



[Snow Covered Temple of Heaven, Beijing by i a walsh via Flickr.](#)

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R. Scott Rodin

What is the difference between true life and counterfeit life? Ownership versus stewardship, the source of happiness as well as our security along with where we look for the provision of our needs are all elements that play a part in having true life. Moving from a counterfeit life into true life does not happen overnight but is a day-by-day journey as we trust in God.

[A Faithful Steward's Freedom](#)

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Helen Wu

The author looks at two lives, that of Samuel Pollard and her own, to help us understand how faithful stewardship of time, abilities, and finances can be used to joyfully serve our Master, Jesus Christ. Pollard, an English missionary who loved the Big Flowery Miao people of southwest China, gave his life to introduce the Miao to Christ and uplift their society. The author is active in the arts and has been used by God to influence many lives in a variety of ways.

[The Joy of Generosity](#)

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Howard Dayton

Experience in the business world followed by extensive Bible study produced within Dayton a desire to be generous. As a result, he founded organizations to teach others the life-changing principles he had discovered. In this article, he discusses attitudes towards giving, advantages in giving, and how to determine the amount we should give.

View from the Wall

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Eric Lee

Four incorrect assumptions often hinder Chinese Christians from understanding biblical generosity. Lee discusses elements of these assumptions involving poverty, prosperity, earthly examples of biblical generosity—including filial piety—and when it is best to start learning to be generous.

Peoples of China

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Ge Jun

The author relates how a small church of twenty-plus members in Yunnan province gave joyfully out of their poverty to help people in another province who had been through an earthquake. His prayer is that others in China will imitate this little Yunnan church.

Book Review

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The Sower: Redefining the Ministry of Raising Kingdom Resources by R. Scott Rodin and Gary G. Hoag

Reviewed by Brent Fulton

For those assigned to raising funds for the ministries they represent, this book, by seasoned fund development professionals, suggests a shift requiring a reorientation of the view of fund raising. Rather than seeing it as a process of reaping financial increase for God's work, it should be seen as a process of sowing into the lives of God's stewards. It is a reminder that it is God who gives the increase.

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Editorial

More Than Money: A Fresh Look at Biblical Stewardship

By R. Scott Rodin, Guest Editor

In this issue we invite you to journey with five authors as we introduce you to the concepts of generosity, freedom, stewardship, and joy.

I begin with the challenge to consider the difference between a counterfeit life and, as Paul puts it, the “life that is truly life.” (1 Timothy 6:19) The article concludes with my prayer that: “My brothers and sisters in China would pursue the true life God created us to live. May we together seek to set aside all desire to rely on ourselves instead of God, to play the owner instead of the steward, to seek happiness in wealth instead of in Christ, and to find our security in earthly things rather than in heavenly treasure.”

Helen Wu introduces you to missionary Samuel Pollard who gave his life caring for others and living a life of one-kingdom generosity. She remarks that Pollard “showed by his life of selfless service that there is only one kingdom—God’s kingdom. He was the ultimate steward serving God with all his heart and mind—a free steward.”

My friend Howard Dayton looks first at our attitudes toward giving and then proposes four advantages to giving. You will be challenged by the cycle of giving and how to find your place within it. As Howard reminds us: “One reason the Lord reveals that we can anticipate a material increase is because he wants us to recognize that he is behind it. God has chosen to be invisible, but he wants us to experience his reality.”

Eric Lee provides us with a look at both poverty and prosperity in relationship to generosity. I especially appreciate his linking of generosity to salvation when he says: “Salvation is not God giving free grace to us sinners so that we can be rich. The true gospel is God offering his free saving grace to us in order that through us all others can hear the gospel and become rich. The focus is not our receiving (prosperity) but rather, after receiving, passing it on (generosity).”

Ge Jun shares a story about a church in Yunnan province that practiced what we have all been writing about. This little church followed the pattern of the Macedonian church where Paul proclaims their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. He reminds us that: “We are praying that China becomes more missional and giving, just like this little Yunnan church. May God bless you with a giving heart as well!”

We conclude with Brent Fulton’s review of *The Sower*, written by Gary Hoag and Scott Rodin. Brent cites the two-fold challenge of teaching and speaking on money in a Chinese culture, and the belief that talking about money is somehow unspiritual and does not fit in the church. He concludes: “*The Sower* provides a useful starting point for facing these challenges with biblical truth. In the hands of pastors, Christian teachers, and business leaders, *The Sower* has the potential to turn what is often viewed as an uncomfortable or unfamiliar topic into an opportunity for great spiritual growth and blessing.”

We also provide you with two resources for further reading and reflection. The *50-Day Journey to Freedom* will walk you through a process of transformation. *The Good and Faithful Steward* web site is available to support you in your own journey of living as a faithful steward.

In all this we pray God will use these words to draw you closer to him and to your call to be a faithful, joyful steward of all of life. As you do, you will set aside everything that may now distract you and take hold of the life that is truly life.

R. Scott Rodin, PhD, is president of Rodin Consulting, Inc. He has written numerous books and lives in Spokane, Washington. Follow his blog at: www.kingdomlifepublishing.com.



Journal Entry (Joel Montes de Oca) by Chris Lott, on Flickr

Intercessory Notes

Please pray

1. That Chinese Christians would understand the biblical teaching about stewardship and generosity and put the biblical principles into practice in their lives on a daily basis.
2. For those Chinese Christians who are currently using their time, abilities and finances to further God’s kingdom; pray they will have daily strength and make wise choices.
3. That pastors and teachers would have boldness to preach about stewardship and generosity despite cultural influences that would discourage them from doing this.
4. That Chinese churches will give joyfully, even out of their poverty, to share with others in need of the gospel as well as material necessities knowing that God honors this kind of faith in action.
5. That new believers would immediately be taught to be God’s stewards and become joyful givers from the time they commit to living for Christ.



