

Sunday Column – Pure Gift
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Whatever your political affiliation, you are probably aware that the new tax law is going to be a game changer. Whether these changes will be for the better at the macro level is hotly debated but I'm sure everyone can agree that it is going to produce both winners and losers. We in the nonprofit world are apprehensive that the tax based incentives we have come to count on for charitable giving will become a thing of the past on New Year's Day.

Some of the larger nonprofits are predicting dire consequences. I'm counting on the generosity of the American people and what I hope is their real motivation for giving.

After a few years of grappling with the issue of charitable giving, Dave and I developed a structured plan that we commit to writing each October. In the early days of our marriage, our "giving program" consisted of a regular monthly gift to our church, somewhat random responses to direct mail solicitations and the inevitable surrender to the semi-annual pummeling received via the public radio airwaves.

This program didn't come out of nowhere. In the course of working for a regional church organization I had opportunities to attend more than one workshop on stewardship and slowly began to realize that charitable giving is truly a spiritual practice. I heard virtually the same story from every speaker. They balked at the idea of tithing but tried it, and found their lives changed for the better.

I will admit that the idea of tithing was utterly terrifying when I first crunched the numbers. I didn't believe I could live on what remained but we tried to do a little better each year. Our progressive tax system, in which a higher income results in a higher tax bracket, is based on the idea that the more someone makes the more he is able to contribute to the costs of running our local state and federal governments. It seemed to me that the Bible should have provided a sliding scale for charitable giving.

Common sense dictates that tithing is not a realistic goal for everyone. But truth be told, many who don't tithe, could. A Biblical verse from I Timothy is often misquoted as, "money is the root of all evil" The actual quote in the King James version is, "love of money is the root of all evil." It is our attachment to the material world that causes our suffering and just to give credit where due, the Buddha figured this one out 500 years before Jesus came along.

PAWS Humane and the other 1.5 million nonprofit organizations in the U.S. are counting on Americans to take a whole new look at how much they give, who they give to and, most importantly, why they give.

Oh, and by the way, tax advisors all over the country are recommending that their clients maximize 2017 charitable gifts before the year ends.

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