

Homeless In The City: A Call To Service

Jeremy Reynolds, Ph.D.



Theatron Books

Homeless In The City: A Call To Service

Copyright © 2007 by Joy Junction, Inc.

All rights reserved. This book, or parts thereof, may not be reproduced in any form without prior written authorization from the publisher.

Portions of this book previously appeared in *Homeless In America: The Solution*.

Published by Theatron Books

An imprint of Theatron Media Group

Post Office Box 606

Hemet, CA 92546-0606

Visit us at: www.TheatronBooks.com

All scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. NIV®. Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.

Quotations from the *Albuquerque Journal*, the *Albuquerque Tribune* and the *Santa Fe New Mexican* are used by permission.

This publication is designed to provide entry of an authoritative information with regard to the subject matter covered. It is sold with the understanding that the publisher is not engaged in rendering legal, accounting, or other professional advice. If legal advice or other expert assistance is required, the services as a competent professional person should be sought.

Cataloging In Publication Data

Reynalds, Jeremy.

Homeless In The City: A Call To Service / Jeremy Reynalds, Ph.D.—[1st ed.].

p. cm.

ISBN-13: 978-0-9747163-0-5

1. Reynalds, Jeremy 2. Social theology 3. Missions 4. Rescue Missions
5. Homelessness 6. Christian Biography I. Title

BS680.H59 G7 2006

261.8' 32 B—dc22

ISBN-13: 978-0-9747163-0-5

ISBN-10: 0-9747163-0-8

Cover photos: Dreamstime/Sascha Burkard

Printed in the United States of America

Contents

Introduction, *vii*

Part 1 — Preparing To Care for the Homeless

- 1 Homeless In America, *1*
2. Faltering First Steps, *19*
- 3 The Promised Land, *31*
- 4 A History of Shelters, *53*

Part 2 — Operating a Homeless Shelter

- 5 Starting A Shelter, *69*
- 6 Nuts and Bolts of Ministry, *83*
- 7 Working With Officials, *95*
- 8 Developing Financial Support, *107*
- 9 Fundraising Insights, *117*
- 10 Making Time for the Media, *125*

Part 3 — Meeting Needs On a Daily Basis

- 11 When Vision Becomes Reality, *143*
- 12 Shelter Policies, *155*
- 13 The Homeless Speak, *167*
- 14 A Slice of Life At Joy Junction, *181*
- 15 Be Encouraged! *189*

-5-

Starting A Shelter

So you really want to start a shelter or get involved in the people-helping business? Whether you want to start a homeless shelter, a Christian school, an alcohol and drug rehabilitation program, or a crisis pregnancy center, there are some very similar principles you will need to follow.

The Importance of a “Call”

The most important element required for any ministry is the minister's call of God. The call of God is more important than it sounds, because that call is what will keep you going through the hard times. God speaks to His people in various ways.

To some He speaks through pastors, ministers, and priests; to others it is through circumstances, and to others He might highlight some particular aspect of His Word.

When I resigned from my first shelter in Santa Fe in 1986, I made the mistake of telling God that I would do anything He wanted me to do—except run a shelter. I figured I had paid my dues running the shelter in Santa Fe for four years, and now it was time to do something else. I not only told the Lord how

Homeless In The City: A Call To Service

unwilling I was to start another shelter, I told Him I was unwilling to start another ministry—period.

Some of the reasoning behind my fervent determination not to start another ministry was that many times the hours worked paralleled those required for the opening of a new business. Outrageous working hours are exchanged for small and often late paychecks.

For your ministry to succeed, you have to sell yourself and your vision to the community and the local pastors. Your potential donors have to believe in you before they will believe in what you are representing. Before you groan and say that shelter ministry or people ministry in general is not for you, try and understand where pastors are coming from. Ministers (and people in general) receive so much mail asking for money that it would be impossible for their church to respond to every solicitation they receive.

These were just some of the thoughts going through my mind as I kept myself busy telling God what I would not do. Meanwhile God's plans were not my plans, and His thoughts were not my thoughts (Isaiah 55:8). They were much better and infinitely higher. God had eased me into my calling in Santa Fe, but if I had been sensitive, I would have realized that He orchestrated so many special events in my life to give me empathy for the homeless that He was not going to let me out of the calling. He was going to use me in that particular way and he was going to work in me to help me to receive that calling.

So, if you are worried about the step you are considering taking, that is a positive sign. Use the questions in your mind as a reason to pray more, both individually and with those to whom you look for spiritual counsel. If you decide at this point not to go ahead, it is okay. It does not mean that you are less spiritual than anyone else. Rather, it means that God has something else in mind for your life. On the other hand, make sure that you are obeying God and not giving into fear. Do not try and wriggle your way out of God's calling on your life, like I tried to do.

