

## Beggars Can't Be Choosers

by Pastor Marty

I begin with a scenario some of you may have experienced—especially if you have been a Christian for a while. Cassie, a single mother you recently met at church, calls you one day to ask for your help. It seems that she has run into some financial difficulty this month and needs groceries until her check comes in next week. In an act of charity, you offer to take her shopping for what she needs for the week for herself and her 2 young children, thinking it will take about an hour and cost about \$30. However, you soon find that Cassie has other plans. When you get to her house, you discover she has to drop the kids off at separate locations that afternoon for planned activities, meaning you need to drive much further than estimated. After loading the kids (with sports items) into the car, Cassie tells you that she only shops at specific stores on the other side of town, and she needs to make two stops on the way—to make a bank deposit and to mail a package. You now discover you are a designated babysitter in the car while she does those errands. When you get to the store—the one that carries only the best brands—she then produces a list of all their “absolute necessities” for the week, which requires going to both of the stores and spending almost \$80. During the two shopping trips, you notice her buying bulk packages of paper towels, paper plates, toilet paper, frozen dinners, instant meals, batteries, and diet soda. During both shopping trips, you had to keep track of 2 children that remind you of velociraptors in a movie you recently saw. You are relieved to finally load several bags of groceries in the car when Cassie apologetically explains that it is their “sacred routine” to get “a quick bite” after shopping, and she promised the kids last week that they would all go to the big Mouse restaurant this week. Of course, she guarantees it will only be fifteen minutes and not more than \$10. At this point, you lost all

track of time (Dante explains this effect in his famous text on the subject), so you barely notice. After what seems like hours, along with \$20 in quarters for the games, you get back in the car to bring them home. Did you forget the kids needed to be dropped off at their sport activities? Cassie is a very good sport to remind you—although she points out that you need to drive fast since they are late. She has no idea! You finally seem to wake up after you drop off the kids, bring her home, and help her unload and put away the 8 bags of groceries. (Weren't there only 6 when you loaded them in the car?) When you finally go to leave, Cassie thanks you profusely, apologies most sincerely for it taking so long, and very politely asks if you are able to help her with a very quick dentist appointment tomorrow. You apologetically explain that your sister (you were an only child until then) will be having a kidney transplant, so you will sadly not be available. As you leave, she says she will be praying and can easily reschedule her dentist appointment for when you are free next. In the car, you start mentally listing everyone that you need to notify of your new phone number.

***Sometimes, we do not recognize the true nature of our actions and our requests.***

As we read this fictitious story, we easily think of the saying “beggars can't be choosers” in relation to Cassie. She clearly took advantage of a generous offer for help, probably without realizing what she was doing or intending to do it. In her conscious awareness of her needs and those of her children, she was either oblivious to or unconcerned with the difficulties she put on someone else. However, we need to give her the benefit of the doubt. She may not have realized her choices were improperly imposing on someone else because perhaps she was a very generous person and would have willingly

gone out of her way to help someone else in a similar situation and thought nothing of it. In other words, we are able to say that her actions were insensitive, but we are not able to say she was intentionally being insensitive. However, it is likely that her attitude and behavior will limit the quantity and quality of friends she keeps in the future as well as earn her a reputation for unhealthy (or maybe imbalanced) relationships.

***Taking advantage of people will limit the quantity and quality of your friends.***

However, let us see what happens if we make a minor change to the story. We began with the premise that Cassie is a single mother you just recently met at church: perhaps the two of you just spoke after the service one day, or you maybe prayed together before worship one Sunday. What if that is actually not the case? Instead of Cassie being a person you just met at church, she happens to be your sister—the one who let you stay with her for 6 months after you lost your job last year, and she never accepted money from you for food, utilities, or even that very specific diet soda you just could not live without. Suddenly, the whole tone of the story changes and is no longer totally black and white. In this case, the type of relationship changes what can reasonably be expected on both sides. Of course, it does not mean Cassie has the right to take advantage of you because she is your sister; however, more might reasonably be expected of a relative in certain circumstances—such as you already being fully aware ahead of time of the situation with her velociraptor-ish children, her idiosyncrasies, her grocery needs, her schedule, etc. You were more aware of what you were getting into in that case. Everything changes then. What we discover is that the type of relationship and the personal history make a huge difference in what we can ask or expect of another person.

