

FIGHTING HOMELESSNES

I love listening to the conversations of the teenagers I work with. I learn so much about them and their world, and I tune in every chance I get, especially when they aren't necessarily aware that I am listening.

Recently my co-worker and I were driving a van full of teenage girls to Youth Councils. Somewhere between Seaside and Camp Redwood Glen the topic in the van shifted from "who is dating whom" to a more serious nature. I could see the sadness in the eyes of my co-worker as we both listened to them talk in detail about the struggles their families go through. These kids may be 14 years old, but they understand injustice in the world. They have lived it and have felt the consequences of it. They probably wouldn't call it "social injustice," but they recognize it. Their experiences can teach us a lot.

We don't always think about homeless families because we don't see them. They

probably aren't panhandling or sleeping on the streets. If they are lucky, they may be in a shelter and have a regular job. Their kids are in school and in our programs, and we may not ever know about it. However, families who are homeless have some unique struggles. Unlike an individual, packing up a family of four and moving in with a relative for a few months isn't that easy. How many of us have room for an extra three to four people in our homes? There are shelters for homeless families, but many of those shelters and housing programs come with a lot of qualifiers. You have to be chronically homeless. You have to have had drug and alcohol problems. You have to be a victim of domestic violence. If you have a son over age 12, you can almost forget about being accepted into a women's shelter.

The burden of homelessness weighs on the entire family. A family staying in a motel can feel like they are living in a matchbox. Kids who are homeless have to deal with hiding their situation from their friends, changing their daily routine and even the possibility of attending a new school. To a child, those things can be a big deal and play a large role in their behavior.

We have a wonderful opportunity to reach out to these families. I would suspect that in most of our youth groups, we have a few children who fit into this category or their family is dangerously close to being there. As much as we may want, we can't fix all of their problems. However, we can be a place of refuge for those families. We can encourage the families and give them sense of belonging. We can give them hope that the world can't offer them.

Simply put, fighting homelessness isn't easy. It requires a heart willing to be broken for someone else. We can't provide a home for every family in our community, but we can provide consistent love and support. We can also be a resource to the families by being aware of what is going on in their lives and noticing changes when they happen. Most importantly, we can keep listening and keep using those opportunities as times to show what Jesus meant when He commanded us to "love your neighbor as yourself."

perspective

By Stacie Brown

Courage is known by several names: valor, bravery, fearlessness, assertiveness, heroism. It also has a few nicknames: guts, grit, backbone, nerve.

No matter what name you give it, one thing is for sure, it will always require a stretch to meet the challenge. No matter how difficult it may be to develop the quality of courage, it is an absolute necessity to your survival. Don't attempt any challenge or change without it. It is as basic to you as the food and water in the hiker's pack.

Courage is the inner strength and determination it takes to stand firm in the face of challenges. You need it to do what's right, to take a step of faith, to be honest, to befriend someone who is new, or to obey God's call. The Bible gives us many examples of courage in action. David had courage when he grabbed his sling and fought the Philistine. Daniel displayed it when he knelt in prayer before his God rather than Nebuchadnezzar's statue. Job showed it when he was covered

in boils and scarred by emotional pain. Paul demonstrated courage when lashes tore his flesh, and his limbs were bound in chains. Christ personified it as the thorns were placed on his head and the nails were driven into his hands.

There is no question that courage is required to face the unusual and unexpected challenges that come our way. This is the stuff that goes down in history, and for which well-earned awards are given! What is less recognized is the everyday variety of hero who draws on courage to trudge the path, in the dirt of responsibility, where the grit of reality and the grind of accountability hold their feet to the fire. This kind of courage requires you to get up in the morning and start the day, knowing you are going to face difficulties, disappointment, heartache, being misunderstood, or not fitting in. It would be much easier to stay in bed and pull the covers over your head. It takes courage to live day in and day out with your values and sense of personal mission intact.

Salvationist who have gone before you have carried courage with them like a hiker carries his pack, depending on its resources for survival in unfamiliar territory. It has enabled them to travel across the steep terrain of cultural differences, economic despair, racial tensions, and spiritual emptiness in order to offer a dying world the hope of Christ. It has spurred them on to shout from the hilltops with confidence "Here am I, Lord, Send Me!"

As you face the challenges and changes that confront us all on a daily basis, hold tightly to the courage of David, Daniel, Paul, Booth, and Railton, for you are MODERN DAY HEROES!

YOU ARE A MODERN DAY HERO!