During my last few months in Santa Fe, I applied to pastor a number of churches. During the trial sermon, I told them

Starting a Shelter

what I thought the prerequisites for a good church were. A recurring theme in my messages was always ministering to the poor and needy. It was not intentional. The subject "just" kept coming up. Evidently what came through in my messages to my potential congregations was that I was more interested in the poor and needy than I was in the spiritual needs of their church members.

Needless to say, I was not offered the position of pastor in any of those churches. So, I came to the end of my time in Santa Fe and had no job offers. In desperation, I applied to a foreign missions agency for a job and was accepted. That should have been cause for rejoicing, except that to take the appointment would have required relocating to Denver, and the job was a "faith position." In other words, I had to raise my own salary. I attempted to raise some money, but nothing happened to clearly move me in that direction. It seemed to be all my own doing, with no guidance from above. I felt like I was fighting my own battles. Life was getting very discouraging.

Yielding To God's Call

That is what happens when you fight God's will for your life and you are reluctant to listen to the still, small voice of His Holy Spirit. God sometimes ends up having to hit you over the head with a spiritual two-by-four. On the other hand, do not run into ministry because you think it is cool. Running a shelter and ministering God's love is some of the hardest work that you will ever do in your life. It will certainly level you if you are not spiritually prepared for it. And in many cases no one thanks you, except God.

It is very hard to describe God's calling, because it is such an intangible and personal experience. In many cases, the calling of God almost defies written description, but I will attempt to do so by relating some more of my own experiences, which will hopefully help you as we go through this adventure together.

While my family was staying in Taos, New Mexico, on sever-

Homeless In The City: A Call To Service

al occasions we visited good friends of ours who formerly pastored a little church in Questa, a little village community about twenty-five miles north of Taos. While visiting these friends, we also had several occasions to go to the mountains to pray. Talk about God orchestrating events.

My friend's name was Frank Tercero; he was at that time a pastor in the Assemblies of God denomination. Little did I know that four years later I would meet Frank at a mutual friend's home in Santa Fe, and the Lord would use Frank to bail both me and the shelter out of a financial mess when we received unfavorable publicity in June of 1990.

During this time when I was seeking the Lord for His direction in my life, the Lord brought Scriptures to my mind. Frank also had words of encouragement and direction. Those words confirmed what was already on my heart, but I had been unwilling to face up to. God would not let me out of my calling. How awesome He is!

God' Works In An Orderly Way

It is very rare for God to use other people to speak to you about a situation or a calling, or a change in calling, that He has not been speaking to you about already. There have been situations when people have received and acted on directions to quit a job, sell everything, and move to a far corner of the earth. In a situation like this, God has not been speaking to them directly, and neither has He been preparing their hearts. However, people listened to erroneous advice from others that masqueraded as a "word from God." I urge you to be very careful about that. You can know God is working because He orchestrates in an orderly fashion the course of events that will lead you to His perfect will, including the people He sends to help you in that regard.

The Scriptures that the Lord used to direct me that critical year included verses from Isaiah 41,

The poor and needy search for water, but there are none;

Starting a Shelter

their tongues are parched with thirst. But I the Lord will answer them; I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them. I will make rivers flow on barren heights, and springs within the valleys. I will turn the desert into pools of water, and the parched ground into springs.

While the Lord was able to speak gently to other people in my life that serving the hungry and homeless was still where He wanted me to be, it really took something more drastic on my part. He had to continue to engineer the circumstances and take every other opportunity away from me before I would finally give in and say, "Yes, Lord. I'll do what You want." The Lord will do whatever it takes to get your attention to listen and obey His calling. He will woo you and be very gentle initially. But if you are quite determined that you are not going to obey Him, then you give Him the freedom to resort to other measures in an effort to get your attention.

The calling that God has on your life will also be confirmed by others in your fellowship or church body. In all probability, if God has been dealing with you about starting a shelter or entering some form of people-ministry, it will be an extension of a call He has already placed upon your life.

What I mean by that is while the spiritual calling of God is somewhat intangible it will, in most cases, coincide with tangible physical circumstances and visible actions as described below.

Hopefully, in most cases even before reading this book, you will have had some concern for the poor, needy, and hurting whom you see around you. Perhaps you have been encouraging your pastor and your church to do more for the hungry and homeless in your community. Maybe you have been taking homeless families into your home who call the church asking for help. (I would not recommend doing this, as it can be dangerous.) Or have you been taking food and blankets to the homeless downtown? Perhaps you have had a real concern for the alcoholics you see wandering around town.

