

Book Review: The Sower

Reviewed by Harold Naylor, Tall Oaks Classical School

Some of the most profound books are the shortest and easiest to read. Of course, that does not make them easy to digest. Nor does it mean that implementing culture change comes quickly, even when supported by the Scriptures themselves.

Scott Rodin and Gary Hoag are the mentors and stewardship big brothers that I need. They understand that raising Kingdom resources means that we will have to see how our Lord Jesus Himself raised up people and caused them to release their time, talent and treasure.

The book is divided into two sections of four chapters each, "The Calling of the Sower" by Rodin and "The Seasons of Work for the Sower" by Hoag. These eight chapters were studied by our school board, and we discussed one chapter per meeting until we completed the book this past August.

During the course of the book you will be challenged to look at "what works," which is short-term and transactional versus "what builds up," which is long-term and transformational. To quote Rebekah Basinger, "The basic premise of *The Sower*—that growing givers' heart should be a priority for the fundraising programs of Christian ministries—is a message that today's hard-pressed fundraisers need to hear and practice. It's a challenge to balance the very real financial needs of our organizations with the spiritual nurture of donors, but as the authors suggest, the resulting eternal fruit makes

doing so well worth the effort . . ."

In the beginning Rodin calls us to a journey from transaction to transformation. Transactions can be reduced to mechanical principles and "turn the crank"

bondage to one-kingdom freedom is the next concept. Because of the Fall, man's relationships degraded and, as a result, there are areas of our lives that we (wrongly) believe are ours to own.

The Sower: Redefining the Ministry of Raising Kingdom Resources

by R. Scott Roding and Gary G. Hoag

Winchester, VA: ECFA Press, 2010, 112 pages, \$12.99.

techniques. Transformation means that we must look at the outward actions in light of the heart we have in doing that work. It is the same "being vs. doing" described in the New Testament with Mary and Martha. One was consumed with doing right all of the time; the other saw being and sitting at Jesus' feet as the most important. This is a good place to start since many of us fundraisers measure our work by being busy or frenetic with event after event and mailing upon mailing.

Transformation, then, begins in our own hearts when we prioritize *being* over *doing*. It is time that we grow and "fill the seed bags" so that we have something to sow. Rodin asks us to look at our own transformation—are we on the path and do we have a sense of God's calling on our life, i.e., are we doing what we are called to do or is this a job? This leads us to plea to the Lord: "Help me discern how you want to use me as an instrument in their journey to become a more godly steward"

Moving from two-kingdom

The more we try to carve these out and manage them for our benefit, the more the Lord will show us our utter inability to manage anything. Like the rich young ruler, we want to ask Jesus about everything except money and still enter the Kingdom. Jesus answers with a one-kingdom answer: sell everything you have and give it all to the poor. Jesus is teaching that serving two masters is impossible. Where have we heard that before?

Rodin uses the Macedonians (2 Corinthians 8:1–9) as examples of joyous givers, those who gave in the midst of poverty yet were privileged to do so. The way I have seen that work out is when a donor makes a meaningful gift and then thanks me (the school actually) for the honor and joy of seeding wealth into Kingdom building. I call this the bilateral blessings of good stewardship.

Rodin ends his part of the book with five spiritual disciplines that, when practiced, orient us for the work as a sower.

With Scott Rodin's work as the foundation, Gary Hoag explains that raising Kingdom resources is raising up stewards to be rich toward God. He begins by recalling the parable of the poor steward

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who decided to build bigger barns. Two-kingdom bondage led to his demise. One-kingdom living prevents us from having an accumulation mindset and, ultimately, frees us to live fully human as we subject everything to God's will. He owns it all and we are free to use everything for His glory.

Using the analogy of the *Farmers' Almanac*, Gary describes the four seasons of work for the sower:

Winter: This is our time for preparation, to understand the role of the sower, how to fill our seed bags, and how to prepare the soil.

Spring: Time to sow biblical principles. We must know the hindrances to growth for the steward.

Summer: The time to see the spiritual growth of stewards. We are taught how to enlist others in helping during this highly productive time to encourage Christian generosity.

Fall: This is where we see the harvest. In this phase we are

taught how to maximize the harvest, to celebrate God's provision, and to accept when the crops are not as plentiful as we would have expected.

One of the most valuable aspects of these chapters is the side-by-side comparison of secular fundraising versus biblical steward-raising. Here is one example from Winter:

| Secular Fundraising | Biblical-Steward Raising |
|---|---|
| 1. Leaders consider their role as being the fundraisers for the organization. | 1. Leaders understand that their role is to sow biblical stewardship principles; God is the Fundraiser. |
| 2. Leaders strategize to get people to make gifts to their organizations. | 2. Leaders gather biblical truths that encourage people to become givers who are rich toward God. |
| 3. Leaders do whatever works to get people to respond generously. | 3. Leaders model generosity and pray for God to help people grow spiritually in the grace of giving. |

The seed is God's Word spread liberally and wisely. We are to cast the seeds everywhere. There are many factors that affect how the seeds come up, just like the seeds the farmer scatters in Mark. This parable concludes with the amazing multiplier of thirty-fold or more. When we scatter seeds in the way Scriptures teach we should not be surprised to experience returns that defy human understanding; they do.

Read this book to equip yourself to see the wonderful role God has for you as His "sowing agent" in a field that is ripe for the harvest. God is calling you to be thoroughly Christian in every dimension of resource raising.

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I Want to Be a Fundraiser . . .

officer gives thanks for one more gift closer to the annual goal. On and on, an overflow of thanksgiving is given to God.

So perhaps we ought to encourage Johnny in his dream to be a fundraiser. If he is a great one he will be a person of favor, faith, focus, fitness, and faithfulness.

NOTES

1. Lauren Libby, "Maximizing Generosity by Aligning God's Calling," in *Revolution in Generosity*, ed. Wesley K. Willmer (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008), 198.

2. William T. Sturtevant, *The Artful Journey* (Chicago: Bonus Books, Inc., 1997), 11.

3. Jerold Panas, *Born to Raise* (Chicago: Pluribus Press, Inc., 1988), 1988, 47.