

Introduction

ASHLEY SITS AT THE KITCHEN TABLE, STEAMING CUP OF coffee in her hand, staring into blank space to avoid the stack of collection notices on the table. But the pile looms regardless, along with the nagging whispers of an ever-dwindling bank account balance. As her kids sleep soundly in the next room, Ashley anxiously wonders what she can possibly do to fix these harsh financial realities and avoid what is likely a teetering future for her family.

Though Ashley is a fictitious person, her situation is not unique. Perhaps you can relate. Many people today feel strapped—living paycheck to paycheck, suffocated by student loans or credit card debt, and wondering how on earth they're going to round up the money needed for this month's basic living expenses. I've read countless e-mails and blog comments about the financial struggles many families face, and I can nod in empathy. While I can't, of course, personally relate to all of their financial situations, I do know what it's like to feel trapped by limited income and desperate, trying to figure out ways to get (and save) more money.

And that's just one reason this book is dear to my heart. I'm

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stoked to share the important lessons (through many tries, failures, and ultimate successes) that helped carve out my family's path to financial freedom. Hopefully I'll be able to save you from repeating the same mistakes I made!

I wrote this book to teach women how to increase their incomes and use it to make an impact, while at the same time maintaining a healthy balance of priorities. Whether you are feeling the stress that comes from an unexpected financial crisis or looking for a little extra side income or are the primary breadwinner in your family, these pages will empower you with practical ideas for starting a business or finding a creative way to make a part- or full-time income. In addition they will provoke you to think about making a difference with that income—whether to help your family get in a better financial position or to give generously to a cause you're passionate about.

Regardless if you are married, single, have children or don't, live on a one- or two-income budget, I want to inspire and encourage you to:

- stop living under the stress of barely making it
- stop feeling desperate and discouraged when you look at your bank statements
- stop worrying about an uncertain financial tomorrow
- stop living without intention

Through the lessons learned and wisdom cultivated from my journey and those of many other women from all walks of life, I want to challenge and help you to:

- find the freedom to dream big and set long-term financial goals

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- start thinking creatively
- forge an intentional pathway for your future in line with your priorities
- best of all: be in a position to help others along the way

I will show you, through real-life examples, that no matter how bad of a financial situation you may feel you're in right now, you're not stuck. Or trapped. I want to help you find a way to start over in a new direction.

Entrepreneurialism is something I've always been passionate about. I love helping people find creative ways to earn more money. And I've learned how important it is to keep a balanced perspective. The reality is . . .

Money doesn't buy happiness.

Money doesn't equal fulfillment.

Money doesn't solve your emotional problems.

Money doesn't give you purpose.

If it did, the richest people in this world would be some of the happiest, most emotionally healthy people in existence. In reality, many of them are struggling through divorce, depression, and addictions, just like many people who don't make a seven-figure annual salary.

Properly stewarded, money can be an amazing tool and a resource for those who need it not only to survive but to live with purpose. It can help feed and clothe the hungry. It can build houses, schools, and hospitals in the poorest of countries. It can provide nourishment and medicine for malnourished children. It can help your disabled

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neighbor pay her rent or help you buy groceries for your recently widowed aunt.

For the past few years, my husband, Jesse, and I have used some of the proceeds of my book sales and blog earnings to fund a Child Survival Program with Compassion International for 130 to 160 moms and babies in the Dominican Republic. This wonderful organization provides food, medical care, education, marketable skills training, and spiritual mentoring to mothers and babies living in poverty. We had the opportunity to visit the Dominican Republic in 2012 to see this program at work. We were forever changed and moved at a deep soul level to continue to help however we can.

I realize that there are many pressing needs around the world. None of us can obliterate worldwide poverty, but if each of us wisely stewards our finances so that we can give generously, we can collectively have a powerful impact in reaching those who are in need.

Financial freedom has a lot to do with cultivating a deeper perspective of life, a shift in priorities, and a greater significance in your purpose than you may have ever thought about.

However different (and hopefully better!) your life, your bank statements, your financial goals, and your business plans look weeks, months, or even years after reading this book, remember: Use your resources wisely. Invest your time carefully. And make the most of what you have been given so that you can bless others generously. Because that's a big part of what life is all about.

