



## MY STORY

FOR THE past twenty years, my wife Sandy and I have been entrepreneurs, which makes us intimately acquainted with the good, bad and ugly of financial life. We've been so low financially we had to look up to see bottom. I'll share some of these stories with you throughout these sessions.

But we've also done well. Our ups and downs remind me of the Mae West quote. "I've been poor, and I've been rich," she quipped. "Believe me honey, rich is better."

I started my first venture, a design and print company, in the early 1990's, after graduating from UW with an engineering degree. The company was nothing but a desk beside the bed in my apartment in Seattle. But over the next seven years it grew to multi millions in sales and almost eighty employees.

1998 was a good year for us. The local paper, the *Tacoma News Tribune*, did a front page article on me and the success of the venture. Friends,

relatives, and outsiders who heard about our story were investing in the company left and right. We were on track for a top spot in the Inc. 500, a list of the world's fastest growing companies.

But then, tragedy struck. We lost our top two clients for unrelated reasons and wound up in a messy lawsuit. One bad thing led to another and I had to downsize the company from eighty people to eight. It was horrible. One by one I laid off friends. We had dreamed together, worked together, succeeded together. And now that was gone. I remember sitting in my office one day, crying and feeling completely defeated. I went on unemployment, just to keep the remaining eight employees on board.

Long story short, it ruined me financially. My new seven-series BMW was repossessed. My beautiful house on the hill was gone. Oh, and did I mention that my wife Sandy was pregnant with our sixth child? I felt so low I could have changed my name from Erik Van Alstine to Erik Van Down By The River! Problem is, even a van down by the river won't work for a family of eight! There aren't any vans big enough!

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On top of all that, I lost three million dollars of investor money. People called me a thief and a liar. I got accused and sued right and left. Investors complained to state securities regulators, and I went through a full-blown securities review. I was at the courthouse so much they practically knew me by name! And after all the dust settled, my parting gift was a personal bill from the IRS for TWO HUNDRED AND FIFTY THOUSAND DOLLARS. That'll clear your sinuses!

But by the grace of God my wife and I survived. It wasn't easy, but we stayed together. I love the story of how a reporter once asked financial expert Dave Ramsey how he "bounced back" from his financial meltdown. "Bounce back?" he said. "When you fall that hard, you don't bounce. You splat." Same was true for me. The turnaround didn't come in three months. It didn't come in three years for that matter. But God helped us through.

We have since come back stronger than ever. We've learned great lessons, and are putting them to work. We've got a great sense of vitality and purpose. My wife and I are still married, which is a whole story in and of itself. My kids are healthy and provided for. In fact, as I write this line in late 2009, I've become the father of four teenagers, and just a year from now, it will be five. So say a prayer for me if you could!

Truth is, I feel blessed to have walked through financial hell and made it out the other side. I can truly say that all the things that went so badly eventually helped me a better person today. God has graciously worked all of it for good.

I hope that my story can give you hope. I've had people tell me, "Man, if you can go through that, I can make it too. My problems aren't near as bad as yours!" And in the sincerity of my heart, I am glad my big mistakes make you feel better about yours. Big financial problems or small - we've all gone through stuff. If you feel like you're the only one who's done "stupid with zeros on the end," remember you are not alone.

I hope you understand that I feel your financial pain. I know what it is like to feel trapped. I know what it's like to lose hope. And I want to tell you, you can get through it. You can get back on track. And you can take lessons learned at the school of hard knocks and put those lessons to work for future success.

Now, if you're not going through financial problems right now, fantastic. I also know how it feels NOT to have financial problems - and that's a good feeling! But don't think this workshop isn't for you. The more money you make, the more you need these strategies! I can tell you that now that I have more money than

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I used to, I need these principles even more. When you make bigger money, it's easy to make bigger money mistakes. Just the cash flow system alone saves upper middle class couples literally thousands of dollars a month. Yep, that's right, that's how much they *save*.

Whether you're going through financial hell, enjoying financial heaven, or living somewhere in the middle, *Breaking Free* will equip you to help yourself and help others break out of debt and break into a life of abundance. ■

**M**ANY PEOPLE have crazy ideas about money. They think success is a dirty word. It stands for mansions and yachts, snooty friends, 24-carat gold faucets, and more budget for your poodle than the average family spends in a year. Yes, there are some arrogant and wasteful rich people out there. But there are also some arrogant and wasteful poor people too.

Money is simply power to fulfill purpose. It makes you more of who you already are. If you're an idiot and you stumble into money, it just makes you a bigger idiot. If you have a heart to serve people and create value, and you get money, you'll serve more people and create more value.

Contrary to what some believe, success is a Bible word. Joshua was promised that he would be "prosperous and successful" as he followed God's commands. Joseph's success came from God as well. "The LORD was with him," Scripture says,

"and gave him success in everything he did." Success, prosperity, wealth - these words are listed hundreds of times in the Bible. We shouldn't be ashamed of these words.

But we should clarify what they mean. Success, simply, is "the attainment of a goal." That's it. If we set a goal to stop smoking, and we actually do, that's success. If we set a goal to get a raise, and work hard and get it, that's success. And when we're "success-ful", our lives are full of these accomplishments, big and small. We are setting goals and achieving them, day after day.

That's the life God wants us to live. He wants us to be progressing, adding accomplishment to accomplishment in every area of life. The apostle Peter says, "add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control," and so on. Then he says, "For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive..." God wants you to live a productive life, spiritually, relationally, emotionally, and of course, financially. He wants you flourish like a tree planted by a running stream, which yields its fruit in season, and whose leaf does not wither. He wants your life to prosper.

You know what I think is interesting about money? So many have the wrong idea of what it really is. Money is nothing in and of itself. It has no inherent value. It's simply a way to store value. It is a medium of exchange, a way to trade.

# WHAT IS MONEY?