



RECONCILIATION REPORT

Liberating and Maximizing Greenbacks

The dollar you save is worth more than the dollar you earn—the latter netting about 70 cents, depending upon your tax bracket and giving level. Here are suggestions to liberate more dollars. The wisest financial habit is not frugality or savings, it's giving. "One man gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty. ²⁵ A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed." (Proverbs 11:24-25); "Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously." (2 Corinthians 9:6, NIV). Generosity complies not only with God's principles, but also with His character (Rom. 8:32).

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Americans are saving again--a benefit of the recession. In May 2009 the overall savings rate was up to 6.9%¹, a level seen basically twenty years ago². This is more important due to the federal government's spending binge--seemingly un-tethered to reality, which is making our nation ever more the servant of lending nations (Prov. 21:7). The US government may spend up to 23.7 trillion (that it does not have) in its current bailout³--more reason to have our financial house in order in case the White House is foreclosed-upon.

The need to budget (allocate resources) increases as resources become more scarce. You'll see the whole picture, and remember to include all funding priorities. After planning expenditures, track expenditures. See our budgeting helps online⁴. No pain, no gain. If married, discuss the budget each month, as needed. Crown.org has excellent budget guides according to income⁵. Pay down debt until you are debt-free.

The Internet enables anyone with a connection to be a careful shopper. Shop online at reputable sites. Look for Better Business Bureau, BizRate.com, Shopping.com, Google Payment and similar logos, as well as for the company's physical address--and their return policy. You'll save sales tax (unless the store has a physical presence in your state), gas, time, and maybe shipping. For instant savings, try Googling "name of store (or brand)" + "coupon" (or + "promotion"). I've saved 5% or more after about ten minutes of searching coupon sites. Try Googling (or Bing-ing) the exact model number of an item you're considering plus the brand name, and surprisingly you'll often find pages of prices for that exact product (Google seems to be more comprehensive than "Froogle").

Get expert reviews of products before purchasing. We subscribe to *Consumer Reports* online. Look for their "Best Buys." If a family member wants help with a purchase, I can provide needed reviews. Amazon.com has very helpful user reviews. Search for product blog sites. I was ready to purchase a Trane HVAC unit until I read a lot of user posts, then settled upon Lennox instead. Cnet.com is great for tech reviews, as is PCWorld.com. When shopping, bookmark pages in a tab such as "Shopping--current." Try typing in "subject" or "brand" + reviews (you'll find bogus listings, but may find expert reviews).

Check SierraTradingPost.com (a Christian company), which offers deep discounts on outdoor gear, clothing, and luggage, and if you subscribe and use their (daily) email coupons, you can save substantially more. Amazon.com offers used books at excellent savings--just type in the book title at the site. Dell.com enables the easiest and widest custom-

izing of a computer (last I checked), and gives tremendous value. We've also purchased Dell computers at their refurbished and auction sites. If buying new, configure it online, print that out, call a rep, ask questions, buy through the rep (making sure the price matches your online configuration price), and ask to have free shipping thrown in.

I'll mention savings in various budget categories, starting with household expenses. It's a good time to own a home by leasing and renting-to-own, judging from signs seen in local yards. We built by buying land at a city tax sale, and building over a three-year period, as God provided⁶. You can save by bundling home or renter's insurance with car insurance. We save for our annual property tax through monthly deposits in a money market account, for better interest. Paint your own home and ask for a contractor-type account (without credit) at a chain such as PorterPaints.com. Using a TurboTax program (check Amazon's price) will save preparer's costs on state and federal taxes, but will take longer.

Save significant electrical costs by putting a timer on your electric water heater. Last July our propane water heater was ready to blow up the place. We replaced it with a Noritz tankless (on-demand) unit, purchased online with a venting kit. I found the lowest price and bargained with a supplier with better credentials to match it. Normally we fill our 500-gallon LPG tank twice a year. After a year we still have 25% left in the first fill-up. Installation may cost \$1,000 (we got three bids), but the extra cost of installation can be made up in less than two years. Our heat pump compressor died last month, so we replaced it with one that qualified for both a substantial rebate from the manufacturer, and the (up to) \$1,500 tax credit⁷, saving \$2,250.00. The credit is good for windows, doors, roofs, water heaters, etc. Also check for local energy company "green" specials, such as for solar panels.



We also fight high telephone costs. Our solution is a landline with a dial tone--*nothing* extra, for about \$23.50/month. Due primarily to eldercare, we also have a mobile phone (1500 anytime minutes for \$47.00/month, taxes included), which we use for long distance. For backup long distance on the land line we use a pre-paid plan⁸.

Moving to the supermarket category, marry a frugal wife, as I have. Consider shopping clubs, such as Costco or Sam's Club (outstanding produce and meats) and Walmart Supercenters. Buy health and beauty aids at such stores. Use the in-store comparison features, such as the price per ounce of coffee. Consider a garden. Our soil is poor, so I built a 4' x 4' raised-bed box from used lumber and our compost pile. Also, eat leftovers. For auto savings, I change my own oil, buying five-quart jugs of oil (auto stores may sell the four-quart size) and a filter at Walmart for about \$20. You might check local gas price locators before a fill up⁹.

For health costs, if you don't have serious pre-conditions, consider a Christian health coop, such as SamaritanMinistries.org. We joined them in 1997 after years with another health coop (tell them I sent you). It doesn't cover regular office visits, dental, optical or meds, unless related to a medical need above a deductible. My wife and I pay an average of about \$270/month.

