

Week 2 – Feb. 22-26

Helping Hands primarily works with the homeless in South Wood County. But with the lack of a local shelter our ministry has become one of walking beside people as they attempt to get back on their feet. The process often takes six months or longer.



Homeless... the shattered dream.

by Steve

Corinthians 4:16-18

¹⁶Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. ¹⁷For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. ¹⁸So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

I've often thought about the homeless man I met the other day. I've seen him from time to time around town and I'll think about him of course as I sit in the comfort and warmth of my own home late in the evening. I wonder if he's ok, is he warm enough, has he eaten today? Those thoughts go through my mind. I wonder what it must be like to be homeless and how frustrating that would be. I'm sure everyone has goals and dreams and longs to be successful in their life, and being homeless is most likely not one of those dreams or goals. I guess it just happens sometimes. A series of unfortunate events and there you are. It can happen to anyone I suppose. One thing for sure in my own life, things did not go as I had planned or dreamed they ever would. In some areas of my life I've been blessed beyond measure. My career, my parents and sisters, my wife and children, also my health, there's so much to be thankful for and I've never dreamed that these blessings would be so wonderful as they are. Yet there are other events in my life that have caused such pain and suffering and I would have never dreamed or imagined that I would be going through. For instance my son's addiction to drugs and the serious consequences of this and the pain this has caused not only himself but the whole family as well. I've watched it drain the excitement of life right out of my wife, not only her but with me as well. We had such dreams for our children. We both praise the Lord for our youngest son and the decisions he's made in his life. What a responsible young man he has become, but with our oldest son the plans or dreams we had for him were shattered due to choices and events that we didn't expect. I never saw it coming either. It just happened, or at least that's how it seemed. Of course there were a series of events that took place over a period of time but the reality of it is what hits you hard. As your working through it, you think maybe you'll get a handle on it, but then you realize that you can't. It's too deep, too far gone now. There's no going back, only moving forward and pressing on through the mess before us. It's hard and difficult and the tendency is to think back, to return to the dream, but all that does is remind you that it didn't happen the way you had hoped and you go through the hurt all over again. I think it's best to move on, plan new dreams and goal from where you are today. The old ones are gone, but new ones exist. You just have to push past and through the crushed ones laying in your way. These crushed dreams seem to block your view from the new ones, or at least for a while they do. I guess it's because of the morning and sorrow we go through and that takes time to heal.

Back to Jerry, the homeless man I met the other day. I don't know what series of events caused this man to be alone and homeless, but whatever changed his hopes and dreams, I hope he finds the strength to create new ones.

Prayer: Lord, I pray for those I know and love who are facing unexpected things. Give them strength and wisdom to deal with it. Help me not judge those in tough situations, but as I wonder what events brought them to that point, use me to help give them strength to make changes.

Serving The Least

Matthew 25:31-36

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ (ESV)

Jesus provides a vivid and explicit picture of how when He returns to finally establish His kingdom he will separate people “as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.” His litmus test to determine whether we’re truly part of His kingdom seems simple and clear: however we treat the least of these- the hungry, thirsty, naked, homeless, sick, and imprisoned- is how we treat Him.

We can examine our lives and see how we respond to the least of these and know whether the good news of God’s kingdom took root in our lives. During His earthly ministry, Jesus and His followers constantly pursued those who seemed far from God and forgotten by society. As His followers, He calls us to do the same today. We can choose to ignore those people in the world around us and miss an amazing opportunity to experience Jesus. Here are some questions to ask yourself:

- Who are the least of these in your community?
- How do you personally respond to those who are hungry, thirsty, naked, homeless, sick, and imprisoned?
- How do you think our response to the least of these reveals whether we’re truly part of God’s kingdom?

Prayer: God, give me Your heart for the least of these in my community and show me how I can join You in Your activity.

BURDENS

BY MELANIE GIBBONS

Galatians 6:2, 5

Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ ... For all must carry their own loads.

These verses seemed a contradiction to me for many years, until I learned more about the difference between "burdens" and "loads." Here's how I think of it now: a load is like a backpack full of the things one person needs to carry with them to make it through the day. A burden is like a cart. One person could pull it if they have to, but it's really made to be pulled by a team.

That's how I think of compassion work in the world. Through development projects that help build resilience, deepen resources and expand knowledge, we enable people and communities to "carry their own loads." But when an emergency comes — a flood, an earthquake, a conflict, even a drought — the load grows into something bigger. It becomes a burden.

Here's where we come in. We are called to fulfill Christ's law by bearing one another's burdens. And the good news is this; because it's Christ law, by the power of the cross it has already been fulfilled. Now it is a calling that's given to us through grace. It's a calling we don't face alone but with the whole body of Christ. Through your prayers, generous gifts and donations of Quilts and Kits, we reach out together as Christ's hands in the world.

PRAYER: Thank you, God, for calling us to work alongside you in our global community. Give us the strength and wisdom to reach out at the right time and in the right way to help bear one another's burdens when the load grows too heavy. Amen.

