



## "Here's what I believe:

when someone panhandles money from me, I give them whatever I have in my pocket. If they use the money to buy booze or cigarettes instead of food, that's their problem. I gave them the money to help them, and if they decide to use the money to destroy themselves, they're responsible, not me. My motives were pure."

Andy, 18

## The Stats

Teens are less inclined to give to charity than they were at the beginning of the decade. But while the number of teens giving to charity has fallen, the money has increased. In 1991, the average contribution from a teenager was \$56. In 1995, it rose to \$82.

*The Joplin Globe*  
December 11, 1996

## By the Book...

"For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me."

Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?"

The King will reply, "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me."

Matthew 25:35-40

# JESUS THE CON MAN

It was in the beat-up garment district of Los Angeles's inner city that the youth group was spending a week with the Center for Student Missions. As Barbara walked down the street with her friends toward the Head Start Day Care Center, a homeless woman blocked her path.

"Could you give me money for food for my children?" the woman asked softly. "They haven't eaten all day."

Barbara felt something, like God was speaking through this woman—in fact, just like the Scripture they had studied in the morning in Matthew, where Jesus said that "whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it for me." Barbara reached into her pocket and took out nine one-dollar bills and some change—all she had—and gave it to the woman.

The woman's eyes filled with tears. "Thank you, thank you," she muttered, then hurried away and disappeared around a corner.

"Do you know what you just did?" Barbara's friends asked. "She was just conning you for money to buy her booze. She sure made a sucker out of you."

Barbara wasn't so sure. She couldn't help feeling that God was present in the woman's eyes...or was it her imagination? When she retold her experience with the homeless woman at the debrief that evening, everyone agreed that giving that much money to people who will do whatever they can to survive was irresponsible.

Yet for reasons Barbara has never been able to understand, she has never wavered. As far as she is concerned, Jesus was present that day in the eyes of that woman. Barbara prays for her every day.

1. Was Barbara irresponsible?

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2. Have you ever had an experience like Barbara's? What did you do?

3. Did Barbara really see Jesus in the poor or was she conned?