STEPPING STONES CURRICULUM

MONEY MAKES THE WORLD GO 'ROUND

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UNIT ONE:
GOALS

Have you ever set a New Year's resolution? A goal that you set for yourself…maybe it was to read more, or clean up your language, or lose weight. We all do it. We set resolutions and goals that we never attain. We never seem to get where we want to be and end up feeling miserable and like a failure. But goals can be easier to meet when you make short-term, mid-term, and long-term goals.

This section will talk about how we set goals, how to attain your goals, and the difference it will make in planning your future. Our goal is to help you plan for the time when you will leave Joppa House and enter into a new lifestyle; a time when you will have your own home, be responsible for all your own expenses for your household, like: utilities, groceries, the needs of your children, your job, and your education. This time in Joppa House is just a stepping stone to bettering your situation and creating a better life for you and your children. God has a plan and a purpose for your life. He loves you and He wants to give you the desires of your heart.

For I know the plans I thoughts that I think toward you,
says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil,
to give you a future and a hope."
- Jeremiah 29:11, NKJV -

GOALS - GOALS - GOALS

What does it mean to set goals?

A goal is defined as: *the result of achievement toward which effort is directed; aim; end.* In other words, the end result of your stay in Joppa House when you are ready to move out and live independently, utilizing the life skills you have been taught here. When you came into residency here, you would have set personal goals, family goals, educational goals, employment goals, and financial goals. At this point, we hope that you are in the process of making these goals a reality.

This unit talks about financial goals. Financial goals are very important as they set the tone for your future. How we handle our money will have both share and long-term effects on our lives and on the lives of our children. Your future may depend on how you set your financial goals, reach them, and use your money.

Many financial institutions recommend both short and long term goals. Where do you want to be five weeks from now? How about in 5 months? In 5 years? Do you want your own home or do you want to continue your education before you purchase a home? Maybe you would like to buy a car. Is it your desire to send your child to camp next summer? Perhaps you have to save money to do that. Or maybe it is for school clothes or Christmas presents. So many things to think about when dealing with your money.

WHAT GOALS DO YOU HAVE?

Take a few moments right now, on a separate piece of paper, to write down the goals that are on your heart, especially regarding those that will cost money. Write down three short term goals, three mid-term goals, and three long term goals.

A short-term goal would be a goal that you can meet in 5-6 months. An example of a short term goal might be:

1. Save for Christmas gifts
2. Save enough money to buy that pair of sandals you have been looking at in the shoe store window.
3. Finish paying off court fines

A mid-term goal may be something that takes a year or two to acquire. An example may be:

1. Buy a car before next winter
2. Save a deposit on a rental home or apartment
3. Take a class that would increase your ability to get a raise at work

A long-term goal is something that you really want in life, but it may take 3+ years to get it done. That kind of goal is something like:

1. Pay-off my car loan
2. Go to college and get a degree
3. Save a down down-payment for a house.

What is your number one financial objective (can be short-term or long-term)?

Many of us haven't thought much about which financial objectives really matter most. Instead, we muddle through our financial lives, spending to meet the day-to-day expenses that dominate our attention. That approach risks leaving your most important objectives unmet. That's what this lesson is all about: helping you identify the financial goals that matter most to you and making sure they happen. That's not as easy as it sounds, since financial goals continually collide with one another. Paying for a child's braces may rob money that would otherwise go into the car fund, for example.

To get what you want most you must: 1) Decide which goals will take priority, and, 2) Work toward the smaller goals only after the really important ones are provided for. You will need to decide early on which of the many financial goals are realistic and worth pursuing. Then, start working toward them.

Questions to ask yourself: 1) Are your goals realistic? 2) Can you really achieve the goal you're setting for yourself? 3) Are you able to determine the difference between short and long term goals? Are there people who can help you either set or accomplish your goals?

GOALS FOR SETTING PRIORITIES
HOW TO SET PRIORITIES

Keep it simple & Narrow your objectives. You probably won't be able to achieve every financial goal you've ever dreamed of. So identify your goals clearly and why they matter to you. Then decide which are the most important. By concentrating your efforts, you have a better chance of achieving what matters most.

Focus first on the goals that matter. To accomplish primary goals, you will often need to put the less important ones on the back burner.

Be prepared for set-backs. Even worthy goals often conflict with one another, shuffling the priority of one goal over another. When faced with such a conflict, you should ask yourself questions like: Will one of these goals benefit my family or my situation more than the other? Which goal will cause the greater harm if it is deferred? It is okay, just reevaluate and if necessary, reprioritize.

Put time on your side. The most important ally you have in reaching your goals is time. The more the you have the more chance you have of success. Take the time to do it and do it well. Just because you say that you'll "reach this goal in six months" and it takes you seven or eight months, does not mean that you are a failure. When you reach your goal it will be a tremendous accomplishment irregardless of how long it takes to achieve it.

Choose carefully. When you made your list of goals, look for the things that will help you feel financially secure, happy, or fulfilled. These are the things that are the most important to you, that will provide a sense of satisfaction for a long, long time. Put your number one needs or desires at the top of the priority list.

Include family members. If you have a spouse or a significant other, make sure that person is part of the goal-setting process. Children, too, should have some say in goals that affect them.

Start now. The longer your wait to identify and begin working toward your goals, the more difficult it will be to reach them. Don't wait!

Sweat the big stuff. Once you have prioritized your list of goals, keep your spending on course. Whenever you make a large payment for anything, ask yourself: "Is this taking me nearer to my primary goals, or is this leading me further away from them?" If a big expense doesn't get you closer to your goals, try to wait on it or reduce it.

Don't sweat the small stuff. Although this lesson encourages you to focus on big-ticket, long-range plans, most of life is lived in the here-and-now and most of what you spend will continue to be for daily expenses, including many that are simply for fun. That's okay, so long as your long-range goals are taken into consideration.

Be prepared for change. Your needs and desires will change as you age, so you should probably reexamine your priorities at least every five years. The following worksheets will help you set and prioritize the goals you have set in this unit.

Click here for the Unit 1 & Unit 2 Worksheets. You can fill them out on your phone/computer (make sure to save your work!) or you can print them off and fill them in.

BUILDING YOUR CREDIT

The next step in your journey to independence is to build your credit so you can eventually get a loan for an automobile or perhaps a mortgage for a house. Building or restoring your credit should be one of your life priorities. In the next few pages, let's talk about way you can build or restore your credit.

