

Three questions to ask each time you look at a new story : (A child to ask from the table)

What does this say about God?

What does this say about people?

How might we change after hearing this story and Bible passage?

Prayer time:

What does a prayer sound like to Jesus in response to this story and Bible passage?

Story one:

José Ferreira. He runs a small pharmacy in a slum of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. It's really more a tin-walled shed and bench, but since he sells medicine, it bears the hand-painted sign 'Farmácia'.

He started his store with three dollars' worth of medical supplies that he bought from a larger pharmacy downtown. As soon as he sells the medicine, he closes his store, walks to a nearby bus stop, rides one hour to the larger pharmacy, and buys more stock.

By the time he returns, it is dark, so he waits until the next morning and repeats the cycle: open, sell the product, close the store, and travel to purchase inventory. Some days he does this twice. Since his store is closed as much as it is open, he scarcely makes a profit. He and his family live in the back of the shack and subsist on the equivalent of three dollars a day. If rains flood the favela and wash away his shack, he will lose everything. If one of his children comes down with dengue fever, he likely will not have the money for medicine.

José knows this. But what can he do? He indwells the low-ceilinged world of the poor.

But while José is struggling in Rio, God is working in London. A good-hearted taxi driver named Thomas reads an article in a magazine. It details the fascinating process of microfinance. Microfinance provides small loans to poor people so they can increase their income not rich, but he is blessed. He would happily help a fellow businessperson on the other side of the world. But how can he? Can a British taxi driver help a Brazilian merchant? Through microfinance organizations, he can.

So he does.

A few days later José is offered a microloan of fifty-five dollars.

In order to qualify for it, however, he has to join a borrower group of six neighbouring businessmen. Each one receives a loan, but each member of the group cross-guarantees the loans of the other members. In other words, if José does not repay the loan, his friends have to cover for him. (Peer pressure turned positive.)

José puts the loan to good use. With the extra capital he is able to reduce his purchasing trips to once a week and keep his store open all day. After two years of growing his business and paying back his loans, he saves a thousand dollars, buys a plot of land in the favela, and is collecting cinder blocks for a house!

How did this happen? Whom did God use to help José Ferreira?

A taxi driver. A humanitarian organization. Fellow favela dwellers.

They all worked together. Isn't this how God works?

Bible Passage Acts 4 v33-34

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Story two:

At 7:51 a.m., January 12, 2007, a young musician took his position against a wall in a Washington, D.C., metro station. He wore jeans, a long-sleeved T-shirt, and a Washington Nationals baseball cap. He opened a violin case, removed his instrument, threw a few dollars and pocket change into the case as seed money, and began to play.

He played for the next forty-three minutes. He performed six classical pieces. During that time 1,097 people passed by. They tossed in money to the total of \$32.17. Of the 1,097 people, seven— only seven—paused longer than sixty seconds. And of the seven, one— only one—recognized the violinist Joshua Bell.

Three days prior to this metro appearance staged by the Washington Post, Bell filled Boston's Symphony Hall, where just fairly good tickets went for \$100 a seat. Two weeks after the experiment, he played for a standing-room-only audience in Bethesda, Maryland. Joshua Bell's talents can command \$1,000 a minute. That day in the subway station, he barely earned enough to buy a cheap pair of shoes.

You can't fault the instrument. He played a Stradivarius built in the golden period of Stradivari's career. It's worth \$3.5 million. You can't fault the music. Bell successfully played a piece from Johann Sebastian Bach that Bell called "one of the greatest achievements of any man in history."

But scarcely anyone noticed. No one expected majesty in such a context. Shoe-shine stand to one side, kiosk to the other. People buying magazines, newspapers, chocolate bars, and lotto tickets. And who had time? This was a workday. This was the Washington work-force. Government workers mainly, on their way to budget meetings and management sessions. Who had time to notice beauty in the midst of busyness? Most did not.'

Most of us will someday realise that we didn't either. From the perspective of heaven, we'll look back on these days-these busy, cluttered days— and realise, That was Jesus playing the violin. That was Jesus wearing the ragged clothes. That was Jesus in the orphanage... in the jail... in the cardboard shanty. The person needing my help was Jesus.

Bible passage Matthew 25 v42-45

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Story 3

Congratulations. God changes the world with folks like you.

Just ask the twenty-two people who travelled to London on a fall morning in 2009 to thank Nicholas Winton. They could have passed for a retirement-home social club. All were in their seventies or eighties. More gray hair than not. More shuffled steps than quick ones. But this was no social trip. It was a journey of gratitude. They came to thank the man who had saved their lives: a stooped centenarian who met them on a train platform just as he had in 1939.

He was a twenty-nine-year-old stockbroker at the time. Hitler's armies were ravaging the nation of Czechoslovakia, tearing Jewish families apart and marching parents to concentration camps. No one was caring for the children. Winton got wind of their plight and resolved to help them. He used his vacation to travel to Prague, where he met parents who, incredibly, were willing to entrust their children's future to his care. After returning to England, he worked his regular job on the stock exchange by day and advocated for the children at night. He convinced Great Britain to permit their entry. He found foster homes and raised funds. Then he scheduled his first transport on March 14, 1939, and accomplished seven more over the next five months. His last trainload of children arrived on August 2, bringing the total of rescued children to 669.

On September 1, the biggest transport was to take place, but Hitler invaded Poland, and Germany closed borders throughout Europe. None of the 250 children on that train were ever seen again.

After the war Winton didn't tell anyone of his rescue efforts, not even his wife. In 1988 she found a scrapbook in their attic with all the children's photos and a complete list of names. She prodded him to tell the story. As he has, rescued children have returned to say thank you. The grateful group includes a film director, a Canadian journalist, a news correspondent, a former minister in the British cabinet, a magazine manager, and one of the founders of the Israeli Air Force. There are some seven thousand children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren who owe their existence to Winton's bravery. He wears a ring given to him by some of the children he saved.

It bears a line from the Talmud, the book of Jewish law: "Save one life. Save the world."

Bible Passage Acts 1 v8