

Burdens of the Downcast

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Psalm 55

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*To CARE for one another in truth and in love,
To GROW together as followers of Jesus,
To SERVE those God has placed in our path.
– CG Mission Statement*

Icebreaker: Share an experience you have had with a homeless person and how it affected you..

Worship: Read Matthew 11:28-30

(Read aloud three times, spending time in reflection after each, listening for what God's invitation to you might be.)

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.
Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me,
for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.
For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

Bible Passage & Guiding Question *(The following question is intended to help frame your discussion. Keep it in mind as you read the bible passage and review the sermon summary together.)*

Bible Passage: Psalm 55

Guiding Question: What does it look like for us to understand and engage with the homeless of Los Angeles?

Sermon Summary

The homeless population in Los Angeles is as large as it's ever been. The numbers are staggering: nearly 59,000 when last counted. A literal city of homeless within our city. We see them daily, but don't really understand them. And it's in our nature to fear, judge or pull away from things we don't understand.

So often, our reaction to homelessness is, "What's wrong with that person?" when the real question ought to be "What *happened* to that person?" There's a reason why they are the way they are. If we knew their backstory, it'd change how we view them and how we step into their situation. Unfortunately, we usually misunderstand what their needs are. So when we try to care for them, we fail to meet the true, deep needs that have created the problem. This is one of the fundamental issues we face as we seek to help the downcast.

Psalm 55 offers a look into the prayers a homeless person might have. Through it, we can find a greater understanding of who they are. May this understanding instill in each of us a greater sense of compassion and willingness to serve them.

For most homeless, their wounds didn't come from the streets; they came from those they most trusted (often family). They've been let down by the very people who were meant to hold them up (v12-14). What would any of us do with that pain? They have become overwhelmed; they see no way out (v1-5). What we may see from the outside as laziness is really chronic depression and hopelessness.

How would any of us react to such tribulation? We isolate (v6-8). We can't bear the pain or the shame. All we want to do is get away from it. We rush to find shelter from our afflictions... even if that shelter is ultimately harmful. That's where many end up medicating. Drugs and alcohol may seem to shelter from all that assaults the heart and mind, but those very things end up owning us – only adding to our pain and shame. It's then that many of us

become embittered, angry. Because so much of what we're dealing with is a reaction to what has happened to us. We want to retaliate (v15). But how ought we to respond? What does Psalm 55 say is the way out?

When we are downcast, we need to cast our burdens on the Lord (v22). He has been on the journey with us. He will hear us. He will save. He will redeem. He will sustain. There is great comfort in this. But how do we align these promises with the reality that so many cry out to God... and yet nothing changes? Our doubts mean we don't let ourselves let go of our burdens. This is the very problem for so many homeless. They've run out of trust. But the beginning of recovery is to learn to trust again. We need to trust God, Who can redeem because He has redeemed. In Christ, we find His promises fulfilled. And so we can finally lay down our burdens... while also turning our hearts to those who need God the most. May that spark in each of us the question of what we can do to help.

Discussion Questions *(It's better to wrestle deeply with a few good questions than to gloss over many.)*

- How did this sermon impact your thoughts on reaching out to the homeless with compassion?
 - Pastor Dan of Union Rescue mission said, "For most of us, what we don't understand, we judge, avoid or fear." How does this statement resonate with you?
 - How can we grow in understanding the backstory of how the homeless got where they are?
 - How can you be a friend to a homeless person? What would you do? When? Where?
 - What do you learn about God and prayer from these verses? (vs. 1-5, 9-11, 12-14, 20-21)
 - In what ways can you see someone on skid row praying Psalm 55?
 - When in the life of Christ could He have prayed Psalm 55? Why?
 - Name a situation in your own life where praying Psalm 55 would be beneficial.
 - Like many homeless people, it seems the Psalmist is deeply wounded in this Psalm. How does he react to this difficulty? (vs. 6-8, 15)
 - How are you prone to react in difficult situations?
 - How does the Psalmist choose to respond? (vs 16-19, 22-23)
 - What would it look like for you to do what the Psalmist is telling us to do in vs. 22?
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What Can We Be Praying For?

Praying is always the first resource and remedy for the burdens we carry. This week, take off the backpack of your worries and troubles and give it to the Lord through prayer.

Engage & Experience

- Be open to opportunities for conversation with homeless people, possibly with an outreach organization to learn how to better engage the marginalized.
- Make yourself aware of resources to refer to a homeless person who is genuinely interested in getting help.
- Plan to carry items in your car to hand out to a homeless person you may encounter near your home or work location.
- Plan to go on a Union Rescue Mission tour to hear stories of lives transformed.