If you've never had a credit card or a loan, your credit history is a blank slate. Your credit history, as documented on your credit report, is a record of how responsibly you have repaid money that you have borrowed. Creditors and lenders use your credit history to make you a loan. However, if you have no credit history, there's no record of how you might manage debt. As a result, many creditors and lenders won't lend you money. It may seem impossible, but there are ways to build credit when you have no credit.

HOW TO BUILD YOUR CREDIT

Get a secured credit card. A secured credit card is just like a "regular" or unsecured credit card, only you are required to put down a security deposit (typically $300-$500) to provide assurance to the creditor that you will repay your debt. Your credit limit is often the amount of your security deposit, or a percentage of it. A secured credit card functions like a “normal” or unsecured credit card with one exception — the credit card company requires you to put down a security deposit.

Many people confuse a secured credit card with a debit card. However, the two are very different. First, banks do not report debit card usage to the credit bureaus, as a debit card is not an extension of credit. A debit card is merely a convenient way to access the funds in your bank account.

Creditors, on the other hand, do typically report secured credit card activity to the credit bureaus, as a secured credit card is an extension of your credit. Your purchases are not deducted from your security deposit. Rather, each time you charge something, you are borrowing money from the credit card company and are obligated to repay that debt. As a result, how responsibly you use a secured credit card will affect your credit score, both positively and negatively.

Only charge what you can afford to pay off in full. Building credit means consistently demonstrating your ability to pay back any money you borrow. Your goal is to prove to creditors and lenders that you can responsibly manage debt. That’s why it’s smart to start small — only charge purchases that you can afford to pay off in full every month. Unfortunately, it is not enough to open a credit card, secured or otherwise, and sit on it. If you don’t use your credit card, you’re not demonstrating anything. Use your card at least once a month for small purchases like inexpensive meals, gasoline, and drug store essentials. Try not to charge more than 50 percent of your credit limit in a given month as that can take a toll on your credit score.

Pay on time every month. The most important thing you can do to build and maintain a good credit score is to pay off all of your bills on time every month. Even one late payment can greatly damage your credit score. The amount you charge matters little compared to your history of paying on time. One late payment can significantly damage your credit score, especially when you’re just getting started.

Avoid applying for more than one account. Each time you apply for a credit card or loan, your credit score takes a small hit. And there’s no point to chipping away at a credit score you’re trying to build up, especially when you haven’t shown that you can handle just one credit card yet. Instead, use that energy to prove to yourself that you can keep the balance low on one credit card and pay the bill on time every month.

Check your progress by checking your credit report and score. After six months of paying your credit card on time, check your status by reviewing your credit report and score online. Pay special attention to what's on your credit report and any positive or negative factors listed, so you have a better idea of what you need to work on next. Also make sure to take a look at your credit score. It will help you make sense of your credit report and give you and idea of how well you are doing.

To take a peek at your credit report for free, check out the website https://www.creditkarma.com or download the CreditKarma app. CreditKarma is free and easy to use.

After a year, apply for an unsecured credit card. Twelve months of timely payments should be enough to show your credit card company that you can responsibly manage debt. Now is the time to give your creditor a call to see if you can make the switch from a secured credit card to an unsecured credit card. The key to building credit is patience. Remember that having a good credit score is like having the world's best coupon book for all the big financial transactions in your life. It may take time to establish good credit, but once you do, you'll reap big benefits.

There are many things that can hinder your credit or your financial priorities. If you have outstanding debt it is important that you put repayment on the top of your short-term and/or mid-term goals. Small things such as library fines, past utility bills, video store fines, and money borrowed from friends or relatives that have not been repaid are financial items that keep you from moving forward. List these on your priority list and make every effort to get them cleared up before taking on any more financial responsibilities. You will want to start your new, transformed life with a clean slate — ready to take on a whole new way of life; a better life for you and your children.

UNIT TWO: BUDGETING

Budget! Budget! Budget! Ughhhh! That word is everywhere! And yet it is soooo hard to actually budget. Seems as if you just get everything paid up and then something happens: the car needs a new muffler, the kids need new shoes, and the dog gets hurt and need to visit the vet. All of those things that cost money. The unexpected things in life can derail a budget faster than we can blink!

There is never enough money to go around; to cover all the expenses that occur in our families over the course of a week, a month, or a year. To manage a household and a family successfully we have to have some sort of a plan. A plan to pay all of our bills, have enough money to buy groceries or household items, and try to save a little bit of money to buy a better vehicle and eventually move into our own home.

Budgeting just means “planning”; planning how you will spend your money. In the first unit we talked about goals. You were asked to identify short and long term goals. Budgeting your money, whether you have a little or have a log, will help you meet those goals. It will also ensure that you stay on track, keeping your bills paid on time while building your credit. It all goes hand in hand: setting goals, budgeting, and building your credit is all part of becoming independent and successful. The following pages will help you as you place your feet on the road to independence. Are you ready? Let’s get started!

YOUR SPENDING HABITS

When we are employed, we receive a paycheck on a weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly basis. Your paycheck will reflect a certain amount of deductions each pay period. These deductions are called employment taxes. Everyone in Michigan is required to have taxes taken out (or deducted) from your Gross pay. “Gross” pay is the amount of pay you would receive <u>before</u> deductions. Let's say that you work 40 hours per week for $10.00 per hour. Your paycheck would show a "Gross" amount of $400.00.

$$40 \times \$10.00 = \$400.00$$

However, you will find the deductions right underneath the Gross pay. The deductions may look something like this:

FIT W/H — Federal Income Tax Withholding
MIT W/H — Michigan Income Tax Withholding
FICA — Social Security Tax Withholding
MC — Medicare Tax Withholding

These taxes will be deducted from your Gross pay along with any other withholdings you may have such as child support, wage garnishment, insurance, etc. After all withholdings are met, the bottom amount should be your Net pay. "Net" pay is the amount you actually take home on your paycheck. It is the money you can actually spend. Some weeks you may receive more net income than others. As the income or "Gross" pay increases, taxes also increase. It is the "Net" pay that we have to use for our budget. We cannot plan a budget on money we don't actually have.

We have to be very realistic with managing our money. Getting by on a low income takes careful planning. To gain control over your money, you have to be willing to honestly look at where your money goes and how wisely you are spending what you bring home. All of us work hard for our paycheck. Using it to better your situation is the ultimate goal of using a budget.