The Life That is Truly Life

By R. Scott Rodin

“Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.” (1 Timothy 6:18-19 NIV)

What does Paul mean by the term, “life that is truly life”? What other life would we seek to “take hold of”? The implication is that any other form of life that is not founded on generosity and a desire to be rich in good deeds is a *counterfeit life*.

This is a powerful and important teaching. It is particularly timely for Christians in China as their country moves into an era of increasing prosperity. Are we willing to take it seriously? If so, we may be surprised by the message of hope that lies within it. Let’s look at four comparisons between this “life that is truly life” and the counterfeit life.

True life: God is my provider of all I need.

“And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:19) Do we believe these words from Paul? Do we trust God to be the provider of all we need? Trusting God does not mean we sit by and do nothing, expecting him to bless our idleness; rather, it requires that we work hard using the skills he gave us. It expects that we will manage our money carefully, save wisely and be accountable for our financial situation.

However, we must be able to see the bigger picture where God is the provider of all good things. Our jobs, our skills, the opportunities before us are all gifts provided through his grace and love for us. This is an opportunity for real freedom in life. When we understand God is our ultimate provider we can live and work with freedom and joy knowing that the one who loves us is also the one who promises to care for our every need. By keeping our focus on God as our provider we will work with excellence and give him the glory for all that he provides. It will also work in us an attitude of generosity toward others. If God meets our needs, we are free to look for opportunities to meet the needs of others. This is the true life that God created us to live.

Counterfeit life: I must rely on myself or others to provide what I need.

There is a saying that goes: “If it's to be it's up to me.” This is the attitude of one who believes that they alone are the provider for their own needs. This is an easy attitude to fall into because it is the way of the world around us. Asked who or what they believe in, many in China today would say simply that they believe only in themselves. It is up to them to figure out how to get ahead in China’s competitive, materialistic society.

But it is not God's way. This view of life places us in bondage to a stressful, frantic approach to the way we work. God expects us to be productive, but he does not take pleasure in our stress or anxiety over our work. That is a sign that we are living a counterfeit life and placing too much reliance on the work of our hands, not trusting that God will ultimately provide for our needs. When we constantly worry about providing for ourselves, it is very difficult to have a generous heart that looks for opportunities to meet the needs of others. We must guard against such attitudes in our lives and pray that God would generate in us a heart of trust that will allow us to work with peace and be generous with what we have.

True life: God is the owner and I am the steward.

From the creation story in Genesis through the end of the Bible, God is depicted as the owner of everything. *“The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it on the sea and established it on the waters.” (Psalm 24:1-2)* This is great news for the Christian. If God is the owner, then our place in God's creation is to be faithful stewards—caretakers of all that belongs to God. A key question, given China’s remarkable economic growth, is whether China’s affluence will be accompanied by an increase in generosity, or whether greater wealth without generosity will negatively affect China’s future social and environmental development.

The truth of God’s ownership sets us free in all of our relationships: our relationship with God, our relationship with ourselves; our relationship with our neighbor; and our relationship to creation. God calls us to faithfully steward each one of these as a gift from his hand. As we do so, our hearts will be open to opportunities for generosity as we use God's resources to do God's work. This is the true life he created us to live.

Counterfeit life: I am the owner.

In Genesis chapter three, when Adam and Eve disobeyed God, they demonstrated our sinful desire to have power and control over our lives and those around us. As a result of this sin, we moved from being joyful stewards to anxious owners. God may grant us the right of temporary ownership of things in this world, but we must acknowledge that we are never the ultimate owner of anything; we are stewards. When we believe we are the ultimate owner we live a counterfeit life and experience the stress, fear, anxiety, and despair that such a life brings. It is very difficult to be generous as an owner. Instead, we will hold tightly to what we have, work anxiously to have more of it, live in fear that we may lose it, and envy others who have more of it. This is the life of bondage of the owner. We must reject this view of life and embrace our role as a steward so that God can set us free to live the life he created us to live.

True life: Happiness comes from giving.

“In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’” (Acts 20:35) These words of Jesus, as relayed to us by the apostle Paul, seem to be just the op-



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posite of how we often view life. How different might our life look if we really believed these words? If we believed that the greatest blessings that God has for us in this life come as a result of a generous heart that gives freely and joyfully, would we not dedicate our lives to such a task? Building on our points above, if we trust God to be our provider, and see ourselves as stewards of what belongs to God, why would we not invest our lives in acts of generosity? This is the question we must confront as followers of Jesus. We must pray that he would cultivate in us the heart of a generous giver, for only then can we live the life he created us to live.

Counterfeit life: Happiness comes from accumulating.

Our culture tells us that the more we have the happier we will be. More money, a bigger house, a nicer car, these all promise happiness and peace. Even for Christians, the lure of a more attractive ministry position or a more comfortable church facility can become an idol. As China's newly emerging urban professional church comes into its own, its leaders will need to learn to face such temptations.

The Bible teaches something very different. It states that true happiness for a Christian is knowing God and doing what pleases him. In fact, it warns that those who strive after becoming rich and use it to accumulate things will find just the opposite; disappointment, sorrow, and danger. *"Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs,"* (1 Timothy 6:9) and also, *"...but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful."* (Mark 4:19) For the Christian who wants to know true happiness, it comes not from what we receive, but from what we give. Cultivate a generous heart, refuse to believe that possessions bring you happiness, and you will be set free to live the life God created you to live.

True life: Security comes from God.

One of the greatest marks of being a follower of Jesus is our complete trust in him for everything in life. China's Christians learned this lesson in a profound way as they experienced God's gracious provision during dark days of persecution. As personal freedoms have increased, along with the ability to accumulate wealth for oneself and one's family, will a new generation of believers be drawn away from this simple trust in God?

