

HOLY CURRENCY EXCHANGE

101 Stories, Songs, Actions, and Visions of
Missional and Sustainable Ministries

Eric H. F. Law



CHALICE
P R E S S

ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI

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Acknowledgments

As an author, I am always apprehensive about creating a model of ministry and having to put it down on paper, as I did with the “cycle of blessings” from my last book, *Holy Currencies: Six Blessings for Sustainable and Missional Ministries*. I will wonder: Have I tested the model enough to know that it really works in different contexts? Have I missed anything that is crucial to the comprehensiveness of the model? Luckily, I have had many occasions to continue to work with the material with local churches and ministries since the book was published. Yes, the model continues to work. And, yes, there is more to learn and explore with this resource. The stories, actions, and visions in this book are the results of the exchanges with the good and faithful people who invested their currencies of time and money to attend Holy Currencies workshops.

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My gratitude, as always, goes to the staff at Chalice Press, especially Brad Lyons who convinced me to write another Holy Currency book. I am always grateful for their openness to let me include unconventional materials in my books.

Preface

One way to get attention on the Internet is to string words together that are not commonly used in everyday language. This technique works because people can find you simply by typing these unlikely couplings of words into a search engine, such as Google, Yahoo, or Bing. It has been about two years since the book *Holy Currencies* was published. I had been using the term “Holy Currencies” for about three years before that in my blog, *The Sustainist*, and in workshops I have given across the United States and Canada. When I Google “holy currencies” today, I discover pages and pages of references to this two-word phrase, the majority of these references directly connected to me, the Kaleidoscope Institute, and the book. I was also pleasantly surprised to read sermons, study guides, articles on missional ministries, success stories of missional programs, gracious invitations, diagrams, stewardship addresses, and stewardship packets based on the cycle of blessings model as presented in *Holy Currencies*.

The words “holy” and “currencies” do not usually go together, and that is precisely why I put them together—perhaps initially for shock value, which invites people to pay attention. Combining these two words also challenges our assumptions about what is holy and what is currency. The reason we don’t think these two words belong together is that most people don’t think currencies (referring to money) can be holy.

The Greek word for “holy” is ἅγιος (hagios), which means set apart for (or by) God. The word implies that the thing, person, or place that is holy is different from the world because it reflects the likeness of the nature of God. Merriam-Webster.com defines “currency” as “something that is in circulation as a medium of exchange.” Notice that the word “money” is not part of this definition. Money is just one of many media of exchange. In *Holy Currencies*, I proposed that a missional and sustainable ministry must have the dynamic exchanges of six currencies—Money, Time/Place, Gracious Leadership, Relationship, Truth, and Wellness. These currencies by themselves are not necessarily holy. In fact, they can be exchanged for many destructive actions that individuals and systems can do to people and our environment. For these currencies to be holy, they must resemble the likeness of the nature of God. We must utilize these currencies in ways that follow the pattern of God’s will and action.

Here is the big issue: being holy relies on one’s concept of the Divine. If I believe in a God who only judges and punishes, then holiness means passing judgment and punishing others. If I believe in a God who forgives, then holiness means forgiving. As a Christian, I believe in the just and

compassionate God who shows me the pattern of God's will and action in the person of Jesus. At the heart of holy currencies is the consistent choice to exchange our resources according to God's will, following in Jesus' footsteps.

Where did Jesus spend his time, and what was exchanged for his currency of time and place? What was Jesus' relational network and what were the currency exchanges for these relationships? How did Jesus speak the truth, and what did the currency of truth bring to him and others around him in return? How did Jesus manage Sabbath, and for what did his spiritual wellness prepare him? What was the pattern of exchange when Jesus talked about money?

We all have resources—time, place, leadership, relationship, truth, wellness, and money. What makes these resources holy is a dynamic process of exchanging them to empower the cycle of blessings that sustains communities. This book captures real life stories of these holy currency exchanges, most of which emerged out of Christian communities. Some of these stories are not specifically Christian, but I consider them holy because they follow the divine patterns of holy currency exchange.

This book also offers innovative ideas for holy currency exchanges—some of which have never been tried. These ideas are dreams or visions of what can happen if we dare to follow the divine pattern of holy currency exchange. Some stories and ideas are local, in the sense that they address how to use resources locally. Other stories and ideas are global, addressing broader concerns, such as the wellness and truth of the environment, and of national and international communities. Along the way, I provide songs and poems to open your minds, hearts, and spirits to live into the cycle of blessings.

