



SHARING SCRIPTURE

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The Stranger in Your Gates

For use: October 24 - 30

Texts: Mark 12:29-31, Deuteronomy 10:1-19, Psalm 146:5-10, Matthew 7:12, Deuteronomy 27:19, James 1:27-2:1

Walla Walla University student Mitchell Powers is making waves of positive changes for those of College Place, Washington.

The town is home to Walmart, the largest retail store in Walla Walla County. While Walmart offers a myriad of products to consumers, it also offers basic products required for daily existence that some living in the area cannot afford, but decide to take anyway in the form of shoplifting.

According to Troy Tomaras, Police Chief, 145 shoplifting cases took place in 2020, but close to \$1 million is lost each year. Other box stores have chosen to stay away from the Walla Walla Valley because of the shoplifting problem.

It was not the amount of stolen product that captured the attention of Mitchell Powers. Rather, it was the toll it took on the lives of those involved.

Taking his idea to the city's Diversity and Inclusion Board, he was amazed at the speed of their response. College Place, Walmart, and other community entities now have a program aimed at reducing recidivism (repeat offenses) and helping offenders. As a part of the program, counseling is provided, people are empowered, and lives become changed. [1]

This week we study the larger implication of what it means to love one's neighbor, to care for strangers, to treat others with grace from a heart, mind, and soul of one who loves God.

We see a broad definition of neighbor as we examine the expanse between a mighty God and those who are struggling in our world. What does this powerful loving God suggest we do? We are encouraged, or admonished, to be part of that broad reach, that gap between God and struggling man by reaching out

and caring for those within our gates.

Who is included in this definition? God states both the specific and the general. This great God does not favor those who achieve over those who have difficulties from day to day. No partiality is shown toward those of means and those who struggle. Instead, we are accepted as pure and faultless when we look after orphans and widows, take up the causes of those who are oppressed, work for justice for those imprisoned, and feed those who are hungry.

University students keep busy schedules and it might have been easy for Powers to look at “his gates” as just his apartment or dorm, or the confines of campus. For those who couldn’t afford life’s basic needs and made less than ideal choices about obtaining them, their lives are now changing as a result of his outreach. Will we do the same?

~Joy Veverka

[1] https://www.union-bulletin.com/news/grace-in-the-cosmetics-aisle-college-place-program-aims-to-curb-shoplifting-at-walmart/article_d69ada24-27bb-11ec-bea7-67d355327fe9.html

For Reflection

Connecting: Have you ever been the recipient of the grace of others? Maybe it was Meal Train while grieving or while recuperating from surgery or an illness. Is it easy for you to accept the gifts or help others offered?

Sharing: What attitudes toward helping others resonate with you?

1. I only give to a few select agencies so I am certain the donations go where they are intended.
2. When people are asking for food or money, wouldn’t giving it to them just perpetuate their dependence on others rather than help them learn to take care of themselves?
3. If people lived responsibly, wouldn’t they have the resources to meet their own needs without me giving them mine?
4. God asks me to help others, to feed them, to seek justice for them, and I openly search for ways to do this.
5. I pray for the Holy Spirit to reveal ways I can make my reach even further and deeper to provide what others need.
6. Other

Applying: What types of programs does your church or community provide? Brainstorm other avenues that might be a benefit to your neighbors or the strangers in your gates.

Valuing: As you read [Psalm 146:5-10](#), thank God for the abundance of blessings you enjoy and ask for direction as you share those blessings and grace with others.

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