

Character Matters: Generosity

Giving freely of my own resources to provide others' needs

It Matters for Life

Once upon a time, a young man made a New Year's resolution. In the following year, he was going to become a generous person. He felt quite happy about himself after making this resolution, for he knew it was a good one.

On New Year's Day, our young man dutifully appeared at the local soup kitchen. He toiled away for an hour or two, and felt he had made a good beginning on his pledge.

To reward himself, he stopped by the local electronics store on the way home. Using his credit card, he took advantage of the sales and bought several items he "really needed," though he knew he couldn't technically afford them on his salary.

Over the next few months, the young man occasionally remembered his resolution. He gave a few dollars to some neighborhood kids for a fundraiser in January, sent a few more to a charity in February, missed March, but in April he made up for it by giving a handsome offering to his church.

But May was when the real trouble began. The young man had been living rather extravagantly for his income, and it was beginning to show. He

wanted to be generous, he thought, but he just didn't have the ability to be right now.

Despite his growing concerns about financial stability, he did try to be generous in the small ways he could. He took his friend Susie out to dessert, gave Tom a new set of golf clubs, and treated his brother's kids to a day at the zoo. He always felt better after these gestures, but his pocketbook suffered.



Nevertheless, our young man persevered. He simply must enjoy life, he thought, so he couldn't cut off his satellite tv, though it was beginning to be a nuisance when the bill came around. By now it was August, and when the pleas came in the mail for donations he threw them in the trash.

"I just don't have enough to give," he thought. "I wish I did, for I do feel deeply about all those causes, but I just don't have the means. Other people I know have plenty of money. They have the ability to give, but they don't do it. If I had the money my friend has I would certainly give half of it away. It's ridiculous how much he spends on extravagant things, and here are children literally starving all over the world! Why is it the compassionate people like me have nothing to give, while the heartless people like him have it all, and won't give any?"

And so life went on for the young man. On his birthday in October, his grandmother gave him a very nice gift. He thanked her profusely, went and got out his wish list, and bought several items he had especially wanted. "She wanted me to use it on myself!" he protested when his conscience squirmed.

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- ◆ Manage your resources wisely
- ◆ Look for needs
- ◆ Plan ahead for giving
- ◆ Go without something
- ◆ Invest in truly lasting endeavors

It matters for life (con.)

And then it was December again. In the flurry and bustle of the season, he had quite forgotten his resolution, but the “spirit of Christmas” was in him, so he went shopping with a good will. No one should think him a Scrooge, so he pulled out the credit cards again for nice gifts to give all his friends, and those he wished to be his friends. And he never forgot to give his



loose change at the Salvation Army buckets.

On New Year's Eve, the young man looked

back over the past year with contented self-satisfaction. He had certainly been kind-hearted this year, at least as much as he could be.

But did he keep his resolution?

As I write this little tale, I am afraid my ‘sermon’ will be taken to be a bit too harsh. But if I am being harsh, it is on myself, for I am the model for most of the actions of our unfortunate young man. I think it is a true enough picture of many of us, including me.

Most of us don't mean to be “stingy” or ungenerous. But we think that compassionate thoughts, haphazard giving, and

unnecessary expenses make up a generous life. They don't.

A truly generous life is one that is willing to go without and work hard at being financially free to give. A generous life is one that doesn't expect giving to come naturally, but budgets and plans for it. A generous life is one that actually does give, rather than just thinking about it. And a generous life gives to truly worthy causes.

Generosity matters - because a New Year's resolution is not enough.



*Good King Wenceslas looked out on the Feast of Stephen,
When the snow lay round about, deep and crisp and even.
Brightly shone the moon that night, though the frost was cruel,
When a poor man came in sight, gathering winter fuel.*

*“Hither, page, and stand by me, if thou know'st it, telling,
Yonder peasant, who is he? Where and what his dwelling?”
“Sire, he lives a good league hence, underneath the mountain,
Right against the forest fence, by Saint Agnes' fountain.”*

*“Bring me flesh and bring me wine, bring me pine logs hither,
Thou and I shalt see him dine, when we bear them thither.”
Page and monarch, forth they went, forth they went together,
Through the cold wind's wild lament and the bitter weather.*

*“Sire, the night is darker now, and the wind blows stronger,
Fails my heart, I know not how; I can go no longer.”
“Mark my footsteps, my good page, tread now in them boldly,
Thou shalt find the winter's rage freeze thy blood less coldly.”*

*In his master's steps he trod, where the snow lay dinted;
Heat was in the very sod which the saint had printed.
Therefore, Christian men, be sure, wealth or rank possessing,
You who now will bless the poor shall yourselves find blessing.*



The words of “Good King Wenceslas” were written by John Mason Neale in 1853, but the tune is that of a 13th century hymn, “Tempus Adest Floridum.” The “good king” is based upon a duke of Bohemia who lived during the 10th century. This song is an old, yet timely reminder of the beauty of a truly generous heart.