7 KEYS

OF

FINANCIAL SUCCESS

FINANCIAL SUCCESS BEGINS WITH FINANCIAL HEALTH

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7Keys of Financial Success: Financial Success Begins with Financial Health

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Author’s Note

Several years ago, the Gallup organization released a massive global survey on human wellbeing based on more than 100 million interviews worldwide. Some of their findings were published in the book *Wellbeing at Work* by Jim Clifton and Jim Harter. We found the conclusions fascinating because they touched something deeply human and universally recognizable.

No matter where people live, whether in a large city or a small village, in wealth or in poverty, in the West or the developing world, people long for certain things to be true of their lives. We want to flourish. We want stability. We want meaningful relationships. We want enough. Gallup used the phrase *wellbeing* to describe this pursuit.

That word itself is worth thinking about for a moment.

At the deepest level, human beings desire to be well. We want our lives to feel whole rather than fractured, stable rather than chaotic, meaningful rather than empty. We want our families to thrive. We want peace in the areas of life that often produce stress and pressure.

Gallup identified five key areas that strongly influence whether people experience a thriving life or a struggling life:

1. **Career Wellbeing** – You enjoy what you do each day.
2. **Social Wellbeing** – You have meaningful relationships and friendships.
3. **Financial Wellbeing** – You manage your money in a healthy way.
4. **Physical Wellbeing** – You have the health and energy to live well.
5. **Community Wellbeing** – You like where you live and feel connected to it.

We care about all five of these areas because they are deeply connected. Yet while all these areas matter, our organization focuses primarily on one: **financial wellbeing**. Financial stress affects marriages, friendships, emotional health, work, and even physical wellbeing.

At 7Keys Financial Coaching, our mission is simple. We help individuals and families develop healthier financial systems and practical money-management skills so they can move forward with greater stability, purpose, and peace. We believe financial health is not reserved for the wealthy. Healthy financial habits can be practiced at many income levels and in many different cultures around the world.

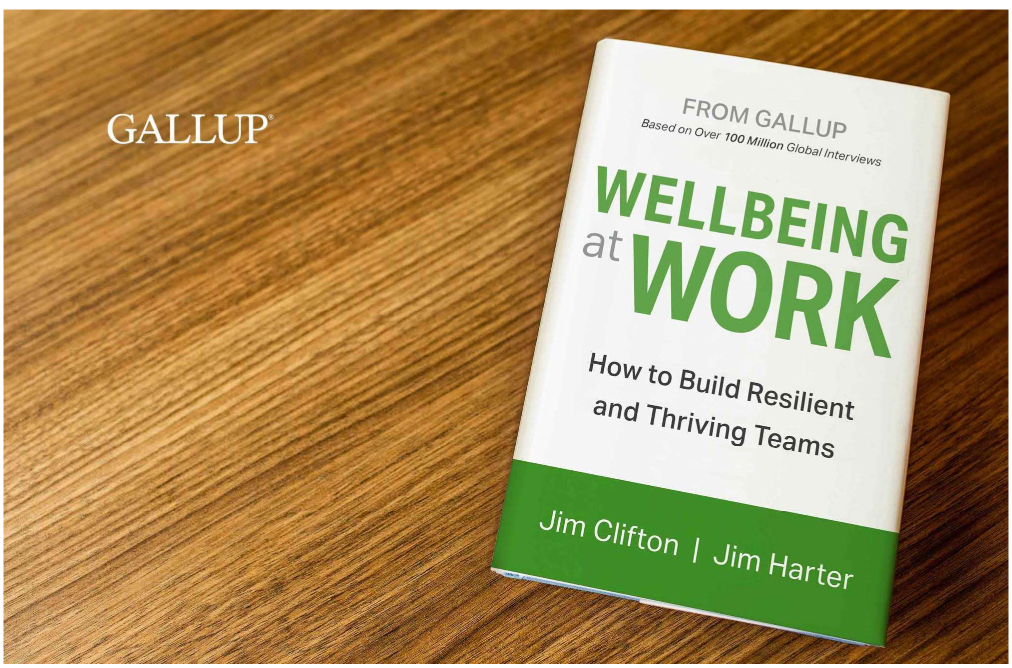
Our model begins with a simple idea: establish meaningful goals, then align your financial life with them. Sometimes we say it this way: many people discover that their lives are headed in one direction while their money is headed in another. Part of financial health is helping those two move together in the same direction.

7Keys Financial Coaching operates under the umbrella of Freedom 5:one Ministries, a nonprofit organization based in the United States. Freedom 5:one has historically focused much of its work within the faith community. Over time, however, we realized that financial stress, debt, instability, and the desire for healthier financial habits are universal human struggles. That realization led to the development of 7Keys Financial Coaching, which takes a broader and more multicultural approach to financial wellbeing.

In this book, we hope to draw wisdom from many places and many voices. Along the way, you will encounter practical financial principles, stories, observations, proverbs, and wisdom traditions from diverse cultures and communities worldwide. While our own perspectives have certainly shaped this work, our goal is not simply to share our experiences but to participate in a larger human conversation about money, wisdom, generosity, responsibility, and financial health.

One final note: we are not an investment company, and we do not sell financial products or insurance. We are a nonprofit organization committed to education, coaching, and practical financial training. We have also been fortunate to partner with organizations and leaders around the world who share a desire to help individuals and families build healthier financial lives.

We hope this book encourages you, challenges you, and helps you move one step closer toward financial health—little by little.



Introduction
The Pursuit of Financial Success (Health)

“Take care of the pennies and the pounds will take care of themselves.” — English Proverb

There is something deeply human about wanting our lives to work.

Not perfectly. Not without difficulty. But with some sense of stability. Some sense of order. Some breathing room between us and disaster. Most people are not looking to become millionaires. Most people are simply trying to build a life that holds together. A life where the bills are paid, the marriage survives, the children are cared for, and there is enough margin left to sleep at night.

It is our opinion that financial success is directly linked to a person's financial health. That is why we speak of financial success and financial health synonymously.

If you noticed, we intentionally use the phrase *"financial health"* rather than *"financial wealth."* That distinction matters.

A great deal of financial writing today focuses on helping people become wealthy. There is no shortage of books, podcasts, seminars, and influencers promising to help people become rich, financially independent, or wildly successful. To be clear, we are not against financial wealth. In fact, we believe that healthy financial systems often produce financial stability and even wealth over time. Wealth is a measure of financial success. But not the only measure.

But in our work with individuals and families from many walks of life, we have discovered something important: before people can even begin thinking about becoming financially wealthy, they need first to become financially healthy.

And those are not always the same thing.

Can the banker in New York City become financially healthy and financially wealthy? Certainly. But what about the day worker in India? What about the single mother raising seven children somewhere in Indonesia? What about the retired couple living on a fixed income who didn’t save well? What about the young family buried under student debt and trying to survive one paycheck at a time?

Can they become financially wealthy? Maybe. But time, circumstances, financial life skills, opportunity, and their specific situation will tell the tale.

Can they become financially healthy? We believe the answer is usually yes.

Because financial health is not reserved for the wealthy. Healthy financial habits can be practiced at many income levels and in many cultures around the world. Financial resources may not be distributed equally, but healthy financial systems can still help people move toward greater stability, clarity, generosity, and peace. And success.

So, what is financial health?

A Working Definition of Financial Health

> "Financial health is the ability to manage money in a way that brings increasing stability, clarity, generosity, and peace to your life and relationships."

That definition deserves a little explanation.

Stability

Healthy financial systems reduce unnecessary chaos. Stability means emergencies become more manageable. Bills become less overwhelming. Financial life becomes less fragile over time. Stability is not perfection. It is simply becoming less vulnerable to collapse every time something unexpected happens.

Clarity

Many people live with financial fog. They are not sure where the money is going, what the goals are, or how to move forward. Financial clarity helps people move from confusion to intentionality. It allows individuals and families to make decisions with purpose instead of constantly reacting to pressure.

Generosity

Healthy financial systems create margin not only for survival but also for helping others. There is something deeply human and deeply healthy about generosity. Most people genuinely want to help someone beyond themselves. Yet unhealthy financial systems often leave people so overextended that generosity becomes difficult. It's been said that "it is better to give than to receive." And most of us concur.

Peace in Life

Financial pressure quietly affects nearly every area of life. It impacts sleep, emotional energy, concentration, and outlook. While healthy financial systems cannot eliminate every hardship, they often reduce unnecessary stress and create greater emotional breathing room.

Peace in Relationships

One of the great destroyers of unity in families and marriages is financial chaos. Secrecy. Overspending. Debt pressure. Different goals. Lack of communication. Healthy financial conversations often create greater trust, teamwork, honesty, and unity.

Unfortunately, unhealthy financial systems often produce the opposite:

- confusion

- stress
- secrecy
- instability
- conflict
- impulsive decision-making
- and chronic lack of margin.

And the statistics are telling.

In the United States alone:

- many families are living paycheck to paycheck,
- finances remain one of the leading causes of marital stress and even divorce,
- large numbers of people feel overextended by debt,
- many households do not consistently follow a written spending plan,
- many people spend more on themselves than helping others and quietly feel dissatisfied by that reality,
- and many approach retirement years with significant anxiety because they have not been able to prepare financially for the future.

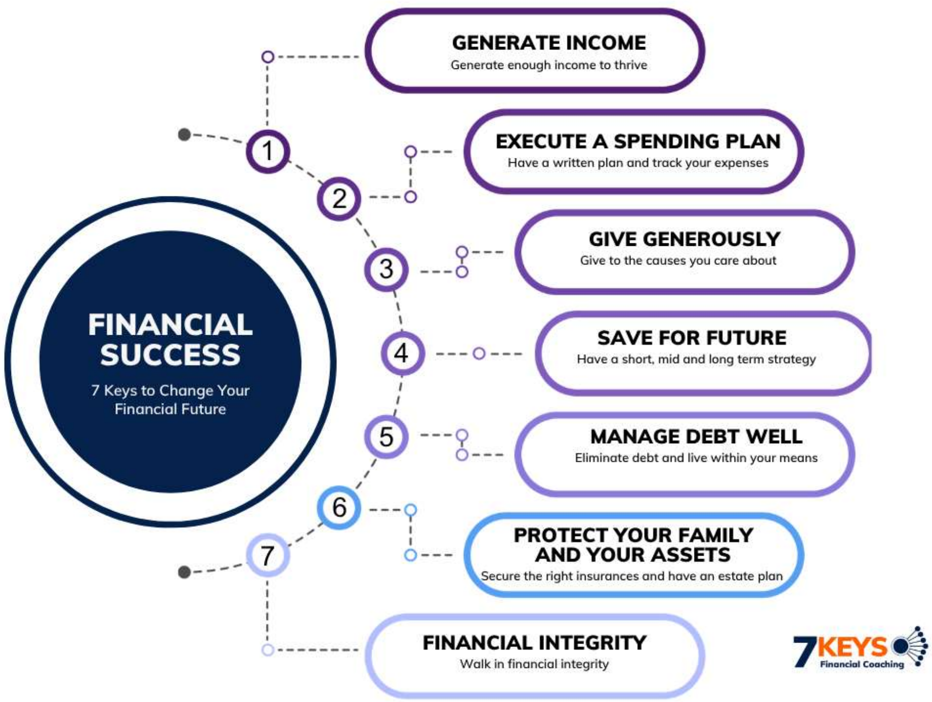
Marriages under Assault Worldwide

In 2010, when Chris started our nonprofit, he was working in Benton County, the county in the northwesternmost corner of our state (Arkansas), which was leading the nation in per-capita divorce rate. And our area is one of the top places to live in the US. And if marriage experts are right, the number one cause of divorce is the inability to resolve conflict. And finances are a top area where couples argue. This assault on the family and marriage is a major reason we focus our attention on financial health

That is not merely an American issue. Versions of these same struggles appear all around the world. Tim was in Uganda a few years ago and ran across an interesting idea that seems to permeate the landscape in East Africa. What the husband earns is for the family's bills, and what the wife earns is hers. In some situations, where money is tight, this idea causes a lot of stress in the family.

So, what are we trying to accomplish in this book?

We want to share some ideas we think will be helpful as you navigate the steps to keep your financial system healthy. At 7Keys Financial Coaching, we focus on seven key financial skills that help people become better managers of the resources entrusted to them. These seven disciplines, habits, patterns, mindsets or whatever you want to call them shape our approach to training. Some find it encouraging that there are a manageable number of things to focus on.