"Holy" and "currencies" may not go together in our minds initially. It is our choice to make our resources holy by exchanging them for things that are of God's will. *What resources are you setting aside to make holy? What stories can you tell about how you have practiced the cycle of blessings?*

I am sure if you type "holy currencies" into your preferred search engine by the time this book is printed, you will find more stories of holy currency exchanges in addition to those included in this book.

Eric H. F. Law

April 2015

Prelude



Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow

Praise God from whom all blessings flow
 Circling through earth so all may grow
 Vanquishing fear so all may give
 Widening Grace so all my live

Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow

Principal Canon

C G Am Em

Praise God from whom all bless - ings flow;

F C F G⁷₂

Circ - ling through earth so all may grow;

C G Am Em

Van - quish - ing fear so all may give;

F C 1.2.3. F G⁷ 4. F G⁷ C

Wid - en - ing grace so all may live. all may live.

Secondary canon

G Am Em F

Circ - ling through earth; Van - quish - ing fear;

C F G⁷ C

1



What's in a Name?

In the Western Christian tradition, January 1 is the feast of the Holy Name, celebrating when Jesus was given his name in the traditional Jewish naming ceremony. January 1 is also my birthday, when I was given the name “Hung-Fat”—a transliteration of my Chinese name written on my birth certificate. Yes, this is where my middle initials, H.F., came from.

鴻
發

The word 鴻 (pronounced hòng) means overflowing. The word 發 (pronounced fā) means expanding, and is a word often used to apply to money, as in the new year well-wishing phrase, “Gong Chi Fā Chai.” This phrase literally means “congratulation expanding money.” My family was poor when I was born and I suppose my parents gave me this name hoping I would bring prosperity to the family. For similar reasons, many Chinese businesses such as restaurants and hardware stores have the same name.

I used to be embarrassed by my name. However, over the years I have learned to appreciate it, because I have re-visioned what it means for me and my life-work. The word 鴻 is a compound word consisting of the words for river (江) and bird (鳥). The image I have is a scene in which fishermen are pulling in a net so overflowing with fish that hovering birds can share the abundance. As for 發, the image I have is of yeast in bread dough causing it to rise to the right shape before it is baked into bread for our nourishment. I have redefined my name as a symbol of living in abundance. My purpose in life is to expand and share the resources given to me and not hold onto them out of fear.

We have different relationships with our names at different times in our lives. I wonder how Jesus related to his name, which means “God delivers.” I wonder how he might have struggled with living up to its meaning as he was growing up. I wonder how his name helped him resolve to live his life and carry out his ministry the way he did.

I invite you to ponder your own name—its meaning, the circumstances around how you were named, how it shaped you, how you struggled with it, and how you might reclaim it, re-vision it, or even change it for the coming year.

When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. And

because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God. (Galatians 4:4–7)

Name *A Dialogue*

Invite members of your community to gather and learn about each other’s names.

1. Invite participants to spend time writing down:
 - My name
 - Meaning of my name or a story associated with my name
 - What have been my relationships with my name over time?
2. Invite participants to share.
3. Invite participants to reflect on what they have heard by completing the following sentences:
 - I noticed...
 - I wonder...

2



Song of Simeon

When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, [the parents of Jesus] brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord”),... (Luke 2:22–23)

In the traditional ceremony, Jesus was being designated as holy—set apart for God. But there was something special about this child. A man named Simeon, guided by the Spirit, came into the temple, took the child in his arms, and praised God, saying,

“Lord, now you have set your servant free
to go in peace as you have promised;
For these eyes of mine have seen the Savior,
whom you have prepared for all the world to see:
A Light to enlighten the nations,
and the glory of your people Israel.”
(Luke 2:29–32 as translated in The Book of Common Prayer)

There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher... At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. (Luke 2:36a, 38)

Of course, Jesus’ parents were amazed by what was being said about him. The exchange of Jesus’ life was going to be the transformation of his people and the peoples of the world. The exchanges were gracious leadership, truth, wellness, and relationship based on unconditional love for all.

When we dedicate our lives to be holy, we should not expect anything less than that which Jesus exchanged for his holy living, dying, and rising. We may not know all the ramifications at first, but if we stay on the course of this holy exchange, we will see, as Simeon and Anna saw, that a child dedicated to be holy will be a catalyst for local and global transformation.

The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him. (Luke 2:40)

Song of Simeon

Principal Theme

Mmm. God, you now have set your ser-vant free
(Lord),

Mmm. to go in peace as you have pro - mised.

