

The world's most generous people

By Tim Wildmon, president, American Family Association

"So my lovely and talented wife Alison and I are walking into Walmart Wednesday afternoon when she gets a call from Wesley, our 21 year-old son. He is on his way to a meeting at a local church about a mission trip to Honduras in June. Particularly in the summer, thousands of American churches will sponsor exactly this kind of trip to places all over the world.

"Okay, I will give Dad the check and he will wait for you in front of Walmart," she said to him. So she wrote out the check and handed it to me.

"How much is it?" I asked casually.

"She handed me the check. I almost fainted.

"It's a 10-day trip, including airfare," she said. "That is about what you would expect."

"I agreed. But still, it was a whole lot of money out of our bank account. Monday that could be spent many other ways. And for what purpose really? How does this expenditure of time and money benefit Wesley? What does it benefit his parents who are paying for most of this trip? Wesley is going to a poor country in Central America for 10 days to help people he has never even met and whom he may never see again — what is the purpose of that? Where exactly does that fall on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs?

"In terms of pure self-interest, with the possible exception of experiencing another part of the world for cultural reasons, there is absolutely nothing to gain here. And yet, this is what Americans do. More specifically, this is what American Christians do, more than any other group of people in the history of the world.

"The motivation to give money and volunteer time to help victims of natural disasters or to assist people in underdeveloped countries has its foundation in the New Testament. In other words, to participate in these things is an act of obedience to God. That teaching has been a mainstay of Christianity since its inception. Because the Christian faith has been the dominant religion in America for more than two centuries, it stands to reason that Americans would also be the most generous people in the world with their money and time.

"No other major world religion practices acts of charity and compassion like Christianity. It's not even close. Hospitals, orphanages, schools, food, shelter, the list goes on. Catholics and Protestants alike carry on this work around the world. And they do so with absolutely no expectation of ever receiving anything in return from the people they help and serve.

"In 2008, the *Journal of the American Enterprise Institute* posted on their Web site an article titled "A Nation of Givers." In it they delve into the reasons why Americans donate more to charitable causes and volunteer so much more time than do other people around the world.

"Here are some of their findings:

"• No developed country approaches American giving.

"• A study conducted in the 2000, showed that religious Americans are 25 % more likely to give charitably than secularists and are 23 % more likely to volunteer their time.

"• Religious people do not just donate to their own church — they also donate more to charities with secular causes than do secularists.

"• Self-described 'conservatives' are more likely to give to charities — and give more money — than self-described 'liberals.'

"• In 2002, conservative Americans were more likely to donate blood each year, and do so more often, than liberals. People who said they were 'conservative' or 'extremely conservative' made up less than one-fifth of the population, but donated more than a quarter of the blood.

"• Charitable giving in America has generally risen faster than the growth of the economy for more than half a century.

"• Tax deductibility for charitable donations is irrelevant for most Americans.

"• IRS records show that only about a third of people who file tax returns itemize their deductions, which means that most Americans don't even claim the deductions to which they are entitled.

"The truth is, unlike Christianity, most religions in this world do not foster concern or care for other people. Most major religions have a fatalistic worldview and do not believe in a personal God who cares how humans treat one another.

"Christians believe that God is watching how we behave while we are here on Earth and Jesus admonished us to practice acts of kindness, benevolence and charity because doing so pleases God. The Bible does teach that those who live by these values will be rewarded spiritually and otherwise here and in the hereafter.

"And the bonus is that it blesses us even in the present."

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