***The level of love and type of relationship affects what can be asked or expected.***

If we return to the original story, there is plenty of blame to go around, and it does not all belong with Cassie. Her imposing on others may be a sin, but she could only do so once or twice before the person fully knows what her requests entail; further offers to help would be given with full understanding of the situation. This is where things get a bit tangled. You may be willing to continue to help Cassie because of sympathy for her and her children, or because you love adventure and get an adrenaline rush from the constant unknown, or because of an ingrained self-hatred and inferiority complex in you, or because you would rather swim with a pack of great white sharks than face conflict, or because Cassie's family is secretly paying you a small fortune to keep her occupied. There are many reasons you may continue to put yourself in that situation; however, it is important to see that by doing so, you might be seriously sinning against Cassie in the process. If she repeatedly imposes on others, either through ignorance or gross insensitivity, it is unloving to enable her in that destructive behavior and prevent her from realizing she is taking advantage of others. Also, it is harmful toward the next person who may get imposed upon unsuspectingly by Cassie. Of course, it is a very different story if she is aware she has an entire afternoon's worth of errands that need to be done and is honest about that. It is also true that Murphy's Law can be a very pernicious and sneaky force, manifesting at the most unsuspecting times. Growing up, Murphy visited so often that we had a spare bedroom in the house just for his unexpected appearances! However, sin becomes an issue when we avoid addressing sinful behavior—in a loving manner.

***Sin becomes an issue when we do not address sinful behavior—in a loving way.***

In this newsletter, however, I am going to go in a completely different and unexpected direction: what Cassie's behavior might suggest she is doing right, and the rest of us are doing wrong in other parts of our lives. You see, we rightly affirm politeness, consideration, and not taking advantage of people as positive values, and they are foundational for good relationship with others. However, there are a few other equally incorrect positions we can fall into on the other extreme. First, we can put ourselves in the position where we do not ask for help when we need it. Let us look at another story. John has decided to open a business. His dream is to provide jobs for people who need them. As is not surprising, the economy makes it hard for him to continue with the business, and paying bills is very tight from month to month. Then, a golden opportunity appears on the horizon. He is very excited about it. It means his business is finally going to expand. However, as described previously, Murphy shows up, and what was a great possibility falls through. John gets totally discouraged about any future for his business. He has friends who would willingly invest in the business to get him through the tough times, but he instead decides to close the business. He cancels his lease and notifies his vendors that it is over. He makes these decisions and finalizes them before calling even one of his friends to discuss his options. What was distressing is that his friend Jess just received a financial blessing and was considering investing when John called with the news. John made his irreversible and final decision without giving any of the people who love him the opportunity to be a friend in need. In essence, John chose self-destruction and pride over self-acceptance and humility. If John had put himself in the place of his friends, asking how they would feel about the situation, he may have considered his options differently.