A real calling from God will transform your life. It will allow you to keep your mental, emotional, and spiritual sanity when

Homeless In The City: A Call To Service

it looks like everything is going to come crashing down around you. A calling from God should not make you arrogant; rather, it will give you peace.

Do not forget something that many Christians ignore. If you know that God has called you to do a job, while it is up to you to do everything you can to ensure success, ultimately the final responsibility for its achievement lies in God's hands. Another reason why the calling is so significant is that where God leads, He feeds, and where God guides, He provides. Remember that during this whole process, while you are trying to work out your calling, you need to keep praying. God knows and is not impressed with the enormity of the need. He is God and is more impressed with your obedience in the area of need which He equips you to meet.

Getting Your Spouse on Your Side

If you are married, share your vision with your spouse. Ministry of most kinds—especially the kind where you go out and start it yourself—will probably demand a dramatic change in your schedule and quite possibly your paycheck. As I have already shared, spousal support is critical since ministry will change your family life.

Let me proceed by asking you a few pertinent questions. Is your spouse willing to put up with the excessive hours you will initially be gone from home, quite possibly for some years into the future? Be realistic about this, not hopelessly optimistic. Spousal support is also an indication of the will of God, although this may not happen overnight. God may need to work in that person in order to bring them into the vision He has for you as a couple.

Will you have to obtain outside employment for a while to make even basic ends meet? Is your family not only willing, but able to reduce its standard of living? If you are heavily in debt, this might be the time to stop right now and, rather than attempting to start a shelter, look for one already in existence and offer your prayerful and financial support. Of course, you should start reducing your debt load, as well.

Starting a Shelter

If your spouse is not initially thrilled when you first share what you feel God has been speaking to you, do not give up, or write him or her off as being unspiritual. Do not make any rash moves at all, but keep praying. After all, if the burden you have for the homeless comes from the Lord, and He managed to get through to you, He can also get through to your husband or wife and turn their heart in favor of the project. Remember, it is the Lord's responsibility to turn your calling into a reality.

Sharing With Your Pastor

Make an appointment to speak with your pastor. Tell him honestly and as simply and clearly as you can how God has been speaking to you. Ask your pastor to tell you truthfully what he thinks. Be willing to listen to what your pastor says. He sees things about you and your family, both strengths and weaknesses, that you might not see.

If you do not have this sort of relationship with your pastor, then find someone godly whom you can trust who knows you and is willing to tell you both your strong and weak points. Ask them all to pray for you. Among other things, you will need prayer for wisdom, guidance, and God's favor.

Start to meet regularly with your pastor and/or those who have been praying for you. While there is a chance that God could deal with you in a manner similar to that in which he dealt with me (where you have no job, but God still has to force your hand to get you to do what He wants), it is more likely that you will be leaving a job where you have been relatively well-established and may be earning a reasonable income. You will need all the prayer power you and your family can muster.

If you are thinking about leaving a good job, there are some people who will think you are crazy. Are you? Maybe. Could it all go wrong? Possibly. If after receiving all the right signals you still decide to not go ahead, you will probably never be totally happy and fulfilled again. There will always be a nagging doubt at the back of your mind about what your life might have been like had you launched out in faith and obeyed God. God may approach you at another time in your life, but maybe He won't.

Homeless In The City: A Call To Service

You must be willing to give your all to Him. If you do so, you will not regret it. Don't worry when inevitable trials come; He is just forming your character into the beautiful image of His precious Son, Jesus.

Also tied in with the will of God is the community need for the ministry you believe God has called you to. Consider taking an informal community survey. For example, if you feel God has called you to start a Christian school and there is already one in the area, please make sure that you visit with the school already in existence. Do not be a maverick, doing whatever you think. The best way to spread fear and rumor is to operate in secret and isolation.

Communication, the Essential Ingredient

You should make appointments to meet with the directors of already established agencies and ministries in your city and let them know what you believe God is telling you to do. Make it clear to these individuals that you are not planning to compete with them (that would be foolish anyway); rather, you are intending to complement what they do.

Allow me a word of caution. Sometimes Christians are very free in our use of evangelical jargon. And when we talk in evangelical-ese, no one else knows what we are talking about. If you are at the zoning office for an official appointment, do not talk spiritual lingo. Be polite, official, courteous and to the point; then leave.

