

Caring for the Homeless - Roundtable Discussion

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Title: The Hope of Christ on the Slow Road to Recovery

Thesis: Mercy care and practical care should continue even while our addicted and homeless neighbor is struggling and not taking the appropriate steps toward sobriety. Our worth is found in Christ, not in our ability to better ourselves. Our neighbors should know we care, why we care and that we are here to serve them in love and mercy.

Problem to be Addressed: How do we best serve a homeless, addicted neighbor who is not ready to take steps toward sobriety?

Case Study: “I don’t want to keep living this way. I want to stop. Please help me stop.” The desire to stop is real, but she is currently not taking the steps to become clean. She knows and I know she’s going to use again after she leaves my office. When I ask where she would like to be a year from now – she would like to be clean, living in her own apartment, maybe with a job. But today, she’s going to use. And tomorrow. No amount of reasoning or discussion convinces her to take the steps to stop the use now. So we pray.

She knows her lifestyle is sinful. Not only illegal drug use, but the things she does to get the drug. She is on the fringe of society. Living in the gutter (actually an abandoned garage with unlivable, horrible conditions). Like many of our addicted neighbors, she is dealing with deep struggles – childhood abuse, trauma, mental illness, etc. Initially, drug use may have been inflicted on her, or she may have been self-medicating. She continues to use – it’s her way of surviving.

She does not want to live like this. No one would. Family has given up and does not see her or talk to her anymore. The people in her life (other drug users, her dealer, johns) are nice to her one minute (when they want something) and beat her up the next.

Why does she remain in this lifestyle when she obviously wants out? Does the unknown of what is expected of her after drug rehab (and during) cause anxiety, fear . . . ? Is she certain she would not be successful, so why try and fail? Does she fear she would have no one after losing the only friend circle she now has (she has already lost family – parents, siblings, children). As miserable as this life is, does she fear that a life without drugs would be more miserable? After all, drug use is her coping mechanism; it makes the pain go away.

What can we give her to encourage her to make a change? What does she need from us the most? What is crucial for this woman? She knows she’s a sinner. She needs to know that there is salvation for her now, even while she is a sinner. We don’t abandon her while she continues to struggle. It may be a long time before she appears to make progress. The church should remain constant and not desert her. We

recognize her true worth – a very high price has been paid for her. God the Father gave His Son for her. Christ died for her. She should know we care and that it is the mercy of Christ that we share with her.

In the lost and suffering neighbors that I serve, I see Christ. “And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me’” (Matthew 25:40).

In the lost and suffering, I see myself. We are the same, in need of the same Savior. “. . . the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus . . .” (Romans 3:22-24).

God works in His own time. With our presence, we bring comfort and assurance of hope to our neighbors. “Wait for the Lord; be strong and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!” (Psalm 27:14).

Conclusion: The suffering, lost neighbor needs the church to be there for them, when they are abandoned and mistreated by everyone else. They need to know the love and forgiveness of Christ. We can show that love. They are suffering and we can show Jesus in that suffering. Romans 5:8, “but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” It’s the gospel message that will work change in the lost.

Although we are working towards recovery from addiction, an addicted individual can have salvation and not sobriety.