I'm excited as you step out into a great adventure, not only learning strategies to generate more income, but also finding meaning and purpose as you do it.

First Steps to Financial Freedom

Many people make the mistake of thinking that all the challenges in their lives would dissipate if they just had enough money. Nothing could be further from the truth. Earning more money, in and of itself, rarely frees people. It's equally ridiculous to tell yourself that greater financial freedom and mastery of your finances would not offer you greater opportunities to expand, share, and create value for yourself and others.

—ANTHONY ROBBINS

THE SOUND WAS DEAFENING. RAIN PELTED DOWN, LIGHTNING bolts flashed, thunder crashed in rapid succession, while the wind howled and rocked our flimsy aluminum trailer. My ten-year-old little self huddled in a damp corner. All around me were varying-sized pots and pails on the verge of overflowing with rainwater leaking through the ceiling and windows.

This hailstorm was the product of two separate thunderstorms

that hit within hours of each other in the Wichita, Kansas, area. It is also on record as one of the worst storms in the history of the state. Experiencing this was definitely scary. Waiting out the torrential weather in the flabby construction trailer where we were living was a whole other level of frightening. But this was just par for the financial course my parents were charting.

And I am so grateful.

Yes, you read that right. I said I was grateful to have gone through such a terrifying hailstorm without a sturdy basement to take shelter in. Well, okay, so I'm not sure I'm thankful for the storm itself, but I am so thankful that my parents decided to make sacrifices and live their lives counter-culturally as far as money management is concerned.

Mom and Dad's frugal lifestyle and wise financial choices weren't something they learned entirely on their own; these lessons were handed down to them by their parents. One thing Pop (my dad's dad) ingrained in my father was that you should never go into debt for anything except a house. From the beginning of my parents' marriage, they followed this principle.

When I was around six years old, my parents made a radical decision to work hard and sacrifice in order to pay off the mortgage on our house. They were frugal, spending their money wisely and setting aside every bit of extra cash from raises or bonuses to pay off the mortgage. My mom never bought new clothes; instead, she either made them or we shopped at thrift stores. She also gave us haircuts, baked our bread, bought in bulk, and always looked for ways to get the best deal on any purchase she needed to make. My dad took care of repairs around the house and on our vehicles. If he didn't know how to do something, he usually figured it out on his own (my dad is a very smart and handy man). We used what we had, wore a lot of

hand-me-downs, drove used cars, and learned a lot about contentment in the process.

I still remember how exciting it was when my parents' hard work came to fruition and they paid off our house. The relief and fulfillment of not having a mortgage was something that I could feel even as a young child. Soon after, my parents took their financial ambition to the next level. They had dreamt of building a house, debt-free, out in the country. So they began saving every dime and thinking up creative ways to make their dream a reality.

Four years later, Mom and Dad found the perfect plot of land. They purchased it with much of their savings and sold our paid-for house. This was all well and good except for the looming question of where we would live while they built our new house. My dad quickly provided the solution to that equation when he rented a single-wide construction trailer from the real estate development company where he worked. Yes, the very same trailer I talked about in the beginning of this chapter.

The minute the big semitruck pulled that trailer into the newly poured gravel driveway on our just-purchased property, the adventure began. Our first matter of business was to secure the trailer propped up on cement blocks to the ground as tightly as possible using cables and stakes. Then, it was time to clean. Every inch of the trailer needed elbow grease. There was dirt and filth everywhere we looked, from the stained, deep blue-carpeted floor to the grimy cheap wood paneling to the cobweb-covered ceiling.

After spending days deep in bleach, the seven of us got the trailer into livable shape, moved most of our possessions into a storage unit, and moved the basic necessities into that trailer. For the first few days, it felt like we were on vacation in a rustic cabin. But that euphoria quickly wore off.