*Thinking about the opinions of others helps us consider our choices carefully.*

In some instances, we may be trusting God with our needs so completely that we have decided it will be God or destruction; however, that kind of decision relies on faith—not on an attitude of hopelessness or of discouragement. The second incorrect extreme is if we ask for what we need to survive but not what we need to live. Diane is also a single mother, and she is just paying her bills. Unlike Cassie, she works 2 jobs to cover necessities. One month, her car needs new brakes, and her son needs sneakers. Then, her cousin calls her with an amazing offer: she is going on a week-long cruise next week, and her friend cancelled due to a family emergency, so she can take her place for free. This has been a dream of hers for years, and all it would cost her is \$100 to pay the neighbor to take care of her son for a week. However, as she looks at her finances and sees she does not have money for any of these unexpected bills, she has to make some choices. She needs the car for her job, so passing on the brakes is not an option; without sneakers, her son will lose his place on the track team, one of his few joys in school. She decides to call Joanne to ask if she can borrow money until she gets her tax refund. Joanne asks what she needs. Diane says she needs \$150 for brakes and another \$75 for sneakers. Joanne, who tithes more than that and remembers how Diane helped her through a rough time in her marriage, says it is not a problem at all, it is a gift, and is there anything else she needs? Diane immediately thinks about the sitter but says that is all. She then calls her cousin to say she cannot get a sitter at this short notice and has to pass on the cruise. She decided her doing something she dreamed about was not worth mentioning to someone else because it was not an absolute necessity. She chose not to mention the situation to her friend—who has often heard her describe her dream of going on a cruise—and thereby did not let her decide if it is something she wanted to offer to cover. When Joanne discovers this

several months later, she feels terribly hurt that Diane never gave her the opportunity to bless her after all the kindness she had shown her in her troubles, especially as she probably would have gotten divorced without her wise counsel. Diane saw herself as a beggar instead of sharing the whole situation in honesty and humility and letting her friend decide what was worth doing.

***Seeing ourselves as beggars prevents us from honestly explaining our situation.***

There are times when we wisely choose to sacrifice fun things because we do not want to impose on others. However, the situation is dependent on recognizing when something we desire may not be an absolute necessity but is still something extremely important. A healthy self-worth means that we view ourselves as we view other people. Again, we need to consider how others would feel about the situation. Still, the most important thing we learn from Cassie has to do with our personal relationship with our Heavenly Father. We can claim to possess faith and love from morning until evening, but our opinion does not matter; God's opinion is the only one that truly matters, and he tells us we are to present our requests boldly before the throne (faith) and treat others as ourselves (love). If we actually see ourselves as beggars when we pray, we cannot boldly ask in faith; instead, we minimize our needs, ourselves, and even our God. Begging indicates not only how we see ourselves but also how we view God our Father. If we had to beg to get something from our earthly father—whether it was a real need or just something we desired—then he was not the type of father God wanted him to be—or a good representation of God our Father; Jesus clearly describes a Heavenly Father who gives exceedingly, abundantly beyond all we can ask, think, or imagine. Of course, we may not get everything we ask, and there are many reasons for that, but we should dismiss any explanation we believe would be solved by our begging. If

we desire a healthy and biblical view of God as our Heavenly Father, we must ascribe to Him the character and nature expressed by Jesus. If He really loves us the same way He loves Jesus, which is exactly what John 17:23 says, then we should never approach Him as beggars, for that demeans and cheapens His perfect love for us.

***If He loves us just as much as He loves Jesus, begging demeans His love for us.***

Cassie clearly took advantage of people by presuming their being willing to go and give above and beyond what she actually asked. Her actions reflect immaturity and a lack of honest perception on her part. However, I suspect her view of God may be a bit more in line with the words of Jesus than we want to admit. There may be unhealthy aspects to her prayer life, but I expect she goes boldly before the throne and is not afraid to request all she desires, trusting God to sort it all out. Joshua told the Israelites to choose who they would worship and serve, and as we see, beggars can't be choosers. Viewing ourselves as beggars does more than just demean God's character and love as our Heavenly Father; it rejects His grace, love, and acceptance of ourselves. If we desire to love God, we must love what He loves and hate what He hates. To decide we know ourselves better than God knows us is a dangerous level of pride. True humility accepts God's opinion as the only perfect and true opinion, and it has to include His opinion of ourselves. Additionally, we love because He first loved us. This does not only mean we love God because He first loved us; His love also makes us able to love others. Jesus commands us to love our neighbors as ourselves, but if we view ourselves as beggars, then we do not fully understand God's love for us . . . and if we do not understand His love for us, then we cannot fully love others. If we love others as we love ourselves, but do not really love ourselves, we will not love others very well at all. If we love God, we will choose to not beg.