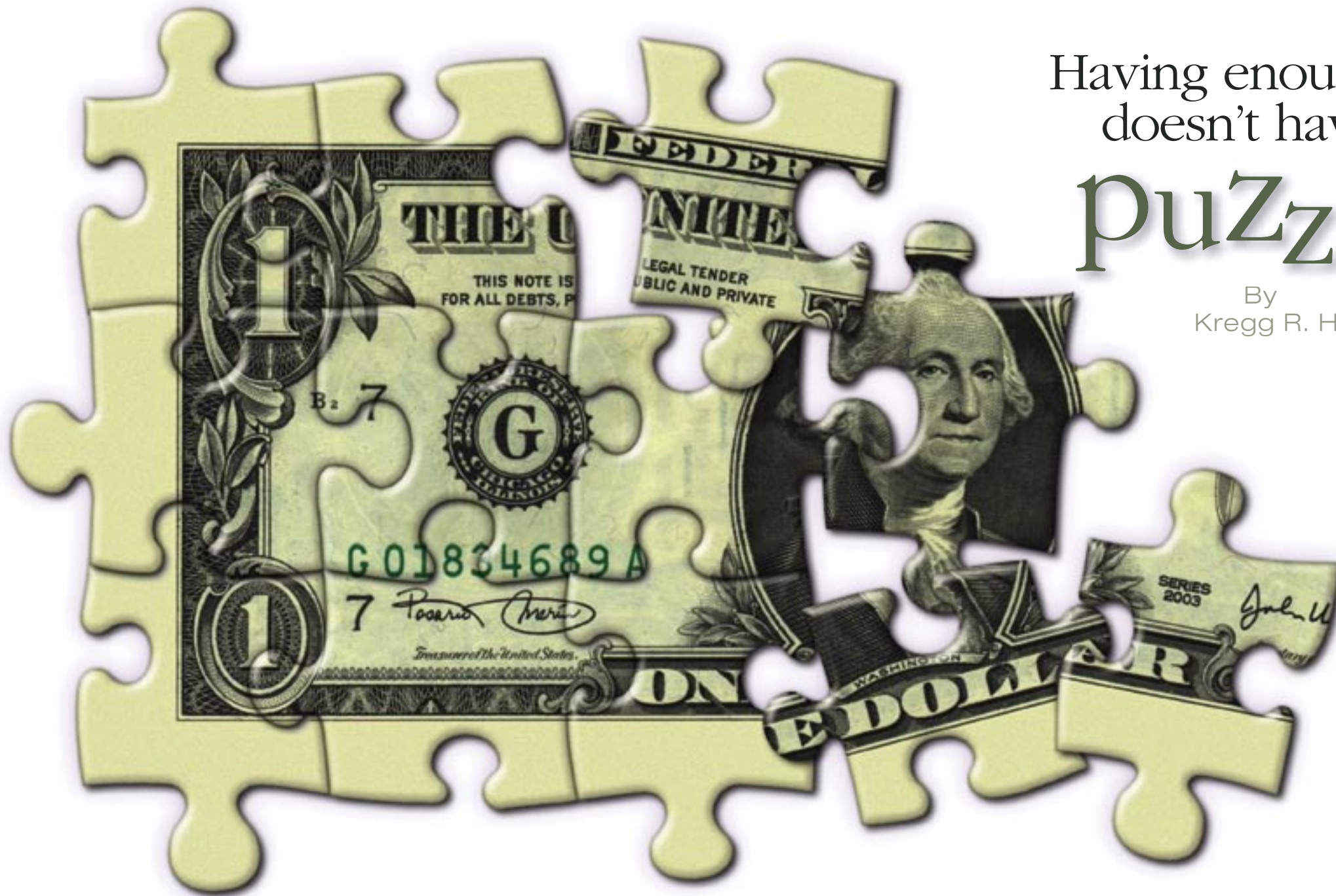


Having enough money doesn't have to be puzzling

By
Kregg R. Hood



When I attended high school, my dad planted a tiny pecan tree in our backyard. The tree stood only 2 feet high and I remember wondering if it would live, let alone produce pecans.

Recently, I returned to my parents' home in Texas, walked out of the garage and noticed all the broken pecans and sticks on the driveway. Now, 30 years after the planting of that sapling, it has grown into a mighty tree loaded with pecans and shading much of the backyard and driveway.

