

FamilyLife Today® Radio Transcript

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Sweet Saving

Guests: Crystal Paine and Steve and Annette Economides
From the series: Money-Saving Families (Day 3 of 3)
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Bob: Crystal Paine believes that what really matters, when it comes to your family's finances, has more to do with your contentment than it does with your bank statement.

Crystal: Contentment, for me—I really feel like that is the key issue to financial success, especially as a Christian. If we can just learn to be content with what God has given us—I mean, because, really, when we are discontent, we are saying that God is not good enough. You know, we need to accept what God has given us with a joyful, thankful heart. When you have that gratitude for what God has given you, it changes your whole outlook.

Bob: This is *FamilyLife Today* for Wednesday, July 31st. Our host is the President of FamilyLife®, Dennis Rainey, and I'm Bob Lepine. We have some very practical suggestions for you today on how you can get your financial house in order, as a family. Stay with us.

And welcome to *FamilyLife Today*. Thanks for joining us.

Dennis: I'm grabbing my billfold right now. I can tell you, for sure.

Bob: You hanging on tight?

Dennis: I'm hanging on tight.

Bob: Are you afraid somebody is going to pry it out of your hands or what?

Dennis: Well, I just heard about the new book you are writing. [Laughter] You want to share it with our listening audience?

Bob: Well, because of the guests we have with us this week—we're talking with Crystal Paine, who wrote a book called *The Money Saving Mom's Budget* and has the Money Saving Mom® blog; right?

Crystal: Yes.

Bob: And we're also talking to Steve and Annette Economides, who have written *The MoneySmart Family™ System*; and that's your third book.

Annette: Yes.

Bob: What are your other two books?

Annette: The first book is called *America's Cheapest Family Gets You Right on the Money*.

Steve: And the second book is *Cut Your Grocery Bill in Half*, and then, the third book is *The MoneySmart Family System*.

Bob: Okay, so, since we're talking about all of this, I thought, "I need to write a book on this." And I've come up with my title—

Dennis: And the name of that book would be?

Bob: *Fifty Shades of Frugal*. [Laughter] That's what—I just think that would sell well; don't you think? Look for it on your newsstands soon.

Dennis: Okay, Steve, let's talk about saving on groceries. I mean, these are serious economic days. A lot of families are challenged to be able to make ends meet. Give a couple your best advice concerning saving at the grocery store.

Steve: First off, saving at the grocery store is the fastest way for a family to turn their finances around—

Annette: Right.

Steve: —because, in one month's time, just making a few changes, you could cut 40-50 percent off your grocery bill without clipping a single coupon.

Bob: So, if you are going to zero in one area of the family, you'd start at the grocery store.

Annette: Absolutely, you can—

Steve: Well, yes and no.

Annette: —save at least \$4,000 a year—

Steve: Yes.

Annette: —just starting with groceries.

Steve: But you have to have a way to capture that savings. That's why you need a budget; because if you save the money but blow it—

Bob: Got it.

Steve: —you're no money ahead.

Bob: So, you start with a budget—

Annette: Right.

Bob: —but where do you start trimming is at the grocery store?

Annette: Right. We've got thousands of ideas; okay? But let me just say, when we go grocery shopping, we do it as a team. We take walkie-talkies. I do the inside aisles of the store—

Bob: Yes.

Steve: —and Steve does the outer loop. So, he does the produce, the dairy, the meat, and—

Bob: And you're doing the canned goods and the frozen foods.

Annette: Right.

Bob: Okay.

Annette: Right, works through that.

Steve: But key—number one, you've got to have a plan because the grocer has a plan already. The grocer's plan is for you to pick up 60 percent of the items *he* wants you to buy—60 percent impulse buys. That means—if you go to the store for 10, you're going pick up 16. So, you need have a plan before you go into the store; but it's like anything in life: The more you plan, the more efficient you're going to be, and the more you save.

Annette: So, start with a list.

Dennis: Help me spot the impulse buys. Where are they?

Steve: They're—

Annette: Oh, they're everywhere! It's whatever you're feeling at the moment. It's whatever you are feeling at the moment.

Steve: It starts when you walk in the door and you smell the rotisserie chicken.

Annette: Or the French bread that just baked, and it's not on your list. So, you need to have a list. We have a downloadable list on our website, AmericasCheapestFamily.com, where people can adjust it to whatever they want it to be. That's the first thing—is to have a list.

