

On crucial stories Jesus didn't tell

The story of the good Samaritan is a powerful one – but it shortchanges us in one key way. Of course the Samaritan story teaches us that followers of Jesus are to reach out - even to foreign strangers when they are in need. The inclination to walk by, even if driven by the desire to minister in your own local context, is an unacceptable one.

What we're shortchanged by is the story Jesus didn't tell. That's the one where the Samaritan arrives a few minutes earlier – just as the robbers have confronted their intended victim. At this point the Samaritan, recognizing what is occurring, faces at least eight possible choices:

- The Samaritan can make the same choice the pastor and the religious leader made in Jesus' story. He can simply look the other way and go by while muttering about his need to attend to his important ministry in his community (option A). ____
- The Samaritan can choose to hide, wait until the victim has suffered his beating, then appear and, just as in Jesus' story, and treat the victim's wounds. Upon leaving to attend to his local ministry the Samaritan can promise to those attending the victim he will take care of future medical expenses (option B). ____
- Recognizing the superior force of the robbers the Samaritan can choose to assist the robbers in mugging the victim in the hope that through his participation the victim might not be beaten quite as badly and the Samaritan can remain afterward to treat the victim's wounds (option C). ____
- The Samaritan can grab the nearest weapon (say, speculatively, a whip), and, by threatening force like Jesus did in the temple he can attempt to protect the potential victim from harm. (We're ignoring momentarily, for the sake of making a personal decision, the similar option of trying to enlist the police to provide this same sort of threat.)
 - Threatening force leads to two further options:
 - If the robbers do not retreat the Samaritan can use actual force to defend himself and the potential victim (option D) ____ or the Samaritan can reveal the raised whip to be a bluff.
 - Revealing the bluff leads to two final options:
 - The Samaritan can then seek to run away and abandon the victim (option E) ____ or the Samaritan can surrender his possessions and his body to the robbers while encouraging the intended victim to run away (option F). ____
- Another option, the opposite of option F, is for the Samaritan to act as if he is surrendering his possessions and his body to the robbers but then attempt to use force to protect the potential victim at the last second (option G). ____
- In a final option the Samaritan chooses not to threaten or use force. In this option (option H) ____ the Samaritan freely surrenders his possessions and his body to the robbers in the hope of both sparing the intended victim and sparking the conscience of the robbers.

Having exhausted our list of possible options (please let me know if you come up with any additions) the simple question is, "What would Jesus do?" The easy part of your goal in this exercise is to number the eight options in the order you believe most closely follows Jesus. Another way to think about this is to ask yourself how Jesus would have told this story (use the space after each option - one being the most likely, eight being the least). Does your ranking change at all if crossing the street to care for the victim also involves illegally crossing an international boundary?

Having ranked your options the hard part of this exercise is to live out your convictions in response to the foreign strangers, community members, and friends whose needs you are aware of. As Jesus said, "Go and do likewise."