

Season 3, Episode 6: How Our Stories Shape Our Giving with Vinh and Leisle Chung

Vinh: Giving from a position of power is actually very easy, because it doesn't demand anything of us. But when we really give because we have been humbled and broken, because we really have seen the suffering and injustices for what they are, I think only then could we really be transformed and find joy in giving.

Grace: Welcome to Giving Done Right, the podcast on everything you need to know to make an impact with your charitable giving. I'm Grace Nicolette.

Phil: And I'm Phil Buchanan.

Grace: Our stories shape us. But they also shape our giving. When we overcome hardship, or benefit from the generosity or support of others, or just experience luck, it can spark in us a desire to give back, to make a difference for others the way that others have for us. Today, we explore this through an interview with two people with remarkable stories of grit, kindness, and perseverance.

Vinh Chung's family fled Vietnam in 1979 when he was just three years old in a dilapidated and overcrowded fishing boat. Miraculously, the people on the boat, including Vinh, were rescued by the nonprofit World Vision in the South China Sea. He tells this incredible story in the 2014 book, *Where the Wind Leads*, which I highly recommend.

His wife, Leisle Chung, came to the US with her family from South Korea and endured poverty in rural Arkansas. Her story is amazingly depicted in the Academy Award winning 2020 movie *Minari*, written and directed by her brother, Lee Isaac Chung.

Vinh and Leisle met in high school in Arkansas. He went on to get his medical degree and she earned an MBA, both from Harvard.

They worked together to build a thriving medical practice in Colorado, Vanguard Skin Specialists. Inspired by their stories and their Christian faith,

they've devoted tremendous energy to giving locally and globally on issues such as child sex trafficking, healthcare access, and mental health.

Phil: Vinh and Leisle are incredible people and have unbelievable life stories. It can be almost hard to imagine what they have experienced, and yet all of us have experiences that shape our priorities, our values, our giving. But no matter what our own stories, we can all learn from the sort of self-reflection that they have gone through to ask themselves what they want their legacy to be, what kind of difference they want to make.

As always, if you have feedback for us, shoot us an email at gdrpodcast@cep.org. Here's our conversation with Vinh and Leisle Chung.

Grace: Vinh and Leisle Chung, welcome to the Giving Done Right podcast.

Leisle: Thank you for having us. Happy to be here.

Grace: We have loved diving into your stories. So, Vinh, we've read your book, and Leisle, we are huge fans of the movie, *Minari*. And obviously your lives and your story are beyond those two pieces of important work, but they gave us such a great foundation for understanding where you're coming from, and I thought I would just ask for you all to reflect a little bit on how your stories and your life trajectory, so Vinh, your family being rescued off of a boat in the South China Sea, and Leisle, being an immigrant to this country—how has this influenced your personal view of giving?

Leisle: Well, Grace, thank you so much for that warm welcome. For me, I grew up in rural Arkansas, and you referenced the movie that you saw, *Minari*, and in the opening scene of that movie, you see this family that drives just endless miles on this country road, and they end up coming to this single wide trailer in the middle of nowhere, and the father says, “here we are, welcome home.”

And the first time I saw that scene, I just burst out laughing, because that's pretty much what happened. And so, I grew up in rural Arkansas, a small farming community, and my parents worked in chicken houses. They also farmed. And I think having that type of background from this community, I learned a lot from my parents and just the work ethic, but also just the generosity that I saw in both of them. Because regardless of what our circumstances were, what I witnessed in my parents was just this generosity with everything that they had. They were always willing to share with members of our church, members of the community, and I think that's what they instilled in my brother and me as we were growing up.

I will say though, as I grew up watching my parents and then also growing up in church, I felt this, okay, you're supposed to tithe, and it was very much done out of obligation, and it wasn't until I was much older that I think I found joy in the giving. In fact, when Vinh and I moved out to Colorado Springs and we started our medical practice, and we realized that things were going to go well, and we made this decision to start giving out of our practice, I would say just based on my Christian upbringing, and it wasn't until I went out and started seeing the impact of the work that my heart really changed.

