

Homeless Ministry

1. Define homelessness. By what other names does homelessness go by?
2. Explain the reasons people experience homelessness. What options for shelter do the homeless have?
3. What groups of people are most likely to experience homelessness? Why?
4. Do the following:
 - a. Research the five items most commonly given to someone facing homelessness. Learn the five items most needed by someone facing homelessness. Compare and contrast the two lists.
 - b. Using what you learned in requirement 4a, create a homelessness kit to give away.
5. What items should you avoid giving to someone experiencing homelessness?
6. Besides housing, what other challenges do the homeless face?
7. Know and demonstrate safe practices when participating in homeless ministry.
8. Do one of the following:
 - a. Interview someone who regularly works in a homeless ministry and ask them why this ministry is so important.
 - b. Interview someone who experienced homelessness in the past and ask what they learned from their experience.
 - c. Spend some time talking to someone who is currently homeless. Ask them what items they need most. If possible, give them a homelessness kit with these items in it.
9. Why is homelessness stigmatized? What can be done to prevent this?
10. Many myths exist about homelessness. Describe at least three and share the truth for each one.
11. Do one of the following:
 - a. Choose and participate in a homeless ministry for at least 2 hours. When you finish, share what you learned with your group.
 - b. Develop a plan for increasing awareness about homelessness. Alone or with a group, put your plan into action. When you finish, share what you learned with your group.
12. What does the Bible say about homelessness? Creatively share a devotional with your group about it.

Name(s): _____

Date: _____

Homeless Ministry

1. Write a brief definition of homelessness. _____

2. Write the top 5 items given to the homeless, and the top 5 items actually needed by the homeless:

Items Commonly Given:

Items Commonly Needed:

3. For each of the following statements about homelessness, circle “MYTH” or “FACT:”

- | | | |
|------|------|---|
| MYTH | FACT | People experiencing homelessness are more likely to commit a crime. |
| MYTH | FACT | People experiencing homelessness are more likely to be the targets of violence. |
| MYTH | FACT | Most people experiencing homelessness are mentally ill. |
| MYTH | FACT | 20 to 40% of those experiencing homelessness struggle with substance abuse. |
| MYTH | FACT | People experiencing homelessness are dangerous. |
| MYTH | FACT | People experiencing homelessness choose to be homeless. |
| MYTH | FACT | Many people experiencing homelessness have a job, or even 2 or 3 jobs. |
| MYTH | FACT | There is not enough housing to provide reasonable shelter for the homeless. |
| MYTH | FACT | Middle-aged men are the most likely to become homeless. |
| MYTH | FACT | People experiencing homelessness don’t want jobs. |

4. Participate in a homeless ministry or develop a plan to raise awareness for homelessness.



Homeless Ministry

Upper Columbia Conference Honor Pilot

In the United States, more than 7% of the entire population will experience homelessness sometime during their lives. There are many myths and stigmas associated with being homeless, and oftentimes, this big issue is forgotten or ignored. Even though politicians often use this to make a political point, they often forget how difficult homelessness is for the people who find themselves in that situation. It is important to remember that homelessness is not just a number, but that it is our responsibility as Christians to do as Jesus did and minister to those without a home to return to!



Did you know that, according a House and Urban Development (HUD) report in 2023, 653,104 Americans were homeless?
That's a 12% increase from 2022!

Background: <https://media.newyorker.com/photos/66a9001bbe1741fdd1c5ed90/master/pass/Heller-homeless-GettyImages-2163692828.jpg>
(1) <https://www.offthegridnews.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/feeding-homeless-takepartDOTcom.jpg>

Types of Homelessness

A person is considered **homeless** when he/she lives in places not meant to be lived in. Those who are **unsheltered** live in places such as cars, parks, sidewalks, and abandoned buildings. Those who live in an emergency shelter or in transitional housing are also considered homeless, but would be called **sheltered**, because they have a temporary place to stay. Those who have been continuously homeless for either a year or more or who have had at least four episodes of homelessness in the past three years are called **chronically homeless**.