Like the humble beginnings of

that pecan tree that grew strong in maturity, most people want to see their finances grow proportionally over time. A few nurturing steps in the beginning can lead you into the essence of practical, biblical stewardship. Stewardship involves managing and developing our time, treasure and talents. God wants these resources to increase, both in order to bless us and to build His kingdom.

Step 1: Spend less than you make

To realize an increase in fi-

nances, your expenses must be less than your income. The fact that income moves you up and expenses bring you down is the "financial law of gravity." You cannot add to your worth without having money left at the end of each month, quarter and year.

You can increase your income through a variety of methods, including receiving a raise, finding a better-paying job or gaining a second income. You also can reduce your expenses — by spending less or spending less frequently.

Because adding to income is more difficult in the short term, you should eliminate any unwise spending habits immediately. You will find a number of helpful ideas in this article.

After cutting nonessential spending, start tracking your monthly spending efforts. For example, you might pick every second Saturday afternoon to total the money that came into your checkbook (from your job, gifts, rebates, refunds and the like). Next, subtract every dollar you spent. Note the positive

(or negative) difference. If your total is positive, congratulate yourself and keep up the good work.

If your total is negative, you are in trouble. My hunch is you are using credit cards too often. Credit card debt destroys financial growth. Do not despair, but do not ignore this red alert. Put your credit cards away without delay, spend only the cash you set aside and force yourself to say no to all unnecessary spending. Later, when your monthly financial total is positive, you

might relax a few spending restrictions. The dollars will add up faster than you think.

Step 2: Grow what you have

Financial growth is fueled by series of small, wise, consistent actions. Yet, many Americans (Christians included) complain about not having enough money. While money can certainly be tight, research and practical experience tell us small, daily expenses add up and cause overspending. Trips to an automated

BUDGET worksheet

Budgeting takes practice. But if you're patient and persevere you will find it becomes easier. Don't make it complicated. You may have to estimate some of the following amounts until you become familiar with what you spend on average or until you decide upon an amount you want to spend for items such as food and clothing. Looking back at recent bills and receipts will help. For yearly costs such as taxes, you can divide the amount by 12 to distribute the cost.

Monthly household gross income \$ _____

Tithing	\$ _____
Giving	\$ _____
Savings/investments	\$ _____
Rent or mortgage	\$ _____
Taxes	\$ _____
Electric	\$ _____
Gas	\$ _____
Water	\$ _____
Trash	\$ _____
Food	\$ _____
Telephone	\$ _____
Cell phone	\$ _____
Insurance (home or renters)	\$ _____
Healthcare costs, including insurance	\$ _____
Prescription medicine	\$ _____
Credit card(s)	\$ _____
Auto payment(s)	\$ _____
Auto insurance	\$ _____
Auto repairs, tags, oil change, etc.	\$ _____
Auto gas	\$ _____
Clothing	\$ _____
Hair care and grooming	\$ _____
Cable or satellite TV	\$ _____
Internet	\$ _____
Dining out	\$ _____
Entertainment	\$ _____
Travel/vacation	\$ _____
Gifts	\$ _____
Pets	\$ _____
Other	\$ _____
Other	\$ _____
Total Expenses	\$ _____

puzzling

teller machine to withdraw cash to have on hand, or drinking a daily Dr Pepper gnaw at your ability to invest and produce income.

Imagine what would happen if you trimmed your excessive expenses and put this money to work in your future by increasing investment. As Solomon put it, "He who gathers money little by little makes it grow" (Proverbs 13:11, NIV). Sure, it will take time, but if you develop a regular habit and enjoy adding to the amount you can put away each month, amazing results are possible.

Giving
is not
designed to
benefit us,
but to
build God's
kingdom.

Some time ago I watched an instructional video on money management for young adults. The speaker described what would happen if someone at age 18 began investing \$50 each month. He then showed an investment graph that assumed a 10 percent average yearly growth rate. Then he showed what would happen if the person invested for 20 years (stop-

ping any new investments at age 38), yet left the money in the account to keep growing.