Grace: And Vinh, how about you? Your story of your family being rescued off of this boat by this nonprofit when you were three. You eventually become a board member of this nonprofit, that transition from being someone who benefited from its services to someone who is a donor. Tell us more about how your story intersects with your giving philosophy.

Vinh: I think that my story of giving is completely unexpected. As you mentioned, I came over as a refugee from Vietnam at three years old, and I grew up as one of 11 kids in a Vietnamese refugee family, and so my entire life has been struggling to achieve a position of security. And I did. And I think, eventually, my wife and I began to pursue meaning and purpose, and that was when we started giving and reunited with World Vision, which is the nonprofit organization that rescued my family. And so, we supported their projects, and it was through one of our trips to Cambodia that really solidified our path today and how we think about giving.

Grace: Can you say more? What was it about that trip and what was it about that chapter of your life?

Vinh: Oh, that was a rough trip. Because I had grown up poor, one of 11 kids, I'd always been in a vulnerable position, and that's part of my drive to have done so well in school and in my career, is to move out of that vulnerability. And so, what I started giving, I'd always wanted to give from a position of power or a position of wealth. But then when we went to Cambodia for this World Vision project, where we were sponsoring this project that rescued kids who had been sex trafficked. And you know, before I went there, I had read about it, I knew intellectually what it was all about. But when I went there, and I saw the kids for myself, I broke down. I'm someone who normally doesn't cry or talk about my feelings and stuff like that, but it was there where I felt that I finally confronted and encountered something that's evil, something that is so much bigger than myself, is something that I personally cannot overcome or beat or outwork or outsmart, and it was really humbling.

And so, my heart was broken, not something that I had looked forward to, but in that brokenness, it gave me clarity because in that brokenness, I knew that this is something that I have to respond to. So, giving from a position of power, which is something that I always thought giving was, I thought it was just something where I would go through a process to find out what I'm interested in, what strengths I have, and maybe that's what I can offer to the world.

But when I went to Cambodia and saw the magnitude of evil, the magnitude of suffering and injustice, I felt that I had to respond to it. And in the response, I feel that my wife and I just have clarity in what we do. And that was the first step, I think, towards experiencing joy in giving. And so, now we give through a medical practice. We always give to help serve and to protect the vulnerable and in particular children.

Phil: I'm so glad to be talking to both of you and so moved by both your stories. I grew up in this kind of like hippie family where a song I heard played all the time on the record player, which is “there but for fortune may go you or I,” and I kept thinking about that lyric as I learned about your stories and the notion that one boat was rescued, another boat wasn't. What does that mean? And so, there's something in your amazing book, *Where the Wind Leads*, where you say, “Why me? Why my family and not theirs?” And later you say, “I am a refugee, and I always will be. But in a way, all of us are refugees. We all are born in a time and place we didn't choose, born without language, property, or money, dependent entirely on the decisions of others for our very survival... We all have been blessed—every one of us—and we are all expected to give back.” Can you both talk a little bit more about the feeling that giving is something that you must do?

Vinh: I think that when I was growing up, I always thought that I didn't have much, I thought I had the short end of the stick compared to all my friends. And then, growing up as a refugee in this country, I was a permanent resident, so I always felt like I was a second-class citizen that never really fully belonged. But it wasn't until about 20 years ago, Leisle and I had a chance to go back to Vietnam, where we visited some of my family members, and these are my cousins, my uncle, my aunts, they left with me on when we left Vietnam as refugees. As it turned out, we were separated, and they ended up back in Vietnam. And here I was, I was about to graduate from Harvard Medical School. And I looked at their life, and I thought, oh my goodness, I've been blessed tremendously. I just didn't know that.

