

DEAN NELSON

# Serving with simple tools

There is never a convenient time for a washing machine to stop working, but this time was particularly inconvenient. I needed some particular clothes for the next day, so my wife and I did what we used to do when we were in college or were newly married: We went to the local Laundromat.

The closest one to our house is in a neighborhood shopping area. We went there on a Saturday night, and by the time we were pulling the last loads out of the dryers, we were the only people in the entire place. About 15 minutes before closing time we saw what I presumed to be a homeless man walk in.

He and I nodded to each other as he walked past, and then he disappeared on the other side of the vending machine. Several minutes went by, and he didn't come back out.

"Go see what he's doing," my wife suggested.

"You go see what he's doing," I said. I didn't really want to know.

After a couple of moments of stand-off, I went to see what he was doing.

On the other side of the vending machine was a lost and found table piled

with clothing people had left in the dryers. The man was trying on jackets.

We nodded at each other again, and I went back to folding my stuff.

"He's fine," I said to my wife.

A few minutes later the man walked out, wearing a jacket that was clearly too small for him.

As we loaded stuff into our car, I noticed how cold it was. Yes, weather in San Diego is largely perfect, but that night, about this time of year, it was around 40 degrees. That's really cold if you're sleeping outside.

"We should find that guy and see if he has warm enough clothes," my wife said. This time I didn't hesitate. I found him leaning against the back of the adjacent grocery store, overlooking a canyon.

"I saw you in the laundry place, and I'm wondering if you'd like warmer clothes," I said.

"I'm fine," he said.

"Seriously—I have a sweatshirt that I just washed that would be warmer than that jacket. And since we're right here at a grocery store, could I get you something to eat?"

Eventually he came into the store with us. I told him to get whatever he wanted. He settled on a large container

of Red Bull, the energy drink.

"You won't sleep for a week if you drink that without any food," I said.

He went back through the store and came out with a can of soup.

As we headed to my car to get a sweatshirt for him, I asked if he needed anything else.

"What I could use are some socks," he said. I had just washed about 10 pair.

So I gave him a sweatshirt and a

**I just gave him what I had at the time.**

pair of socks. I didn't go all Blind Side on him and bring him into my home and have him sleep on my couch and teach him how to play football and have a movie made about our relationship. I just gave him what I had at the time.

When Moses told God that there was no way he could be God's messenger to the Pharaoh, God asked Moses, "What do you have in your hand?" Moses had a shepherd's staff. That was all God needed. That, and a willing servant.

When Jesus told the disciples to feed the 5,000, they said there wasn't enough to go around. Jesus asked the disciples essentially the same thing that God asked Moses: What *do* you have? It turned out to be more than enough.

That night at the Laundromat I had a sweatshirt, some socks and a Vons card.

What do you have in *your* hand?



Dean Nelson is the founder and director of the journalism program at Point Loma Nazarene University. His most recent book is "God Hides in Plain Sight: How to

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