The second thing is to make a plan. We tell people, "If you're just starting out, start with dinner because that's probably the most difficult meal of the day." That's when people are tempted to just throw in the towel and say, "Let's just go get fast food or go to a restaurant."

Steve: Especially, if mom's out working.

Annette: Right.

Steve: You come home—and the tendency to say, "Let's just do fast food." Fast food is going to cost \$20 or \$30, and you do that five times a week. You're talking thousands of dollars a year.

Annette: So, plan your menu and use your food ads. Every week, around the country, there is a newspaper with food ads. Those are like your map, your lottery ticket—whatever you want to call them—those are your key to saving because there is something called "loss leaders" that are going to be in those food ads—Crystal, you just jump in whenever you want to—stores will actually take a loss on some items to draw you into the store.

Steve: Those items will be 30-60 percent discounted. If you can plan your meals around what's discounted, you've just cut your food bill.

Bob: Okay, let me ask you: "How do you handle the grocery store? What would it look like if I was going grocery shopping with you, Crystal?"

Crystal: Well, I wouldn't take you with me because you're a 4—is that right? [Laughter]

Dennis: In other words, he's not frugal.

Bob: Not frugal enough, I understand. Okay.

Dennis: But he's the guy who is writing the book, *Fifty Shades of Frugal*.

Bob: That's right.

Crystal: Okay. Well, I do what the Economides do—the same thing of planning my list, based upon what's on sale at the store. But they don't like to use coupons, but I think you can use coupons and you can do it really efficiently. What I encourage moms to do—if you are really busy and you don't have a lot of time—find a blog who is covering the deals at your local store. There are thousands of blogs, online, who are covering, in very specific detail, all the deals at your local store. So, before you go shopping, go to that blog. Scroll down, look at the list of everything that is on sale, and print a few coupons for things you are already planning to buy or things you will use that you might be getting for free or 25 cents. That's another really simple way to save.

The other thing you can do is—you can take your planned list of things you are planning to buy and you can enter those items into a coupon database. On MoneySavingMom.com, we have a coupon database that you can enter the name of any brand or product. We'll generate a list of all coupons that are available. So, you can take five minutes, go through your grocery list, print a few extra coupons, clip them to your grocery list, and save yourself some extra money.

Bob: I'm just wondering if—like dinner time at your house—we've talked about rice and beans—that's how you got through college. I mean, would I even like the meals that you serve?

Dennis: Bob?! [Laughter]

Bob: You know what I'm saying—I mean, at \$17 a week—right? Isn't that what you said you were—

Annette: No. Crystal, go first. Then, we'll jump in because I know what you're going to say.

Crystal: We spend about \$50 dollars a week on groceries, now.

Bob: For you, and your husband, and three kids?

Crystal: Yes. We average that. We take that out in cash, at the beginning of the month. We put \$200 in an envelope. That's what I have to spend on groceries. We also go out to eat once a month—I mean, once a week. So, you could come on those nights. [Laughter]

Bob: If I order off the dollar menu, I can come on those nights.

Crystal: That's right.

Dennis: That's a good comeback—good comeback.

Bob: But are you eating dinners that have meat in them?

Crystal: Yes. We eat meat now, but it's planned. We plan our menus based upon what's on sale at the store.

I also practice what I call "The Buy Ahead Principle", which is—so, if something is at its rock bottom price—when you talked about 30-60 percent off—if I can pair a coupon with it, too, I can get it for almost free or 75 percent off what I would usually pay. I'm going to buy extra, and stick it in my freezer, and put it in my pantry. So, then, I'm planning my meals, based on what's on sale at the store and what I already have on-hand, that I've bought at a great price.

Annette: But at our house, we'll eat things like meatloaf stew, beef stroganoff, tacos, homemade spaghetti sauce with homemade meatballs—

Steve: Marinated steak on the grill.

Annette: Marinated steak on the grill.

Steve: We found a deal on top round—

Annette: You know, I'll make things like—

Steve: We found a deal on top round one time that was marked down to a dollar a pound for a 14-pound chunk. We cut it into steaks. We bought about 60 pounds of it. We stock up in advance. We've got steaks for—

Annette: Yes, we'll have chicken pot pie, chicken cashew—

Bob: Okay, I can eat these things.

Annette: Yes, you would definitely enjoy dinner at our house; definitely.

Bob: Alright.

Steve: So, when are you coming over? [Laughter]

Bob: Okay, so, I think we've got the grocery store covered. If you're looking for the next big area to save in your budget, Annette, where would you point people?