Giving Ourselves

Lonnie Selje

Acts 16

⁷ When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. ⁸ So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas.

The nature of some of my work is in showing people the difference between helping vs. enabling them. This week I was reminded of a very important component to helping.

In this day and age, we are quick to write a check or even give a few dollars to someone on the street. But it isn't always money they need. Oh, they may want it, and they may take it, but it's not what they need.

Helping Hands Gospel Mission has a policy of not giving gas cards to people without a valid driver's license and proof of insurance. We don't want to encourage anyone to break the law, and both of those are law in Wisconsin. Someone I have been working with for a bit asked for gas. She couldn't afford to even register her car. I could have offered her cab fare, but instead chose to offer to take her to the store myself. (Trust me, it was divine leading and not thoughtfulness on my part.)

Now you have to know me to understand that shopping is not my passion. I typically run to the store on the spur of the moment, doing as many things as possible in the shortest amount of time when there are the fewest number of people in the store. I have been known to fill a cart and be back on the road in record time. So taking the time to schedule a trip to the store, and wait for someone who had limited resources to figure out how to purchase some necessities was not part of my game plan.

I realized something in that process. We give too much money and not enough of ourselves. This person knew the sacrifice to give her my time, and I knew in that moment that today's world is too disconnected. We text, we tweet, we Facebook, but we don't give people time. Our presence has the same power of Jesus'. It's through our time and presence that we touch their hearts and lives.

While at the store doing some of my own shopping, I ran into someone from church and had a wonderful chat, catching up like you don't get to in the hustle and bustle of a Sunday morning. On my way out I ran into a woman from the assisted living home I do Sunday services at and chatted briefly. This was the first time we were able to connect beyond the superficial, "Hi, are you coming to services today?" For the first time she knew that I knew who she was, and that I cared about her as a person. I'm curious to see if she decides to come to church services now, or how she might greet me when I'm visiting the home.

Oh, and the person I took shopping in the first place. She asked me to pick her up for church Sunday morning. It all makes me wonder how many divine appointments I've missed by producing quantity vs. quality!

Prayer: Most Gracious God, don't allow me to miss any more of your Divine Appointments in my life. Make me more sensitive to your leading, no matter the inconvenience I may feel.
Amen

I Am Poor and Needy

(by Pastor Jason Coker)

Psalm 86.1

Hear, O LORD, and answer me, for I am poor and needy.

In America there's almost nothing worse than to be poor and needy. America is the land of strong, relentless workers. Workers who won't take poverty for an answer, who look hardship squarely in the face and pull themselves out of the pit by sheer determination and grit. These are our heroes, men and women with an "I can" attitude and a rags-to-riches-story, the American dream of which we all drink deeply.

To be poor in the midst of a wealth that can be freely earned is shameful to American sensibilities. Be honest, isn't it hard sometimes to look squarely upon people who have their hand out? Isn't there - even among the most compassionate among us - a distant sense of being puzzled by a poor person, or a lingering aftertaste of bitterness, or perhaps even for some of us the hearts hair-trigger, explosively firing off accusations and condemnation?

Scripture, of course, explicitly teaches the value of a strong work ethic. "How long will you lie there you sluggard? When will you get up from your sleep? A little sleep a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest and poverty will come on you like a bandit and scarcity like an armed man." (Proverbs 6: 9-11) We celebrate these passages, and rightly so, for in them is great wisdom for life, but I think our problems with the poor run deeper than simply the abhorrence of laziness, for clearly the reality of poverty is more complicated than mere laziness. Some of the hardest working people in America are among our poorest.

Instead, our embarrassment of the poor and needy is at least partly entangled with the impression that by their very existence they repeatedly utter the two dirtiest words in American English: "I can't." People who say such things are beyond our patience. Just ask yourself, how would your thoughts respond to someone saying these words? "I can't pay my rent; I can't take care of my kids; I can't hold down a good job; I can't take care of myself. I can't, I can't, I can't..." Rather than mercy, such people tend to reap our total rejection to the point of blind indifference. To be counted among such people is the worst possible condition for proud Americans. Would you rather be a sick person "fighting" your illness, or a "charity case" living off someone else's benevolence? Most of us would choose the former.

And herein lies our spiritual problem, for in the Kingdom of God there's nothing better than to be poor and needy. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven." (Matt 5:3) Here Jesus is merely echoing age-old wisdom. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise" (Psalm 51:17) says David, and Isaiah seems to agree when he offers us this from the Lord, "I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite."

Not only do we all need the mercy of others from time to time, but from the vantage point of eternity we need the mercy of God all the time! We are forever destined to live off the charity of the Lord. As long as we insist upon our self-sufficiency, we will remain distant from God, but once we've realized we are truly poor and needy, God will dwell with us.

Prayer: Gracious God, cleanse my heart of judging others, reminding me that You alone can judge. Give me wisdom to truly help people, but more importantly, to love them with the same type of love You so generously give to me. Amen