

# Fresh Start

By Jerry Bader

## Stranger on a Train

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*“Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment.” John 7:24*

Anthony Torres had just spent three days in a homeless shelter, so he decided to clean up. On a New Jersey Transit train one evening in September, he pulled out shaving cream and razor and began to shave; in his seat, flicking the used shaving cream to the floor. Someone on the train found Torres’ behavior interesting enough to video record. You can probably guess what happened next. As reported by the Associated Press (AP):

*The video, posted on Twitter, had 2.4 million views by Monday afternoon. Another video showed a clean-shaven Torres with a beer in his hand.*

*The self-grooming earned its share of negative comments on the Internet, with insults like “slob,” “animal” and “nasty.” Others humorously lauded his steady hand with a razor. A few cautioned against passing judgment and suggested people didn’t know the whole story.*

Bless the “few” that cautioned against passing judgment. Torres was taken back by the reaction. He told the AP a brother of Torres had given him money for the train he was using to get to another brother. He left the shelter before having a chance to clean up: “I don’t want to say that I’m homeless, let everybody know,” he told the AP. “That’s why I’m shaving.”

Those passing judgment on Twitter didn’t know that. They also didn’t know that health issues, including two strokes, have made it difficult for the 56-year-old Torres to stay employed. There has never been a shortage of people willing to judge others based on appearance. Social media now allows millions to do it en masse, publicly and semi-anonymously.

One of my favorite expressions is – God doesn’t waste anything. And there is reason to have hope that Torres’ story is being used by God to turn some hearts of stone to hearts of flesh (see [Ezekiel 36:26](#)).

Once Torres’ story was told by the AP, the Washington Post and other outlets, some of the people who had mocked him expressed regret, including New Jersey journalist S.P. Sullivan on Twitter:

*If you, like me, shared the video of the dude shaving on the train, you should read this and feel bad about the culture we’ve created in which we boil everything down to a dumb viral video.*

The passenger who recorded the video expressed regret after learning Torres’ story. He posted a message that said he had licensed the video and planned to donate all proceeds to Torres and his family. And that wasn’t all. From the Washington Post:

*But the biggest show of support came from Jordan Uhl and the GoFundMe page he set up after seeing the video and reading the Associated Press story. Days after the story broke the fundraiser, titled “Anthony Torres Assistance Fund,” had raised more than \$20,000 toward a \$25,000 goal.*

Another one of my favorite expressions is – don’t judge my story based on the chapter you walked in on. In the verse taken from John at the top of this post, Jesus is responding to religious leaders who were judging him for healing on the Sabbath:

*"If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath, so that the law of Moses should not be broken, are you angry with Me because I made a man completely well on the Sabbath? Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment." John 7:23-24*

All of us have many chapters in our lives. I don't know about you, but I'm going to pray that the next time I'm tempted to judge a stranger based on appearance, either online or quietly to myself, that Jesus will remind me of His own words and of Anthony Torres.

I close by humbly suggesting that you ask yourself a question I'm asking myself. If I had witnessed Torres' actions on a train would my first impulse have been to record him, or to wonder why he is doing this and is there any way I can help? God is always ready to make things work together for our good (see [Romans 8:28](#)). But it's a way of showing our love for Him when we get it right the first time. *"The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'"* Matthew 25:40