

## THE GREATEST GIFT YOU HAVE TO GIVE

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? Who was this woman, and what did she do to deserve such impressive notoriety? You and the rest of the world knew her. She was Mother Teresa.

By our materialistic, western 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, nor had much of an income. She did not own a car, and wore the same style of clothes every day. There was no logical reason why this fragile woman working with hundreds of seemingly insignificant children in the inner city of an obscure, economically struggling country 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 vicariously 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. I traveled with a group of 12 youth and adults 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 with major respiratory problems. She could only go outside for a few minutes at a time.

The campsite where we pitched our 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 all over the food we tried to eat. We slept on the ground, and from about 2:00 a.m. were serenaded by a chorus of roosters, making a sound night's sleep impossible. We cleaned up each day by pouring buckets of water over our heads. It was a challenging week in many ways.

In spite of all of this, we 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, we were reminded that they were not just building a house, but helping a family. Seeing that woman's tears of joy made enduring all the discomfort of the trip wholly inconsequential. We came to appreciate the words of Jesus, *It is more blessed to give than to receive* (Acts 20:35b, NIV). In this very small act of kindness, we had been reminded of this enduring truth.

What is interesting is that we came home richer than we were before the trip. Some left their wives and children to go, some took a week off work. We all spent money to make the trip, and all endured physical discomfort. Yet, we 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: *You will always make a profit when you give yourself away to others*. Let me suggest that the personal delight of giving away massive sums of money 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:

*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, NASB).*

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.

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## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR — E. G. "JAY" LINK**

E. G. "Jay" Link has a unique combination of being an ordained minister with a Master Divinity degree in Biblical Theology and a professional Stewardship planning coach who for over 40 years has been working with very affluent Christian families to enable them to optimize their Kingdom impact with all that the Lord has entrusted to them to manage. After retiring from his personal practice, he then served for five years as Director of Taylor University's Stewardship Planning Ministry, which he launched for them. Most recently, Jay founded the Stewardship Resource Group to serve Christian ministries, colleges, and churches to better minister to their highest capacity families. He has written six books, hundreds of articles and has provided extensive training curriculum for hundreds of professional financial and legal advisors in how to provide stewardship planning services for their clients.