

Book Reviews from the Ecumenical Stewardship Center Giving Magazine

Simple Rules for Money: John Wesley on Earning, Saving, & Giving by James A. Harnish, Abingdon Press, 2009

In *Simple Rules for Money*, James Harnish offers Methodist founder John Wesley's guidelines for financial living, still strikingly appropriate for us today. "Wesley's rules are not about fund-raising for the church," he states. "They are about practicing the spiritual discipline of generosity so that we become generous people whose lives are shaped in the likeness of an extravagantly generous God." In this small book, individuals or study groups can delve into Wesley's admonition to "gain [or earn] all you can, save all you can, give all you can." With help from the included discussion questions, it prompts readers to realign their daily habits. Earn all you can, says Harnish, but not by harming your health, hurting your neighbor, or damaging your soul. Work at your livelihood supported by your Christian community and financial counselors, trusting God in the process.

"Save all you can" means not to waste money on things that derail us from our relationship with God. Here the author offers eight real-life steps we can take to counter our instant-gratification, credit card addicted culture. "For Christ-followers," Harnish says, "giving is a defiant act of rebellion against the insatiable power of greed." Wesley's phrase "give all you can" is not about giving from our financial leftovers but about "a total reorientation of our financial life around our commitment to Christ." He then highlights Wesley's four challenging questions to ask ourselves before we make any expenditure. Summarizing Wesley's outlook, *Simple Rules for Money* affirms that generosity is a non-negotiable Christian practice. It requires planning, motivated by our identity as children of God. And it results in joy, as we see our generosity "touch[ing] the life of this world with the love and grace of God."

(Review by Betsy Schwarzentraub, writer and retired United Methodist minister. She is the author of *Afire with God: Becoming Spirited Stewards* and the 2012-16 United Methodist Guidelines book on stewardship. Find her resources and blogs at generousstewards.wordpress.com. Betsy also is a member of the Ecumenical Stewardship Center Resource Editorial Team.)

be thrifty...not cheap: How to Live Better with Less, edited by Pia Catton and Califia Suntree, Workman Publishing, New York, NY, 2010

Want a practical guide for living the simple life? Try reading *be thrifty* (...not cheap!)*. The book's subtitle summarizes the content beautifully: How to Live Better with Less. It even provides a little help by embedding a brand new penny in the front cover! In the introductory chapter, the editors point out that the noun thrift is derived from the verb thrive. This book is not a guide about how to live on the cheap. Rather it is a great resource for learning to thrive using the resources available to us. To be sure, the book is thoroughly secular. There are no references to faith or God. So, if you are looking for a practical daily living devotional book, look elsewhere. Nonetheless, it is extremely useful for all—including Christians who want a practical guide to faithful, daily stewardship. The editors collected ideas, recipes, do-it-yourself instructions, and illustrations from the works of some 100 journalists, writers, and

experts. And of course, the authors added their own contributions --thoughts and ideas -- to make this a thoroughly practical, enjoyable book to help the average person make the most of their time, talent, and treasure.

The book's format is largely that of a reference book. But a cover-to-cover read is enjoyable, providing outside the-box ideas covering a multitude of topics. Every aspect of household management is addressed: home repair to car maintenance, gardening, cooking, groceries, vacations and leisure, entertainment, health, hospitality, pets and, of course, money management. In addition to the general table of contents at the beginning of the book, each chapter is preceded by a table of contents, making the book both easy to read, and a quick reference resource. As an example, in the chapter entitled "Taking Care of You," instructions for several projects are included. How-to instructions are provided for: sewing on a button, letting down a hem and cutting hair. Recipes are plentiful, as well. One of the better callout articles, "Dealing with the Gimmes," speaks to the issue of wants vs. needs especially as related to teaching children the difference. Along the way I found hundreds of very practical ideas and tips for living a more simple life. I highly recommend this practical guide for anyone who wants to live simply and thrive!

(Review by Dr. Marc L. Kirchoff, Director of Development for The Foundation for Evangelism and a member of the Ecumenical Stewardship Center Resource Editorial Team.)

The Power of Enough: Finding Contentment by Putting Stuff in Its Place, Lynn Miller, MMA, Evangel Press, 2003

In his book, *The Power of Enough*, Lynn Miller teaches the importance of being satisfied with enough. Guided by biblical principles, Miller writes from the Anabaptist cultural perspective that has historically valued simplicity. Miller explains in theological, philosophical, and practical ways how individuals can consider their relationship with money and how to take a healthy perspective within a North American culture that values the newer, bigger, and better. He makes even the most theological passages approachable with his casual, personal storytelling style. Instead of telling readers that money is bad or that they should deny themselves, Miller emphasizes a measured attitude toward money and things that leaves a person satisfied because they have "neither too little nor too much." The book includes study questions that make it great for study groups and Sunday schools. Miller's book can be found used on Amazon.