Earlier we said we need to trust God to be our provider. As we do, we will be able to place the security of our life and future fully in his hands. Scripture is overflowing with promises of God's love for us and his invitation to trust him in all things. This is one of the great keys to living a generous life. The more secure we are in the hands of God, the more freely we will give ourselves to others. We have no need to hold on, protect and hoard. We are free to give generously and lavishly because our security for our future comes from a God of absolute abundance. He will always provide, always meet our needs, always deliver us in the day of trouble. With such security in our hearts, how can we live but as joyful and generous givers? This is the life God created you live.

Counterfeit life: Security comes from what I have saved.

And Jesus told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.' Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. And I'll say to myself, 'You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.' " But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'" (Luke 12:16 - 19)

This teaching from Jesus perfectly illustrates the counterfeit life of placing your security in anything but God alone. It does not mean we don't invest wisely, save well, and prepare for our future, but this is a matter of the heart. In whom or what do we ultimately place our trust? If it is in anything but God, we will live a counterfeit life, and in such a life it is impossible to be generous. Put your trust in God, let your security be fully in him, and be set free to live the life he created you to live.

My prayer for our brothers and sisters in China is that they would pursue the true life God created us to live. May we together seek to set aside all desire to rely on ourselves instead of God, to play the owner instead of the steward, to seek happiness in wealth instead of in Christ, and to find our security in earthly things rather than in heavenly treasure. I believe that how Christians today choose to respond to this message will have far-reaching implications for the future of China's church.

Moving from our old, counterfeit lives to the true life God has for us is a journey that will last a lifetime. We do not get there all at once, but day by day, step by step, we walk in faith and trust that the God who loves us, the Son who died for us, and the Holy Spirit who fills us each day will walk with us on that journey and help us live the "life that is truly life"—the generous life of a free and joyful steward.

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A Faithful Steward's Freedom

By Helen Wu

Upon receiving the invitation to write this article, my heart immediately went through introspection. I examined my inner condition as to whether I am a faithful steward and if I am indeed free in the stewardship dimensions of my life.

In 1904, the Miao ethnic group in southwest China was at the bottom of society and its people were slaves to another Yi minority group. That same year, Samuel Pollard, an English missionary sent by God to China from Britain, prayed to know God's will for him.

One morning Pollard found many Big Flowerly Miao standing outside his door requesting: "Teach us how to read and write." In the beginning, there were only 10 people. Then the group grew to 30, then 100, and later to more than 1,000. Pollard's house could no longer hold so many people, so he moved his missionary station from Zhaotong to Shimenkan—a place the locals described as so poor that even a worm would not live there.

Using 5£, Pollard led the Miao, with their desire for God's love and light, to build a simple church called *Wu Bang Fang* (Five Pound Room). Five thousand people were baptized at the completion of the church building. Not only that, he also built a Miao village school, invented a written language for the Miao and translated the Bible into their language. The Miao script has since been recognized by the United Nations as the "Pollard Script" and is still in use today.

Pollard promoted education in the Miao villages. In Wumeng, he constructed the first up-to-standard Chinese running track and field stadium, the first swimming pool with separate male and female lanes, the first football team, the first leprosarium in the nation, and the first hospital in southwest China. Most important was the general rise in educational level. A census done after the war in 1946 indicated that out of 100,000 Han, 2.19 were college students. Out of 100,000 Miao, 10 were college students (primarily from Shimenkan district).¹



Lang De by Michael Mooney via Flickr



Samuel Pollard's memorial by Mr. ZhiHuang

In July 1915, a terrible typhoid epidemic spread to Shimenkan and many Miao came down with the disease. A cave on a cliff under the school was used as a temporary quarantine and treatment center. There Pollard watched over and cared for the patients. Unfortunately, in the process he was also infected. He insisted on saving the limited supply of medicine for the villagers and did not get well. On September 15, he passed away at the age of 51. The villagers donated money for the construction of his grave that sits on a small hill overlooking Shimenkan. Since then, the older folks in Shimenkan have asked to be buried beside Pastor Pollard.

What motivated Pollard to willingly leave home for a remote Miao village that resulted in the enlivening of a people? What caused Pollard to give up his life willingly? Pollard and God had a very intimate relationship, so, through God's eyes, he saw the preciousness of the souls of the Miao over his own life.

Dr. Rodin speaks about the four dimensions of relationships for which we are created.² They are: our relationship to God; to our self; to our neighbor; and to creation. When we live as faithful stewards, we are free to have healthy relationship in all four dimensions.

Pollard showed by his life of selfless service that there is only one kingdom—God's kingdom. He was the ultimate steward serving God with all his heart and mind—a free steward.

In 2000, three years after becoming a new believer, God called me into a unique ministry in southwest China—to found and manage an international, Chinese, cultural exchange, arts center. This center has two galleries, a stage for live performances, and a café that allows people to sit and converse freely. It serves those in the arts or those who are accomplished academics who erroneously believe that arts and culture are the highest religion of the masses. It also serves those who believe they are worthless because they come from the lowest social strata of minority groups.

At my cultural center, we believe that God has absolute authority and sovereignty over all areas of life. Genesis chapters one and two reveal that the origin of arts and culture is from God, so we established a vision of stimulating reflection on human worth and values expressed in a variety of artistic forms. Through the arts (music, dance, art, literature, and theater), the artists and audience/spectators are ultimately brought back to God. In past years, more and more artists and intellectuals have begun to reflect on the meaning of life. Many people have accepted Christ and have become Christians. We have witnessed the transformation of many hundreds, confirming that even cultural revival is part of the kingdom of God.

In my sixteen years of ministry I have seen God's greatness and mercy. The entire experience of knowing God is like Jacob's wrestling with God and holding onto him at the river Jabbok. Though a mark was left on his body, Jacob could only hold onto God and surrender to him. The basis for our experience of knowing God more fully is our understanding and desire for growth in the four dimensions mentioned above.

