

BIBLICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR A MINISTRY TO HOMELESS STREET YOUTH

Highten Hamweene and Pako Edson Mokgwane

Adventist University of Africa, Zambia

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ABSTRACT

Following the observation of the increasing incidence of street youth phenomenon in Zambian urban centers, this study examines the Biblical text about the subject matter.

Keywords: Homelessness, Street Children, Street Youth, At-risk, Ministry, Poverty, Urban Missions.

1. INTRODUCTION

In this contribution, we relate the Biblical text to one of the most problematic issues of our urban settings: Poor Homeless Street Youth. Two scripture passages, Isaiah 58 and James 2:14-18 were examined herein given their emphasis on the needy, poor, homeless, or persons of multifaceted lack. Other Biblical references that were employed are dotted across the canon. They support the main passages by shedding additional insight into the subject matter. The paper is organized as follows: Background of the study, the phenomenon of street youth, exegesis of identified passages, findings and discussions, conclusions, and recommendations.

Background of the Study

Both male and female youths on the streets of Lusaka have no shelter. These youths roam the streets during the day begging for food and money. At night, some of them sleep under bridges, in incomplete buildings, in old cars, and in drainage places and culverts. During winter, they suffer the most due to the cold. Street youth in Lusaka face exploitation and victimization by strangers and peers alike. They also find themselves engaged in vices such as prostitution, gambling, alcohol abuse, and drug trafficking among other things. The government from time to time intervenes by taking away street kids to special camps and equipping them with skills some of the at-risk street youths. Similarly, some Evangelical Churches as well as well-meaning Christians run centers that provide socio-economic assistance to street youth. Despite these efforts, the Church in general and the Seventh day Adventist Church in particular, is not providing an adequate ministry to meet the physical and spiritual needs of at-risk street youth. Meanwhile, it remains that “the children on Zambia's streets are an eyesore and not a source of pride. They reflect the existence of fundamental problems within the Zambian society.”¹

Phenomenon of street youth in the Bible

The Bible sheds light on different subjects that concern people. Both the Old Testament (OT) and New Testaments (NT) present counsel regarding the believers' duty to the poor, destitute, homeless, disadvantaged, and less privileged in society (Deut 15:10, Prov 19:7; 22:19; 31:8-9, Matt 25:35, Luke 4:17-19, 1 John 3:17-18, 1 Tim 6:18, Jas 1:27 etc.). The Bible is positioned as a voice for the voiceless and a word for marginalized people-groups in society.

Phiri J., “The Plight of Street Children in Zambia,” *Africa Insight* 26, no. 3 (January 1, 1996): 276.¹

The phenomenon of homelessness is not merely a modern problem. This problem can be traced even in Bible times. Though the Bible does not necessarily mention the words street youth or street kid or street children, it shows that there were in Bible times individuals who patronized the streets. Following the instructions which were given in response to the plight of vulnerable persons, the Pentateuch outlines principles of care and concern. In Exodus 23:11 for instance, instructions were given to make provision for the vulnerable poor by leaving food in the fields. Bruckner observes that the motivation of this legislation favored the poor and wild animals.² In the Psalms we also find an indication that certain parents will have children who turn into begging street urchins (109:10). An urchin is a young child who is poorly or raggedly dressed. Here the description compounds the problem by showing the activity of the street children as vagabonds who subsist on charity. By implication, the text seems to advance the idea that because of lack of shelter and means, the vagabonds find subsistence on the streets.

Matthew 8:20 and Luke 8:52 record Jesus stating and explaining His own homelessness. He said, “foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the son of man has nowhere to lay His head.” The homelessness of Christ was necessary due to His itinerant ministry in which he had to move about. This however does not imply that Jesus had no home. Osborne et al posit that Jesus likely had a house of his own (Matt 9:28; 13:1, 36; 17:25) but like the Apostle Paul, He stayed in the houses of His disciples.³ In other places in the New Testament, we are presented with persons who patronized the streets. In one instance, in Mark 10:46, a blind man sat by the roadside in Jericho begging. The reference concerns a man of an unidentified age. His location and activity sheds light into the predicament that characterized him i.e., he was a needy case patronizing the streets in order to find sustenance. This form of destitution is similar to the experience of street youth. Following this dilemma, an inquiry ought to be made: How do we explain the prevalence of suffering street youth loitering on streets around the world?

