FIN4
Private Clients

DIE WITH ZERO

A BOOK REVIEW AND A SOUTH AFRICAN INVESTOR'S PERSPECTIVE

Based on the ideas in Bill Perkins' *Die With Zero: Getting All You Can from Your Money and Your Life* | FIN4 Private Clients Article

The book's central challenge: what is your money actually for?

Bill Perkins' central argument is deliberately provocative: a life spent only accumulating wealth can be as poorly planned as a life spent recklessly. *Die With Zero* asks readers to stop treating the largest possible final bank balance as the ultimate measure of success and instead consider whether money, time and health are being used together to create a meaningful life.

The title should not be read as an instruction to empty every account. The more useful idea is intentionality. Perkins asks us to recognise that money is a tool. Its value lies not only in what it earns, but in the security, freedom, relationships, generosity and experiences it can enable while we are alive.

> **The planning question changes from "How much can I accumulate?" to "How can I use my resources, at the right time, to build the life I value?"**

Three ideas that make the book worth reading

1. The memory dividend — Perkins argues that experiences can continue paying emotional "dividends" long after the money has been spent. A meaningful trip, family occasion or personal achievement may be enjoyed once in the moment and then repeatedly through memory, photographs and shared stories. Timing therefore matters: an experience at 35 can potentially produce decades of memories.

2. Time bucketing — A conventional bucket list assumes that every goal can be postponed. Perkins' stronger idea is to divide life into age or time bands and ask which experiences belong in each period. Some goals require health, mobility, young children, living parents or simply the energy of a particular season. Money can be replaced; a missed life stage often cannot.

3. Give while it can make a difference — The book also challenges the habit of postponing generosity until death. Financial help may have greater practical value when adult children are establishing homes, careers or families than decades later. The same principle can apply to charitable giving: timing can increase the usefulness of the gift and allow the giver to witness its impact.

A balanced review

The strength of Die With Zero is not that every recommendation should be followed literally. Its strength is that it attacks an assumption many investors never examine: that postponing consumption is automatically virtuous and that more capital is always better. The book is memorable because it introduces a second balance sheet — one measured in time, health, relationships and experiences.

Its limitation is equally important. Longevity is uncertain, markets are volatile, medical and care costs can be substantial, and investors do not know their exact date of death. A South African investor therefore needs to combine Perkins' philosophy with disciplined cash-flow modelling, emergency reserves, appropriate insurance, tax planning and a sustainable retirement-income strategy.

What should a South African investor take from it?

South Africans face a distinctive planning environment: inflation, currency risk, tax, longevity, healthcare costs and the need to balance local and global exposure. The answer is not to choose between "living now" and "saving for later". It is to build a plan that funds both.

- **Build three financial buckets, not one.** Think in terms of a security bucket for emergencies and near-term commitments; a growth bucket for long-term wealth and retirement; and an experience bucket deliberately earmarked for the people, travel, learning and goals that matter to you.
- **Use tax-efficient structures deliberately.** From 1 March 2026 the annual South African tax-free investment contribution limit is R46,000, while the lifetime contribution limit remains R500,000. Growth inside a qualifying tax-free investment is free of income tax, dividends tax and capital gains tax. The value of the benefit makes these accounts worth integrating into long-term planning rather than treating them as spare savings.
- **Protect retirement capital from short-term temptation.** The two-pot retirement system gives members limited access to the savings component, but withdrawals are taxed at the individual's marginal income-tax rate. Access does not mean that withdrawal is automatically wise: money removed today also loses years of potential compounding.
- **Plan experiences around capacity, not only affordability.** A financially affordable goal can still become physically or practically impossible later. Put demanding travel, family experiences and personal ambitions into the years in which health, family circumstances and energy make them realistic.
- **Know your 'enough' number.** A retirement plan should estimate sustainable income, inflation, longevity, tax, medical costs and contingency capital. Once the required capital range is understood, additional saving can be weighed against other life priorities rather than accumulated without a defined purpose.
- **Diversify the risks you cannot predict.** A philosophy of purposeful spending works best when the foundation is resilient. Maintain appropriate emergency liquidity, diversified investments, suitable life and disability protection where needed, and adequate short-term insurance. A single uninsured event should not destroy a carefully designed life plan.
- **Review giving and estate planning together.** If helping children or family is a goal, consider whether some support can be provided at a useful life stage without compromising your own independence. Donations, estate duty, capital gains tax and liquidity consequences should be considered before transferring assets.

The FIN4 Private Clients perspective

Good financial planning should not merely produce a bigger number. It should help a client decide what capital is for, when it will be needed and which risks could prevent it from doing its job. Perkins' "time bucket" concept is particularly useful because it connects a financial plan to a calendar: which goals belong in the next five years, which can wait, which require health and mobility, and which need to be funded now?

YOUR NEXT CONVERSATION

Contact Eric Streso at FIN4 Private Clients to discuss your own time buckets, investment priorities and financial plan.

Article prepared by FIN4 Private Clients | Submitted by Eric Streso

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Author credit: Bill Perkins, Die With Zero: Getting All You Can from Your Money and Your Life. This article is an independent summary and review, with additional South African financial-planning commentary.

General information only; not personalised financial advice. Tax references reflect SARS information current for the 2026/27 tax year. Sources: SARS Tax-Free Investments and Two-Pot Retirement System guidance.