

## TIME FOR CHARITY

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I take great pleasure in startling people with the comment “When I was in jail...” A raised eyebrow, perhaps an awkward pause, then nervous laughter emits before I explain that both my father and I worked in the prison system for many years. I began ‘going to jail’ when I was a little girl to sing hymns in Sunday Chapel and then worked at a correctional facility in Calgary for several years. I love jail! Or more appropriately, I love THE PEOPLE in jail. Both the inmates and my co-workers. Every person, on either side of the bars, has deep hurts and struggles, and everyone is looking to belong, to be loved, to be valued. And that is where the love of Jesus comes in. Someone once asked me in prison “Why are you so happy? There is something different about you.” What a compliment! Yes, there is something different about me, and I know exactly why I am full of joy! And I’d love to share that with you!

### **Please read Matthew 25:31-40**

It sometimes seems the world takes advantage of the Christmas season as a one-off time of year to be generous to one another. It is well known that charities get an overwhelming influx of people wanting to volunteer during the Christmas season. “This sounds great Amy, what is the problem with that?” While charities are thankful for any and all volunteers and/or donations, they typically need these donations and volunteers year-round. While it is fantastic to serve Christmas dinner to the homeless or ‘adopted a family’ and provide gifts to less fortunate children, there are needs so much bigger than just Christmas, and so much broader than charities. Matthew 25 gives us a glimpse into both how simple and how incredibly vast unselfish love can be.

When Keith and I became foster parents, whilst in the ‘honeymoon’ phase (yes, there is a honeymoon phase, and yes, it fades – sometimes quite quickly!) I was adamant and rather disconcerted with my fellow Christ followers and Bible believers. It says very clearly in Matthew 25 that we should take care of the orphans, so, by my calculations, if every single Christ loving family who had a spare bedroom in their home took in a child then the matter of parentless children would be eradicated – overnight!

It seemed so simple. But as I wrestled with my incredible disappointment in humanity, I was gently reminded that we are all different, and appropriately and amazingly so! Keith and I had the time, the capacity, the love, and the desire, to foster children. I cannot assume that every Christ follower with a spare bedroom has the same capacity. I do know, however, that all Christ followers have the same instruction; to love one another in whatever capacity God has provided you with.

Yes, I have had the incredible privilege of loving people in jail, homeless on the streets, orphans welcomed into our home, and in multiple other ways as addressed in Matthew 25. Just because you don’t work in a jail or charity does not preclude you from showing love to others. Yes, the Christmas season provides us with lots of opportunities to be selfless and generous, but so does the rest of the year.

Look around – at your neighbor, at the senior’s home across town, at the exhausted teacher, at your family doctor. There are limitless possibilities in your sphere, no matter how old or young you are, no matter your ability or situation. Love someone today, and tomorrow, and every day!