Those who engage in some ministry to poor homeless people and youth in particular should seek knowledge about the predisposing factors that lead persons into the streets. Though the Bible does not directly discuss the problem of homeless street youth as observed above, streetism seems to be caused by various factors. It may be a result of God’s curse.

The Environment before the Fall

A closer look at the Bible shows that God is the originator of all things in the created order. Thus, in the beginning, the environment is that of perfect harmony with no taint of disorder, suffering or misery. The original environment had no trait of despondency or lack of any kind. The Scriptures state that God “saw all that he had made, and it was very good” (Gen. 1:31). The writer repeatedly mentions that “...and God saw that it was good” (Gen 1:10, 12, 18, 21, and 25). Homelessness,

James K. Bruckner, *Exodus*, New International biblical commentary 2 (Peabody, Mass. : Milton Keynes, ² UK: Hendrickson Publishers ; Paternoster, 2008), 218.

Grant R. Osborne and Clinton E. Arnold, *Matthew*, Zondervan exegetical commentary series on the New ³ Testament v. 1 (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2010), 305.

destitution and streetism emerge somewhere after the fall of man due to disobedience against the express will of God; and as a result of the sin curse (Genesis 3:1-3f). Streetism, poverty, homelessness and suffering in general were not part of God's original order. It was the entrance of sin into the world that altered God's original perfect design.

The Bible does not necessarily discuss reasons as to the causes of homelessness and the street youth phenomena. As underscored above, what is apparent is that this condition, among other misfortunes such as disability, poverty, disease, and human misery, was necessitated by the entrance of sin in the world. Among the most vulnerable urban poor individuals can be found the most this group known as street youth. Though confronted with poverty, there is a unique way in which street youth stand out among other urban groups that are poor. This necessitates an inquiry into what God says about vulnerable-needy people. Two such places in the Scriptures which speak to the theme of social justice, equity and extending a hand of help and concern to the vulnerable are Isaiah 58 and James 2:14-18.

Appreciating Isaiah 58

Introduction

The book of Isaiah has a series of prophetic messages and Messianic prophecies in particular – pointing to Jesus, his nature, work and mission e.g., 7:14; 53:4-5; and 61:1. In the New Testament, Jesus, the Messiah quotes several portions from Isaiah as can be clearly shown in Matt 21:13 and Luke 4:18-19f. When Jesus quoted Isaiah 61:1-3 (cf. Luke 4:18-19f.), he enunciated his Mission and purpose on earth. It should be observed that His mission was to center around lifting up people from their position of lack, despondency and plight.

As we now consider Isaiah 58, we note that it comprises 14 verses. The entire treatise is a rebuke by God through Isaiah of Israel's hypocritical fast while explaining what He really requires. It has been observed that not only is Isaiah 58 confrontational, it bears important elements of exhortation and warning.⁴ In as far as the confrontation is concerned, God rebukes religiosity at the expense of fairness and regard for the underprivileged and needy.

It would appear that God was inviting Judah to a reformation authenticated by decisive action.⁵ Reformation is a vital process in the life of those who seek to serve God. As observed by Bromiley, reformation is all about letting oneself to be instructed and to learn discipline.⁶ Reformation actually has connotations to the times of perfecting things, by a change of external forms into vital spirituality. Thus, Israel outwardly seemed to conform to piety - "daily they seek me out; they seem eager to know my ways," (Isa. 58:2) and the ordinances of God but their 'godly' words and acts did not match their inward condition which found reflection in their conduct. The prophecy

NKJV Study Bible, 2nd ed., eds. Earl D. Radmacher, Ronald B. Allen, and H. Wayne House (Nashville, 1997).⁴

Nichol, *SDABC Vol. 4*, 305.⁵

Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia: In 4 Volumes. 4: Q - Z*,⁶
Reprinted. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 64.

therefore spells out the fact that Israel was rebellious and sinful. In fact, the problem was that some of those who followed after Yahweh also treated ordinary people badly, and for Yahweh this duplicity is antagonistic to His will (vv. 3b-5).⁷ In order to show a genuine religion, there was need to match profession with practice. They were to embrace an authentic inward reformation from which its power would be seen in the honorable treatment of the poor, outcast and downtrodden.

