

Book Review: Who Really Cares

by Carrie Cavanaugh

Who Really Cares: America's Charity Divide: Who Gives, Who Doesn't, and Why it Matters by Arthur Brooks immediately caught my eye because many Christian Organizations rely, at least to some extent, upon charitable giving in order to meet their budgetary needs. Brooks gives a breakdown of what demographic groups give more than others and there is some really good news for Christian organizations.

Arthur Brooks is Professor of Business and Government Policy at Syracuse University. In addition to authoring three books, Brooks has been published in the Wall Street Journal and other publications. Brooks has a BA and an MA in economics as well as a Ph.D. in Public Policy Analysis from Rand Graduate School.

Brooks' analysis of a number of surveys examining charitable giving patterns of time, money and even blood, in relation to demographics, and happiness, are revealing. Although Brooks is clearly an academic who has the ability to sift through the data and determine what is significant, he presents it in a way that is accessible for the average reader. I also appreciated that he went beyond presenting the straightforward conclusions as to who gives, telling why they give, why it is good that they give and how can we encourage more giving.

The book has two weaknesses. 1) The data is a bit old. The book was originally printed in 2006 and the surveys Brooks relies upon were conducted as early as 1999. 2) Although I thoroughly agree with Brooks that charitable giving, rather than government funding, is the best thing for our nation, I think he fails to do justice to the rational of liberals. It was telling, however, that Brooks began his research as a liberal.

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I found this book to be very encouraging as it presented a picture of an overall generous America. I had no idea that the percentage of GDP comprised of charitable donations was so high. It was also telling to learn that one's faith is the biggest determining demographic factor in one's likelihood to give.

I appreciated Brooks' explanation of the effect of government funding for charities and how it decreases giving. He tells how one philanthropy expert says that "Adversity is the mother of donation," and explains that the budget cuts in government funding

for social programs in the '80s caused charitable giving to rise by a third in real terms.

Another bit of information that should encourage Christian organizations that rely on donations during the recession is that giving isn't directly related to the economy. That is, during times of recession, the giving will drop less than the economy as a whole.

The research on the relationship between giving and happiness was also interesting. Brooks explains that "as a giver, I am by definition a provider of help, as opposed to a victim. When I am thus empowered, my life improves in all sorts of ways." One survey of Americans shows that people who give money charitably are 43 percent more likely to say they are "very happy" than non-givers. Similarly, volunteers are 42 percent more likely than non-volunteers to say they are "very happy."

In summary, this book has a lot to offer to leaders of Christian organizations if they rely on donations or volunteers. I also found it personally challenging as I want to one day raise my children to be givers. Although I had been raised with an emphasis on serving and tithing, this book helped me see a little bit more of why God's ways are so beneficial, both individually and for the community. God is good.