

GUIDELINES FOR WRITING YOUR MONEY AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Faith and Money Network, Inc.

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.

Conversion is hearing and knowing God's love and call in our lives, becoming conscious of what has been previously unheard or unaccepted. Jesus repeatedly spoke about money and challenged the disciples, the scribes, and the crowds to become conscious of money and their relationship to it. We, too, need to examine our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors which relate to money. As we discern the ways we earn, inherit, invest, spend, give, or waste money, often without conscious choice or a deliberate faith stance, we will be enabled to respond more fully to God.

A money autobiography can be useful not only in personal growth, but also in the growth of the church. Whatever blocks our response to God as individuals also cripples the Body of Christ, the church. The Spirit cannot set us free to be communities of liberation if we are in bondage to an ancient idol. 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 the church to the world.

How to Prepare a Money Autobiography

Elizabeth O'Connor, in Letters to Scattered Pilgrims (HarperCollins 1982), has given guidelines for writing a money autobiography. It is important to focus on feelings and relationships as well as reflecting on factual accounts; use some or all of the following questions as are appropriate and helpful to you.

Assignment:

Using the questions listed below that are most relevant to you, write a three-page autobiography that deals only with the subject of your life as it is related to money.

Questions:

Describe the role of money in your childhood. What is your happiest memory in connection with money?

What is your unhappiest childhood memory? What attitude did your mother have about money? 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 your attitude about money as a teenager? What are your memories of this period?

What role did money play in your life as a young adult? As a parent? At age 45, 50, 65? Did 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?

Are you generous or stingy with your money? Do you spend money on yourself? If so, do you do it easily?

Do you feel guilty about the money you have?

Do you count your money?

Do you take risks with your money?

Do you gamble with your money? Do you 'throw it away?'

Do you worry about money?

When you eat out 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 you were not in a 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?'

Do you tithe? If so, how do you really feel about it? Do you tithe because this is how you want your money used, or do you tithe because you want to belong and are willing to pay this cost of belonging?

Have you made a will? If not, why not? Did you include anyone in your will besides your family? Did you include your church? If not, why not? Did you include some oppressed segment of society or any needy members in your community? The biblical faith says that we have a common life together - a common wealth. How do you feel about a private will?

Additional Questions to Consider

Culture and church have taught different roles and behaviors toward money based on gender norms. How have gender expectations shaped your approach to money? Are there financial gender norms that have impacted your decisions?

How have your thoughts about money been shaped by the church?

How do you deal with the fact that 2/3rds 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 church community, etc.?

How does having or not having money affect your self-esteem?

How does having more/less money than your spouse, partner, and/or a friend impact your relationship with that person?

Do you ever use money to control events and/or persons? Do you ever use money to give others freedom and opportunity?

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?