A second teaching that is important for us regards two kingdoms. We tend to describe life as one-kingdom people, where everything belongs

to God, and he is Lord over everything in our lives. However, there is another kingdom—the one we build for ourselves. In our kingdom, we put the things we like to control. Here is where we play lord instead of allowing God to be in charge. It is the source of our fears and anxieties. We must stop playing lord over our own kingdoms and return to being one-kingdom people.

When we are fully confident of the total victory Christ secured on the cross, we can leave our kingdom and throne to become part of God's kingdom. Then we will be stewards in body and mind; we will walk with God, willingly and joyfully serving only one master, the triune God.

Where the master is, there the faithful steward is also. A faithful steward knows his master's mind and freely uses all the resources entrusted to him to grow his master's business. Then, at harvest time, master and steward rejoice together.

Pollard and other faithful stewards of God are like the cloud of witnesses surrounding us. We are to lay aside all the encumbrances that so easily entangle us and work diligently until all God's creatures have freedom and exalt him with resounding praises. (see Hebrews 12:1)

¹ Chen HaoWau (陈浩武) quoted in "Beijing University's Chen HaoWu: What is the Contribution Today of Shimenkan to the Chinese Church and Society?" (北大陈浩武：石门坎给今天中国教会和社会带来什么启发) by Wang Lu De (王璐德), July 15, 2014 *Christian Times* (基督时报), <http://www.christiantimes.cn/news/14765/>北大陈浩武：石门坎给今天中国教会和社会带来什么启发？

² R. Scott Rodin, *The Steward Leader*. InterVarsity Press, 2010.

Helen Wu (Wu Yuerong) came to Christ 18 years ago and immediately began serving in the church. In 1999, with a Swedish missionary, she established the Christian Cultural Center TCG Nordica www.tcgnordica.com in Kunming where she and her husband live. For the past 13 years, she has been the general manager at this center that has worked towards stimulating reflection on human worth expressed as various art forms. As young artists came to Christ, she established the Chinese Christian Artists Ministry (CCAM) to aid them in their Christian growth. Currently, she is also studying theology.



Church in Shimenkan the area where Samuel Pollard served by Mr. ZhiHuang

The Joy of Generosity

By Howard Dayton

Few areas of the Christian life can be more misunderstood and frustrating than that of generosity. My entire perspective changed after learning what the Bible actually teaches—suddenly I *wanted* to be generous. But then I was frustrated by another problem: an unlimited number of needs versus my limited resources. How should I decide where to give? My church, the hungry poor, campus and prison ministries, missionary efforts, radio and television programs, and many other vital ministries needed financial support.

Attitudes in Giving

God evaluates our actions on the basis of our attitudes. John 3:16* reveals his attitude toward giving: “For God so *loved* the world, that he *gave* his only begotten Son” (emphasis added). Note the sequence. Because God loved, he gave. Because God is love, he is also a giver. He set the example of generosity motivated by love.

An attitude of love in giving is crucial: “If I give all my possessions to feed the poor...but do not have love, it profits me nothing.” (1 Corinthians 13:3) What could be more commendable than giving everything to the poor? However, generosity without an attitude of love provides no benefit to the giver.

In God’s economy, the attitude is more important than the amount. Jesus emphasized this in Matthew 23:23: “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter without neglecting the former.” The Pharisees had been careful to give the correct amount, but Christ rebuked them because of their attitude. He looks past the amount of the gift to the heart of the giver.

We can consistently give with love only when we recognize that we are giving to the Lord himself. We see an example of this in Numbers 18:24: “The tithes of the sons of Israel... they offer as an offering *to the Lord*” (emphasis added). If giving is merely to a church, a ministry, or a needy person, it is only charity; giving to the Lord is always an act of worship, expressing love and gratitude to our Creator, Savior, and faithful Provider. Whenever we put something in the offering plate, we should remind ourselves that our gift goes to the Lord himself.

In addition to giving with love, we are to give cheerfully. “Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” (2 Corinthians 9:7) The original Greek word for cheerful is *hilarios*, which is translated into the English word hilarious. What a picture that creates! We are to be joyful givers.

When was the last time you saw hilarity when the offering plate was passed? The atmosphere more often reminds us of a patient in the dentist chair awaiting a painful extraction. So how do we develop this hilarity in our giving? Consider the early churches of Macedonia: “We want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity.” (2 Corinthians 8:1-2)

How did the Macedonians, who were in terrible circumstances, “severe trial,” and “extreme poverty,” still manage to give with “overflowing joy”? The answer is in verse five: “They gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God’s will.” The key to cheerful giving is to yield ourselves to Christ, and ask him to direct how much he wants us to give. That places us in a position to experience the advantages of giving with the proper attitude.

Stop and examine yourself. What is your attitude toward giving?

Advantages of Giving

Gifts obviously benefit the recipient. The church continues its ministry, the hungry are fed, the naked are clothed, and missionaries are sent. But in God’s economy, gifts given with the proper attitude benefit the giver more than the receiver. “Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that he himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’” (Acts 20:35) As we examine Scripture, we find that the giver benefits in four significant areas.

1. An increase in intimacy

Above all else, giving directs our heart to Christ. Matthew 6:21 tells us: “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” This is why it is necessary to give each gift to the person of Jesus Christ: it draws our heart to him. Do you remember the faithful steward in the parable of the talents, and his eventual reward? “Enter into the joy of your Master.” (Matthew 25:21) Giving is one of your responsibilities as a steward, and the more faithful you are in fulfilling your responsibilities, the more you can enter into the joy of knowing Christ more closely. Nothing in life compares with that.

