Bob: Brian and Cherie Lowe had more than $100,000 in debt when they decided to do something about it. They were in it for the long haul.

Cherie: When we started paying off debt, we thought it would take us 15 years—7½ if we really hustled—and God showed up in a major way. It took us less than four, which is, in my opinion, nothing short of a miracle.

I think there is a temptation, too, to just not be wise about our money—and throw that out there and say, “God will provide,”—you know?—and just kind of toss our hands up in the air and not be good stewards and manage what He already has provided.

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Friday, June 26th. Our hosts are Dave and Ann Wilson; I'm Bob Lepine. We'll hear from Brian and Cherie Lowe today about how God showed up as they began their journey of digging out from a mountain of debt. Stay with us.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us. I had the chance to talk—this was, I don’t know, maybe a year ago—with a couple, who are very publicly online for accountability, working their way out of debt.

In fact, our guests today—I don’t know if you guys know them—Brian and Cherie Lowe join us again. Welcome back to FamilyLife Today.

Cherie: Thank you.

Bob: So the couple I’m talking about—Phillip and Jasmine Holmes—do you know them?

Cherie: No, I don’t.

Bob: Okay; so they’re not as far gone as you were. They’re in the mid-60s [$60,000] in terms of—

Ann: —meaning in debt? [Laughter]
Dave: —you mean in debt. [Laughter]

Ann: I just wanted to make that clear. [Laughter]

Bob: They’re not as far into debt as you guys [were]. You were past [$]100,000 when you said, “We’ve got to get out of debt.” They were in the mid-60s.

But the thing they said, that parallels what you’ve already shared with us this week, is they said: “Some day, we’d like to adopt. We began to look at the fact that we can’t adopt if we’re in this level of debt. We’re going to have to have some money to be able to adopt.” That vision of what they wanted to do in their marriage was the motivation for them to start denying some present desires for a future reality that was bigger than the momentary desire that they might have.

Brian and Cherie have written a book called Your Money, Your Marriage and another book called Slaying the Debt Dragon. The first book is where you kind of chart the path you took to get out of debt. This book is all about the fact that your marriage is not going to be what God wants it to be if you’re in debt; that’s going to have an impact on your intimacy and your oneness. Am I overstating the case to say: “Your marriage can’t be what God wants it to be if you’re in significant debt”?

Cherie: I don’t know about significant debt—even if you don’t have any debt—so people, who are listening: “Managing money well together takes these skills; and when we’re able to manage it well together, then we are able to function within God’s kingdom more effectively.” Maybe God has called us to adopt; or maybe He’s called us to be generous givers in our local faith community; or a number of different things. We want to be prepared to do what God has made us to do; and when we’re working together well with money, we’re able to do those things.

Ann: I love that; but what if we have one spouse, who is all about that—like, “Oh, I want to get this debt down; we could do all these things…”—but the other person isn’t on board?

Bob: Why are you asking that, Ann? [Laughter]

Dave: Yes; why are you asking that, Ann? I wonder who wants to get the debt down and who doesn’t. [Laughter]

Ann: I want to get the debt down; but I also want to do other things, too; I like both. But what if the other person’s like, “No,”—like—“No, I don’t think this is necessary.” How do you respond to that?

Cherie: Sure; well, I’ve got a story; and I’m going to let Brian share a scriptural principle behind that as well. One of the things that Brian did, early on in our journey, that spoke volumes to me—because I was the person that was a little more hesitant, and I wasn’t
sure that that was really something we could even do—we had a credit card at the time. It had about $16,000 on it; it was for what we said were *emergencies*.

Brian said one day to me: “You know what? If I have an emergency, it’s not going to happen in the drive-through of Starbucks®.” I thought, “This is a very interesting principle.” He very quietly, and without any fanfare, slipped that credit card out of his wallet and put it in the desk drawer. And he didn’t say to me, this time, “You put yours in there, too; you do this.”

**Ann:** Ooh, that’s good.

**Cherie:** He just said, “I’m not going to do this anymore.” I carried mine for a few weeks more, and it dawned on me that I was probably not going to have an emergency at Target® either. So one day, with similar kind of just low-key ceremony, put it right in the desk, along with his as well. We never used it again, and that was 2008.