Tema principal, en español

A - ho-ra des-pi-des Se - ñor a tu sier-vo. Mmm. Con-

-for-me a tu pa - la-bra en paz. Mmm.

Verses: *To be sung by soloists or in a small group.*

For these eyes of mine have seen the Sav - ior, whom

you have pre-pared for the world to see; a light to en-light-en the

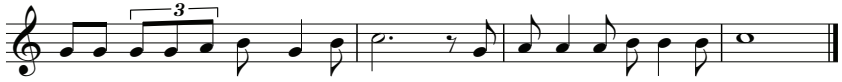
na-tions, and the glo-ry of your peo-ple Is - ra - el.

Doxology or Gloria Patri

May be sung to end the piece. Choose either text.



Praise to the ho - ly and un - di - vi - ded — Tri - ni - ty, One God: — as
Glo - ry to the Fa - ther and to the Son, and to the Ho - ly Spi - rit: as



it was in the be - gin - ning, is now, and will be for ev - er. A - men.

For Compline, begin with this theme



Guide us wak - ing, O God, and guard us sleep - ing, that a -
(Lord),



wake we may watch with Christ, and a - sleep we may rest in peace.

Add this theme in Easter Season



Al - le - lu - ia. Al - le - lu - ia.



Al - le - lu - ia. Al - le - lu - ia.

Accompaniment 1

C G/B Am C/G F D/F# G G/B

Musical notation for Accompaniment 1, first system. It shows a grand staff with treble and bass clefs. Above the treble staff are guitar chord diagrams for C, G/B, Am, C/G, F, D/F#, G, and G/B. The treble staff contains block chords for each of these chords. The bass staff contains a simple bass line with notes: C, G, F, C, G, F, G, G.

C G/B Am C/G F G C

Musical notation for Accompaniment 1, second system. It shows a grand staff with treble and bass clefs. Above the treble staff are guitar chord diagrams for C, G/B, Am, C/G, F, G, and C. The treble staff contains block chords for each of these chords. The bass staff contains a simple bass line with notes: C, G, F, C, G, G, C. The system ends with a double bar line and repeat dots.

Accompaniment 2

Musical notation for Accompaniment 2, first system. It shows a grand staff with treble and bass clefs. The treble staff has a melodic line with eighth notes and quarter notes. The bass staff has a simple bass line with quarter notes.

Musical notation for Accompaniment 2, second system. It shows a grand staff with treble and bass clefs. The treble staff has a melodic line with eighth notes and quarter notes. The bass staff has a simple bass line with quarter notes. The system ends with a double bar line and repeat dots.

Performance Note: Using these melodies, a music minister can arrange the piece in many different combinations. As an example, if this piece is used in the context of Morning or Evening Prayer, the group can begin the piece by singing the English principal theme. The group can then add the Spanish principal theme. This will become the background chant throughout the whole piece. A soloist can then sing the verses a few times, and a group can add the Doxology or Gloria Patri to end the piece. If this piece is done in the context of Compline—the traditional final prayer service of the day—the group can begin with “Guide us waking . . .” If it is the Easter season, add the “Alleluia.” After the English and Spanish principal themes are introduced, the previous two themes should gradually fade out. Then a soloist can add the verses and the Doxology or Gloria Patri. The “Alleluia” may reenter here. Then “Guide us waking . . .” is reintroduced again, while the rest of the themes fade away, leaving the group quietly singing “Guide us waking . . .” to end the piece.

Accompaniment Notes: Only the harmonic structure and the chord progression of the basic unit of each piece is given here. In order to accompany the singing, one only needs to repeat the basic unit continuously, maintaining a steady tempo.

If a guitar is used, it should always be unobtrusive, using plucked chords or arpeggios to provide a steady background of sound, avoiding staccato strums or syncopated rhythms except when called for in the piece.

In a church, the organ or another keyboard instrument will be most useful. Experienced keyboard players are encouraged to improvise on the basic unit, adding to the texture of the piece.

Instruments can be employed either playing the various parts with the congregation, or solo if the instrumentalist can improvise.

3



The Gift

At the beginning of the new year, I often hear people say with a sigh of relief, “Thank God the holidays are over!” I recall seeing frantic shoppers before Christmas trying to find the right presents for people to whom they are obligated to give gifts. If gift giving is reduced to an obligation and is measured as a commodity, I can understand how it would be a relief to be done with it until the next birthday or anniversary or Christmas.

