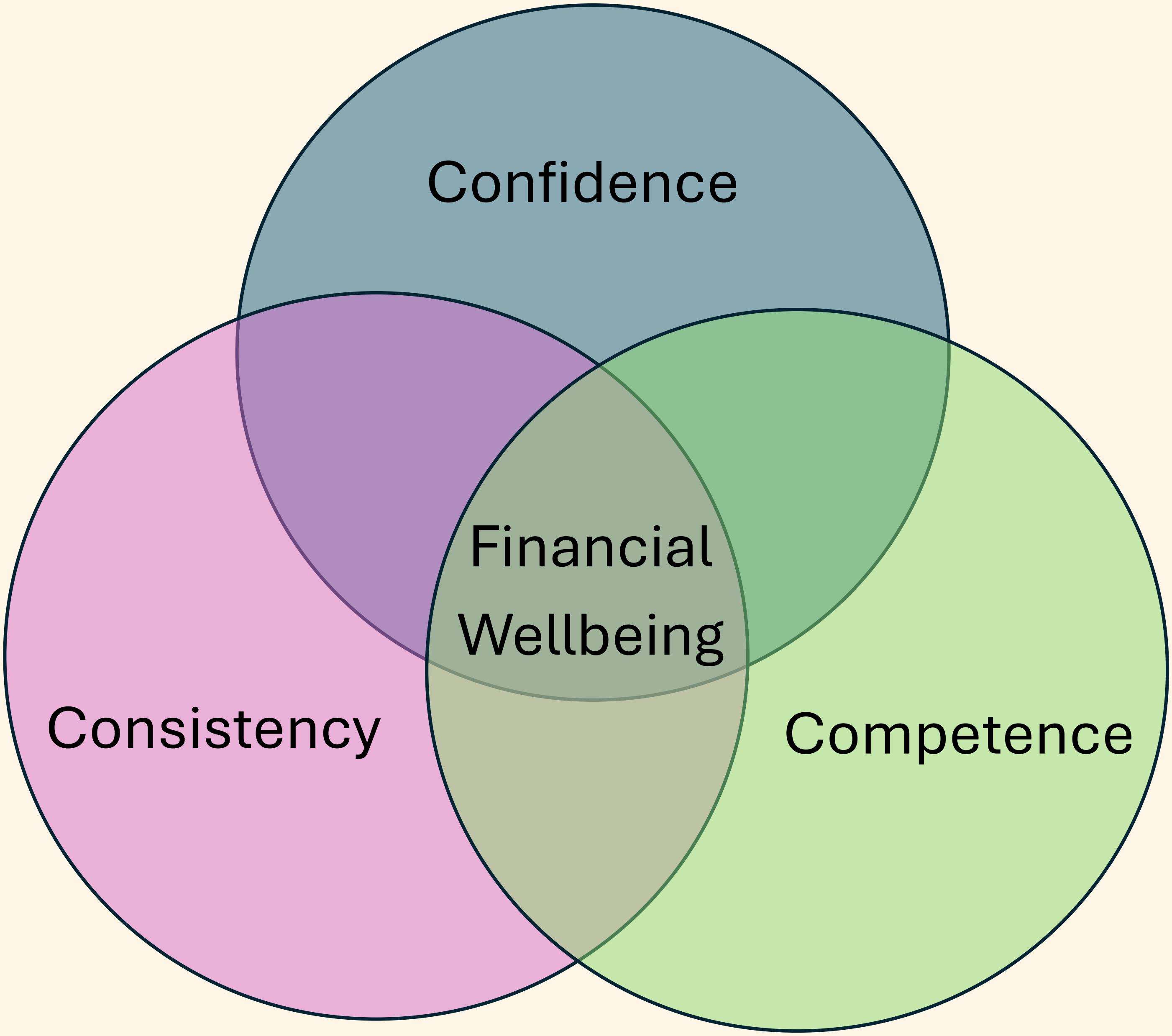
FINANCIAL WELLNESS

Starter Kit

Steven Gilbert CFP®

The Three Pillars of Financial Wellbeing



Confidence shapes your mindset — the beliefs and emotional readiness to engage with your finances.

Consistency is your behavior — the systems and habits that turn good intentions into reliable progress.

Competence is your knowledge — the financial understanding that helps you make informed, effective decisions.

Confidence

Your Mindset Around Money

Confidence is the internal belief that you are capable of managing your financial life, even if it's imperfect or still a work in progress. **Financial wellness is attainable.**

Without financial confidence, even good plans go unexecuted. You may delay decisions out of fear, avoid reviewing your accounts, or internalize shame and doubt your past mistakes. This pillar matters because almost every meaningful financial decision — whether it's paying off debt, asking for a raise, or investing for the future — begins with the belief that it's worth doing and that you can do it.