And I think that was a very eye-opening experience for me. And then, you know too, where you're talking about how, in many ways, we're all refugees and

immigrants, and that's true, and I think that's a unifying factor for us. And I think that prior to that, I always focused on, when I see myself as a second-class citizen, I look at me compared to other people, and focus on our differences. But the reality is that none of us chose our skin color. None of us chose the family that we're born into, or the time, or the place. I think in many ways that was very freeing, for me to see me as neither having too much or too little. But it was just to see the reality that this is what I have been given and it's been a tremendous.

Phil: There's an interesting question that Grace and I were talking about when we were talking about this interview is the people in your lives who bestowed sort of random acts of kindness on you. So, Vinh, you talk about someone placing money in your pocket, or a family member's pocket, or Leisle, in the movie that depicts your family, *Minari*, there is this figure, a very eccentric man, who proves to be important in your family's life. And Grace and I were talking about how folks often say, well, you know, you need to give strategically, don't just give randomly to someone you meet and you feel affection for or whatever. But actually, your lives have been changed by people just responding in the moment to you. So, how do you think about that question of strategy in your giving versus just being responsive to what you see or your experience?

Grace: And if I may add, I think another dimension that really stands out to us is that it was not World Vision's strategy to rescue boat people at that time. They did though.

Vinh: That's right. So, World Vision's purpose was to go and to assist the refugees, but not to pick them up. But when they saw the boat that my family was in, they recognized that they just couldn't leave us there. They had to respond to their conscience. And I think that one of the risks of trying to overthink giving is to step back and think about having to solve a gigantic problem. And the reality is that none of us will be able to solve poverty within our lifetime. The other challenge when you try to think too strategically is that you may end up look at your beneficiaries as a project, and for me, being someone on the receiving end of generosity, I can sense when I'm being treated as a project, it is not something that is dignifying, nor is it the way that giving should be.

And so, like, you mentioned the random stranger that responded giving me a hundred dollars when we were refugees in a San Francisco airport, he wasn't going to solve any problem, but he saw my family and recognized that we needed that money. And so, he responded. And I think that that's what Leisle

and I do, we respond. But of course, we also want to make sure that we respond wisely and not cause harm. And I think I tend to be someone who's more of the ready, fire, and then aim and then see what happens. Whereas Leisle's someone who would think more strategically and wisely, and she would actually aim and make sure that, you know, what we do is wise. And so, I think it's a balance of both.

Leisle: Well, it is a balance of both, but when I think about the projects that we've stepped into that have been really impactful, it has been places where we've been led with our heart. And so, for example, Vinh talked a little bit about this project in Cambodia, which was the first project that we walked into as a medical practice. And when we were first exploring what it is that we could do, we had a very set idea in our mind. We said we were going to do medical work in Southeast Asia. And so, when we started having conversations with World Vision and other organizations, that's very much what we were homed in on.

But then we heard that the biggest problem that was being dealt with at that time was just this issue around child sex trafficking in Southeast Asia. And so, we were asked, would you be willing to consider this and come in as a donor on this project? And it was not what we were looking for, but we ended up saying yes. Because after learning more, we felt like we couldn't walk away from it. The problem was messy, and it was big, but I think that's what we needed to step into.

And Vinh talked a little bit about that project and just the impact that it had. What he didn't add to that is while we were there on our very first trip, he also ended up tearing his ACL, and he was just playing volleyball with some street kids, tore his ACL. The trip itself was really difficult for both of us, and so when we came out of it, we felt like we were emotionally broken and literally even physically broken.

But it was a turning point because through that journey, we actually fell in love with the women and the girls that we spent time with. And I think that's the change that we actually needed to have in our hearts, which was not just looking at these numbers and the results, but to really fall in love with the people that we were serving. And so, we're hoping that's the heart that we can have as we go into these projects.

