

Helping Hand

I came across a famous Princeton University study based on the parable Jesus told about the Good Samaritan. You know the story. A traveler is set upon by robbers, beaten, and left half dead. A priest and a Levite each pass by in turn, neither stopping to help. But then a Samaritan (a member of a despised race) sees the injured man and has mercy on him.

"...He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'" (Luke 10:34-35)

With this story in mind, the Princeton researchers wanted to find out what factor(s) influenced people most as to whether or not they would help a stranger in distress. So they designed a study using seminary students (in 1973, presumably all young men) and incorporating three variables. Then they observed, one at a time, how many of their clueless subjects stopped to assist an actor posing as a fallen man, moaning in pain. The majority did stop, except if they were put under time pressure. That factor made the biggest difference. Even those who were going into the ministry for the most altruistic reasons, even those who had just been reminded of the Good Samaritan parable, were far more likely to pass by without helping if told they must hurry somewhere to complete their assignment.

Is that what it comes down to in our busy world? Most of us are willing to help people... if it's safe, not too unpleasant, won't take a lot of time or money, and if we judge the needy person worthy of our assistance. But none of those things applied in Jesus' parable. The Samaritan couldn't be at all sure the situation was safe, and it would definitely be unpleasant. Caring for the injured traveler was going to require a considerable sacrifice of time and money. And the Samaritan had no way of knowing what sort of man he was helping – whether or not the stranger deserved or would even appreciate his efforts. Yet, he stopped anyway.

Jesus said, *"Go and do likewise"* (verse 37). That's quite a challenge, isn't it? What keeps you from helping people in need around you? Prayer is always the right first step in deciding what to do. But if clearly directed by the Holy Spirit to provide aid, let us not be found "too busy" to help our neighbor in distress.

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