(Review by Sara Alvarez, Marketing Manager for Everence and a member of the Ecumenical Stewardship Center Resource Editorial Team.)

Propel: Good Stewardship, Greater Generosity by Clayton Smith, Abingdon, 2015

You'll get down-to-earth guidance in *Propel: Good Stewardship, Greater Generosity*. Author Clayton Smith is executive pastor of generosity at the Church of the Resurrection United Methodist Church, a vanguard in generosity ministry. This slim-but-packed book is a training and planning tool for your local church stewardship and generosity team, finance committee, and related groups. Smith says it's crucial to focus clearly on financial stewardship. Only as people overcome their money fears can they grow in giving, experiencing it as a joyful act of worship. The first task of a stewardship and generosity team is to teach ways members can practice better financial stewardship of their own resources, says Smith. This includes how to manage their money better; eliminate personal debt and practice budgeting; and tithe, become generous, and acquire key biblical teachings on giving. Propel makes core points about three essentials in stewardship and generosity ministry: leadership, vision, and community. Its leaders need to be expert listeners, aided by a church audit and assessment tool (provided) every three to five years. Their personal giving sets the pace for others. The book lists attributes to look for in team members and their roles within the congregation. "People give to change lives, transform the community through mission, and bring renewal to churches," says Smith. Vision is a dynamic driver in a healthy church, creating a sense of unity. The team reminds members of the vision and invites them into involvement in it. Smith describes six specific annual objectives against which to measure progress at each meeting. He advises to keep it simple and make a little progress each year. When preaching about financial stewardship, Smith says to "preach in a way that invites people to respond from the heart as well as the mind," including using imagery and creative themes. He applies seven key insights about preaching and calls for a "paradigm shift from focusing on what the church wants from the members to what the church wants for the members." His list of twenty-two worship and sermon planning practices is worth buying the whole book! Propel also offers "six giving models to propel generosity": the annual giving campaign, strategic mission and emergency-relief giving, the capital giving campaign, memorial giving, planned legacy giving, and major donor development. Each section gives core guidelines for motivation, planning, implementation, and evaluation from the viewpoint of growing generous givers. This book is a treasure of keen insights borne out of practical experience. The Ecumenical Stewardship Center Author Chat library includes a recording of Rev. Dr. Clayton Smith talking about Propel. Access it at <https://stewardshipresources.org/author-chats>.

(Review by Betsy Schwarzentraub, retired United Methodist minister and member of the Ecumenical Stewardship Center Resource Editorial Team. She is the author of the 2012-16 United Methodist Guidelines book on stewardship and of *Afire with God: Becoming Spirited Stewards*. Find her resources and blogs at <http://generousstewards.wordpress.com>.)

Embracing Stewardship: How to Put Stewardship at the Heart of Your Congregation's Life by Charles R. Lane and Grace Duddy Pomroy, Embracing Stewardship LLC, 2016

Embracing Stewardship is an excellent resource encouraging the church to recapture the true meaning of not just the word but the concept of Christian stewardship. Ms. Pomroy is financial education

specialist for Portico Benefit Services in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and Rev. Charles Lane has served as the Director of the Center for Stewardship Leaders at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota and as Director for Stewardship Key Leader in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. He currently serves as Pastor for Stewardship and Generosity at Lord of Life Lutheran Church in Maple Grove, MN, and works with Kairos and Associates. The authors come at the definition from different but complementary viewpoints. Each begins with a theological perspective. The first two chapters are excellent, brief summaries of the biblical/theological basis of stewardship. These insights, in themselves, are worthy of any church leader's time. Having established a solid foundation, the authors trade chapters in addressing the practical issues that define stewardship much more broadly than it usually is today. The concept of stewardship in church culture has evolved to an extent that is unhealthy. Its definition has narrowed severely. This book recaptures a definition and, more important, an understanding and practice that is true stewardship. In essence, the authors construct a devolution that takes us back to the full meaning of stewardship: the management of all of life, including time, talent, and treasure. Each chapter is written individually and concludes with the other author's reaction. Each chapter also ends with a "What might you do?" section. The book is not prescriptive but reads more like an insightful coaching session in which the reader discovers best practices for his/her own ministry context. The book is especially helpful to church leaders who are seeking ways to enhance the stewardship and, indeed, the entire ministry of the local church. Practical suggestions are sprinkled throughout, but the primary value of the book is its explanation of effective processes to help congregations redefine stewardship for their members. The authors lean heavily on the concepts of technical challenges and adaptive challenges to draw distinctions between the obstacles that stand in the way of their desired devolution. Identifying the different (and differences between) various challenges that stand in the way of enhanced stewardship in the local church becomes a bit easier if one follows the flow of ideas presented by Lane and Pomroy. Reading *Embracing Stewardship* would be a fruitful investment of time and effort as well as a treasure!