2. An increase in character

Our heavenly Father wants us—his children—to conform to the image of his son. The character of Christ is that of an unselfish giver. Unfortunately, humans are selfish by nature. One essential way we become conformed to Christ is by regular giving. Someone once said, “Giving is not God’s way of raising money; it is God’s way of raising people into the likeness of his son.”

3. An increase in heaven

Matthew 6:20 reads: “Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal.” The Lord tells us that heaven has its own “First National Bank,” where we can invest for eternity. Paul wrote: “Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account.” (Philippians 4:17) Each of us has an account in heaven that we will be able to enjoy for eternity. Although it is true that we “can’t take it with us when we die,” Scripture teaches that we can make deposits to our heavenly account before we die.



[Snow Covered Temple of Heaven, Beijing by i a walsh via Flickr.](#)

4. An increase on earth

Many people have a hard time believing that giving results in material blessings flowing back to the giver. Time and again, however, we encounter that very principle in the pages of Scripture. Consider Proverbs 11:24-25: “There is one who scatters, and yet increases all the more, and there is one who withholds what is justly due, and yet it results only in want. The generous man will be prosperous, and he who waters will himself be watered.”

Examine 2 Corinthians 9:6-11: “He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.... God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed.... Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness; you will be enriched in everything for all liberality.”

These verses clearly teach that giving results in a material increase: “...will also reap bountifully ...always having all sufficiency in everything...may have an abundance...will supply and multiply your seed...you will be enriched in everything.”

But note carefully why the Lord returns a material increase: “Always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed...will supply and multiply your seed for sowing...you will be enriched in everything for all liberality.” As shown in the diagram below, the Lord produces an increase so that we may give more and have our needs met at the same time.



Study the cycle of giving. One reason the Lord reveals that we can anticipate a material increase is because he wants us to recognize that he is behind it. God has chosen to be invisible, but he wants us to experience his reality.

When we give, we should do so with a sense of expectation—anticipating an increase from the Lord even though we have no idea how or when he may choose to provide it. Our experience has shown him to be very creative! Remember, givers experience the advantages of giving only when they give cheerfully and with love—not when the motive is just to get.

Amount to Give

Let’s survey what the Bible says about how much to give. Before the Old Testament law, there were two instances of giving a known amount. In Genesis 14:20, Abraham gave ten percent—a tithe—after the rescue of his nephew Lot. And in Genesis 28:22, Jacob promised to give the Lord a tenth of all his possessions if God brought him safely through his journey. With the Law came the requirement of the tithe. The Lord condemns the children of Israel in Malachi 3:8-9 for not tithing properly: “Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing me! But you say, ‘How have we robbed you?’ In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you!”

In addition to the tithe, there were various offerings. The Lord also made special provisions for the poor. Every seven years all debts were forgiven; every fifty years the land was returned to the original land-owning families. Special harvesting rules allowed the poor to glean behind the harvesters.

God made another significant provision for the poor in Deuteronomy 15:7-8: “If there is a poor man with you, one of your brothers, in any of your towns in your land which the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart, nor close your hand from your poor brother; but you shall freely open your hand to him, and shall generously lend him sufficient for his need in whatever he lacks.” Even under the law, the extent of one’s giving was not to be limited by a locked-in, fixed percentage but was to be adjusted by surrounding needs. The New Testament teaches that we are to give in proportion to the material blessing we receive. It also commends sacrificial giving.

What I like about the tithe is that it is systematic, and the amount of the gift is easy to compute. The danger of the tithe is that it can be treated as simply “another bill” to be paid. If we fall into that sort of attitude or rut, we will not be in a position to receive God’s richest blessings. Another potential danger of tithing is the assumption that once we have tithed, we have fulfilled all our obligations to give. For many Christians, the tithe should be the beginning of their giving, not the limit. And we should never, never close our hearts to the obvious needs we encounter in our path through life.

How much should you give? To answer this question, first give yourself to the Lord. Submit yourself to him. Earnestly seek his will for you concerning giving. Ask him to help you obey his leading. I am convinced that we should tithe as a minimum and then give over and above the tithe as the Lord prospers or directs us.

*All scripture quotations are taken from the New International Version of the Bible.

Howard Dayton was the founder of Crown Ministries which later merged with Larry Burkett’s Christian Financial Concepts to form Crown Financial Ministries. As Dayton served for 22 years as the unpaid volunteer CEO, the organization taught over 50 million people in 88 countries. In 2009 he founded Compass: Finances God’s Way that uses small group studies to teach God’s financial principles. He is an author and hosts the radio programs MoneyWise and Hey Howard. Howard and his wife, Beverly, live in Orlando, Florida.

View from the Wall

Christian Generosity from a Chinese Cultural Perspective

By Eric Lee

As we consider the topic of how Chinese believers might learn biblical generosity, there are four incorrect assumptions that we must overturn. First, is that poverty prevents Chinese believers from learning generosity; second, that prosperity helps Chinese believers learn generosity; third, obligation is the best way to teach Chinese believers about stewardship or generosity, and finally, that it is best they first be saved and then taught generosity later.



雪! by 艾文 Wisse via Flickr.

Poverty and Generosity

Does poverty prevent Chinese believers from learning generosity? No! Many Chinese people experience severe poverty. Many pastors suffer extreme poverty because it is illegal for them to accept a salary from their congregations, and most congregations wrongly believe that the poorer the pastor, the more spiritual they are. Poverty actually makes many believers more generous. When people lose all their material goods, they experience the overwhelming value of knowing Christ and become richer spiritually. This causes them to be more generous with the fewer material possessions they have remaining.

