

CHMIN 760 Advanced Leadership  
Book Reflection by Steven Poenitz  
*Growing Givers' Hearts* co-authored by  
Thomas H. Jeavons and Rebekah Burch Basinger  
August 5, 2007

Agreement

I have read the book co-authored by Thomas H. Jeavons and Rebekah Burch Basinger, *Growing Givers' Hearts*. Special thanks to our professor for prescribing this volume on Christian fund-raising as a contribution to my library for the leadership cohort. The book format was organized in easy-reading fashion with some testimonials and stories as illustrations; yet, the authors' presentation provided helpful introduction and summary of their topic with a repetitive summary at the close of each chapter.

Application

What a book on stewardship education, even though the main thrust is growing givers' hearts while pursuing Christian fundraising! Reading Jeavons and Basinger made me think I was sitting again at the feet of Mel Rees, Seventh-day Adventist deceased dean of stewardship education. Over the years I've had the privilege to enjoy pastors' workshops, seminars, and books by Mel Rees while pastoring in New Jersey, Kansas City, and Oregon specifically. Our conference president in New Jersey brought Rees to our pastors' meetings on several occasions and our Chapel Oaks Seventh-day Adventist Church in Kansas City invited him to speak for a weekend while he was living at the foot of Mt. St. Helens in Woodland, WA. The principles inscribed within *Growing Givers' Hearts* defined the true course of the gospel and kingdom building for Christ's sake. I observed from the principles proffered in *Growing Givers' Hearts* that our motives of

fund-raising can make a long-term difference in the giving practices of Christians and non-Christians as well as their future relationship to Christ and his church.

Jeavons and Basinger remind us that approaching people for money is not the bottom line in spiritual ministry, but “bringing the gospel into their lives” does demand a response (109). When the gospel is priority for the Christian worker called to serve the body of Christ, a natural love response will result as individuals are converted. Luther makes clear that “conversion of the purse” comes “most powerfully with the conversion of the heart and mind rooted in a deeper experience of grace and faith” (67). One pastor asserts that “we discovered that people who have been evangelized understand the importance of giving” (159). Over and over again the authors emphasize that this work of fund-raising deals with heart work. When the heart is right toward God, it will be receptive toward appeals and needs for resources. There will be loving responses with time, energy, and personal treasure (money).

The concept of fund-raising as a ministry I strongly endorse. The authors made a serious case for fund-raising as a calling and vocation for the Lord in a later chapter of their book (165). What impacted me most was that our witness is revealed by how we ask for money. The authors state that “In short, the kinds of relationships that Christian fundraisers create, or seem to be trying to create, in the development process say a great deal to those who are watching and listening about whether we Christians and Christian organizations really do place commitment to God, the common good, and the best interests of others above our own interests, as the Gospels teach” (36). The methods we use to raise money have a lot to do with our witness and influence.

Our theology also is revealed by our methods of fundraising (99). Thus, how important for fundraisers and development officers to know the theology of the specific organization they are working for. Donors will pick up signals real quick if the theology of the fund-raiser is subtly misconstrued or different from the mission and vision of the particular organization. Donors' generosity will begin to wane if clarity of mission is not parallel with the parachurch or local church organization.

The authors address a tension that exists in fundraising between the local church and parachurch organizations. In the Seventh-day Adventist system there are self-supporting organizations like It Is Written, Amazing Facts, 3ABN, etc. These organizations have a wider outreach than the local church for raising funds. In some ways this tension is healthy; because it challenges the local church to keep its world-field perspective as prescribed in Rev. 14:6-12. However, undoubtedly, in some cases, even tithe is diverted probably to these entities rather than the conference church.

Most of these organizations have publicly communicated their desire to cooperate rather than compete with the local church. The advantage of these parachurch entities is the wider range of media outreach to broadcast and televise their needs for resources. And yet, the web and internet now make some of the playing field more equal for the local church. Those organizations that see the local church as partners rather than prey convey the best integrity and curry the best interdependent relationships. I salute those local church and parachurch organizations that can humbly and graciously support funding going to sister entities—the spirit of competition definitely exists in the church, but a spirit of cooperation and selflessness among church entities motivates this pastor to give more to an organization that can laud and support parallel ministries.

