



WARM UP

Do you know any horror stories about debt? Any stories about people caught in the trap of credit and repayment? Know anybody who has declared bankruptcy?

Share a few stories in your group. Talk about the trap of debt and the despair of debt and the slavery of debt.

Now, can you tell your scariest personal debt story? A time when you owed and could not pay?



GROUP THINK

Read Deuteronomy 15:1-15 aloud in your group. Discuss the following:

1. Why did God command a "cancellation" of debt every seven years?
2. Wouldn't this promote irresponsibility?

3. What does this tell us about God's attitude toward debt?
4. There will always be those who need others to be "openhanded and freely lend" them what they need. What attitude towards these people does God encourage?

Now read Leviticus 25:8-28.

1. Every 7 years debts were cancelled. Every 50 years (7x7 years), all property was returned to its original owners. Why would God command this?
2. God never intended debt to be a permanent condition. He built in checks and balances to alleviate the burdens of debt and to give people a chance to start over. Comment?
3. Does there seem to be any shame or blame in the system God set up?
4. Are there any comparable debt-systems in place today?



APPLY IT

Use some of the concepts you've discussed today to think about the following:

1. Do you know anyone who needs a seventh year cancellation of debt? Something to free them from the burden of owing? If they owe you, why not consider forgiving the debt? If they owe someone else, why not consider helping them pay the debt off?
2. Could you declare your own personal "Jubilee"? Could you pick a time to start over financially? Work towards paying off your debts. Set a deadline for getting out from under financial obligations and beginning with a fresh slate.
3. Agree to talk and pray about what is owed to you and what you owe.



THE SLAVERY OF DEBT

In ancient times, when slavery was very commonplace indeed, there were two customary paths to becoming a slave. One was warfare. The losers in a military confrontation were taken captive, shipped off to the slave market, and sold as part of the booty of battle.

The other customary path was debt. People were sold off by the authorities to recover debt. People sold themselves or their offspring to repay debt.

Today, we don't practice slavery like the ancients did. No chains and deeds of ownership. But that doesn't mean there is no slavery in these modern times. There is. It just takes a different form.

Debt enslaves us. It hampers our freedom and takes away our ability to choose. It puts us in the service of our creditors. Our work and reward goes to making others rich. It steals our joy, ties our hands, and greatly multiplies our worries. That sounds like a form of slavery to me.

A mortgage is considered a necessity these days. But what about a car payment? What about that furniture we bought on credit? The "No payments or interest until 2009!" deal that made our home entertainment system possible? What about the maxed out cards and the \$0 balance savings accounts and the "Rob Peter to pay Paul" shell-game that too many of us must play to survive?

We take on debt because we have the freedom to choose ... to charge this ... to owe for that. But soon, debt steals our freedom and we become debt's slave.

And that's no way for children of freedom to live.

PROVERBS 22:7, 27

The borrower is servant to the lender ... Do not be a man who strikes hands in pledge or puts up security for debts; if you lack the means to pay, your very bed will be snatched from under you.

ROMANS 13:7-8

Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor ... Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another ...

QUOTATION

Debt is the slavery of the free.

Publius Cyrus

Debts and lies are generally mixed together.

Francois Rabelius

Some debts are fun when you are acquiring them, but none are fun when you set about retiring them.

Ogden Nash

Debt is to man what the serpent is to the bird: its eye fascinates, its breath poisons, its coil crushes sinew and bone, its jaw is the pitiless grave.

Edward Lytton

PERSONAL STUDY

As we've already noted, many of Jesus' parables touch on the subject of money. And of those, several say some pointed things about debt. Read the following parables and comment on these questions:

The Unmerciful Servant (Matthew 18:23-35)

This parable is premised on the idea that debt puts us under the power of the one we owe. How is this demonstrated in the story?

The forgiveness of debt is completely one-sided. Only the creditor can cancel a debt, not the debtor. What is the only way a debtor can legitimately address debt?

Those who owe should be careful in their treatment of others who owe *them*. Why is that?

The Moneylender (Luke 7:41-42)

Notice the common theme: these people did not have the money to repay their debt. Comment?

This moneylender forgave both debts. What was his other legitimate option? If forgiveness prompts "love," is the opposite also true ... that insisting on repayment prompts hate? Why not?

The Shrewd Manager (Luke 16:1-9)

Apparently, there were many who were in debt to the master of this story. The manager hoped to do what in appealing to this group?

Notice the connection between "owing" and dishonesty. What the manager asks these debtors to do is unethical. Do you suspect that there is often a connection like this?

Why did the master "commend" this manager? For his dishonesty or for his shrewdness? Does "shrewdness" seem a strange virtue to commend?

There are a range of emotions underlying these stories – deep feelings that accompany debt. List the emotions you can imagine the debtors in these stories feeling:

What were these debtors' feelings about being caught in overwhelming, hopeless, unpayable debt?

What do you imagine these debtors felt when called in to "give an account" to their creditor?

What did they experience emotionally when their debt was forgiven?

RESOURCES

BOOKS

[Financial Peace: Restoring Financial Hope to You and Your Family.](#)
Dave Ramsey.

WEB SEMINAR ON HOW TO GET OUT OF DEBT

www.fool.com/seminars/sp/index.htm?sid=0001&lid=000&pid=0000 (there's a downloadable workbook and everything!)

WEBSITES

www.gotquestions.org/money-debt.html (this article – along with other links on this site – is worth reading)

WEBSITES FOR DEBT CONSOLIDATION

www.christianccc.org
www.familylifecredit.org
www.christiancrossroads.org

[Links are available on our web site.]