

# Bite Size Bible Study

Least of These #164

By Pastor Lee

My youngest daughter, Mary, graduated from Westmont College in Santa Barbara and spent the next 20 years in various positions working in the campus library. After earning her MA in Library Science she later became director of that library. When she moved back to San Diego she found a position with the San Diego Public Library as a librarian. Recently she was hired as a librarian at Point Loma Nazarene University.

One of the privileges of being back at an academic library was the request by the Association of Christian Librarians to write a short devotional for their monthly spiritual encouragement posting. It's aimed at librarians so obviously the audience is a bit narrow. However, as I read it, it seemed that the concept had a greater audience and so I asked if I could pass this along to you. So here is her devotional paper.

*"The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'" Matthew 25:40 NIV*

While working in the public library my understanding of who the "least of these" were grew as I daily interacted with those who are marginalized in society: the homeless, those who are technologically challenged, those who aren't comfortable speaking English, the recently released from prison, and those who just seem to have been forgotten about by society for whatever reason.

So many of my patrons, generally regulars, were struggling or hurting. Sometimes through poor choices of their own, sometimes from a series of incidents they had no or little control over, sometimes because of one seemingly minor event, and sometimes because of their place in society. I saw how quick and easy it is to go from being perfectly fine in life (financially, emotionally, spiritually) and slip into a state of disaster--oftentimes finding yourself there alone.

The marginalized aren't just in our public libraries. They also exist in our academic libraries. It just looks different. What about our first generation students, those who don't "conform" to the institutional culture, those with disabilities?

Look at any library whether public, academic, or special and you find a population of patrons there that is marginalized. Who are those in your library who fall into that category? There are many ways to be marginalized. So many people who are unseen all around us. Who is it that have I not been seeing or have been judging too quickly/harshly? And, what is my responsibility to them?

God has purposefully placed us in our jobs, our churches, and our social circles. We have each been gifted in specific ways and called to help "the least" who are in our lives. That help may be financial, providing services, teaching, listening, a smile, or a simple acknowledgement of someone's presence.

At the public library I realized there were so many who just needed to know that they were seen and valued as a person. Concepts such as homelessness, discrimination, and disadvantaged became individuals with faces I saw every day. Individuals with such complicated situations and hurts. It was hard to see God's plan as I saw the problems and the unfixable pain of those around me. But I know God loves each person and He invites me to be His arms, words, and presence on earth as best I can to love His people.

A quick reminder though. While we are called to help others, we are never called to do more than we have the capacity for. I may not have the capacity (financially, emotionally, etc.) to help in certain situations. Others will. Know your limit. Love and care and act when God calls you to. And, when He calls you to care for yourself instead, do so. That's ok. And, there are times we may be "the least" of these and need the care and help of others. That's ok too, accept it.

I (Lee) think that this applies to anyone who is in contact with other people – especially marginalized people. We are all marginalized in one-way or another.

I hope Mary's story will open our eyes to those who are on the fringes of our society. Being aware of the people we are around and being willing to be their friend or supporter is all about what Jesus was talking about when He said; *"whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."*

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