

Monday /_O _____ Backfire
Inspirations II> `.` ____IU__,
from /I ~` I--O-----O-I.
Pastor Jeff .I.\ ~~~~~~ 8/23/2010

My son, Ben, spent a week as a homeless person on the streets of Chicago recently. He felt that God was calling him to understand the plight of the homeless from the insider's view. In his blog¹ he recounts his first night, which was spent in Pacific Garden Mission, the largest homeless shelter in the Mid-West. He got an hour of "counseling" which consisted of hearing about salvation and the rules of the Mission. I guess they didn't care enough to inquire about his situation and why he was on the streets. He was just a captive audience.

From 8:00 to 9:00pm the homeless had to sit through a hard-sell gospel service before they could go to sleep. After this, they were required to shower (not a bad idea) all together in a large room (awkward!). Their clothes were hung and put through a hot box to kill anything that might be living in them and they were assigned hospital gowns to sleep in. The hotbox didn't clean the clothes or take out the smell. It only disinfected them. The dorm was hot and uncomfortable. The occupants felt exposed and got little sleep. At 5:00am they were awakened to be preached at again so that they might receive a breakfast of oatmeal, bananas and coffee.

Out on the streets Ben felt lonely and rejected. In a Christian Mission he felt unloved and exposed, like cattle being herded off the streets. Somehow, I don't think that Christ would have treated the homeless this way.

There are probably numerous churches supporting this Mission and trusting that it is being effective in reaching the homeless for Christ. The homeless, however, have a different view. Most homeless people warn each other to stay away from there. They think it is the worst shelter around and will only go there if they have no other options.

This "hard-sell" approach to evangelism has backfired. It doesn't bring people to salvation. It turns them away... even when they are desperate for it.

People need to see a God who cares. They need to know that someone loves them. They need to know that someone will remember their name. They need to feel compassion. People were drawn to Jesus' love (and still are). They felt acceptance from Him, not judgment and rejection. For, as He said, "God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him."²

When we leave out love, we leave out the heart of the Gospel. We cannot communicate the truth of salvation without expressing the love of the Savior. When we do, we are just a "resounding gong or a clanging cymbal."³ The most important part of our witness is not informational. It is love. And love is transformational.

Think about that.

Make it a great week! -- Pastor Jeff Collins

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