

GIVING AND HAPPINESS



GREG PARSONS
/ GLOBAL DIRECTOR,
U.S. CENTER FOR
WORLD MISSION

Giving is an interesting aspect of our lives. You would think that it would be painful to give away what is “ours,” but a number of recent studies show that givers are actually happier.

Authors Elizabeth Dunn and

Michael Norton looked at tons of scientific research on how people feel when they use their money. Their book *Happy Money: The Science of Happier Spending* details study after study about what makes people happy when it comes to money. One chapter is focused on investing in others.

Here are a few of the things from the book: “Remarkably, there is almost no evidence that buying a home—or a newer, nicer home—increases happiness.” (p 2) There was also no relationship at all between the Blue Book value of the car and the amount of enjoyment the owners got from driving it. (p 29)

Beyond that, the amount of money individuals devoted to themselves was unrelated to their overall happiness. What did predict happiness? The amount they gave away. (p 109)

People given a gift card to give to someone else were happier than those who were given a gift card to spend on themselves. And “how people spent the money mattered much more than how much of it they got.” (p 109) If, in addition to giving to someone, they

spent time with the person, they were also happier. (p 119)

It turns out that investing in other people and spending time with them brings the most benefits to the giver, affecting not only happiness but health and other areas of life. But actually, this shouldn't be a surprise.

Like many things, the Scriptures tell us to expect this. According to 2 Cor. 8:2, the churches in Macedonia had “...a severe ordeal of suffering, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in the wealth of their generosity.” Paul goes on to say they begged for the opportunity to give and gave beyond their means. But all of that was the overflow of their having given themselves to the Lord first.

Commentators often talk about the major theme of Philippians being joy. In chapter 4, Paul expresses “great joy in the Lord” because of their concern for him and giving to his life and ministry. He tells them that he sought not the gift, but “the credit that abounds to your account.”

Jesus established this giving principle in his simple but profound statement: “Do not accumulate for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But accumulate for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Matthew 6:9-21 NET)

In his book, *The Law of Rewards: Giving What You Can't Keep to Gain What You Can't Lose*, Randy Alcorn says everything we have now will be destroyed...and everything we give

to the Lord in life becomes treasure in heaven that cannot be destroyed or taken away.

Meditate on that for a few minutes. Think about what you are doing with your time and earthly treasure.

My wife and I have been supported missionaries since 1982. While we have been on the receiving end of many faithful and joy-filled churches and individuals, we have also seen this work in our own giving.

I learned this even before we were married. A few years before we joined staff at the USCWM, I was in seminary and was going on a 12-week overseas mission trip to SE Asia. I came to church one Sunday as some of the money was coming due for the trip. After the college/young adult class I was leading was over, I sat in church, about to tithe my small amount. I wondered where the funds for my trip would come. Should I give to my own short-term trip? The answer was yes, just not at the expense of giving (and serving!) my local church. So I put my usual amount in the offering. As I returned to the classroom, there was an envelope there with my name on it, with a cash gift about five times the amount I had given to the church.

It doesn't always happen that directly, but I've learned that giving our lives and resources is in reality investing in both our rewards in heaven and in people's lives today. What are you investing in? Who are you investing in? Can you think of someone who needs the encouragement from you today—either by a word of encouragement or a gift? God works in such a way that joy and reward is yours. 

Follow Greg on Twitter: @parsonsg