

MONEY AND SPIRITUALITY

Guidelines for Writing Your Money Autobiography

Why Write a Money Autobiography?

Writing a money autobiography is a challenging and crucial step in understanding our behavior and powerful feelings evoked by money. Even for those of us who find it difficult to write, reflection on money and our life's journey yields insights and deepened awareness.

We benefit from examining our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that relate to money. This process involves discerning the ways we earn, inherit, invest, spend, give, and waste money, so that we can become more conscious and intentional about our choices.

A money autobiography is useful not only in personal growth, but also in the growth of the congregation. What affects individuals affects the organizations to which they belong. As we grieve over our entanglement with materialism, status and power, and as we open ourselves to compassion, new vision and hope will flow through us and our faith community into the world.

You are encouraged to set aside some quiet time, take up your pen or keyboard, and discover for yourself the gifts of healing, insight, and freedom which often come when in vulnerability and trust we acknowledge feelings, attitudes and experiences evoked by money.

How to Prepare a Money Autobiography

When writing a money autobiography, it is important to focus on feelings and relationships as well as reflect on factual accounts; use some or all of the following questions, as appropriate and helpful. Write a three-page autobiography that deals only with the subject of your life as it is related to money.

- Include the role of money in your childhood. What is your happiest memory in connection with money? What is your unhappiest memory? What attitude did your father have? What was your attitude toward money as a child? Did you feel poor or rich? Did you worry about money?
- What was (is) your attitude about money as a teenager? What are your memories of this period?
- What role did (does) money play in your life as a young adult? As a parent? At age 45, 50, 65? Did (does) your attitude or feelings shift at the different transition stages in your life?
- How do you feel about your present financial status? What is your present financial status? What is your monthly income? What are your other assets? What will your income be at age 65, 75, 80? Will you inherit money? Do you think about that?

Money and Spirituality: Guidelines for Writing Your Money Autobiography

- Are you generous or conservative with your money? Do you spend money on yourself? If so, do you do it easily?
- Do you feel guilty about money you have? Do you count your money?
- Do you gamble with your money? Do you “throw it away?” Do you worry about money?
- When you eat with friends and there is a group check, are you the one to pick it up? Do you make sure that you pay your share and that it includes tax and tip?
- Do you tend to be more on the giving end of things, or on the receiving end?
- If you lacked money, how would you feel about others helping you pay your rent, or treating when you went out and were not in the position to reciprocate?
- If you have money, how would you feel about subsidizing a friend’s rent, or paying more than your share of things? What would you want in return? How would you feel if that friend spent money on something that in your value system seemed “extravagant?”
- How have your thoughts about money and your behavior been shaped by the church or your faith?
- Do you give a percentage of your income? If so, how do you feel about doing so? What are your reasons for giving?
- Have you made a will? If not, why not? Did you include anyone in your will beside your family? Your congregation? Other organizations?

Additional Questions to Consider

- Culture and religion often teach different roles and behaviors toward money for men and women. How has your approach to money and its use been shaped by your gender?
- How do you deal with the fact that two-thirds of the people of our world are poor? If you have personal relationships with people who are poor and/or work for social justice, how has that affected your attitude toward money?
- What experiences have you had of rich and poor living happily together? What did it require of each?
- How do you feel about asking other people for money. . .for yourself, a worthy cause, your congregations, etc.?
- How does having or not having money affect your self-esteem?
- How does having more/less money than your spouse, partner, or friend impact your relationship with that person?
- Do you ever use money to control events and/or people? Do you ever use money to give others freedom and opportunity?

Money and Spirituality: Guidelines for Writing Your Money Autobiography

- Do you feel that dealing with money is a bothersome intrusion into the real purpose of your life?
- In what ways is your relationship to money a training ground for your spiritual journey, or an expression of your deepest values?
- How would you feel if you discovered that your income was derived from questionable enterprises?
- How do you feel when beggars approach you asking for money?

Ways to Use the Money Autobiography

Sharing money autobiographies in a small group seeking to grow in stewardship and compassion offers unique opportunities for understanding and growth, as well as the possibility of dealing with issues, feelings, and decisions at a much more profound level than would otherwise be possible.

Suggested Resources

The Abundance of Our Faith, Terry Sweetser and Susan Milnor, UUA, 2006.

Growing Givers' Hearts, Thomas H. Jeavons and Rebekah Burch Basinger, Jossey-Bass, 1995.

Growing Up Generous, Eugene C. Roehlkepartain, Elanah Dalyah Naftali, and Laura Musegades, Alban Institute, 2000.

Inspired Philanthropy, second edition, Tracy Gary and Melissa Kohner, Jossey-Bass, 2002.

The Soul of Money, Lynn Twist, W. W. Norton & Co., 2003.

These guidelines were adapted by Laurel Amabile from the *Guidelines for Writing Your Money Autobiography* brochure, Ministry of Money, Germantown, MD.

~July 2008, LBA