Being “**doubled up**” occurs when someone stays with friends or family because they don’t have anywhere else to live. This is similar to be **precariously housed**, which is staying in a motel, hospital, detox center, jail without permanent residence.



To help those living in homeless camps like the one above¹, many charities run shelters like the one to the left², temporary housing so those experiencing homelessness can spend the night with a roof over their heads.

(1) https://i.abcnewsfe.com/a/6906f0fe-af40-4406-84f1-64f49e525751/homeless-03-gty-jt-240801_1722559986610_hpMain_16x9.jpg?w=992
(2) <https://images.theconversation.com/files/225982/original/file-20180703-116135-ysmk1y.jpg?ixlib=rb-4.1.0&rect=0%2C0%2C6709%2C3349&q=45&auto=format&w=1356&h=668&fit=crop>

Reasons for Homelessness

There are many reasons why someone might find themselves homeless. One of the biggest reasons is unemployment, the inability to find work.



For every 100 extremely low-income renters nationally, there were only 34 affordable units in 2013.¹

People can also become homeless when the amount of money required to afford housing is lower than the amount of money that they are being paid. After paying their rent and utilities, 75% of Extremely-Low Income (ELI) households end up with less than half of their income left to pay for necessities such as food, medicine, transportation, or childcare. These people are on the verge of homeless.

(1) <https://smartasset.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2022/04/low-income-1.jpg>

Reasons for Homelessness

Untreated mental health and addictions can also cause homelessness, and those who become homeless with one of these issues often find it is harder for them to escape homelessness.

Those struggling with an addiction are more likely to experience homelessness, and are more likely to struggle escaping homelessness.¹



People dealing with mental health challenges are more likely to experience homelessness than those who don't.² Up to 22% of the adult homeless population suffer from a severe and persistent mental illness.

Domestic violence, violence in the home, is another cause of homelessness. This cause of homelessness most often affects women and children, when living without a home at all is better than living in a violent home.



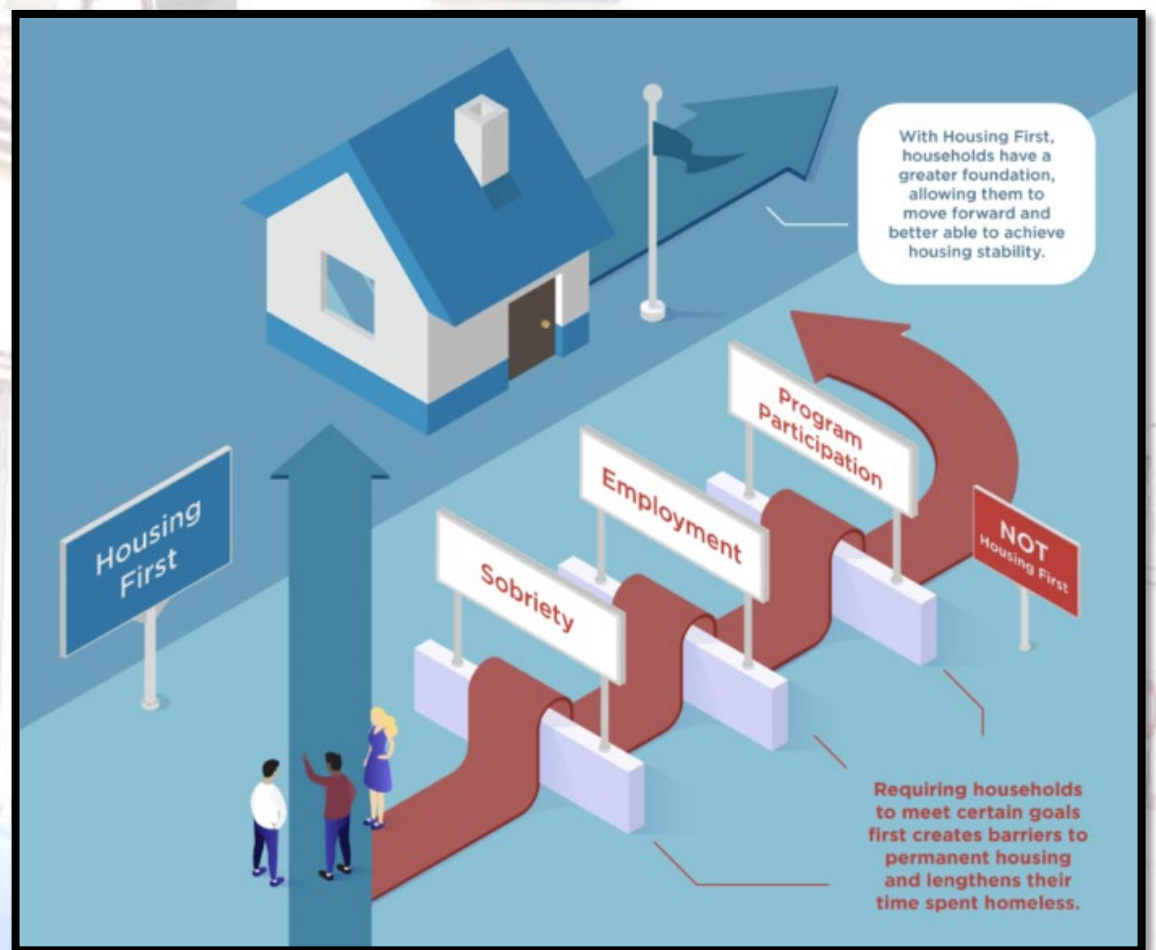
In a 2014 survey of 25 US cities, 15% of all homeless adults were identified as survivors of domestic violence.³

