

# The Blessing of Giving

By

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“It is more blessed to give than to receive.” Whether we learned this text in Sabbath School or in some other way, most of us can easily retrieve this phrase from our memory banks. In fact, perhaps it has become so common in our everyday language use that we no longer stop to think of its meaning. Yet this is the foundation on which we understand our responsibilities as stewards of what God has provided for us.

Too many dwell on the word “give,” whereas the real attention should be on the word “blessed.” There are many texts in the Bible that state the idea, “if you do this, then . . .” and a blessing follows. For example, the Psalmist David often spoke of God’s “benefits to me,” and about his duty to bless others in turn. David’s psalms are full of such thoughts, including enumeration of the blessings that we can receive if we are generous—long life, health, happiness, and peace being a few.<sup>1</sup> These ideas are also found as statements of Jesus, which Luke quoted, “Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.”<sup>2</sup>

The secular world has grasped the same idea. Research studies, such as a recent one by the National Institutes of Health, have determined that generosity brings about many of the same results as David and others in the Bible, including the Apostle Paul, have described.<sup>3</sup> Their 2006 finding that unselfishness can feel good lends scientific support to the admonitions of spiritual leaders including Saint Francis of Assisi, who said, “For it is in giving that we receive.” But it is also a dramatic example of the way neuroscience has begun to elbow its way into discussions about morality and has opened up a new window on what it means to be and do good.

Some might think that being philanthropic is a modern phenomenon occurring mostly in America, where resources are relatively abundant. But the roots of philanthropy, defined by leading scholar Robert L Payton as “Voluntary action for the public good,” go back to not just biblical times with biblical injunctions and promises, but to early civilizations as well, such as the Greeks and Romans. In fact, Aristotle is quoted as saying, “To give away money is an easy

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<sup>1</sup> For example, Psalm 116:12, Psalm 103:1-2

<sup>2</sup> Luke 6:38.

<sup>3</sup> While this study and others are reported in various sources, one is “If It Feels Good to Be Good, It Might Be Only Natural,” by Shankar Vedantam, **Washington Post** Staff Writer Monday, May 28, 2007; Page A01.

matter and in anyman's power. But to decide to whom to give it, and how large and when, and for what purpose and how, is neither in everyman's power nor an easy matter. Hence it is that such excellence is rare, praiseworthy and noble."

Researchers Paul Schervish and John Havens of Boston College's Center for Wealth and Philanthropy have conducted in-depth studies about why people give, why they share their resources to the tune of \$306.39 billion in 2007, with over 33% going to religious causes or churches.<sup>4</sup> The most prominent reasons for giving are:

Communities of participation—we give because of whom we are associated with, or what organizations we belong to or believe in.

Frameworks of consciousness—we give because we identify with the cause.

Invitation to participate—we give because we are asked to give.

Discretionary resources—we give because we believe we can (and this doesn't apply just to the upper third of America's income brackets).

Models/experiences from youth—we give because we have seen positive examples of generosity.

Intrinsic and extrinsic rewards—we give because we can expect and have experienced positive outcomes.

Urgency and effectiveness—we give because we meet needs of fellow humans.

Demographic characteristics—we give because we've been acculturated to do so.<sup>5</sup>

Adventists have a long tradition of being philanthropic, for many of the motivations listed above as well as spiritual reasons and obligations. However, a formalized version of giving, facilitated through fundraising professionals and countless volunteers loyal to a cause, has only in recent decades seen development, growth, and enormous success. While similar figures as those provided nationwide by Giving USA, are not readily available, Adventist and other friends have caused healthcare institutions to flourish, colleges and universities to provide outstanding education which is on a par with secular institutions (and in some cases helped institutions survive), and overseas missions (both through the denomination and via other worthy Adventist organizations) to fulfill Christ's injunction of "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel."

But we can do so much more. How much do we assist when we see dire needs in our communities, not just Adventists? Do we give generously so young people can attend Adventist

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<sup>4</sup> Giving USA 2008 is published by the Giving USA Foundation™ and is researched and written by the Center on Philanthropy at Indiana University.

<sup>5</sup> This and other research studies can be found at [www.bc.edu/research/swri](http://www.bc.edu/research/swri).

schools? Do we care about feeding the hungry? This is where an Adventist organization, established by a pioneer, Milton Murray, can aid in fulfilling Jesus's hopes for us, that we will indeed be generous in voluntary action for the good of others. And we indeed are blessed when we do so. Philanthropic Service for Institutions is a North American Division entity, available to assist in philanthropy, fundraising, and above all, service in the name of the Lord.<sup>6</sup>

The following two tombstone in the United Kingdom succinctly illustrate what an honor it is to give to others. One is in Warwickshire, England:

Here lies a miser, who lived for himself,  
And cared for nothing but gathering pelf.  
Now where he is or how he fares,  
Nobody knows and nobody cares.

The other one is in St. Paul's Cathedral, London:

"Sacred to the memory of Charles George Gordon, who at all times and everywhere gave his strength to the weak, his substance to the poor, his sympathy to the suffering, and his heart to God."<sup>7</sup>

Indeed, may God bless us as we continue to bless others with our love, generosity, caring, and intervention.

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<sup>6</sup> For more information, please contact (give appropriate contact info).

<sup>7</sup> Epitaphs sent to the author by a British fundraising professional.