

Loving others is secret for happiness

So what do we really want for Christmas? Probably most of us can't even remember all the gifts we got last year. But, whatever they were, they probably no longer excite us quite as much.

Our consumer culture breeds addictions to the "new," to the next thing! We see a new outfit, a new purse, a new car, a new computer. We have to have it! But in a short time, the "new" thing quietly slides into the background, and we want another new thing. The thrill didn't last! The new thing didn't satisfy us. Constant shopping and consuming may be great for the economy, but it's very discouraging and disheartening for the individual. We really are gerbils on the wheel of life, consuming faster, but getting nowhere closer to happiness!

So what do we want for Christmas? We want happiness. Where is happiness? It's right inside each one of us! Allow me to tell a true story.

Lester Levenson had just had his second heart attack. In the 1950s there were no bypasses, stents, transplants, and all the medical treatment available today. He was told by his doctors that he had two weeks to live and was sent home to get his affairs in order.

Lester had been a successful engineer. But now he was depressed. He realized that all of his education, all of his success, was meaningless. Whatever he had learned hadn't been enough to make sense of his own life.

So he decided to devote the remaining days of his life looking inside of himself to see what he had missed. He made two amazing discoveries. The first thing he discovered from his introspection was that he was happiest when he was loving! He discovered, also, that he was unhappiest when he wanted to be loved!

Trying to get others to love us is a futile effort. It leaves us dependent on the moods and behaviors of others. And because all humans are limited, all love will necessarily disappoint us. There will always be limits to how much we are loved.

But there are no limits to being loving! We can love those who don't love us. We can love those who don't even know us. Being loving is the secret of happiness and joy.

The second thing that Lester discovered is that he had allowed so much negativity to be stored inside his body. So he decided to spend the rest of his remaining days simply releasing every negative feeling that he felt. He released every feeling of guilt, every feeling of fear, every feeling of anger, every feeling of sadness, and on and on. He simply would "pull up" every negative feeling in his body and, like links in a chain, simply release them one at a time. He would open a symbolic door in his chest or stomach and simply allow all the negative feelings to drain out.

Those two discoveries saved his life. By focusing on being loving, rather than wanting to be loved, and releasing every negative feeling as soon as he felt it, the man with two weeks to live, lived another 40 years!

Lester discovered that what Jesus said is true: "The kingdom of God is within you!" All that we need for happiness is within us. We all have the capacity to be loving in all circumstances. And we all have the capacity to let go of every negative feeling as soon as it arises.

So, in truth, we don't need to want anything for Christmas. In truth, we have within us all that we need for a loving and peaceful life.

The line from the Christmas carol "O Little Town of Bethlehem" goes: "Cast out our sin and enter in. Be born in us today!" If we cast out, release the sins against ourselves - guilt, fear, worry, etc. - we find God is indeed inside us. We don't need anything for Christmas. We all have God within us.