The 7 Keys to Financial Success

1. Generate Enough Income to Thrive. First, people must generate income before they have resources to manage. Because of that, we will spend some time discussing work, income generation, and developing the capacity to provide for yourself and your family.

2. Build a Working Spending Plan. A spending plan helps you tell your money where to go instead of wondering where it went. It creates intentionality and alignment between your goals and your finances.

3. Learn the Power of Generosity. Generosity changes both individuals and communities. Healthy financial systems enable us to think beyond ourselves and contribute to the well-being of others.

4. Develop a Healthy Savings Strategy. Savings create margin. Margin creates stability. Healthy savings habits help individuals and families prepare for emergencies, future needs, and long-term goals over time, little by little.

5. Manage Debt Wisely. Debt is not evil, but unmanaged debt can quietly reduce freedom, increase stress, and create long-term instability. Healthy financial systems learn how to handle debt carefully and intentionally.

6. Protect What Matters Most. Part of financial health is protecting your family and assets through wise preparation. This includes things like insurance, emergency planning, and estate preparation.

7. Financial Integrity. Finally, healthy financial systems must be built upon financial integrity. Financial health without honesty, discipline, and responsibility eventually becomes unstable. So, throughout this book, we will also discuss integrity, wisdom, and contentment because the health of the system ultimately depends upon the health of the person managing it.

In the big picture, we believe the pursuit of financial health is a worthy endeavor.

When the United States declared independence from Great Britain, its founders wrote that people possess certain inalienable rights, including "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." While cultures around the world may define happiness differently, most people understand the desire for stability, peace, purpose, and the ability to build a better future for those they love.

That is what this book is about.

Not merely wealth. Not financial hype. Not trying to impress others.

But helping ordinary people build healthier financial systems that allow them to move forward with greater stability, generosity, clarity, and peace, ultimately enjoying financial success.

PART 1 — THE SYSTEM

Chapter One
The Health of Your Financial System

"He who does not know one thing knows another." — Kenyan Proverb

In many parts of the world, people survive not because they have abundance, but because they learn to pay attention. A farmer watches the sky. A merchant watches inventory. A shepherd watches the condition of the flock. Healthy systems require awareness. Problems ignored rarely improve on their own.

Before we move too deeply into budgets, savings, debt reduction, generosity, or long-term planning, it is probably wise to pause for a moment and ask a very simple question:

How healthy is your current financial system?

Not how wealthy you are. Not how successful you appear to others. Not how your situation compares to your neighbor, your coworker, or someone on social media.

But honestly and quietly: How are things really going?

When you think about your finances, what emotions come to mind?

- Peace?
- Pressure?
- Hope?
- Fear?
- Confusion?
- Stability?
- Exhaustion?

In Japan, there is a business philosophy called *Kaizen*, which emphasizes small, continuous improvements. One of its foundational ideas is that improvement begins by seeing reality clearly. You cannot improve what you refuse to examine. In a similar way, a Spanish proverb says, "The habit does not make the monk." In other words, appearances can be misleading. Many people appear financially stable on the outside while privately carrying enormous stress beneath the surface.

This chapter is not about judgment. It is not about shame. It is not about making you feel like a failure because your financial situation may not be where you hoped it would be by now.

It is simply about establishing a starting point.

If you were sitting with a doctor discussing physical health, one of the first things they would likely do is evaluate where things currently stand. They would check the basics. They would ask questions. They would look for strengths, weaknesses, warning signs, and opportunities for improvement.

Financial health works much the same way.

Some readers of this book may already have healthy financial systems. Others may feel like things are hanging together with tape and string. Some may be overwhelmed by debt. Some may have no savings. Some may be silently carrying financial stress within marriages or families. Others may simply feel stuck and unsure what to do next.

That is okay. You are not alone. And more importantly, financial health is often rebuilt little by little.

A Chinese proverb says: “The best time to plant a tree was twenty years ago. The second-best time is now.”

That idea applies to finances as much as anything else in life.

So, before we begin discussing the 7 Keys of Financial Health, we want to help you evaluate the health of your current financial system. Think of this less like a final exam and more like a map. It is difficult to move toward a destination if we are unwilling to honestly identify where we begin from.

As you walk through the following Financial Health Evaluator, resist the urge to compare yourself to someone else. The goal is not perfection. The goal is awareness.

A few years ago, one of our coaches was coaching a young lady just getting started in her career. But she had a lot of financial anxiety, specifically related to her lack of knowledge of finance. She confessed to her coach that when people started talking about finances, she would quietly leave the room. When she took her first evaluation of her personal finances (like the one you are about to take), she did not score very well. But 6 months later, she took the same evaluation and scored exceptionally high. Surprised, her coach asked her about the improvement. Her response was very telling. She said, " When I first started meeting with you, I didn't know what I was doing, and now I do. She had slowly but surely gained confidence in managing her finances, and it showed in a short time.

Take some time and work through this evaluation. Be honest with yourself and get a good feeling for where you are.

Financial Health Evaluator

Score each area from **1 to 5**:

1 = unhealthy / struggling
2 = weak
3 = developing
4 = healthy
5 = strong and consistent

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1. Income Capacity

Do you have enough income to meet basic needs and make progress?

Score yourself: 1–5

Healthy sign: income is sufficient to support basic needs, some savings, generosity, and future planning.

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2. Spending Plan

Do you know where your money is going?

Score yourself: 1–5

Healthy sign: your money is not wandering around unsupervised.

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3. Generosity

Is generosity built into your financial life?

Score yourself: 1–5

Healthy sign: generosity is part of the system, not just an emotional reaction.

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4. Savings

Are you preparing for the future?

Score yourself: 1–5

Healthy sign: tomorrow is getting some attention today.

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5. Debt Management

Is debt helping you or controlling you?

Score yourself: 1–5

Healthy sign: debt is not stealing your future peace.

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6. Protection

Have you prepared for what could go wrong?

Score yourself: 1–5

Healthy sign: love has made a plan.

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7. Integrity

Are your financial dealings honest and clean?

Score yourself: 1–5

Healthy sign: there is nothing financially hidden that would embarrass you if it were brought to light.

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8. Clarity

Do you understand your financial picture?

Score yourself: 1–5

Healthy sign: confusion is giving way to understanding.

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9. Peace

How much stress does money create in your life?

Score yourself: 1–5

Healthy sign: money may still require attention, but it is not ruling your emotional life.

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10. Relational Unity

If married or sharing finances, are you aligned?

Score yourself: 1–5

Healthy sign: money is becoming a teamwork issue, not a battleground.

Scoring

Add your score.

10–20: Financial Crisis Zone

Your system is under real pressure. Don't panic, but don't ignore it either. Start with clarity, basic needs, income, and a simple spending plan. Contact a 7Keys Financial Coach (www.7keysfinancial.com)

21–30: Financial Stress Zone

Some things are working, but the system is fragile. A surprise expense, lost income, or debt pressure could quickly create trouble. Contact a 7Keys Financial Coach (www.7keysfinancial.com)

31–40: Financial Growth Zone

You are developing healthier habits. Keep building consistency, margin, generosity, and protection. Contact a 7Keys Financial Coach (www.7keysfinancial.com)

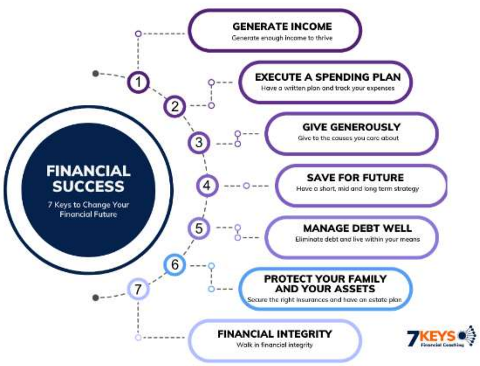
41–50: Financial Health Zone

You are killing it. Keep up the good work! Consider becoming a 7Keys Financial Coach and helping others. (www.7keysfinancial.com)

PART 2 — THE 7 KEYS OF FINANCIAL HEALTH

Chapter Two
Key #1- Generating Enough Income to Thrive

“Little by little, one walks far.” — Spanish Proverb



One reality many financial books miss is that not everyone who struggles financially is irresponsible. Certainly, some people undermine their financial lives through overspending, impulsive decisions, unmanaged debt, or a lack of discipline. We all know situations where the problem is not income but behavior. But there is another reality that is equally true and perhaps discussed far less often: many people simply do not earn enough to thrive.

That is not laziness. That is not moral failure. Sometimes it is simply math.

A family can be disciplined and still feel pressure every single month. A single mother can budget carefully and still feel overwhelmed. A couple can avoid extravagance, work hard, and make responsible decisions, and still feel like they cannot get ahead.

Financial health is not merely about abundance. It is about alignment. It is learning to manage what you have in a way that produces increasing stability, clarity, generosity, and peace over time. But having said that, we also need to acknowledge something honestly: there are moments when discipline alone is not enough. At some point, many families must ask a different question, and it is an important one:

“How much income do we actually need in order to thrive in this season of life?”

Everybody has a number.

Not a fantasy number. Not a celebrity number. Not a millionaire lifestyle. Just your number. The amount of income required for your family to live with stability, responsibility, generosity, and some breathing room in this season of life. That number may change over time. A young couple with small children may have one number. A retired couple may have another. A family caring for aging parents may have a completely different number. The point is not comparison. The point is clarity.

Many families have never actually stopped long enough to ask themselves what kind of life they are trying to build and what that life realistically costs. So, they drift. Their life is headed in one direction while their money is headed in another. They want peace but have no plan. They want a margin but have no target. They want stability but have never calculated what stability requires.

As we have worked with families over the years, we have noticed that most people fall into one of four financial categories.

Surviving- The first category is what we might simply call *surviving*. This is the place where there is not enough for necessities. Bills consistently go unpaid. Emergencies become disasters. Stress is constant. Financial decisions are often made under pressure rather than through thoughtful planning. Many people around the world live in this reality every day. They are poor, and they know it.

Striving- The second category is what we like to call *striving*. This is where many families live, even if they do not appear poor from the outside. They are making progress. They may own a home. They may pay their bills most months. But there still is not quite enough. And their credit cards show it. They are constantly juggling priorities and often lack margin for what we might call the "electives" of financial health: meaningful savings, proactive planning, generosity, investing, or long-term preparation. They are striving, and they are tired.

Thriving- Then comes what we believe is a very important line. We sometimes call it the "*enough*" line. This is the place where a family finally has more than enough to survive and has moved into that wonderful place called *thriving*. There is a margin. There is room to breathe. There is the ability to save intentionally, help others consistently, think long-term, and absorb normal life pressures without constant panic. Thriving does not mean extravagance. It does not mean luxury cars, private jets, or a vacation home somewhere on the ocean. It simply means there is enough. Enough to live. Enough to prepare. Enough to give. Enough to breathe.

Arriving- Beyond that is a fourth category we might simply call *arriving*. These are people with abundant financial resources far beyond basic needs and margin. Some people in this category use those resources wisely and generously. Others do not. Wealth itself does not guarantee financial health. We have all met wealthy people whose financial systems were emotionally unhealthy, relationally unhealthy, or deeply unstable beneath the surface. Sometimes, when we present this category, we say *"Give" (rhymes with "thrive"*). And make a dumb joke about it being a French word that means the rich should consider sharing with the poor. To whom much has been given, much is expected. We think that once you have arrived, you should consider how to make an impact on those around you.

The goal of this chapter is not to convince everyone they need to become rich. The goal is to help people move toward enough. Toward thriving. Toward a healthier financial system where there is enough margin to live with increasing stability and peace.

Some people feel guilty even wanting that. They come from difficult economic environments or cultures where struggle has simply become normal. Sometimes, communal cultures are so focused on the community that they won't allow an individual to get ahead, and they must share any margin with the group. But let us say something clearly: it is okay to want enough. It is okay to want your children to be educated. It is okay to want food security, emergency savings, reliable transportation, and a more peaceful home. It is okay to want breathing room. That is not greed. That is stewardship.

In many parts of the world, financial health is not built on sudden wealth but on slow, disciplined progress. A little saved here. The debt was reduced there. A new skill learned. A side income started. A better opportunity was pursued. Healthy financial systems are often built gradually, almost quietly, before their strength becomes visible.