Isaiah's Rebuke of Mere Fasting

The task of Isaiah was to “cry aloud” i.e., literally to announce “with full throat.”⁸ This implies that the message of Isaiah 58 needed to be loud and clear calling for decisive action matching profession with practice. The prophet rebuked the pious act of fasting. Sankfeld defines fasting as the practice of abstaining from nourishment, usually over the course of a day.⁹ A simpler definition reckons fasting as “abstinence from food.”¹⁰ In Isaiah 58, the word fast is employed six times in three verses: once in verse 3 and verse 5, and twice in verse 4 and verse 6. The repeated use of the term “fast” underscores a special emphasis.

As rightly observed by Baker and Walton, “Isaiah here condemns its misuse not the practice per se.”¹¹ While Scriptures generally encourage fasting, what emerges in the passage is God’s dissatisfaction of their activity since it did not take into account the needs of the poor and vulnerable.

The Acceptable Fast

God does not necessarily desire a series of prescribed perfunctory rituals, but deeds which must be accompanied by a true moral reversal and a commitment to address social injustice.¹² It would occur that God is presenting a superior form of fasting – one which transcends and surpasses ritualistic activity. It is the sympathetic acts and self-denying love which gives up bread or any other possession for the sake of the needy that is enjoined.¹³ Thus, to adhere to the injunction in 58:6-7 is what amounts to true godliness:

Goldingay, *Isaiah*.⁷

⁸ Vine, William. E. (1965) *Isaiah: Prophecies, Promises, Warnings*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan. p. 188.

Abingdon Press, ed., *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press,⁹ 2006), 431.

James Strong et al., *The New Strong's Expanded Dictionary of Bible Words* (Nashville, TN: Nelson,¹⁰ 2001), 94.

David W Baker and John H Walton, *Isaiah*, 2013, 179, accessed July 18, 2019,¹¹ https://nls.ldls.org.uk/welcome.html?ark:/81055/vdc_100059761704.0x000001.

Paul, *Isaiah 40-66*, 480.¹²

“Isaiah 58 Commentary - Keil and Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament,” *StudyLight.Org*,¹³ accessed September 2, 2019, [//www.studylight.org/commentaries/kdo/isaiah-58.html](http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/kdo/isaiah-58.html).

6 ... To loose the bonds of wickedness, To undo the heavy burdens, To let the oppressed go free, And that you break every yoke?

7 Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, And that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; When you see the naked, that you cover him, And not hide yourself from your own flesh?

Motyer sums the intention of Isaiah 58:6-7 when he states, "These verses urge that the objectives of a fast day are the creation of a just society (6), the meeting of individual needs (7a-c) and domestic care (7d)."¹⁴ So, God would like to see a reformed society at whose core is the regard for human beings and their dignity.

Implications for the Church

Having studied Isaiah 58:1-14, the following are the implications for the Seventh day Adventist Church:

1. The church of God is challenged to move from mere religious profession to a practical demonstration of that religion.
2. The work of relieving oppression, feeding the hungry, and satisfying the needs of the thirsty, naked, and outcasts is an integral part of genuine worship.
3. The church of God should go out of its way to selflessly satisfy the souls of the marginalized in society.
4. Ethical behavior is wholistic. It calls not only for observation and proclamation but active service for the oppressed and downtrodden.
5. There is a special way in which being a Sabbath keeper means helping human beings to find rest from social injustice.

