

life lines “Never judge a brown paper bag by its color”

By Ian Robinson, Major

Brown paper bags have been on my mind lately.

I have discovered that every year Americans use about 10 billion of them, for which we cut down 14 million trees. And they are definitely less eco-friendly than plastic bags. Four times the amount of energy is used in manufacturing paper bags vs. plastic ones, and 98 percent more energy is used to recycle them. They also create 70 percent more pollutants than plastic bags.

“Brown Paper Bag” was a popular rap song in the 1990s, although the lyrics are morally questionable. I also found that Brown Paper Bag is the name of an event planning company in Glasgow, Ken., and an interior design company in San Pedro, Calif. You can steam vegetables in a brown paper bag, and a software design error was once called a brown-paper-bag bug because culprits would wear one over their head to avoid being recognized.

As you can see, brown paper bags have been on my mind lately.

Although these facts are fascinating—well, they are to a trivia buff like me—there is another reason that brown paper bags have been on my mind. Recently, a gentleman walked into our corps office and asked to speak to someone about a donation. In his hand he was holding—you guessed it—a brown paper bag! Most of us would have believed it to contain his lunch. Maybe a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, an apple and a carton of juice. Or maybe it was his groceries: a carton of milk, a loaf of bread, some cheese and crackers. However, when he handed it over, inside we found \$713 in \$1 bills. Some lunch! The gentleman refused a receipt and quickly left before he could be further questioned.

Brown paper bags have been used to carry our groceries or our lunches for a long time, but I realized that now we need to change how we think about them. God used a humble brown paper bag and an anonymous gentleman to bless our corps. It reminded me of Jesus feeding the multitude. He took a small boy’s lunch of five loaves and two fish, maybe from the biblical equivalent of a brown paper bag, and multiplied them to provide lunch for 5,000 men, plus countless women and children, who had come to hear his message. It was a great demonstration of how God can do so much with so little,

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and how he blesses the faithfulness of his followers in ways we can never imagine.

Deuteronomy 7:13 says, He will love you and bless you and increase your numbers. He will bless the fruit of your womb, the crops of your land—your grain, new wine and olive oil—the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks in the land he swore to your ancestors to give you (TNIV).

Never judge a brown paper bag by its color—judge it by its contents.