(1) https://weillcornell.org/sites/default/files/styles/custom_1440x960_/public/news_images/shutterstock_784914139.jpg?itok=TyxkN1kS
(2) <https://domf5oio6qrer.cloudfront.net/medialibrary/7813/a83db567-4c93-4ad0-af6f-72b57af7675d.jpg>
(3) https://unisa.edu.au/siteassets/media-centre/images/child-crying-original_1164198319.jpg

Addressing Homelessness

In the past, it was thought that the best way to end homelessness was to “fix up” the lives of those experiencing homelessness, either by providing counseling for mental health or addiction, helping the homeless individual face and address domestic violence, or finding them a job. This approach was known as the “housing ready” method, and meant that the person had to meet a set of requirements to qualify for housing. This didn’t work well!

One of the most effective ways to end homelessness is to simply provide housing for them. This method is known as the Housing First method,



The Housing First method of addressing homelessness is based on the philosophy that a person can better deal with the underlying causes when they are securely housed.¹

which prioritizes placing a person into permanent housing over addressing the underlying causes of their homelessness. The idea is that a person can better deal with the underlying causes when they are securely housed.

(1) <https://www.caft.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Screen-Shot-2022-05-26-at-1.27.55-PM-1-1024x573.png>

Shelters and Housing

A variety of temporary housing options, often known as shelters, exist to help support those in need of housing assistance.

Youth shelters specialize in supporting homeless young people, helping them find jobs and counseling.



Youth shelters specialize in helping kids and young people by making sure they are safe, helping them find and get jobs, and start their lives.¹

Transitional housing is a form of housing to help people who are getting a new start in life.

Emergency shelters serve those who lose their home for a sudden reason, such as a natural disaster.

Emergency shelters are most commonly found near areas that have been affected by a natural disaster. The one shown above was created to serve people who were affected by Hurricane Harvey.²



(1) <https://freepressokc.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Sisu-shelter-provided.jpeg>

(2) https://media.newyorker.com/photos/59a9d2cc690c17706eea3a2e/master/w_2560%2Cc_limit/Nuila-Medicine-Houston-Houston-NRG-Center.jpg

Shelters and Housing

Domestic violence shelters help those who face domestic violence at home. Because domestic violence affects primarily women and children, these are often called women's shelters.