By using time and the effects of compound interest, more than \$440,000 would be saved by age 65! This hypothetical but realistic scenario indicates that it is possible to invest only \$50 a month, or \$600 per year, for 20 years and have that \$12,000 outlay pay off in a big way.

In the same video, the speaker also showed what would happen if someone waited until 45 to begin saving and investing at this same rate. At 65 the total would be only about \$40,000, a difference of \$400,000!

This scenario is well within the reach of most Americans who discover the mathematical and financial effects of time and compound interest. These powerful forces either help you or hurt you. They provide a fantastic incentive to give up double-lattes, invest the money saved and build your finances. Start as quickly as you can.

Step 3: Increase your giving

Because God has all the wisdom in the universe, it makes sense to trust His judgment about finances. God owns everything (Psalm 50:12), can create anything (Genesis 1:1) and needs nothing (Acts 7:49). Giving is not designed to benefit us, but to build God's kingdom. Consider these passages:

- " 'Bring the whole tithe [10 percent] into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,' says the Lord Almighty, 'and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it' " (Malachi 3:10).

continued on page 24

The trip of a lifetime THE HOLY LAND

Let the Bible and the life of Jesus come alive before your eyes as you visit:

- Jerusalem and Bethlehem
- The Galilee and the Golan
- Megiddo and Armageddon
- Masada and the Dead Sea
- Mt. Carmel and Mt. Calvary



Your hosts, Dr. George and Jewel Wood, have led more than 20 tours during the past three decades. They will bring a rich spiritual perspective to help you experience this trip of a lifetime.

TOUR DATES: May 9-20, 2007

TOUR COSTS: \$3,299 from New York City. Based on double occupancy.

PASTOR APPRECIATION. Let your local church invest in the ministry of your pastor and spouse by giving them a Christmas or pastor appreciation gift of a trip to Israel — a trip that will benefit them and the church for a lifetime!

CRUISE POST-TOUR OPTION: Athens, Corinth and a four-day cruise to the Greek islands. May 20-26, 2007. Tour includes Athens, Mykonos, Ephesus, Patmos, Rhodes, Crete, Santorini, Corinth and Epidaurus. Post-tour option costs: \$2,279 based on double occupancy.

Call today for complete tour brochure and additional information. Sponsored by Journeys Unlimited, Inc. 800 Bustleton Pike Richboro, PA 18954 Phone: 800-876-9502, ext. 100 www.journeys-unltd.com e-mail: lindam@journeys-unltd.com



Mohammed:

- Three years' education
- Prays five times a day
- Believes Jesus was a good Muslim
- No one has ever told him otherwise

Across the Middle East, North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula, Muslims are choosing to follow Jesus Christ. In some places they come by ones and twos - in other places by the thousands. Someone like you reached out in Christ's love to them. It's what we do almost every day in Arab lands where people have never really heard His story.

God is opening doors. All you have to do is walk through them. It's that simple.

Read our story. Open your "I." Join the Eurasia community.

Visit www.eurasiacommunity.org

EURASIA
MIDDLE EAST / NORTH AFRICA



puzzling

- “Give, and it will be given to you. ... For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you” (Luke 6:38).

- “You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God” (2 Corinthians 9:11).

Get the point? One of your smartest financial growth decisions is to make giving to the Lord a top priority. Would you rather have 90 percent plus God’s blessing or keep 100 percent and be on your own? The choice is yours.

Step 4: Live by a spending plan

What would you do if you

hired a homebuilder who did not draw up and work from a blueprint? You would not pay him a cent! Anything important requires a plan, and your spending is no exception. A spending plan, often called a “budget,” is simply a “to-do list” for what, how much and when you will spend money. Your spending plan is your friend, not your enemy. It will bring you:

- Clarity to describe exactly how you will spend your money.
- Priorities so that spending for essential expenses comes first, important expenses come next and fun stuff comes last, based on what is left.
- Conviction to keep you on track when temptation knocks. Set aside time and develop

your plan carefully. Start by listing all your required expenses, then your important expenses and finally your discretionary expenses. Next, examine each expenditure and decide which ones can be reduced or eliminated. Be objective.

Some items, such as your tithe check, retirement contribution and savings may need to increase. Do not forget to plan for car maintenance and insurance. Ask the Lord for direction and seek the counsel of a wise Christian friend.

