

HOW TO HELP THE HOMELESS WITHOUT JUST GIVING THEM MONEY

For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in ... Matthew 25:35.

In 2007, the [National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty](#) estimated that 3.5 million people in America (1.35 million of them children), were likely to experience homelessness in a given year. While difficult to measure, the increase in the demand for shelter beds each year is a strong indicator that homelessness is on the rise, and not only in America. According to the [United Nations](#), there are at least 100 million homeless in the world today.

I have been blessed to work directly with the homeless in Florida, and in the early 1990's in Boston, Massachusetts. The street can be brutal, and often the way society treats the homeless is, to say the least, unchristian. The U.S. Justice department found that the homeless were much more often to suffer as a victim of a crime and commit a crime. Further, you have a higher chance of being a victim of a crime in your own home than by a homeless beggar simply asking for money.

However, the question remains, what can we do today to help without adding to the problems the homeless face?

If your heart has been gripped by the needs of the hungry, thirsty, strangers on the streets, here are four effective ways to help the homeless in your community.

1) Volunteer

The most productive way to get started helping the homeless is to join forces with a well-established operation. As a volunteer you will learn from those who are already making a difference, rather than repeating the mistakes of well-meaning but misguided novices. By receiving "on the job" training, our team in Brazil was able to experience the rewards of accomplishment right away.

A good place to start volunteering is at your local church. If your congregation doesn't have a homeless ministry, find a reputable organization in your city and invite church members to join you and your family in serving.

- The [Association of Gospel Rescue Missions](#) represents 300 rescue missions in U.S. and Canadian cities offering food and shelter, youth and family services, prison outreach and rehab programs for the mentally ill, elderly, urban poor and street youth. Check out their extensive resources and information directory.

- Use this [Homeless Shelter Directory](#) to find the shelter nearest you.
- This site offers a [Homeless Search Engine](#) for locating food banks, soup kitchens, shelters, housing, food stamps and employment services for the homeless and needy.
- Consider partnering with [Habitat for Humanity](#), a nonprofit, ecumenical Christian ministry that invites people of all backgrounds, races and religions to build houses together with needy families.

2) Respect

One of the best ways to help a homeless person is to show them respect. As you look into their eyes, talk to them with genuine interest, and recognize their value as an individual, you will give them a sense of dignity that they rarely experience. Be prepared to refer them to a shelter/food bank/soup kitchen. To do this, you need to know and become educated about what resources are in your neighborhood. Volunteering is the best way to educate yourself about those resources.

While it's wise to exercise caution and take measures to ensure your personal safety when ministering to the homeless, by identifying with the real person behind the face on the streets, your ministry will be much more effective and rewarding. Learn additional ways to help the homeless:

- Association of Gospel Rescue Missions presents [Several Ways to Volunteer to Help the Homeless](#).
- JustGive.org lists [35 Ways You Can Help the Homeless](#).

3) Give

[Giving](#) is another great way to help, however, please **do not give money directly to the homeless**. Cash gifts are often used to buy drugs and alcohol. Instead, make your cash donations to a well-known, reputable organization in your community. Many shelters and soup kitchens also welcome contributions of food, clothing and other supplies.

- Visit the [Charity Navigator](#) to find top rated charities.

4) Pray

Because of the harshness of their lives, many homeless people are crushed in spirit. But Psalm 34:17-18 says, "The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles. The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit." [\(NIV\)](#) God can use your prayers to bring deliverance and healing to broken lives.