Annette: I would say the next biggest area that is really affecting families today would be debt. I know we touched on this, but debt is just—it is literally choking, alive, America today. People think: "Buy it now; pay for it later. I live better." You don't live better! You

actually live worse because “Buy it now; pay it later”—how many of those pay it laters are going to hit you—

Bob: Right.

Annette: —next month? I really think people need to be more intentional, more—they need to learn how to pick their priorities.

Steve: Scripture says, “The borrower becomes the lenders slave.” There’s not one positive reference to borrowing money in Scripture. Our mindset is, “If you have debt, get rid of it as fast as possible”. We paid off our first home in nine years. It meant some sacrifice, but we are free. We are free to do whatever the Lord calls us to do.

Annette: Right.

Steve: So, here’s what we recommend for people to do. Line up all your debts—smallest to largest. A lot of people we coached—they owe money to family members, they owe money to apartment complexes that they never paid. Those things—they may not be pursuing you, but they’re on your mind.

Really, Scripture says, “The wicked borrows and doesn’t pay back.” We don’t want to be classified with the wicked! We want to do things God’s way. Line it up. Pay everybody something. Generate excess by selling things off on eBay, Craig’s List, having a garage sale. Gather as much excess as you can. Put it down on the first debt, and pay everybody something. You’ll accelerate that plan. Most people can be out of debt in 18 months.

Dennis: It is back to a word we mentioned earlier, sacrifice. If you are in debt, and it’s got the best of you, and you know that you’re swimming upstream, draw a line in the sand and say, “In the next 18 / 36 months,”—whatever it takes you—“get out of debt.”

I have a friend, who I was mentoring, who actually set down over a lunch with me one day. He said: “I’ve got a problem that I’ve got to tell you about. It’s credit card debt.” I said, “How bad is it?” I think, at the time, it was \$35,000.

Annette: Yes.

Dennis: And he had a new truck—

Steve: He looked great; didn’t he?

Dennis: —had a house that was brand-new. I said, “First of all, I want you to cut up your credit cards or melt them on a cookie sheet in the oven”—

Steve: Three hundred fifty.

Dennis: —“and eliminate anymore charging; and then, get after paying it down.” Today, he is free. If you start mentioning about somebody not living life to the fullest—if you owe someone—you are thinking about that all the time.

Annette: You know, Dennis, I don’t even think of it that much as a sacrifice—maybe, the earlier days of our marriage were sacrifice—but today, I think 30-50 percent of America has storage units that they are paying for on a monthly basis. What’s in them?!

Bob: Right.

Annette: I mean, if America just went through their *closets* and started selling stuff—I mean, we could easily pay off the first two debts on the list! That’s not really sacrifice! That’s really just saying, “Am I going to play less video games this week, or am I going to start *doing* something to get myself to a better place?” It’s priorities with your time and your money.

Steve: Here’s what we’ve seen when we’ve coached people out of debt. At first, it was sacrifice. It was hard because it was changing a mindset. Once they got on a role and they started crossing those things off the list, there was this incredible enthusiasm. We had to hold them back because they started saying, “All the excess we have, we want to put on debt;” and they would be sacrificing the savings. But it works.

And another thing people can do—and this is a tip that we’ve seen work—is you contact your creditors and you talk to them. You get one person on the phone, write their name down, speak with them consistently, and pay on time. If you accumulate enough cash, call the creditor and ask if they will take a cash pay-off. You know, we are under their authority because we’ve become their servant;—

Bob: Right.

Steve: —but if the master says: “You are free. You owe me \$5,000, write it for \$3,000.” That’s their choice. You aren’t defaulting. They can choose to do that, and we’ve seen that happen, numerous times, as people have paid regularly. God has graciously delivered them. The other thing we’ve seen that happens every time someone decides to do things God’s way is that God blesses and dumps large sums of money when you have proven to be faithful.

Annette: From completely out of nowhere.

Bob: You guys said you paid off your house in nine years. Did you do that just by adding to your monthly payment?

Annette: Yes.

Steve: We started paying a dollar a month; and then, God increased our income. We paid \$20 and, then, \$500 and just—

Annette: And we actually had a little party when it was done because it was just so much fun! [Laughter]

Bob: Crystal, you guys—did you save the money before you bought the house?

Crystal: Yes, we did. It was because we had done the math. We realized that, if we were to go ahead and put a down payment and then work as hard as we could to pay it off, we would actually—it would take us longer. We felt like we wouldn't be as highly motivated as we were, living in a small rental—we knew that we could do it in a shorter time frame. So, we went ahead and did—

Bob: How long did it take you to save money to pay cash for a house?

