

FINDING GOD'S LESSON



INTRODUCTION

The book *A Man Called Norman* came to mind as I read this next story. The author, Rev. Mike Adkins, humorously describes how his life was changed forever as a result of sharing the Gospel with his misfit neighbor Norman. For years Norman had been ridiculed and judged by the people of their small town because he was a recluse and lived in a run-down house. The Lord began to move on Reverend Mike's heart to care for Norman, wash him, clothe him, love him, and treat Norman like he was family. Mike wrestled with the question "Why me, Lord?—He's so unlovely."

Steve has a similar encounter, with a gentleman by the name of Howie. I love the personal lesson the Lord taught Steve, a life-changing lesson that I will never forget.

INSPIRATIONAL VERSE

“Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it for me.”

MATTHEW 25:40

MESSAGE

For several years I voluntarily cared for a man named Howie, who was a bit of a hermit, had no family and no running water, and was a hoarder. The social worker assigned to Howie’s case warned me that his living conditions were alarming and that several other volunteers had not been able to “make it” after the initial visit. I admit that I gulped when I first saw the shack that Howie called home. It took everything I had to commit myself to care for him. It was a great challenge for me, but where others had failed, I became determined to succeed.

The first months were difficult, but we were able to establish a routine. Once I was able to see past the lack of personal hygiene and the mounds of junk that filled his home, I found that Howie was a great conversationalist and a bit of a charmer. He’d often nudge me as we stood in the checkout line at the local grocery store and say, “Hey, do you see how that clerk is checking me out?” Despite his outward appearance, he had a great smile and made others smile too.


I brought him to my home several times, and he loved my kids. He had a small garden and was sure to give me strawberries and tomatoes to take home to my family. I came to enjoy Howie. I know he appreciated my

time and friendship before dementia and Parkinson's disease took control of his mind and body. His home was eventually condemned, and he was forced through legal guardianship to move to a local nursing home.


I continued to visit him regularly for several more years as his health deteriorated. With very poor health habits to begin with, and advancing dementia, he became quite a burden on the facility's staff—often even defecating wherever he pleased. Eventually he couldn't remember my name, became uncommunicative, and mostly lay shaking in his bed.

As I returned home one day after a visit during which I found he had once again made a mess of himself, I asked God why He would allow a person to be such a nuisance to others. Why hadn't God taken Howie, since he wasn't able to speak or think for himself any longer? Then it suddenly occurred to me: Howie was there for me! God was teaching me how to love someone even when he offered nothing in return . . . no conversation, no interaction. What a great lesson for me, and one that gave me strength to continue to care for Howie until his death.

Steve Nooyen



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CAREGIVER'S PRAYER

God of Love,

Your Holy Word tells us to love our neighbors as ourselves. Help me to step out in obedience and follow those instructions. Change my heart, O God, and give me compassion to love others even when they are difficult to love and not able to respond or reciprocate.