In his now-classic book, *The Gift: Creativity and the Artist in the Modern World*, author Lewis Hyde shares stories from different cultures around the concept of exchanging gifts. He writes:

These stories present gift exchange as a companion to transformation, a sort of guardian or marker or catalyst. It is also the case that a gift may be the actual agent of change, the bearer of new life. In the simplest examples, gifts carry an identity with them, and to accept the gift amounts to incorporating the new identity.¹

According to Hyde, there are at least three obligations to gift economy—the obligation to give, the obligation to accept, and the obligation to reciprocate. In many of the cultural stories that Hyde examined, the reciprocation may not go directly back to the original giver but to a third party. Sometimes the gift is expected to keep flowing throughout the community and it may eventually return to the original giver in different forms. Hyde wrote, “[A] gift that cannot be given away ceases to be a gift. The spirit of a gift is kept alive by its constant donation.”²

For Christians, one of the greatest gifts that we receive is Jesus. To accept this gift is to incorporate a new identity embodied by the words and actions of Jesus. At the baptism of Jesus:

[J]ust as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.” (Mark 1:11)

Jesus taught us, in the Lord’s Prayer, to call God “Father.” The actual word that Jesus used was “Abba,” which was what a child would call his or her parent in the language that Jesus spoke. Jesus, as the catalyst, transforms

¹See Lewis Hyde, *The Gift: Creativity and the Artist in the Modern World* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007), 57.

²*Ibid.*, xix.

our relationship with God to that of parent-child relationship. This is the gift, the new identity. We are to reciprocate by giving this gift to others, treating them also as children of God so that the gift can be kept alive and continue to increase and flow through our communities and spread throughout the world.

I invite you to begin each morning with this mantra: "I am a beloved child of God, with whom God is well pleased." Then, as you go through the day, affirm each person you encounter (in your family, neighborhood, workplace, school, etc.) as a beloved child of God by silently saying, "You are a beloved child of God with whom God is well pleased." In some cases, it might be appropriate to say this out loud. When we give this gift to ourselves and to everyone we encounter, we become catalysts who might actually transform the world!

Gift and Identity

A Dialogue

Invite members of your community to gather and learn about each other's experiences of giving and receiving gifts:

- Invite each participant to recall a time when he/she received a gift that helped define his/her identity.
 - Describe the occasion. What was the gift?
 - Who was the giver?
 - How did this gift help you understand or define who you are?
 - What else did you gain beyond the actual gift itself in the process?
 - If you have had the occasion to give the same gift to another later in life, describe that experience as well.
- Invite participants to share their recollections.
- Invite participants to reflect on what they have heard by completing the following sentences:
 - I noticed...
 - I wonder...

4



Love First

During many of my sermons and workshops, I have often asked participants to stand up and approach at least three people and say, “You are a beloved child of God with whom God is well pleased.” This activity always seems to connect people very quickly and in meaningful ways. At one particular gathering, a man started crying and said, “No one has ever said that to me before!”

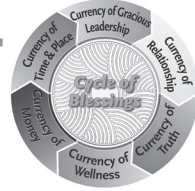
Some of us might think that love is something that we must earn—that is, we have to do something good and pleasing in order to receive love. Some of us might think that we don’t deserve such a love because we have done something wrong in the past. Some of us might think that a person who loves us unconditionally doesn’t really exist. Some of us might think that it is foolish for a person to love without any conditions, because he or she would be opening him/herself up for abuse.

Yet, Jesus talked about God as someone who loves us first unconditionally. We don’t have to earn this love. When we have made mistakes, instead of judging us, God still loves us. We change our ways, but not in order to re-earn God’s love. We change because we are loved. This love is given freely without expectation of anything in return. Whether I accept it or not, this unconditional love from God is still there—always there. To receive and accept this love is to embrace love as my core identity. I receive the gift of unconditional love, and in my gratefulness, I can’t help but share it, so others can also see it and experience it and acknowledge it.

Therefore, unconditional love is not a currency of exchange. If I trade love as a commodity and expect a return, my offer ceases to be love. Love allows me to know who I am. Love gives me the courage to give of my self and my resources. Love, therefore, is the power source, the spiritual battery that empowers the cycle of blessings. Unconditional love is the foundation of a sustainable community. Offering this love to each other energizes the flow of material, human, spiritual, and natural resources, rejuvenating relationships and creating a gracious, sustainable community.

Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us. (1 John 4:11–12)

5



Love Is My Name

To say that I am made in the image of God is to say that love is the reason for my existence: for God is love. Love is my true identity. Selflessness is my true self. Love is my true character. Love is my name. If therefore, I do anything or think anything or say anything or know anything or desire anything that is not purely for the love of God, it cannot give me peace, or rest, or fulfillment, or joy.³ —
Thomas Merton

³See Thomas Merton, *Seeds of Contemplation* (Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions Books, 1949), 46.