One of the most powerful things that happens when families identify their number is that dreaming begins again. Not fantasy dreaming, but intentional dreaming. They begin asking questions like: What kind of life are we trying to build? What kind of parents do we want to be? What would generosity look like for our family? What would peace feel like? Once those questions become clear, income suddenly has purpose attached to it.

Young Family Learning to Thrive

Years ago, I (Tim) was coaching a young family. They made a pretty good living, but they were in a season where the wife was staying home with the four children and the husband was the sole breadwinner for the household, and when they came to see me as a financial coach, they were pretty short on their budget, meaning they had more expenses than they had income.

And so, we began to dream with them about what they wanted their lives to look like, and instead of just looking to cut from the budget, I began to ask them realistic questions about what the ideal amount was for each budget category.

For example how much did the wife need for the budget in food for their four growing children, how much did she really need to properly clothe the children and pay for activities that they were participating in, did their family want to go on a vacation and so on, we begin to think about all of these different things and as we added things that they were dreaming about we realized that we now had an even larger deficit number than when they came in.

I turned to them and asked, "so how committed are you to keeping your wife at home as a stay home mom" they looked at each other and said we're very committed to that and so the solution became very simple he was going to have to figure out how to generate more income and/or she was going to find some sort of job that she could do at home. And that's exactly what they did. So the next time I talked with him, he had resigned from his current position and gone out and found a more lucrative role, and she began to explore the idea of selling real estate that provided a little more flexibility, and they were on a journey to generate the amount of income that they needed to thrive and meet their family goals.

One of the mistakes many people make is assuming their current income is fixed forever. But around the world, thriving people often think creatively. They solve problems. They develop skills. They start small businesses. They learn trades. They create side income. They adapt. They keep moving forward little by little. In another resource we developed, called Rise & Build, we explored entrepreneurial principles for generating enough income to thrive. One of the central ideas was simple: income often follows usefulness. People who solve real problems and provide real value frequently discover new opportunities opening over time.

We have included a copy of the US edition of Rise and Build in the appendix. If you are interested in generating more income, you may find these entrepreneurial principles helpful in thinking through how you might do that.

That does not mean the journey is easy. Opportunity is not distributed equally. Some people face enormous barriers related to geography, education, politics, family history, health, corruption, or economics. We should acknowledge those realities honestly. But we should also acknowledge something hopeful: movement is still possible. Growth is still possible. Financial health can still improve over time.

An African proverb says, “However long the night, the dawn will break.” We believe that. We believe many people are not failing because they are lazy or foolish (though that is sometimes the case). They are simply under-resourced, under-trained, or stuck without clarity. And sometimes the first breakthrough is simply understanding your number and realizing what it will take to thrive.

This chapter is about helping you think honestly about what your family needs to become financially healthy in this season of life. Because once clarity appears, decisions become easier. Priorities become clearer. And movement becomes possible. Success is just around the corner.

Chapter Three
Key #2 — Build a Working Spending Plan

“A goal without a plan is just a wish.” — Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

There is an old saying in construction that you should “measure twice and cut once.” Carpenters understand something important: when you begin building without a plan, mistakes become expensive. The same principle applies to money. Many families are working hard, earning income, and trying to move forward in life, but without a clear financial plan. The result is often confusion, stress, overspending, and the constant feeling that money is disappearing faster than it arrives.

As every house construction should begin with a blueprint, every financial journey should begin with a spending plan.

At 7Keys Financial Coaching, we often use the words *budget* and *spending plan* interchangeably, though we prefer the phrase *spending plan*. It feels a little friendlier and a little more hopeful. For many people, the word "budget" sounds like a punishment. It sounds restrictive, like a diet that constantly reminds you of what you cannot have. A spending plan, however, shifts the conversation. Instead of merely exposing failure, it helps reveal whether your spending is helping or hurting the goals you are trying to achieve.

In the early days of the organization (actually, before it even began), Chris was working as a financial advisor at a local investment firm. Their investment company did some pro-bono work in the community, helping people put together a budget and coaching them in personal finance, and that is where Chris got the idea to start our organization, as he saw the real impact financial coaching was having on families.

A couple came in to meet with a financial coach. And the financial coach was male, and as the husband and the coach began to talk about the budget, they kept bringing up the word "budget". Finally, the wife, who had been listening to the two men talk, interjected and said, “Could you guys stop using that word?” As they inquired of her “what are you talking about” she says, “I don't like the word budget,” So they asked her “what would you like to call it” and she said “what if we called it a spending plan” this got a laugh from the whole group but the idea behind the idea that our goals and our desires direct our spending and therefore determine if we're headed in the right direction or stuck.

That distinction may sound small, but words matter because mindset matters.

A spending plan is not about controlling every penny in a fearful or obsessive way. It is about bringing intentionality to your financial life. It is about ensuring your money aligns with your values, goals, and responsibilities. Many people spend more time planning a vacation than planning their finances. Then they wonder why the financial side of life feels chaotic.

A spending plan creates order from financial chaos.

One of the surprising findings from Gallup research was that only about one in three American families consistently follows a written budget or spending plan. That means many people are attempting to navigate one of life's most emotionally powerful areas without a clear map. And honestly, this is not merely an American issue. Around the world, many families operate on a financial basis of memory, pressure, impulse, or reaction rather than intentional planning.

The problem with financial chaos is that it eventually creates emotional chaos as well. Money fights increase. Stress increases. Future planning disappears. Generosity becomes difficult. Savings become inconsistent. Debt quietly grows in the background. Many unhealthy financial systems are not built on a single catastrophic decision but on years of unorganized decisions.

A spending plan helps interrupt that cycle.

So what exactly is the spending plan?

At its core, a spending plan is simply a written plan for how you intend to use the resources available to you. It begins with goals. If you know where you want to go, you need a plan to get there. You might even think of it as a financial roadmap. Without one, it becomes very easy to drift.

A healthy spending plan helps allocate resources toward:

- necessities,
- savings,
- generosity,
- debt reduction,
- future planning,
- and discretionary spending.

It allows you to prepare not only for expected expenses but also for unexpected ones. Life has a way of surprising people. Cars break down. Children get sick. Jobs change. Roofs leak. Healthy financial systems anticipate that life will not always cooperate perfectly.

Master Tracker

One of the most important ideas we try to communicate to families is this: if you do only one thing financially, become a master tracker of where your money is going. Many people have never actually stopped to examine their spending patterns honestly. They know they feel pressure, but they are not completely sure why. Tracking creates visibility, and visibility creates clarity.

There are several ways to do this. Some of the most effective trackers are those who just use paper and pen and write down everything they earn and everything they spend. Some use spreadsheets while others use technology such as apps on their computers or mobile devices. Whatever works for you is the way you should approach it.

A couple of ways to track

- **Track monthly-** by that we mean collect all your data in monthly batches. For example, how much did you earn and spend in the month of January? This will also allow you to evaluate your numbers from month to month. For example, how does January compare to February? Or how am I doing for the year to date?
- **Track categories-** How much did you spend at the grocery store, or in entertainment, or on debt, or utilities, etc.?
- **Look for trends**- You may not think of yourself as the CFO (Chief Financial Officer) for your personal finances, but you are. CFOs look for trends. What is happening with the numbers? Our feelings about our finances lie sometimes, but numbers don't lie. Find your trends and adjust.
- **Communicate regularly with stakeholders**- This includes your spouse and even your children. Do you understand your finances, and do those around you? You may need to adjust in spending (up and down), and communicating makes that possible.

A Japanese proverb says, "Vision without action is a daydream. Action without vision is a nightmare." A spending plan helps connect vision with action. It takes the hopes you have for your family and begins organizing your financial decisions around those hopes.

<u>So where do you begin?</u>

The first step is understanding your financial goals. Before starting a journey, it helps you to know where you are trying to go. What are you building? Stability? Margin? Debt freedom? Savings? Greater generosity? Peace in your marriage? Retirement preparation? A child's education? Your financial goals help shape your spending priorities.

The second step is tracking income and expenses. List your income sources and begin categorizing where money is going. For some people, this exercise is eye-opening. Small expenses repeated consistently often reveal patterns people never noticed before. The issue is not usually a single expensive purchase but a thousand small, unconscious decisions that accumulate over time.

The third step is prioritizing generosity and savings. We will discuss these ideas in more depth in later chapters, but healthy financial systems intentionally create room for both. Families that spend everything they make often remain financially fragile, no matter how much income increases. Margin matters.

The fourth step is creating spending categories. Housing, transportation, food, debt payments, medical expenses, clothing, entertainment, education, and discretionary spending all need structure. Categories create clarity. They allow you to evaluate whether your current financial behavior aligns with your larger goals.

The fifth step is to review and adjust regularly. Spending plans are not static documents carved in stone. Life changes. Income changes. Priorities change. Emergencies happen. A healthy spending plan is flexible enough to adapt while still maintaining overall direction. If you are married, reviewing the spending plan together can become one of the most important financial habits in your relationship. Financial unity rarely happens accidentally.

The sixth step is getting outside input. Few people have ever invited another person to review their financial system honestly, but an outside perspective can be extremely valuable. Sometimes another set of eyes can identify blind spots, unhealthy patterns, or opportunities for improvement that we cannot easily see ourselves. In many cultures around the world, wisdom is passed relationally. People learn by walking with those who are a little further down the road.

An African proverb says, “Wisdom is like fire. People take it from others.” That is true financially as well.

Perhaps someone in your sphere of influence manages resources wisely and would be willing to offer guidance. Maybe it is a parent, mentor, business owner, financially healthy friend, or coach. Asking for help is not weakness. Often it is the beginning of wisdom.

At 7Keys Financial Coaching, we offer coaches and training resources in many parts of the world to help individuals and families organize their finances and build healthier financial systems. More information can be found at:

- 7Keys Financial Coaching- www.7keysfinancial.com

The seventh step is to give yourself some grace as you work on your plan. It takes time to move from disorganized to organized. From fog to clarity. From reactive to proactive. From financial weakness to financial strength. In our time with clients who are not organized, we say it takes 6 months to figure out your numbers. So, take your time and put in systems that work for you. Don’t be so hard on yourself (or your spouse) as you move toward financial health (success). There is a lot more to finances than just numbers: psychology, sociology, theology, and plain old human nature and background. Give it time. Good habits and good systems are built over time. As they say, “Rome was not built in a day”.

Ultimately, a successful spending plan is not merely about controlling money. It is about creating alignments. Alignment between your resources and your goals. Alignment between your present decisions and your future hopes. Alignment between your values and your spending habits. Alignment between you and your spouse.

Because when your financial life has no plan, chaos tends to fill the vacuum.

But when you begin planning intentionally, even imperfectly, something powerful begins to happen. Clarity increases. Stress decreases. Communication improves. Progress becomes measurable. And little by little, financial health begins to grow.

Action Point: In the appendix, there is a simple, straightforward spending plan exercise that you should complete.

Chapter Four
Key #3 — Learn the Power of Generosity

“We make a living by what we get. We make a life by what we give.” Winston Churchill

One of the most interesting things about studying generosity around the world is discovering that nearly every culture values it in some form. Religions speak about it. Philosophers write about it. Communities celebrate it. Parents try to teach it to their children. Even people who disagree deeply about politics, religion, or economics often still admire generous people.

Why?

Because somewhere deep inside, most human beings understand that life was probably never meant to revolve entirely around ourselves.

Generosity is one of the great connectors of humanity. It builds relationships. It strengthens communities. It creates hope. It reminds people who are struggling that they are not alone. In many ways, generosity is one of the social glues that helps hold communities together.

And interestingly, modern wellbeing research increasingly suggests that generosity may be beneficial not only for the recipient but also for the giver.

Researchers at Harvard Business School studying what they called “prosocial spending” discovered that people who spend money helping others often report greater happiness than people who spend the same money only on themselves. What was especially fascinating was that this effect appeared across cultures, income levels, and even in poorer countries. In other words, generosity does not seem limited to wealthy societies. Human beings appear wired for contribution and connection, not merely consumption.

That idea matters because modern culture often trains us in the opposite direction. We are constantly told to accumulate more, upgrade more, consume more, compare more, and focus more intensely on ourselves. Yet many people who finally acquire the things they thought would satisfy them discover something surprising: consumption alone rarely creates deep meaning.

Contribution often does.

One of the interesting discoveries in modern wellbeing research is that people often derive greater satisfaction from meaningful contribution than from endless personal consumption. Human beings seem to flourish when they believe their lives are helping someone beyond themselves.

