

Generosity Season Community Comment: December 13, 2018 Mike Goldsby

This is the season of giving and a time of generosity. The term generosity has a couple of related definitions and meanings.

Generosity is the quality of being kind, understanding and not selfish. It also has a definition related to money. Generosity is the virtue of being unattached to material possessions, often symbolized by the giving of gifts.

Generosity is seen as a virtue around the globe and by most religions. The Bible refers to generosity as charity. Jesus apparently said it is better to give than to receive.

Buddhism calls generosity one of The Ten Perfections and the only antidote to the poison of greed. Islam states that whatever one gives generously, God will replace it.

Our seasonal view of generosity is somewhat shaped by Charles Dickens, "A Christmas Carol." Ebenezer Scrooge was stingy, miserly, envious, petty. He gets angry when people wish him "Merry Christmas" and "Happy New Year." He believes the needy are trying to pick his pockets. And his employees are under constant threat of being fired, apparently as a way to increase productivity.

Seeing the ghost of his dead miserly partner is not enough to shake him, so he has a series of spiritual encounters that help him analyze his life, take a personal inventory and make an adjustment. "A Christmas Carol" sounds like a metaphor for Alcoholics Anonymous.

Dickens practiced what he preached and became a very charitable man, using the wealth he had accumulated from his novels. In "A Christmas Carol", he wanted people to honestly look at how they viewed their fellow man. And look at generosity year-round, not just one month out of the year.

Our personal views of generosity are shaped by our parent's views. Even poor families can be generous. It is all relative. Donating to a church. Helping a family in need. Giving someone a roof and a warm bed, even sharing a meal are all forms of generosity that poor people do all of the time.

Growing up, some of us were warned not to be too generous. Describing a person as “generous to a fault” was bad, viewed as a person who ignored their own needs for others. “He would give you the shirt off of his back”, He’s a great guy but he is cold. He doesn’t have a shirt.

“Generosity begins at home” is true, but it is also a justification for not being generous. And then the whole judgement of whether someone is worthy of charity. Scrooge justified his stinginess by deciding the poor were not worthy. We all have our preferences and biases, even if we don’t verbalize those words.

I believe some of the appeal of supporting abandoned dogs is the clarity that those dogs had nothing to do with their current situation. People are still a little suspicious of abandoned cats.

It is hard to talk to others about generosity. They may get defensive or guilty. You may get defensive or feel guilty. It’s easier to just not bring it up.

But you just might be surprised. Generosity is a personal gain, not a loss.

Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays.

This is Mike Goldsby for Community Comment