Sometimes, even though a person may have a job, it might not pay them enough to pay housing expenses. To fight this problem, **permanent supportive housing** is often used. This type of housing provides a home that charges a certain percentage of the person's income, making it more affordable.



Permanent supportive housing is a longer-term solution for families who might otherwise be unable to afford housing prices.¹

(1) <https://housingcatalyst.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/mason-place-2.png>

Other Names for Homelessness

Words matter and the way we describe conditions and experiences can sometimes cast a negative light on people. In order to destigmatize the experience of homeless people, organizations are looking for other words to describe the experience of being homeless. Some of those options include:

- Unhoused
- Unsheltered
- Displaced
- Wandering
- Itinerant



One of the greatest challenges that those who are experiencing homelessness face is the stigma and myths surrounding homelessness. This can make it hard to get the help that they need to end their homelessness.¹



Homelessness is not a choice. Being careful of the way that we talk about those who are experiencing homelessness can make a big difference.²

(1) https://media.npr.org/assets/img/2019/04/02/ap_17131627093179-c8744b8e94fb14e2882e5c1a3cd225863fc82704.jpg

(2) <https://media.npr.org/assets/img/2021/05/24/homeless-camp-d556709b5cd8f070e570ec4b9a6c37d158e5c022.jpg>

Greatest Needs

The most commonly needed items for those who are experiencing homelessness are:

1. SOCKS. People experiencing homelessness spend a lot of time on their feet trying to obtain resources and get to appointments. A fresh pair of clean, dry socks can feel like heaven on tired, soggy feet. Add in some band-aids to help ease the pain of blisters.



A basic-needs kit designed to give to the homeless.¹

2. SNACKS & WATER.

Throw in some soft food bars (crunchy items don't work well with poor teeth!), crackers, dried fruit, trail mix, or other light-weight, nonperishable food. Water brings relief, especially in hot weather.

The 5 items most commonly given to someone who is experiencing homelessness are: (1) Shampoo (2) Garbage Bags (3) Sleeping Bags (4) Soap (5) Socks.

3. HYGIENE ITEMS. Add anti-bacterial lotion, moist wipes for when soap and water aren't available. Include small soaps and shampoos from your hotel stays. Consider lip balm, toothpaste, toothbrush, comb, razor, shaving cream, and deodorant. Small travel sized items are best as mentioned earlier.

4. RESOURCE GUIDE. Most larger communities have a variety of services available to homeless men, women and families that they might not know about. You can get copies of local resource guides from charities working for the homeless in your area.

5. ENCOURAGEMENT. All the items listed above are helpful, but the most meaningful part of a care kit is the opportunity for a conversation and friendship. Take time to learn their name and listen to their story.

(1) <https://content.instructables.com/FPV/APP5/IIDH7G0T/FPVAPP5IIDH7G0T.jpg?auto=webp&frame=1&width=320&md=6cf333b78cd956c14b12001926a1c0d3>

What NOT to Give

Here's three items that are commonly given to the homeless, but are not helpful:

“Postage-Stamp” blankets, like the ones sold at Walmart, are soft, cute and utterly worthless as a blanket for an adult.



