

# It really IS more blessed to give than to receive

By

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Admitting to being a professional fundraiser is perhaps the best way to stop unwanted conversation. Reactions to fundraising range from aversion to suspicion—although fortunately a large portion of the U.S. population does find it a valuable and significant act, given the \$316.23 billion that were given to the nonprofit causes in 2012.<sup>1</sup> For those who find fundraising distasteful for any number of reasons, perhaps it's good to remember that fundraising is actually prevalent in the Bible; we simply call it by other terms and sometimes fail to recognize it for what it is—generosity and a way to effectively make a difference in the lives of one or many.

What is perhaps most interesting is that biblical injunctions about giving and the benefits of generosity have now been verified by research. For example, in Proverbs we read “If you give to the poor, your needs will be supplied! But a curse upon those who close their eyes to poverty.”<sup>2</sup> A text in the Psalms echoes this concept: “Good will come to him who is generous.”<sup>3</sup> The Apostle Paul provides this advice, “Since you excel in so many ways--you have so much faith, such gifted speakers, such knowledge, such enthusiasm, and such love for us--now **I want you to excel also in this gracious ministry of giving.** I am not saying you must do it, even though the other churches are eager to do it. **This is one way to prove your love is real.**<sup>4</sup>

Let's balance these few references, which represent an abundance of advice regarding generosity, with research results. First, No matter what the motive, research shows that generosity directly benefits the well-being of those who give. A study from University of Oregon demonstrated that for many participants, giving activates the same pleasure centers of the brain as receiving. The conclusion is that generosity brings happiness, longevity and popularity.<sup>5</sup> Another research study reported that human beings appear to be genetically disposed to be happiest when they are selflessly giving to others. We tend to be unhealthy when we are devoted to self-gratification. People who emphasize service to others and connection to community show a pattern of gene expression that results in less inflammation and stronger immunity.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Giving USA*, <http://store.givingusareports.org/Giving-USA-2013-Report-Highlights-P98.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> *Proverbs 28:27 (TLB)*

<sup>3</sup> *Psalms 112: 5 (NIV)*

<sup>4</sup> *2 Corinthians 8:7-8 (NLT)*

<sup>5</sup> Reported in *The Nonprofit Quarterly*, November 14, 2011

<sup>6</sup> Research by University of North Carolina, reported in *The Week*, Sept. 13, 2013

Researchers at University of British Columbia and Harvard showed that money can increase happiness—but more important is how the money is spent, by giving. The way we spend money on a daily basis can determine our level of happiness. People who give to others or to charity are happier than those who don't.<sup>7</sup>

Finally, neuroscientists at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) have scanned brains of volunteers who were asked to think about scenarios involving donating money vs. keeping it for themselves. They found that altruism is not a superior moral faculty that suppresses basic selfish urges but rather is basic to the brain, hardwired and pleasurable. This is just one example of how neuroscience has elbowed its way into discussions about morality and generosity and what it means to be good and do good.<sup>8</sup> And one more thing, especially for those busy persons and professionals who repeatedly bemoan the lack of time, people who give time away feel happier and more effective.<sup>9</sup>

Given this evidence—and there's more that could be cited—both the Bible and secular research verify that it really IS more blessed to give than to receive! Perhaps the next time someone states he or she is a fundraiser, this news should be welcomed as an opportunity to not only bless but be blessed.

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<sup>7</sup> *Express, a publication of the Washington Post*, March 2008

<sup>8</sup> Research reported in the *Washington Post* May 2007

<sup>9</sup> *Harvard Business Review* September 2012