

# CORE VALUES AND CORE BELIEFS



*Catherine Nelson, Ph.D.*

When I drive to different local events and activities in our town, I often take one or two people with me who need a ride. There are two former passengers I seldom see anymore, but I often think about them.

Mary is a lover of dogs. She and her husband are both retired. They chose to adopt several older dogs from the local animal rescue facility, as they know these dogs are unlikely to get adopted by others. They willingly pay the medical bills for expensive medicines for these older animals and want the dogs to have a good life. Needless to say, the dogs become increasingly healthy and happy with all the love and attention that they receive.

Mary is a volunteer at the local library, and she has several jobs. One is to deliver library books every week to several older people who can no longer safely drive their cars. She typically stays a while, talking to each house-bound individual. Mary has a quality of goodness that shows up in a number of her other volunteer activities.

Bill is another former passenger I often think about. Bill is retired, and he too finds many ways to be of service as a volunteer in his small community. In the summer months, he works for the National Parks Conservation Association to help remove or modify barbed wire fencing on ranches near the national park. Sometimes he removes the lower strand of barbed wire so the pronghorn can crawl under the fencing as they migrate through a valley.

Sometimes he gets to remove all the fencing, so wild animals can travel through the fields freely. Other times, he helps to roll up old rusty barbed wire, so the wild animals will not get caught in it and get injured. It is hard work on hot and dusty days, moving through fields, ditches and mountainous areas.

In addition, Bill is a volunteer at the local food bank in town, helping with the shipments and distribution of foods. Once again, he works hard lifting heavy boxes of vegetables, canned goods, and other products in and out of trucks on to the shelves in the storage area of the old building.

Mary and Bill have a lot in

common. They are caring individuals, and they volunteer many hours during the week doing what they love. They contribute willingly in a multitude of ways. However, there are major differences between Mary and Bill. Mary reads a lot, talks to people where ever she goes and believes in the fundamental goodness of human beings.

Bill was a quiet passenger in my car but when asked his opinion about different topics, he would speak and his thoughts were usually critical. He read the local community newspaper every morning with his coffee, and he listened to his favorite radio talk show. Bill would get annoyed and angry about the actions and decisions of local and national politicians and leaders. Bill tended to be suspicious of people's intentions, and he expected worse things were going to happen all the time. Even when Bill heard of something good going on in the community, Bill would quickly move to another issue or topic that was not, in his opinion, "right" or fair.

I think about Mary and Bill and wonder how they are doing. They are good people, and they each are reliable and responsible community members. They are generous with their time and energy in their numerous volunteer activities. Mary was much better company on long car rides. She could be critical and concerned, but she could also talk about something happening that was positive and worthwhile going on in the community. Mary also enjoyed talking to other passen-

gers in the car and was interested in their opinions and ideas. Bill was more introspective.

Sometimes when I think about Mary and Bill, I remember the old cliché, “Is the glass of water half empty or half full?” Bill would be the one who saw the glass as “half empty” most of the time. Mary was more likely to see the glass as “half full.” I wondered how two people could be so generous and caring and yet, have significantly different beliefs about people and life.

I do not know about their individual backgrounds growing up, or their families or friends. I do not know what life events might have helped to shape their fundamental beliefs about others or even their own sense of self-worth. I do know that as different as they were in their beliefs about others, they were equally committed to helping do good things for people, for animals, and for the community. In retrospect, perhaps what I saw in Bill’s and Mary’s contributions and good work is all I really needed to know about each of them. Their core values were more important to me than their beliefs about human nature and life. ■

### Catherine

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