

Johnny The Bagger Illustration

Treating Others The Way You Want Them To Treat You

[Luke 6:31-32]

Some of the most important things we do in life that impact people for the kingdom of God are often neither dramatic nor memorable. But Jesus said that *"to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of mine, even to the least of them, you did it to Me"* (Matt. 25:40).

We tend to forget or discount the little things that we do, but Jesus *never* forgets them. And He does not disregard them. It's those seemingly *insignificant* things that make the character of our Christianity believable to the world around us. One of best examples of this truth I know is the true story of a Down Syndrome man by the name of Johnny. And this story is worth repeating.

[Ken Blanchard, *The Simple Truths of Service*, quoted by John Ortberg in: *It All Goes Back In The Box*, p.158ff]

Johnny works at a grocery store. One day he went to a training event led by a speaker named Barbara Glanz who goes around the country and speaks to people about positive attitudes in the workplace. And she was talking to three thousand front line workers for a supermarket chain - truck drivers, cashiers, and stockers.

Barbara was speaking on how people can make a difference. She described how every interaction with another person is a chance to create a memory, to bless someone's life. She talked about how important it is to look for those moments. She placed on the walls, as she always does when she speaks, posters with inspiring sayings. She told some stories and then went home, but she left her phone number behind. She invited the people at the conference to give her a call if they wanted to talk more about something she said.

About a month later, Barbara received a call from one of the people at that session, a nineteen-year-old bagger named Johnny. Johnny proudly informed her that he had Down syndrome, and then he told her his story.

"Barbara, I liked what you talked about. But I didn't think I could do anything special for our customers. After all, I'm just a bagger." Then he had an idea: he decided that every night when he came home from work, he would find a "thought for the day" for his next shift. It would be something positive, some reminder of how good it was to be alive, or how much people matter, or how many gifts we are surrounded by. If he couldn't find one, he would make one up.

Every night his dad would help him enter the saying six times on a page on the computer; then Johnny would print fifty pages. He would take out a pair of scissors and carefully cut three hundred copies and sign every one.

Johnny put the stack of pages next to him while he worked. Each time he finished bagging someone's groceries, he would put his saying on top of the last bag. Then he would stop what he was doing, look the person straight in the eye, and say, "I've put a great saying in your bag. I hope it helps you have a good day. Thanks for coming here."

A month later, the store manager called Barbara. "Barbara, you won't believe what's happened here. I was making my rounds, and when I got up to the cashiers, the line at Johnny's checkout was three times longer than anyone else's. It went all the way down the frozen food aisle."

The manager got on the loudspeaker to get more checkout lines open, but he couldn't get any of the customers to move. They said, "That's okay. We'll wait. We want to be in Johnny's line." One woman came up to him and grabbed his hand, saying, "I used to shop in your store once a week. Now I come in every time I go by-I want to get Johnny's thought for the day." Johnny is doing more than filling bags with groceries; he is filling lives with hope.

There is a reason Johnny's lines are three times longer than anyone else's. Our souls need to be fed, just as our bodies do. Bodies are fed by protein and carbs; souls are fed by words. What people need from us the most is not more information. They just need words that will feed their souls. Sometimes words as simple as "thank you" or "I hope you have a really good day" can feed a soul.

Of course, what makes the words on the paper mean so much is who they come from. Words alone can come from a fortune cookie. When people get them from Johnny, they are reminded of the beauty of one person forgetting his own limitations and seeking to make his life a blessing to someone else. Whatever burdens Johnny carries make his gift that much brighter.

Know who the most important person in the store is?

Johnny the bagger.

A few months later, the manager called Barbara once again to tell her Johnny was transforming the whole store. He told her that when the floral department had a broken flower or unused corsage, they used to throw it away. Now they go out in the aisles, find an elderly woman or a little girl, and pin it on her. The butchers started putting ribbons on the cuts of meat they wrap up for customers. The people who make their shopping carts are trying to make carts with wheels that actually work...

If it can happen in a grocery store, it can happen anywhere.

By the way, do you know who the most important person in your family, your neighborhood, and your workplace is? You! When you're blessing somebody else.

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You can be a Johnny the bagger. What Johnny does isn't flashy, slick, overly complicated, or strategically calculated. He's just a bagger expressing his heart. Leaving his "signature" on their lives. You can do that. In fact, that's kind of what being a *real* Christian is all about. We're just lovers of Jesus expressing our heart. Leaving *His* signature on people. *When* on earth did we forget that? Maybe if we remembered *that* we'd recover our passion for the gospel.

Luke says, "*Treat others the same way you want them to treat you. "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them."* [Lk. 6:31-32]