In order to gain control you have to know what money is coming in and what is going out, and when. Making a budget gives you a clear picture of where your money goes, and show you where you are spending foolishly. It may also help you save money or see if you are living within your means.

As previously stated, you may not always be able to control the amount of money you have coming in, especially if you are working at a seasonal job where hours get cut at certain times of year. But you can control what goes out. Your budget shows you where your money is going, so you can see if there is anything you can easily cut back on, or shop around for a better deal.

SPENDING DIARY

One way to find out what you are spending and where, is to keep a spending diary. A spending diary will give you a clear picture of what you spend your money on, especially the non-essentials. This isn't to say that you shouldn't enjoy the little pleasures in life, but you might be surprised at how much small things (like those yummy coffees from a fast food drive-thru) add up when you purchase them every day.

So what does a Spending Diary look like?

<<Insert Spending Diary Worksheet>>

Why keep a spending diary? Keeping a spending diary gives you an accurate picture of what you spend your money on.

How long should I keep a spending diary? Over a period of at least a week. Even better, a month.

Write down everything that you spend. You could use a smart phone, if you have one. There are plenty of free apps to help, but a low-tech pen and paper works just as well. Hold onto all of your receipts and check your bank statements or online banking app for non-cash payments.

Now, look over your diary and see where you are spending your money. Is it spent on essentials or non-essentials?

Work out how much you spend overall on the non-essential items (take out coffee, fast food, etc.). If you find that you are spending a lot of cash on little luxuries, perhaps a diary will motivate you to cut back a little once you realize how much these treats are actually costing you over the course of a week or a month's time! I think you will be very surprised!

MAKING A BUDGET

What is the definition of a budget? It is "an itemized summary of estimated or intended expenditures for a given period along with proposals for financing them."

I think most of us know that we have to plan for certain expenses in our regular daily routines. Expenses like cell phone bills, cable TV, Hulu, Amazon Prime, car payment, car insurance, gas for the car, food, utilities; the list goes on and on. There are so many demands on the little bit of money we get every month. For most of us, our paycheck is gone before we even get it, meaning we have so many areas of need to cover, we never really see much spending money! Because money goes through our hands like water, we can find ourselves with a shortfall or "broke" before the end of our payday. That is why it is so important to "budget" or plan for the expenditures we will encounter in our daily living.

If we have a car, we have to plan for our car payment. Having a car also means planning for insurance and license tabs. An apartment or house means we will have rent and utilities that we will also be responsible for. Planning to meet those expenses will help us meet our financial obligations, but also help us to keep a little money for fun or put in a savings account for future needs.

The definition of budget is in two parts: first, it says it is a summary. Secondly, the definition says it entails a proposal for financing them. In other words, these are expenditures that you have, and now you need to figure out how you are going to pay for them. After you analyze your spending diary, it is time to prepare your budget.

Budgeting will help you prepare to meet the financial needs of your family and household. Having a budget plan and finding cost-saving measures also help you to cope with the daily challenges a low income presents.

Gather the following together:

- Copies of all your bills
- Bank statements for at least three to six months, or your pay stubs
- Any other income statements you may have

- Approximate amounts of incidentals (gas for the car, lunch money for the kids, etc)

PREPARING A BUDGET PLAN

Step 1:

Monitor what you are currently spending. Using the Budget Worksheet, list all of your bills of fixed expenses, such as rent or mortgage, repayment of bank loans, insurance payments, or child support. The things that are the same amount each month.

Step 2:

Calculate the monthly portion of all of your bills. For example, if your car insurance is $2,400.00 per year, divide that number by 12 and record $200 as a monthly expense, even if you make the total payment once per year.

Step 3:

Look at your recent bank statements if you have a bank account to determine how much cash you have been withdrawing. Take the average over the last few statements. For example, if you withdrew $100, $65 and $75 over the last three months, record $80 as the average amount of withdrawals per month.

Step 4:

Determine where your cash was spent. List every stop at the gas station, candy bar, chips, bus pass, restaurant bill, grocery purchase, and everything else you can remember buying.

Step 5:

Total all your expenses for the month and compare this figure to the net income earned in a month. If your current expenses exceed your income, you may need to find ways to reduce spending or find an additional part time job.

Step 6:

Budget a certain amount to set aside each week to save for unexpected emergencies or for fun, family activities. There will always be something that will occur, such as home or car repairs and maintenance, or an unexpected medical or dental condition.

After you fill out the worksheet, take an honest look at your monthly income and expenses. Are you making enough money for the style of living you are at? Are your fixed expenses, such as rent, car payment, or insurance too high for what you make? If that is the case, you may have to consider a second job or reducing your expenses to make your finances manageable. If that is not an option, you will have to find cost-saving measures to make ends meet.

Finding Cost-Saving Measures
from thenest.com

- Prioritize what you need most. Examine all expenditures (*the things you spend money on*) and determine what is *necessary*. For example: food and shelter are usually the most important. Look carefully at how much discretionary spending *(things not in your budget)* you are doing. This is often where most savings can be made.
- Examine your cell phone plan and usage. For example, you might be able to manage without internet access from your phone. Consider getting rid of your land line. If you're like most people, you probably don't use it. If you make lots of long distance calls regularly, switch to a pre-paid phone card to save money and limit your talk time.
- Reduce your gas or electric bills by keeping the house a few degrees cooler in the winter and warmer in the summer, using less heating or air conditioning.
- Scan newspapers and flyers for food coupons. Stock up on items when they are on special. Buy larger-sized containers when possible; they cost less per serving. Shop from a grocery list to reduce impulse buying.
- Reduce the amount of money you spend on gifts. *Look for sales and discounted prices*. Create a coupon to give the gift of your time to family members who might appreciate your services as a babysitter rather than an expensive gift.

- Buy second-hand clothing. Many stores sell good quality items at a fraction of the price for new. Check out garage sales before heading out to buy something that you need.
- Change your habits. No more eating out in restaurants. Brown bag your lunch to work every day and drink coffee at home. Calculate how much you can save by not buying that cup of coffee on the way to work each morning. It could save you as much as $30 each month!
- Give up drinking bottled water and switch to tap water. Invest in a reusable water bottle, fill it, and refrigerate it. Or fill it halfway and place it in the freezer overnight. In the morning, fill the rest. Many people find that water tastes better when it is very cold and you probably won't miss the taste of your expensive bottled water.
- Find an exercise buddy who will walk through the neighborhood with you regularly or who will come over and work out with you to an exercise video. This partnership will motivate you to exercise regularly without needing an expensive gym membership.
- Find alternative things to do for entertainment. For example, rather than paying admission to a movie theater or theme park, look for creative ways to have fun with friends. Organizing a potluck dinner can be even more enjoyable than an expensive meal in a restaurant.