An African proverb says:

“The hand that gives is the hand that gathers.”

A Hindu proverb says:

"Thousands of candles can be lit from a single candle."

Different cultures say it differently, but the underlying idea remains remarkably similar: generosity multiplies influence, strengthens connection, and improves communities.

One of the more fascinating discoveries from Gallup's wellbeing research involved what they called *community wellbeing*. Earlier in this book, we discussed Gallup's idea that thriving people tend to like where they live and feel connected to their communities. When researchers explored this more deeply, two major indicators consistently appeared among people with higher community wellbeing:

- volunteerism,
- and philanthropy.

PEOPLE WHO GAVE THEIR TIME AND RESOURCES TOWARD HELPING OTHERS OFTEN FELT MORE CONNECTED TO THE PLACES WHERE THEY LIVED. THEY WERE NOT MERELY CONSUMERS WITHIN THE COMMUNITY. THEY WERE CONTRIBUTORS TO IT.

That idea resonates deeply with our own experiences.

Several years ago, our organization became involved with a statewide giving initiative called Arkansas Gives (this is the state we live in). Nonprofit organizations across the state would mobilize their supporters through a coordinated giving campaign to strengthen the nonprofit sector and meet community needs. After several years of participation, the statewide initiative eventually ended, and, honestly, as a nonprofit that benefited from it, we were disappointed to see it disappear. We have seen firsthand how generosity can mobilize communities and help organizations that serve real human needs.

On a whim, we decided to start a regional version in Northwest Arkansas called NWA Gives.

The idea was simple: communities have needs, and many nonprofits exist to meet those needs. Why not create a platform that connects a community's generosity with the organizations already serving it?

What happened next surprised even us.

Over time, NWA Gives has helped raise millions of dollars for hundreds of nonprofit organizations throughout our region. But perhaps more importantly, it reminded people that generosity creates connection. It gave ordinary people an opportunity to participate in strengthening their own community. Some gave large amounts. Others gave small amounts. Some volunteered time. Others shared causes they cared about with others. But together, something larger began happening.

The community itself became stronger.

That is one of the powerful things about generosity. It changes more than bank accounts. It changes environments. It changes relationships. It changes how people experience the places where they live.

Now, before going further, it is important to clarify something. When we talk about generosity, we are not talking about reckless giving, emotional manipulation, or giving beyond healthy limits. Generosity should operate inside a healthy financial system, not destroy one. In fact, many financially unhealthy people genuinely want to be generous but feel trapped because their financial systems lack margin.

That is one of the reasons financial health matters so much.

Healthy financial systems create room for generosity.

And generosity itself often becomes an indicator of a healthy financial system. Families consumed entirely with survival pressure frequently lose the ability to think beyond immediate needs. But as stability grows, generosity often begins growing alongside it.

Interestingly, generosity is not always measured by amount. In many cultures around the world, some of the most generous people are not wealthy at all. They simply share what they have. A meal. A ride. Time. Shelter. Advice. Encouragement. Community.

A Mexican saying puts it beautifully:

"He who gives what he has is worth more than he who has much."

That is an important distinction because many people quietly postpone generosity until they feel wealthy enough to afford it. But generosity is less about abundance and more about orientation. It is a posture toward others.

At its healthiest, generosity says:

"My life is not only about me."

That is powerful.

So where should generosity flow?

Different cultures, religions, and philosophies answer that question differently, but most people naturally feel drawn toward several similar categories:

- family,
- vulnerable people,
- community needs,
- education,
- healthcare,

- disaster relief,
- faith communities,
- and causes that improve the lives of others.

In our own work, we often encourage people to think intentionally about where their giving goes. Generosity tends to become more meaningful when it aligns with values and purpose rather than occurring only randomly or emotionally.

Healthy generosity is often:

- thoughtful,
- intentional,
- consistent,
- and connected to meaningful causes.

So, how can people grow in generosity practically?

First, set generosity goals. Many people plan vacations, purchases, and entertainment expenses but never intentionally consider how they want their resources to impact the lives of others. Setting goals changes that.

Second, include generosity inside your spending plan. Healthy financial systems usually prioritize generosity rather than leaving it only to emotional impulse at the end of the month.

Third, support causes and people that genuinely matter to you. Generosity becomes more sustainable when people feel connected to the impact of their giving.

Fourth, remember that generosity includes more than money. Time, encouragement, mentoring, hospitality, expertise, and volunteerism also strengthen communities.

Finally, start somewhere. Some people wait until they feel financially secure before becoming generous, but generosity itself often helps reshape how people think about money, priorities, and purpose.

An Arabic proverb says:

“A little generosity grows into abundance.”

That does not necessarily mean financial abundance. Sometimes the abundance created by generosity is relational. Emotional. Communal. Meaningful. Human.

At the end of the day, financial health is not merely about accumulation. It is about building a life that functions well and contributes well. Healthy financial systems do not merely create consumers. At their best, they create contributors.

And perhaps one of the surprising truths discovered both through ancient wisdom and modern wellbeing research is this:

People often experience deeper fulfillment not merely when they receive but when they give meaningfully.

Chapter Five
Key #4 — Save Little by Little

“Dig the well before you are thirsty.” — Chinese Proverb

One of the more interesting things about human beings is how differently we relate to time. Some people live almost entirely in the present. Others are constantly worried about the future. Some remain trapped in the past, unable to move forward because of previous failures, fears, or losses. Financially speaking, all three perspectives can create problems if left unbalanced.

Healthy financial systems require us to think beyond today.

That can be difficult, especially for people who have spent much of their lives simply trying to survive. I (Tim) remember opening my first savings account embarrassingly late in life, somewhere around thirty. Growing up in a poor household, our mindset was simple: the future can wait because we need to survive today. If money came in, it got consumed almost immediately. There was always another need, another bill, another emergency, another pressure.

And honestly, for many families around the world, that pressure is real.

But over time, I began to realize something important: healthy financial systems require margin not only for today, but also for tomorrow. The future eventually arrives for everyone. Emergencies happen. Income changes. Bodies age. Vehicles break down. Roofs leak. Children grow up. School fees arrive. Winter comes—not just literally, but financially.

One of the great benefits of savings is not merely financial growth. It reduces panic. Savings create breathing room.

An Arabic proverb says: “Time is made of gold.” In many ways, savings are simply resources transferred forward through time. You are helping your future self survive, stabilize, and eventually thrive.

Now, before discussing different types of savings, it may be helpful to ask a simple question:

Are you naturally a giver, a spender, or a saver?

Most people tend to lean toward one of these financial instincts. Givers often enjoy helping others and may prioritize generosity over long-term preparation. Spenders enjoy experiences, opportunities, and the pleasures of life today. Savers naturally think ahead and often feel more secure when they set aside resources for the future.

None of these instincts is entirely wrong by itself. In fact, healthy financial systems usually include all three dimensions:

- generosity
- enjoyment
- and preparation

ARE YOU NATURALLY A GIVER, A SPENDER, OR A SAVER?

The challenge comes when one instinct dominates everything else. Extreme spending without saving creates instability. Extreme saving without generosity can create isolation or fear. Healthy systems seek balance.

Savings help connect present decisions with future realities.

Three Important Types of Savings

Over the years in coaching, we have found that many people struggle with savings because they only think about it in one category. Healthy financial systems often require multiple kinds of savings working together.

1. Retirement Savings — Helping Your Older Self

One of the simplest but most powerful exercises we use with people is asking them to think about their older self.

Imagine yourself at sixty-four or sixty-five years old. Perhaps you began your working life around twenty-four or twenty-five years old after school, vocational training, or an apprenticeship. Now, imagine forty years have passed.

What would your older self want to say to your younger self?

Would they say:

- "Thank you for preparing."
- "Thank you for thinking ahead."
- "Thank you for sacrificing a little earlier so I could have stability later."

Or would they say:

- "Why didn't you start sooner?"

That question has a way of capturing people emotionally because eventually, the older person becomes you.

Retirement savings is not merely about money. It is about dignity, peace, and preparation for a season of life when your ability or desire to work may decrease. Different cultures approach aging differently. In some places, older parents are largely cared for by family. In others, individuals are expected to prepare independently. But almost everywhere, aging creates financial realities that must eventually be addressed.

The good news is that retirement savings rarely happen all at once. It is usually built little by little over long periods of time.

Many of us are living without a lot of financial margin, and if we don't focus on it, the reality is that time will slip away, and then we will be facing old age without a lot of resources.

One of our favorite books is *The Richest Man in Babylon* by George S Clason. In this financial allegory, a young man in ancient Babylon goes to the richest man in the city and asks him to tutor him in accumulating wealth. The secret is to find an amount of money to invest in wealth building off the first of what you make versus what is left over.

We have people who retire early with a lot of savings, who relay a similar story that someone counseled them early in their career to pay their future self first and live off the rest.

We sometimes say give 10%, save 10% toward retirement and live off the rest.

2. Emergency Savings — Preparing for Income Loss and Crisis

One of the most important financial questions a family can ask is this:

"If all income stopped tomorrow, how long could we continue paying our bills?"

That question gets people's attention quickly.

Emergency savings are designed to protect families during unexpected financial disruption:

- job loss,
- medical emergencies,
- economic downturns,
- disability,
- major repairs,
- or sudden income interruption.

In the United States, financial educator Dave Ramsey popularized the concept of building an emergency fund equal to 3 to 6 months of living expenses. While the exact amount may vary depending on culture, economy, or income level, the principle itself is extremely helpful.

Healthy financial systems prepare for instability before instability arrives.

Earlier in the book, we discussed the idea of "the number"—the amount of money required for your family to function in this season of life. Emergency savings are directly connected to that number. If your monthly expenses are $3,000, a six-month emergency fund would require approximately $18,000. If your monthly expenses are lower, then the target changes accordingly.

The purpose is not fear. The purpose is resilience.

A family with emergency savings often experiences a crisis very differently from a family with no margin at all. Savings create time. Savings create options. Savings reduce panic.

And for many people, even beginning slowly matters. We know a family who spent nearly 10 years building an 8-month emergency fund, saving roughly 1 month of expenses per year. Progress was gradual, but eventually the system became strong.

Little by little.

3. Setback Savings — Preparing for Irregular Expenses

This category may be one of the most overlooked forms of savings, yet it is one of the most practical.

Many expenses in life are not monthly. They are irregular but predictable.

Christmas comes once a year.
School fees arrive at certain seasons.
Vehicles need repairs.
Clothing wears out.
Medical expenses happen.
Vacations occur.
Birthdays arrive.
Homes require maintenance.

The problem is not that these expenses are surprising. The problem is that many families fail to prepare for them in advance.

As a result, predictable expenses become financial setbacks.

Sometimes in coaching, we call this a "Setback Savings Account." Others call it annual savings or sinking funds. Whatever terminology you use, the principle is simple: calculate predictable irregular expenses in advance and save monthly for them.

For example, let's say you estimate vehicle repairs and maintenance will cost approximately $2,400 this year. Divide that by twelve months, and suddenly you realize you need to set aside roughly $200 per month in preparation.

The same principle works for:

- holidays,
- travel,
- school fees,
- clothing,

- insurance premiums,
- home maintenance,
- and many other irregular expenses.

Once families begin adding these categories together, the numbers can become surprisingly significant.

In some of our informal coaching observations, we have seen irregular annual expenses ranging from $2,500 to $5,000 per person in certain American contexts. A family of four could easily experience $10,000 or more in irregular expenses over the course of a year.

Globally, the categories may change, but the principle remains the same.

For example, we know a family in southern Kenya with eight children whose annual school fees total roughly $1,500 USD. In a context where monthly household income may be only several hundred dollars, it becomes an enormous financial event unless savings are built up gradually throughout the year.

This is why setback savings matter so much.

Without them, many families repeatedly fall into debt not because of irresponsibility, but because they failed to prepare for predictable irregular expenses.

Making Saving a Habit

Many people assume that saving requires large amounts of money, but the greater issue is often consistency. Healthy savings systems are usually built gradually over long periods of time.

A few practical principles help:

- automate savings whenever possible,
- separate savings categories,
- track progress,
- celebrate milestones,
- and adjust goals as life changes.

Most importantly, start somewhere.

Too many people put off saving because they feel overwhelmed by how far behind they are. But financial health rarely improves through shame. It improves through movement.

Even small savings begin to change something psychologically. People begin feeling less trapped. Less reactive. Less fragile. The future no longer feels entirely out of control.

