

The Poor Are Always With Us
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The weather is nice, and that means they're out there. At busy intersections and exits from the interstate. They carry crude signs in attempts to gain our sympathy. They say they are homeless, have hungry children, are disabled veterans. They are always asking for money.

A couple of times, I have told them of places that are hiring. Once, I gave a man a slip of paper with the name of a man who was willing to hire someone to mow his grass on a weekly basis. Several times I have offered to take the person holding the sign to a nearby fast food place and feed them. Surprisingly, no one accepted any of that. What they wanted was money.

We all "know" of those who take advantage of programs offering free food and clothing. We "know" that there are some able to earn money that won't. Every church knows that there are those who "work the system," going from church to church asking for money.

We become cynical. We tend to put all those asking for money into one category—lazy people who find it more profitable to beg for their money than to work for their money. We judge them. We won't look them in the eye. Maybe we even let them go hungry.

Yet, Jesus told a rich man, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven." Jesus also said that there will always be the poor among us. In Matthew 25:34-40, Jesus said that when we do good things "for the least of these," we do good things for Him.

Hearing those words of Jesus pokes my heart a bit. Maybe I need to change my attitude and reaction. So I've come up with a few ideas that might ease up on those sharp pokes in my heart.

I'm going to pray for them. For their safety in standing so close to traffic. For them to see God moving in their lives. If I can, I will roll down the window and ask what they would like for me to pray about. (I'll also be praying for a good reaction from them!)

I'm not going to give them money, but I will be willing to give them things like bread, peanut butter, cheese, crackers. Maybe I'll start carrying some gift cards in my car to have ready.

I'm willing to look foolish to others. A friend once told me, "When you take on the business of giving, just know you are going to get taken. But you should give anyway."

I'm going to remember that it's hard to listen to anything, even that Jesus loves them, on an empty stomach.

I know I won't make much of a difference. I know there will always be those who beg for money. But, just maybe—with the love of Jesus and compassion on one less fortunate than myself—I might be able to make a difference, even if it is only to one person.

Maybe it will work. I'll let you know.