It really is very important that already existing agencies hear about your plans from you and not from someone else. There is a tremendous fear of the unknown among human beings, and you would be surprised at what the image of your proposed homeless shelter (or whatever ministry you are starting) could quickly become once it has traveled through half-dozen people. Before you know it, someone will be claiming that you intend to be the only shelter in town and close down everyone else. (Or you might be accused of planning to begin a cult!) Gossip is not based on common sense. Good communi-

Starting a Shelter

cation with the community should result in less gossip.

Reassure any fearful agency heads because unfortunately even in the people-helping business, there is sometimes a certain amount of territorialism. As you speak to other agencies, use a soft approach. Tell them that you are concerned about the lack of family shelters, Christian schools, alcoholic rehabilitation centers, etc., available in your city and ask them how they would feel about an additional agency in the city targeting the specific need which interests you. Hopefully, such a meeting will turn out to be a very positive experience, allaying any fears that you are a maverick trying to sneak in the back door or trying to do something behind their backs. It could also serve as a good reference point for leads to attain an adequate property for your proposed shelter, school, or other parachurch faith-based ministry.

Location Is Critical

Finding adequate property that is correctly zoned could well turn out to be one of your most difficult tasks. There is a really good chance for discouragement to set in during this process, which is another reason why it is so important to have a call of God you can stand on. With a genuine call of God, discouragement can turn into an opportunity for God to prove His greatness and power to you.

Joy Junction has been exceptionally fortunate in zoning issues. The property the shelter occupies is a fifty-two acre farm in Albuquerque's South Valley that was formerly used as a Christian alcohol and drug rehabilitation center. I did not realize when I began looking into this property how God had been going before us to prepare the way. It was about a year after the shelter opened that I found old press clippings from DARE (the name of the center that occupied the property). One story stayed in my mind, reading something like this, "Angry Residents Protest Influx of Drug Addicts into the South Valley."

The property's former zoning status was A-1, an agricultural zoning. Despite the protests of the concerned residents, the

Homeless In The City: A Call To Service

then county commission decided to grant a special use permit (S-U) for the life of the property. The S-U reads that permissible activities on the property are educational, rehabilitative, and religious. We have thus been blessed with a zoning classification that many mission directors only dream about. God had given us exactly what we needed at that point.

Neighbors

During the years that Joy Junction has been in operation, we have only had occasional neighbor problems. I guess our neighbors are more willing to have homeless families in their neighborhood than they were to have recovering drug addicts. Now if you are sheltering, say, homeless families as opposed to homeless men, you will have the sympathy factor on your side. It is much easier to complain about a homeless man than a homeless woman and her child.

However, when there has been a problem with our neighbors, I have dealt with the situation quickly. I have also assured our neighbors that we are as interested in their welfare, safety and property values as we are in the care of the homeless.

Some time back, I also invited our neighborhood association to meet on site. I felt it would help allay any fears that they might have about the shelter. The fear of the unknown is one of the best causes of gossip, so I thought that if I invited them to our property and they could actually see what we were doing, then they would realize that the homeless are normal people just like you and me.

Property and Prayer

As you look for property, pray and look and keep praying. Ask your church to help in the search, go to those who are praying for you, and consider joining one or maybe two civic support groups like the Kiwanis or the Civitans. These groups

Starting a Shelter

are always looking for both worthy projects and good speakers.

Do not expect your search for suitable property to necessarily resemble mine. God works in an infinite variety of ways.

You see, my experience in finding property in Santa Fe was very different from my Albuquerque experience. In Santa Fe, I quite literally had to tour the city on foot (I had no car back then) to find a suitable property. We also experienced frequent complaints from neighbors who did not appreciate having a homeless shelter as a neighbor.

For Joy Junction, I thought about this property, did a quick tour of the facility, put a proposal in to the landlords, and awaited their response. A few weeks later, a favorable answer came, and we moved on site. If you do not find a building at first, do not give up. If this is God's project, He will provide the means for you to accomplish it.

Your Personal Financial Support

While looking for a building, you also need to be considering support, both to finance the ministry and to provide for yourself and your family. Please do not ruin your family in your desire to help the homeless. You need money to survive, and it is not unspiritual to admit it.

If you are planning to enter ministry, please do it responsibly. Do not blame God for crazy ideas. I am embarrassed to be a Christian sometimes, when I hear some of the strange things for which God is blamed. When I started Joy Junction, I had no reserves of money, but I did have part-time employment working for a local Christian television station as a master-control operator. That put bread on the table and covered some basic needs.

The Bible says that if you do not take care of the needs of your family, or make no effort to do so, then you are worse than an unbeliever. Do not do something silly like quitting your job and having no tangible means of support to fall back on. That approach is very unwise and just brings reproach on the Kingdom of God.

