

ARE PEOPLE YOUR BUSINESS?

PRAY FIRST:

Then, do the Purpose (goals) and Guidelines

ICE BREAKER:

If you were responsible for hiring a department store Santa, name one quality that you would look for in the applicants. (No repeat answers, please.)

WORSHIP:

Worship. Wait. Then, ask if anyone has heard from the Lord.

TESTIMONY & SCRIPTURE SHARING TIME:

Ask for a few brief testimonies, OR have someone share a verse of Scripture.

SCRIPTURES:

Luke 6:31; Acts 20:35; Philemon 2:4; Ephesians 4:28; James 1:22-25

TOPIC: ARE PEOPLE YOUR BUSINESS?

One of the most popular Christmas stories is "A Christmas Carol," written by Charles Dickens. In this drama, Ebenezer Scrooge is a penny-pinching miser of the worst type. He cares nothing for the people around him, and believes mankind exists only for the purpose of exploiting them. Scrooge particularly detests Christmas, because everyone else is happy while he's miserable, and because he must give a day's holiday pay to Bob Cratchit, his employee.

As the story goes, Scrooge is visited on Christmas Eve by the ghost of Jacob Marley, his former business partner who died seven Christmas Eves ago. Marley, a penny-pinching miser from the same mold as Scrooge himself, is suffering in the afterlife, and hopes to help Scrooge avoid a similar fate. The most insightful part of the drama is the discussion between Scrooge and the deceased Jacob Marley, who informs Scrooge that he faces a terrible future in the next life. Let's listen in on their conversation:

Scrooge (trembling) "Why do you walk the earth?"

Marley "It is required of every man that the spirit within him should walk abroad among his fellow men. If it goes not forth in life, it is condemned to do so after death. It is doomed to wander through the world, and witness what it cannot share, but might have shared on earth to enter into happiness."

Marley "In life, my spirit never rode beyond the limits of our money changing hole. Now, I am doomed to wander without rest – with only incessant torture for a reward."

Scrooge "But, it was only that you were a good man of business, Jacob."

Marley "Business??? MANKIND WAS MY BUSINESS; THEIR COMMON WELFARE WAS MY BUSINESS. And it is at this time of the year that I suffer most."

While Dickens view of the afterlife is not scriptural, some parts of this drama agree completely with God's Word. Jacob Marley was right when he said "Mankind was my business; their common welfare was my business."

The apostle Paul told the Philippians "Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others." (Phil 2:4) Later in this same chapter, Paul bemoaned the fact that most believers didn't care enough to help others. He said, "I have no one else like Timothy, who genuinely cares about your welfare. All the others care only for themselves and not for what matters to Jesus Christ." (Phil 2:20-21)

When speaking to a group of ministers at a conference in Miletus, the apostle Paul commented, "I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And, remember that the Lord Jesus Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" (Acts 20:35)

Before meeting Jacob Marley that Christmas Eve, Scrooge was visited by two men collecting money to buy the poor some food and clothing. Scrooge refused to donate, saying: "It's not my business." He denied that he was responsible for helping the poor and claimed that he was too busy to help.

One of the biggest problems with the Church today is that many believers refuse to accept responsibility for helping others. Like Scrooge, many claim they are too busy, or offer a hundred other excuses. However, if we make helping others one of the priorities of our life, eventually we are sure to accomplish this goal and make a difference in the world.

The Bible makes it plain that people must be our business. Besides helping the poor and needy, this means we should share the gospel with those who don't know Jesus. It won't be easy, but if we consistently work at it, God will bless our efforts, and we will see souls won to Jesus.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. If asked, each of us would prefer being well-off, rather than be the one who needs help. How does being well-off (whether spiritually or financially) obligate us to help others?

(* Jesus said, "Treat others just as you want to be treated." (Luke 6:31) This is the Golden Rule, and it obligates us to help the spiritually or financially needy.)

(* By helping others, we show our gratitude to God for His blessings. Those who refuse to help the needy show God that they don't belong in His Kingdom.)

2. Some people will hear this topic, and dramatically be changed by it. Others will hear this topic, and ultimately do nothing about it. Why is this – and what can we do to correct it?

(* Many believers do not live according to God's Word as they should. Just like James 1:22-25 says, we need to become doers of the Word – not forgetful hearers.)

(* We must make helping others a priority in our life, and work at it frequently.)

3. How is the world a better place because you live in it?

4. What significant changes do you plan to make in your life in the near future – that will enable you to help more people and lead more souls to Jesus Christ?