



MEMBERS OF THIS GROUP OF FARMERS IN TAMIL NADU, INDIA, COLLECT RICE FOR PEOPLE WITH HIV AND AIDS. LIVING A GENEROUS LIFE MEANS STANDING UP FOR THE WEAKEST PEOPLE IN SOCIETY.

# Reflections on *the generous life*

How to share the power of generosity at home, at work and around the world.

BY MIKE DICKSON

**F**OR 30 YEARS, MOST OF US IN THE Western world have been having a party. We have been encouraged to be self-sufficient and independent, to become successful and rich, to search for true happiness and find “the real us.” We’ve been encouraged to buy our own homes, invest in shares, become entrepreneurs, travel the world and borrow as much money as we liked to consume “things” that upon cool, calm reflection we didn’t really need—or use. We have been

cleverly and ruthlessly advertised and marketed at to buy a lifestyle rather than get a real life. We thought we had it all.

But now, the world is not in a happy state—and neither are most of us. We are nationally, corporately and individually bust, owing unimaginable trillions that would make our more prudent forebears groan with disbelief and which will take our children decades to repay.

I think it is time to change the world, for every one of us to wake up and decide that

we, as individuals and in groups, can tackle the challenges our society faces. We can all become leaders and authors of change by living more generous, proactive lives, by inspiring each other and by setting an example for our friends and our children.

We know in our hearts that it is good to be generous. Each one of us feels far better about ourselves when we can help other people, and we are touched when others are generous to us. A generous life is a life well lived and a happier life. The challenge

is to find a way to lead a more generous life in the real world.

As individuals, we cannot hope to address the problems we and the world face—socially, economically and environmentally—but collectively we can. It is time to be more generous and to build a more generous world, to recapture some of the practical simplicity of the ways we used to live when we depended on each other. It is time to set out to create a world rather than acquire one, to take the first step toward a more generous life.

Generosity isn't about money, although giving money to a good cause or even a person—quietly and without ceremony—can be an important element in a life worth living. Giving of ourselves is the greatest act of generosity.

A generous life involves putting more effort into looking after each other, becoming more actively involved with our own communities, speaking up for the poorest and most disadvantaged members of our society and becoming their champions and ambassadors. A generous life involves paying attention to the plight of the world's poorest people and learning how we can help them, actively campaigning to save our planet, amassing fewer things we don't need and withdrawing our financial support from those who are destroying our world for purely commercial gain. It involves acknowledging that we do care about the destruction of the rain forest, about preserving fish in the sea and tigers on land for our children to wonder at when they are grown up. It involves acknowledging that we value these things more than we value fabric conditioner.

Our society is overflowing with people whose everyday lives do indeed involve an enormous amount of love and care for others, people who do their jobs but are also generous with their lives. We need to cheer these people on, celebrate their work and create a mood that encourages them to emerge and thrive. But there are many more—teachers, doctors, nurses, ambulance drivers, charity workers, firemen, social workers—whose daily work includes a generosity of spirit that we should admire and applaud.

We want our children to be taught well and inspired to learn. If we are ill, our lives might depend on a student nurse or a junior doctor on their fourth night shift. A group of brave firemen might save our homes; a nurse might care for our mothers. They are the people on whom we rely. Yet it is one of the sad ironies of modern life that people often seem to be paid in inverse proportion to their value to society.

But there is hope. We live in an exciting age in which ideas, campaigns and movements can spread to millions of people instantly through the Internet and social networking sites. All of us as individuals, families, schools, businesses, politicians, journalists, faith leaders—young or old—can use these outlets to spread the power of generosity and of living more generous lives. All of us can encourage each other, tell stories from different countries and cultures, recount inspirational tales of generosity we have experienced and report examples of the generous acts we have done. Because we are better than we have been—and because we can. ■

*This is an edited excerpt from Please Take One (One Step Towards a More Generous Life) by MIKE DICKSON, available at [pleasetakeonestep.com](http://pleasetakeonestep.com).*