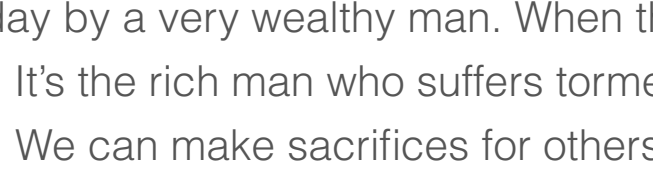


Stop Telling Me about the “Lazy” and “Entitled” Poor

By Jayson D. Bradley for Patheos

by ProgressiveChristianity.org · on January 26, 2018 | 1 Comment



Years ago I led my small-group discussion on Christ's troubling parable about Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16:19–30). It's a harrowing story about a poor man named Lazarus who's ignored every day by a very wealthy man. When they both die, they experience a biblical Freaky Friday. It's the rich man who suffers torments while Lazarus is comforted. The message is clear. We can make sacrifices for others today, or have the choice made for us later.

Imagine my disappointment when—instead of wrestling with this extremely troubling story —my small group decided to take the conversation in a different direction. They focused on the urban legend of freeway-off-ramp panhandlers who were secretly pulling in six-figure salaries. Except it wasn't a story to them—it was an obvious truth. Here were “poor” people cheating good people out of their hard-earned money.

The point of Lazarus and the rich man is pretty clear, but I would have had an easier time getting a cat to discuss its implications. This group wasn't interested in the parable's application. They had a narrative about the poor that exonerated them from responsibility. I remember sitting in my car afterward and quietly crying frustrated tears.

Banksy and privilege

I was reminded of this story a couple of months ago when I shared a Banksy quote on Facebook:

“The human race is an unfair and stupid competition. A lot of the runners don't get decent sneakers or clean drinking water. Some runners are born with a massive head start, every possible help along the way, and still the referees seem to be on their side. It's not surprising that a lot of people have given up competing altogether and gone to sit in the grandstand, eat junk food, and shout abuse.”

Banksy is talking about privilege here, but within two comments, someone responded with:

“Conversely, many have also chosen to stand on a skateboard or sit in a wagon and ask others to push or pull them along because they feel entitled or are too lazy to make an effort themselves.”

Once again, the point was completely ignored by turning the focus on “bad” poor people. It's as if invoking these examples is like putting on a pair of sunglasses that block out the UV rays of culpability and conviction. These deflections come in a variety of styles:

- * They're just going to spend my money on drugs or alcohol.
- * They're in this position because of their choices.
- * People on welfare all have 60" TVs and iPhones.
- * I had to work for what I have. They should, too.
- * There are plenty of entitlement programs available.
- * People spend their food stamps on steak and lobster.

I'm not suggesting that there's never any truth to these critiques. Some people will spend what money they receive on booze, and people are receiving SNAP who might occasionally splurge on expensive foods (which I'm not sure I judge them for—Top Ramen shouldn't be your penance for poverty).

The point is that Christians shouldn't use the occasional abuse of charity as an excuse to ignore need and be self-indulgent with their finances. It's like Jesus saying, “I shouldn't extend grace to these knuckleheads; someone might abuse it.”

We don't have an excuse

We *could* look at how infrequently the needy abuse help. We could discuss how the system makes it difficult for the hard-working poor to get themselves ahead. We could even build a case for why impoverished people deserve our attention and aid. But you know what? It doesn't matter. If you follow Jesus, the responsibility isn't on me to prove that poor people deserve assistance.

In the parable of the sheep and the goats (Matt. 25:31–46), Jesus points out specific charitable actions that he views as being done (or not done) specifically to him. For instance, he tells the “sheep” that when they give a glass of water to someone who was thirsty, they were doing it to him. Conversely, when a glass of water was withheld from the thirsty, it was being withheld him.

The specific people (and actions) he mentions are:

- * The hungry (they are fed)
- * The thirsty (they receive water)
- * The stranger (they are welcomed)
- * The naked (they are clothed)
- * The sick (they are cared for)
- * The imprisoned (they are visited)

The point of this parable rests on what was (or was not) done for the “least of these.” The sheep and goats are separated by what they did (or did not) do.

What we need to wrap our heads around is this: Jesus never addresses the reasons someone might be hungry, naked, or sick. It doesn't matter. Jesus doesn't say, “I was undeservingly a stranger and you welcomed me.” He doesn't point out that “I was in prison for a crime I didn't commit, and you visited me.” There's no point in this parable where the goats respond, “Some people are hungry because they're lazy and entitled.”

As a follower of Jesus, it doesn't seem like I have the luxury to embrace a narrative where the poor are undeserving of my help. Obviously, I want to be wise with my giving, but I don't think I'm allowed to try and discern whether the poor have earned my care.

Who am I to judge?

After the comment about the lazy and entitled poor, there was more discussion. At one point they said, “I'm all about helping those who can't help themselves for whatever reason that may be.”

I appreciate that sentiment, but I see big problems with it:

How do the poor prove their helplessness to us?