And perhaps that is one of the great gifts of healthy savings systems.

Not merely wealth.

But peace.

Chapter Six
Key #5 — Manage Debt Wisely

“Debt is the worst poverty.” — Thomas Fuller

Few financial issues create more emotional pressure than debt. Around the world, people carry debt related to homes, education, vehicles, business ventures, medical needs, credit cards, family obligations, and emergencies. Some debt is carefully planned and strategic. Other debt grows quietly through pressure, impulse, lack of planning, or desperation. But regardless of how it begins, debt tends to create emotional weight.

It follows people home at night. It affects marriages. It affects sleep. It affects stress levels. It affects future choices. And in many cases, it limits generosity, flexibility, and peace.

One of the key contributors to financial education in the United States has come through the work of Dave Ramsey and Ramsey Solutions. There is a wealth of practical information on their website. Over the years, they have helped millions of families recognize both the practical and emotional dangers of unmanaged debt (they have a lot of wisdom about other financial areas as well). Their message is often simple but powerful: debt limits freedom.

Ramsey frequently says:

“Live today like no one else, so later you can live and give like no one else.”

That idea has resonated deeply because many people eventually realize they do not merely want more possessions; they want more breathing room.

Now, before going further, we should probably acknowledge something honestly: we are not completely anti-debt. This book is not arguing that every form of borrowing is automatically immoral, foolish, or irresponsible. In fact, in some situations, debt can function as a strategic tool. Mortgages, business loans, educational investments, or transportation loans may help individuals and families create future opportunities when managed carefully and modestly.

The issue is not merely the existence of debt. The issue is whether debt is serving your future or quietly undermining it. There is a major difference between manageable debt attached to a thoughtful financial plan and overwhelming debt that controls your life. Unfortunately, many modern financial systems encourage the second category.

Credit cards routinely carry extraordinarily high interest rates. Payday lending systems often target financially vulnerable people and trap them in cycles of borrowing against future income. In poorer countries, predatory micro-loan systems sometimes charge devastating rates to people with very little financial literacy. Around the world, there are businesses willing to loan money to people who cannot realistically afford repayment because the interest itself becomes profitable. That reality deserves to be named honestly. Some financial systems are designed less to help people thrive and more to profit from their desperation.

An American saying warns: “Easy credit is expensive.”

That is often painfully true.

At the height of the financial crisis in the early 2000s, some researchers observed that many American households were living beyond their means, sometimes spending over 100% of their income and funding the shortfall with consumer debt. Credit cards, personal loans, and financing arrangements quietly filled the gap. For a while, it worked. Until it didn’t.

Debt has a way of borrowing peace from tomorrow.

And one of the most eye-opening aspects of debt is interest itself.

Many people focus primarily on monthly payments rather than total repayment. But interest changes the math dramatically. An impulsive purchase today can quietly cost far more over time than people initially realize. In some cases, families end up paying several times the original value of an item because interest stretches repayment across years.

That is why debt requires wisdom. Not fear. Not shame. Wisdom.

A HEBREW PROVERB SAYS: “THE BORROWER BECOMES SERVANT TO THE LENDER.”

A Hebrew proverb says: “The borrower becomes servant to the lender.”

Cultures all over the world have recognized for centuries that debt changes relationships. Owing money reduces flexibility. It limits options. It creates obligations that follow people into future decisions.

So is it possible to become completely debt-free?

Yes.

Difficult for many people? Certainly. But possible.

And honestly, working toward reduced debt or complete debt freedom is one of the healthiest long-term financial goals many families can pursue.

I (Tim) still remember a season in our own lives when debt became emotionally overwhelming. One day, I was walking through the house, and my wife, Terri, said, “You look stressed.” I remember replying, “I am stressed.” We had accumulated debt connected to a rental property project we believed would sell quickly, but the property did not sell as planned. The debt remained, and the pressure followed us home every day.

Eventually, we reached out to Chris (who was a financial advisor at the time) for help. What we needed was not condemnation. We needed perspective. We needed a plan. We needed someone who could help us see a path forward rather than simply feeling trapped. He helped us put together a plan and eventually eliminate our debt. I can still remember something he said when he looked at our situation. He said, matter-of-factly but kindly, “Well, this is not the worst situation that I have seen.” Immediately, my stress lessened. You see, for many of us, our personal finances are both the best and the worst we have ever seen. Mainly because we have never seen someone else’s finances. Don’t let your lack of perspective back you into a corner and cause unnecessary stress. Now it was still a mess, and it took us some time to get out of it, but we did work it out.

That experience and those kind words shaped much of how we think about financial coaching today.

People in debt do not usually need more shame.
Most already feel plenty of that.

They need:

- clarity,
- structure,
- encouragement,
- and movement.

One of the most helpful concepts Ramsey Solutions introduced was creating momentum while paying off debt. Their “Baby Steps” framework gave people simple, understandable progress markers. Two of the most well-known debt reduction methods today are the Snowball Method and the Avalanche Method.

The Snowball Method focuses on paying off the smallest debts first while making minimum payments on the others. As each debt disappears, momentum and confidence grow.

The Avalanche Method focuses first on debt with the highest interest rate, helping reduce total interest costs over time.

Both methods can work well. Different personalities respond differently. Some people need emotional momentum. Others are highly mathematical and want to attack interest aggressively. The important thing is movement.

One payment. One decision. One month. One behavior change at a time.

Now, one of the more sensitive areas related to debt today involves education loans. In many cultures, especially in the United States, young adults often borrow very large amounts of money to pursue university or vocational training. We want to approach this area carefully and compassionately because education itself can absolutely be a worthwhile investment.

Training that develops meaningful skills and future earning potential may create long-term opportunity and stability.

But wisdom still matters.

Borrowing modestly within the realistic earning capacity of your future profession is very different from accumulating enormous debt that is disconnected from your future earning potential. Sometimes young adults are encouraged to borrow so aggressively that when they finally graduate, the debt load itself becomes financially paralyzing.

Again, this is not about shame.
It is about thoughtful planning.

Debt should ideally create opportunity, not lifelong bondage.

Part of wise debt management is understanding healthy exposure levels. In our coaching work, we often encourage families to think carefully about how much of their monthly spendable income goes toward debt obligations. For example, housing and transportation debt should remain at manageable percentages of income whenever possible because losing all income immediately makes every debt payment feel much heavier.

That is one reason emergency savings matter so much. Healthy savings systems reduce the need to constantly rely on debt during setbacks and emergencies.

In fact, many people go into debt not because they are irresponsible but because they fail to prepare for predictable expenses:

- vehicle repairs,
- medical costs,
- school fees,
- holidays,
- home maintenance,
- or temporary income disruption.

Savings and debt management are deeply connected.

One of the most powerful moments in financial coaching often occurs when families finally stop adding new debt. And buying stuff with real money and not plastic money. For the first time, progress becomes possible. The financial hole stops getting deeper. Even if the climb out takes years, hope begins to return because the direction has changed.

An African proverb says: “When there is no enemy within, the enemies outside cannot hurt you.”

In many ways, unmanaged debt often reflects internal pressures: impatience, comparison, fear, lack of planning, emotional spending, or cultural pressure to appear successful. Healthy financial systems require honesty about those realities.

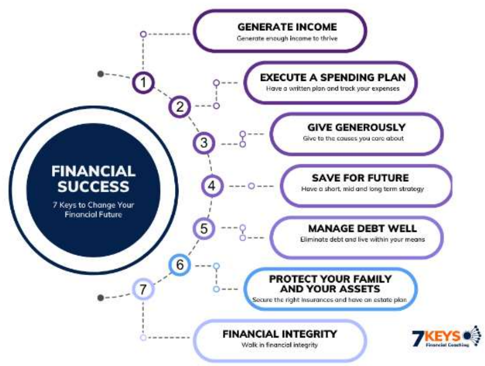
That does not mean life becomes easy overnight. Debt reduction is often slow. But slow progress still matters.

Some countries and communities have also developed credit counseling services designed to help families renegotiate interest rates, consolidate payments, or create structured repayment plans. Some programs are legitimate and genuinely helpful. Others are predatory themselves. Wisdom and caution are necessary. But the existence of these systems itself reveals how widespread debt pressure has become in modern society.

At the end of the day, managing debt wisely is about reclaiming freedom.

Chapter Seven
Key #6 —Protect What Matters Most

“Fix the roof while the sun is shining.” — John F. Kennedy



One of the realities of life is that eventually something unexpected happens. A medical emergency. A vehicle accident. A storm. A death in the family. A business setback. An injury that limits work. A legal problem. A house fire. An aging parent who suddenly needs care.

Healthy financial systems do not pretend these things will never happen. They prepare for the possibility that they might. That is what protection is really about. Protection is an act of wisdom. Protection is an act of responsibility. And in many ways, protection is an act of love.

One of the challenges in discussing this topic globally is recognizing that different cultures and countries approach protection in different ways. In some places, the insurance industry is highly developed and offers countless products. In other places, insurance products may be limited, unreliable, expensive, or almost nonexistent. Some communities rely heavily on extended family systems or communal support during a crisis. Others expect individuals to carry nearly all the responsibility themselves.

So, we want to be careful not to present protection as though every family in every country should own the exact same financial products.

That is not realistic.

But regardless of where we live, the principle remains remarkably universal:

We need a plan for dealing with life’s vulnerabilities.

Sometimes that protection comes through insurance.
Sometimes through savings.
Sometimes through family systems.
Sometimes through legal planning.
Often, through a combination of all of them.

The important thing is not pretending we are immune from hardship.

A Swahili proverb says: “Prevention is better than cure.”

That idea applies financially as much as medically.

One of the more common reactions people have toward insurance is frustration. In many countries, people feel insurance companies are expensive, difficult, or even exploitative. In some situations, those frustrations are understandable. Insurance systems are imperfect because human systems are imperfect.

But sometimes people reject protection altogether because they dislike the industry connected to it.

That can become dangerous.

For example, someone may say:

"I cannot afford health insurance."

And perhaps that is true.

But the deeper reality is this: if a major medical issue arises, they will still need medical care somehow. The need itself does not disappear simply because insurance was unavailable or unaffordable. In many cases, families without protection are forced into financial crisis because they never created a plan.

So, when we talk about protection, we are not merely talking about insurance products. We are talking about preparedness.

Preparedness says:

- "What happens if something goes wrong?"
- "How exposed is my family?"
- "What systems have we created to reduce damage during crisis?"

Healthy financial systems consider those questions before emergencies arise.

An American saying warns: "Hope is not a plan."

That may sound blunt, but it is true.

Many people quietly hope:

- nothing breaks
- nobody gets sick
- no accident happens
- no income disappears
- no tragedy arrives

But wisdom prepares anyway.

One of the most important concepts in protection is understanding that not all forms of protection look the same. A family in the United States may use multiple insurance policies. A family in rural Africa may rely more heavily on savings and community support. A business owner may need liability coverage. A farmer may need livestock protection. A parent may simply need enough savings to absorb medical costs or school disruptions.

ONE OF THE HEALTHIEST SHIFTS PEOPLE CAN MAKE FINANCIALLY IS MOVING FROM REACTIVE THINKING TO PROACTIVE THINKING. REACTIVE SYSTEMS CONSTANTLY RESPOND TO CRISES AFTER THE FACT. PROACTIVE SYSTEMS ARE QUIETLY PREPARED IN ADVANCE.

The principle is broader than the product.

Protection simply means identifying areas of vulnerability and creating plans to reduce the damage if hardship occurs.

Areas of Protection to Consider

Different people will need different forms of protection depending on culture, age, income, family structure, and available services, but here are some common areas worth evaluating:

Protection Checklist

- A Written Will or Trust
- Medical Insurance
- Vision Insurance
- Dental Insurance
- Life Insurance
- Dependent Life Insurance
- Short-Term Disability
- Long-Term Disability
- Accident Coverage
- Auto Insurance
- Home or Renter Insurance
- Business Insurance
- Liability Protection
- Long-Term Care Planning
- Emergency Savings
- Parent or Elder Care Planning
- Funeral or Burial Planning
- School Fee Planning
- Livestock or Agricultural Protection
- Other Family Assets

Again, the exact products and systems available will differ around the world. Some readers may have access to sophisticated financial systems. Others may rely almost entirely on savings and family support networks. But every family benefits from asking:

“What areas of our lives are vulnerable right now?”

That question alone often changes behavior.

