

Give Yourself Away

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The Frenzy of the Season

I'm sure in recent times, we have all bemoaned the intense and unrelenting commercialization occurring at this time of year. Beginning with the so-called "Black Friday" immediately after Thanksgiving and right up to and even after Christmas Day, we are bombarded by advertisements -- in our mailboxes, online, on television -- the message, far from being "Peace on earth, good will to men," is instead, "Buy! Buy! Buy!" There've even been news reports and internet images of people fighting over goods, and of hoards crowding into stores, pushing and shoving to be first to get the best deals.

And you may notice that as we get closer to Christmas day, people become tired, short-tempered and can't wait for the whole materialistic hysteria to be over. Not all folks feel that way, though. There are choirs giving beautiful concerts, homes are decorated with colorful lights and images, churches have Christmas Eve services with candles and crèches, children participate in plays with baby Jesus in the manger, visiting angels and wise men. Our Jewish friends are celebrating Chanukah by the lighting of candles. And many children are excited by the legend of Santa Claus and his reindeer coming to distribute presents to all the children. As children in my family, we used to leave fresh-baked cookies and a glass of milk out for Santa, and on Christmas morning, we were gratified to see that he had indeed partaken of our offering of refreshment.

An Experiment

I recently read a book, the contents of which I want to share with you today. The only problem is that I gave the book away and I remember neither the title nor the author! I apologize for this. I have searched on Amazon.com for possible titles and have searched my library thoroughly but with no luck. So I ask you to forgive me. However, the message was so powerful and the results of the suggested practice so seemingly miraculous, I beg your indulgence -- I feel they are especially important at this time of year. This sermon contains a challenge, a dare, if you will. But first I shall describe the contents of the book.

It was a memoir written by a woman who had lost everything. She was in constant pain from a crippling disease; she had lost her job and therefore her only source

of income. She was drowning in debt and self-pity and had thereby alienated all her friends. Her romantic partner had left her. Her life was seemingly an unending misery. One day, one of her last friends to stand by her suggested she try something -- actually she dared her to try it. She dared her to participate in an experiment, and she guaranteed her that her entire life would be transformed if she succeeded in the experiment. At first the woman was resistant and skeptical, especially when she heard the details of the experiment. I have done this experiment myself, and encouraged my previous congregation to try it, and I can assure you, the results were amazing.

This is the dare presented to the sick young lady: for the next 21 days, give something away to someone and keep track of what it was and to whom it was given. Create a journal for just that purpose. It does not have to be money. It can be a hug, a ride, a compliment, a thank-you card, a word of encouragement, comfort or praise, a plant, a meal, a cup of coffee. Each day write down what you gave and to whom. Don't skip any days. At the end of the 21 days, see how your life has changed.

The Results

The woman in question thought it was a dumb experiment. After all, what did she have to give? She had almost no money, and was struggling in so many ways herself. But she was strongly encouraged to do it, especially since her friend made it into a dare. So she did it. Each day, she found something she could give, sometimes something very small. She offered to share a cab with someone who needed a ride. She thanked friends who had helped her in the past. She hugged a homeless lady. She bought a hamburger for a next door neighbor. And so on.

At the end of the 21 days, she was completely out of pain, the disease had disappeared, she was offered not one but two new jobs, her friends began to come around again and her romance was rekindled. The results were so amazing, she decided to write a book about her experiences and, of course, it was published.

Why Does This Work?

In his book entitled *Love Is Letting Go of Fear*, Dr. Gerald Jampolsky discusses a teaching from the Course of Miracles: "Giving and receiving are the same thing."

He states: "All that I give I give to myself. To give is to receive is the law of Love. Under this law, when we give our Love away to others we gain, and what we give we simultaneously receive. The law of Love is based on abundance; we are completely filled with Love all the time, and our supply is always full and running over. When we give our Love unconditionally to others with no expectation of return, the Love within us extends, expands and joins. So by giving our Love away, we increase the Love within us and everyone gains."