My wife and I find the It Is Written Partnership weekends for fundraising to be a win-win situation. We enjoy every year a weekend in Gatlinburg, Tennessee, with the It Is Written staff and family. There we learn of the progress of God's kingdom in the mission and vision of It Is Written television programming around the world.

My wife and I enjoyed the ASI weekend in Cincinnati a few years ago. To hear the reports and personal testimonies of Christian business people who share Christ in the marketplace is invigorating. And, millions of dollars are raised for special projects around the world to reach people for Christ. Right now our own church is pursuing a vision of reaching the 160,000 NASCAR fans that come to Bristol Motor Speedway twice a year. Since Pastor John Earnhardt has conducted evangelistic meetings in Greeneville, Tennessee, our church ministries team has caught a vision of reaching these race fans in several racing venues across the East Coast of the United States. What a faith-building opportunity has been created, seeking God's abundance for this project! The Review and Herald Publishing Association, ASI, and Georgia-Cumberland Conference have cooperated along with our local church to serve the attending race fans at Bristol. We have also been able to freely associate with Raceway Ministries, an evangelical ministry to the race fans in Bristol. God has opened the door for us to connect with other faith-based Christians. This year we have been offered our own campground to serve the fans of Bristol with Christian literature, emergency assistance, water, and snacks. What an opportunity God is providing for a local church to interact with other Christian organizations and our own parachurch entities for sufficient resources! I praise God for the abundance mentality of our local church ministries team of laity!

Back to donors' expectations, I believe it is critical that parachurch and church entities understand the value of our witness in the messages we send by our fund-raising tactics. It's so sad when donors feel like ATM dispensers under pressure to donate resources to causes that do not necessarily inspire their hearts (141). That type of pressure is not sanctioned by scripture or Ellen White. The Bible encourages "cheerful" giving and a "willing" spirit in the appeal for beneficence (2 Cor 8:12; 9:7). This also highlights the unfortunate temptation to promote impulse giving versus planned giving. In a donor's personal setting where undue pressure is expressed to give on the spur of the moment—there is a definite loss of ministry—the value of consulting with God in prayer and determining with the Holy Spirit's influence a passion for consistent and systematic giving.

Probably, the major contribution of Jeavons' and Basinger's book is the spirit of faith-building and nurturing of donors' hearts in the process of fund-raising. My heart was warmed with the passion for caring about people rather than hitting them up for money. What a commendable spirit for a fund-raising organization and their development staff! Too often I hear as pastor that the only time folks see the pastor roll up to their driveway is when he/she comes to give a personal appeal for money. On the other hand, when a personal, spiritual visit occurs by parachurch local church ministry staff, hearts can really be nurtured and uplifted. My own parents were very encouraged when the director and his wife for the Quiet Hour ministries stopped by and personally visited them a few years ago. My parents were especially moved by their taking personal time to visit them. Before they left, my folks chose to give them a substantial donation.

The real bottom line of fundraising is not getting money, but growing givers' hearts to advance God's kingdom. Jeavons and Basinger makes this appeal: "All of us involved in Christian fundraising feel challenged to raise the money we think is required to support the good work God has called us...to do in the world. Surely that is true. But just as surely we should feel the equally important challenge to grow givers' hearts and feed their souls—and our own!" (188) [emphasis mine].

The scandals in the past decades of the evangelical world have obviously affected the fundraising approaches and acquisitions. There is public fallout which affects most Christian organizations and the image of the church when abuse and misuse of funds occurs (36). The outreach and nurture of the organization's fundraising efforts is very critical in developing credibility with donors' hearts. Because, "if we raise money we need now at the cost of undermining or misdirecting people's faith, we do no favor to our cause or our God. If we raise money by giving people a vision of a God who cannot provide all we really need, a God who is never enough, a God who does not really offer us a life more abundant, then our work is an affront to the Gospel, a denial of everything Jesus taught" (188).

The above quotations impress me that we serve a big God. One in whose heart there is an abundance of love and grace, ready to dispense to His children's hearts. This mentality is one that I covet for my own pastorate and that I desire to disseminate among the members of my congregation. Not to manipulate members into giving more, but to enhance and enrich their lives for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. I truly covet an abundance mentality and have a strong desire to grow givers' hearts with the pure and precious gospel of Jesus Christ.