(Review by Marc L. Kirchoff, DMin, Director of Development for The Foundation for Evangelism and a member of the Ecumenical Stewardship Center Resource Editorial Team.)

The Passionate Steward: Recovering Christian Stewardship from Secular Fundraising Michael O'Hurley-Pitts: St. Brigid Press, 2001

"Secular fundraising models . . . fundamentally undermine the Christian values we profess individually and communally. . . . [Stewardship is] a matter of living out our vocation as Christians . . . not grounded in . . . individual rights, but in the idea of gratitude for our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer and the inherent dignity which belongs to every human being" (p. 8). O'Hurley-Pitts lists many differences between Christian stewardship and secular fundraising (pp. 59-60), but his main points are these:

- All gifts, whatever the size, are important. Emphasizing leadership gifts or major gifts subtly tells everyone else that they are not important.

- Christians give for the joy of giving, not in order to be praised. Christian donors do not have a bill of rights promising that they will be complimented.
- Time is our most valuable gift and far more important than money.
- Motivation, not method, should shape our stewardship. Financial resources are precious gifts, not assets. The author, a Canadian who has worked with both Roman Catholic and Protestant parishes and judicatories, has thoughtful, practical theological reflections on annual appeals, capital campaigns, and planned giving. He, perhaps provocatively, discourages credit card giving (it overlooks issues of debt and high interest rates), questions the tithe (it is rooted more in obligation than in joy), and defends rummage sales (cost-effective does not necessarily mean good; involving more people is good). He emphasizes the importance of long-range planning and the uniqueness of every parish. Even when you disagree with his views, he will help you think seriously about financial stewardship and living as Christians within our cultural context.

(Review by Hermann Weinlich retired Moravian pastor and ecumenical officer for the Moravian Church in North America. His work as a freelance editor includes copyediting the *Feasting on the Word* lectionary commentary. He is a member of the Ecumenical Stewardship Center Resource Editorial Team.)

Beyond Stewardship: A Church Guide to Generous Giving Campaigns by John Zehring and Kate Jagger, Judson Press, 2016

Beyond Stewardship: A Church Guide to Generous Giving Campaigns is a hands-on text filled with practical advice for an extensive annual stewardship program, including financial commitments to God's work through the church. The book gives a two-pronged approach. First, it stresses a theological emphasis on abundance instead of scarcity. Second, it uses the most fruitful practices from effective fund-raising. On the theological side, authors Zehring and Jagger prompt church leaders to shift from talking about a stewardship campaign to a "generous giving ministry" and switch from talking about the church's needs to how the church meets people's needs. They emphasize raising givers more than raising funds and involve a large number of people in the process. What makes this book distinctive is its use of positive fund-raising practices. First, it assigns three groups to work in partnership. The Generous Giving Ministry (coordinating team) makes the case for church members to grow as givers. The Trustees make the case for giving to meet the church's financial needs. And the pastor and Church Council focus both cases on meeting the giver's needs. The other four fund-raising techniques are interlocking strategies to communicate with every person in the congregation: Concentric circles. All members of the asking group give their own financial commitment before they speak to the next group, like waves rippling out on a pond. Two Generous Giving Ministry members speak to the Council, who divide into pairs to speak to all other groups. At every point, the representatives thank people for their current service and giving, share how the church has met their personal needs, and ask them to join the speakers as they grow in the spiritual discipline of giving.

Personal visits

After making their own commitments, Generous Giving Ministry members visit the top giving families not covered through the concentric circles, about one-fourth of the congregation. They bring personalized giving packets and use the same approach of thank, share, and ask.

Public witness

For six to eight weeks before dedication of pledges, church members speak for three minutes in worship about how the church meets their needs. They also witness through worship bulletins, newsletters, banners, and electronic and social media.

Direct mail

Direct mail consists of mailing a letter introducing the program's theme, two optional reminder letters, and personalized giving packets to those not personally visited. *Beyond Stewardship* will surprise church leaders who have denigrated fund-raising as a less-than-godly enterprise. It is not for the less-is-more crowd but offers a complete manual, emphasizing giving as a spiritual discipline. In this sense it is beyond the usual stewardship campaign, in both theology and method. This makes it a refreshing resource.

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