Love Is My Name

Theme I

G Em7 Cmaj7 D7

Love is my name. Love is my true i-dent-i - ty

G Em7 Cmaj7

Love's who I am. Self-less-ness is my true self.

Theme II

D7 G Em7 Cmaj7

Love is my name Love is my name

D7 G Em7 Cmaj7

Love is my name Love is my name.

Theme III

D7 G Em7 Cmaj7

If I do an-y-thing or think an-y-thing or say an-y-thing or want

D7 G

an - y-thing that's not pure-ly for for the

Em7 Cmaj7 D7

love of God, then I have no peace or joy, 'cause

G Em7 Cmaj7 D7 G

Love is my name. Love is my true i-den-ti - ty Love's who I am.

Em7 Cmaj7 D7 G

Self-less-ness is my true self. Love is my name.

6



I Am...

Bill Strickland grew up in the 1960s in Manchester, Pennsylvania—a poor, low-lying inner-city neighborhood in Pittsburgh. In the wake of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968, Manchester was under siege with racial strife. Strickland, who was just 19 at the time, wanted to provide “a safe, sane, quiet environment where [young people] could escape the madness that reigned in the streets, work on some clay, find a way to shape something personal and beautiful, and spend some time in a bright, clean, nurturing place where it did not seem pointless to dream.”⁴

With the help of the Episcopal Church, he founded the Manchester Craftsmen’s Guild, a tiny neighborhood art center, to teach young people to make pottery. Thirty years later he is the president and CEO of Manchester Bidwell Corporation, the premier job training and community arts-education center in Pittsburgh. The facility comprises three separate buildings, with 150 people on staff, 1,200 students, and 2,500 young people served by programs in public schools.⁵

During the creation of the Craftsmen’s Guild, Strickland discovered what would become the foundation of his later work. He wrote, “...I knew that identity isn’t something you inherit, it’s something you must discover. The Craftsmen’s Guild was helping me discover mine. Who was I? I was the guy who believed that art and creative experience are stronger than fear and ignorance. I was the guy who created this place out of passion and vision and sweat. I built the Guild out of ideas and things that I treasured, or needed, or believed in, and in doing so, I created the kind of personal foundation... crafted from genuine values and passions that would serve as a base for a rich and meaningful life.”⁶

Our core identity is what drives us to do amazing and courageous things in our ministries, as demonstrated in the following story from Exodus:

The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, “When you act as midwives to the Hebrew women,...if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, she shall live. But the midwives feared God; they did not do as the king

⁴Bill Strickland with Vince Rause, *Make the Impossible Possible* (New York: Broadway Books, 2007), 7.

⁵Watch a video about Bill Strickland called “The Hope Business” at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-_cAUzAHZw&feature=channel_video_title.

⁶Strickland with Rause, *Make the Impossible Possible*, 69–70.

of Egypt commanded them, but they let the boys live. So the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and said to them, “Why have you done this, and allowed the boys to live?” The midwives said to Pharaoh, “Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them.” So God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and became very strong. (Exodus 1:15–20)

Shiphrah and Puah helped prevent the genocide of male Hebrew infants because they knew who they were and they feared God. They were midwives; their role was to bring lives into the world, not destroy them. Their understanding of identity gave them the courage to disobey the powerful Pharaoh. Because of their conviction, the people continued to grow strong in spite of ongoing oppression.

Just as being a midwife was the rock of courage that enabled Shiphrah and Puah to stand up to the destructive life-depleting power, Bill Strickland built his dream on his foundational identity and over the years helped turn many lives around, providing spiritual, social, and financial sustainability for many individuals and families.

As part of our Holy Currencies training curriculum, we invite participants to complete the following sentences without using church jargon:

- Being a Christian is...
- Being a Christian is not...
- Belonging to the Church is...
- Belonging to the Church is not...

Most church members are quick to respond to what “Being a Christian is NOT” and “Belonging to the Church is NOT,” but are slow and even struggle to find words to describe what “Being a Christian IS” and “Belonging to the Church IS.” This inability to articulate clearly and readily their identity as individuals and as a community might explain why many church organizations have difficulty reaching and serving people outside their own comfortable circle. Without this foundational identity, many churches also lack the courage to confront injustice. Without this identity, many churches become unsustainable both socially and financially.