Phil: We talk so often about the head and the heart and needing both to be a part of the, the approach to giving. And I'm curious, in your work with children in terrible circumstances and being parents yourself, how did that affect you in terms of how you think about imbuing a sense of the importance of giving in

your own children or maybe their own sense of their privilege and sort of opportunities to make a difference?

Leisle: Well, when we first got involved with these projects, our kids were really young, so I'll be honest, we didn't think about it that much. But what has been surprising and such an incredible blessing for our family is we found out our kids have been listening and watching the entire time.

And so, I think about our oldest, he's 17 now, but when he was 11 years old, he came to us and asked if he could run a half marathon to raise money for clean water in Africa. And I told him no. I said, you're 11 years old, you're not going to run a half marathon. And he just persisted, and he just kept saying, well, if these kids are walking for water, I can run 13 miles to raise money for this. And so, he wore us down. We ended up saying yes. And over time it's become one of the things he does. He runs these half marathons, and he raises money. He's raised, I think, I mean, close to a hundred thousand dollars over the time that he's been doing this. And it just became his heart. And then we watched his younger brother do the same and then start to sponsor kids overseas and take on extra odd jobs to do that. And we've been really gratified, because it's not something that we asked the kids to do, but instead they've watched us. And so, Vinh and I have come to recognize that in giving, we've received so much more because it's just changed the trajectory of our children's heart.

Vinh: And there was another instance too. I remember there was an event where one of our, our sons, he was probably 10 at this time, and he's just learning about these kids in Africa who are walking for water because they don't have water, so they had to miss school and just the challenges they have. And then he asked me and Leisle, asked if he could work at Vanguard, which is a medical practice. We're like, wait, why would you want to work at Vanguard? He says, because right now he has allowance to sponsor only one child. So, he would like to work at our medical office to be able to sponsor another child. And when he learned about it too, talk about tears came out of his eyes. And it was at that point too with an oh my goodness, what we have done has shaped the hearts of our own children. And for us, that's a victory.

Grace: It's apparent to me that the values that the two of you have, you're saying the kids have watched them. I know that sometimes we try to teach values to our kids, but it's that whole concept of some things are caught, not just taught, and so it seems like that's very much the spirit of your family. I also want to talk about something that is in both the book and in the movie is your faith, right? Your faith also drives your giving. And I think even, Phil, the song lyrics that you referred to, I think kind of refer to this like there by the grace of

God go I kind of thing, or like to much has been given, much will be expected. And so, I'm wondering if you guys can talk a little bit about that component of your giving as well.

Vinh: When you think about giving, right, there are three questions that I always ask. It's what, right? What do you do, what you can accomplish? And then how? How do you do it? How do you execute it? So that's to me is the mind part. What do you do and how do you do it? But our faith component answers the question why? And I think that's also why I feel that we can't give. There's situations that we must respond because there's such a clear why, and it's so compelling, and we can't just sit there in the sidelines when someone's suffering. And you know, that caused us to give to World Vision, caused us to respond to the Afghanistan refugee crisis. It caused us to respond to refugees coming out of Ukraine. But it's the why that's there. And that right there is, is clearly where our faith is. Just gives us a clear why for ourselves as well as for our family.

Grace: Vinh, you were talking earlier about being a refugee, wanting to attain to a level of security before you got to sort of meaning and purpose. And I think that often a challenge, even if we aren't refugees, is that when do we actually reach that level of it's enough, and now I need to be thinking about meaning and purpose because we could always convince ourselves that it's just right around the corner, but then we actually never really get there. And so I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit about that. How did you, for instance, start imbuing the giving into your practice? Because I know a lot of our listeners may have their own businesses and, you know, struggle to think about how they can start there as well. So, I know there's a lot wrapped into there personally and professionally, but what made you continue on this path when so many people say, actually we're good, maybe in another 10 years.