Crystal: It only took us two and a half years. We were planning for it to take five, but our income increased. As we were—you know, God was pouring out His blessing—and as you know—living simply, and living frugally, and all those years of the sacrifice—it just—you know, laying that foundation so that we were able to do it in two and a half years.

Dennis: But you, undoubtedly, had a house in mind that you could afford. You didn't set your eyes on something that, perhaps, you would, maybe, be living in today. You started with something you could afford; right?

Crystal: Right. We were planning to—actually—our goal was we were going to save for five years. Whatever, at that point, we could buy—because we had figured out we could set aside this—every year, we could set aside enough that we could buy this little fixer-upper; but then, God increased our income. We were able to buy—we didn't end up having to go with a fixer-upper—but we also live in Kansas, where home prices are a lot less. So, you can get a—you don't have to go pay \$2 million for a house!

Annette: You know, I just—I've got to say something! You know, something Crystal said was so important. You may use the word sacrifice, but I just don't think it's that intense. She said: "We waited. We stayed where we were, even though it was a little bit uncomfortable, until we had the money saved." If people—the biggest problem we see is people keep jumping to the next step; you know? They are not willing to wait where they are for a little while.

We were tripping over each other in our first house. It was awful! We finally had to clear stuff out because we had five kids—it was a small house—until we had what we had wanted to have saved as a down payment for the next house. I think one of the biggest mistakes people make, in America, is they just jump too fast!

Steve: Impatience.

Annette: Yes.

Steve: "All discipline, for the moment, seems not to be joyful but sorrowful; but afterwards, it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness." That's what we are talking about—is peace, financially, as you wait for God to provide rather than running to the bank or running to get it before it is time.

Dennis: We are also talking about a word that is not that well-known in America. It's called contentment.

Annette: Yes.

Dennis: All the advertising and all the bombardment tells me, "What I have is not enough, and what they have is what I need." And Paul said in Philippians, Chapter 4, "I have learned, in whatever circumstance I'm in, to be content."

Annette: Yes.

Dennis: I think there is something within my human nature that mitigates against that.

I was thinking, Crystal, of you and your husband, Jesse, when you bought your house. It would have been really easy to say "You know, we've saved \$100,000. We could borrow just \$50, and we could get a so-much nicer"—

Bob: A really nice house.

Dennis: Yes. It's a creep. It's a consumer-creep that occurs. You start comparing what you have with what you'd like to have, and we begin to justify it.

Crystal: Contentment, for me—I really feel like that is the key issue to financial success, especially as a Christian. If we can just learn to be content with what God has given us—I mean, because, really, when we are discontent, we are saying that God is not good enough. You know, we need to accept what God has given us with a joyful, thankful heart. When you have that gratitude for what God has given you, it changes your whole outlook.

Bob: Let me tell you a discontented story and just see if you've ever felt like this; okay? When we were living in San Antonio, Texas, we had lived in a rental house for the first year that we were there. We, finally, found the house that we wanted to move into. Lovely home—had a bigger back yard than the other houses did. We were excited about that. It had a master bedroom, and it had three bedrooms on the other side of the house. I mean, it was just a nice layout. It was going to be perfect for our family.

And we moved in. We were excited. It was the nicest house we'd lived in; and we'd

been married for 15 years, at that point. Well, one night, we got invited to dinner, at a friend's house. Now, we didn't know these people very well; but we knew the division—the subdivision they lived in—because it was—

Annette: Posh.

Bob: —it had—it was a named subdivision. It had a guard gate, out at the front. Behind that guard gate, George Strait's house was back there; and David Robinson's house was back there; okay?

Dennis: So, it was upscale?

Bob: It was a nice part of town. We went and had dinner at their house. I remember driving home from their house, that night, back to that dumpy little house that we had just moved into. [Laughter] It was funny how, when we'd left that afternoon, we were really excited about our new house. When we drove back—ours was kind of plain and boring. Have you ever found yourselves in that comparison trap, where you go, "Gee, I would like, just once, to have something really nice"?

Crystal: I know—especially, during law school—when we'd see all these other students, who were in law school, who we knew were in debt—and they were going out and buying these new vehicles, and going and doing things together. We couldn't afford to go out with them because we didn't have any money. It was hard to look at them and say—you know, you just felt like we were missing out. But at the same time, we knew that it would be worth it.