Tips to strengthen financial confidence:

- **Talk about money.** Open up with a trusted friend, partner, or advisor. Silence breeds shame — conversation builds courage.
- **Celebrate progress, not perfection.** Mark small wins (like paying off a card or saving your first $500).
- **Use encouraging self-talk.** Replace "I'm bad with money" with "I'm learning new skills."
- **Limit comparison.** Focus on your goals, your values, and your pace.
- **Pray over your finances.** Ask the Lord for wisdom, as James 1:5 promises, He will give it generously.

Imagine a day when you don't hide from your accounts. You act with a plan instead of out of fear. You trust that even setbacks can be temporary. You begin to view money not just as a source of stress or scarcity, but as a means of supporting the life you are thoughtfully and faithfully living.

"Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion…" **— Philippians 1:6**

Consistency

Your Habits and Systems

Consistency is where transformation really happens — not in one-time windfalls, but in repeated small actions that align with your financial goals. Even the best financial plan won't work without steady follow-through. Without this pillar, your money management is likely to be reactive: spending without awareness, saving when it's convenient, or bouncing between systems without sticking to any of them.

It is better to faithfully act on a good plan today than to endlessly wait for the perfect plan tomorrow.

Tips to build consistency:

- **Start Small:** Start with small habits that move you down the path to financial wellness. Try budgeting a few categories, or saving a small monthly amount.
- **Automate savings and bill payments.** Remove friction wherever possible.
- **Set a monthly check-in.** Take 15 minutes each month to review spending, account balances, and upcoming priorities.
- **Use visual cues.** For example, a chart of your emergency fund progress or a calendar reminder for financial tasks.
- **Simplify your systems.** Fewer accounts, fewer tools, fewer rules = better follow-through.

When you have consistency, financial progress feels calm and steady. You don't have to rethink your budget every week. You're not surprised by bills or wondering where your paycheck went. You've built systems that support your goals automatically — freeing your time and energy for more important things.

"Let us not grow weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up." **— Galatians 6:9**

Competence

Your Financial Knowledge and Skill

Competence is your practical understanding of how money works — and how to steward it wisely. It's not about becoming a financial expert; it's about building the literacy and decision-making skills to navigate life's opportunities and risks. Financial competence allows you to make decisions that are not driven by fear or impulse but by clarity and stewardship.

Even someone who is disciplined and motivated can find themselves overpaying on loans, missing out on investment growth, or falling into financial traps. Competence helps close that gap by equipping you to ask better questions, understand your options, and protect your family from unnecessary pitfalls.

Tips to increase competence:

- **Learn in small chunks.** Watch a 5-minute video or read one blog article each week on a topic you care about.
- **Ask questions — often.** There's no shame in not knowing; financial literacy is learned, not inherited. Proverbs tells us, *"Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed"* (Proverbs 15:22).
- **Get context before decisions**. Understand the terms of a loan, the fees in a retirement plan, or how taxes affect your paycheck.
- **Keep a glossary**. Maintain a personal cheat sheet of terms you're learning (e.g., "What's the difference between Roth and Traditional?").

When competence is well-developed, you feel empowered to make financial choices rather than intimidated by them. You know how to evaluate options, spot red flags, and ask the right questions. You're no longer dependent on luck or outside opinions to tell you what's "smart." Instead, you trust your understanding, and that understanding becomes a source of calm and clarity.

***"Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise…"* — Ephesians 5:15**

Actionable Steps

1) Start a Budget

Developing a budget is the first step to Financial Wellness. It tells you how much you have coming in and where it is going. Without this knowledge you're flying blind.

There are many types of budgets. Your budget does not have to be complex to be effective. Choose one that works for you.

In your budget, work to identify the following:

- How much you spend on needs (foods, utilities, car, etc)
- How much you spend on wants (dining out, vacations, TV)
- How much you pay for past choices (debt)
- How much you put aside for future choices (savings)

Here are some helpful tools to get you started:

How to Budget Series

Budgeting Part 1: The Basics – Gilbert Wealth

Budgeting Part 2: Income and Expenses – Gilbert Wealth

Budgeting Tools

Account aggregation is a tool that brings all of your transactions and balances from different accounts to a single platform. It eliminates a large amount of tedious work and promotes you from data entry to management.

Program	Free/Paid	Account Aggregation
FaithFi	Free and Paid	Paid Only
YNAB	Paid Only	Yes
EveryDollar	Free and Paid	Paid Only
Monarch Money	Paid Only	Yes

There are other free and paid options. The options above keep distractions to a minimum. When something is free, you're the product and you may see tempting ads that do not align with financial wellness.

2) Build an Emergency Fund

An emergency fund prevents a financial inconvenience from becoming a small crisis. Its money set aside for life's bumps.

