

Don't Skip This Important Part of Our Holiday Traditions

This is a season when a spirit of generosity ignites us and highlights the best of humanity. For those of us in the Jewish community, we have celebrated Hanukkah, lighting the Menorah and giving gifts. Now, my Christian friends are celebrating Christmas by lighting trees and giving gifts of their own.

This season of generosity and gift-giving is perhaps the best opportunity to live our faith out loud to a watching world. Blessing others brings God's light and love to earth. And that blessing can take many forms—from giving to charities, to lending a helping hand to a neighbor, to simply placing a phone call to those who are alone and isolated. Even those around us who do not worship our God benefit from His blessings through us. God has instructed us, as He instructed Abraham before us, not only to receive His blessing but to be a blessing to others. Our generosity turns on the lights for those who need it who may not know that God loves them.

Both Hanukkah and Christmas illuminate the darkest, coldest days of the year with this spirit of generosity. The holiday season isn't simply a materialist adventure; it's a time for modeling the ways God has blessed us by blessing others. This is the core of our shared values between the Jewish and Christian faiths—to love others and to bring God's light to the world.

Our blessing to others lights up what could otherwise be a dark world. As I'm sure you have, I've met plenty of families this year who could use a blessing: elderly women wondering where their next meal will come from, families fleeing anti-Semitism and children without the proper clothing to keep warm

in the winter.

In Psalm 112:4 (NIV), the psalmist wrote, “Even in darkness, light dawns for the upright, for those who are gracious and compassionate and righteous.” That psalmist who wrote Psalm 112 is believed to be David. David was faced with tremendous struggles, much like what we endure today. His nation even underwent a pandemic when he was king. Yet even in the darkest times, he knew that generosity would bless the world. The receiver is blessed by the gift; the giver is blessed by God.

“Good will come to those who are generous,” he wrote (Ps. 112:5). That blessing includes God’s presence through tough times. “[The generous] will have no fear of bad news. Their hearts are steadfast, trusting in the LORD” (Ps. 112:7).

As we allow our generosity toward others to light up their lives, God’s promise is to bless our lives. David went on to tell us, “[Those who] have freely scattered their gifts to the poor, their horn will be lifted high in honor” (Ps. 112:9).

If you see others struggling this year, I encourage you during this season to “scatter your gifts” freely and turn on the lights through compassion and generosity. You can indeed find every reason in the world right now to scale back your benevolence, as David could have. Inflation might make heating your home more expensive, medical bills may be piling up, your business may be short staffed. But it’s important to remember what God still asks of us, even if the mountains seem steeper this year.

If you are generous in times of want and in times of plenty, be assured that God will not overlook your faithfulness. He is the ultimate gift-giver who can’t be outdone.

So don’t skip this important part on your holiday to-do list. In fact, don’t skip generosity during any other month of the year either. God’s been good to us and it’s paramount that we reflect that to a world in need right now. {eoa}

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