Vinh: Yeah, so it is not a clear transition, right? Because to be a fully functional, healthy human being, you need security, you also need purpose and meaning at all levels of your life. And I think for us, our faith was a big factor. I learned when I was a kid going to Sunday school, so I was taught, I didn't have anything to give, but you know, I was taught, that's what I did. And then my father set the example for us. So, we didn't have much, he was a blue collar worker, 11 kids, but he still gave faithfully to our church. And so, he still tithed 10%, gave it to the church. He also gave it to his family back in Vietnam. And so, growing up it was just always a part of my life, something that I saw. And I remember times, so there were times when I, if I had to be honest, I would resent it a bit because I thought, man, I could probably use some of that money. But watching him do it, it's just a part of my life.

Leisle: I mean, definitely my parents influenced me. And then I would say with Vinh and me, it was, there was a decision that we made when we were driving out to Colorado Springs.

And so, both of us, we had been living in Atlanta at the time. I was working as a management consultant, Vinh finished up his fellowship, and then we made this decision that we were going to open this medical practice out in Colorado Springs. It was in 2009, when the economy tanked, it was really hard to get a bank loan, we couldn't sell our house. And we thought, you know what? Let's do this. Because even if we don't make it, our kids are young, we're both employable. We think we could do this. And so, we were doing this drive from Atlanta out to Colorado Springs, and we were listening to this sermon series that Andy Stanley had done, out of NorthPoint Ministries. And it was this sermon series called "Balanced." And it was about managing your finance. And at this point, we had this loan, we had this practice we were trying to get off the ground, we had this house in Atlanta that we couldn't sell, and the two of us started talking, and we said, let's just commit to giving this percentage. And there was a percentage that we had in mind, and we said, this is the percentage that we're going to give. And we made that decision when we really didn't have that much. And I think pre-deciding that in advance has helped us over time. And you would think the more successful we get, the easier it is. But actually, the giving gets larger, and so maybe not necessarily, but I think pre-deciding that has made a big difference for us when we had not very much. And it's helped us to continue on that path. So that's one.

I think the second that really helped us is we just made a decision of what is the finish line for us. And then after that, we know, after we cross it, that all the work that we do, it's for God's kingdom and so predetermining that finish line has been helpful, because then being able to cross it and then to move forward from there has been impactful for us.

Vinh: So, I would call that as a line of enough. If you don't declare for yourself what is enough, pick a number, whatever it is. If you don't pinpoint it and declare what's enough, you will always be living under the tyranny of needing more.

And so, when I think about giving, you have to first of all, declare enough. Once you do that, then it gives you so much freedom to then focus on what matters. Regardless of what faith you have or no faith at all, we all want freedom, right? We all want meaning and purpose. We all know that we're more than just organisms that pass through on this planet on a finite period of time, and then leave a carbon footprint right there. There's more to us than that, and

so once we are able to declare for ourselves what is enough, we commit to it, and then we have the freedom to just focus on what matters.

Phil: You know, one of the things, and I don't know if either of you'll have a response to this, but I can't help but be thinking about it, is that Grace and I spend a lot of time talking to people who have a very inspiring level of commitment to giving. We believe that giving is so important, and we believe that so many nonprofits and NGOs in this country and around the world do such vital work that needs to be supported. But at the same time, if you were to look over the last 20 years, the rates of giving in this country are actually declining. It was about two thirds of American households that gave in 2001. It's just under 50 percent in the most recent data. I don't know what to make of this. Part of what we try to do is hold up people that we hope are inspiring to others to say, I want to make a difference too, I want to have that experience, I want to feel that joy of knowing that I gave. Do you have any thoughts on that or what is wrong in our culture or our society that we're seeing less giving back in terms of just not the dollars, but the rates of participation?

Vinh: I have a lot of theories, but no science to back it up. So this is just my opinion.

Phil: That's okay. Yeah, it's okay. Disclaimer noted. Yeah.