The surprising and generous way in which God worked in the Macedonian church fully applies to the persecuted Chinese believers. Paul observed, "Fierce troubles came down...pushing them to the very limit. The trial exposed their true colors: They were incredibly happy, though desperately poor. The pressure triggered something totally unexpected: an outpouring of pure and generous gifts. I was there and saw it for myself. They gave offerings of whatever they could—far more than they could afford!—pleading for the privilege of helping out in the relief of poor Christians." (*The Message*, 2 Corinthians 8:2-4) This is the best pattern for Chinese believers to follow in regards to generosity.

It was reported that after a major flood in China, local Christians gave away the relief food and blankets they received rather than meet their own needs. This unselfish generosity deeply touched many unsaved neighbors. The resulting church growth was so phenomenal that the local authorities banned Christians from traveling to the neighboring villages to redistribute supplies.

When John, a prisoner, asked his wife to bring him a winter coat, he also instructed her to get enough coats for all the inmates, most of whom were on death row. When the prison guard saw the winter coats being distributed to all the inmates, he said in total amazement: "I have never seen anything like this in my entire life. People always focus on getting, not giving." Through generosity, John had the privilege of leading many to Christ.

Christian prisoners in North Korea are known to save portions of their rice ration in order to give to other inmates. It is meant not only to lessen their hunger, but also to soften their hearts to accept Christ as their eternal Bread of Life. They call the saved portion "holy rice."

Interestingly, poverty and persecution may be the best tutors to teach Chinese believers regarding biblical generosity.

Prosperity and Generosity

Does recent prosperity in China help Chinese Christians be more generous? No. People who have lived through years of poverty usually cannot stand the test of sudden prosperity. Christian leaders are often the worst. Church leaders who willingly suffered poverty and persecution for the Lord often turn greedy and begin to hoard when suddenly given opportunities to handle financial resources. This is due to an inner sense of "entitlement," which had been suppressed for years, that suddenly finds opportunity to rise to the surface. They did not mind suffering and doing without when the environment required it and they were used to hardship. However, once there is prosperity to be enjoyed, they demand their "long-overdue share," totally forgetting that their reward is to be claimed in heaven.

We were saddened to learn that our years of well-intended generous "investments" in China often resulted in over-dependency and entitlement. To assume that because Chinese believers are now more prosperous, they will be more generous, would be totally naive.

At one time, I was personally entrusted to deliver 6,000RMB (US\$960) to a network leader who had spent twenty years in prison and at that time had total control of a church network. The funds, a donation from overseas supporters who had saved their pensions and overtime pay, were designated for the purchase of cassette tapes for duplication and distribution. This leader took the money and had the audacity to purchase a suite for himself and gifts for his two mistresses. When he was finally exposed and confronted, he had no remorse at all claiming he deserved these things after all his prison suffering that was "supposedly" for Christ.

Paul aptly exhorts us saying: "Put yourself aside, and help others get ahead. Don't be obsessed with getting your own advantage.... Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself. He had equal status with God but didn't think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what.... When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became human!... He didn't claim special privileges. Instead, he lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death.... Because of that obedience, God lifted him high and honored him far beyond anyone or anything...." (*The Message*, Philippians 2:3-11)

At age 79, Wang Ming Dao was released from prison nearly blind and very deaf. Many offered to relocate him to America for medical treatment and well deserved rest. Mindful of his earlier fall, he declined all offers and remained in China wanting to strengthen other believers who were facing persecution. He lived out what he wrote earlier: "From a man with a selfish heart, any terrible act can emerge. Anyone looking for selfish gain can lie, cheat, practice evil and plot for his self interest. The majority of sins in this world issue from people who are out for selfish gain." Wang Ming Dao was truly generous. He gave away his chances to gain physical comfort to provide other believers spiritual encouragement so they could victoriously persevere despite persecution. Not claiming privileges but freely giving them up for the benefit of others is the fundamental Christ-likeness which is pure generosity.

The best remedy for overcoming entitlement is Christ's example of absolute self-forgetfulness lived out in the lives of leaders. As Chinese

believers see this in the lives of their leaders, they will learn generosity.

Earthly Examples and Biblical Generosity

Is there a clear cut earthly example that can help explain the concept of biblical generosity to Chinese believers? No. Some suggest the concept of "filial piety" which is a virtue of respect for one's father, elders, and ancestors. It means to be good to and take care of one's parents; to engage in good conduct not just towards parents but also outside the home so as to bring a good name to one's parents and ancestors. It is to perform the duties of one's job well so as to obtain the material means to support parents as well as carry out sacrifices to the ancestors. Children are not to be rebellious but to show love, respect, and support. They are to ensure male heirs, uphold fraternity among brothers, wisely advise their parents—including dissuading them from moral unrighteousness—display sorrow for their sickness and death, and carry out sacrifices after their death. It is a social cycle designed to preserve Chinese culture.

In filial piety, the original provider and protector (the father) eventually becomes the recipient of provision and protection. The original recipient of benefits (the son) later plays the role of the giver of care and resources. On the contrary, in biblical stewardship, the Provider and Protector is eternally the same Person. By grace, the creatures are invited to participate in God's plan to experience the incredible love of their Father.

Some try to press the fact that because God created everything he ultimately owns everything and we own nothing. I also believe that God created everything, owns everything, and can demand of us anything, at anytime, in any fashion. God demanded that Abraham kill, cut up, and burn Isaac. He is fully entitled to it. However, I prefer not to use this truth to teach generosity to Chinese believers. Rather, in Philemon 8 and 9, Paul says that although in Christ he could be bold and order Philemon to do what he ought to do, he prefers to appeal to him on the basis of love. This is my approach.

God not only "owns" everything, he also "gave" us everything freely including his son's life for our salvation. This is a better truth to teach Chinese believers generosity. I can never forget a father who rescued his young daughter from drowning and used this action to force her into a life of "slavery." The daughter was not allowed to have a boyfriend or get married. She was forbidden to have any personal life except to serve her father. She obliged because she had to, but with extreme bitterness in her heart. We surely do not want to even hint that our Heavenly Father is demanding all believers to render dutiful submission in stewardship and giving.