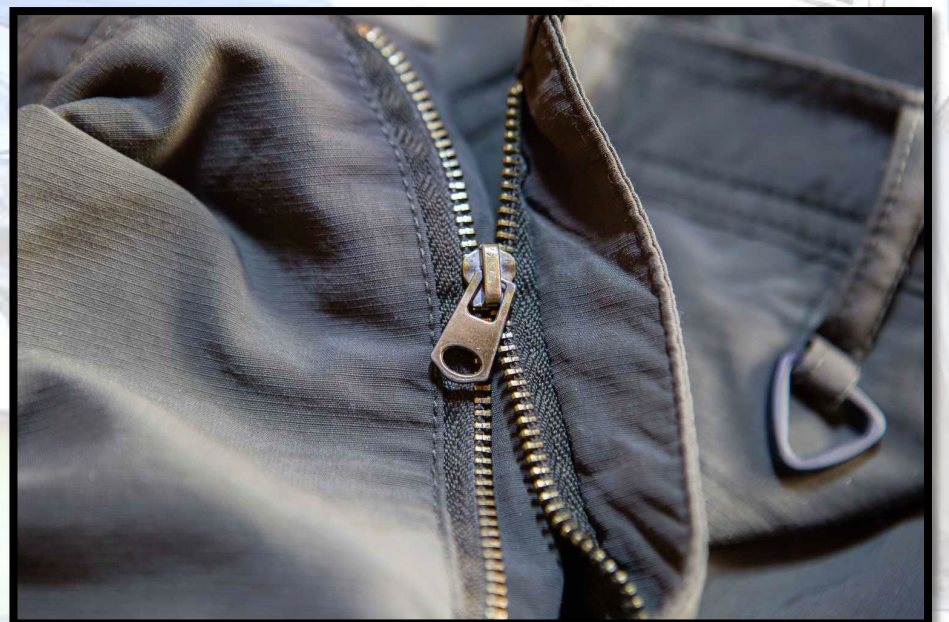
Homeless people living in the shelter are issued ONE blanket a day, and these pretty fleece blankets don't help much. Be sure to donate a decent blanket!¹



Homeless life is nomadic by nature since one must take their belongings with them to avoid loss or theft. Small containers are easier to take with them.²

“Family” or “Economy” sized toiletries such as soaps, shampoos, shave cream and lotion in giant containers get tossed after one use. Donate travel-sized toiletries instead.

Coats or Jackets with broken zippers. Donate coats and jackets that function properly!



Jackets with broken zippers don't do any good for those who are homeless.³

(1) https://ae01.alicdn.com/kf/S05e8333e63dd428aa7210ccdc91fd71Q.jpg_640x640Q90.jpg_.webp

(2) https://www.publicgoods.com/cdn/shop/files/travel-size-shampoo-lifestyle_1000x.jpg?v=1700591468

(3) [https://www.treehugger.com/thmb/Nl6Nea7R0fydx2bYUuiAs6FDNKk=/1500x0/filters:no_upscale\(\):max_bytes\(150000\):strip_icc\(\)/GettyImages-1069858038-c707882b8a4540a9be8377f1d5104eed.jpg](https://www.treehugger.com/thmb/Nl6Nea7R0fydx2bYUuiAs6FDNKk=/1500x0/filters:no_upscale():max_bytes(150000):strip_icc()/GettyImages-1069858038-c707882b8a4540a9be8377f1d5104eed.jpg)

Other Challenges

Not having a home is a challenge that we can begin to imagine and have empathy for. But there are so many more challenges that accompany the experience of being unhoused. Those challenges include...

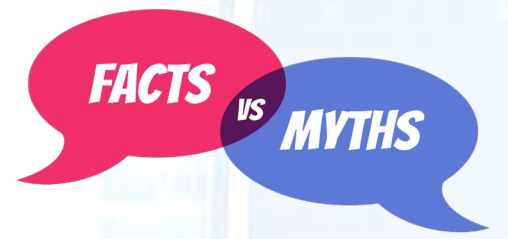


Many homeless camps are built under bridges to help protect from wind and rain.¹

- Hygiene
- Employment
- Limited access to healthcare
- Problems getting enough food
- Personal safety
- Unsanitary living conditions
- Exposure to severe weather.

(1) <https://affordablehousingaction.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Homeless-Under-Munich-Bridge.jpg>

Myths and Facts



Besides looking for shelter and food, those experiencing homelessness also have to deal with the stigma that often accompanies being homeless. Some of these stigmas include:

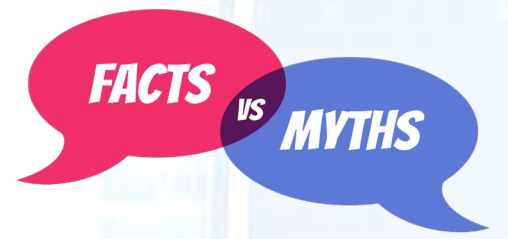
(Myth) Most are mentally ill.