Vinh: Yeah, so, and I speak not as a doctor, I speak just as a normal individual. So, these aren't medical data. But I think about, again, these are broad generalizations here, right? I think about the idea of anxiety, anxiety, depression, and horrible things are happening, and you see it everywhere on media, right? It's just horrible things are happening in this world, and it leads to this sense of helplessness when you see bad things that happen in this world, and you don't respond to it. Through giving, we're able to shape this world. And so, it's a very empowering process and a very empowering act that we do. And so, we try to teach our children that if there are things that they see, first of all, if they want it, I say, well get a job and you can earn it, right? Grow up and get a job and earn it. But if you see suffering, instead of talking about suffering, instead of ignoring that it's there, putting it aside—when we fail to respond to suffering in this world, it's not neutral. We suffer what—this is a real medical term—it's called moral injury. And it's a type of assault to the essence of who we are, our ideas of what is right and wrong, what is just an unjust, it's actually an assault, and we suffer damage from it. It's a term used to describe combat veterans, so these are soldiers who see horrific things. And so, for us, for our children, you know, we give, not because we're going to fix some grand problem in this world, we give because we're responding to a suffering that we

see, we're responding to a need that we see. And so, we need to respond as much as a person receiving it needs it. And so, both people need it, the receivers as well as the giver. That's how we see philanthropy.

Grace: I'm so glad that you said that because oftentimes we talk about giving, I think that piece is completely left out, right? Like the way that we as donors get to be changed. It's like sometimes we feel like, okay, we're helping other people who are in deficit in some way, but then we completely forget that perhaps in non-monetary ways we are in deficit.

Vinh: Yes.

Grace: And actually, the transformation that happens when we are in community with them is actually very much a part of the story that needs to happen with us, perhaps sometimes even more than what needs to happen with them. And so why do we always sort of leave that piece out?

Vinh: I think that money is charged. I think wealthy people have a bad reputation. That's just how we see money. I can't explain why, but that's just how it is. At least for me. When I was growing up, that's how I saw it. I had a very unhealthy view of what wealth was and what it means to give. But the challenge, though, is that giving from a position of power is actually very, because it doesn't demand anything of us. But when we really give, because we have been humbled and broken, because we really have seen the suffering and the injustices for what they are, I think only then could we really be transformed and find joy in giving.

Leisle: And Grace, I just want to add to that because I love what you said about how we are the ones that are transformed, and in many ways, we actually end up receiving, and we end up learning, and we end up becoming the beneficiaries. I actually think about this young woman who I met during one of my trips and she was a young woman who was about 17 years old at the time that I met her, and she was at a trauma recovery center, and it was for women and children who had been trafficked. When we were there, she asked me if she could do my hair and makeup because she was learning how to be a cosmetologist. She wanted to do my hair and makeup, just to thank me for being there and for supporting the work that was being done there. And as I got to know her, I learned her story and I learned that she had been at this recovery center for about a year. She had been rescued out of a brothel, and she said that when she was first brought to this center, she was really upset, and it's because her income was what was supporting her mother and her two younger siblings. And as a teenager, she was placed in this situation where her father had left the

family, her mother was very sick, unable to work, and she had two younger siblings. And so, no matter what job she took, it was never enough until she went and started working as an underage prostitute.

So, she's sharing the story with me, and I thought to myself, you know, here I am, I'm this woman who lives this very comfortable life, and everything I give in many ways is just my extra. And then here's this 17-year-old girl, but really, I'm going to say woman, because of the life that she's lived and just the maturity that she had. And for her, she gave everything she had to support her family. And then here she was doing my hair and makeup to thank me for my generosity. In that moment, I recognized that I was the recipient of her generosity.

And so, Grace, what you say is absolutely true. In this journey, we're not necessarily the ones who are the givers, but we also receive so much.