Jesus was generous with his glory. He became flesh and sacrificed all so that we might share in his glory. He was willing to share his "heavenly living room" with us all, while some of us might be hesitant to house displaced refugees. Jesus gladly shed every drop of his blood while some of us might be hesitant to give one pint of our blood. He generously used a towel to wipe the disciples' feet while we might be unwilling to wash the feet of our aging parents. Jesus was generous with his forgiveness, patience, love, time, friendship—with everything. May we get to know him so closely that his generosity will overflow from our lives.

"We can understand someone dying for a person worth dying for, and we can understand how someone good and noble could inspire us to selfless sacrifice. But God put his love on the line for us by offering his Son in sacrificial death while we were of no use whatever to him." (*The Message*, Romans 5:6-8)

Like the concept of the Trinity, there is no easy earthly example of biblical generosity. We just have to illustrate and demonstrate it until it is clearly understood within the Chinese context.

Salvation or Generosity: Which Should Be First?

Since it is so difficult to teach Chinese Christians about stewardship, should they be saved first and then taught generosity later? Never! The Chinese church has shied away from teaching the subjects of biblical giving and stewardship for a number of reasons such as: faith-based mission groups discouraged mentioning finances; business pursuits are considered secular and not spiritual; making money is sinful in the thinking of some; Christian workers cannot legally be paid a salary; talking about finances in church is taboo; businessmen are considered to be less spiritual than full-time Christian workers. As a result, when it comes to this all-important subject, most believers are ignorant while pastors are tongue-tied. Years of silence make it almost impossible for the average pastor to even bring up the subject of stewardship let alone give it a biblically sound presentation.

I heard one pastor say: "Christian maturity takes a lifetime. The subject of biblical generosity will take so long to learn. Let us just get them saved first; then, we can take time to teach them about generosity, one small step at a time." I am strongly against this. By separating salvation and generosity we destroy the gospel. Paul explained this truth saying: "You are familiar with the generosity of our Master, Jesus Christ. Rich as he was, he gave it all away for us—in one stroke he became poor and we became rich." (*The Message*, 2 Corinthians 8:9)

Salvation is not God giving free grace to us sinners so that we can be rich. The true gospel is God offering his free saving grace to us in order that through us all others can hear the gospel and become rich. The focus is not our receiving (prosperity) but rather, after receiving, passing it on (generosity). First, we must be generous with the gospel we have received and then become generous with all our possessions as the means of giving away the gospel. Those who are not willing to share what they were given are not real followers of Christ.

When Jesus fed five thousand men, he blessed the food and then handed it to the disciples. But the hungry disciples did not immediately eat the food. They could see over their shoulders five thousand hungry people. Even more importantly, they knew that their master meant to feed the entire crowd not just them. They served the crowd, and with baskets of food left over, I'm sure they did not go away hungry. Real followers of Jesus participate in feeding the entire crowd, not just themselves.

When the Good Samaritan saw a wounded traveler, he concluded that both he and the wounded man should benefit from his resources. Initially, when thieves had seen the traveler, they concluded that only one person should benefit from the traveler's resources, and it had to be them. The religious leaders did not want to use their resources to help the traveler but kept them for themselves, so in this, they are exactly the same as the thieves. Biblical generosity consists in not keeping all of one's resource for one's self, but rather in a willingness to use one's resources to be a part of God's generosity and blessing of others.

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Peoples of China

The Church in Yunnan Province

By Ge Jun

A small church of twenty-plus members in Yunnan province collected 246.50 RMB (about 36 USD) during a recent Sunday offering as their relief fund for one of our national partners who has a ministry team in the recent earthquake epicenter in Yushu, Qinghai province. While this may not sound like much, let me tell you more about this faithful little church.

This small church is located in a mountainous area, which itself is in great poverty and in dire need of help. The only crop that grows locally is potatoes. Most families live off two meals of potatoes each day. The average annual income per household is 200 RMB, less than 30 USD. This means that this small church of twenty or so members has offered up *more than a whole year of one household income* in this one Sunday service alone to help people in need thousands of miles away, people whom they have never met.

This is a church filled with joyful givers despite their own poverty. They are living examples of 2 Corinthians 8:1–5, where their “...extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity”! This is a church whose members give what they have as the widow’s mite, each person coming forward with small bills of ½ RMB and 1 RMB (7 cents and 14 cents USD). Nevertheless, their offering is valued as kingdom treasure in Jesus’ eyes, which God will take and multiply a hundredfold. God certainly honors such kinds of faith in action. We are praying that China becomes more missional and giving, just like this little Yunnan church. May God bless you with a giving heart as well!

This article is an excerpt from “The Church in Yunnan Province” by Ge Jun in Christ-Centered Generosity, R. Scott Rodin, editor, Kingdom Life Publishing, 2015. Used with permission.



Mingjia Zhou via Flickr.

Resource Corner

Two Stewardship Resources

[50-Day Journey to Freedom](#)

An online course in English
(Available in Chinese in 2016)



In this engaging study you will be challenged and inspired to walk more closely with Christ in all four relationship areas of life:

- with God
- with yourself
- with your neighbor
- with creation

Through lessons, teaching, Bible study, self-examination, and journaling you will walk the road to greater freedom as a faithful steward. Find more information or enroll at: The Steward's Journey at <http://thestewardsjourney.com/training/>.

[The Good and Faithful Steward](#)

A Chinese-Language Stewardship Blog at <http://blog.sina.com.cn/zxhaoguanjia>

This indigenously run Chinese-language blog site features posts on biblical stewardship and generosity. Topics range from stewarding influence and finances to family relationships, gifts, and talents. Posts are drawn from a wide range of sources from inside and outside China.