Summary of Isaiah 58

Isaiah 58 is an instructive chapter in which hypocrisy is rejected and reproved by God. Yahweh, through the prophet, addresses the problem of false and empty religious observance showing that rituals that are self-focused are unacceptable to God. Isaiah 58 puts forth a new definition of fasting. Fasting is thus related to justice or injustice and the motive thereof has moral overtones. It is unethical to afflict oneself through fasting while neglecting the hungry, homeless and oppressed. A genuine compassion for the poor, the helpless, hungry and the oppressed touches and elicits the response of God. God spells out the fact that reaching out to the needs of the needy will result in His bestowal of blessings to the giver. Similarly, the Sabbath is connected to justice. So, in the same way that responding to the needs of others demonstrates a commitment to liberation and justice, the keeping of the Sabbath shows that a person is just and fair. Allowing others to rest who are under one's authority is an integral part of true Sabbath observance. Consequently, the religion which God accepts is one that matches profession and confession with action. An important part of Isaiah 58 is the admonition to be liberal and deliberate in acts of service and love to other human beings. Such a service goes beyond mere profession, prayer and the exercise of spiritual disciplines. It is all about glorifying God in a religion that is undergirded by a response of love to men and women in need. Such a response is the outflow of a non-hypocritical union and

Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 481.¹⁴

relationship with God.

Christian Works

The apostle James speaks not of work (ergon) but works (erga). It should be noted from the onset that ergon and erga are expressions of the same word. Ergon is singular, while erga is plural. James makes a provocative statement when he says that faith without works is dead (2:17). Bible students often see a contradiction between Paul and James.¹⁵ When Paul speaks of works, he emphasizes their inadequacy or lack of efficacy to save. Thus, his emphasis is that we are saved by God's grace through faith (Eph 2:8, 9, Gal 2:16, 21). James on the other hand connects faith and salvation to works (2:24). The question thus arises as to how to resolve the contradiction. Valentine settles, and appropriately so, the seeming controversy when he posits that, James and Paul approached faith and works from different points of view. James' viewpoint was essentially pastoral, while that of Paul was essentially missionary. James saw faith and works in the light of what God requires for those who have already become Christians, while Paul saw faith and works in the light of what God requires for a person to become a Christian. James was concerned about the fruits of Christian experience, while Paul was concerned about the roots. As a pastor, James gave special attention to living the Christian life, while, as an evangelist, Paul gave special attention to beginning the Christian life. For James, the gospel of Christ was the consummation of the "law of liberty" (Jas. 1:25; 2:12), while for Paul the gospel of Christ was the antithesis of the "law of sin and death" (Rom. 8:2). James' focus was on the human factor in salvation, while Paul's focus was on the divine factor. . . James directed his message primarily to those who gloried in their creed at the expense of their conduct, while Paul directed his message primarily to those who gloried in their conduct at the expense of accepting the creed's consummation in Christ.¹⁶

James addresses an audience which understands the theme of salvation. Their relationship to Christ is in a process of growth. He repeatedly refers to them as "brethren" or "my brethren." This in and of itself presupposes that they are practicing Christians. It therefore does not come as a surprise when James challenges them to demonstrate through works, the faith which they profess. James uses the words "my brethren" 15 times or once every 7 verses on average to express the bond of brotherhood in Christian fellowship.¹⁷

In James 2, faith is being employed side by side with works. Faith (pistis) refers to conviction or trust. The apostle contends that such a conviction and trust in the divine should inspire actions corresponding to the profession. "Can that faith save him?" (2:14) – is the inquiry. The question probes into the essential matter of the quality of faith. A living faith therefore is that which applies itself in a positive response to the ensuing situation: "If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be

Valentine, *Hebrews, James, 1 & 2 Peter*, 78.¹⁵

Foy Valentine, 78.¹⁶

"My brethren." (James 1:1). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (SDABC), rev. Ed. Francis¹⁷
D. Nichol. (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1976-80), 7:503.

filled,” and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?” verses 15b-16.

Consequently, the apostle answers his own question in verse 17 where he states emphatically that, “Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.” A dead faith is therefore a non-saving faith. By implication, this letter condemns an idle faith that will not get to perform corresponding works. Such an erroneous, idle and dead faith assumes that mere profession in the God of heaven guarantees salvation when in fact it does not. As a matter of fact, “[t]here is something deep inside humans that leads them to presume that knowing the right truth or holding the right position is enough to make them righteous.”¹⁸ This observation is essential in the discussion of salvation and faith. As has already been noted, faith (accepting and knowing or accenting to propositional truth) is incomplete. Until it is acted out in works of selfless service to others can it suffice. That is why Richardson points out, and rightly so, that since it is in “neither profession of faith nor deeds of faith actually save anyone; only God saves.”¹⁹