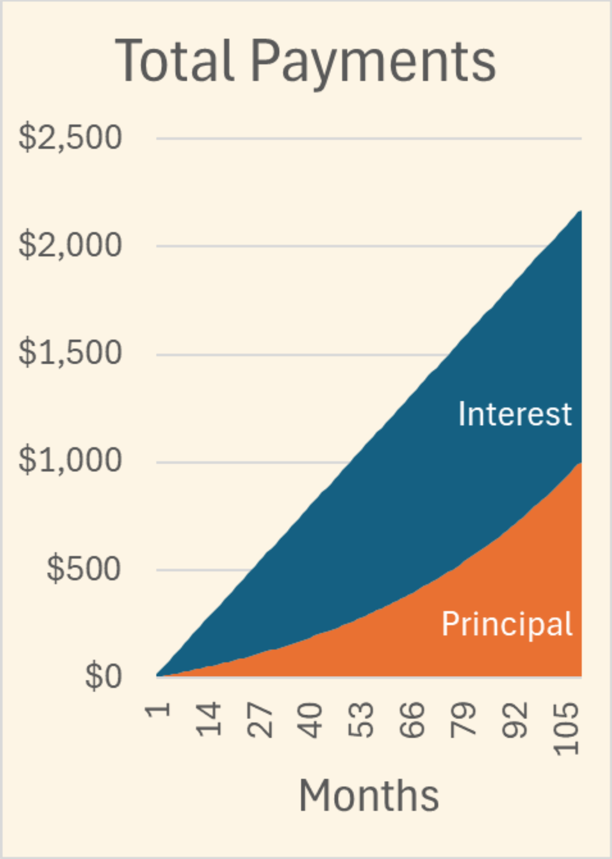
Start small. Work to set aside $1,000. Once there, slowly build it up to 3-6 months of your spending.

[How Much You Should Have in an Emergency Fund – Gilbert Wealth]

3) Pay Off High Interest Debts

Carrying high-interest debt is like trying to fill a leaking bucket — no matter how hard you work, most of your money drains away in interest before it ever reaches your goals.

Consider this - if you put $1,000 on a credit card with 20% interest and only pay the minimum balance, you'll end up paying over $2,100 over the lifetime of repayment which could last over 9 years!



"The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is slave to the lender." — Proverbs 22:7

As a rule of thumb, start with debt over a 15% interest rate (usually credit cards) then work through debts with greater than the average mortgage rate (6% to 7%)

Here are a few tools to help you organize and develop a repayment plan:

- unbury.me
- Undebt.it
- Debt Payoff Planner

4) Protect Yourself and Your Family

No one likes to think about death or disability and it's easy to think that it won't happen to you. But here's the thing… the statistics of death and disability come from real people and I'm pretty sure many of them would say they didn't think it would happen to them either.

- ✓ **Have a plan put together for if you die, aka an estate plan**
- ✓ **If people rely on you financially, ensure you have sufficient life insurance in place.**
- ✓ **If you were to become disabled, have a plan in place to continue to provide for yourself.**

5) Boost your Savings

Saving for the future gives you a financial cushion and financial freedom as you build wealth.

The average savings in the United States hovers around 4% which is not enough to build a financial future for yourself.

The earlier you start the better. **"The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The second-best time is now."** — *Chinese Proverb*

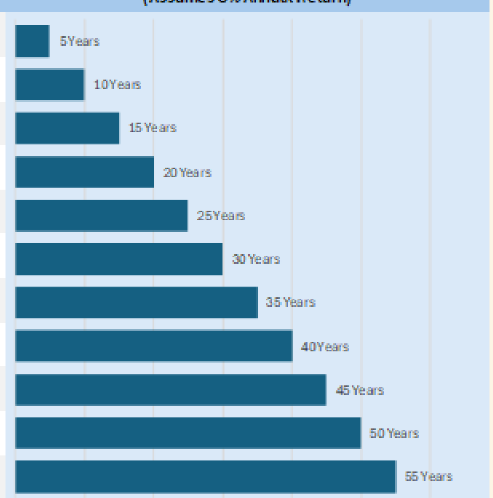
Here are some goals:

- ✓ **Start early, even if it's small.**
- ✓ **If your employer matches retirement savings, save up to your employer's match to maximize free money.**
- ✓ **Boost savings to 15% of your income.**

Savings Required to Reach $1M by Time Horizon

Years	Annual Investment	Total Amount Invested
5 Years	$148,907	$744,534
10 Years	$57,041	$570,413
15 Years	$28,613	$429,188
20 Years	$15,872	$317,448
25 Years	$9,244	$231,093
30 Years	$5,527	$165,798
35 Years	$3,354	$117,400
40 Years	$2,054	$82,161
45 Years	$1,265	$56,905
50 Years	$781	$39,053
55 Years	$483	$26,587

Investment Timeframe
(Assumes 8% Annual Return)



Tips for Making Good Financial Decisions and Overcoming Mental Barriers

Automate Everything You Can

Automation removes willpower from the equation. You only have to make the right decision once.
However, automation does not mean “Set It and Forget It”. You should be reviewing your progress along the way and make adjustments as necessary.