Who ultimately gets to decide whether someone is deserving of help?

What reasons are acceptable for being unable to help themselves?

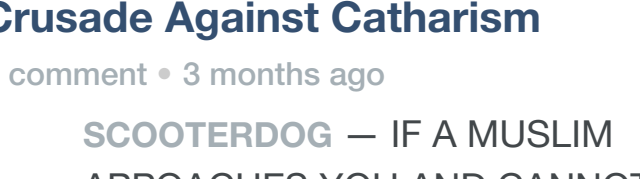
- * Sickness?
- * Mental illness?
- * Addiction?
- * An upbringing that screwed them up or modeled terrible behavior and decision making?

I think the reason that Jesus doesn't qualify who's deserving of charity is that the judgment isn't ours to make. If we're to leave vengeance to the Lord (Rom. 12:19), I imagine that includes people who abuse our kindness. We're to be the hands through which he cares for others—deserving or not. I mean, I was an enemy when Christ gave up *his* life for me. I'm going to withhold a money, shelter, or care from someone because I think they're unworthy?!

Are we sheep or goats?


Most of the time, the people who respond to discussions about charity by pointing out how the poor are gaming the system are the same ones who tell me it isn't the government's job to take care of the poor. They say that taking care of poor folk is the church's responsibility. It makes me thankful for the government's involvement because a lot of church people I know seem to think the poor are getting exactly what they deserve.

Read more at [Patheos](#)



Topics: Action, Belief, Compassion, Health and Healing, Mindfulness, Sacred Community, Service, and Social & Environmental Ministry. 8 Points: Point 3: Inclusive Community, Point 4: Act As We Believe, and Point 5: Non-Dogmatic Searchers. Resource Types: Articles and Read.

You might also enjoy:



THE BIBLE
The Bible and The New York Times
by Fleming Rutledge
purchase for \$26.97



BROKEN
Broken We Kneel: Reflections on Faith and Citizenship
by Diana Butler Bass
purchase for \$24.95



JONATHAN SACKS
The Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations
by Jonathan Sacks
purchase for \$15.19

Review & Commentary

You can skip to the end and leave a response. Pinging is currently not allowed.

1 Comment <http://progressivechristianity.org> [Login](#)

[Recommend](#) [Share](#) [Sort by Newest](#)

Join the discussion...

LOG IN WITH OR SIGN UP WITH DISQUS

**Rev Hank Galganowicz**
7 hours ago

Bravo, Jason.

Reply

ALSO ON [HTTP://PROGRESSIVECHRISTIANITY.ORG](http://progressivechristianity.org)

[Crusade Against Catherism](#)
1 comment • 3 months ago
SCOOTERDOG — IF A MUSLIM APPROACHES YOU AND CANNOT CONVERT YOU TO HIS RELIGION, HE CONSIDERS ...

[How do you recognize a spiritual abuser?](#)
2 comments • 4 months ago
Marion Tally — Well said. I understand what you are talking about because I have first-hand knowledge. The damage these ...

[You Are God: The True Teachings of Jesus](#)
2 comments • 2 months ago
Jamieson Spencer — I wonder how Brandon would address the evolution of rational thought in our particular species? Yes, I ...

[I Want to Die](#)
2 comments • a month ago
Cleanslate — Religion hopes for an afterlife in heaven or to attain enlightenment in order escape the dreary cycles of death and ...