James’ Concern

Two elements in the illustration of James stand out as examples of exhibiting genuine faith. James speaks of a situation involving a brother or sister “without clothing and in need of daily food.” The two situations are nakedness and hunger. The two terms “brother” (Gk. adelphos) and “sister” (Gk. adelphe) underscore the general nature of need as it affects humanity – male and female. Apparently, James brings to light two universal problems confronting mankind – nakedness and hunger. The need for clothing to cover one’s nakedness, protect the body from the elements of weather and the need for food to nourish and keep the body healthy is paramount. This is why Valentine suggests that the message of James “identifies with the poor, the powerless and the oppressed.”²⁰ James uses the word “without clothing,” or “naked” (gumnos) which means absolutely or relatively unclothed. In this context, it conveys the idea of being inadequately clothed, such as having only an undergarment.²¹ Nichol also speaks of gummos as referring to being thinly clad and facing the elements with insufficient protection.²² He also employs the term trophe to designate food – which entails nourishment or by implication daily “rations.” Thus, the

Leander E. Keck, ed., *The Letter to the Hebrews, the Letter of James; the First and Second Letters of Peter; the First, Second and Third Letters of John, the Letter of Jude, the Book of Revelation*, The New Interpreter’s Bible general articles& introduction, commentary, amp; reflections for each book of the Bible, including the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical books; in twelve volumes / [ed. board: Leander E. Keck ...]; 12 (Nashville, Tenn: Abingdon Press, 2005), 199.

Kurt A. Richardson, *James*, The new American commentary v. 36 (Nashville, TN.: Broadman & ¹⁹ Holman, 1997), 129.

Valentine, *Hebrews, James, 1 & 2 Peter*, 66.²⁰

Kurt A. Richardson, *James*, The new American commentary v. 36 (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & ²¹ Holman, 1997), 130.

“Naked.” (James 2:15). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (SDABC), rev. Ed. Francis D. ²² Nichol. (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1976-80), 7:521.

apostle unequivocally advocates for a living concern for the vulnerable and needy among us especially those who are naked and hungry.

Responding to the Needy

In the analogy of James, the predicament looms over the person lacking food and clothing. The apostle states, “. . . and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,” and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?” (James 2:16d). In the face of the needy, believers with the ability to help reduced themselves merely to bestowing kind wishes without corresponding action. Richardson states,

James put the insensitive, inactive believer on the side of the unjust, unrighteous rich who have neither mercy nor compassion. James doubtless believed his hearers had the capacity to supply what was needed to the poor and yet hard-heartedly were withholding the necessities of life. In the contemporary situation, this verse accuses all rich Christians, or even moderately well-off Christians who withhold what is good and necessary for life from the poor around them and most of all among the poor within the Christian family. Christians should cultivate some sort of almsgiving in their personal and church financial practices.²³

Thus, in the foregoing, the tendency to withhold aid when in fact you are blessed of God with means constitutes injustice and unrighteousness.

James returned to his inquiry: “what good does it serve” – the faith that is contented; is idle or does nothing; that helps no poor, naked or hungry persons? So, ultimately the statement, “Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself,” goes to show how unfitting such an attitude is. From the beginning in James 1:22-25 the message was that believers ought not to be hearers of the word only but doers. The care of those in need gives the mark of true religion. It discounts as false a faith that refuses to help those in need.²⁴ Anything less than this is an error of resting on bare profession while altogether being disagreeable to a professed holy religion.²⁵ Thus, the apostle draws the conclusion that works should not be seen as optional for an individual who claims faith in Jesus.²⁶

Summary of James 2:14-18

There is a theological unity between faith and works. A genuine faith is one that gets into action in favor of the needy. Such a faith must acknowledge the lordship of Jesus Christ and ought, as a result, to respond to Christ with corresponding obedient actions. The practical actions are

Richardson, *James*, 130.²³

Keck, *The Letter to the Hebrews, the Letter of James; the First and Second Letters of Peter; the First, Second and Third Letters of John, the Letter of Jude, the Book of Revelation*, 196.

Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary*. (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 789.²⁵

Ralph P. Martin et al., *James*, Word biblical commentary [General ed.: David A. Hubbard; Glenn W. Barker. Old Testament ed.: John D. W. Watts. New Testament ed.: Ralph P. Martin]; Vol. 48 (Waco, Tex: Word Books, Publ, 1988), 82.

necessitated by the spiritual life born out of conviction and trust in God. Thus, true and biblical spirituality is practical. Since humanity is clothed with a variety of needs such as food and clothing, the Christian with a genuine faith will respond not with words only but the actual provision of the things necessary for life.

The Jesus Model – A Trusted Approach

The Jesus model is a ministry that recognizes humanity and needs before thinking about baptism and membership. Getting up close and personal (Aboagye, 2023) was Christ's approach, which is a fundamental property of Ellen White (1905, p. 143), "Christ's Method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Savior mingled with people as one who desired their good. He showed sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He invited them, 'Follow Me.'" The Jesus model considers the target and their circumstances before the mission agenda. At the center of this model is a personal effort towards improving the situations of others. In this case, homeless street kids, and proclamation comes last.

The rehabilitation of homeless street kids is an honorable work that demands patience and servanthood. Jesus was a true servant to the people (Molano, 2019; Lauren & Henson, 2021). He was concerned with the people. Benmira and Agboola (2021) corroborate that servanthood is concerned with putting people first. It comes as no surprise that Leavy and McKiernan (2020) dub it a winning strategy. Therefore, in the quest to minister to homeless street kids, we draw key elements from the said property (Christ Method) that puts people first: mingling, compassion, ministering to needs, winning confidence, and proclamation.

Mingling

Mingling is the first and foremost thing in ministering to people. Ministry can only take place with presence. Salt cannot savor the food unless it encounters it (Matthew 5:13,14). The salt is useless unless it seasons the food. Therefore, the ministry of presence provides spiritual caregivers with untold prospects of impact and influence (Sullivan, 2019). The mingling of the privileged with the less privileged, or the ministers and homeless street kids, flattens the ground. Flattening removes any hierarchy between the parties concerned (Chassagnon & Hollandts, 2019). As a result, the target group will feel valued (Mokgwane & Omobonike, 2020). Jesus set the example by going where the people were (Kidder & Bradburn, 2022). He went to their weddings (John 2:1-12), homes (Luke 19:1-10), vocation (Matthew 4:18-20) and "by so doing, He touched their hearts (Kidder, 2009, p. 21). Jesus opened networks and built relationships.

Christ interacted with people, staying true to Matthew 1:23, God with us (man). Even though He largely expected to be with rulers and kings, He chose to be with misfits, commoners, and the underprivileged. Since He had come to "seek and save the lost" (Luke 19:10), His ministry had to begin with personal contact with people (mingling). Similarly, those who wish to minister to homeless street kids should consider going to them and getting to know them. It is easy to find them. This approach will open ineffable opportunities to minister intentionally and holistically. The walls of separation come down with consistent socialization where the street kids are located. However, mingling must be punctuated by respect and humility.

Compassion

Jesus did not only have sympathy for people. In fact, He took sympathy a notch up because he was willing to alleviate the sufferings of others. According to Patel, Pelletier-Bui, Smith,

Roberts, Kilgannon, Trzeciak, and Roberts (2019, paragraph 5), “Compassion is an emotional response to another’s pain or suffering involving an authentic desire to help.” In recent years, compassion has become the main focus of prosocial behavior research (international) because of the fantastic behavior of human beings to help or benefit others out of their free volition (Gilbert, 2019). According to Gu, Baer, Cavanagh, Kuyken, and Strauss (2020), the compassion construct includes identifying the suffering (sympathy), understanding suffering, and feeling for the victim (empathy), and finally, a motivation to improve the conditions of the sufferer. The latter essentially makes the difference between sympathy, empathy, and compassion.

True to his nature, Jesus had compassion for people (Mark 6:34) but more explicitly He was moved by compassion (Matthew 20:34, Mark 1:41, Luke 7:13). He did something about what he felt for the people. His compassion sprang into action. In the same vein, God’s servants must have compassion for the living conditions of the homeless street kids and be moved to do something for them. In other words, feel it and act on the feeling. The results of sin, the adverse effects of world economies, the extreme imbalance of the social order, and the widening gap between the rich and the poor “call for immediate compassion, wisdom, and courage because there are people everywhere who are in need and in danger (Everist, 2020, p. 10).”