Then take the list and develop a written plan for when and how much you will spend each month. When unexpected spending opportunities arise, simply check your plan. If the

expense fits the plan, you are free to make the purchase. If not, wait until the following month or two. You will be surprised at how often waiting cures a spending urge.

A good spending plan, just like a blueprint, helps you expand your finances, especially over time. The lack of a plan virtually guarantees failure. Remember, God wants you to succeed. Keep Lamentations 3:40 in mind: “Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the Lord.”

Step 5: Review your progress and adjust for more growth

Remember the pecan tree? Dad did not simply stick the

Monthly bargain guide

Shopping at the right time can save you money. Many retailers sell items at discounted prices at the end of a particular season or when sales cool down. That’s when you can find some great deals. For instance, if you buy a bathing suit in August — at the end of the summer season — for a drastically reduced price you’ll not only have saved money, you’ll also have a brand-new suit the following summer.

JANUARY	FEBRUARY	MARCH	APRIL	MAY	JUNE
Bedding, quilts, blankets, towels, Christmas décor	Coats, scarves, winter wear, furniture, housewares	Winter clothing, china, glassware, washers, dryers	Eggs, ham (Easter items), paint	Silver, picture frames (after Mother’s Day), watches	Hunting and fishing gear (around Father’s Day), floor coverings, furniture
JULY	AUGUST	SEPTEMBER	OCTOBER	NOVEMBER	DECEMBER
Hot dogs, ground beef (Independence Day), washers, dryers, fabric, men’s suits	Bathing suits, summer wear, patio and lawn furniture, fresh vegetables, rugs, linens, pens, pencils, paper	Grills, lawn furniture, root vegetables, housewares, new autos	Fabrics, rugs, house	Ham, turkeys, flour, sugar (Thanksgiving), house	House, flour, sugar, candy, turkeys, seasonal décor (after Christmas)

