



Giving It *All* Away

An Interview With David Green

From humble beginnings, David Green grew up in a home that focused on God and giving. These principles remained when David started a business out of his garage making picture frames. Much has changed for that business since its creation in 1970, as Hobby Lobby now employs more than 32,000 people and is the largest privately owned arts and crafts retailer in the world. But one thing that hasn't changed is David Green's commitment to faith and generosity. Despite being the founder of Hobby Lobby, Green would be quick to tell you he's not the owner. In fact, it is God who owns the business. We spent some time with David Green to discuss his new book, **Giving It All Away . . . and Getting It All Back Again**, and why living generously yields a life full of blessings.

You grew up as a pastor's kid in a very poor family, but your book mentions that your family still emphasized giving and generosity. You included a phrase from your father: "Ninety-percent with God is more than 100 percent without Him." How did that mindset help shape you?

My background had a lot to do with shaping me. My parents, who never pastored a church over 100, had six children, and I would watch them pay their tithes, which is the first tenth. God blessed our family because of that, even though we were never rich by any means. We would see miracles in our lives of God's provisions and God's blessings. One of the things I learned about tithing is it's not like you give tithes and then you get a dollar for dollar. The Bible says when we tithe the windows of Heaven open up and we have blessings. The example of my parents really impacted me because I saw how God blessed us in so many different ways, like our health. We never had a prescription while I was growing up—not even so much as an aspirin. I think that was just one of God's blessings He gave us. We really don't know what blessings God will give us when we pay our tithes. That had a big impact on me. It also told me that God was the most important thing in my family's life because He came first—He got the first ten percent. Tithing became a big, big deal for me.

In the book you talk about how you once believed people with callings became preachers and missionaries and those who pursued business were backsliders. How has your perspective on "calling" changed over the years?

I know God can use all of us wherever we are. I feel like I have a calling on my life to be a businessman, just like my brothers and sisters who are pastors and pastors' wives had a calling on their lives. But that's not something I was taught. I don't blame my parents, however. Their motives were good because they wanted their children to do things that have eternal value and not just temporal. They were big on eternal versus temporal, and I don't know if they really saw the eternal things you can do no matter where you are. I think God calls all of us to wherever we are, and we are to be obedient wherever He places us.

You are the founder of Hobby Lobby, but you have said that God owns Hobby Lobby. What do you mean by that?

It is real, real simple. The Bible says He owns everything. I believe God's Word is God's Word. When He tells me He will bless me when I pay tithes, I believe that. When He tells me He owns everything, He owns everything. So, if He is the owner, then I'm just the steward. And to me, it's not radical to think

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that; it is radical to think you own anything if God says He owns everything. We don't think we're radical to say we don't own this business. We think this is simple: God owns it, and for a period of time while we're here, we are going to be the stewards of it.

Hobby Lobby now gives away 50 percent of its profits. Why have you been able to do something so radical?

From the very beginning we tithed our business. I say tithing is just like training wheels. You pay what belongs to God, and then you go into giving. We would start giving, and God would start to bless. It has taken time. It was evolutionary to get to 50 percent. We have no long-term debt, so we are able to do that and still grow our business. It is important for us to do things that have eternal value. That is why we want to give. We want to know that at the end of the day we didn't just build a big business. In my first book, the last chapter says, "So what?" You have a business that does \$4.3 billion, but the question on that is, "So what?" We realize God has given this to us for a reason, so we want to do everything we can to spread the gospel, to get God's Word out there, to get the Bi-

ble to as many places as we can. Obviously, it is important to us because everything other than what we're doing for Him is temporal. It won't matter a hundred years from now.

In your book you write, "If we don't use Hobby Lobby's earnings to touch people for the Lord, I really don't see the reason for me to be in business at all." How is Hobby Lobby actively working to reach people for Christ?

We saw 88 percent of our giving the last two years go to eight different ministries, and all of them are very strong in two things. We say there are only two things that are eternal: God's Word and man's soul. That's where we're heavily involved. Every Home for Christ is an example. They go out and put God's Word into every single home in China, into every home in over 100 countries. That's eternal. God's Word is as well. That's why we're building a museum in Washington D.C. It's going to be the third largest museum in the United States in size—over 430,000 square feet. Sometimes we commit ourselves to thinking, "A businessman should always think about the bottom line." Well, in life, the bottom line is God's Word and man's soul because everything else is temporal. So that's where we put our emphasis and that's where we put the lion's share of our dollars.



