

God looks with favor on those who help the poor

Johnelle Donnell, For the Times Record News Published 6:06 a.m. CT Nov. 28, 2019

One of my former clients from the Wichita County jail, Bobby, texted me recently ... "I'm in a struggle ... I've lost my job ... truck repossessed ... electricity off ... haven't paid rent ... don't even have any clean clothes...and my girlfriend just received the worst news we could have gotten ... stage 4 cancer ... but at least I'm clean and free."



Donnelly (Photo: Torin Halsey/Times Record News, AP)

I sent Bobby a photo of the big sign out on the highway advertising for truckers. He called the number and found out he would have to go to school, and he needed work immediately. We bought as many non-perishable groceries as his little apartment would hold. His landlord let him do odd jobs to keep from getting evicted. Then his phone started acting up, and we lost contact

It's times like these that really test the resolve of recovering addicts. Their brains still remember how to solve cash flow problems quickly, and they are every bit as addicted to fast money as they were to drugs.

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After a few days, I went by Bobby's apartment, took him to lunch, and we prayed and brainstormed how he could get on his feet. My personal challenge was to figure out an appropriate way to help him that would meet the approval of my husband who balances out the inclinations of my heart with the logic in his head!

As Thanksgiving and Christmas approach, my heart is especially heavy for people like Bobby who constantly live on the edge of poverty. I have seen their homes; I know their struggles. They are hard workers who just want to make it in life. The holidays add extra weight to the financial demands placed upon them because they long to make up for holidays past when they were behind bars, and their children had no Christmas.

This leaves them highly vulnerable to the lure of predatory payday loans — loans secured by a post-dated check or account debit authorization — which claim to be short-term loans but end up pulling many borrowers into a long-term cycle of high-cost debt that can be catastrophic to my friends.

One of my girls recently took out an auto title loan on her car amounting to \$650, and when she explained to me how she would pay it off in six easy installments, I pointed out the 487% rate of interest and payoff date of less than one month on the document she had just signed. As we walked away from the loan office, I said, "Tiffany, that man who was so friendly is going to become your worst enemy in less than a month."

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God looks with favor upon those whose hearts are touched by the needs of the poor. Many of the readers of this article will be comfortable enough financially to have a nice Christmas and also pass an extra blessing or two along to others who have little.

There are the conventional means of helping the poor such as Faith Mission/Faith Refuge, the Food Bank, Salvation Army, Interfaith Outreach Services, Food Pantry, Catholic Charities, local churches, but there are also many people we come in contact with regularly who could probably use a surprise gift.

My friends with felony histories work as waitresses, others work at the carwash, they are housekeepers, health aides, pizza delivery personnel, just to name a few. Most make \$10 an hour or less, not a viable salary to live independently.

The wife of one of the men I write in prison has had a lifestyle since age 14 of only paying the most critical bill. With three young children and only a waitressing job, she has lost her car and often has her phone cut off. A surprise cash gift for someone like that can be life-altering.

Bobby contacted me this week to share that God had provided him with an incredible job through the help of a Christian friend; he starts immediately. Many of us have connections, we know business people, employers who could give those living on the fringe of society a break they desperately need. People like Bobby need intentional friends.

Consumer experts predict Americans will exceed \$1 trillion in holiday spending this year. Rather than keeping it all in the family, let's spread it around and have ourselves a meaningful little Christmas.

Johnelle Donnell, a founder of the Faith Refuge and volunteer in prison ministry, has served on the Times Record News Editorial Board.