

Please Give (2010)

Rated R. Our Ratings: V-1; L-4; S-1/N-5. Length: 1 hour 30 min.

Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, "Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land."

Deuteronomy 15:11

Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat!

Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.

Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?

Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.

Isaiah 55:1-2

Kate, played by the wonderful Andra arrives for her birthday party with her two mother who certainly keeps the granddaughters as Kate greets Torah's commandment to give them.

alms. However, from what we see of her in this film, she is not motivated by a religious faith, but by a guilt complex that towers as high as the high rises of her Manhattan. She cannot pass a homeless person without handing out five or twenty dollar bills, much to the disgust of her bratty teenaged daughter Abby (Sarah Steele), upset with her mother because she will not spend \$200 on the

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jeans she fervently covets.

With husband Alex (Oliver Platt) Kate runs a very upscale vintage furniture/home accessories store specializing in furniture of the mid-Fifties. Part of her guilt stems from the fact that they buy their items cheap at estate sales held by the children of a deceased person: in one scene Kate conjures up in her mind the image of the woman who had died in the chair she is now selling. Buying furniture and decorative items that the sellers deem is of little value, they are able to sell them to well to do adults at a huge mark-up. Kate and Alex live a very privileged life, so when she sees a homeless person on the street, her sensitive conscience gives her no peace until she gives something to them—even if it's the leftovers she is carrying home in a doggy bag from a restaurant. (In this case she is embarrassed when the African American man to whom she offers them tells her that he is waiting in line to be seated!)

Kate and Alex have optioned to buy the next-door apartment currently occupied by the crotchety old Andra, whose two grown granddaughters look in on her virtually every day. There is an almost macabre scene in which Kate and Alex invite the grandmother and sisters over for a birthday party for Andra, who proves grateful neither for the event nor for the gift they provide: nor does the party proceed smoothly when one of the granddaughters ask the couple what their remodeling plans are when Andra passes away. The parents are also ill at ease because of daughter Abbey's reluctance to join them at the dinner table.

All of the characters in this story have major flaws. If Kate has trouble holding in her impulse to give so as to assuage her guilt feelings, Andra's problem, at least for others, is her unbridled tongue that expresses her negativity. She just cannot hold in any negative feelings, which due to the aches and pains of her age are many. Her youngest granddaughter Rebecca (Rebecca Hall) looks in on and shops for her on a

regular basis. She is very sensitive and tender hearted to the patients to whom she administers mammograms at a clinic, but in her personal life is downbeat. Her sister Mary (Amanda Peet), who also helps the grandmother when convenient, gives facials at a spa and spends too much time in its tanning bed. Thus each of the sisters has her own issues, which we need not go into further, including an unfortunate sexual relationship that develops between one of them and Alex.

This is an interesting and amusing character study, marred only by the subplot of adultery (which does not make much sense, at least for the young woman involved). Kate is especially interesting in that she has virtually everything that our society says leads to a happy and fulfilled life, and yet is still very discontented. Her plight is one familiar to those who experienced the "gender gap" rebellion of the Sixties, and which seems to be re-emerging today. Although the film ends on a note of reconciliation between Kate and Abby, one might question director Nicole Holofcener's conclusion. Do you think that the mother has sold out?

For Reflection/Discussion

Contains spoilers.

1. Which of the women in the film would you relate to best? Why? Why do you think Kate always feels so guilty? How is daughter Abby caught up in the materialism of society?
2. What do you think of Kate's attempt to serve as a volunteer? Why do you think she would be ineffective?
3. What issues do the granddaughters have? What hope do you see for them, if any?
5. What do you think of Andra: what might have happened that she has become such a nasty person?

6. Why do you think Alex does what he does? Do there seem to be any consequences for his actions?

7. During the montage in the clinic at the beginning of the film we hear a song playing that includes the line "I had no shoes and I complained/Until I met a man who had no feet." How do you think that this is both a mocking of and a commentary on Kate?

8. What does Kate do at the end of the film to reach out to daughter Abbey? We see by the expression on Kate's face, when Abby uncharacteristically thanks her, that she is happy for the moment: but, do you think this is selling out? Will Abby ever learn richer values if her parents keep giving in to her?

4. How could Isaiah's appeal to ancient Israel apply to Kate and her family? How have they settled "for that which is not bread" ? Compare this to Jesus' teachings in Matthew 6:18ff. Do you detect any trace of spirituality or faith in the lives of the characters? How might this be of benefit to them?