(Fact) Decades of research reveals that one-third, at most, have a serious mental illness. De-institutionalization or closure of mental hospitals was initially believed to be a prime cause of homelessness, but this occurred well before the sharp increase in the 1980s.

(Myth) The majority abuse drugs and alcohol.

(Fact) It is believed that only about 20 to 40 percent of homeless have a substance abuse issue. In fact, abuse is rarely the sole cause of homelessness and more often is a response to it because living on the street puts the person in frequent contact with users and dealers.

Myths and Facts



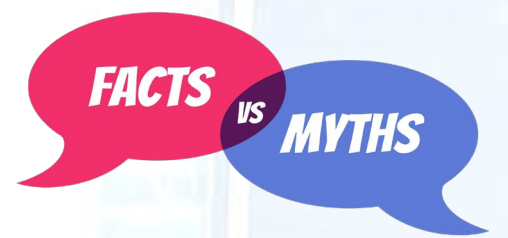
(Myth) They're dangerous and violent.

(Fact) Homeless persons are far more likely to be the *victims* of violence than the perpetrators. Of course, some homeless individuals may commit acts of violence beyond self-defense but such acts rarely affect the non-homeless individuals they encounter. To put it another way, any violence by homeless persons is either self-defense or due to the rare violent perpetrator who preys on other homeless people. Non-homeless need to understand this.

(Myth) They're criminals.

(Fact) Homeless persons *are* more likely to have criminal justice intervention. However, this is primarily because many of their daily survival activities are criminalized—meaning they might be given a summons or arrested for minor offenses such as trespassing, littering, or loitering.

Myths and Facts



(Myth) “Bad choices” led to their homelessness.

(Fact) Everyone makes mistakes, but the descent into homelessness is not necessarily the direct result of “choices.” Far more often a sudden illness or an accident, losing one’s job, or falling into debt leads to eviction—or doubling up with family or friends becomes untenable.

(Myth) They prefer the freedom of life on the street.

(Fact) There is no evidence to support this notion that homeless persons are “service resistant.” Since “Housing First” began in New York City in 1992 at the nonprofit Pathways to Housing, Inc., it became clear that the offer of immediate access to independent housing with support services is welcomed and accepted by most homeless. People on the street often reject the option of crowded, unsafe shelters—*not* housing in general.

Myths and Facts

FACTS

VS

MYTHS

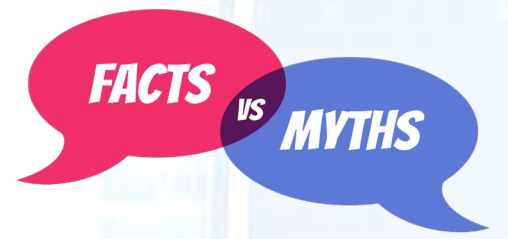
(Myth) They spend all their money on drugs and alcohol.

(Fact) Interviews with street homeless persons show that most of their money goes to buying food and amenities such as socks, hygiene products, and bottled water. Although some do spend money on alcohol or drugs, the same can be said of anyone.

(Myth) They just need to get a job.

(Fact) A significant portion of homeless people do have jobs—they just cannot afford to pay rent. Some receive disability income due to physical or mental problems but still cannot afford rent. For those wanting to work—a common refrain among those interviewed by my research team—the complications of applying for a job with no address, no clean clothes, no place to shower, and the stigma of being homeless (or having a criminal record), make such individuals far less competitive in the low-wage job market.

Myths and Facts



(Myth) The homeless are not part of “our community.”

(Fact) Surveys have shown 70 to 80 percent of homeless persons are from the local area or lived there for a year or longer before becoming unhoused.