- ☐ Direct deposit your paycheck into multiple accounts: some to checking, some to savings, some to investments.
- ☐ Set up automatic bill pay for essential bills to avoid late fees and decision fatigue.

Use "Automatic Escalation" to Save More Over Time

You won’t miss small increases over time, but they dramatically improve your future.

- ☐ If available with your employer, set up an automatic annual increase to your 401(k) or savings contribution — even just 1% per year.
- ☐ When you receive a raise, raise your savings as well before you get used to the higher cash flow.

Create "Friction" to Stop Bad Habits

Adding even small inconveniences interrupts impulsive decisions.

Add steps to spending:

- ☐ Remove stored credit cards from shopping apps so you have to type the number in manually.
- ☐ Remove shopping apps from your cell phone
- ☐ Institute a 24-hour "cooling off" period before any non-essential purchase.

Pre-Commit to Good Choices

Pre-commitment removes emotion and impulsivity from future decision-making. Decide today what you will do when faced with a choice tomorrow.

Examples:

- "If I get a raise, I will save 50% of it before adjusting my lifestyle."
- "If I want to make a big purchase, I will wait 24 hours before acting."

Simplify Your Choices

Decision fatigue leads to no action. Simplicity creates momentum. Use default strategies that are "good enough" and get you started. You can always adjust strategies later:

- ☐ A low-cost diversified index fund or target date funds instead of picking stocks.
- ☐ One simple budgeting rule like the 50/20/20/10 rule (Needs/Wants/Savings/Giving) rather than a 100-line budget.
- ☐ Term insurance over permanent insurance.

Anchor on Your Why

Visual reminders reconnect daily choices to long-term meaning. Write down your biggest financial goal and put it somewhere visible:

- "Freedom to retire early."
- "Buying a home for my family."
- "Funding missions work."

Use Positive Peer Pressure

You become like the people you spend the most time with — surround yourself with examples you want to follow. Join communities or accountability groups that encourage financial progress.

Examples:

- A friend who saves aggressively.
- A church group doing a stewardship challenge.
- Join a “debt-free journey” community online.

Turn Off Financial News, Read Trusted Financial Sources, and Avoid Comparisons

In a world of 24/7 financial headlines and curated social media highlight reels, it's easy to feel like you're behind — like everyone else is doing better, saving more, retiring earlier, or investing smarter.

Financial wellness isn't built by chasing headlines or comparisons. It's built by tuning in to your own values, your own goals, and your own timeline.

The more you quiet the outside voices, the easier it becomes to hear what really matters: your next right step.

- ☐ Turn off the news when it fuels anxiety, not insight.
- ☐ Log off social media when it stirs up pressure instead of perspective.

Lower the Stakes of Starting

Tell yourself you are *experimenting,* not committing forever. Psychological resistance drops dramatically when the brain sees an action as temporary or low-risk.

Example:

- "I'll try saving an extra $50 a month for three months and see how it feels."

Track Small Wins

Motivation grows when you recognize progress, not just when you hit the finish line. Celebrate every small milestone:

- ☐ First $100 saved.
- ☐ First debt payment made above the minimum.
- ☐ First full week tracking your spending.
- ☐ First month sticking to a basic spending plan.
- ☐ Credit card balance under $1,000.
- ☐ First $1,000 emergency fund reached.
- ☐ First loan fully paid off.
- ☐ Net worth turns positive.
- ☐ First $10,000 saved.

You Can Do This.

You're not behind… you're beginning.

You're not falling apart… you're rebuilding.

You're not failing… you're learning.

You're not incapable… you're just getting started.

Financial wellness is not a destination — it's a direction.

You don't need to have everything figured out. You don't need to be perfect. You just need to take one step today, and another one tomorrow.

Wherever you are on your financial journey, you are not alone. God is with you and He wants you to be in His will.

"Commit your work to the Lord, and your plans will be established." — Proverbs 16:3 (ESV)

Let's Build Something Great Together

Steven Gilbert is the founder of Gilbert Wealth, a fee-only financial planning firm based in Fort Wayne, Indiana. A CFP® professional with over a decade of experience, he helps individuals and families align their money with their values through thoughtful, personalized planning. Steven lives in Fort Wayne with his wife and four kids and enjoys faith, family, and lifelong learning.

When you're ready to take the next step in your financial journey, I offer free consultations for those looking for personalized financial guidance. It's a chance to explore what a planning relationship could look like.
If you want to go further, schedule a Free Consultation at https://gilbertwealth.com/schedule-an-initial-consult/

Clarity is possible. Confidence is within reach. And your future is worth building — one simple step at a time.

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