One area where protection is frequently overlooked is estate planning.

Many people assume estate planning is only for wealthy individuals. But honestly, estate planning is really about clarity, not merely wealth. It is about making your wishes known and helping protect the people you love after you are gone.

Unfortunately, in many cultures, death planning is approached passively. People avoid the conversation because it feels uncomfortable, emotional, or even disrespectful. Others assume family members will simply “figure it out” after they die.

But often they do not.

Instead, confusion emerges.
Conflict emerges.
Financial hardship emerges.

Sometimes widows become vulnerable.
Sometimes children lose stability.
Sometimes, property becomes disputed.
Sometimes families are left trying to interpret wishes that were never clearly communicated.

I just finished a book about a lady in western Uganda whose life and her future outreach to vulnerable children in her area were radically changed with the written will of her husband, who had died and left the home and farm to her.

One of the greatest gifts you can give your family is clarity.

A written will.
Clear instructions.
Organized accounts.
Known passwords.
Documented wishes.
Basic planning.

These are not merely legal exercises.
They are acts of care.

An African proverb says: “When roots are deep, there is no reason to fear the wind.”

Protection helps deepen roots.

And honestly, one of the most loving things we can do is reduce chaos for the people we care about most.

This chapter also connects naturally to aging. Around the world, people are living longer than in previous generations. Medical advances continue to increase life expectancy in many countries, and with longer life often comes greater financial need.

Whether through retirement savings, family support systems, pensions, or community structures, most people will eventually reach seasons when their earning capacity slows. Winter comes financially for everyone eventually.

That reality deserves preparation, not denial.

One of the healthiest shifts people can make financially is moving from reactive thinking to proactive thinking. Reactive systems constantly respond to crises after the fact. Proactive systems are quietly prepared in advance.

That preparation may not always feel exciting.

No one enjoys paying insurance premiums.
No one enjoys discussing wills.
No one enjoys imagining emergencies.

But mature financial systems understand something important:
Protection creates stability.

And stability creates peace.

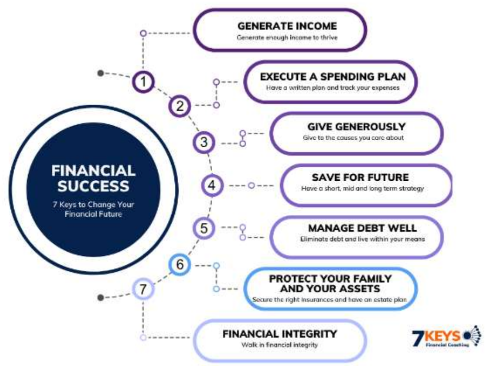
At the end of the day, protecting what matters most is not fundamentally about fear. It is about responsibility. It is about recognizing that our decisions affect other people. It is about loving our families enough to think ahead.

Healthy financial systems do not merely help people survive good seasons. They help people withstand difficult times.

And perhaps one of the clearest signs of wisdom is not merely enjoying today but thoughtfully preparing for tomorrow.

Chapter Eight
Key#7- Walking in Financial Integrity

"The reputation of a thousand years may be determined by the conduct of one hour." — Japanese



There is an interesting thing about integrity. Almost everybody wants it from other people.

We want honest mechanics.
Honest governments.
Honest business owners.
Honest employees.
Honest spouses.
Honest friends.
Honest financial systems.

Very few people wake up in the morning hoping to be cheated.

And that reality tells us something important. Deep down, human beings seem to share an understanding that honesty matters and that deception damages trust. Every culture develops different customs, laws, and expectations, but almost every society still punishes theft, fraud, dishonesty, corruption, or exploitation in some form. Why? Because without integrity, human systems eventually begin breaking down.

Financial integrity is about learning to do the right thing with money, even when shortcuts, pressure, or opportunity tempt us otherwise.

Now, admittedly, much of our own thinking about integrity has been deeply shaped by biblical ideas. But even outside explicitly religious systems, there remains a broad human recognition that honesty, fairness, trustworthiness, and reliability matter enormously. Businesses collapse without trust. Families fracture without trust. Communities weaken without trust.

Integrity is the glue holding human relationships together.

One of the more interesting conversations I (Tim) had related to this happened in Nairobi, Kenya. I had hired a taxi driver to take me somewhere, and during the drive, we began discussing financial coaching. He asked me what a financial coach does. I told him that one of the things we try to teach people is the importance of financial integrity.

He paused and asked: "What is integrity?"

That question stayed with me because many people have never really stopped to define it carefully.

So, we began working through a practical example together. I knew from an African friend that the normal fare for the taxi ride should have been around 500 Kenyan shillings, roughly 4 or 5 US dollars. But when the driver first saw me as a foreign white visitor—a *mzungu*—the price increased dramatically.

I asked him honestly:

“Would you have charged me more because I was foreign?”

He smiled sheepishly and admitted that he probably would have.

Then I asked:

“Why?”

He did not really have a good answer.

What we eventually discussed was this: integrity means doing what is right regardless of who is standing in front of you. It means fairness that is not manipulated by opportunity, power, race, wealth, or advantage. Charging fair prices for everyone may not always maximize short-term profit, but it builds something more valuable over time: trust.

And trust is one of the most valuable currencies in the world.

WE WANT HONEST MECHANICS.
HONEST GOVERNMENTS.
HONEST BUSINESS OWNERS.
HONEST EMPLOYEES.
HONEST SPOUSES.
HONEST FRIENDS.
HONEST FINANCIAL SYSTEMS.

An African proverb says: “A lie has many variations, the truth none.”

That is especially true financially.

One of the dangers in financial life is that people often begin compromising in very small ways. Rarely do people wake up one morning intending to destroy their reputation. More often, integrity erodes slowly:

- a hidden expense
- a dishonest reimbursement
- a misleading invoice
- unpaid taxes
- manipulated numbers
- stolen time
- “borrowing” from a company account
- or taking advantage of someone who lacks knowledge or power

At first, many of these compromises feel small. Manageable. Explainable.

But integrity problems tend to grow.

I have personally known individuals who slowly drifted into financial dishonesty and eventually destroyed their careers and reputations. One friend flirted around the edges financially for years, convinced he was not really doing anything terribly wrong. Eventually, the legal system disagreed. He spent time in jail, lost his professional credibility, and found it nearly impossible to return to his previous career path afterward.

Nobody wants a chief financial officer who steals from the company.

Integrity matters because trust matters.

And once trust breaks, rebuilding it can take years.

A Mexican proverb says: “He who loses wealth loses much. He who loses a friend loses more. But he who loses courage loses all.”

I might add:

“He who loses integrity eventually loses everything attached to it.”

One of the interesting dimensions of integrity is that the word itself carries the idea of wholeness or soundness. Engineers talk about “structural integrity.” A building with structural integrity is stable, sound, and trustworthy. A building without integrity may look fine on the outside but may contain hidden weaknesses that can lead to collapse later.

Financial integrity works much the same way.

Years ago, I (Tim) owned a house that eventually developed severe foundation problems. At first, the issues seemed minor—small cracks, sticking doors, uneven floors. But over time, the hidden structural weaknesses became impossible to ignore. Eventually, the repairs cost tens of thousands of dollars because the structure's integrity had been compromised.

Human character can function the same way.

Sometimes people appear successful externally, while hidden compromises quietly weaken the structure underneath. Eventually, the pressure becomes too great, and collapse follows:

- marriages collapse
- businesses collapse
- reputations collapse
- organizations collapse
- governments collapse

Not always because of incompetence.
Sometimes, because of compromised integrity.

A Chinese proverb says: “The strength of a nation derives from the integrity of the home.”

Integrity creates stability at every level:

- personal
- financial
- organizational
- and societal

So what does financial integrity look like in practice?

First, it means honesty in financial dealings. Honest reporting. Honest pricing. Honest reimbursement practices. Honest taxes. Honest wages. Honest contracts. Honest communication. It means refusing to manipulate people financially simply because you can.

In our organization, we sometimes use a phrase related to questionable expenses: "When in doubt, throw it out."

That principle has saved many people from crossing ethical lines they later would regret.

Second, integrity means honoring commitments whenever possible. Paying what you owe. Following through on agreements. Communicating honestly when problems arise. Around the world, trust-based economies depend heavily on people keeping their word.

Third, integrity means resisting exploitation. Some people become financially successful by taking advantage of weaker, poorer, less educated, or more desperate people. But healthy financial systems should create value, not merely extract it unfairly.

A Hindu proverb says: "Truth alone triumphs."

Not immediately, perhaps.
But eventually.

Fourth, integrity means consistency. It means being fundamentally the same person regardless of who is watching. Public honesty and private honesty align.

That is harder than it sounds. Especially when money is involved.

Because money has a way of exposing character. Pressure exposes character. Opportunity exposes character. Scarcity exposes character. Success exposes character.

And honestly, most people can justify almost anything to themselves if they want to badly enough. That is why integrity must become intentional.

One encouraging thing about integrity, however, is that it tends to compound over time, just like healthy savings or wise investments do. People known for honesty, reliability, fairness, and trustworthiness often build stronger relationships, businesses, reputations, and communities over time.

Integrity creates durability.

At the end of the day, financial integrity is not merely about avoiding illegal behavior. It is about becoming the kind of person people can trust.

A trustworthy spouse.
A trustworthy employer.
A trustworthy employee.
A trustworthy business owner.
A trustworthy friend.

And perhaps one of the greatest forms of financial success is not merely accumulating wealth but building a life strong enough that people trust both your character and your word.

PART 3 — THE HEART OF FINANCIAL HEALTH

Chapter Nine
Enough: Learning Contentment

"Enough is as good as a feast." — English Proverb

One of the more difficult realities about financial health is that progress often takes time.

Healthy systems rarely appear overnight.
Debt reduction takes time.
Savings take time.
Careers take time.
Businesses take time.
Communities take time.
Even entire economies sometimes take decades to stabilize after seasons of inflation, corruption, or financial chaos.

And while people are moving from instability toward financial health, they often face an important emotional challenge: learning contentment during the journey.

That word can feel strange in modern culture because we live in a world constantly encouraging us to want more:

- a bigger house
- a better car
- a higher salary
- another promotion
- another vacation
- another upgrade
- another lifestyle

Much of modern advertising quietly trains dissatisfaction. The message is often: "What you currently have is not enough."

But contentment pushes back against that pressure. Contentment says: "I may still be growing, improving, and working toward goals, but I can still appreciate the life I have right now."

That is very different from laziness or lack of ambition. Contentment does not mean we stop growing. It means we stop despising where we currently are.

And honestly, some of the most content people we have met have not necessarily been wealthy people. In many poorer cultures around the world, people often learn to appreciate simple things:

- meals shared together
- family
- friendships
- laughter

- community
- meaningful work
- and small moments of joy

That does not mean poverty itself is desirable. Financial hardship can be incredibly stressful and painful. But sometimes people with fewer resources still learn an important truth: having more does not automatically create peace.

An African proverb says: “The grasshopper that is always near its mother eats the best grass.”

There is wisdom in learning to appreciate what is already in front of you.

When I (Tim) got married, one of my friends gave us humorous advice during our wedding celebration. He looked at me and said: “Tim, give Terri everything she wants.” His wife applauded enthusiastically. Then he added: “And Terri, want only what you need.” Immediately, his wife started booing from the back of the room.

Everyone laughed but hidden inside the humor was an important principle: contentment is closely connected to desire.

Sometimes the endless pursuit of what we do not currently possess quietly undermines our ability to enjoy what we already have.

I know people who spend so much emotional energy focused on the future that they never enjoy the present. Others stay trapped in regret over the past. Some constantly compare themselves to someone else’s life, house, salary, or success.

Comparison is often the enemy of contentment.

I was talking with someone recently who had been contacted by a recruiter about another job opportunity. The interesting thing was that his current situation was quite healthy. He had good balance, meaningful influence, decent income, and strong relationships. Yet something inside him still felt restless. We ended up joking that the grass is not always greener on the other side of the fence.

In fact, the grass on the other side still has to be mowed.

That conversation stuck with me because discontentment often disguises itself as opportunity. Sometimes growth opportunities are legitimate. But other times, we simply become unable to appreciate the lives we already have.

Contentment has a way of grounding us.

A Japanese proverb says: “He who knows he has enough is rich.”

That is a fascinating idea.

Not rich financially, necessarily.
Rich emotionally.
Rich relationally.
Rich internally.

