

3 Small Steps: Rich Man, Poor Man, Beggar Man, Thief

How many times have you repeated that rhyme as a child when counting cherry or plum stones? Let's take a closer look at those characters and see that whatever your circumstances, God can bless you with his gift of generosity to make you a blessing to others.

Step One: Get rid of preconceived ideas about the rich. Much has been written about the rich ruler, who came to Jesus; my focus is that he was also young. I often hear repeated that young people are not interested in God or spirituality but that simply isn't true. On the train to Truro this week I overheard a family's conversation. The youngest – about 12 or 13 – was stating he didn't think he was going to live very long and wondered what would happen to him when he died! The older brother (in his twenties) said he didn't want to talk about it as the thought of it upset him. These were openly discussing what the future held for them. It was recently reported that Adam Peaty, the British Olympian swimmer, said, all the gold medals in the world couldn't fill the void he felt inside. The rich young ruler had everything but it didn't satisfy him. We have knowledge of a Saviour who satisfies so why not give young people the opportunity to reveal what is really going on in their lives and be ready to share Jesus generously with them?

Step Two: Get rid of preconceived ideas about the poor. Poverty is very often a hidden ill. When Jesus pointed out the widow in the temple (Luke 21), he may have been the only one who understood the depth of her poverty, yet he did not prevent her from giving all that she had. A phrase too commonly heard in church circles is, "They're too poor to give". How condescending! Firstly, you will usually have no real idea and secondly it is not up to you to rob people of the joy of being a blessing both to God and to others. Jesus didn't rush to the widow saying, "Stop! You're too poor to give!" He allowed her to step into a greater blessing by that faith gift. That doesn't mean we turn a blind eye to those who are clearly struggling or who ask for help but neither should we presume they are incapable of great generosity or suffocate their faith and a potential miracle in their lives.

Step Three: Give what you do have, without worrying about what you don't have. When Peter came across the beggar outside the temple asking for alms (Acts 3) he knew that money would only be a temporary fix. Moreover, Peter knew that he had something much greater to give. It's a shame that the only benefit the beggar expected to receive from the religious was money! As Peter and subsequently the early church then went on to demonstrate, every believer has a much greater gift within them, the gift of the Holy Spirit, with power to heal, save and deliver. What if Peter had stopped his sentence with, "Silver and gold I do not have" and left it at that? The beggar would never have known the blessing of *Jehovah-Raphah* – the God who heals. Are you willing to go one step further than expected and boldly give out of what you have freely received, praying for those you encounter and trusting God to answer?

Finally, a thought for the thief. Condemned, dying, hopeless. Until the most generous act of all time ensured his eternal future. As Jesus's followers we are called to act in the same generous way, turning despair into hope. Let's get to it!