

When you live in Colorado and spend a bit of time in a ski resort like Vail, Aspen or Steamboat Springs, sooner or later you're going to hear the phrase "*trust fund baby*." And that's a phrase that has a lot to do with personal finance. So how might you hear those three words? Well, you might be eating lunch and your tablemate who lives in Aspen looks at the guy at the next table and says, "Oh, he's a trust fund baby!"

Now sometimes that's said with more than a touch of envy...sometimes with a touch of contempt...and often with a mixture of both! That's because, in that type of resort setting, it often means that the person was born into wealth and doesn't have to work for a living and has the inherited income to ski every day ...all season long...and then party every night—without ever having to work!

So, what's really going on here? Well, *trust fund baby* often means that parents or grandparents set aside significant money for their offspring to have a less worrisome life or even a luxurious life financially. But the realities of trust funds are interesting and the motives, actions, structures, and principles underlying it all are relevant for us to think about as Christians. So, let's take a stab at some basics...

A trust fund is set up by benefactors or "settlers"—like a couple of parents or grandparents—and it can contain anything of value from the benefactors—from stock, bonds, and cash to real estate, artworks, and heirlooms. But definitely know that specific jurisdictional laws rule the roost on some of these types of issues—for example, California law is surely different than Texas law in some ways, as it is in many things!

Just who is called out as the primary beneficiaries can be one or multiple children or grandchildren, maybe with focus on their under-age (minor) status or acute medical needs or disabilities. And there can be secondary beneficiaries like other family members, other trusts, companies, or charities. And a trustee is appointed to manage the trust in accordance with the instructions laid out in the trust document.

And that can get pretty interesting. Let's take several possible facets of such a trust fund that are often troubling points of worry, discussion, structure, and execution. So, is it desirable and wise to distribute substantial money to an 18-year-old? What if a key beneficiary marries badly at age 19? And is it desirable and wise to distribute *the full 100% of the assets* when a beneficiary turns 18 years old? What if a key beneficiary has already shown great immaturity and bad judgement?

And should a benefactor treat the several children who are beneficiaries differently when they have significant differences in maturity? Is that wise—but not seemingly fair? Is it OK, then, to structure distributions that will be squandered in the name of fairness? Another scenario: do they structure staging such that able beneficiaries have to work to earn a living rather than just be an unemployed ski bum for decades? (The worry is that amidst the long-term staging of parceling out distributions, the trust fund baby remains a rather immature "baby" as to personal maturity for a very long time.) Yeah, can such folks actually become trust fund *adults*? Benefactors often struggle mightily with such thorny issues—yes, when simply wanting to leave a legacy that will be of significant benefit to each of their beneficiaries.

So, sometimes they stage the desired inheritance into several distributions to a beneficiary over a number of years, say, 1/3 of the assets distributed at age 25...1/2 of the remaining assets distributed at age 30...and all the rest distributed at age 35. Some benefactors value helping with unanticipated or established medical needs. Many strongly want to fund college expenses for beneficiaries, sometimes all the way to advanced degrees. But don't you wonder how many of those benefactors who've done just that in the past would be horrified that their careful funding was spent on academic learning like "God doesn't exist" and "people who earn wealth in places like America are greedy evildoers." Hey, will your *trust fund baby* actually morph into an *admirable trust fund adult*? Is the ski bum to be envied...or pitied for not attaining maturity as an adult? Suffice it to say, using trust funds in the modern era can be a very tricky business!

All of this is about being a good steward of that micro-economy that we call our personal finances. And even if we are much more modest in our archived treasures lovingly pointed in the direction of kids and

grandkids, discerning the ways of the Lord in the midst of all possible future factors is not always obvious. But we can turn to how God handles such types of issues *in His economy*...and, boy, is it fascinating!

And that's why we once again turn to the signature event in the history of humanity: the death and Resurrection of Christ on the Cross about two thousand years ago! You see, our Creator, Jesus, afforded us something beyond extraordinary with His sacrificial offering on our behalf on the Cross! We've covered the extraordinary benefits of that sacrifice in many episodes. But, here and now, *let's speak of our inheritance in Christ*. And, to that end, here are a couple of stunning revelations in the New Testament...

