



Interaction

Money autobiography

A personal story

Pam Klainer is a “career coach” in the States. She works with people who want to develop their business careers or manage the balance of home and life better. She tells how a female business executive came to see her for help. Work dominated this lady’s life so much that her family was suffering. She knew it but she could not stop her inbuilt need and drive to keep working. Strangely enough this lady was already a multi millionaire due to an inheritance from her parents. But she would not allow herself to touch that money until she had built up a fortune all of her own.

Pam Klainer asked her client to write her money autobiography. Starting with her earliest memories of money the executive remembered and reflected upon how she had learned to think, feel and act around money. It turned out that her parents were self made millionaires and their money messages about making your own way in life were still dominating her thinking. Somehow it was wrong for this executive lady to use an inheritance to make her life easier. Once she realized this she was freed and enabled to work less and was planning to give some of her considerable wealth away to charity.

What is a money autobiography?

Many people are living by money rules, attitudes or experiences handed down by their parents. Many others are living by money messages from advertising and peer group pressure. A money autobiography helps to discover, examine and evaluate those messages.

The idea is simple - we just remember and think about our money stories, beginning with the earliest

stories from our childhood. Each one of us grows up getting messages about money; a money autobiography simply invites us to remember and think about them and how they might affect the way we think and feel about money today.

- What was your earliest memory of money as a child?
- Was money discussed in your family?
- Do you worry about money or feel guilty about what you have?

There can be a whole range of questions that can be explored. Some we will share in the group, others we might tell our partners or closest friends, many we might record in a private diary or journal.

Why is a money autobiography important?

Pam Klainer is quite clear that money is often the root of the problems her clients bring to her: “*In my experience, money is almost always the silent subtext to stories about work and career*” By learning to tell a money autobiography we give a voice to what is silent; by thinking about the money messages we have received we can begin to understand our motivations, our anxieties, our hopes much better.

Nor is this confined to issues around work and career. Some 70% of couples experiencing relationship problems give money as the number one problem which they face. How helpful it would be to explore the different attitudes to and experiences of money that shape the behaviours of the couple and enable a common understanding. Recalling and reflecting on the money messages that are often buried very deep inside us is an enlightening and liberating experience.

Good for the soul

Finding freedom in this difficult, foundational and personal area of money often has a domino effect as we discover new freedom in other areas of our lives. This is no less true of our spiritual lives. These early money messages are hardwired into our DNA and as long as we are unaware of them they will always have an impact upon how we live and, critically, how we listen to what the Bible has to say about money and possessions.

When we are not listening to the hidden money messages within us we are able to hear the Bible's teaching about money much more clearly. The voice of the Bible and the promise of blessing through giving it speaks of will not need to compete with other voices for our attention! For this reason as well as reading and discussing the Bible passages in *Study Exodus!*, *Study 2 Corinthians!* and *Study Luke!*, encourage group members to explore their own money autobiography.

Dan R Dick is a well known author and speaker in the United Methodist Church in America. He defines a money autobiography as follows:

"A money autobiography is a reflection process on the role and influence of money and material possessions in our lives. It challenges us to explore the past to see how our attitudes, assumptions, and values concerning money and wealth were formed. The money autobiography provides a lens through which we examine how we manage money and how money manages us. It allows us the opportunity to wrestle with our needs, wants, and desires and helps us understand the lifestyle choices we make. It can even help us set some priorities and goals for the future. What we pursue says a lot about who we are, and the way we order our priorities says a lot about what we believe".

Dan R Dick¹ provides an excellent [introduction](#) to a money autobiography and some carefully grouped questions to assist people in writing their own story. These are perfect for individuals who wish to write a money autobiography over a month with a question for each day. The small group resource *Study Exodus!* includes a slightly adapted version of Dan's questions. *Study 2 Corinthians!* includes a smaller selection of questions based on Dan's work.

¹ We are grateful for permission from Dan R Dick to reproduce the questions and gladly acknowledge his work as the source