Discovering our identity in the context of the diverse and rapidly changing world is the foundation, the rock, on which a sustainable community can be built. When we know who we are, we can have the courage to confront the system that seeks to stop the flow of resources to the powerless and the oppressed. Standing firmly on the rock of our identity in Christ and as the Church, we can work with others to do more with less, recirculate resources, and build a sustainable future together.

Identity

A Dialogue

Gather members of your community for a time of dialogue on “identity.”

1. Invite participants to recall an event in their lives that gave them a sense of identity and purpose, particularly in doing good for others, the community, and the world. This could be a moment of recognition facilitated by a mentor, friend, teacher, or family member.
2. Invite each participant to share his/her story. After each story, invite the speaker to complete the sentence beginning with “I am...”
3. Invite participants to further reflect on this dialogue by sharing sentences beginning with:

I noticed...

I wonder...

4. Close the dialogue inviting participants to complete the sentence:

We are...



Stewardship of Stories

A few years ago, I was invited to be the speaker at a conference titled “Stewardship of Our Stories.” As I planned my keynote address, I realized that in order for a story to be worth anything, it must flow like a currency of exchange. In fact, stories can be part of the currencies of relationship, truth, and wellness. If I have a wonderful story but I don’t know I have it and I don’t know how to tell it, it is of no use to anyone. So the first step to becoming good stewards of our stories is to know our own stories, especially the ones that sustain life and relationship, and speak the truth. The second step is to learn how to tell the stories authentically. That is, speak from what you hear, see, and feel. Be honest with yourself and share from your heart.

Third, even if I can tell my story, if no one is listening, the story is useless. So, in order to be good stewards of our stories, we need to find or develop an audience.

Fourth, I need to connect my story with the greater story with which others can connect. How is my story part of God’s story of love, grace, and truth? How does my story connect with the saints of the past?

Fifth, I can’t just walk up to anyone and tell my story, because it may be received and interpreted in any number of ways—some of which might be negative and unproductive. To maximize the currency of stories, I need to create a gracious time and place in which these stories can be received without being prejudged, so that they will bring blessings.

Finally, I need to remind my listeners about the ethical responsibilities that go along with listening to stories. The responsibility might be to pass the story—the gift—along. The responsibility might be to hold the story in confidence in support of the wellbeing of the storyteller. The responsibility might be to address the truth that is shared through the story by moving from listening and receiving to action.

Daniel Taylor, in an article in the *Mars Hill Review*, wrote, “Stories tell us who we are, with the understanding that who we are is greatly shaped by the community of which we are a part. (The universal in us is a product of our common humanity as colored by our particular community.) And who we are unavoidably raises the host of ethical questions about how we should live.”⁷

⁷See the article I found at <http://www.leaderu.com/marshall/mhr03/story1.html> by Daniel Taylor, “The Ethical Implications Of Storytelling: Giving Ear to the Literature of the Oppressed,” in *Mars Hill Review*, issue 3 (Fall 1995): 58–70.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., in his *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*, defended and even embraced being labeled as an extremist. Placing his story within the context of the greater story, King challenged his audience (at that time, white religious leaders) to act for love and justice:

But as I continued to think about the matter, I gradually gained a bit of satisfaction from being considered an extremist. Was not Jesus an extremist in love?—"Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, pray for them that despitefully use you." Was not Amos an extremist for justice?—"Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream." Was not Paul an extremist for the gospel of Jesus Christ?—"I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus." Was not Martin Luther an extremist?—"Here I stand; I can do no other so help me God." Was not John Bunyan an extremist?—"I will stay in jail to the end of my days before I make a mockery of my conscience." Was not Abraham Lincoln an extremist?—"This nation cannot survive half slave and half free." Was not Thomas Jefferson an extremist?—"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal." So the question is not whether we will be extremist, but what kind of extremists we will be. Will we be extremists for hate, or will we be extremists for love? Will we be extremists for the preservation of injustice, or will we be extremists for the cause of justice?⁸

His passion for the wellness of the people in this nation compelled him to speak the truth of his own experience and the experiences of the African Americans. He created an audience through his relationships with the religious leaders of his time. He knew he had an audience who would listen. And I think he knew that his letter would be shared widely beyond the initial group to which he was addressing it. King's identity and actions transformed a nation, leading its people to reclaim basic human rights and act as if all people really are equal and resources should flow not just within one group, based on skin color, but to sustain all.

