

LIVING THE GENEROUS LIFE

It's Not Just About Money: The Greatest Gift You Have to Give

What is the greatest charitable gift you have to give? Yourself!

Have you ever wondered why a poor, old woman living in the slums of Calcutta, India, who devoted her life to the mundane task of caring for unwanted, starving children was internationally known and revered and even awarded the distinguished Nobel Peace Prize? What did she do to deserve such impressive notoriety? Who was this woman? You and the rest of the world knew her. She was Mother Teresa.

By our materialistic, American standards, Mother Teresa was a miserable failure. She never owned her own home. She had no money set aside for retirement, had not built a successful business or had much of an income. She did not own a car and wore the same style of clothes every day.

There was no reason why this fragile woman living in the inner city of an obscure, economically struggling country, working with hundreds of seemingly insignificant children should have earned such worldwide respect and prestigious accolades.

The fact is that as a country, specifically, and as a world, generally, we have drifted quite far from our original moral, ethical, and religious moorings. However, we have not drifted so far from them that we do not still deeply respect people who are willing to sacrificially give of themselves to help the helpless. Deep down, each of us knows that in so doing we will experience the highest level of personal fulfillment and spiritual joy even though this reality is seldom part of our daily consciousness. Sadly, we often find ourselves so busy in our headlong pursuit of living life that we actually end up missing the true essence of life.

It is not enough to simply read the biographies of great men and women who throughout history have happily traded a life of prosperity, luxury, and comfort for one of toil, sacrifice, disease, and even death to help those who cannot help themselves. You may be inspired by their great religious and humanitarian efforts, but you will never experience their tremendous blessing. They would all acknowledge that the fulfillment they found surpassed everything they voluntarily gave up in the trade.

The following story is just a simple illustration of this truth. A group of twelve youth and adults traveled to Juarez, Mexico to build a home for a needy family.

The husband of the family, for whom the group was to build the home, worked sixty hours each week to earn \$30. Their current home was a tiny, one-room shanty constructed out of shipping skids and wrapped in tar paper. Their three-year-old daughter was an invalid and had major respiratory problems. She could only go outside for a few minutes at a time.

The campsite where this group pitched their tents was an old cow pasture located across the road from a pigpen. The restrooms were pit toilets where it seemed half the flies in all of Mexico resided. If the flies didn't drive you out, the smell would. The other half of the flies in Mexico swarmed over their food as they tried to eat. They slept on the ground, and from about 2 am on they were serenaded by a chorus of roosters making a sound night's sleep impossible. They cleaned

up each day by pouring buckets of water over their heads. It was a challenging week for this group in many ways.

Yet, in spite of all of this, the group seized the challenge of building a humble dwelling for this needy family with the unity and zeal you might expect only from those who were building a grand palace for a king.

On the second day, as the team enthusiastically raised the walls to the new home, the mother stood by crying. All who saw her wept too. At that moment the group was reminded that they were not just building a house, they were helping people.

Seeing that woman's tears of joy made enduring all the discomfort of the trip wholly inconsequential. The group had again come to appreciate the words of Jesus, "*It is more blessed to give than to receive*" (Acts 20:35b). In this very small act of kindness, they had been reminded of this enduring truth.

What is interesting is that this group came home richer than they were before the trip. Some left their wives and children to go. Some took a week off work. They all spent money to go and they all endured physical discomfort. Yet, they came home richer. How? The answer cannot be explained in physical terms because it transcends the realm of the physical. It can only be explained in spiritual terms. And the explanation is this: *You will always make a profit, when you give yourself away to others.*

Let me suggest that the personal delight of giving massive sums of money away is decidedly minuscule in comparison to the joy you will realize by giving *yourself* away to a worthy cause.

The story of the rich young ruler expresses this reality perfectly. Here is the story:

A ruler questioned Him, saying, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments, 'Do not commit adultery, Do not murder, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother.'" And he said, "All these things I have kept from my youth." When Jesus heard this, He said to him, "One thing you still lack; sell all that you possess and distribute it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." But when he had heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich (Luke 18:18-23).

You see, Jesus was not interested in this young man's wealth. In fact, Jesus told him to give it all away to the poor. What Jesus really wanted was the *young man himself*. And what Jesus wants most from you – is you!

So, what is the greatest charitable gift you have to give? *Yourself!* Why not commit to make a gift of yourself to our King and to some worthy Kingdom cause that you can spend yourself on? You will without a doubt be all the richer for it.

STUDY GUIDE QUESTIONS

1. What is your initial reaction to the message of this lesson?
2. Share a recent incident when you personally gave of yourself for the good of others.
3. Discuss your reaction to this statement: Deep down, each of us knows that in so doing (giving of ourselves) we will experience the highest level of personal fulfillment and spiritual joy, even though it is seldom part of our daily consciousness.
4. What would have to change in your life to enable you to give more of yourself to others on a regular basis?
5. Describe a recent mission trip or community project and how it changed your attitude and life?
6. Discuss the differences between giving money and giving yourself? Which one has the greatest impact on you?
7. If your life continues as it is now, what will people remember you for after you eternally relocate?
8. As believers, what do you think are our greatest barriers in giving of ourselves?
9. How do you react to the statement: The personal delight of giving massive sums of money away is decidedly minuscule in comparison to the joy you will realize by giving yourself away to a worthy cause.
10. Have you ever personally known someone who lived this out? What impacted you most about them?
11. What is going to change in your life going forward because of this lesson? What are you going to start doing differently?