Basic household money-saving ideas

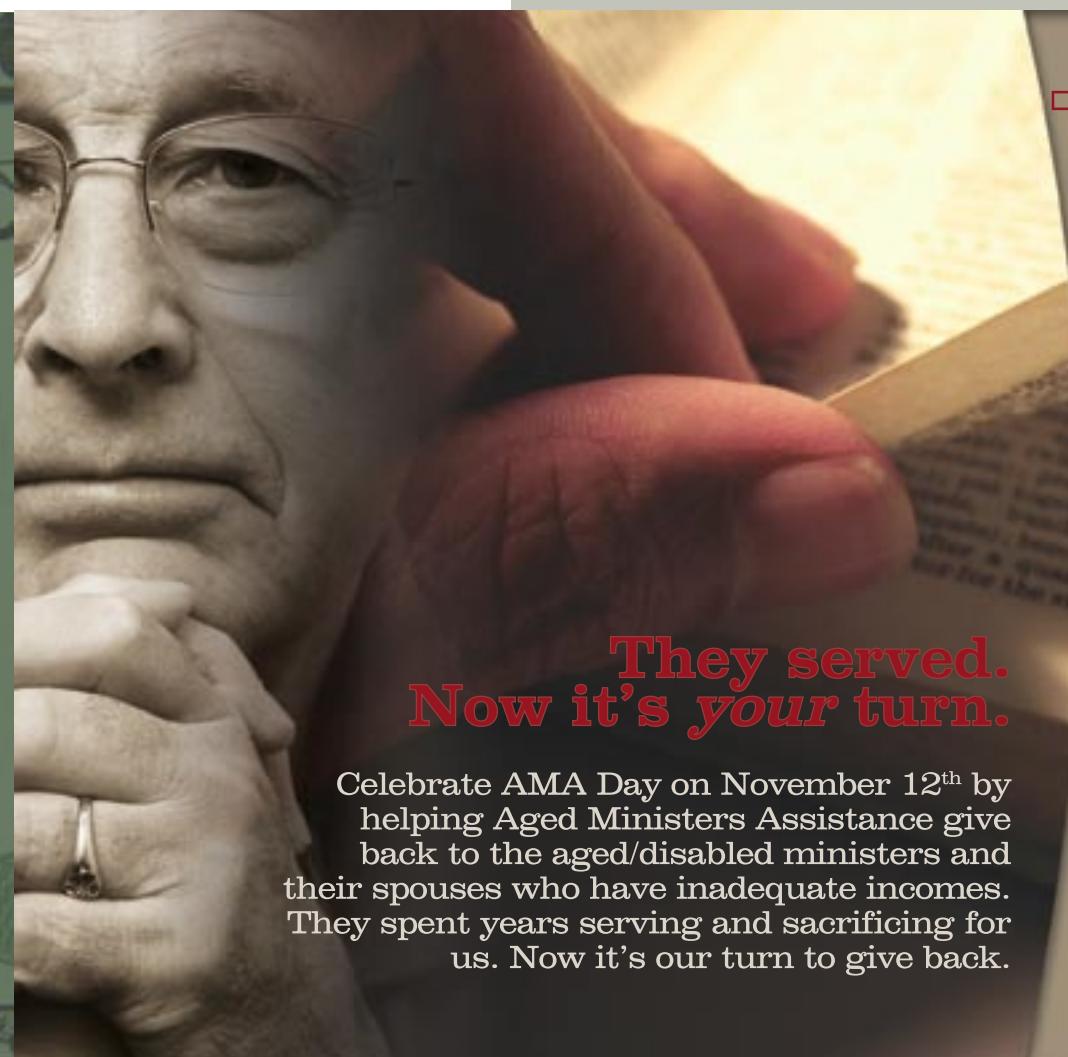
By Connie Cross

Cleaning: Buy cleaning products at a discount store rather than a grocery store where they often cost more. Try inexpensive products such as baking soda, ammonia and vinegar that can clean a lot for less. You also may want to experiment with adding water to concentrated dishwashing liquids and shampoos to make them last longer. Before you endlessly run water or use any cleaning solution, think about what amount you’ll really need to do the job.

Utilities: Try to keep your air conditioning/heat set to a certain temperature (one in winter and one in summer). Experiment to see what temperature you can comfortably tolerate. Utilize ceiling and room fans in warm weather and keep window shades closed. In cold weather close off unused rooms, shutting the door and the vent. Check your insulation and windows and doors for drafts. Replace air filters as needed. Also check with your local utilities company for suggestions to decrease your house’s energy consumption.

Laundry: Try skipping dryer sheets and fabric softeners to see if you really need them. Static cling is most problematic in colder months, so you may find you don’t need them during warmer weather. Also, use cold water whenever possible. Save warm and hot water to wash whites and very dirty items. Try to wait until you have a full load of laundry before washing. Doing half loads uses more water, electricity and detergent.

Storage: Regularly check your kitchen pantry and refrigerator to see what may be hidden in the back. Make a mental note so you won’t buy ingredients you already have. Keep your pantry and closets organized and your clothing stored neatly so you can see everything and avoid buying unneeded food, clothing, shoes, linen, cleaning products and other products. If you can’t see it, you may forget you have it.



They served. Now it's your turn.

Celebrate AMA Day on November 12th by helping Aged Ministers Assistance give back to the aged/disabled ministers and their spouses who have inadequate incomes. They spent years serving and sacrificing for us. Now it’s our turn to give back.

- YES!** I want to help ministers in need.
- My check / money order is enclosed.
- Please charge my credit card:
 - Mastercard
 - Visa
 - Discover

_____ - _____ - _____

Exp. ___ / ___

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____

Zip _____

Church to credit _____

Aged Ministers Assistance
1445 N. Boonville Ave.
Springfield, MO 65802
Phone: 417.862.2781
Web: www.ama.ag.org



Steps to determine whether home refinancing is right

By Gregg R. Hood

In the past two years, millions of homeowners have taken advantage of low interest rates, refinanced their homes and saved tons of money each month.

Some homeowners who locked into new loans before interest rates hit their lowest point wonder if the current drop in interest rates means they should refinance again. Others might be interested in refinancing to take out equity to pay debt, send a child to college or add on to the house. Some refinanced before at a higher rate because of credit issues.

