

Leslie bought a young horse and she had it shipped from Kentucky to her home in Wyoming. It was a long journey for a three-year-old gelding, but the horse did well. The trailer driver, Joe, cared about all the horses he transported. He always made sure they had good water and hay and breaks from standing for hours in the trailer. When Joe delivered the gelding, Leslie was pleased with the horse's surprisingly good condition and she thanked Joe. As they talked, the topic of politics came into the conversation. Leslie realized that Joe was a member of the "other" political party. She suddenly ended the conversation and Joe left puzzled and wondering why she had cut him off so quickly and seemed to be angry with him.

Her friend, Nancy, came over to see the new horse and she listened to Leslie who was still angry about Joe's political statements. Leslie told Nancy that she did not want to ever talk to or see Joe again. Nancy did comment on how good the new gelding looked from such a long journey, but Leslie was too angry to even acknowledge Nancy's observation.

Jack is twenty and graduating from college. He has a gift for learning languages. He can speak five different languages and plans to learn more. Soon he will join the Air Force and travel the world helping his country. His father, Doug, grew up in Idaho. His parents have always lived there. Doug works as a mechanic repairing tractors and other farm equipment. Every year Doug hunts in the fall and fishes all year with his friends. Doug and his wife, Mary, enjoy the way they live their lives and they raised Jack to be like them.

Jack is like his parents in some ways but not in all ways. Jack became a vegetarian as a child and



he does not like hunting or his father's politics. Doug does not understand his son and Mary, who is proud of Jack, remains quiet when he comes home. Doug and Jack end up arguing a lot. The holidays are coming and Jack may not come home this time.

Bill is fifty years old and the owner of a general store in a small town in Vermont. His family goes back three generations and he is proud of his Christian heritage. He is a deacon in the only church in town and he is respected by his neighbors and fellow residents. They look up to him and seek his leadership. His wife is well known for her charitable activities too.

Recently two refugee Muslim families moved to Bill's town. The adult men and women seek work but their English is poor. They are grateful to be in the United States and are willing to work hard in their new life. Bill is having a hard time accepting Muslims in his town. He has not spoken critically about them, but he also has not spoken in favor of them as newcomers. He is skeptical of their beliefs and religious practices, since they are not Christians.



The Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays are coming in the next few weeks and Bill has a lot of work to do in his store. There are many shipments of boxes, supplies, and holiday foods arriving and he needs more help which is hard to find. Amir, one of the young Muslim men, is wanting work and willing to work ten hours a day, six days a week. Bill hires him even though his English is poor. Amir is a bright young man and he learns quickly what he is to do. Bill closely monitors his work and sees how willing this young man is. Bill occasionally gives Amir a broken box of food for his family and Amir is most grateful.

The winter weather arrived with ice and snow in town. One night, Lucy, Bill's seventy-year-old mother, attended an evening meeting planning for the holiday with her friends. She walked home in the dark, tripped and fell at an icy intersection. She twisted her ankle and struggled to get up. Amir, who was walking in her direction, saw her and ran over to help her walk home. Lucy did not know the young man but was grateful for his help. She realized his English was poor so at her front door, she held his hand and smiled at him to thank him. Amir hurried home. The next day Lucy told Bill about the young man who had helped her. Bill realized the man was most likely Amir. Lucy insisted that Bill do something to thank Amir. Bill was increasingly impressed with Amir.

After several days of thinking about how he could best help Amir, Bill contacted his fellow church leaders and asked them to fund an English language program for adults who don't have good English-speaking skills. The church funded the program and it was successful. Local teachers volunteered and helped set it up to teach several times during the week for those who worked long hours on their jobs. Amir and his family members attended along with others in the community who didn't speak English well. As their English skills improved, they became more valuable workers to the local businesses. Bill was "seeking common ground" for Amir. It was a great idea.

The phrase, "seek common ground," requires two elements. It involves a willingness to "search" for something that may not be obvious and secondly, the search needs to come from our heart with a positive intention. As we approach the holiday season in the months ahead, many of us will have the opportunity to seek common ground with one another. Yes, we will be with family members, friends and others. We will be eating together, drinking together, and participating in group activities. And yes, there will be differences among us—political, racial, ethnic, social, etc.

Can we each make conscious choices with positive intentions and seek common ground with those close to us? Can we let go of demanding that everyone else think like us, look like us, vote like us, and even pray like us? Can we seek to nourish the deeper values of our humanity with each other? After all—that's what Thanksgiving and Christmas are about—to bring forth our gratitude, our goodness, our kindness, our generosity, and our caring of other people—whomever the "other" might be. ■

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