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The Problem

Tim Connor slammed the front door behind himself in disgust. He and his wife, Cindy, had been arguing about money—*again*. As their burden of debt had grown, so had the frequency and intensity of their conflicts. He had to get out of the house to clear his mind.

Tim couldn't believe what he had said to Cindy in his anger: "Your middle name is spending! You waste money more than anyone I know! And I'm the one going to work every day!"

Cindy had shot back, "At least I didn't buy a new bass boat using a credit card! How stupid was that! And you think I waste money. Give me a break! I'm so tired of fighting about this stuff. I don't think I can take this too much longer, Tim. This just isn't working. Maybe we should get a divorce."

"What are you saying?" Tim yelled back. "You really want to leave me, don't you?" With that, Cindy had started to cry. She retreated in tears to their bedroom, angry, frustrated, and feeling alone.

Tim's heart filled instantly with regret. He couldn't believe it had come to this. *Was she really suggesting divorce?* Tim thought of their two young children and how much they loved their mother. He loved her too. He had always considered their marriage—nine years long at this point—a success. From the outside, everything looked picture perfect. Yet, somehow this latest blowup was different from the past squabbles he and Cindy had had over money. He had seen desperation in her eyes that he had not seen before. And now that the “D” word had surfaced, it was clear the debt pressure had begun to turn their financial disagreements into a potential marriage breaker.

The truth is Tim and Cindy's financial stress did not develop overnight. This was no sudden turn for the worse. What they were experiencing is all too common in this buy-now-pay-later culture in which we live. In fact, in most situations I've been involved with in helping people get out of debt, their troubles had developed and intensified almost imperceptibly—like a storm gathering on a horizon.

A GATHERING STORM

In the last fifty years meteorologists have discovered the secrets of how hurricanes develop. A monster Category 5 hurricane that unleashes its catastrophic destruction when it makes landfall in the eastern United States can begin with a gentle weather pattern of warm air rising in the plains of western Africa. Soon a growing thunderstorm moves out over the tropical Atlantic Ocean waters, and then, in stages, becomes a tropical depression, a tropical storm, and finally a full-blown hurricane. Hurricanes start small and gain in intensity—just like problems and conflicts over debt.

That's precisely what happened with Tim and Cindy. They allowed the problem to go too long before they addressed it honestly.

Though they had overcome earlier challenges that grew out of their different family backgrounds, they never thought that their financial problems brought on by worry over debt would soon threaten everything.

Cindy had been raised in a middle-income family and, as the apple of her father's eye, got anything she wanted. She learned to expect a life of relative ease and comfort that caused her to take hard work and sacrifice for granted. Tim, in contrast, knew firsthand the struggles of tight finances. He had grown up on a farm, the third of five children. With never enough money to go around, his parents had seemed to be in a never-ending squabble about how they were going to make ends meet. Often he could hear his mother cry herself to sleep. Even as a youngster, Tim had gone to bed imagining that his family might be out on the street the next day.

FREE AND CLEAR: THE ROAD TO FREEDOM

For some reason, Tim and Cindy had never really discussed with each other their hopes and dreams—or their fears—regarding their future. They had never talked about how they wanted to use money to fulfill those dreams. They, like many other people, had unspoken expectations they didn't fully understand. They are not alone, and neither are you.

God loves you and cares deeply about you. He knew that money would be a challenge for us and wanted to help us manage it wisely. That's why He said so much about it. You may be surprised to know that the Bible contains 2,350 practical verses on how to handle money and possessions. Indeed, 15 percent of everything Jesus Christ said in the Scriptures dealt with money and possessions!

In this book you will learn God's way to get out of debt. God's roadmap is the only reliable guide to lead you, no

matter your situation, to experience the joy and blessing of true financial freedom—free and clear from the stress and strain of debt.

TAKING STOCK

This section at the end of each chapter will help you to measure your progress as you follow God's roadmap toward becoming free and clear of debt.

1. Circle the word below that best describes your current financial situation (If you're married, see if you and your spouse chose the same word. Then discuss your responses.)

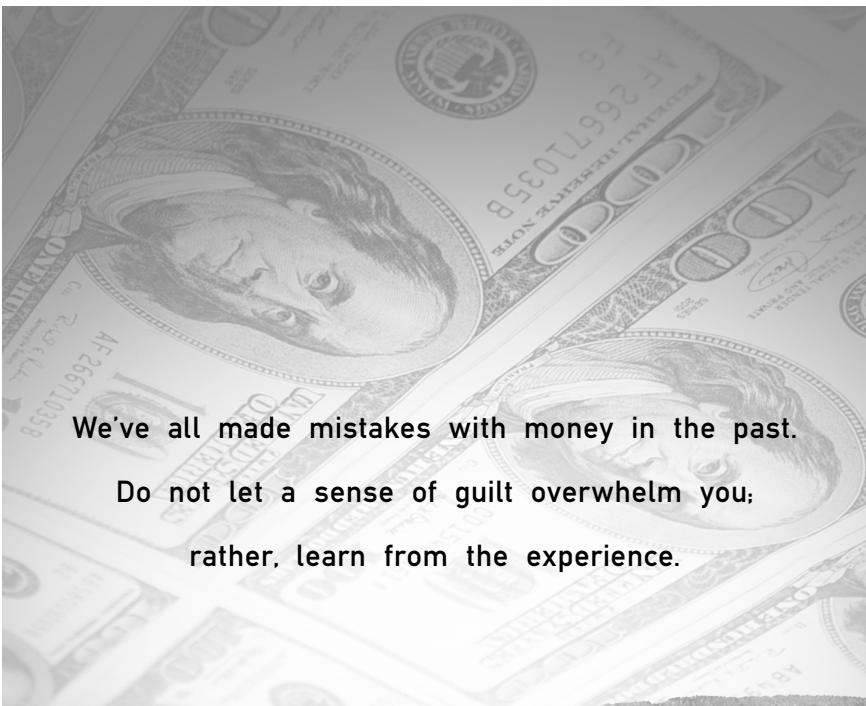
Manageable

Challenging

Stressful

Desperate

2. What do you believe is your greatest barrier to getting out of debt?



We've all made mistakes with money in the past.

Do not let a sense of guilt overwhelm you;
rather, learn from the experience.

