

The Gift of Giving & the Art of...



Catherine Nelson, Ph.D.

Here we are already making plans for the upcoming holidays, especially Christmas. Some of us have already stashed presents away, and some of us will be last minute shoppers. The spirit and joy of the holidays is infectious, and we all want to be a part of it one way or another.

One of the main themes at this time of year is giving gifts to friends, family, and others. Some of us worry about finding the “right” gift for each person on our list. Will it be a good color or the right size? Will it be “enough” for a certain person? If it is not well received or valued, what should I do? How can I afford all of the gifts on my list?

These kinds of questions and concerns create tension, worry, and frustration inside of us. We seem to have lost the real value of giving. Maybe these two stories will help us remember the essence of gift giving in the days ahead.

George is an older man, retired from a good job with a modest pension. As a child, George was very poor and lived with his mother, who worked long hours to financially take care of the two of them. There were many times in the winters when they had to cut back on the groceries in order to pay for the heating bills. At Christmas, George and his Mom would find a way to exchange

small presents and enjoy the holiday spirit.

George lives alone and enjoys his comfortable but small apartment. He volunteers in different community groups and participates in local social events. Often George is invited to other people’s homes over the holidays, especially Thanksgiving. He finds pleasure in being with his friends, and there is much for which he is grateful in his life.

Christmas is more challenging for George. He can’t afford to buy presents, so he declines invitations, saying, “he has made other plans.” Nevertheless, George has the holiday spirit of “giving” and wants to help others

who are poor, as he once was as a child.

Last Christmas several friends of George’s noticed he was smiling a lot and seemed very happy. George had found a way to give a gift to others. At the local market, George discovered that he could earn a free turkey by buying enough groceries to qualify.

George got his free turkey about a week before Christmas, and he took it to the local food bank to give to a family. George did not know who would get his turkey, but it didn’t matter to him. He was pleased that he had found a way to gift someone else in need. George is already planning to do the same thing this Christmas, and he is smiling a lot already.

The second story is about Lia, a five year old girl, who liked to draw and paint. She loved her grand-



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Receiving

parents, Bill and Martha. Lia had a present for Martha, and she painted a picture for Bill just before Christmas. Bill was 75 years old and had been a farmer much of his life. He and Martha were looking forward to seeing their son, daughter-in-law, and especially Lia. Since their son worked in the city, it was a long drive for them to come to the farm, but they always came for Christmas.

On Christmas morning, Lia could hardly wait until breakfast was over so everyone could open their presents. Lia walked over to Bill with her picture open wide in her small hands.

Unfortunately she tripped and fell and the picture was torn in two. Lia picked up the two pieces, looked at them, and began to cry because her gift was no longer worth giving to her beloved grandfather.

Bill called Lia over, and he comforted her until her tears slowed down. Martha found some tape and Bill helped Lia tape the picture together. Bill looked at the picture and smiled. He told Lia that it was the most beautiful gift he had ever received. Lia stopped crying as she listened to Bill's words. Lia asked her grandfather how her torn picture could be the best gift he had ever received? Bill put his arms around Lia and said, "This picture is from your heart, and I love you." Bill and Lia hugged each other and were seen later laughing over some Christmas cookies and apple cider.

Lia's grandfather died a year later, and they never had another Christmas together. However, Lia did visit her grandparents several times that year at the farm. Each time she arrived, she saw her picture in a pretty wooden frame on the wall with the tape still holding the two pieces together.

Lia is now 25, and she says that of all the presents she has given to others, her grandfather's gift was the best. It made her feel so good because he knew her gift was from her heart, and nothing else mattered.

Lia has her torn picture still in the frame on her bedroom wall. The tape has dried out and the two pieces of the drawing have been glued together. Lia says that when she looks at her picture around the holidays, she is reminded that it is the intention of the one giving the gift that matters even more than the gift itself. Lia's grandfather taught her a valuable lesson about giving. ■

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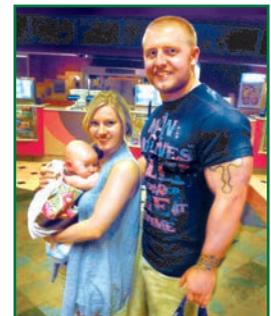
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