**Bob:** You’re living without credit cards?

**Cherie:** We don’t; we have a debit card that we use for those types of purchases.

**Bob:** But you don’t get points and miles and all of that stuff.

**Cherie:** No, I’m good with laying that down; because for us, it was *too* dangerous. We *knew* that we would slip back into the habit again. Eventually, we did shut down the account; we cut it up. But it took a baby step in between for us. Some people just can’t quite go to the cut-it-up stage; they need like an in-between stage. Sometimes I tease them and say: “Freeze it. Put it in some ice, and throw it in your freezer. Then if you really have an emergency, get the hair dryer out; and you can get it back out again.”

But in the desk drawer for us was that *first* step of obedience.

**Ann:** This is *radical*. I’m thinking of parents that have teenagers and college students, who have credit cards; they’re using them without any limit. What’s happening in the future generations? Are they incurring more debt or less?

**Brian:** I think it depends on which future generation. The young folks that can have credit cards *right now* are still incurring debt; and it’s near the trillion-dollar mark, if I’m not mistaken. That’s too much; it’s too much for folks to handle.

Again, even if you pay it off, research has shown that you spend about 40 percent more if you have a credit card; because you don’t feel it. It doesn’t trigger the pain center of your brain the same way that cash does. What we did with our daughters—I think fall into that *next* generation coming up—is we’ve started banking with them **now**.
And my younger daughter, when she was about 14, I got a debit card, that was not attached to our bank account, so that she could see what was going on: so that she could manage it and learn how to do that. Now that she’s 16, she has a student checking account that links through her savings. That’s one of the things that we’ve done to teach them about managing the money and the resources that you have: money in, money out.

Bob: We got our kids cards—whether it’s a debit card or a credit card—we got them when they started high school, because we wanted them to mess up at home rather than messing up out in the world with it.

Cherie: Yes; well, and they might not even know the terminology. The difference between debt and debit is one letter; and a lot of kids don’t know the difference, to be quite honest, because we’re not talking about financial things regularly.

Brian has a great scriptural kind of association with that idea of the reluctant spouse that we were talking about earlier—just an idea of what you can do if you are that spouse that’s gung-ho/you want to get things in order—but you feel like there are brakes on the other side.

Brian: You’re not the only one that’s asked that—that’s the number-one question we get when we speak at churches or conferences. Someone always comes up and asks: “What do you do to get my spouse on the same page? How do you do that?”

I was reading through the Bible and—actually, The Message, the transliteration by Eugene Peterson—and Romans 5 just hit me like a ton of bricks. There’s this verse in there, where he references passionate patience; this idea of an active waiting.

I think the putting the credit card in the drawer—the doing everything that you can—and to have those conversations, like what you talked about: “I feel disrespected,” “I need your help,”—that’s something powerful that a wife, especially, can say to her husband—“Help me with this.”

Dave: Talk about this: you say/you talk about it in the book about wedding vows and then money vows—

Brian: Right.

Dave: —and how important money vows are—almost just as important as a promise you’re making about your marriage. What about the promises you’re making about your money? I’d like to hear a little bit about that.

Cherie: Yes; so I think you know, especially, when you’re planning a wedding—if you’ve been through this recently, either yourself or you have a child, who’s gotten married—there’s so many details involved with the wedding. We have to make sure we have the
right dresses, and we have the right music, and food—and the whole nine yards—but rarely, do we really think through our vows: “What is it we’re saying when we get to the end of the aisle?”

For us, we kind of composed our own money vows, which are a little bit further step out from that/promises that we made. For instance: “I promise to share freely the money I make, resisting the temptation to see what’s mine as mine and what’s yours as yours,” “To never lie or avoid talking about what I’ve spent,”—that's a big one.

Ann: That’s big.

Dave: That’s a big one.

Cherie: Right?

Ann: —or hiding it.

Cherie: That’s the very next one.

Ann: Not that I’ve done that. [Laughter]

Cherie: “Refrain from hiding or hoarding money,”—very next one.

Dave: Hey, wait, wait, wait. Before you go to the next one, I heard my wife over there say she’s hidden something about money.

Ann: Maybe just for a little—not money—like maybe a bag of some things I bought. [Laughter]

Cherie: Oh yes. There’s a whole culture around that right now though—it’s like on memes and stuff like that, where like: “Hide your packages before your husband gets home.”

