



The Greatest Gift You Have to Give

Have you ever wondered why a tiny, poor, old woman living in the slums of Calcutta, India, who has 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 for her work? 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 even an adequate income, didn't even own a car and wore the same style of clothes every day.

There was absolutely no reason why this old woman living in the inner city of an obscure, third-world country, working with hundreds of insignificant little children should have earned such impressive, 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. 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 inside, each one of us really 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 quite unfortunate.

It's not enough to simply read biographies of great men and women who throughout history have happily traded a life of prosperity, luxury and comfort for a life 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 all would acknowledge their efforts have surpassed everything they voluntarily gave up in the trade.

I am not sharing these deeply profound truths with you from some insulated, theoretical "bubble." I am sharing them with you from my heart and my own personal experience because I earnestly try to "practice what I preach."

For example, a few years ago I returned from a mission trip I led to Juarez, Mexico with 12 youth and adults. We went down there to build a home for a poor family.

The man of the house, for whom we were to build the home, worked 60 hours each week to earn

\$30. They lived in a tiny, one-room shanty built out of shipping skids and wrapped in tar paper. Their three year old daughter is an invalid and has major respiratory problems and is only able to go outside for a few minutes at a time.

Our campsite where we pitched our tents was an old cow pasture located across the road from a pig pen. Our rest rooms were pit toilets where it seemed half the flies in all of Mexico resided. If the flies wouldn't drive you out, the smell would. The other half of the flies in Mexico swarmed all over our food as we tried to eat. We slept on the ground, and from about 2 a.m. on we were serenaded by a chorus of roosters making a sound night's sleep impossible. We cleaned up by pouring buckets of water over our heads. It was a challenging week in many ways.

Yet in spite of all of this, our 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 our team enthusiastically raised the walls to the new home, the mother stood by crying. I cried too. In fact, all of us who saw this touching scene wept. At that moment we were reminded that we were not just building a house, we were helping people.

Seeing that woman's tears of joy made enduring all the discomfort of the trip wholly inconsequential. I had again come to appreciate the words of Jesus, "*It is more blessed to give than to receive.*" In this very small act of kindness, I had been reminded of this enduring truth.

How was I able to come back richer than before I left, leaving my wife and two youngest children behind, taking a week off work, spending all that money to go and endure physical discomfort? In this case, 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.*

In our Family Wealth Counseling practice, we are continually showing families how to give millions of dollars away to charity, and I will be the first to admit that it is a very exciting process. But 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 truth perfectly. Jesus was not primarily 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.

What is the greatest charitable gift you have to give? YOURSELF! Why don't you make a gift of yourself to a worthy Kingdom cause? You'll be all the richer for it.

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