Find a time, a place, and an audience today and listen to stories. More importantly, take responsibility for hearing these stories. Then tell your story, and talk about your identity, your passion and how your story (and Dr. King's story) and Jesus' story intersect, empowering your own transformation, moving yourself and others toward actions that create sustainable communities.

⁸I found the complete text of the *Letter from a Birmingham Jail* by Martin Luther King Jr. at <http://www.uscrossier.org/pullias/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/king.pdf>.

8



Year-Round Stewardship

Many church leaders get nervous about finances in the middle of the year. They wonder, “Are we going to meet our budget? If the church’s income is not on target, how can we get people to give more during the second half of the year?”

Then, as they approach the last quarter of the year, many churches start their stewardship campaigns, which often focus exclusively on the currency of money. Having “tunnel-vision” when it comes to money leads to ignoring other currencies that may help church leaders make wise decisions for long-term sustainability. This is how churches fall into the scarcity trap: the more the church obsesses over money, the more they narrow the focus and ignore other opportunities and options. They make decisions without the full benefit of the currencies of truth, wellness, and gracious leadership. These decisions, in turn, may cause the church’s financial picture to worsen. In this way, the cycle of scarcity continues.

One way to move people out of tunnel mode is to interrupt with reminders of what is important. A group of economists tried to help poor people in Bolivia, Peru, and the Philippines increase their saving. The economists’ research showed that the poor fail to save, in part, because of tunneling. “Saving is an important but not urgent task, the kind that nearly always falls outside the tunnel. At any point in time, there are more pressing things to do than save.”⁹ To bring saving into the scope of vision of the poor, the economists sent them a quick note at the end of each month, reminding them of what they were saving for and how much. These benign reminders boosted savings by 6 percent. “We were able to increase savings not through education or by steeling people’s willpower but merely reminding them of something important that they tend to overlook when they tunnel.”¹⁰

One of the biblical images of our role within God’s creation is that of a steward who is put in charge of the household while the owner is away (Mark 13:33–37). Because we don’t know when the owner will return, we are challenged, as stewards, to stay alert. At any moment, we might need to account for that which has been put in our charge. This alertness should not be limited to a particular time of the year. Therefore, churches should not wait until the last quarter of the year to conduct a stewardship campaign. They should avoid focusing only on the currency of money, which can reinforce

⁹Sendhil Mullainathan and Eldar Shafir, *Scarcity* (New York: Picador, 2013), 206–207.

¹⁰Ibid.

the tunnel effect. Try reminding your community to be good stewards of all of God's currencies—time and place, gracious leadership, relationship, truth, wellness, *as well as* money—through the entire year.

In this book, there are sample pledge cards for all the holy currencies. Use them to interrupt whatever tunneling your church members might be preoccupied with and remind them of what is important in addition to money—the flowing of truth, the exercising of gracious leadership, the networking of relationships, the fostering of wellness, the sharing of our places, and the investment of our time. Use these pledge cards, perhaps once a month, to remind everyone that they can choose to direct these currencies toward the holy, and toward creating a sustainable community through all the days of their lives.

Think of us in this way, as servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy. (1 Corinthians 4:1–2)

9



Pledge Card for Currency of Relationship

Since the publication of *Holy Currencies*, readers have discovered exciting ways of applying the cycle of blessings, and have challenged me to do the same. One of the recurring requests has been, “We are nearing the traditional time for pledge campaigns and I was wondering if anyone has created ‘pledge cards’ based on Eric Law’s model?” In response, I began to construct the pledge cards based on the cycle of blessings. The goal was to use a familiar medium, the pledge card, to assist members of the church community to value and give other currencies beyond money.

Here is the first of these pledge cards, on the currency of relationship. Built into this card are the internal and external elements that are essential for fully applying each of the holy currencies to ministry. The “accountable person” (mentioned on the card) is someone who will remind me of my commitment. This is also the person to whom I will report when I have fulfilled my pledge.

Look for the other pledge cards for currencies of truth, wellness, gracious leadership, money, and time and place in this book and consider using them as part of your stewardship program. These pledge cards, when used regularly, become tools for teaching the cycle of blessings, transforming the way people think about church from maintenance to missional. Obviously it would be too much to ask church members to commit to all six currencies at one time. The cards are more appropriate for a year-round stewardship approach—perhaps, every two months, invite church members to pledge to one of the currencies.