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Family and legacy are very important to you. As businessman, as a father, and as a grandfather, what do you hope to leave behind to future generations?

Barbara and I got married in 1961, and now there are 35 of us between our children and grandchildren, their spouses, and our 11 great-grandchildren. We feel like it is important to leave a legacy that doesn't stop with us but passes down. We came together and put together a document that talks about our vision, our mission, and our values. We all try to come together once a month to celebrate birthdays, and then we come back and we talk about this document. It's all based on what the Scriptures say because we have nothing of any value outside of what God says. So this is what we try to do with our children and our children's children. And that's the most important thing. If someone asked me about my greatest success, I would say my children serving the Lord is my greatest accomplishment. I would rather have no Hobby Lobby and kids serving the Lord than have Hobby Lobby and one of them not serving the Lord. If one of them wasn't serving the Lord, then Hobby Lobby wouldn't be worth it. We have to know what is valuable, and that is that our children and our marriages stay together. This is what God wants for us, so those are the things that are important to us.

What advice would you give to parents who want to instill a strong work ethic in their children?

One of the hardest things for me to do was *not* to do for my kids. Some-

times parents struggle with this. They say, "We don't want our kids working to buy their car because we can pay for it." If we really love our kids, I think it's important that we let them earn early on. Our boys were seven and nine when they worked gluing frames together making seven cents apiece. We wouldn't buy their cars for them. We might help them—"You earn a dollar and I earn a dollar"—but you need to start early letting them know what the importance of a dollar is. Too many parents say, "Well I didn't have it [growing up], so I'm going to give it to my kids." Well, it didn't hurt for them not to have it and that is probably why they worked hard. It's the parents' responsibility to get the children working as early as possible. Get them out earning, no matter how much they have. We have a company worth billions of dollars, but none of us can touch it. I can't touch; my kids can't touch. We can only get what we earn. We think that people getting something they don't earn is really a negative thing. You have to earn it here. There is no one getting a penny, including our grandchildren and our children, that doesn't earn it by working.

Your book also chronicles your very public Supreme Court battle, and how you were willing to close the doors of the company to avoid violating Scripture. How difficult was it for you to take that strong biblical stance?

I have to admit, when I first saw that it was going to cost me \$1.3 million a day because of the number of employees we had, I did not sleep at night and I tossed and tumbled. But then it got real easy for me. It was like

I had one decision: either to take life or not. And I was 100 percent sure I was on God's side. Barbara and I talked about it, and we were at total peace after the first week or two. We realized we had been looking at the wrong thing. We were looking at \$1.3 million instead of looking at Him and knowing we made the right decision. God is the only One who has created life, and they (the government) were asking me to take life. That is a black and white [issue]. It goes back to [the question]: "Do you really stand on God's Word?" I knew it would be wrong to take what God has created. We were at peace for that reason, and also because we had so many people praying for us. This is God's business. This is not ours. He owns it. When you know He owns the business and you make the right decision, why should you concern yourself? If He wants to close the business that's His [decision]. Why am I going to concern myself about what God does with His business?

You share your five personal goals at the end of the book. How have those goals shaped your life?

I think they have helped shape my life because it *is* my life. It is about why I exist. I think we have to build a foundation with our family. I knew I wanted to serve the Lord—that was known already—but I wanted to have a marriage that would be beautiful. Second, I wanted to have a family that served God. Third, I wanted to be successful at whatever work I did. Those were the three I had for a long time. But later in life I said, "I

have grandkids and great-grandkids, and I want them to serve God," so I added that to my list. Finally, I want to tell everyone I can [about Christ]. That is who we are. What else is greater than those things? All of those things have to do with eternity. It has to do with whether we make it when we check out. When I check out, I will not care how many billions of dollars Hobby Lobby is worth. That will not be important to me, or any other people that have been given great wealth by God. They are going to be more concerned about who they are—their relationship with the Lord, their relationship with their family, their relationship with their wife, and if they do anything that has eternal value. Those are the things that are important. There is no eternal value to Hobby Lobby but it can be a means to an end—the end being that more people know about Christ.



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