

WORLD

Generous helping

Unlikely bestseller plants seeds of generosity worldwide by WARREN COLE SMITH and RUSTY LEONARD

BRIAN KLUTH DID NOT intend to write a best-selling book or build a ministry empire. In fact, his life work is all about combating the materialism that often produces a "bigger is better" mentality. "I want to help lead a generosity movement around the world," he says. "I hope to counter the secular materialism of our day, on the one hand, and to counter the prosperity gospel on the other."

One of his first efforts was the creation of a little book called *40 Day Spiritual Journey to a More Generous Life*. Kluth was pastor of the First

Evangelical Free Church in Colorado Springs, Colo., when, 11 years ago, a wealthy man he knew asked him to compile and organize a list of all the verses in the Bible that related to giving. "I knew that people like Larry Burkett had done this sort of thing, but I went through the exercise myself," Kluth

says. "I came up with 600 verses that I organized around 40 key principles."

Kluth adds, "I was glad to do that project, but when I handed over what I had done to the man, I was also glad to get back to my life as a pastor."

But God had different plans. "People kept asking for copies of the book," he says. "So we thought perhaps a Christian publisher would be interested, but seven publishers turned us down." In 2006, Kluth and his wife used some inheritance money to self-publish 15,000 copies of

the 90-page book. Kluth gave away thousands of copies and sold others for the cost of the printing. Soon the first printing was gone and demand was increasing. It's been less than three years since that initial printing. To date, more than 400,000 copies have been printed in the United States alone. Because Kluth gives away foreign rights to the book, it has been translated into 50 languages.

"Our book is not a fundraising tool," he says. "It's not a fundraising tool for us, and we don't intend for it to be a fundraising tool for ministries. This is not a book you give your donors to get them to give more." He says that, quite unintentionally, the book is "transformational, not transactional."

The first life it transformed, Kluth maintains, was his own. "I was very materialistic ... More about taking than giving." Kluth became a Christian as a young adult, but it "took years before I experienced the joy of giving," he says. Today, his goal is to give away more than he lives on. He calls it "give more than you live."

That could be a challenge as he enters a new phase in his life. Kluth's work to create a "generosity movement" was taking up more and more time. Kluth and his church decided it would be easier to find a new senior pastor than to replicate his generosity work. So this month, Kluth becomes a full-time "generosity minister-at-large." He will remain on the staff of the church, and therefore under its accountability, but his church salary will be reduced to \$1 per year. Kluth is excited about that salary: "God wants us not rich, but generous."

But Kluth admits that the task before him as a "generosity minister-at-large" is a daunting one. "We're in the midst of a 40-year decline in Christian giving," he says. "And we're also in the midst of a global economic downturn. But I'm encouraged by the book of Haggai. God allowed cold economic winds to blow so that God's people would re-focus on giving to God's work. Those cold winds ended up being a blessing to God's people."

Kluth says that God's people in the 21st century have an opportunity to learn those lessons, too. And the main one, he believes, is this: "Don't put money in a pocket full of holes." ☉



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