Hebrews 1:1-2 (ESV) says this: "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world." *That's right, the Son of God is appointed heir of all things!* Now that's a *whole lot* of things—yeah, *infinitely far beyond our puny reality* of oil billionaires and real estate in New York City and owning a whole lot of tech stocks. So, we now know the position of God's Son—*appointed heir of all things!* But wait—what's *your* standing with God? The Apostle John wrote this...

"See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are." (1 John 3:1) Wow, God is not holding back His love for later distribution—His Son died as a ransom for all, for every person in the world! Yes, born-again believers are *children of God!* But that's not all! The Apostle Paul *links believers being children of God to being fellow heirs with Christ!* "The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ..." Romans 8:16-17a *That's mind-blowing!* Christ is the appointed heir of all things and we as God's children are heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ...*yeah, fellow heirs of all things!* We should become very serious about this next statement: *this reality deeply informs all of our financial planning—now and for eternity!* Yes, this directs us in understanding how to contextualize stacking up all those stocks, bonds, and residences and...well, you know. Listen again! *We. Are. Fellow. Heirs. With. Christ.*

What a trust fund *that* is! Indeed, we will come into the fullness of our inheritance at a later date...in the perfect timing that God has planned for us! But we have our own experience of a trust fund: we *trusted* in Jesus and believed...and God establishes all the *funding!* At some future point in time, you might say, we will be full-blown *trust fund adults*, reveling in God's riches in ways that we simply cannot grasp today.

In the meantime, we are *trust fund babies*. But maybe you're not even *there*, perhaps you are a prodigal, rashly departing from a godly home some time ago, turning your back on your choosing to be a child of God. See the story in Luke 15:11-32. So, if you would just say "yes" to Christ and Him crucified, it's not too late to become a trust fund baby on your way to heaven! *But you must believe!*

Yes, now, as believers, we are trust fund babies right now—God's fullness of our heirship comes later. So in the meantime, we are to invest the time and finances that He has provided to us in service to Christ and His Great Commission! God is not holding back the necessary spiritual resources: He has given us His Spirit for witness, and He always has His love and grace at our disposal—*both for us and for others!* As Paul wrote to believers in Corinth, "...[God] said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.'" (2 Corinthians 12:9) *Yeah, we trust, He funds!* And we see expectation of our morphing from babies to adults in God's economy in Luke 12:48: "Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more."

Yes, God is *not* holding back the necessary resources until we turn 25 or 30 or 65—He has given His full measure of love at the Cross and all the necessary grace you and your neighbors need! But are we the spiritual equivalent of ski bums—inactive today, blithely luxuriating in today's inheritance? Or are we "all in," being a conduit of God's love, grace, and full complement of resources He provides? In other words, are we a trust fund baby...or moving into a trust-fund adulthood on God's behalf? Look, your fullness as a fellow heir of Christ will come soon enough...*how about the unfilled opportunities of working for God now?*

A&A: Application & Action

1. When it comes to American workplaces and public communications, do you observe that most Christians have effectively enacted being a public conduit of God's love and grace to all people as He commanded? Or do most seem to hoard His love and grace for themselves? In other words, are many Christians seemingly more trust fund babies...or trust fund adults? Discuss.

2. Some benefactors of wealth tend to withhold part of their substantial-but-naturally-limited assets to their children-beneficiaries, strategically working to distribute their assets in stages for perceived best results for the long-haul. This is often in response to a perceived immaturity in the beneficiaries who may mature more later. So, do you believe God withholds some of His unlimited grace to new or immature believers in the same fashion—so as not to cause people to turn His grace to “license?” Some teachers seem to believe this happens regarding immature believers taking the reins of grace. So, what do you think about God's handling of His grace in this regard?

3. Do you have a tendency to be a conduit of God's love and grace and your financial resources more freely with your children (or grandchildren) than you are with several of your quite unlovable yet truly needy neighbors and workplace colleagues—yes, their being needy regarding both the things of God...and the things of yours? Discuss.