SO, YOU HAVE A BUDGET…NOW WHAT?!

An example of what a budget should do for you is likening a budget to a roadmap or a GPS. You don't have to use a map on a GPS to get where you are going, but it sure helps us on the right track if we do! A budget doesn't help you unless you *use it*. Much is said about making a budget, but what do you do with one after you've got it?

<u>A budget isn't supposed to make you feel trapped or constrained.</u> It's not there to make you feel bad. It isn't someone standing over you questioning every expense. A budget is a *planning tool, and it is yours*. It is there to put you in the driver's

seat so you don't have to wonder where your money went at the end of the month. It's there to help. So you should use it!

Often a budget has to be re-worked after it is set and followed. Perhaps you spent more on fuel for the car this month than last month. Maybe you had to pay for laundry because your washer or dryer quit working. Maybe you could not brown bag lunch every day or the kids had extra-curricular activities that required a fee to be paid.

A budget should be flexible tool. A guideline to help you try to keep control over your spending so the basic needs of running a household are met. So the utilities and rent are paid and you don't have to worry about getting evicted or have your heat shut-off in the winter.

<u>Budgets are very effective, but you do have to use them.</u> This takes us back to the very beginning: if your income does not cover all of your expenses, which the budget will prove one way or the other. Perhaps a budget will help you determine if you will need a home with lesser rent, a home with utilities included, a cheaper car with a lesser car payment and insurance, or perhaps it is time to consider a better job or even a second job. Budgeting lets you know where you are spending frivolously and wastefully, it helps you align your financial priorities, helps you control your spending and transforms money into a tool that helps accelerate your long-term financial goals. While budgeting requires some time and attention in the early months, learning to maintain a budget will pay dividends in ways never imagined. Review your budget monthly and stick to a strict plan to bring your financial health in line with the goals you have set in the previous exercise. Reward the family for staying within the budget and remember that not all rewards are monetary!

UNIT THREE:
A PLACE CALLED HOME

Recovery transitional housing is an opportunity for you to work on goals that will help you become more stable and better prepared to succeed in permanent housing. This section discusses different types of permanent housing option to explore, as well as resources to access that may help you obtain and/or maintain housing.

Renting or owning a home will be two options for you to consider when you begin to think of permanent housing. There are a few things you need to be aware of before beginning your search for housing if you plan to rent. Possible barriers to being approved for renting a residence include: past felony legal history, bad credit or no credit score, no income and/or limited income, poor rental history with previous landlords.

If you are faced with some of the barriers described above, subsidized housing may be helpful for you to consider. Subsidized housing is income-based. Often you are only required to pay 30% of your gross family income in rent. Unfortunately, subsidized housing can sometimes have a long waiting list before becoming eligible for a housing unit.

If you are considering owning your own home, there are many things to investigate before committing to such a large purchase. Most individuals who own a home have a mortgage loan through a bank in order to be able to afford several thousands of dollars that most homes cost. You will also be subject to a credit check. If your credit is poor, you may not be able to get a mortgage loan, or you may find that the interest rate (a percentage fee that is added to your mortgage loan amount) is very high. It is strongly suggested that, if you are planning to purchase a home, you seek education and assistance on understanding the basics of home ownership.

FINDING AND MAINTAINING HOUSING

Affordable Housing Options. Local housing commissions provide housing assistance to low income residents through the management of Low Rent Public Housing. This program is income based and the eligibility guidelines are set by Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

There may be waiting lists for these rentals. At times, the lists may be closed to new applicants due to cuts in funding or the length of the waiting list. If you are in need of housing assistance in the area please contact the Housing Commission directly to obtain more information about eligibility requirements, availability of rentals, the status of any waiting lists, and their application procedures.

Charlevoix Housing Commission
210 W Garfield Ave
Charlevoix, MI 49720

Phone: 231-547-5451

Hours of Operation:
Monday - Thursday, 1pm - 4pm

East Jordan Housing Commission
451 Water St
East Jordan, MI 49727

Phone: 231-536-2051
Email: ejhc@freeway.net

Hours of Operation:
Monday, Tuesday, & Thursday, 9am - 3pm

Boyne City Housing Commission
829 S Park St
Boyne City, MI 49712

Phone: 231-582-6203
Email: info@boynecityhc.com
Web: boynecityhc.com

Hours of Operation:
Monday, Tuesday, Friday, 8am - 4 pm

IMPORTANT RENTAL TIPS

Money Up Front

Be aware that most landlords will require first and last month's rent, as well as a security deposit when signing a lease agreement. You will need to pay this up front.

Security Deposit

This is to cover possible damage that may happen to the rental unit. This fee is usually refunded at the time you exit the residence if it is left in good, clean condition, without damages.

Lease Agreement

Read the lease agreement. You may be locked into renting for a determined amount of time (such as one year or two years) once you sign the papers. You will not be able to break the lease (move out early) without penalty.

Additional Rental Fees

Monthly rental fees may or may not include additional costs, such as:

- Application Fee
- Pet fines/fees
- Late payment fees
- Cable/Internet Costs
- Electric, water, and/or trash
- Extra occupant fee
- Extra vehicle fee
- Garage or car port rental

HOUSING ASSISTANT AGENCIES

There are local agencies that can assist you with understanding the options to purchase/rent housing, as well as understanding the process of signing a rental lease or housing loan. Some agencies can also provide assistance with paying first/last month's rent and security deposit, or agencies may also provide emergency assistance if you are behind in rent or mortgage payment.

