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OPENERS: REFRESH BUTTON; Philanthropy Outside the Box

By ROBERT JOHNSON

At 92, Sir John Marks Templeton may seem an unlikely dispenser of the maxim that life is short.

But he is not talking about the number of years that one has to draw breath. What he sees in short supply is the time that most people allot to accomplishing something worthwhile. "We should try to waste very little time on fiction, or entertainment, or television," he said.

He has wasted little time in his life. He started his career on Wall Street in 1937, when he was in his early 20's, and went on to create the Templeton family of mutual funds. Sir John sold the fund business, Templeton, Galbraith & Hansberger, to the Franklin Group, now known as Franklin Resources, in 1992 for \$913 million and is now a full-time philanthropist.

Sir John, a Tennessee native who graduated from Yale and was a Rhodes Scholar, has remained an innovator. His philanthropies include the \$1 million Templeton Prize, which recognizes "progress toward research or discoveries about spiritual realities." It has been presented annually in London since 1973; the first recipient was Mother Teresa of Calcutta. (Sir John became a naturalized British citizen in 1968 and was knighted by Queen Elizabeth II in 1987.)

The prize is one of more than a dozen programs run by the John Templeton Foundation. Some encourage research into the benefits of cooperation between science and religion. Others focus on the nature of altruism or freedom. Among the research topics the foundation has supported, for example, is the salutary effect of forgiveness on offenders and victims alike. The foundation gives away about \$40 million a year.

Sir John says he continues to work enthusiastically with seven colleagues in his office in Nassau, the Bahamas, and he still helps to manage the foundation, which is based in West Conshohocken, Pa. "Such enthusiasm derives from humility to think that humans have not researched or discovered even 1 percent about what can be discovered about aspects of spiritual realities."

Why not concentrate his philanthropy on urgent problems like starvation and poverty?

"Always, humans have wanted to donate toward alleviation of suffering," he said, "but probably, such donations can be over 10 times more cost effective if focused on ways to prevent suffering."

Twice a widower, with 12 grandchildren and nine great-grandchildren, Sir John is well aware that his philanthropy is unusual and may not yield many tangible results in his lifetime. But, he said, "it is the far-reaching thinker who breaks out of the traditional mold." Robert Johnson