Users can also join *The Good and Faithful Steward* on WeChat (ID: 忠心好管家) and Weibo at <http://weibo.com/zxhaoguanjia>.

Christian Generosity from a Chinese Cultural Perspective

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"Toward evening the disciples approached him. 'We're out in the country and it's getting late. Dismiss the people so they can go to the villages and get some supper.' But Jesus said, 'There is no need to dismiss them. You give them supper.' 'All we have are five loaves of bread and two fish,' they said. Jesus said, 'Bring them here.' Then he had the people sit on the grass. He took the five loaves and two fish, lifted his face to heaven in prayer, blessed, broke, and gave the bread to the disciples. The disciples then gave the food to the congregation. They all ate their fill. They gathered twelve baskets of leftovers. About five thousand were fed." (*The Message*, Matthew 14:15–21)

Salvation is possible because Jesus decided to share his life, his glory, his all. As Christ followers, when we practice generosity through our actions, we show to others a more complete gospel.

Eric Lee is from Canada and has been involved in training Christian Leaders for over 30 years.

Book Review

From Transaction to Transformation: Rediscovering the Biblical Foundations of Fund Raising

Reviewed by Brent Fulton

The Sower: Redefining the Ministry of Raising Kingdom Resources by R. Scott Rodin and Gary G. Hoag. ECFA Press, 2010, 112 pages. ISBN-10: 0979990793; ISBN-13: 978-0979990793; hardcover, \$19.95, Kindle, \$9.95 at Amazon.



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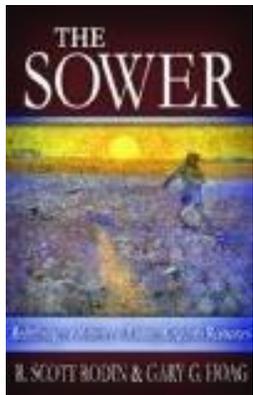
Written for pastors and organizational leaders tasked with raising funds for the ministries they represent, *The Sower* provides a refreshing and somewhat counterintuitive approach to the ministry of fund development.

In their introduction to the book, coauthors Scott Rodin and Gary Hoag, both seasoned fund development professionals, write: “For too long there has been too little said about how we should be raising money in the kingdom of God. Secular approaches were adopted without question by Christian organizations and ministries. As a result, while we may have had some success in raising money, we have failed to raise up godly stewards.”

In response, Rodin and Hoag propose a movement away from fund development that is focused on “closing the deal” and toward developing the hearts of people who are rich toward God. This shift requires that we reorient our view of fund raising, seeing it not as a process of reaping financial increase for God’s work but rather a process of sowing into the lives of God’s stewards. Their challenge is a much-needed reminder that it is God who ultimately gives the increase.

Rodin and Hoag lay out the biblical foundation for faithful sowing in three parts.

First, they take us through the journey from transaction to transformation. The focus here is on the steward’s spiritual development, not on his or her willingness to give.



The authors point out that much of fund development work today focuses inordinately on *doing*, as if it is entirely up to the fund-raiser to produce the intended results. They invite those involved in fund-raising to examine their own hearts; if our work is ultimately about developing hearts of generosity in others, we must ask whether we ourselves have prioritized the work of God in our own lives. In the authors’ words, “God is primarily concerned with the transformation of our hearts rather than the transaction of our business.”

They next contrast the bondage of a “two kingdom” life with the freedom of living as a “one-kingdom” steward. The key here is helping followers of Christ move from playing the owner to assuming their rightful stewardship role in God’s kingdom. The authors examine the four levels of relationship that were broken in the fall and subsequently won back through the redeeming work of Christ. Although our relationship with creation (quite literally, our “stuff”) is often where our desire to be owners becomes most apparent, this same desire for ownership can sabotage our relationships with God, with ourselves, and with others. The question for those engaged in raising funds is whether they are perpetuating an ownership mentality among those whom they serve, or whether they are helping them to become faithful stewards in all areas of life.

Finally, Rodin and Hoag ask whether we are encouraging giving out of a sense of legal obligation or out of a sense of joy. They close this section with a set of daily spiritual disciplines to help those engaged in fund-raising put these biblical principles into practice.

In the second half of the book, Rodin and Hoag use the metaphor of an almanac to offer “seasonal advice” for those who are called to sow into the lives of God’s stewards. Winter, for example, is a time for preparation; spring, for sowing; summer, for cultivation. In each section the authors contrast biblical steward-raising with secular fund-raising. They detail in practical terms the activities to be done in each season, and they point out the pitfalls associated with the work of each.

Throughout these seasons there is an emphasis not just on raising funds but on inviting God’s stewards into greater faithfulness in all areas of their lives, which will likely translate into greater engagement with God’s work, including the ministry being represented.

As China becomes a more prosperous nation, Chinese believers increasingly find themselves in a position to steward greater financial resources. Traditionally there has been a dearth of teaching on this topic in the Chinese church. While it is assumed that finances are needed for the Lord’s work, little is said from a biblical perspective about how this financial support is to be developed. As a result the default in Christian circles has often been to resort to secular techniques or to treat raising money as a necessary evil.

In addition to the assumption that talking about money is “unspiritual,” there are also the culturally engrained assumptions that “money stays in the family” and that it is primarily those who have great wealth who are expected to be generous.

The Sower provides a useful starting point for facing these challenges with biblical truth. In the hands of pastors, Christian teachers, and business leaders, *The Sower* has the potential to turn what is often viewed as an uncomfortable or unfamiliar topic into an opportunity for great spiritual growth and blessing.

For information on obtaining *The Sower* in simplified Chinese, please write to info@chinasource.org.

Brent Fulton is the president of ChinaSource and the editor of the ChinaSource Quarterly.