Northwest Michigan Community Action Agency (NMCAA)
Antrim, Charlevoix, and Emmet Counties
2240 Mitchell Park Dr, Unit A
Petoskey, MI 49770

Phone: 231-347-9070 or toll free: 800-443-5118
Web: nmcaa.net

The NMCAA is a HUD approved housing counseling agency. Contact them for assistance for any or all of the following:

- Fair Housing pre-purchase education workshops
- Financial management
- Budget counseling
- Home improvement and rehabilitation counseling
- Mortgage delinquency and default resolution counseling
- Non-delinquency post purchase workshops for homeowners
- Pre-purchase counseling
- Pre-purchase homebuyer education workshops
- Prepatory lending education workshops
- Rental housing counseling
- Services for homeless counseling
- Supportive services for Veterans and their families

Department of Human Services
Charlevoix and Emmet Counties
2229 Summit Park Dr
Petoskey, MI 49770

Phone: 231-348-1600
Web: mibridges.gov

- Contact this department to find out if you qualify to receive assistance with first/last months' rent and security deposit if you are preparing to rent housing.
- Emergency assistance may be temporarily available if you fall behind on your rent and/or utilities.

<u>Northwest Michigan Supportive Housing (NMSH)</u>
3588 Veterans Dr, Suite 1
Traverse City, MI 49684

Phone: 231-929-1309
Email: contact@nmshousing.org
Web: nmshousing.org

NMSH is located in Grand Traverse County. In order to qualify for being placed on the list of interest for NMSH, the following criteria must be met by an application:

- The individual must be **homeless**
- The individual must be **certified disabled by a clinician** and or be battling substance abuse and/or be diagnosed with HIV/AIDS
- The individual must have **little or no income**
- The individual must be referred by a caseworker, therapist, or physician. Referrals are available online at the NMSH website.

Individuals who qualify for NMHS will be charged 30% of his/her monthly income for rent. NMHS will assist with the security deposit, utilities, and 100% of the rent if the individual does not have income.

HOME OWNERSHIP

Because purchasing a home will most likely be the largest financial commitment you will ever make in your life, it is important to understand the process of buying a home and making smart choices as a home owner before signing the papers. The majority of home owners take out a mortgage, which is a loan from a bank, in order to afford purchasing a house.

The key piece to remember is that when you sign mortgage papers with the bank of your choice, you are committing to pay back the amount the bank has loaned you; that means signing a legal document committing to pay thousands of dollars (via monthly mortgage payments) for 10 or more years. That is a huge investment and not to be taken lightly.

It is very important to research the following information prior to purchasing a home:

- Steps in the home buying process
- Understanding the costs of home ownership
- Why good credit is important
- Know how to determine how much house you can afford
- Who is on your home buying team
- Mortgage loan basics
- How to maintain your investment

It may be helpful to seek workshops or seminars that are available to educate you on the basics of homeownership. Consider contacting the following agencies to inquire about what upcoming classes/seminars are available regarding home ownership:

<u>MSU Extension, Charlevoix County</u>
319 B. North Lake St
Boyne City, MI 49712

Phone: 231-582-6232
Email: msue.charlevoix@county.msu.edu
Web: canr.msu.edu/charlevoix/county-extension-office

Hours of Operation:
Monday - Friday, 8:30am - 4:30 pm

<u>Northwest Michigan Community Action Agency (NMCAA)</u>
Antrim, Charlevoix, and Emmet Counties
2240 Mitchell Park Dr, Unit A
Petoskey, MI 49770

Phone: 231-347-9070 or toll free: 800-443-5118
Web: nmcaa.net

On a separate piece of paper write out answers to the following questions and take them to your next case management meeting:

1. Explain where you want to live once you leave recovery housing. What is your dream?
2. What are the housing options in the area in which you would like to reside?
3. What is your permanent housing goal once you exit recovery transitional living?
4. Identify 1 step to take within the next week that will help you reach your goal of permanent housing.
5. Identify 3 steps to take within the next month that will move you toward reaching your permanent housing goal.

UNIT FOUR:
MANAGING DEBT

DEBT CREDIT

It seems to be so easy. The "American Way"! You buy the things you want on credit spending more than you make. Ads and commercials make it look so easy:

"We'll pay the sales tax!"
"20% off with no money down!"
"No payments for 12 whole months!"
"No credit? No problem!"

The media bombards us with bigger, better deals that entice us into accumulating debt that we cannot pay back. Then we find ourselves in financial trouble and we have debt collectors coming after all the things we have bought on credit. Our furniture gets taken away, or car gets repossessed, a garnishment is put on our wages and our credit is ruined! We easily become slaves to our debt and slaves to our money.

Scripture states in Matthew 6:24: "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money."

There are some good biblical principles on how we should manage money or be "good stewards" or what we earn. Spending foolishly can get us into a love of money trouble. But spending wisely can help us attain the goals we have set, keep nice things in our home, do things with our family, and live a life free from financial pressure.

So how do we manage the debt we have, protect our credit, and still end up with the nice things in our home and lives that we desire? This unit is designed as an overview of debt management, show you ways to rebuild your credit, and successfully manage your money to give you life-long freedom and financial burdens!

HOW DO YOU MANAGE DEBT?

"When you get in debt you become a slave."
— Andrew Jackson —

The best way to manage debt is to not go into debt to begin with. If at all possible, don't borrow money for material things. Live your life on a cash-basis, using cash for all your purchases no matter how large or small.

Don't succumb to the temptation of obtaining a credit card. Credit cards offer low monthly payments while imposing extremely high interest rates on unpaid balances. The cards give you a sense of security, thinking that you have something to fallback on if things get tight. When, in all actuality, credit cards become a trap of easy money that is nearly impossible to get out of. Instead of using a credit card, opt for a debit card.

A debit card acts like a credit card, except the purchase is directly posted against your bank account. This means you have to have the money in your account to make the initial purchase. If you don't have the money available, your transaction will be denied. This is a great safeguard against spending more than you have: eliminating debt and those little, impetuous purchases of frivolous items so common in stores! But, if you already have debt, plan to not only manage debt, but make every attempt to get out of debt. The less debt you have, the more peace you will have in your life. There are many ways to enjoy life without going into debt!

To get out of debt, the first step is to be realistic. What is causing you to have debt and why? Perhaps you have a mortgage on your home, or an auto loan. These are big items that cause a heavy debt load. Or you may have incurred debt with student loans, credit cards, past due utility, or medical bills. All of these things can be cleared up with careful planning, debt management, and financial discipline.

