

Spirit-Filled Pastor's 3 Secrets to Financial Peace

When my family of seven moved to Branson, Missouri, we were in uncharted territory after 20 years of local church ministry. We were excited to jump into this new season, yet we knew we'd have to get creative with our financial strategy. The Ozark Mountains have millions of beautiful trees, but money doesn't grow on any of them.

Super long story very short, we decided to start a new business in this tourist destination. Specifically, a new escape-room attraction was our plan, and we had a lot work ahead of us in the next six weeks (yes, six!) before we opened the doors.

THE SECRET SAUCE OF FINANCIAL FREEDOM

Wisdom

"But you must remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you the ability to get wealth, so that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is today" (Deut. 8:18).

Today, the escape-room industry is quite saturated and it's difficult to start one in most cities. Competition is fierce. In late 2015, however, that was not the case. Nobody had started an escape room in Branson, and we felt it made sense to move toward being the first, as being first to market in this industry is critical.

We believe this was a "God idea," and we didn't hesitate in our planning for one minute. Time was of the essence. From that point on, we remained prayerful and diligent as we covered every base we could find, and then several we didn't even know existed! We consulted with experts, researched (and

visited) many other escape rooms in the nation and learned all we could about starting a business. We studied nonstop.

Understand, God absolutely has given us the power, the ability, to create wealth. What does this mean? He paved the way, but He's not going to do it for us. He has set us up for success. He's ready to move miraculously as we move obediently. He is the one who will bring the increase, yet it's you and I who must move out and build the systems, do our due diligence and work smartly in the creation of wealth. Of course, we must be very careful to understand that it's God, and not us, who enables this wealth-creating ability. (Wealth is simply financial resource, money and material goods that we can use in our lives and to advance the kingdom. *Wealth* and *wealthy* are not one in the same.)

For us, this step of applying wisdom also included hiring the best architect, consulting with the city's planning department, following every one of their rules perfectly, choosing the right colors and design for our logo and other branding, researching how to best market and how much to spend on ads and so much more. In fact, our diligence resulted in passing a state audit a few years later with flying colors. They were gladly surprised to see such honesty and attention to detail. Wisdom is one of the three keys to financial breakthrough.

When we understand God gives us the power to create wealth, it's important that we believe it, that we respond to it and that we do it rightly.

Faith

"But my God shall supply your every need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19).

In the midst of learning how to relate to the fire department, the planning department and other city officials, it got a little scary. The little money we had was being devoured by

the thousands, and if this didn't work, we were in trouble!

Even though the Branson, Missouri, city leaders and employees are absolutely amazing, we were in the dark regarding approval processes and how much there was to do when opening a business here. At one point Amy, my wife, was in tears and ready to stop everything. It was too much. Today she shares that it was my faith that kept her on board. She's so thankful that we stayed the course!

As a side note, it's wonderful being in a relationship that exhibits such diverse giftings, strengths and weaknesses. Amy is absolutely brilliant in the wisdom department. Faith regarding finances specifically is a strength of mine. We both have to consistently monitor all of our various ventures in life to ensure both faith and wisdom are working together. Leaping out in faith without being wise is a recipe for disaster. Wisdom without faith will keep us hiding out in caves!

Knowing that God has promised to supply our every need makes it easier to keep moving forward. Faith is a result of trusting truth found in Scripture. God has gone before us and He understands we are fully reliant on Him.

Peace

"The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD, And He delights in his way" (Ps. 37:23, NKJV).

This final ingredient in our secret sauce is one that may trigger financial breakthrough for many: peace.

Peace is a manifestation of faith, and the above verse has been a very important one for the Burton family. God knows faith requires risk, and He doesn't want us holding back due to overreaching "wisdom," which is actually fear. He wants us jumping, moving, shifting and advancing!

So, He makes it clear that, as we do this, He has our back. He's ordering our steps. As long as we are living rightly, moving ahead the best we can, trusting His voice and refusing to allow any measure of fear to keep us paralyzed, He will keep us on the straight and narrow. Wisdom plus faith equals peace. If we aren't at peace, we need to evaluate why before moving forward. It may reveal a lack of wisdom or misguided faith.

God is not waiting to crush us under the weight of His disapproval. He is cheering for us! Even if, after investing in the process that wisdom demands and after doing our best to respond to God's instructions in faith, we fail, He's got us! He will make things right. He will order our every step. We don't have to hesitate, delay or be afraid. God will take very good care of us, even if we stumble.

Miraculously, we opened Escape Code in Branson, Missouri, six weeks after having the first thought about starting a new business. The sign was up, the rooms designed, the website published, marketing launched and the open sign turned on—and people started coming! Wisdom, faith and peace were the ingredients of the secret sauce that caused this to happen.

Since then we've received awards and recognition including being voted the fifth best escape room in the nation by *USA Today* in 2017! It's exciting to see God moving in a project from concept to implementation!

A NEW TEST(IMONY)

Tests are simply an opportunity for a testimony.

We believe it's important (and wise) to develop multiple streams of income. In addition to Escape Code I make a little (very little) selling my books and we enjoy producing travel videos on our YouTube channel that has recently become eligible for monetization (we can't wait for our first \$100 check!). In addition to those endeavors, we decided to

implement our wisdom/faith/peace strategy again by opening two additional businesses, both of them right next door to Escape Code in the same shopping mall.

The Axe Game's build out was more expensive than we had expected and Sagas Mysteries would have to wait an additional 12 months before we opened it, even though we were pouring money into the lease for an empty storefront (which we had to secure so we didn't lose it).

The investment and monthly expenses, even though we applied as much wisdom as we could have and moved out in faith with peace, resulted in a difficult season. It greatly impacted our overall financial situation.

The solution? This might seem insignificant, but it's what God prescribed: In addition to our regular tithe and our already established additional monthly offerings and other giving, in the midst of financial crisis, we were to start giving an additional 1 percent. We did that, and last month the entire investment in our new businesses was paid off! New seasons will have new tests, but if we implement wisdom, faith and peace, God will always be there!

It's wise to give. It takes faith to give. We should be at peace when we give. Add increased giving to the other strategies that also require wisdom, faith and peace and you'll start to see a new financial culture develop in your life and family.

Oh, and by the way, this secret sauce isn't really secret at all. It's all right there in the pages of Scripture. {eoa}