Ann: Oh, really?

Cherie: Yes! And it's not funny, friends.

Dave: No, it isn’t; not at all.

Cherie: That’s dangerous; that’s deceit. It begins like that—small—and then it blows into something much, much more.

Ann: I will say—my mom used to do that.

Cherie: Oh, did she?
Ann: Oh, she’s like, “Girls, get those bags in the house before your dad gets home.”

Dave: Talk about God providing—talk about trusting God in this area of your life, as well—money.

Cherie: I think it’s a combination of a couple of things that we’re—number one: certainly, always dependent on God to provide for our needs. When we started paying off debt, we thought it would take us 15 years—7½ if we really hustled—and God showed up in a major way. It took us less than four, which is, in my opinion, nothing short of a miracle.

But I think there is a temptation, too, to just not be wise about our money—and throw that out there and say, “God will provide,”—you know?—and just kind of toss our hands up in the air and not be good stewards and manage what He already has provided.

Ann: When we first got married, we came on staff with Campus Crusade for Christ®. We raised our own financial support for 15 years, and there were times where we were tight/really tight. I remember one time our boys were little, and they really wanted a Power Wheels®; we just couldn’t buy one. They were $200, and $200 to us was like a $1,000,000 at the time.

We said, “Let’s pray and ask God.” And that’s the part that’s so beautiful; that it brings God into the equation/into the picture. We prayed every night. Dave, how long did we pray?

Dave: Months—every night with them out loud.

I was thinking, “If it would be today, it would be so easy to slap down a credit card”; because that is like the replacement substitute god—boom!—I got it!

Ann: Yes; and it’s fun to do that, as a parent, to buy these things that they desire and want; but for us, we couldn’t; so it brought God into the picture.

And we, one day, got a check in the mail. Do you remember why?

Dave: It was out of nowhere for some speaking thing that I did. I had forgotten about it.

Ann: Maybe like months and months ago. And it was for the exact amount of that Power Wheels. We took that to our boys and said, “Look at how God has provided.”

Cherie: —“showed up.”

Ann: And it’s beautiful, and it’s not that God always does that; but it was such a great picture of going to God first.
**Cherie:** Yes.

**Bob:** You know what you’re illustrating with that—and I ran across this, and I can’t verify that this is 100 percent true—but in 1863, when they minted the first two-cent piece, somewhere the idea struck somebody, “We need to write on this two-cent piece ‘In God We Trust.’” I think the reason is because somebody recognized, pretty early on, how easy it is for us to go: “*This* is what I trust.

**Ann:** Yes.

**Dave:** Right.

**Bob:** “I trust my money. This is my provider; this is my protector; this is my source. My joy comes from this; my happiness comes from this.” We begin to make money—it has the same attributes/many of the same attributes that God has. We don’t pray “Give us this day our daily bread”—because we’ve got bread at home—we don’t have to pray for that. We don’t pray “Lord, are You going to provide?”—because we’ve got a credit card.

**Ann:** Right.

**Bob:** And I think we need to get back to the idea that it is *in* God we trust—not in the money—that whatever little you have or how much you have—as soon as you start to think: “My security’s there,” “My joy is there,” you’ve assigned to an inanimate object something that belongs only to God.

**Ann:** It’s become an idol.

**Cherie:** That is huge. I think God knew; in the Scripture, we know that there are well over 2,000 verses about money/possessions. One out of every ten verses in the gospels is either about money or possessions. Sixteen of the parables that Jesus uses to teach are about money or possessions. God knew it would have competition for our hearts; I think it’s so important that we recognize that.

**Bob:** Did your debt—back when you were [$]100,000-plus in debt—did it ever threaten the foundation of your marriage? Did you ever look at each other and go, “I don’t want to be married to you anymore”?

**Brian:** I don’t think we ever got there, because we were both just sort of numb to it together. But there was some passive aggressiveness that didn’t have to be there: “You spent what?!” “You did what?!” “Why?” “I, obviously, don’t make bad choices with money; what are you doing?”

**Bob:** Right.
Brian: Because we can always justify our purchases or our spending but the other person, that’s frivolous; right? We had a lot of that going on, and that was tearing our relationship, little by little.


Cherie: Yes.

Bob: Dave, I’m thinking about you as an athlete.