DEBT MANAGEMENT

Before you tackle debt management you will need to pull out your budget; the one you prepared in Unit 2 on Budgeting. A budget gives you a realistic assessment of how much money you take in and how much money you spend. The goal is to make sure you can make ends meet on the basics: housing, food, utilities, etc. If after you have a budget you find that your expenses outweigh your income and you cannot make your loan payments on time, you will need to contact your creditors immediately if you are having trouble making ends meet. Tell them why it is difficult for you, and try to work out a modified payment plan that reduces your payments to a more manageable level. Don't wait until your accounts have been turned over to a debt collector. At that point, your creditors have given up on you and won't even talk to you.

It is always easier to avoid dealign with overdue bills. Avoiding your responsibility is always a recipe for disaster. Do your best to be proactive in managing your payments and debt load. Communicate with your creditors. Most are very easy to work with if you are attempting to do your best with what you have to work with and keep your promises, meeting the payment arrangements or re-negotiating if necessary.

Many people believe that they can walk away from debt. Walk away from your car loan or let the bank have it when you are in a mortgage. This is not true. Regardless of the length of your delinquency or the fact that your car is no longer in your possession due to a "repo" (repossession), you are still responsible for that debt. You signed a legal contract stating you would repay, and if you don't, that debt will follow you into other areas of your life. Defaulting and walking away from your debt obligates your creditors to take legal action. They may turn your bill in to a collection agency that will use every legal means to get money from you for the amount due. A creditor may garnish your bank accounts or your wages. They may start to call you several times a day. A debt collection agency can make your life miserable!

When dealing with a collection agency, you need to know that **Federal Law** dictates how and when a debt collector can contact you: not before 8:00 am, after 9:00 pm, or while you are at work if the collector knows that your employer doesn't approve of the calls. Collectors may not harass you, lie, or use unfair practices when they try to collect a debt. And they must honor a written request from you to stop contacting you.

AUTO AND HOME LOANS

Your debts can be unsecured or secured. Secured debts usually are tied to an asset, like your car for a car loan, or your house for a mortgage. If you stop making payments, lenders can repossess your car or foreclose on your house. Unsecured debts are not tied to any particular asset, and include most credit card debt, bills for medical care, and signature loans.

Most automobile financing agreements allow a creditor to <u>repossess your car</u> any time you are in default (have missed payments). No notice is required. If your car is repossessed, you may have to pay the balance due on the loan, as well as towing and storage costs, to get it back. If you cannot do this, the creditor may sell your car. If you see default approaching, you may be better off selling the car yourself and paying off the debt. You will avoid the added costs of repossession and negative entry on your credit report.

Sometimes, an auto company can promise an easy way to get into a new car. Then the loan is 5-6 years to payoff and the payments are more than you can manage. A new car also incurs higher insurance premiums. Often, we find ourselves enslaved to our vehicle. Purchasing a newer, gently used car is a better, less expensive option. The loans are often written for a shorter length of time and for a lesser amount, making your payments manageable.

If you have a high auto payment, it is to your advantage to sell off the vehicle as stated above, getting off from under the heavy debt load and looking for a less expensive alternative.

<u>If you fall behind on your mortgage</u>, contact your bank or mortgage company immediately to avoid foreclosure. Most lenders are willing to work with you if they believe you are acting in good faith and the situation is temporary. There may be a possibility of reducing or suspending your payments for a limited time. This may be an option even though you may have to pay an

additional amount toward the past due total. Other lenders may agree to change the terms of the mortgage by extending the repayment period to reduce the monthly debt. Find out if additional fees will be assessed for these changes, and calculate how much they total in the long term.

If you and your mortgage lender can't work out a plan, contact a housing counseling agency. Many banks offer foreclosure information. Many financial institutions, county agencies, and special groups offer counseling services to homeowners who are having trouble making mortgage payments. Call the local office for the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) or the housing authority in your state, city, or county for help in finding a legitimate housing counseling agency near you.

Credit cards are relatively easy to get. Advertising for credit cards come in the mail with what seems to be an amazing offer. Especially when you don't have any credit or you don't have a loaded bank account to help you in the case of an emergency.

However, the use of credit cards can get us in significant financial difficulty. Once you rack up debt on a credit card, it is difficult to pay it off. If all you can do is pay the minimum amount on your credit card debt, then the interest rates can add an unbelievable amount to the balance on your card. Then it is hard to pay it off an you end up with a credit card debt load that is controlling your life.

Whenever possible, stay away from credit cards and use debit cards instead! But if you have incurred credit card debt and cannot repay what you owe, try to work out a repayment plan with the credit card company. If you can't, or cannot meet their repayment demands, consider contacting a **debt relief service** like **credit counseling** or **debt settlement**. Depending on the type of service, you might get advice on how to deal with your mounting bills or create a plan for repaying your creditors.

CREDIT COUNSELING

A good, reputable credit counseling organization with a good reputation can advise you on managing your money and debts, help you develop a budget, and offer free educational materials and workshops. Their counselors are certified and trained in consumer credit, money and debt management, and budgeting. Counselors discuss your entire financial situation with you, and help you develop a personalized plan to solve your money problems. An initial counseling session typically lasts an hour, with an offer of follow-up sessions.

Most reputable credit counselors are non-profits and offer services through local offices, online, or on the phone. If possible, find an organization that offers in-person counseling. Many universities, military bases, credit unions, housing authorities, and branches of the U.S. Cooperative Extension Service operate non-profit credit counseling programs. Your financial institution, local consumer protection agency, and friends and family also may be good sources of information and referrals.

Be aware that “non profit” status doesn’t guarantee that services are free, affordable, or even legitimate. In fact, some credit counseling organizations charge high fees, which may hide, or urge their clients to make “voluntary” contributions that can cause more debt.

DEBT MANAGEMENT PLANS

If your financial problems stem from too much debt or your inability to repay your debts, a credit counseling agency may recommend that you enroll in a debt management plan (DMP). A DMP alone is not credit counseling, and DMP’s are not for everyone. Do not sign up for one of these plans unless a certified credit counselor has spent time thoroughly reviewing your financial situation, and has offered you advice on managing your money that is customized to your situation. A good credit counseling organization can help you create a budget and teach you money management skills. In a DMP, you deposit money each month with the credit counseling organization. It uses your deposits to pay your unsecured debts, like your credit card bills, student loans, and medical bills, according to a payment schedule the counselor develops with you and your creditors (organizations you own money to). Your creditors may agree to lower your interest rates or waive certain fees.