“The law of the world, on the other hand, states that what we give away, we lose. That is to say, when we give something away, we don’t have it anymore and suffer loss. The world’s law is based on a belief in scarcity. It holds that we are never really satisfied. . . . When we are feeling unloved, depressed and empty inside, finding someone to give us love is not really the solution. What is helpful is to love someone else totally and with no expectations. That Love, then, is simultaneously given to ourselves. The Law of Love is that you are Love, and that as you give Love to others you teach yourself what you are.”

Our Holiday Challenge

In the Bible somewhere, we are instructed that when we give, we should not let our right hand know what our left hand is doing, or something like that -- in other words, not to make a big show of what we are giving or how generous we are. This is different. This is a challenge for the next 21 days (the exact number of days before Christmas) to practice conscious giving, to write down what you give and to whom every day during this challenge. The purpose is to open your heart, to allow love to flow from you in a variety of ways, some quite small, but consciously, to prove to yourself the Law of Love.

In Dr. Jampolsky’s book, he encourages us to do this “unconditionally, with no expectation of return.” However the first book I spoke of discusses the many returns that showed up for the woman who was ill and full of self-pity, and yet pushed herself to give something for 21 days and keep track of it. Yes, indeed -- there were returns, and her friend who made the dare did say that there would be, but the woman had no idea of what they would be, and stated in her book that she was completely surprised and overwhelmed by them. So I do not offer this challenge so that you may get stuff. Rather that you may experience the great Love that you are and that you have to give all the time, every day no matter what. And so that Love will flow back to you in many surprising forms.

A Personal Story

One year, my mother and I experienced a double tragedy. My step-father shot himself in the head and my mother and I found him. He believed he had cancer and had a horror of doctors and hospitals. No matter how sincerely we urged him to allow one of the family to care for him in our homes, he checked himself into a cheap motel and attempted to drink himself to death, and when that was taking too long, he decided to do it with a gun. We had already had someone else in our family attempt suicide that same month. It was Thanksgiving week, and my mother and I decided we did not have it in us to cook and entertain our normal houseful of guests. We decided to go to a local

restaurant and help feed the homeless. Each year, a bunch of volunteers would come to this particular restaurant, work in the kitchen peeling potatoes and getting all the various parts of a Thanksgiving dinner ready and then would stand on line outside in the cold and dish up food for hundreds of hungry people as they came through the line to be served.

We worked all day and night, and exhausted, but deeply moved by the people we worked alongside with and by the homeless we had served, we dragged ourselves home. When we arrived, our remaining family and some neighbors had cooked for us a full Thanksgiving dinner and had decorated the house and poured us both glasses of champagne as we came through the front door. We had not expected to eat or celebrate, and in fact, we had forgotten to eat something ourselves as we worked through the night. So to walk through the door to warmth and love and sharing was so uplifting, so comforting to us.

My Song

My former congregation always laughed when I said the words, “I wrote a song about it...” because there was a comedic routine on a show called In Living Color where a black blues guitarist said those same words every week. No matter what anyone was talking about, he would say, “Wrote a song about it...Here is go!” and he would launch into what sounded like the same song every week beginning with a blues riff. So, here it goes:

Give your love away!
What are you waiting for?
Don't save it for some rainy day
'Cause you can't spend it on that other shore!

Why don't you just give your love away?
What are you waiting for?
Go on and give your love away
And Life will bring you more.

So many people just need a little smile,
Someone to listen to their troubles for awhile,
So many people just need a gentle heart to understand.

So many children just need a little time,
Someone to teach them there is freedom in their mind,
It is so easy for them to learn while there is laughter in the air.

Give your love away!

What are you waiting for?
Don't save it for some rainy day
'Cause you can't spend it on that other shore!

Why don't you just give your love away?
What are you waiting for?
Go on and give your love away
And Life will bring you more.

And In Conclusion

In conclusion, I offer you this dare: I double-dare you to try this experiment for the next 21 days: Give something away every day and write it down, what you gave and to whom. Keep track of it in your journal, and see what happens in your life as a result. I look forward to hearing from you about the changes you experience. I will be doing this practice along with you and will report to you at the beginning of the new year. Make this a different season of holiday giving.