Our temporary home didn't have an oven, air-conditioning, or heat. It also didn't have a regular door, but rather a glass storefront one that offered little privacy and little protection against the hot Kansas summer sun and the unusually cold autumn that year. The trailer also leaked every time it rained. We endured many torrential storms that summer, battling legitimate fears of flooding by scattering kitchen pots and pans under the leaky ceiling and stuffing rolled-up bath towels in the sopping windows. Since we only had space for a washing machine, we had planned to line dry all our laundry. However, the frequent rain prevented us from hanging our laundry to dry outside much of the time. Instead, it required many treks to the laundromat and many hours hanging out there while we waited for our loads of laundry to dry.

Without an oven, we befriended a myriad of other kitchen appliances, learning how to bake birthday cakes in the microwave and create dozens of different meals in the electric skillet and slow cooker. Without air-conditioning, the dry Kansas heat felt unbearable some days. We would take cold showers or hog the space directly in front of the fan to get some relief. When autumn arrived, temperatures took a dive. For the first time in years, it snowed in October. We traded our lament of the suffocating heat for fears of frostbite, snuggling under endless layers of sweaters and articles of clothing, because all of our coats and most of our winter blankets were in storage.

Did I mention the bad mice problem? We had seen some pesky rodents darting around when we first started cleaning the trailer, but we assumed a good cleaning would get rid of them. Not so much! We often woke up to find mice droppings in our kitchen or yet another item that had been chewed up and destroyed in the middle of the night by the furry pests.

Despite the inconveniences, we truly have so many happy memories of that time in our lives. And, looking back, I would not trade the experience for the world. We celebrated when we moved into our new house, not only because we finally had a house with the many conveniences we had missed, but because my parents had fulfilled their dream of building a house debt-free.

Let me tell you, Pop's encouragement to my dad to never go into debt except for a house and then seeing my parents take that advice and go even further with it powerfully impacted me for life—especially seeing how the absence of a monthly house payment afforded financial room for my parents to give generously. I have always admired them for anonymously helping so many different people. I can't tell you how many times they have donated finances and supplies not only to those in their local church but also to missionaries around the world and to families in need in their own neighborhood.

What Mom and Dad offered me as a child and into my adult years as my husband Jesse and I started a family of our own was a healthy picture of financial freedom—in living and giving. Truly, my husband and I owe so much to our parents and grandparents. I know beyond any shadow of a doubt that we would never be in the position we are financially, nor would we have paid cash for our first house, were it not for their influence and examples. We are eternally grateful!

The Power of Financial Freedom

The words *financial freedom* bring to mind different things for different people. I asked my readers to weigh in on what these words mean to them, and I would like to share some of their thoughts.

(To me) financial freedom means:

MONEY-MAKING MOM

- being able to provide for my family without stressing over whether or not I'm going to be able to make ends meet from month to month
- not having to worry about which bills to pay this month, how we'll have money to buy groceries, where we'll get the funds to pay for gas to get to work, etc. It would mean actually having a savings account, and being able to pay off debt.
- having enough for what we need with a little left over for what we want

Other definitions included the following:

- being debt-free
- having x amount of savings
- building a retirement fund
- paying off looming medical bills
- building a college fund for one's children

These are great responses, but, to me, financial freedom is about more than just a bigger paycheck, a better nest egg, or a less stressful existence. I love what one of my readers, Megan, said: "Increasing our income has allowed us to breathe easier and live, save, and give exactly how we want to." She shared her story of how she was able to create financial freedom in her own life. I'd like to pass on her inspiring words to you.

I'm a special education teacher by training and for six years worked as a preschool teacher for children with hearing loss. When my husband and I found out that we were expecting our

first child we wanted to find a way for me to stay at home while still making a part-time income. We are committed to living debt-free and knew I would have to make at least some money, even with a pared down budget, to keep that commitment.

I worked out a deal to work one day a week doing at-home visits through my school but this currently only gives me about three to four hours per week. I started searching online to see what else I could do from home and I began doing a little mystery shopping. While this wasn't ideal (I couldn't bring my son along to many of the shops), it helped bring in a little more money.

