

Giving Thursday

Christmas Day

The twenty-fifth of December in most countries is recognized as Christmas day. The most popular activity on that day is the giving of gifts to show appreciation and love to those close to us. Far too often we forget those who do not have the means to celebrate. We forget the poor, homeless or those who are financially struggling. Sounds of Encouragement (SOE) is asking all residents of The Bahamas join together to make this December 25 the first “National Giving Thursday”. Let us make this Christmas the best Christmas the Bahamas have ever experienced. It is a part of SOE’s Social Transformation Month. Last week Thursday was Friendship Thursday and January 1, 2015, will be New Relationship Thursday.

We have become a very individualistic, cold, and distant society. We do not really care for each other anymore. The rampant crime has forced us into our secluded cocoons of safety and security. While it is logical to care for and protect ourselves from the criminal elements in society, it has made us unnecessary prisoners in our own homes. When we shut and lock our doors and windows in the evenings after coming home from work, we also lock out a world of opportunity and growth. We shield ourselves from thinking and caring for those outside our own “peaceful castles.” To exasperate this conundrum, the development of personal, held-hand devices such as iPads, tablets, smart phones, has encouraged solitary enjoyment instead of group sharing or group fun. Even within sheltered walls the residents themselves seldom interact intimately. When gathered in a room, each one can be seen in his or her corner with a hand-held device swiping, reading, watching or listening. It is a cold, dismal picture to see. So we do give, shamefully to ourselves and not to others. This behavior has resulted in the build up of a toxic level of selfishness and self-centeredness in each one of us. We are slowly killing ourselves with this approach to living.

We must change this picture. We must take the cleansing agents of kindness, caring and giving to others to purge ourselves of this poison. In the article “The Values of Giving and Self Worth” the authors remind us that it is healthy emotionally to think and care for others. “Thinking and caring about others allows a person to learn more about life than thinking and caring about him or herself alone. Finding an interest in helping others can teach you about how other people live and how difficult life can be in many circumstances. Caring about others opens up your world to new friends and provides a sense of satisfaction in life.”

THE BENEFITS OF GIVING

It should be obvious here that giving is not only beneficial to whom is receiving the gift but also to the one who is giving it. Psychologists Jill Suttie and Jason Marsh of the “Great Good Science Center” in the University of California, Berkeley, USA, says that: “New studies attest to the benefits of giving—not just for the recipients but for the givers’ health and happiness, and for the strength of entire communities.” Here are the five ways they say giving is good for your health:

- 1. Giving makes us feel happy.** “A 2008 study by Harvard Business School professor Michael Norton and colleagues found that giving money to someone else lifted participants’ happiness more than spending it on themselves (despite participants’ prediction that spending on themselves would make them happier). . . These good feelings are reflected in our biology. In a 2006 study, Jorge Moll and colleagues at the National Institutes of Health found that when people give to charities, it activates regions of the brain associated with pleasure, social connection, and trust, creating a “warm glow” effect. Scientists also believe that altruistic behavior releases endorphins in the brain, producing the positive feeling known as the “helper’s high.”
- 2. Giving is good for our health.** “A wide range of research has linked different forms of generosity to better health, even among the sick and elderly. In his book *Why Good Things Happen to Good People*, Stephen Post, a professor of preventative medicine at Stony Brook University, reports that giving to others has been shown to increase health benefits in people with chronic illness, including HIV and multiple sclerosis. . . Researchers suggest that one reason giving may improve physical health and longevity is that it helps decrease stress, which is associated with a variety of health problems. In a 2006 study by Rachel Piferi of

Johns Hopkins University and Kathleen Lawler of the University of Tennessee, people who provided social support to others had lower blood pressure than participants who didn't, suggesting a direct physiological benefit to those who give of themselves."

3. **Giving promotes cooperation and social connection.** When you give, you're more likely to get back: Several studies, including work by sociologists Brent Simpson and Robb Willer, have suggested that when you give to others, your generosity is likely to be rewarded by others down the line—sometimes by the person you gave to, sometimes by someone else."
4. **Giving evokes gratitude.** "Whether you're on the giving or receiving end of a gift, that gift can elicit feelings of gratitude—it can be a way of expressing gratitude or instilling gratitude in the recipient. And research has found that gratitude is integral to happiness, health, and social bonds."
5. **Giving is contagious.** "When we give, we don't only help the immediate recipient of our gift. We also spur a ripple effect of generosity through our community. A study by James Fowler of the University of California, San Diego, and Nicholas Christakis of Harvard, published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Science, shows that when one person behaves generously, it inspires observers to behave generously later, toward different people. In fact, the researchers found that altruism could spread by three degrees—from person to person to person to person."

WHAT TO GIVE?

I am encouraging everyone and every organization to find a way of giving something to someone in need on "Giving Thursday" (Christmas day). In addition, you can give something to someone who is not in financial need, but who is emotionally distraught and would appreciate someone showing a caring spirit towards them.

Here are a few things we you do on Giving Thursday:

- Give words of appreciation. Write a letter to a friend. Call someone and uplift them up by your words of encouragement.
- Give a meal. Invite a friend, neighbor or even stranger, for a meal in your home or just to have a fun time.
- Give your space. Invite neighbors to watch a movie together with you on Christmas night.
- Give dry goods. Purchase dry goods such and peas, rice, fruits, pumpkin, can goods, or make an attractive food baskets to give to someone in need.
- Give your skills. On Christmas day it is a great time to repair someone's roof, clean a car, install computer software, paint a wall, etc.

Here is a famous, wonderful story to end with. Have the tissue box nearby.

"It's a cold day in December. A little boy about 10-year-old was standing before a shoe store on Broadway, barefooted, peering through the window, and shivering with cold. A lady approached the boy and said, "My little fellow, why are you looking so earnestly in that window?"

"I was asking God to give me a pair of shoes," was the boy's reply.

The lady took him by the hand and went into the store, and asked the clerk to get a half dozen pairs of socks for the boy. She then asked if he could give her a basin of water and a towel. He quickly brought them to her. She took the little fellow to the back part of the store and, removing her gloves, knelt down, washed his little feet, and dried them with a towel.

By this time the clerk had returned with the socks. Placing a pair upon the boy's feet, she then purchased him a pair of shoes, and tying up the remaining pairs of socks, gave them to him. She patted him on the head and said, "No doubt, my little fellow, you feel more comfortable now?"

As she turned to go, the astonished lad caught her by the hand, and looking up in her face, with tears in his eyes, answered the question with these words: "Are you God's wife?"

This dear kind lady gave more than shoes and socks on the cold winter day. She gave her time, her love, and her concern. This Christmas do you think someone would ask you the question: “Are you God’s wife/husband?”

Let’s change our country by giving of ourselves to others. Happy Giving Thursday!

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