Dave: Am I an athlete still?

Bob: You are.

Dave: I like that!

Bob: Those little nagging injuries that you go—you ignore them, but they get worse every time you go to the gym, or you do something—those can turn into—

Dave: Oh, they always do—

Bob: —debilitating.

Dave: —they have to. It’s sort of what you guys said earlier—you got into debt by not paying attention. You got out of debt by paying attention. You wrote it down; said, “We’re going to make some hard decisions.” Every athlete/every person does the same thing: “I have to take care of little things that lead to big things,”—huge.

Ann: If you guys had to talk right now—if a young couple was sitting in front of you—just give them a couple of things like, “Oh, if I could just implore you to do this…” what would you say?

Bob: What money vow would you have them write? [Laughter]

Ann: There you go!

Brian: We do this—this is a big part of what we do—is that we have/especially, engaged couples—we have a heart for engaged couples. We try to walk through with them, especially, in financial matters; because no one is talking about that. When they’re planning the wedding, we encourage them to use the wedding budget as their first budgeting experience together to working with money. You’re not combining finances yet; but we’re engaging in this exercise that will give us habits, going forward.

I think the main thing is that marriage is not a competition; it’s a collaboration. You need to be working with your spouse on money; you need to be communicating with your
spouse about money; and “Please don’t borrow money; you don’t have to borrow.” I’m
debt averse; so if you can get away with it—because obviously, we haven’t had credit
cards in 11 years—so you don’t need to do that.

Bob: Have you got car loans?

Cherie: We do not. No, we haven’t had a car loan since 2009.

Bob: House still paying off?

Cherie: We still are working on our mortgage, but it is much less than what we’ve paid off.

Bob: Anything else other than the house?

Cherie: No.

Ann: What would you say to the couple, that’s coming in, and they/one person has a lot
of college debt; the other person has nothing. The one person that has nothing doesn’t
want to pay for that college debt or some of the—

You’re already going, Brian; what do you saying?

Brian: Well, I’ve got a story about this. When—this is a big part, especially for our older
daughter, who lived through this, and watched us, and made decisions as a very small
person when it came to this. There was a Mother’s Day that we were headed to the mall
to buy Mother’s Day gifts—as every dad should take their daughter to buy Mother’s Day
gifts.

We were in the car. Out of nowhere, you have these conversations with your daughter
about the future, and about boys, and things like that. She said “You know Dad, if a boy
wants to marry me, and he has student loans”—now she was eight years old at the
time—

Ann: Wow!

Brian: —“if a boy wants to marry me and he has student loan debt, he’s going to need
to pay that off before we get married.” I said, “Why’s that?” She said, “Well, because
before we get married, it’s his and after we get married, it’s ours.” I thought, “I can be
done parenting now.” [Laughter]

Ann: Seriously! That is impressive.

Brian: That’s a mic-drop parenting moment at that point; but she’s right. Before you get
married, it’s individually. But the second that you say, “I do,” two become one and you
are married; and it is now ours, and you need to work together as if you incurred it as well.

**Dave:** One of the cool things that is in your book, as well—and you’ve been saying it all day—is: “It’s His.” At the end of the day, as a married couple, it’s ours; and as a married couple, with Christ as the foundation, there’s that 30,000-foot perspective that says: “Wait a minute. It really is His, and it is a gift; and so that’s why we do want to manage it and steward it well, and also be very generous with it.”

I tell you this—one of the life verses for me and money, because it’s been a struggle as we got married—I grew up in a divorced home, where before the divorce, very rich—airline pilot Dad built homes and mansions in gated communities in New York. He walks out—and I didn’t even know this until I was mid-20s because we ended up—my mom and I/single mom move to a little town in Ohio. Why?—because that’s where her parents were to take care of her. I grew up poor.

Found out later the house that we moved from—that they built in the ‘60s—was in the $400,000 range.

**Cherie:** Oh, wow.

**Dave:** I never knew this until I’m married—because my brother tells me; he’s 12 years older—he goes, “Do you know how the deal worked when mom sold the house after the divorce?” “No, what are you talking about?” He goes: “The deal was Dad said, ‘Sell the house; we’ll split the profit.’ He’s gone with his girlfriend; she sells the house for $60,000.” She walks away with [$30,000] and that’s what I grew up on. She could have been wealthy.