Ministering to Needs

Ministering to needs is another way of forming attachments with homeless street kids. Picking a leaf from Jesus’ approach, He attended to people’s immediate needs. He healed the sick (Matthew 14:14), gave sight to the blind (John 9:1-7), made the disabled walk again (Matthew 5:9), freed the demon-possessed (Mark 5:1-20), the deaf regained their sense of hearing (Mark 7:31-37). In order to drive the point, in one of his lectures to the disciples, Jesus asked a rhetorical question, “If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion (Luke 11:11, 12)?” Jesus taught the disciples to meet the needs of people. It does not make any impression or impact if homeless street kids receive the bread of life (gospel) before they receive bread (physical). Give them what they need first.

Homeless street kids spend most of their time wandering from place to place, looking for food, shelter, or a group to fit in. Some leave home and their families due to family issues, poverty, abuse, war, etc (Kabwela, 2020). Their needs are vast and vary from place to place. It would be in the best interest of God’s servants and His church to meet physical needs before spiritual needs (Aboagye, 2023). Some of their physical and emotional interventions may include:

- a) Giving Clothes – gather clothes from church members.
- b) Providing Food – Run a soup kitchen or hot meals daily.
- c) Provide Healthcare – attend to their health by providing basic care.
- d) Affirmation – genuine positive statements induce positivity.
- e) Company – everybody needs someone to lean on or to converse with.
- f) Security – protect their rights, privacy, and being.

Winning Confidence

It is natural that after meeting the needs of people, the recipients respond by opening up to the giver, thus showing confidence in the provider. Jesus gained the confidence of everyone by demonstrating His love for us that while we were still sinners, He died for us (Romans 5:8). Humanity has the confidence to run to Him for refuge because He made the first move towards

them by giving them a second chance (abounding grace) when we could have suffered the wrath of justice. “In the context of Christ’s example of winning people’s confidence, the implication would be that of evoking absolute certainty, assurance, trust, and belief in response to His unselfish commitment to mingling, sympathizing, and serving (<https://ssnet.org/lessons/16c/less10.html>, paragraph 4).” Jesus seamlessly evoked certainty, assurance, and trust because he was consistent and intentional.

For homeless street kids, winning confidence may be attained in several ways. One of the crucial elements in winning confidence among them is consistency and accepting them the way they are. The more the church mingles, exercises compassion, and meets needs consistently, the more the homeless street kids will trust them. Consistency is explained more lucidly by Leszczyński and Zieliński (2019). In summary, they posit that consistency and intentional effort begets trust. Such consistency assures the recipient that the church is not only present for a season but perennially.

Another way of winning the confidence of homeless street kids is to avoid calling them homeless people or street kids. Lusila (2022) laments that homeless street kids are disrespected when they are called so because they were not born in the streets but circumstances have led them to the streets. The streets are not a life sentence. When the church refers to them as something other than homeless street kids, they will feel accepted, and it may instill a sense of worth and confidence because of the positive sense in which they are viewed. In addition, the church may play a role in working with the civic leaders to integrate them the homeless street kids in some community projects. This approach will boost their self-esteem.

Proclamation

Proclamations denote statements of importance. Indeed, the words by Jesus, “Follow me (Matthew 4:19),” are of great significance and consequence. It is a statement that does not center on Jesus but on the recipient. It designates the blessing of eternal life through obedience to the recipient. It is important to note that Jesus makes this proclamation after meritoriously mingling, exercising compassion, and meeting needs consistently and effectively, winning people’s confidence.

Proclamation must be done based on the belief that the hearer’s destiny depends on the choice to receive or reject it (Patterson, 2019). Proclamation must be done creatively in today’s contemporary and complex world (Stasiak, 2019). The church cannot do business as usual because of the sensitive nature of the plight of homeless street kids. The conventional methods of Bible study, music, and song, health and wellness discussions, worship, and fellowship are all relevant. However, these should be packaged to address the hurt, abuse, anger, disappointment, and rejection the homeless street kids may have experienced. The proclamation of the kingdom of God will open the floodgates of hope, reconciliation, and liberty.

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