Some time ago, I was reading a story about a company that

Homeless In The City: A Call To Service

had just expanded to the Albuquerque area. This was their fourth or fifth store, and their volume of business is now so large they were able to obtain outside financing for a start-up in Albuquerque. But it was not always like that. When the chain originally started, the couple who began the company maxed-out the limits on their credit cards and self-financed their dream. They invested their own personal resources to turn their dream into reality, as well as putting in many long hours. While not necessarily advising that you use the cash allowance on your credit cards, I think you see the analogy. What the world will do for business you must be willing to do at least as much, and hopefully more, for the Kingdom of God. Here is another way to enter ministry.

Find a wonderful loving pastor who has a heart for seeing people responsibly move into ministry. When I started His Place in Santa Fe, I was a newcomer to the community with no credibility. Pastor Carl Conley told me that as I contacted churches, people, and organizations in my attempt to solicit support, I could use both his name and the church name to gain credibility. His kindness was really an instant trust builder, as he was a well-respected community member.

If someone in the community is kind enough to do that for you, please do not let them down. Make sure you honor the promises you make. This will be important to your own credibility.

How Do You Ask for Money Nicely?

Be prepared to write letters to people asking them for money. I know this sounds kind of funny, but it is necessary in order to get your name and ministry into the minds (and hearts) of people in the community. If you can write an acceptable letter, you will be way ahead of many agency heads who have to hire outside consultants at high prices to perform that service. If you have never written such a letter, it may be a good time to get some experience in doing so by registering for a writing course at your local community college or university. I

Starting a Shelter

was loaned the money way back in 1986 for our first mailing. I wrote about three hundred letters and received one response of \$300, enabling me to pay back our postage loan and write an additional letter, generating some more funds.

I also stayed on the phone a lot, calling everyone I could think of and telling them about the new homeless shelter in town. As word of our existence spread, people began referring needy clients to us. I also received a few invitations to speak, which generated a little more income.

Let me remind you again. Be prepared to work long hours with little expectation of reward. Keep your personal expenditures down to a minimum.

Ask your pastor for permission to share your dream with your own church. Maybe he will give you the opportunity to briefly go before the congregation for a few minutes one morning. The church might even end up taking an offering for your proposed work and send you out with their blessing.

How Much to Pay for Your Ministry Building

You start looking and finally find a building that appears as if it might work. You call the zoning inspector, who tells you that this just happens to be one of the few buildings located in an area of the city that would permit a homeless shelter, an alcoholic rehabilitation center, or maybe a homeless meal site.

You make an appointment to go and talk with the landlords; be entirely honest with them. If they do not mind the idea of their building being used for a homeless shelter, then it is time to talk finances. Work out a rental or lease agreement that you can afford. Just as credit cards eventually have to be paid for, so lease and rental agreements also have their day of reckoning. If you cannot afford the price of a building, do not rent it. Please do not take on the responsibility for a building that you have no hope of affording and one where you will end up being consistently late paying the landlords. All that does is reflect badly on you and the Body of Christ in general.

So now you have your building. I cannot emphasize strong-

Homeless In The City: A Call To Service

ly enough that you must be prepared to do everything it takes, for as long as is necessary, to ensure the success of your shelter or chosen ministry. While you as a Christian have God's blessing if you are operating in His will, there are still no shortcuts to success; you still need to do the work He has given you to do. God's will plus God's blessing plus hard work equals success. Leave out the hard work, and the success just will not be there.

As we prepare to wrap up this chapter, I am assuming that you have been communicating in some way with those already in some sort of people-ministry. As you get together with these individuals, bring up the idea gently and courteously, in a non-threatening manner, about the ministry you feel God has laid on your heart. Communication is essential.

Be prepared to start off small. Many people want to start off big and grow even bigger, but God's way is for you to start off small and to see what you do with what He gives you. As God sees you faithful in little, He will reward you with more.

There is definitely no magic formula for starting out in ministry. The advice I would give you for supporting yourself in the initial stages would be very different from person to person, depending on your family size and whether you already have some other means of outside support. There are some things you can do, and those are what I have tried to lay out in this chapter—necessary regardless of your personal situation.

In summary, remember that starting and successfully maintaining a people-oriented ministry is very similar to starting a successful small business. It is time-consuming and emotionally draining. Count on doing everything yourself until the income increases to the point where you can hire staff. Ministry can be very rewarding, but it is definitely not glamorous. Your only reason for wanting to be in full-time ministry should be to obey God's call on your life and to share the love of Jesus Christ with hurting people. If you are thinking about ministry for any other reason, you are probably considering the wrong profession.