[Subscribe](#) [Add Disqus to your site](#) [Privacy](#) **DISQUS**

Eric A Hendersonville NC US \$1,000

Al B Burlington VT US \$25

Don F Bunkle LA US \$20

Bey I Penetanguishene ON Canada \$100

Carl K Ridgway CO US \$75

Kay L Long Beach CA US \$25

Dale P Norwich CT US \$50

Rick S North Reading MA US \$15

Skip T Fort Thomas KY US \$25

Don W Riverside CA US \$25

Art W Chimaum WA US \$25

Sally A Oro Valley AZ US \$25

Lila A West Hills CA US \$150

Charles A Rochester MN US \$200

Barry A Port Kennedy WA Australia \$15

Cliff B Oro Valley AZ US \$25

Susan B Pleasanton CA US \$25

Duane B Waterford CT US \$25

Carol B Mandeville LA US \$1,000

Carolyn B Clarkston MI US \$50

Alan B Pompton Plains NJ US \$25

Susan B Columbus OH US \$200

Warren B Bowden SA Australia \$15

Debra B Keswick VA US \$100

Susan C Phoenix AZ US \$25

Rose C Denver CO US \$25

Margaret C Miami FL US \$15

Kathy/David C Midland MI US \$250

Geoff C Bradley Beach NJ US \$100

Laurie C Durham NC US \$15

Phil C Toronto ON Canada \$50

James C Memphis TN US \$50

William C Fort Worth TX US \$25

Kirkland C Kirkland WA US \$75

Kilvert C Dunbar UK \$25

Lulu D Mesa AZ US \$25

Alexis D Sharon CT US \$50

Kevin D Alice Springs NT Australia \$110

Dave D Brookings SD US \$25

Jerri D Arlington TX US \$15

Sam/Elaine G Divide CO US \$50

Howard E Irvine CA US \$100

Sharon E Champaign IL US \$15

James E Eadsleyville VA US \$50

Steven M Standley SC US \$25

Robert F Bellefontaine OH US \$25

Bob F Gwynedd PA US \$100

Jeff F Stanley UK \$50

Janet G Nicellville FL US \$25

Patricia G Buckland MA US \$50

Winky G Jefferson MS US \$50

Lucinda G West Jefferson NC US \$50

Thence G North-Canal OH US \$100

Linda G Cornwall PA US \$25

Albert G Marmion WA Australia \$25

Constance C Gahanna OH US \$25

Susan H Green Valley AZ US \$50

Richard H Scotts Valley CA US \$100

Ron H Lynn Haven FL US \$25 50

Judy H Boise ID US \$25

John H Sandy Spring MD US \$25

Porter H Kansas City MO US \$15

Phyllis H Columbus OH US \$50

Deanna H Dallas TX US \$50

Archer H Alexandria VA US \$100

James H Sheboygan WI US \$15

Robert H \$15

Ron I Chellenham UK \$25

Nancy J Allen Park MI US \$25

Patricia J Masterton New Zealand \$25

Miriam K Farmington CT US \$15

Charlyn K Eden Prairie MN US \$25

Edward K Henscheid NH US \$25

William K Anthony TX US \$25

Susan L High River AB Canada \$25

Meridith L La Jolla CA US \$50

R. David L Townsend DE US \$100

Gene L Champaign IL US \$25

James L Middletown OH US \$15

Kathleen L Toronto ON Canada \$25

Mary L Bennington VT US \$50

Norman L Renton Super Mare UK \$25

John A. M Powell River BC Canada \$50

Susan M San Jose CA US \$15

Chester M Fort Collins CO US \$50

Gary M Graylake IL US \$15

Paul W M Benton KY US \$25

John M St. Paul MN US \$25

Geraldine M Boulder City NV US \$15

Janet S Redwing Centre NY US \$25

Houston M Portland OR US \$25

Heather M Arlington VA US \$25

Julia M Norwich UK \$25

Steve M Dassel MN US \$200

Ross N Auckland New Zealand \$50

Robert O Brookings OR US \$500

Lynn P Florence IL US \$25

Michael P Phoenix AZ US \$50

Ann P St. Petersburg FL US \$10

Roy P Pandora OH US \$50

Roger P Greentown PA US \$50

Chadron P Fox Island WA US \$2400

Morris P JA"kaplins Latvia \$25

David R Fumo AZ US \$50

Stacy R Fresno CA US \$100

Robert R Glenview IL US \$25

James R Poland OH US \$25

Linda R Pluggerville TX US \$15

Janet R Olympia WA US \$25 \$0

Graham R Bristol UK \$15

Richard S Tucson AZ US \$50

Larry S La Mesa CA US \$50

Robert S Oceanside CA US \$125

Marshall S Montrose CO US \$5

William S Marathon FL US \$250

Heather S Pierson Manitoba Canada \$40

Jeffrey S Cragmoor NY US \$50

Douglas S Lexington NC US \$25

Larry S Wooster OH US \$15

Charles S Conway SC US \$75

Judith S Crossville TN US \$100

Joyce S McLean VA US \$50

Brian S Applecross WA Australia \$50

Dorothy S Reedsburg WI US \$20

Ronald S Geraldine New Zealand \$50

Jamieson S St. Louis MO US \$50

Robert T Ocala FL US \$25

Larry T Newport IL US \$25

Sandra T Conover NC US \$50

Ron T Yeppoon QLD Australia \$25

Gordon T Prague Czech Republic \$25

James T Plymouth NC US \$200

Martha V Reno NV US \$50

Roy V Springfield OR US \$50

Carlyne W Aurora CO US \$30

Libby W Terre Haute IN US \$25

Constance W Grosse ile MI US \$100

Anne W Portsmouth NH US \$25

Carol W Greenville NC US \$25

William W Mt Pleasant SC US \$25


John W Blackburn Victoria Australia \$25

Andy W Kent WA US \$50

Clabornie J Woodside CA US \$25

Robert Y London UK \$50

Follow



Signup

Sign up for an account and get your newsletters right away!

Signup!

Donate

Support our mission with a tax-deductible donation!

Donate Now!

Progressive Christianity

4810 Pt. Fosdick Dr. NW #80
Gig Harbor, WA 98335
United States
© 2018 ProgressiveChristianity.org

Get Help

Help
Contact Us

Useful Links

Home
About Us
Advertising on
ProgressiveChristianity.org
[Bishop Spang Newsletter](#) – Progressing
Children's Curriculum
Contact Us
Donations
Sign Up for our Email Correspondence
Gathering Planning
Liturgy Project
Local Groups
Resources
Store
The 8 Points of Progressive Christianity
What is Progressive Christianity?