

I'm writing this on the first day of spring and I'm reminded of how my mom used to always do "spring cleaning" when I was growing up. Have you ever wondered where the term "spring cleaning" comes from? Well, it seems that in times gone by, in the days before paved roads, people had a hard time keeping their houses clean during the winter months because family members constantly tracked dirt and moisture inside. Springtime was much anticipated, because warmer weather meant an end to snow and ice and brought a chance to take rugs and furniture outside to remove all the dirt accumulated in the winter. Even though my mom did "spring cleaning" every year, I don't remember bringing the rugs and furniture outside!

Most of us today still practice spring cleaning as it relates to our houses and yards, but did you know that it's great idea to practice in other parts of our lives too, including finances? That's right – our finances! You see, **part of spring cleaning is organizing, and most of us need to do some financial organizing from time to time.** Another way to say financial organizing is "setting you financial house in order." **Let's look at three of the ingredients to order to your finances....**

1. It has been said that being organized is the ability to find anything you need in 30 seconds or less. It doesn't mean perfection, but it does mean that when you are trying to find something, you know exactly where to look. So, let me ask you a strange question. Do you know where to look for your money? **Unless your organizing includes a written spending plan, it's quite possible, even probable, that you don't have a clear idea of where all your money is going.** For example, have you ever shopped at Wal-Mart, bought all sorts of things, charged your purchases on a credit or debit card, and then when the bill arrived, not have a clue what exactly you bought? That same sort of thing happens to millions of Americans each day on an even larger scale.

Without a written spending plan in place and consistent tracking of expenses, you will find it nearly impossible to know where your money is going. There might even be times when you wonder if maybe you've lost or misplaced some of your money! **Having and using a written monthly spending plan is the key ingredient in organizing your financial house.**

2. Another facet of "financial spring cleaning" is making sure you have a plan for what would happen to your assets in the event of your death. There is a legal device for solving this problem – **a will** – but it's overlooked by most of us. A recent national survey found that 59% of adults in the U.S. did not have a will. In the 18 to 34 age group, only 11% had a will! Most people view estate

planning as something you do in a later stage of life. Unfortunately, death doesn't play by those rules sometimes. Or you might think that you don't have enough assets to bother with a will. **Just like everyone needing a spending plan, regardless of income level, everyone also needs a will to protect their assets and provide for their spouse and children.**

If you don't take care of this, then the government will do it for you, which basically means you make the government your beneficiary by paying estate taxes that could have been avoided or at least reduced through estate planning. With the government as beneficiary, your heirs lose valuable assets that could provide financial stability in the event God takes you home. And, you also lose assets you could have put into God's kingdom work through a nonprofit Christian organization. Gifts to nonprofits are 100% deductible from your estate. It's a wonderful way to leave a lasting legacy by contributing a portion of your estate to God's work. **I encourage you to honor God in your planning by leaving something to His work.**

3. **One other item that's a very important part of setting your house in order is to have adequate life insurance.** Like wills, this is not a topic most of us like to deal with because it involves death. But, if you have family members who depend on your income, life insurance is a must. **We have found that regular fixed-rate term life insurance is almost always best.** There are many other kinds, including some that are supposed to actually generate financial growth, but there are other, more productive ways to invest your money. You need to check with your life insurance professional to determine what's best for you.

A good rule of thumb is to have insurance equal to about ten times your annual income. Such coverage is very affordable for a young person in good health, and fairly inexpensive for those of us who are a bit older. And, don't forget to carry life insurance on your spouse and children. That coverage is very inexpensive, but very valuable in a time of need. **And, as in the case of a will, you can designate a nonprofit organization to be a beneficiary on your life insurance policy.**

God calls each of us to be good stewards or managers. **Practicing some good old-fashioned spring cleaning in the area of our personal finances is good stewardship.** You will have a greater peace of mind and be better organized, more in control of your money, better prepared for the future, and honor God in the process.