

SHARING HOPE ON NEW YEAR'S EVE

By Duane Starkey

The other day as I drove into Houston to the VA Hospital Complex I asked God to put someone in front of me that I could help that day. When I go there on my medical appointments I always see hundreds of veterans waiting for care. It always hurts me inside when I see their physical and mental condition so sad and depressed. There is an atmosphere of depression and hopelessness about them that cries out to me and I want to fight for them and help somehow to make it better. I cannot help them all, but I always ask God to let me help at least one.

I usually visit the men's restroom before I go into the clinic for my long wait. That day (12-31-2013), as I entered, I almost bumped into a wheelchair patient sitting near the aisle pulling paper towels to wipe his hands. He was Afro-American with shining silver hair and gave me a sad smile as I passed by. I apologized to him for almost walking into him and headed on to the urinal. While washing my hands, I suddenly realized this was someone I was supposed to help. I turned around and looked for him but he was gone. I rushed out the door hoping I might catch up with him. He was right there against the wall and pulling himself along the rail down the hall. I went toward him and pulled out ten dollars from my pocket as I stopped him. I said, "Sir, the Lord told me to give you ten dollars and to tell you to have **Hope** because He surely is going to bless you". The sad expression on his face changed in an instant to smiling joy. His eyes flashed as he said, "I always have hope and I will never give it up." He took the money gratefully and said, "Thank you so much." So I went on my way to my appointment and I carried the picture of his smiling, hopeful face with me.

I take the same exit route from the VA every time I go there. There is always a disabled veteran sitting or standing at a particular intersection with a sign asking for help. I always put a few dollars handy to give them as I stop there. When I put the 3 dollars on the console, I asked the Lord to bless it. Approaching the intersection, I saw a vet standing just short of the light and a woman standing past him at the light. I stopped for the light and called the man over and handed him the money. I said, "Please share with the lady down there." He said, "She is my wife." By that time I had read his sign that said, "I am a veteran and my wife and I need help." By that time the woman joined us and I dug into my pocket for the rest of the twenty I had in cash. I called out to them "Here, and God Bless You both". The man was stunned and tried to smile gratefully, but it was the tiny woman, huddled against the cold that I remember so vividly. She looked at me with gratitude and hope in her eyes as she mouthed the words, "Thank You".

Even when I am writing this, days later, tears of compassion and prayers for their hope are present with me. What an awesome way to close 2013 and open 2014. Hope shared on New Year's Eve will come back to me many times over in the coming year.

I pray that you too will have a **Happy New Year filled with Hope.**

God Bless in Jesus name.

Amen