A successful DMP requires you to make regular, timely payments; it could take months or years to complete your DMP. Ask the credit counselor to estimate how long it will take for you to complete the plan. You may have to agree not to apply for — or use — any additional credit while you're participating in the plan; until you get your debts paid off and work on getting your credit back in good standing.

DEBT SETTLEMENT PROGRAMS

Debt settlement programs typically are offered by for-profit companies, and involve them negotiating with your creditors to allow you to pay a "settlement" to resolve your debt — a lump sum that is less than the full amount that you owe. To make that lump sum payment, the program asks that you set aside a specific amount of money every month in savings. Debt settlement companies usually ask you to transfer this amount every month into an escrow-like account to accumulate enough savings to pay off any settlement that is eventually reached. These programs often encourage or instruct their clients to stop making any monthly payments to their creditors.

BANKRUPTCY

Sometimes personal bankruptcy becomes your only option, although its consequences are long-lasting and far-reaching. People who follow the bankruptcy rules receive a discharge — a court order that says they don't have to repay certain debts. However, bankruptcy information, both on the date of the filing and the later date of discharge) stay on a credit report for 10 years and can make it difficult to get credit, buy a home, get life insurance, or sometimes even get a job. Still, with all the negatives in mind, bankruptcy is a legal procedure that offers a fresh start for people who have gotten into financial difficulties that can't pay off their debts.

There are two main types of personal bankruptcy: Chapter 13 and Chapter 7. Each must be filed in federal bankruptcy court. Filing fees are usually several hundred dollars plus an extra attorney fee, which will vary by attorney.

Chapter 13 allows people with a steady income to keep property, like a mortgaged house or. car that they might otherwise lose through the bankruptcy process. In Chapter 13, the court approves a repayment plan that allows you to use your future income to pay off your debts during three to five years, rather than give up any property. After you make all the payments under the plan, you receive a discharge of your debts.

Chapter 7 is known as straight bankruptcy. It means liquidating (selling) all your assets that are next exempt. Exempt assets may be automobiles, work-related tools, and basic household furnishings. Some of your property may be sold by a court-appointed official, called a trustee, or turned over to your creditors.

Both types of bankruptcy may get rid of unsecured debts and stop foreclosures, repossessions, garnishments and utility shut-offs, as well as debt collection activities. Both also provide exemptions that let you keep certain assets, although exemption amounts vary by state. Personal bankruptcy usually does not erase child support, alimony, fines, taxes, or some student loan obligations. And, unless you have an established plan to catch up on your debt under Chapter 13, bankruptcy usually does not allow you to keep your property when you carry an unpaid mortgage or security lien (loan) on it.

In bankruptcy, you will have to prove that your debt load and payments exceed your income. Meaning you do not have enough money nor do you anticipate obtaining enough money to pay your debt. Bankruptcy is not a “way out”. Bankruptcy has long-term ramifications that can ruin your opportunities to succeed in home ownership, renting apartments, and obtaining an automobile loan. Only when you have exhausted all other options and still there isn’t any way out to find a reasonable plan to pay off your debt, then bankruptcy may be a consideration.

Think long and hard before choosing bankruptcy. Seek the advice of friends, family and your financial advisors, such as your loan officers at your bank before going the bankruptcy route!

DEBT COLLECTION

If you're behind in paying your bills a debt collector may be contacting you. A debt collector is someone who regularly collects debts owed to others. This may include collection agencies, lawyers, and companies that buy delinquent debts and then try to collect them.

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC), the nation's consumer protection agency, enforces the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act (FDCPA), which prohibits debt collectors from using abusive, unfair, or deceptive practices to collect from you.

A debt collector may contact you regarding collection on personal, family, and household debts, including money you owe on a personal credit card account, an auto loan, a medical bill, and/or your mortgage.

Under the guidelines of the FDCPA, a debt collector is not allowed to contact you at inconvenient times or places, such as before 8 in the morning or after 9 at night, unless you agree to it. Nor can collectors contact you at work if they're told (orally or in writing) that you're not allowed to get call there.

Debt collectors will call you regularly and sometimes many times a day to collect for their contracted client. If a collector contacts you about a debt, it may be wise to talk to them at least once to see if you can resolve the matter, even if you don't think you owe the debt, can't repay it immediately, or think that the collector is contacting you by mistake. If you decide after contacting the debt collector that you don't want the collector to contact you again, tell the collector — in writing — to stop contacting you.

Here's how to do that: Make a copy of your letter. Send the original by certified mail, and pay for a "return receipt" so you'll be able to document that the collector received your letter. Once the collector receives your letter, they may not contact you again, with two exceptions: a collector can contact you to tell you there will be no further contact or to let you know that they or the creditor intend to take specific action, like filing a lawsuit. Sending such a letter to a debt collector you owe money to ***does not get rid of the debt***, but it should stop the contact. The creditor or the debt collector can still sue you to collect the debt.

If an attorney is representing you about the debt, the debt collector must contact the attorney rather than you. If you don't have an attorney, a collector may contact other people, but only to find out your address, your phone number, and/or where you work. Collectors usually are prohibited from contacting third parties more than once. Other than to obtain this location information about you, a debt collector generally is not permitted to discuss your debt with anyone other than you, your spouse, or your attorney.

Every collector must send you a written "validation notice" telling you how much money you owe within five days after they first contact you. This notice also must include the name of the creditor to whom you owe the money, and how to proceed if you don't think you owe the money.

If you send the debt collector a letter stating that you don't owe any or all of the money, or asking for verification of the debt, that collector must stop contacting you. You have to send that letter within 30 days after you receive the validation notice. But a collector can begin contacting you again if they send you written verification of the debt, like a copy of a bill for the amount you owe.

Legally, debt collectors may not:

Information from: https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/articles/0150-coping-debt

- **Harass you, oppress, or abuse you.** For example, they may not:
    - Use threats of violence or harm,
    - Publish a list of names of people who refuse to pay their debts (they can give this information to the credit reporting companies),
    - Use obscene or profane language,
    - Repeatedly use the phone to annoy someone.

- **Give false statements.** Debt collectors may not lie when they are trying to collect a debt. For example, they may not:
    - Falsely claim that they are attorneys or government representatives,
    - Falsely claim that you have committed a crime,
    - Falsely represent that they operate or work for a credit reporting company,

- Misrepresent the amount you owe,
- Indicate that papers they send you *are* legal forms if they aren't,
- Indicate that papers they sent to you *aren't* legal forms if they are.