Make a pledge today to increase your currency of internal and external relationship. Look around your church: Who would you like to get to know better this year? Using the pledge card below, fill in the number of relationships that you would strengthen within your church. Then take a look outside your church—your workplace, your neighborhood, your friendship circle. With whom among them would you like to build a stronger relationship? Remember that we are not talking about evangelism in which you witness to these people. We are inviting you to simply be a friend to listen to their stories and for them to know your story. Find someone who will be your accountable person. When you have fulfilled your commitment, get together with your accountable person and share what exchanges these

relationships have given you. Discuss what God is calling you to do with the blessings you received from these relationships.

Pledge Card for Currency of Relationship

- I commit to strengthen ____ relationships I have within my church.
- I commit to establish ____ new relationships outside my church.

My name: _____ My accountable person: _____

_____ signature signature

Date: _____

10



I Notice... I Wonder...

In his book *Finding Flow*, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi says that attention is the most precious resource that we have.¹¹ Paying attention can make the difference between being stuck in a boring job or finding fulfillment in the same job. “A supermarket clerk who pays genuine attention to customers, a physician concerned about the total well-being of patients rather than specific symptoms only, a news reporter who considers truth at least as important as the sensational interest when writing a story, can transform a routine job with ephemeral consequences into one that makes a difference.”¹²

When we pay attention to what we are doing, the people with whom we are doing it, and the environment in which we are doing it, we add value to what we do. When we pay attention, we might discover the truth about the people and environment as they are, and not as we want them to be. We might also be surprised by new ideas, options, and solutions we have not considered. We may discover the reason why we do what we do, and the contributions it makes toward creating sustainable community.

One of the gracious leadership skills we teach at the Kaleidoscope Institute is the completion of the sentences:

I notice...
I wonder...

These sentences invite us to pay attention first, and then be curious. Try taking a moment during the day to stop whatever you are doing and complete these sentences. What do you notice about yourself? What do you notice about the environment? What do you notice about the people around you? What do you wonder about yourself, others, and the environment?

Here is another set of questions that can help you learn to pay attention to an event that has happened:

1. What happened?
2. What caused it to happen?
3. What did I learn—about self, others, and environment?
4. What would I do differently next time?

“What happened?” invites you to recall what you noticed. When done in a group, as we ask this question we begin to see the truth from multiple perspectives.

¹¹Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Finding Flow* (New York: Basics Book, 1997), 103

¹²Ibid.

“What caused it to happen?” invites you to recall the flow of actions that led to the event in question. What were the exchanges? Were the exchanges constructive or destructive?

“What did I learn?” invites you to name the learning—the gift—that you gain from exploring the truth about self, others, and the environment.

“What would I do differently next time?” invites you to choose the path toward the holy next time you find yourself in a similar situation.

I have used this set of questions many times in consulting with organizations and communities that had to learn to tell the truth in order to achieve wellness.

Try this yourself or with a group of people who have just experienced something exciting, challenging, puzzling, or affirming. Take time to work through each question. This set of questions teaches people to pay attention, learn, and discern together.

11



Restoring Trust

I was on a plane from Los Angeles to Philadelphia. The flight was full. On the drive to the airport, I had heard a report on the radio about an Associated Press/GfK poll that found most Americans were suspicious of each other in everyday encounters. Nearly two-thirds of the people polled said, “You can’t be too careful” in dealing with people.

On that flight, I happened to be sitting in the exit row. The flight attendant came over to ask if we were willing and able to help in case of an emergency. Of course, I said yes. But then I looked around the enclosed space and it occurred to me that if the poll was correct, two out of three people on the plane didn’t trust me. I realized how serious this was: How can a society be sustainable if people don’t trust each other? When we don’t trust, we don’t share our resources, out of fear. When resources don’t flow, the community will starve. Perhaps Congress’s inability to get things done as well as the “stand your ground” laws that made news after the death of Trayvon Martin are both symptoms of this inability to trust.

A survey of trust in the workplace done by Paul Bernthal, Ph.D., of Development Dimensions International showed that the top five trust-reducing behaviors of a coworker were:¹³

1. Acts more concerned about his or her own welfare than anything else;
2. Sends mixed messages so that I never know where he or she stands;
3. Avoids taking responsibility for actions (“passes the buck” or “drops the ball”);
4. Jumps to conclusions without checking the facts first;
5. Makes excuses or blames others when things don’t work out (“finger-pointing”).

The top five ranked trust-building behaviors were:

1. Communicates with me openly and honestly, without distorting any information;
2. Shows confidence in my abilities by treating me as a skilled, competent associate;
3. Keeps promises and commitments;

¹³http://www.ddiworld.com/DDIWorld/media/trend-research/surveyoftrustintheworkplace_es_ddi.pdf?ext=.pdf