I then stumbled upon the idea of online selling. I currently sell on Amazon using the Fulfillment by Amazon program and I LOVE it! I buy inventory through a mix of retail arbitrage, thrifting, and wholesale and send it directly to Amazon's warehouse. They store it, ship it when it sells, and I collect my money. I can work as little or as much as I want, I can bring my son along sourcing with me, and I'm making more than I ever thought I could while working in my yoga pants at home. I'm slowly figuring this "working mom" thing out, but this has allowed me to still contribute to the family finances so we can continue to live within our means and be able to give to our church.

Did you catch Megan's last statement? The hard effort she put in not only gave her family breathing room in their budget but also allowed them to be able to give more.

This, my friends, is the heartbeat of financial freedom. It's being in the place where you can be intentional with your money. Where you're not constantly living paycheck to paycheck, trying to survive,

trying to make ends meet, hoping that you're going to be able to pay all of your bills this month. It's being able to plan ahead, save ahead, and give generously.

My hope for this book is to give you inspiration, encouragement, and practical ideas so that you can experience this kind of financial freedom. So that you no longer live under the stress of "barely making it." So that you no longer feel desperate and discouraged when you look at your bank statements. So that you can begin to live on less than you make and be in a position to help others.

Free to Make Changes

Those last few paragraphs might sound unrealistic and pie-in-the-sky for some of you. But I truly believe this kind of financial freedom is possible and attainable for everyone reading this book who is willing to work hard, set goals, think creatively, make sacrifices, and, most importantly, not give up.

Why do I believe this? Because I have experienced it. From the time Jesse and I were married, we had established goals for our family including living debt-free and having residual income to supplement Jesse's paycheck. Most important was our vision to live on less than we make so we could give more. We longed to be able to live out one of our family mottos: "Live simply so that others can simply live."

At first, our big goals seemed more like unrealistic dreams, considering that for the first few years of our marriage, we were barely scraping by on our part-time incomes. In fact, as I chronicled in my book *Say Goodbye to Survival Mode*, during those years we often made less than \$1,000 each month.

In order to stay debt-free and be in a position to live out our vision, we spent many years pinching pennies; buying only necessities; waiting to make purchases until we could pay for them with cash; carefully monitoring our spending habits; living on a strict, written budget; having many heart-to-heart (and sometimes hard) conversations to stay on the same page with our finances as a couple; trying many different ways to generate extra income (many that flopped, as I'll share later in this book!); and ultimately creating a solid income from MoneySavingMom.com. It wasn't easy, but with much dedication, goal setting, hard work, and time, we set out on our unique path to financial freedom.

Only a few months before I started writing this book, our family finally made the decision to move from Wichita, Kansas, to Nashville, Tennessee. The move was about three years in the making and was much prayed, thought, talked, mulled, cried, and counseled over. It was a big change and not an easy one to make. It meant saying good-bye to family and friends near and dear to our hearts. It meant moving out of our geographic comfort zone and everything we had known for all of our lives. (Up until 2014, I had never lived outside of the state of Kansas!) It meant making adjustments to a new house, a new city, and a new state.

There are many reasons we made this major leap, but I can sum them up in one word: *change*.

Jesse needed a change. In the past year, the light had gone out in my husband's eyes. So had the passion from his heart, the spring in his step. He started his law firm in 2008. It was exciting to see him turn a dream into a reality and help many, many people. While he was grateful for the opportunity, running the demanding law firm had taken its toll, and he was ready for something different. The time had come to

move on. Jesse wanted to pursue some legal/business ideas that had been patiently waiting on the back burner. Additionally, he was considering taking on a managerial role in MoneySavingMom.com.

Our family also needed a change. We loved being close to family in Kansas. We loved being able to see them often, spend time with them, and build close relationships with them. And we miss them dearly. But Jesse and I both running separate businesses was beginning to wear on us. We didn't have as much margin as we wanted for doing life together as a family. We longed for a slower pace of life and more community.

Finally, our business needed a change. MoneySavingMom.com has grown a lot in the past few years. While we were grateful for the growth and excited at the possibilities and open doors, it had become much more than I could handle on my own. So in 2013 we hired a wonderful management company to help shoulder a tremendous amount of the load I had been carrying. Moving to Nashville, where our management company is located, allowed for more efficiency when it came to having team meetings, developing products, and increasing business growth versus trying to do all these things long-distance.