- **Debt collectors are not allowed to say that:**
    - You will be arrested if you don't pay your debt,
    - They'll seize, garnish, attach, or sell your property or wages unless they are permitted by law to take action and intend to do so,
    - Legal action will be taken against you, if doing so would be illegal or if they don't intend to take the action.

- **Debt collectors may not:**
    - Give false credit information about you to anyone, including a credit reporting company,
    - Send you anything that looks like an official document from a court or government agency if it is not,
    - Use a false company name.

- **Debt collectors may not use unfair practices.** Debt collectors may not engage in unfair practices when they try to collect a debt. For example, they may not:
    - Try to collect any interest, fee, or other charge on top of the amount you owe unless the contract that created for your debt (or your state law) allows the charge,
    - Deposit a post-dated check early,
    - Take or threaten to take your property unless it can be done legally,
    - Contact you by postcard.

If you don't pay a debt, a creditor or the debt collector can sue you to collect. If they win, the court will enter a judgment against you. The judgment states the amount of money you owe, and allows the creditor or collector to get a *garnishment* order against you, directing a third party, like your bank, to turn over funds from your account to pay the debt.

Wage garnishment happens when your employer withholds part of your compensation to pay your debts. Your wages usually can be garnished only as the result of a court order. Don't ignore a lawsuit summons. If you do, you lose the opportunity to fight a wage garnishment. Federal benefits may be garnished under certain circumstances, including paying delinquent taxes, alimony, child support, or student loans.

A BETTER WAY TO HANDLE MONEY

As you read in the previous pages, the best way to handle debt is to simply stay out of debt. Try to make the largest percentage of your purchases with cash. Train yourself to wait to make purchases until you have the money. If you don't have the money, it is wise to abstain from buying something. Chances are, if you wait, you will find that the item isn't as appealing as you originally thought it was. Control impulse buying. Impulsiveness is a quick way to get into debt! And it doesn't take long before we are swimming in a spending pattern that is far beyond your means.

Handling money is very important to our success in life. If we can handle money well, we can manage our debt well and we can have the nicer things in life because we do.

Money makes "the world go 'round" at least our natural world. But God has given us a better way to handle money that does not enslave us to it. When we honor God with our finances, He will bless us with more. If we are putting God first in our lives, we should be putting Him first in our finances. Remember, the Bible says we should be good stewards of our money.

"As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."
1 Peter 4:10

"Tithing" or "giving" is a biblical principle that means you are giving God thanks for the things He has blessed your life with, such as your money. We are to give back to God the first fruits from our labors. First fruits simply mean we give back a portion of our earning to the Lord in what we call a "tithe".

WHAT IS A TITHE?

The tithe is typically 10% of our gross income. Usually, a tithe would be paid to the local house of worship you call your Church home. You can give more than 10%, but we usually use that percentage as our guideline for giving.

Tithing is a biblical principal that is indicative of our relationship with God. Giving of your financial resources gives evidence that God is a priority in your life. It shows that you have a desire in your heart to honor God with everything you have, including your money. If we don't put God first in our finances, chances are we don't put Him first in the other areas of our lives either.

WHY SHOULD I TITHE?

The Bible says that if we give to the Lord our first fruits, or, in the world, the first portion of our money, He will bless with more than we could ever imagine. God says that our "barns would be overflowing" in Malachi 3.

"Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, 'In what way have we robbed you?' In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed Me, even this whole nation. Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this,' says the LORD of hosts, 'If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it.'"
Malachi 3:8-10

This is hard to imagine, especially when you live paycheck to paycheck. It seems as if you need every penny just to make it through the pay period. And it's true, it does seem that way. However, <u>tithing really works</u>. Sometimes it doesn't look like extra money or that money just falls from the sky, but when you begin to honor God with your finances, it seems as if the money goes further. Or maybe the tires on your car seem to last longer. Just little things that bring blessing but cannot be explained.

When you first start tithing, it is a possibility that things may seem to get worse. Don't be discouraged when the times of testing come. Continue to give regularly and you will see God work miracles of provision on your behalf. Give cheerfully and sacrificially. When we give to God, know that He will honor even the smallest effort. He loves even the smallest amount of tithing and effort that we make to put Him first in all things. Jesus put more value on a poor widow's teeny offering than He did on the rich man's offering in the Parable of the Widow's Mite in the Gospel of Mark. Don't be ashamed of what you can give. Give cheerfully knowing that it doesn't matter what people think, just what God thinks.

God looks at the heart. God loves a cheerful and generous giver who gives out of faith and obedience to His Word, sowing into the work of the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus Christ.

"Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously."
2 Corinthians 9:6

You will reap what you sow. When you step out in faith and sow into God's work, He will bless you. Dave Ramsey states this about the tithe on his website daveramsey.com:

"The tithe, which is a scriptural mandate, was not instituted for God's benefit because He already has all the money He needs. He does not need our money. So why does He ask us to give 10% to Him? Tithing was created for our benefit. It is to teach us how to keep God first in our lives and how to be unselfish people. Unselfish people make better husbands, wives, friends, relatives, employees, and employers. God is trying to teach us how to prosper over time."

In other words, you will be the one blessed when you give! It seems so simple. Make it a practice to tithe and see how many things come in to order in your life!

WHAT IS AN OFFERING?

If a tithe is 10% of your gross income, what is an offering? An offering is anything beyond that 10%. Offerings are something that you search your heart and decide to give beyond the tithe, but not in place of the tithe. Tithes go to the local Church, but offerings are free for you to decide what to do with. Many people give offerings to their local Church because they are excited about what God is doing there and they know that there is a need. Others use their offerings to support missions, a favorite non-profit organization, or a local Christian ministry.

As Christians mature in their faith and grow in financial responsibility they should give more and more generously to the kingdom of God through offerings that are over and above the tithe. There is great joy in generous giving and the blessing of giving goes beyond what is required. The more you invest the greater the harvest for both you personally and for the kingdom of God!

Tithes and offerings should be a part of the believer's life. Give joyfully, give thankfully, and do more in the grace of giving, but never feel pressured to give. It's never about the amount you give. Tithing is about the percentage you give, but an offering is about the joy in your heart to give!

I pray that you will discover the joy of giving and trust God in this particular area of your life. If you do I guarantee it will help your faith grow and you will be glad you did!