Several years ago, my (Tim) son asked me a question that unexpectedly forced me into some personal reflection. He noticed that many of his friends lived in a particularly nice neighborhood in our city and innocently asked: “Dad, why don’t we live there?”

It was not a disrespectful question at all. He was simply observing differences. I explained to him that my career path had given me opportunities to influence and help people, but not necessarily to accumulate the same level of wealth as some others in our community. I told him that if someday he wanted to live in a neighborhood like that, he certainly could. He would simply need to work hard, develop his skills, and build toward that goal. He seemed perfectly satisfied with the answer.

But afterward, I found myself wrestling internally. How did *I* feel about where I landed?

One night, I got up in the middle of the night and began quietly walking through my house, thinking about all this. And suddenly it hit me. I was already living my childhood dream. When I was young, there was a beautiful neighborhood in the town where I grew up called Brownwood. I remembered thinking as a child:

“Someday I would love to live in a house like those.” And now, years later, I realized I already did.

Somewhere along the way, I had unconsciously shifted my comparison point from my younger dreams to someone else’s current success. I had stopped appreciating what had already been built because I was evaluating my life against someone else’s life.

That realization changed something in me. Contentment often begins when we stop evaluating our lives primarily through comparison.

A Mexican proverb says: “Do not look where you fell, but where you slipped.”

Sometimes the issue is not our circumstances. Sometimes the issue is perspective.

One of the interesting observations from Gallup’s wellbeing research was that thriving people often experienced a sense of wholeness across several important areas of life:

- work
- relationships
- finances
- physical health
- and community

None of those areas had to be perfect.
But there was enough health to feel grounded and connected to their lives.

That feels very close to contentment.

Not perfection.
Not unlimited wealth.
Not endless comfort.

Wholeness.

The reality is that every life contains tradeoffs. Some careers create wealth but consume time and relationships. Others create influence and meaning but may not maximize income. Some people prioritize simplicity. Others prioritize achievement. Different people define success differently.

Contentment grows when we become more intentional about defining our own lives instead of unconsciously chasing everyone else's definition.

A Hebrew proverb says: "Do you see a man skilled in his work? He will stand before kings."

We often summarize that idea this way: "Focus on your skills. Let God focus on the kings."

In other words, focus on becoming healthy, skilled, faithful, and responsible in your own life instead of obsessively chasing status or comparison.

Contentment is not passive resignation. It is peaceful intentionality.

You may still work toward:

- greater stability
- debt reduction
- healthier savings
- career growth
- or improved opportunities

But you can pursue those things without living in constant frustration over what you do not yet possess.

An Indian proverb says:"Contentment is the greatest wealth."

And perhaps there is more truth in that statement than modern culture wants to admit.

Because eventually, many people discover that achieving the next financial milestone does not permanently remove restlessness. The target simply moves again.

More income. More success. More comparison. More pressure.

Contentment interrupts that cycle.

It reminds us that life is happening now.

Your family now.
Your friendships now.
Your community now.
Your opportunities now.
Your health now.
Your work now.

Not someday.

At the end of the day, financial health is not merely about accumulating resources. It is about building a life that is stable, meaningful, generous, peaceful, and whole.

And one of the surprising secrets of healthy financial systems may simply be this:

Learning to appreciate enough while still responsibly building for tomorrow.

Conclusion- Building a Healthier Financial Life

"Little by little, the bird builds its nest." — African Proverb

If there is one idea we hope you carry away from this book, it is this:

Financial health is possible.

Not perfectly.
Not instantly.
Not without setbacks.
But possible.

For some readers, financial health may mean escaping constant crisis and finally stabilizing. For others, it may mean building savings, eliminating debt, protecting loved ones, or learning how to live with greater peace and intentionality. For some, it may mean learning to be generous. For others, it may mean learning contentment. Different people begin in different places, but the journey toward a healthier financial life is available to far more people than they realize.

Throughout this book, we have tried to present a practical framework for financial wellbeing that works across cultures, income levels, and life situations. We have talked about the importance of generating enough income to thrive because many people are not merely struggling with spending problems—they simply do not yet earn enough to create stability and margin. We have discussed the importance of building a working spending plan, so your money moves in the same direction as your goals. We explored generosity and how contributions often strengthen not only communities but also the human spirit itself. We discussed the wisdom of saving for the future, managing debt carefully, protecting what matters most, walking in financial integrity, and learning contentment along the way.

Together, these ideas form a healthier financial system.

Not a perfect system.
Not a wealthy system necessarily.
But a healthier one.

One of the important distinctions we made throughout this book was the difference between financial wealth and financial health. Wealth is unevenly distributed throughout the world. Opportunity differs from nation to nation, community to community, and family to family. But financial health can still grow in many different environments because healthy financial systems are often built through habits, perspective, wisdom, discipline, and intentionality.

Little by little.

That phrase may summarize the entire book.

Little by little:

- debt decreases
- savings grow
- skills improve
- opportunities expand
- relationships strengthen
- stress decreases
- and healthier systems emerge

The same principle applies to communities, organizations, and even entire nations. Financial stability rarely appears overnight. It is usually built gradually through thousands of wise decisions repeated over long periods of time.

Perhaps as you read this book, you realized there are areas where your own financial system needs attention. Maybe you recognized unhealthy patterns. Maybe you discovered areas where you need structure, discipline, or support. Maybe you found encouragement that progress is still possible even if the journey feels slow.

We hope so.

Because financial health is not merely about money. It is about people.

It is about:

- marriages with less stress
- families with more stability
- communities with stronger support systems
- older adults with dignity
- children with opportunity
- and individuals living with greater peace and purpose

Healthy financial systems create breathing room for life itself.

And perhaps one of the most important ideas in this book is the idea of *enough*. In a world constantly pushing people toward endless comparison and endless consumption, learning what "enough" looks like for your family may be one of the healthiest financial discoveries you ever make.

Thriving does not necessarily mean extravagance. It means there is enough:

- enough stability
- enough margin
- enough preparation
- enough generosity
- enough peace
- enough hope for tomorrow

That is a worthy goal.

As you move forward, we encourage you not to become overwhelmed by trying to change everything at once. Most healthy financial systems are not transformed in a single dramatic moment. They are usually rebuilt through consistent small decisions:

- one budget
- one payment
- one savings deposit
- one honest conversation
- one better habit
- one wise decision at a time

Little by little.

We believe that.

Thank you for allowing us to spend this time with you. Whether you are reading this book from a large city, a small village, a struggling season, or a stable one, we hope these ideas have encouraged you and given you practical tools to help move toward a healthier financial life.

And perhaps most importantly, we hope this book reminds you that financial health is not reserved for the wealthy. It is something ordinary people can pursue through wisdom, discipline, generosity, integrity, and steady progress over time.

Little by little.

You can do this. You can change your financial situation and your financial destiny of your children and grandchildren. But you need to start today.

If you find yourself interested in talking with someone about your financial situation, reach out to one of our coaches at 7Keys Financial (www.7keysfinancial.com)

Appendix A- Rise and Build US Edition

You don’t have to wait for a job. You can create one.

In a world where unemployment often feels like a wall, *Rise & Build* offers a new path: start where you are, use what you have, and grow something that lasts.

This 31-day guide is packed with real principles and simulated stories from the US — showing you how to launch micro-projects, grow side hustles, and take your first steps toward business ownership.

But it’s not just about profit. The bonus section explores the character it takes to build something meaningful — integrity, discipline, and a vision that reaches beyond yourself.

Introduction: Take Responsibility

There comes a moment in every person’s life when something shifts — when you stop blaming, stop waiting, and stop hoping someone else will solve your problems. It’s the moment you look in the mirror and say:

“If something is going to change… it starts with me.”

That moment is called responsibility. And it's where all financial progress begins.

Across America — from small towns to big cities — people are feeling the pressure. Prices are up. Opportunities feel uneven. Student loans and medical bills pile up. And yet, all around us, there are people who are finding a way. They’re starting small businesses, turning hobbies into side hustles, freelancing, and figuring out how to thrive in a changing world.

What makes the difference?

It starts with a choice: the decision to own your life.

Personal finance isn’t just about spreadsheets. It’s about grit, mindset, and vision. It’s about asking honest questions:

- Am I generating enough income to provide for myself and those I love?
- Am I using my time and skills wisely?
- Am I building something for the future?

This 31-day guide focuses on a crucial first step: generating income.

Because no matter how smart your budget is, you can’t manage what doesn’t exist. Generating income is the starting point. And it’s something you can do — whether you have a job, need a second one, or want to create your own.

We've seen that people who thrive financially tend to practice seven key habits — like giving, saving, budgeting, and planning ahead. But all of those habits rest on one foundation:

Responsibility.

Own your income. Own your effort. Own your future.

If you're holding this book, you've already taken a bold step.

Over the next 31 days, you'll learn practical principles, reflect on simulated stories from across the U.S., and begin forming your own plan. Some ideas may spark new ventures. Others may remind you of something you already knew — but hadn't yet acted on.

So let's begin, right here, with one powerful decision:

I will take responsibility for generating income.
I will not wait for someone else to rescue me.
I will learn, work, grow, and build — starting now.

This is your journey. And you're not alone.

Getting Started (Days 1–10)

Day 1 – Start Where You Are

Principle: You don't need everything to begin — just something.
Explanation: Many people wait until conditions are perfect. But most successful ventures start small — with what's already in hand: a skill, a tool, or even time.

Illustration (U.S. version): In rural Missouri, a high school senior started offering lawn mowing services using his dad's old push mower. He began with one neighbor. Within two summers, he had upgraded to riding equipment and hired two classmates.

Personal Reflection:

Day 2 – Use What You Know

Principle: Your knowledge is a product.
Explanation: If you know something useful — like tutoring, digital design, or baking — there's someone who will pay to learn it or benefit from it.

Illustration (U.S. version): A college student in Dallas started tutoring algebra on Zoom for local middle schoolers during COVID. Word spread through a parents' Facebook group, and within a semester, she was earning enough to pay for rent.

Personal Reflection:

Day 3 – Find Needs, Meet Needs

Principle: Income follows usefulness.
Explanation: The fastest way to create income is to solve a problem. Start by asking, "What do people need every day?"

Illustration (U.S. version): In a Detroit suburb, a woman noticed that commuters were always in a rush in the mornings. She set up a curbside breakfast burrito stand near a bus stop and built a loyal customer base on weekday mornings.

Personal Reflection:

Day 4 – Think Small, Start Smaller

Principle: Big dreams grow from small starts.
Explanation: Starting small reduces risk, builds confidence, and allows you to learn while doing.

Illustration (U.S. version): A college dropout in Georgia started selling snow cones at Little League games using a cooler and a card table. By his third summer, he had upgraded to a trailer and hired two high school students to help.

Personal Reflection:

Day 5 – Time Is a Resource

Principle: Treat time like money — invest it wisely.
Explanation: Many business ideas fail not because of lack of money, but poor time use.

Illustration (U.S. version): A single dad in Oregon spent his evenings watching woodworking tutorials while his kids were asleep. He now sells handmade cutting boards at local craft fairs and online.

Personal Reflection:

Day 6 – Money Follows Value

Principle: Don't chase money — create value, and money will follow.
Explanation: When you focus on being helpful, excellent, or reliable, customers come naturally.

Illustration (U.S. version):A rideshare driver in Chicago built a loyal client list by always having snacks, phone chargers, and a clean car. Over time, repeat riders tipped more and started requesting him directly.

Personal Reflection:

Day 7 – Test Before You Scale

Principle: Try it small before going big.
Explanation: A small test helps avoid big mistakes. Before investing a lot, try your idea with just a few people and get feedback.

Illustration (U.S. version):A young woman in Denver wanted to sell custom trail mix blends. She tested her recipes at a weekend farmer's market with samples and surveys. The top two blends became her signature line — now sold in three local shops.

Personal Reflection:

Day 8 – Learn as You Earn

Principle: Earning and learning go hand-in-hand.
Explanation: You don't have to be an expert to begin. In fact, doing something now will teach you faster than waiting.

Illustration (U.S. version):A high schooler in rural Kansas began fixing cracked phone screens after watching tutorials online. His early jobs weren't perfect, but with every repair he improved. Now, he's the go-to guy in town for tech fixes.

Personal Reflection:

Day 9 – Partner with a Person, Not Just a Plan

Principle: A trustworthy partner can double your reach.
Explanation: Many businesses grow faster when two people combine their skills, trust, and time. Choose character over charisma.