All that to say I grew up with sort of a fear that: “I’m going to be poor.” The verse that God gave me was Philippians 4:19—which I’m sure you know—and I can quote it by memory, because it’s ingrained in my heart: “And my God shall supply all of your needs”—and again it doesn’t say wants but it says needs—“according to His riches in Christ Jesus.”

As we start on our first few years of marriage—we’re full-time missionaries, raising support—I claimed that every day. Guess what? Forty years later, I can tell you this: “God supplies your needs; he always...” I could tell you story after story, and a lot of it is as you obey Him in the money principles.

**Ann:** I like the idea, too, of going before God—whether you’ve done a great job of this or not—but going before God, as a couple—maybe getting on your knees and say: “God, we surrender this area to you; and we need Your help/Your guidance. Guide us and show us what this will look like.” I think your book does a great job of guiding people through that and towards Jesus.
Cherie: Oh, thank you; and it takes some bravery to do that.

Ann: Yes.

Bob: Yes; well, you guys helped supply the courage in the book, *Your Money, Your Marriage*, which is a book that we’ve got in our *FamilyLife Today* Resource Center.

Thanks for being with us on *FamilyLife Today*. Good to have you guys here.

Cherie: Thank you so much!

Brian: Thank you.

Bob: And for our listeners, go to our website, FamilyLifeToday.com; we’ve got copies of Brian and Cherie’s books: *Your Money, Your Marriage* and *Slaying the Debt Dragon*. Again, go to FamilyLifeToday.com for more information on how you can order either or both of these books.

We’ve also got a link, Cherie, to your blog, which is called “Queen of Free.” So again, go to FamilyLifeToday.com to find out more about Cherie’s blog or to order either *Your Money, Your Marriage* or *Slaying the Debt Dragon*. If you’d like to order by phone, the number is 1-800-FL-TODAY—1-800-358-6329—that’s 1-800-“F” as in family, “L” as in life, and then the word, “TODAY.”

You know, a great takeaway from what we’ve talked about today is that, if you want to get somewhere, you need to have a “why” for that. That’s what fueled the Lowes getting out of debt—is they had a vision for where they were headed.

The president of FamilyLife®, David Robbins, is here with us. That’s a key principle, isn’t it?

David: Yes; I love how clearly they articulate that a vision of what we hope for in the future provides the *fuel* for self-control in the present. Whether that’s money, like they discussed; or being intentional with relationships with your kids, or facing temptations—

Bob: or Whole30 [diet plan], right? [Laughter]

David: Right—[Laughter]—*anything* that comes your way. It *won’t* always be easy and immediate.

In relationships with our kids, our spouse, our friends, there’s an immediate temptation to avoid it—to hide a lot of times or to run it over—because that’s easier and seems more satisfying; and in the short run, it actually *does* provide for you a little bit, but never in the long run. It takes *vision* to develop real grace- and truth-filled relationships—the
ones that God desires for us to have with Him, and with each other, and with our kids, and friends around us.

It really takes self-control to step into the *discomfort* of conflict resolution and restoration—and to take the *risk* to really go there—because of the future vision of the type of marriage you want in the future that will fuel the self-control in the present.

**Bob:** I think the question is: “Are we living for today?”—and we all grew up being told, “*Carpe diem,*” / “Seize the day,”—or “Are you living for tomorrow?” And it’s good to live in the moment; but it’s not good for the moment to be what’s directing everything about your life. You’ve got to have your legacy in view, don’t you?

**David:** Yes.

**Bob:** Yes; thank you, David.

We hope you have a great weekend. I hope you and your family are able to worship together with your local church, in one way or another, this weekend. And we hope you can join us back on Monday when we’re going to talk about the most common challenges that stepfamilies face. Ron Deal will be here to walk us through those issues and provide some very helpful biblical solutions to those challenges. I hope you can join us for that; or if you know somebody, who is in a stepfamily, invite them to tune in and listen.

I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, along with our entire broadcast production team. On behalf of our hosts, Dave and Ann Wilson, I’m Bob Lepine. We will see you back next time for another edition of *FamilyLife Today.*

*FamilyLife Today* is a production of FamilyLife of Little Rock, Arkansas; a Cru® Ministry. Help for today. Hope for tomorrow.

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