I try to buy clothes at factory outlets or on sale, and have shopped shoes online. I'd go with brands and styles that I know will fit my feet from having put them on. Zappos.com pays for shipping both ways--when ordering and if returning items, and they sell clothing.

The only way that I've found to (potentially) save--instead of dollar-in, dollar-out "savings"-- is to have an automatic-deduction monthly stock purchase at Sharebuilder.com, for \$4. The best advice on stocks I've heard is to look for long-term trends (such as oil use and global population aging) and then invest in companies who will profit from them. It



discourages withdrawals since you can't liquidate it for a week, and selling incurs a fee. What is the most it will cost to fix or replace something in your home, driveway, or business? Savings prepares for that. For more secure savings, consider a CD (at an insured credit union, for better rates).

For dining out, check for local coupons in the newspaper and at Restaurant.com for local restaurants. Be sure you know the minimum purchase required for the "gift certificate" that you buy (I didn't). For anniversaries, consider specials posted on B&B or hotel/resort websites¹⁰. For an inexpensive vacation, go camping. With a discounted outlay for tent, sleeping bags and pads, etc. (Sierra Trading Post), it's about \$20/night, with hot shower and free adrenaline rush from noises in the night.

Check Lastminutetravel.com for vacation ideas and Priceline.com for hotels, and read guest reviews to help decide (sometimes the best regular rates are at the hotel chain website). Sam's Club and AAA offer good discounts. I've gotten a price quote at the hotel desk, used their free WiFi in the lobby, and gotten a better rate at Sam's Club before returning to the counter and getting the keys. The search engine Bing.com has a great feature, showing the dates of the lowest fares on a particular route. You can also use websites such as AllegiantAir.com to determine the cheapest fare dates to fly. Consider travel during off-seasons, if the weather isn't too bad. Assiduously use frequent flyer programs, making sure en route that your ticket is associated with your account, and keeping boarding passes until credit is posted. Sometimes points can be transferred to other programs (see Points.com) and free flights obtained on partner airlines. We've gotten a couple free round-trip flights, as well as a few magazines for the effort. Check Airfarewatchdog.com for their "50 Best Fares" list¹¹. In this economy, you may need a getaway.

Can't afford the getaway? Get a great course from an excellent college professor on DVD from Teach12.com. Each course is discounted once per year. Enjoy free movies at Fancast.com or Hulu.com, or just listen gratis to your favorite tracks at Lastfm.com, while reading your new pre-read book.

Jim Sutherland

1 <http://www.marketwatch.com/story/americans-looking-to-bonds-to-stash-away-savings> Websites listed were visited in 7/09.

2 <http://research.stlouisfed.org/fred2/data/PSAVERT.txt>

3 <http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601087&sid=aY0tX8UyslaM>

4 Find budgeting helps at <http://www.rmni.org/financial-ministry/financial-topics-a-forms.html>

5 http://crown.org/Tools/Calculators/Budgeting_SpendingPlan.asp

6 See the story at http://www.rmni.org/reports/2001/Report_3-2001.pdf

7 For what products and specifications qualify, see http://www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?c=tax_credits.tx_index

8 <http://www.tel3advantage.com/> Skype Voice-Over-Internet is installed, but not used yet.

9 <http://autos.msn.com/everyday/GasStationsBeta.aspx>

10 If you're near the Southeast, see the \$99 specials at <http://www.chateauelan.com/packages/hot-dates.php>

11 PCWorld alerted me to some websites mentioned.

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*Mobilizing the African
American Church for Global
Mission*

www.RMNI.org



Westside projects ministry team (gentle warriors), from left, Michelle (w/ oxygen), Lois, Willie Mae and Emmanuel. They faithfully pray, teach the Bible, evangelize, and befriend each week. They attend three different churches. God has greatly blessed with these willing and able friends.



S. Sudan Mission, March 2010. Interested in helping to build the spiritual foundations and assist in healing people in a land devastated by 21 years of civil war? We plan to return to Eastern Equatoria Province on a fourth ministry trip, March 2010. A variety of spiritual gifts are welcome. In particular, we welcome evangelists (personal and platform) and medical personnel, as we strengthen the foundations for five new church plants. We can use teachers of women and children, youth workers, disciplers and those with the gifts of helps and encouragement. We will be sleeping in tents while in Sudan. The fee is \$3,500, a reduction due to flying in the off-season.

Prayer and Praise



↑ Thanks for praying—we have an excellent SE Asia team. Info from our coordinator is necessarily limited, so we need God’s wisdom, grace power, and love for all aspects of the trip.

↑ Pray for wisdom to put networks together to better serve unchurched men and women at the Westside. Andre Henderson needs prayer for recovery from a severe stroke. He is blind and has helped at the Westside.

↑ Bertha Lloyd, RMNI prayer coordinator, has improved in health, but needs strength.

↑ Please continue to pray for greater cooperation and help with the AfAm missionary census/survey, and the diligence to successfully complete it. We’ve located 71 missionaries so far.

↑ Please pray for the team of God’s choice for the March 2010 S. Sudan trip and for the best use of time and

human resources.

↑ Ask the Lord to help us maximize the potential of our website. Search engine optimization goes well. Pray that our new blog will be useful, under supervision of Rochelle.

↑ Please pray for Patrick, our Sudanese coordinator, who is training church planters, and for five viable churches to be planted in Sudan in 2010.

↑ Energy and strength are needed.