

## IT'S WHO'S IN YOUR HEART, NOT WHAT'S IN YOUR POCKET

I really like being able to help out a friend. Need some groceries? Sure. A ride to the airport? OK. It's one of the ways that I show that I care about them. That impulse becomes weaker, however, when I don't have a very close relationship with someone. When a loose acquaintance asks for help, I'm more likely to weigh the request against other demands for my time. It doesn't happen often, but when a complete stranger approaches me and asks for help or money, I usually start from a place of wariness. I'll listen to their request, but my first impulse is to maintain some distance and then move on. Peter shows us another way.

### READ ACTS 3:1-10

In this passage, Peter and John are confronted by a "man lame from birth" as they enter the temple grounds. Scripture tells us that this person regularly sits by the Beautiful Gate in Jerusalem and asks for alms. This man's physical suffering made him a social outcast and it was probably easy for visitors at the temple to pretend not to see or hear him. Peter doesn't appear to have any special relationship with the man, but in this instance, Peter stops and looks right at him. Peter allows himself to be interrupted on his way to the temple and then he then takes the next step and invites the beggar to "Look at us" (verse 4). A bystander, looking at the encounter might think that Peter is saying, "Look at how we're dressed. We don't have two mites to rub together. How can we help you?"

But Peter doesn't deliver this command as a reproach. Something else is happening in his heart and mind. While Peter could have focused on the lack of money in his pocket, he moves instead from a deep awareness of what he does have – a personal relationship with Jesus that is life-changing and life-giving. Peter also has a very well-established identity as a *witness* for Jesus, which he demonstrates in Acts 3:12-26. Finally, Peter sees an opportunity for Jesus to be glorified through this man's healing and restoration.

And so he says, "I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!" (Acts 3:6).

Peter reaches out and helps the man up as God immediately makes his feet and ankles strong. The man is overjoyed and responds by walking, leaping, and praising God as he enters the temple along with Peter and John. This miracle takes place because Peter isn't focused on what he lacks. He is moving in his identity and fully aware of the good gifts he enjoys. This gives him the ability to see through the immediate, yet superficial need for food and provides an even better gift.

### YOUR GREATEST ASSET

I'm often struck by my encounters with the economically poor of the world. While there is a clear need for food and shelter, there is always an underlying need for simple human connection, acknowledgment, and prayer. Often such people lack a supportive community because their past choices have burnt bridges with family and friends. Typically, they're very lonely. As we encounter those who are struggling, we can be tempted to maintain our distance, thinking that we don't have the resources to address the complicated issues they often have.

This passage is a great reminder that we are more than the resources we have. Our greatest asset isn't what's in our pockets, but it is our identity and purpose as children of God. We are who God declares us to be: His beloved (Col 3:12), His servants (Gal 5:13), and His witnesses (Acts 1:8). Our

relationship with Jesus shows itself in a willingness to be interrupted by others and to share God's love with them. We can do that with a simple acknowledgment of our shared humanity, a willingness to listen, and an invitation to prayer.

## REFLECTION

How do you typically respond to those you don't know who ask for help?

What can you do to develop greater spiritual sensitivity so that you might minister to people beyond their immediate needs and address their spiritual brokenness?

As you go through your day, prayerfully ask God to give you an opportunity to connect with someone new so that you can offer them a word of encouragement, pray for them and provide a tangible witness to the Father's love.