If you are pondering a refinancing now or even refinancing again, the following steps will help you decide:

- **Realize there are no hard and fast rules of thumb.** Conventional advice has been that homeowners should take out 30-year mortgages and refinance only if interest rates drop by at least two points. That advice isn't necessarily valid. If you don't plan to move for several years, a drop of one point could serve you well.
- **Find a mortgage broker who really listens to you.** Be wary of salespeople who start by quoting interest rates. They're not trying to understand variables in individual situations, which include how long you expect to be in the house, your credit score, your cash flow and how soon you want to pay off the house. A good broker or loan officer will take the time to talk to you about your situation, listen carefully and then describe options that will help you make your best decision — even if it means not to refinance.
- **Get a written statement of all the fees and costs before you agree to anything.** Add up the total cost and divide by the total dollars you will save each month. This number will tell you how many months you need to live in your house in order to really save money. If you plan to move in the foreseeable future, the cost to refinance should be less than the total amount you will save over that same period of time.
- **Check your credit score.** If your score is around 675 (close to the national average), you may want to wait and work hard on raising your score. A higher score could save you hundreds of dollars each month.
- **Evaluate your spending habits.** If the main reason you want to refinance is so you can use home equity to pay off higher interest credit card debt, you may be making a dangerous decision. You could end up losing your house if you get behind on paying for your house the way you got behind in paying for your credit card purchases.
- **Minimize your closing costs.** Check every charge in the loan documents you receive before signing anything. Ask if each one is essential and if it can be reduced. Also ask if you qualify for a discount on your title policy. This could save several hundred dollars.



ABCs of puzzling

twig in the ground and leave it alone. He watered, pruned and shaped its growth.

Our finances work the same way. Watering means regularly adding more funds to your accounts. Pruning is akin to making changes that will lead to the greatest returns, without bringing on unwise risk. Shaping involves holding to an investment strategy that will help you reach your financial goals, regardless of your age or life situation.

While this article does not address the details of these three financial actions, they are extremely important. You would be wise to find a competent, professional adviser to help you discover your options and make decisions that are in your best interests, not theirs. Evaluate and adjust every year.

Above all, learn the secret of contentment. When you are content with what you have, you please God. Thank Him for what you have rather than fretting about what you think you lack. Carefully manage every dollar. Enjoy an affordable level of spending. Look for new blessings every day. These steps honor the Lord, build your finances and prepare you to manage more in the future. **tpe**

DR. KREGG R. HOOD is senior vice president of AG Financial in Springfield, Mo. He is the author of *Escape the Debt Trap: Let the Lord Lead You Out* and *From Debt to Life: 10 Proven Steps to Beat Credit Crisis & Build Financial Freedom*.

E-mail your comments to tpe@ag.org.

ABCs OF SALVATION

To know God and be ready for heaven, follow these steps:

A. Admit you are a sinner.

"There is no one righteous, not even one ... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Romans 3:10,23 (See Romans 5:8; 6:23.)

Ask God's forgiveness and repent of your sins.

"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Romans 10:13 (See Acts 3:19.)

B. Believe in Jesus (put your trust in Him) as your only hope of salvation.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16 (See John 14:6.)

Become a child of God by receiving Christ.

"To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." John 1:12 (See Revelation 3:20.)

C. Confess that Jesus is your Lord.

"If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Romans 10:9 (See verse 10.)

For further help, contact the Assemblies of God church near you.

If you would like someone to pray with you concerning your decision to follow Jesus Christ, please contact the church indicated on the back cover or call:

1-800-4PRAYER

Assemblies of God National Prayer Center

Good people at work.

Online Programs

Complete your college degree online by attending one of the nation's fastest growing Christian universities. Choose:

- Liberal Arts Studies (general ed. courses)
- A.A. in Professional Leadership
- B.S. in Business and Professional Leadership
- B.S. and A.A. in Church Leadership
- B.S. and A.A. in Human Services
- M.B.A.
- M.A. Ministerial Leadership

To learn more or apply for admission, visit www.seuniversity.edu or call 800.500.8760



SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY
Continuing & Adult Education
Lakeland, Florida



AGWM Construction, Planning & Development (formerly MAPS Builders)

Together we can make God's vision a reality.

CP&D... linking your church to missions.

Florida Team in the Caribbean

GOD AT WORK with teams!

CRD
CONSTRUCTION, PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT
A G W M

To contact us call: 417.862.2781, ext. 2067
e-mail: agwmcpsd@ag.org
web site: www.worldmissions.ag.org/cp&d