Vinh: When you think about all of the relationships that we have in our lives, right? Like with a marriage, I have received so much more than what I've given. If you have children, right? We give them so much, so sacrificially, but then we get so much in return by the love that we receive from them. So, giving to strangers that I think, from a faith basis, that's what we're doing to complete strangers, who don't look like us, who live in other parts of the world, how is it that we're able to have that type of relationship and community and connection with them? And I think too, for us, that is a part of the philanthropy journey that has been really fulfilling for us.

Phil: I know we started this whole conversation with the disclaimer that this is not science or, you know, medical advice, but in fact, there's been plenty of research that has shown the positive relationship between a generosity between giving and at least self-reported happiness. So, it's not just theory, it's true. And in my mind, how do we help people to recognize that truth? That having a sense of purpose and that drive to give back will actually help you to feel better and do better in life?

Grace: I want to go back to your business, and I know that a lot of our listeners are wondering how do we become philanthropic through our day jobs as well? And, oftentimes, you know, folks do have their own businesses like the both of you have your practice. What does that look like, starting that conversation about philanthropy through your work?

Leisle: Well, the mission for our medical practice is that we're going to make a positive impact on our patients, our community, and our world. And if you were

to walk into any of our eight office locations and ask any of our team members, what's the mission at Vanguard, they're going to be able to recite it by heart because we talk about it so much. And so, it's very much infused within our culture. It has not always been that way. Initially, I think Vinh and I thought of it in silos in terms of here's what we do in our company, here's what we do with our giving, and so on.

And one of the things that helped flip that is when we started a division of our practice called Clara. We named this after our only daughter, Clara. Her name means light, and we named it Clara, hoping that we would stay true to our mission to just be a light. And when we started this aesthetic retail skincare division, we just made this decision of we're just going to give away all the profits, whatever that may be, we'll give away all the profits. And we didn't tell anybody. We then ended up needing to tell the person who was running Clara and then the team at Clara that we were doing this, but we didn't tell anybody else. And then our team came to me, and they said, Leisle, you need to talk about this because we're really proud of it, we want to be able to tell our patients about this, and so you need to talk about this.

And it's really special because we take part of our Clara profits, and we donate it to causes overseas, and then we take a portion of it, and we donate it locally. And when we do that, members of our team, they're actually able to pick charities that they want to give to, and then we send them out with checks to go give them out to these organizations. And whenever they come back, tears have been shed because it's just such an emotional experience to be able to go out and to give out of the profits that they worked so hard for during the course of that year. And then as a medical practice as a whole, we made a decision in 2018 to start taking team members out into the field, into places where we have projects, and that's been incredibly life changing for people.

The first place where we took people, it was Haiti. We took people who've never left the country, and their first time leaving the country was to go to Haiti in this slum area. But when they came back, I think it just gave a sense of purpose and they kind of had this aha moment of that part of our mission—when we're saying we're making a positive impact on our world, what does it look like?

Vinh: Beyond giving, it's been good for our business as well because we have a lot more employee engagement, we have greater retention. And I think that we live in a world now where isolation is rampant. And what we do here is that we're able to connect our work physically—with what we do every single day in the dermatology and plastic surgery practice—we connect people with the

community, we connect people with a greater purpose. And so, giving people that connection right there has been a huge, huge boom in staff morale. That's why we've also been voted best workplace in the Colorado Springs for the past three years in a row. It's also good business to be able to do good.

Grace: That's excellent. Congratulations on that, by the way. At the end of every episode, we always ask our guests, giving done right, to me, means: fill in the blank. How would you both answer that?

Leisle: For me, I would say giving done right is loving other people because I think once you love other people, then it just becomes easy, and it doesn't even feel like generosity or charity.

Grace: How about you, Vinh?

Vinh: I won't give a separate, parallel statement, but I'll follow on the idea of love. And so, I would say love is a verb, is an act of submission, and it's very difficult—we're not wired to submit to others, but I feel that once we're able to do it, we would have profound joy in our lives.

Grace: Thank you both so much for joining us today.

Vinh: Thank you.

Leisle: Thank you.