(Myth) In coastal cities with low rental-housing vacancy rates, it is impossible to find enough housing for homeless individuals and families.

(Fact) New York City has a vacancy rate of 3.6 percent. Of an estimated 2.2 million rental units in the city, this means 79,000 are vacant. This number is greater than the approximately 61,000 persons labeled “homeless” in the city. It means that the argument that “we simply do not have enough existing housing” should be examined more closely.

Myths and Facts

FACTS

VS

MYTHS

(Myth) They live in unsanitary conditions because they don't care.

(Fact) Living outdoors means having no regular place for bodily functions, to dispose of trash, to store food safely, or to bathe. A homeless person who "cares" has few alternatives. Our research shows that lacking access to a shower is one of the more humiliating aspects of being homeless.

DID YOU KNOW?

Some groups of people are more at risk for being homeless than others. While the largest group of homeless people in the US are white men (up to 70%), minority populations like African American, indigenous people, and Hispanic or Latino are more likely experience homelessness.

No matter who they are, we have a duty as Christians to serve those who have less than we do!²



(1) https://flagency.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/shutterstock_2041488161-scaled.jpg

(2) https://regenbrampton.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/shutterstock_694710103.jpg

The Bible Says...

The Bible acknowledges the fact of homelessness and instructs us to help those who are poor and needy, including those in homeless situations.

Jesus could identify with the homeless in His itinerant ministry. In Matthew 8:20, Jesus states that even animals have a place to call home, but He had nowhere to lay His head. He stayed in the homes of whoever would welcome Him and sometimes outside. He was born in a stable and even spent His last night before His crucifixion outside in a garden. The apostle Paul was also at times in a homeless situation (1 Cor. 4:11).

God expects His people to help those who are homeless. The Law directly addressed care for those in need. In Leviticus 25:35 God commands His people to help support those who have no home and cannot support themselves: “If any of your fellow Israelites become poor and are unable to support themselves among you, help them as you would a foreigner and stranger, so they can continue to live among you” (see also Deut. 15:7–11). The Lord rebuked those who kept the outward form of religion yet did not care for the poor: “Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: . . . to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?” (Isa. 58:6–7).

The book of wisdom, Proverbs, lays down the principle of giving to the poor and attaches it to a blessing: “Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will reward them for what they have done” (Prov. 19:17). Those who refuse to help the poor will find themselves on the losing end: “Those who give to the poor will lack nothing, but those who close their eyes to them receive many curses” (Prov. 28:27).

In the New Testament, Jesus and His disciples regularly gave to the poor (see John 13:29), and Jesus commands that we follow His example and also care for the poor: “Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you” (Matt. 5:42). As James points out, talk is cheap; our talk (and our faith) must be accompanied by action: “Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it?” (James 2:15–16).



A statue of Jesus portrayed as homeless reminds us that serving those who are homeless is like serving Jesus Himself!¹

(1) https://www.anglicannews.org/ImageGen.ashx?image=/media/1866055/timothy-p-schmalz_homeless-jesus_700x467.png

The Bible does not shy away from the difficult and unpleasant reality that some people have experienced terrible setbacks and hardships in their lives, even to the point of becoming destitute. The Bible recognizes that poverty, social injustice, and homelessness are real problems that constantly plague society (Mark 14:7). The Bible teaches that we are to be radically different from the world in how we view and treat our neighbors. In fact, we should go out of our way to provide for the homeless and others in need, trusting God to reward us in His time. Our Lord said, “When you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous” (Luke 14:13–14).

Because God created all people in His image (Gen. 1:27), everyone, regardless of social status or economic limitations, has intrinsic worth. Oppressing or exploiting those who are weaker or poorer than we are is wickedness. From cover to cover, Scripture says that we should show generosity, compassion, kindness, and mercy in practical, tangible ways.

Even our Lord Jesus “did not come to be served but to serve” (Mark 10:45).

