

A Disciples Path Devotion Week 4

The Stranger on the Bench

Chrystal Evans Hurst

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“Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.” Hebrews 13:2 (NIV)

A few years ago, my family took a road trip to Baltimore to visit my grandparents. We never visit the city without making a trip to the Inner Harbor. It's something my parents did with me and I have great memories of it, so it's something I love to do with my kids. This area is a very popular tourist attraction. It's also an area where lots of local folks from many different walks of life hang out. On this particular day, we were walking along the main thoroughfare. I stopped for a bit to glance in the window at one of the stores. I turned my eye every few seconds or so to make sure my son was still chasing birds along the sidewalk in an attempt to scare them away. After just a few moments, I turned to check and noticed that he was no longer chasing the birds. Rather, he was standing next to a park bench, seemingly just looking at the birds — or so I thought. As I walked a little closer to him, I realized that he was talking ... to the homeless man lying on the park bench. For a moment, my heart skipped a beat. My son was talking to a stranger. And based on the way this stranger was reclining on the bench, I wasn't sure if he was well. I heard my son say, “Hi! Are you okay, sir? “Do you need some water? Are you hungry?” And then my heart lurched forward outside my body when I heard my son say, “Can I pray for you?” I watched from a short distance. The man mumbled something unintelligible to me and then my son walked away. I stood convicted. When was the last time I had taken the time to notice someone, right in front of me, and ask what needs they had that I could meet? When was the last time I had offered the most basic human needs, water and food, to someone who wasn't a part of my church, neighborhood or social sphere of connection? When was the last time I had offered a stranger my prayers? Just because. Our key verse today makes it clear we are to show hospitality to people — even the ones we don't know. It's so easy to get caught up in our jobs, churches, community affairs and being nice to people we know or those who are easy to be nice to that we forget the most basic kindness — showing hospitality to a stranger. The world is full of hurting people. People you and I can touch with a kind word, a warm smile, a hot meal or a gentle touch. The world is full of people who would be eternally grateful if someone just stopped and prayed for them. When was the last time you offered a stranger a smile, a prayer, a cool drink or a helping hand? I'm sad to say I hadn't even noticed that man laying on the bench ... and even if I had, I can't say I would have stopped to inquire how I might show him a bit of hospitality, grace or understanding. I can't say I would have stopped to pray for him. I can't say I would have stopped to show him love. My son helped me remember that the most simple, basic actions can sometimes mean the most. He helped me remember that showing love to others doesn't need to be complex. He helped me remember I should not let fear, busyness or lack of understanding stop me from giving the most important gift of all to another ... Love. And isn't that the point? That the world would know we are Christians by our love? Father God, forgive me for how I sometimes forget to love others, especially strangers, in simple ways that honor You. Help me recognize opportunities to share the love You have given me with someone else who needs to feel Your love. Allow me to be Your hands and Your feet. In Jesus' Name, Amen. TRUTH FOR TODAY: 1 John 4:21, “And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.” (ESV) Matthew 25:40, “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’” (NIV) - See more at: <http://proverbs31.org/devotions/devotion-category/serving/page/4/#sthash.GbYHoOkD.dpuf>