

mike slaughter

shiny gods

finding freedom from things
that distract us

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Program Components

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shiny gods: finding freedom from things that distract us

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shiny gods: finding freedom from things that distract us

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Program Kit

first: putting GOD first in living and giving

One of each component

shiny gods



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Mike Slaughter

Abingdon Press / Nashville

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INTRODUCTION

A JOURNEY OF HOPE



I believe that when a person becomes Christian, there is one new birth yet many conversions. I became a new person in Jesus in 1969, but I wasn't converted in my wallet until 1976.

I was in seminary at the time. About two weeks before graduation, one of my professors pulled me aside. He said, “Mike, if you are not tithing, please do not go into ministry. Don’t pollute the church. Go teach school or something. We don’t need any more people in the church who preach, ‘Do what I say, not what I do.’”

That simple conversation hit me hard. I was converted. I realized that loving God is not about saying

the right words, accepting an abstract ideal, or claiming an emotion. Loving God is an intentional commitment to self-sacrifice for the well-being of others.

God's word on the subject is clear. Proverbs 3:9-10 reminds us to "honor the LORD with your wealth and with the first of all your crops. Then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will burst with wine." In 2 Corinthians 9:11 we read, "You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous in every way."

And yet, in spite of clear guidance from the God of abundance, our giving is often limited to the leftovers of our perceived scarcity. We need a conversion in our thinking about finances! We need to rediscover that we are designed to be the producers of God's blessings in the lives of others, not simply the consumers of stuff.

There's an old story about a conversation between a chicken and a pig. The chicken says, "Let's do breakfast." The pig replies, "That's easy for you to say. You just make a donation. For me, it's a total life sacrifice." If we are to be followers of Jesus, then we

are the pig, not the chicken. We have to move from donation to sacrifice, from consuming to investing.

Tony is one of our young staff members at Ginghamsburg Church in Tipp City, Ohio, where I am senior pastor. Tony is an Army veteran with a beautiful wife and three young children. He and his wife Karen have a great story to tell about learning to live out God's principles for their finances.

When our church hires staff, we do a criminal background and credit check, so we knew that Tony and Karen were carrying about \$32,000 in consumer debt, including a car loan, credit card debt, and medical expenses. They also had mortgage debt on their home as well as on a rental property. They had a comfortable income, but they were still living paycheck to paycheck.

Tony and Karen were encouraged to see where their money was going. Tony is a gregarious guy who loves to entertain, and the family found it convenient to eat out frequently. They were absolutely floored to find out they were spending \$650 each month on

restaurant meals. They developed a budget, began a debt reduction plan, and started trusting God in the tithe. Within fourteen months they had paid off \$23,000 of their consumer debt, and they expect to pay off the other \$9,000 this year. They recently refinanced their home to a 15-year mortgage at a 2.75% interest rate, so they will own their home free and clear by the time they are fifty years old. They have put together an emergency fund, and now they pay cash for everything. Any extra money that comes into their hands—tax refund, pay increase, bonus—goes immediately against the remaining debt.

It hasn't always been easy, but Tony and Karen have persevered. They plan and work on their finances together. Does that save a lot of heated arguments? You bet. Tony's best advice for others? Seek help and get started. Tony also shared recently with me that tithing has transformed his relationship with God. He says, "You know, it's one thing to be a believer; it's altogether another to be truly committed to the relationship."

I'm also inspired by the story of Kim and her husband John. When Kim was six months into her first pregnancy, she lost her job. As she put it, "One day I was employed; the next day I wasn't. And finding a new job is virtually impossible when you are six months along." It meant an immediate loss of \$30,000 in annual income.

Kim, desperate to save money, turned to coupons and rebates. Soon she was collecting so many free or low-cost items that her family couldn't use them all. In fact, John joked that she just needed to stop. Instead, Kim started donating the extra coupons and rebates to our New Path food pantry. Kim offered her gifts and knowledge of couponing to others at Ginghamburg Church. At first there was little interest, but when the recession hit, people suddenly wanted to hear more.

Kim and John, even though it didn't seem to make sense on paper, also committed themselves to the full tithe. At one point they wrote a tithe check, knowing there might not be sufficient funds to cover it. Yet that same day, in one of those inexplicable God miracles, an

unexpected check from their escrow account appeared in the mailbox with the exact amount needed.

These days, Kim has turned her couponing talent into a ministry for others. She and some of her first students were inspired to start ClipShopShare, a ministry dedicated to teaching others how to do more with less through couponing and rebates. ClipShopShare has a second mission as well; it has donated over \$57,000 of food, toiletries, and household items to our New Path Outreach Ministries through couponing strategies.

Then there is Shannon, a young single woman in our congregation who took one of our financial classes. Prior to then, she too had been living paycheck to paycheck, struggling to support herself with an \$18,000 annual income and \$7,000 in unsecured debt. After completing the class, Shannon developed a three-month equivalent emergency fund, started living on a detailed budget, and paid off all of her debt within fourteen months. Committing to the full tithe was also part of Shannon's process. She actively serves at our two urban campuses in socioeconomically challenged neighborhoods of

Dayton and has become a certified instructor in one of our financial classes. In fact, Shannon leads the financial ministries team for Ginghamsburg.

Why I am I telling you these stories? I want you to have hope. In this book I'll challenge you to do hard things. You will be asked to:

- reject the “shiny gods” or idols that lead you away from God, keep you in debt, and render you ineffective in serving the Kingdom;
- see work as a gift, not a curse, and deploy it powerfully, not just to earn an income but to bring about God's desired outcome;
- eliminate debt, living simply within your means;
- fully release all your resources—time, money, and talents—into God's hands for his purposes.

It's a long journey from shiny gods to a life well lived and a world well served. It isn't a journey for the faint of heart, but it is a journey of hope. Tony, Kim, and Shannon can tell you all about it.

Let's get started.