Having a much more flexible schedule since Jesse is working from home instead of running a busy law firm has been a welcome, and much needed, change for us. We love being home as a family more. We love having Jesse more involved in our everyday lives. And we love a simpler pace of life where relationships are much more important than productivity and to-do lists.

The only reason our family was able to say yes to making these considerable yet needed changes was because we constructed and set in place a solid plan to create financial freedom. We invested

years of time and effort, established strong sources of income outside of a traditional 8:00 A.M. through 5:00 P.M. job, and were then able to step back and ask, “What do we want our life to look like in the future?”

Realizing that we were in a place to choose to downsize our businesses and simplify our lives was a beautiful thing. We didn’t have to keep chasing after more—more business, more money, or more fulfillment. The financial foundation we had in place gave us true freedom to make choices that were in the best interest of our marriage, our children, and our long-term goals.

Creating Your Vision

In a minute, I’m going to ask you to pause, reflect, and capture your vision on paper. But first, I want to talk about what financial freedom is *not*, to help bring more clarity to your personal genesis of breathing easier.

Financial freedom is not:

- something so overwhelming that only women with superpowers and amazing organizational skills can obtain it
- getting rich quickly
- working sixteen-hour days and burning out as a result
- building the biggest business or making as much money as possible
- using other people in order to catapult your own success
- sacrificing for an idea or a new business at the cost of not seeing or spending quality time with your loved ones
- having more money just to have more money

Financial freedom is:

- making choices based upon what is best for you and your family and that align with your long-term goals
- thinking big and creatively
- using the skills and talents you were born with
- taking calculated risks and trying new things
- turning knowledge and available resources into income-generating ideas
- being in a position to give generously
- using your time and talents to bless others and make an impact

I want you to take some time to stop and consider where you are right now and what financial freedom might look like for you.

Maybe you are a single mom and juggling three jobs for chump change is simply not cutting it. Maybe you're a stay-at-home mom whose husband just got laid off, and you need some cash to get through this hard time. Maybe you are just sick and tired of punching in at 8:00 A.M. and leaving at 5:00 P.M. at a lackluster job that leaves you unmotivated and unfulfilled. Maybe you're tired of scrambling to find money to pay your mortgage, rent, car payment, or electric bill. Maybe you are tired of having to borrow money from your parents or close friends. Maybe you want to have more wiggle room in your budget. Maybe you want to start saying yes to help feed the homeless in your community, buy groceries for the widow down the block, or provide clean water for a child in a third world country for a year.

What does financial freedom mean to you?

Think about it. I mean, *really* think about it.

Don't let this question slip by without taking the time to answer it with deep conviction. You may need a few minutes to reflect, or you may have had the answer before you started reading this chapter. Write down your thoughts in the space below. This is the vision, *your* vision, that I will be helping you achieve as you read through this book.

Switch to New Thinking

Financial freedom is not just about getting your finances in order. It's about mentally getting your head in the right space.

You have to believe that you can stand on your own two feet and live in financial freedom. You have to believe that there are options out there that will work, regardless of your particular season of life or unique circumstance. You have to believe in your vision then make positive changes that help propel you and that vision forward. (Throughout this book, I'll show you how!)

I am not going to lie to you. Creating financial freedom takes work, practice, sweat, and tears. There will be many struggles and disappointments along the way. Just as a baby will never learn how to walk if he gives up halfway through the process, you will never realize financial success if you quit.

And don't just think that living out financial freedom means getting a higher-paying job. I can't tell you how many e-mails I receive from people who say they wish they could be in our financial position

but it's just not possible because they only make \$25,000 per year. Truth be told, not too long ago, making \$25,000 per year would have been a significant pay increase for us as we were barely making it on \$600 to \$1,000 per month!

When you see what is possible, you begin to understand that there is no “one” way or “right” way to get there. You can begin—yes, even right now!—to exhale knowing there are so many different opportunities to build income, many of which I will talk about throughout this book. I have learned much over the past ten years (and counting!) of this journey of entrepreneurial endeavors and failures. And so have the wonderful women I've met along the way, some of whose stories I'll also share with you in the coming pages.