

## Five liberal excuses to do absolutely nothing

by [Carol Howard Merritt](#)

July 27, 2015

The person has been robbed and beaten. He's bleeding on the side of the road. Unlike the Good Samaritan, we step over him. But we have really great reasons for why we do it.

**1) We don't want to put on a bandage, because we would not be fixing the deeper problems.** I often hear this as a criticism of people who are actually doing the work of feeding the hungry. It is presented as an either/or. Either you can do the work of feeding people, OR you can advocate for larger policy changes.

Most of us don't have power and access to change the political system. We can vote, protest and agitate, and that'll take a couple of days out of the year. But we *can* give a guy a hot meal and listen to him. The hot meal doesn't keep us from working on systemic problems. Listening and advocacy need to work together. Working for policy changes without personal interaction can be paltry and patronizing, and even disastrous.

**2) We don't want to be a bad ally.** We have all seen white people who speak for racial justice, while edging out people of color on the podium. We have heard about the pastor who sleeps out on the street for one night, in order to tell about the hardships of homelessness. We know straight people who dramatize the sacrifices they make on behalf of LGBTQ issues, while failing to mention the actual LGBTQ people who have been killed, tortured, bullied, destroyed and denied because of their sexual orientation.

If we are middleclass, white, and/or straight, it's easy to let our fear of being a bad ally keep us from speaking out in support of others. Certainly, we have to be willing to make mistakes and we have to know our place. We need to be the back-up singers and not the solo. But we still need to lift every voice.

**3) There are people who are worse off.** When Kelly Gissendaner was about to get executed, people were praying for her and speaking out on her behalf. Then there was the kick-back. White men with Ph.D.'s began to give Twitter lectures on Gissendaner's privilege. "If she weren't a white woman," they said, "we wouldn't care."

Of course, all of this came from people who haven't been women in prison. They may not have even known the extraordinary torture of domestic violence. They certainly didn't know what it was like being threatened every single day, then when you act in self-defense, you get locked up for life. Pointing out the privilege of someone on death row, who is moments away from the injection? That's a great liberal excuse to do nothing.

**4) Doing social justice work is being too political.** I hear this from pastors who shame other pastors for preaching about social justice. They say that we need to make sure we don't offend anyone in our congregation. Preaching about an issue means that the tepid equilibrium in our congregation might be disturbed. We are called to be pastors to all people, including the rich.

Too often, we make the assumption that the rich don't want to be challenged in their faith, and so we're not allowing them to be full disciples. So we not only make an excuse to do nothing, but we also make assumptions about the rich person's faith.

**5) We have compassion fatigue.** There are too many problems, too many issues, and we have a limited amount of time, money, and energy.

But we cannot let our fatigue be an excuse to do nothing. Instead we can open ourselves and commit to one thing. Even if it's not the hashtag of the month, even if there are people who are worse off, don't let the compassion fatigue be another liberal reason that we do nothing.