Illustration (U.S. version): Two cousins in South Carolina started a mobile car wash. One handled scheduling and payments; the other detailed vehicles. Their teamwork and trust helped them expand from 3 cars a weekend to over 20. **Personal Reflection:**

Personal Reflection:

Day 10 – Reinvest the First Profits

Principle: Don't consume the seed.
Explanation: It's tempting to spend early profits, but reinvesting them creates stability and scale.

Illustration (U.S. version): A teen in Phoenix made her first $200 selling handmade earrings on Etsy. Instead of buying clothes, she bought better tools and packaging. Her sales doubled, and she now ships nationwide.

Personal Reflection:

Side Hustle & Bigger Projects (Days 11–20)

Day 11 – Build Around a Skill

Principle: Businesses thrive when built around what you're good at.
Explanation: Your unique skills — sewing, fixing, coding, speaking — can become the foundation of a side hustle.

Illustration (U.S. version): A retired mechanic in Ohio began hosting weekend classes on basic car care for teens and single moms. His garage turned into a paid learning hub — and a community builder.

Personal Reflection:

Day 12 – Treat It Like a Business

Principle: Take your idea seriously.
Explanation: Keep records. Track costs. Be dependable. A hobby becomes a business when you treat it like one.

Illustration (U.S. version): A woman in Sacramento started baking sourdough bread during the pandemic. She created a logo, printed labels, tracked expenses, and named her weekly drops. Local restaurants took notice — and placed wholesale orders.

Personal Reflection:

Day 13 – Create Something Repeatable

Principle: Systems create freedom.
Explanation: If your process works once, make it work again and again. Repeatable systems build consistency and reliability.

Illustration (U.S. version): A dog groomer in Tampa developed a 3-step cleaning and clipping process. She trained her teenage son to follow the same method — now she takes more clients while he handles walk-ins.

Personal Reflection:

Day 14 – Think in Units, Not Hours

Principle: Sell products or packages, not just time.
Explanation: Earning per hour limits you. But creating something that can be sold again and again multiplies your potential.

Illustration (U.S. version): A freelance graphic designer in Seattle stopped billing hourly and began offering flat-rate logo and branding packages. With clear tiers and timelines, she worked faster — and earned more.

Personal Reflection:

Day 15 – Don’t Just Sell Products — Solve Problems

Principle: People pay to have their problems solved.
Explanation: Shift your mindset: don’t push a product, offer a solution.

Illustration (U.S. version): A man in Pittsburgh was struggling to sell his handmade storage bins online. He changed his message from “wooden boxes” to “decluttering tools for small apartments.” His sales increased immediately.

Personal Reflection:

Day 16 – Build Customer Trust

Principle: Trust is more valuable than marketing.
Explanation: People return to businesses they trust. Show up on time. Keep your word. Deliver good service.

Illustration (U.S. version): A woman in Nashville started pet-sitting. She sent photo updates and left thank-you notes. Within three months, her reputation spread through the neighborhood Facebook group — and her bookings were full for weeks.

Personal Reflection:

Day 17 – Design with Excellence

Principle: Stand out with quality.
Explanation: In a competitive market, quality work speaks louder than loud marketing.

Illustration (U.S. version): A teenager in New Mexico sold handmade candles at craft fairs. Instead of basic packaging, she used recycled glass, custom scents, and hand-lettered labels. Her candles became a local favorite.

Personal Reflection:

Day 18 – Multiply Yourself

Principle: Teach someone what you do.
Explanation: Training others frees you to scale. You work on the business, not just in it.

Illustration (U.S. version): A man in Detroit ran a home cleaning service. He taught two friends his methods, created checklists, and launched a team. Now he handles scheduling while his crews work across the city.

Personal Reflection:

Day 19 – Explore Digital Platforms

Principle: Your phone is a tool for income.
Explanation: Social media, WhatsApp, TikTok, and online marketplaces are powerful for marketing and sales.

Illustration (U.S. version): A young mom in Austin started selling thrifted clothing online. She styled outfits, shot short TikTok clips, and linked her Depop shop. Orders came in from all over the country.

Personal Reflection:

Day 20 – Formalize Your Side Hustle

Principle: Make your business official.
Explanation: Registration, licensing, and branding open doors to bigger clients and protect your idea.

Illustration (U.S. version): A snack vendor in Atlanta began selling at pop-up markets. Once she registered as an LLC and got a food handler's permit, she was invited to join weekend festivals and community events.

Personal Reflection:

From Side Hustle to Scalable Enterprise (Days 21–31)

Day 21 – Know Your Numbers

Principle: You can't grow what you don't track.
Explanation: Track sales, costs, and profit margins. Use notebooks, spreadsheets, or mobile apps — but know what's working.

Illustration (U.S. version):
A teenager in Spokane sold custom T-shirts but wasn't making much profit. Once he tracked expenses (ink, shirts, shipping), he realized his prices were too low. Adjusting them nearly doubled his margins.

Day 22 – Build a Brand

Principle: Your name and reputation matter.
Explanation: Branding isn't just a logo — it's the feeling people get when they think of your business. Pick a name, create consistent packaging, and stay reliable.

Illustration (U.S. version): A beekeeper in North Carolina named her honey "Carolina Gold" and designed simple kraft labels with wildflower themes. Her jars stood out on shelves — and her honey ended up in local boutiques.

Personal Reflection:

Day 23 – Embrace Mentorship

Principle: A guide helps you grow faster and avoid mistakes.
Explanation: Find someone ahead of you — and learn from their journey. Mentorship can save years of trial and error.

Illustration (U.S. version): A college student in Minneapolis started a mobile coffee cart. With advice from a retired café owner, she avoided costly permit mistakes and landed a deal to serve at university events.

Personal Reflection:

Day 24 – Build a Team, Not Just a Task List

Principle: A growing business needs more than just workers — it needs owners.
Explanation: Train others to take ownership in their role. Empower them to grow with the business.

Illustration (U.S. version): A landscaping business in Phoenix promoted a crew leader to team coordinator and gave him a bonus for every new contract landed. With pride in the outcome, the team began delivering above-and-beyond results.

Personal Reflection:

Day 25 – Raise Capital the Right Way

Principle: Not all money is smart money.
Explanation: Grow with integrity. Use savings, partnerships, microfinance, or grants — but avoid debt traps.

Illustration (U.S. version): A group of friends in Vermont applied for a local small business grant to fund their organic veggie co-op. They avoided high-interest loans and kept full ownership of their idea.

Personal Reflection:

Day 26 – Diversify Without Losing Focus

Principle: Don't put all your hope in one stream.
Explanation: Once stable, add one or two related income streams. Keep your brand focused, but reduce your risk.

Illustration (U.S. version): A woman in Portland sold homemade granola. She later introduced granola bars and breakfast boxes using the same ingredients and brand. Sales grew — and she didn't lose her niche.

Personal Reflection:

Day 27 – Solve Bigger Problems

Principle: Big problems = big opportunity.
Explanation: Think upstream. What challenges do schools, farms, churches, or local governments face that you can help solve?

Illustration (U.S. version): A welder in Mississippi started out making patio chairs. When he learned local schools needed safer bus stop shelters, he pitched a solution. Within a year, he was building and installing across the district.

Personal Reflection:

Day 28 – Tell Your Story

Principle: People connect with story more than sales pitches.
Explanation: Share your journey on social media, in conversation, and through your marketing. Let others know why you do what you do.

Illustration (U.S. version): A woman in Chicago shared how she began her online meal prep business after losing her restaurant job during COVID. Her vulnerability resonated — and clients said, "I chose you because of your story."

Personal Reflection:

Day 29 – Multiply by Training Others

Principle: Train to grow, not just to help.
Explanation: Offer internships or apprenticeships. Teach what you've learned — and build a network of people who succeed with you.

Illustration (U.S. version): A barber in Baltimore trained local teens after school, teaching both haircuts and customer service. One of his students now rents a chair in his shop — and helps train others.

Personal Reflection:

Day 30 – Build for Generations

Principle: Think legacy, not just profit.
Explanation: What if your children could benefit from your business one day? Train them. Involve them. Steward it well.

Illustration (U.S. version): A man in Kentucky opened a small auto detailing service. He taught his daughter how to run the books and his son how to polish and prep cars. Now they're saving together for a larger garage.

Personal Reflection:

Day 31 – Dream Beyond Yourself

Principle: Business can be a blessing to your community.
Explanation: Don't stop at profit. Build businesses that create jobs, solve real needs, and give back to society.

Illustration (U.S. version): A young entrepreneur in Philadelphia started a custom T-shirt shop and now employs four local teens. Every month, they donate shirts to shelters and nonprofits — and the impact speaks louder than ads ever could.

Personal Reflection:

Appendix B- Simple Monthly Budget Sheet (DIY)

Introduction

If you are not familiar with the term DIY, it means do it yourself. As you have been working through this book, we have addressed the concepts of financial health and stewardship both theoretically and with practical examples. But putting together an actual budget is what holds it all together. There are 5 easy steps to doing this.

1) Write down your financial and personal goals. This will help you determine where you want to go. Use the sheet below to capture these.
2) Write down your income on the budget sheet.
3) Write down your expenses on the budget sheet.
4) Consider talking about your plan with a coach and getting some feedback. Our staff at 7Keys Financial Coaching would love to help. Reach out at www.7keysfinancial.com

Goals

Financial Goals- What are your top 3 financial goals (for each of you if married)?

1.
2.
3.

Personal Goals- What are your top 3 financial goals (for each of you if married)?

1.
2.
3.

Spending Plan Summary Sheet

Income

Total Take Home Income ____________

Expenses

Giving ____________

Childcare ____________

Housing ____________

Food ____________

Transportation ____________

Medical ____________

Insurance ____________

Entertainment ____________

Miscellaneous ____________

Savings ____________

Clothing ____________

Gifts ____________

Schooling ____________

Debt ____________

Total Expenses ____________

Cashflow (Subtract Total Expenses from Total Income)

Cashflow ____________

Appendix C- Interested in Coaching?

As you have read this book, you may have found yourself identifying with several areas of finance, maybe even recognizing gaps, and wishing there was a way to interact with a coach in these areas.

At 7Keys Financial Coaching, we have coaches available for a nominal fee that can come alongside you and help you put together a game plan for your personal finances. We focus on goal setting and on developing systems and financial life skills to help you reach those goals. If this is of interest to you, reach out to our team at www.7keysfinancial.com

We would love to help.

About the Authors

Tim Howington- Tim is a financial coach, author, and speaker who has spent more than three decades helping individuals and families build healthier financial lives. Through coaching, writing, and teaching, he has equipped thousands of people with practical tools for managing money, reducing financial stress, and creating lasting financial success. He holds a Bachelor of Science in Computer Science Engineering from the University of Arkansas and has served in leadership roles in higher education, business, and nonprofit organizations. Tim is the author of several books on personal finance, financial coaching, and stewardship, and serves as Executive Vice President of Freedom5one Ministries and founder of the Freedom5one Institute. Tim and his wife, Terri, live in Rogers, Arkansas.

Chris Haas- Chris is a financial coach, educator, and entrepreneur dedicated to helping individuals and families build strong financial foundations. After earning a Bachelor of Science in Finance from the University of Arkansas, he began his career as a financial advisor before transitioning into financial coaching and nonprofit leadership. Chris is the founder of 7Keys Financial Coaching and Freedom5one Ministries, organizations committed to providing practical financial education, coaching, and life-changing resources to individuals, families, businesses, and communities. Chris lives in Fayetteville, Arkansas, with his wife, Tiffany.

About 7Keys Financial Coaching

7Keys Financial Coaching helps individuals and families achieve lasting financial success by building healthy financial habits. Through practical coaching, educational resources, and proven financial principles, we help people create a clear path toward financial stability, confidence, and peace of mind. Our coaching framework is built around seven essential financial principles:

- Generate enough income to thrive
- Build a working spending plan
- Practice generosity
- Save for the future
- Manage debt wisely
- Protect what matters most
- Live with financial integrity

Whether you're just getting started, working to eliminate debt, preparing for retirement, or looking to strengthen your overall financial health, our coaches are committed to helping you build a financial system that works—for today and for the future.

7Keys Financial Coaching is a division of Freedom5one Ministries and serves individuals, businesses, schools, churches, nonprofits, and community organizations throughout the United States and around the world.

To learn more, visit **www.7keysfinancial.com**.