On the flip side, you know—if you go to a third world country, or even just an inner city, and you see how some of these people are living—all of a sudden, you realize that we have so, so, so much. You start—you just realize that: "We have so much to be thankful for. We should never feel like we need anything more."

Annette: You know, we live in Scottsdale, Arizona. Paradise Valley is pretty close by. There are exactly the kinds of houses you are talking about, Bob. When Steve and I get invited to parties and events at those houses, we sit there and go: "What do you think the utility bills are? And how much do they pay the cleaning crew to clean this?"—and, of course, they are not going to do their own landscaping, if they live in a house like this—so, "What do you think they pay the landscapers?"

Bob: Right.

Annette: So, when you start thinking about the cost of—

Bob: Homeowner's dues.

Annette: —living in a house like that, you’re like—“And what do they pay for taxes?” We’re like, “No, thank you!”—

Bob: Yes.

Annette: —“We want no part of this.”

Dennis: I’m just thinking of Paul, who instructed Timothy—the last chapter of his first book he wrote Timothy—he said, “Now, there is great gain in godliness with contentment for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world.” Now, listen to this. This is an absurd statement, if it was anywhere other than Scripture, given this culture we live in. “But if we have food and clothing, with these, we will be content.” Now, think about that for a moment.

We don’t know much contentment in this culture. It’s about the latest gadget or whatever, but we’re always looking to the next thing that’s going to provide happiness or an experience for us.

Bob: Some of the later manuscripts include food, clothing, and an iPhone®.

Dennis: Technology.

Bob: That’s in some of the later manuscripts. [Laughter]

Dennis: Technology.

Bob: Yes.

Dennis: I want to keep on reading. At the end of the chapter, Paul says, “As for the rich in this present age”—which, by the way, are not the people who make six figures. Most Americans are rich compared to the world—“As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches but on God who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus, storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.” Let me read that again, “...so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.”

The Scriptures are like a GPS. It’s pointing us in the direction. When we deny the truth of this Book, we set ourselves off into all kinds of perilous journeys. I’m afraid, today, most couples—most families—don’t have a copy of *The MoneySmart Family System* nor *The Money Saving Mom’s Budget*, and they are in desperate need of them, and they need to get them.

Crystal, Steve, Annette, thanks for being on the broadcast.

Annette: Thanks for having us.

Steve: It's been wonderful.

Crystal: Thank you.

Bob: You can go to our website, FamilyLifeToday.com, to find out more about the books that Steve and Annette have written or the book that Crystal has written. Again, the website is FamilyLifeToday.com; or you can call 1-800-FL-TODAY for more information—1-800-358-6329. Call to order either or both of these books—the book that Crystal has written for mom's putting a budget together or the book that the Economides have written to help families get a system together for teaching your kids how to be responsible with their money.

Now, we are very grateful for those of you who are able to help support the ministry of *FamilyLife Today*. I know there are families where money is tight, and all you are able to do is support your local church. We hope that's your first priority, and we hope that you make that a priority in your family. But those of you, who are able to help *FamilyLife Today* with our financial needs—help us cover the costs of producing and syndicating this daily radio program—we appreciate your partnership. We are grateful for you.

And this week, if you can help with a donation, we'd like to say, "Thank you," by sending you an interview we did with Kay Wyma. Kay is a mom, who lives in Dallas, and who got frustrated with her kids having expectations about their quality of life; and they weren't pitching in. She decided it was time to change that. We'll hear about her yearlong strategy for getting all the kids involved in helping to manage the household and how it paid off for her.

That CD is our thank-you gift to you if you're able to support *FamilyLife Today* with a donation this week. Simply, go to FamilyLifeToday.com and click the button that says, "I CARE". We'll send you a copy of the CD. Or call 1-800-FL-TODAY. When you make your donation over the phone, just ask for the CD called *Cleaning House*. We'll get it out to you. We do appreciate your standing with us and your support of this ministry.

And we hope you'll be back with us tomorrow when Jill Rigby is going to be here to talk about selfishness and how we can help our kids be cured. I guess—probably, not cured. I don't know if we're ever cured of our selfishness, but how you can help your kids learn to be unselfish in a world that is pushing them in the other direction. That's tomorrow. Hope you can be here for that.

I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, and our entire broadcast production team. On behalf of our host, Dennis Rainey, I'm Bob Lepine. We will see you back next time for another edition of *FamilyLife Today*.

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Hope for tomorrow.

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