Phil: Vinh and Leisle decided somewhere along the way what was enough in terms of the accumulation of wealth and part of what motivated that decision to focus on giving in a big way, and in a way that cuts across their family and their business, was this recognition of their own good fortune, their own stories, and a desire to address that feeling of, sort of, “why me?” which Vinh writes about in the book with a focus on giving to others.

Grace: I could really relate to that “why me?” sentiment. My parents were refugees from mainland China fleeing in the 1940s with my grandparents to Taiwan, and they grew up in abject poverty there. And then, you know, I was raised in the US. I had a chance to go back to China a number of years ago and actually meet a second cousin of mine who was around my age, whose grandparents had stayed in China and were sent to labor camps. She and my situations could not have been more different. I remember really wrestling with “why me?”, and also that phrase, which I think was really a thread in what Vinh and Leisle were saying, which is, to much has been given, much will be

expected. I have the opportunity to receive so much, and I didn't get to pick how life turned out for me, and it turned out pretty well. I have gotten a lot of support over the years from many different places, and so now I want to give back. I want to be part of that virtuous cycle for other people.

Phil: Whether that desire to give is connected in some way, as it clearly is for Vinh and Liesle, to your religious faith, or whether it is rooted in something else—just a desire to have that sense of purpose being focused on something bigger than yourself or bigger than your stuff—It doesn't matter. What we know is that not only is it so important because it will help so many other people, but it is important for you. You will be happier if you give. I hope that folks take inspiration from this story to maybe think about focusing more of their time, attention, and resources on that effort to give.

Grace: Yeah, it's very apparent that Vinh and Leisle have been transformed by their giving, and their lives are much richer because of the generosity that they have shown other people, and I just love being reminded of that perspective. Sometimes we just feel like we're parting with our assets or our wealth when we're giving, but actually we do get a lot in return that is intangible, but no less important.

Phil: Including the relationships with others. I mean, they talked about that so powerfully. The love they feel for the people whose lives they have touched with their philanthropy, and in a time of just increasing isolation in our society, loneliness—giving can be a way to connect and forge those human ties.

Grace: I'm also just reflecting on the fact that you never know who you're going to be benefiting, right, when you give. Like the fact that they have become who they are because of the people who helped along the way, I think is such a good reminder that your giving can really make a difference.

Another thing that I'm really reflecting on too is that, you know, they did receive someone practicing what we sometimes wouldn't call like “effective giving,” right? It doesn't have a strategy, it is just out there charitably. But yet, at key times, that funding really tied them over in Vinh's story, and I think I'm challenged to actually think more expansively about giving. I think at some point in our lives, right, especially when we were kids or when we have young kids, we wrestle with the do I give to panhandler kind of question. And I think where I've landed firmly is, no, you don't. And I probably am still there, but I also am challenged by their story to reflect on how having very neat buckets for giving isn't always necessarily the way to go, that we should also give out of our heart.

Phil: Yeah, and I sometimes do, and what I think we're saying is that there's a place for thoughtful strategy, like the ones that they have supported, for example, through the work on child sex trafficking. But there's also a place for random acts of kindness and generosity, and we shouldn't give up on that either.

Grace: Thank you for listening to Giving Done Right. You can find more resources about effective giving and the podcast on givingdoneright.org. You can find us on Twitter, I'm @gracenicolette and Phil is at @philxbuchanan. And if you like the show, please leave us a review on Apple Podcasts, it really helps.

Phil: Listeners, we want to hear from you. Tell us what giving done right is about to you, what it really means, and we'll feature some of our favorites on the show later this season, just send us a short voice memo—one minute or less—to gdrpodcast@cep.org.

Grace: Giving Done Right is a production of the Center for Effective Philanthropy. It's hosted by me, Grace Nicolette, and Phil Buchanan. Our executive producer is Sarah Martin with mixing and engineering by Kevin O'Connell and additional editing by Isabelle Hibbard.

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