

Sermon outline: the real problem with homelessness

Topic: A Christian response to homelessness in Australia
Main passage: Luke 5:12-15
Other passages: Psalm 82:3, James 1:27, 1 John 3:16-18, Matthew 25:35.

Introduction – the *real* problem with homelessness

I have a problem with homelessness.

But it's not a personal problem ... I'm quite safe and secure in my home.

It's not a theological problem - I've read many times in the Bible where God has strongly encouraged his people to reach out and help the poor and oppressed.

And it's not even a problem about knowing how to help ... there are a myriad of programs crying out for volunteers, support and prayer for the homeless.

No, if I'm really honest here, my problem with homelessness in Australia is that most days, I don't even think about it.

That's not to say that I don't care. If I see someone sleeping rough in the city then I'll smile, drop a few dollars in their hat and even whisper a prayer. But the 2021 Census found that the homelessness we see is actually just the tip of the iceberg, with only seven per cent of the 122,000 homeless people in Australia actually living on the streets.¹

The vast majority are what's known as the 'Hidden Homeless' ... people crammed into overcrowded accommodation and hostels or shunted from place to place, 'couch surfing' until they wear out their welcome.

Of these, a staggering 17,600 children are homeless on any given night. Just think about that for a second ... 17,600 Aussie kids have no certainty about where they'll be sleeping ... that's here ... in a developed country ... a rich nation ... the lucky country.²

So how are we as Christians to respond? I'm sure you are compassionate but many are also a little frightened of homeless people. Maybe you feel helpless to know what to do. I mean, does anything we do make any difference anyway?

¹ ABS, (2021): Estimating homelessness: Census

² ABS, (2021): Estimating homelessness: Census

Or perhaps you're like me ... you know it's a big issue but most days you just don't think about it. Homelessness just doesn't really hit home.

So what does the Bible say about it?

The best place to start is by considering what God thinks of homelessness.

The Bible is very clear on God's incredible, unwavering love for those who have lost their way in life ... it also highlights that WE are part of the answer!

Consider the following passages:

- **Psalm 82:3** - *Defend the weak and the fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed.*
- **James 1:27** - *Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world*

To put it bluntly (which was the only way that James knew how to put it), if your faith is real, then you'll care for society's less fortunate and impoverished.

Just look at Jesus' response when he encountered such a man in Luke 5 ...

- **Luke 5:12** - *While Jesus was in one of the towns, a man came along who was covered with leprosy. When he saw Jesus, he fell with his face to the ground and begged him, 'Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.'*

In this passage we find a man afflicted by leprosy ...

He was an 'untouchable' ...

He was homeless ... forbidden to live in his own house, forced to reside in an isolated area outside of the city.

The Bible doesn't tell us whether he had family but if he did, he would not have been able to see his wife and children.

He was alone, destitute and desperate ... sound familiar?

The latest Census revealed a 5% increase in homelessness from 2016-2021 in Australia.³

Can you imagine it? Finding yourself on the street or in a cold hostel?

Whether through financial hardship, mental illness or addiction, tens of thousands of Australians are unable to live in their homes anymore ... most are cut off from their families ... they are today's untouchables.

³ ABS, (2021): Estimating homelessness: Census

Jesus saw the person, not the problem

In Luke 5:13, Jesus found himself looking into the eyes of this untouchable man and was **unable to look the other way**. Such is God's heart for all his children that Jesus wrapped his arms around the leper and healed his plight.

- **Luke 5:13-15** - Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. 'I am willing,' he said. 'Be clean!' And immediately the leprosy left him.

¹⁴ Then Jesus ordered him, 'Don't tell anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them.'

¹⁵ Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their illnesses.

(INSERT PERSONAL STORY OR USE JOHN'S STORY BELOW)

Let me share with you the story of John. Not the John of the Gospels, but someone who has understood homelessness firsthand.

John never knew his birth parents. He was abandoned at 7 months old.

He was adopted into a good home at the age of 5, but the fact that he was given away by his birth parents never left him.

He was married and divorced twice by his late 30s. He didn't have any children.

After this, alcohol and gambling became serious problems for John. Before long he found himself broke and living on the street.

Without any money, John survived on scraps for six months on the street. He wasted away and weighed just five stone (about 30kg). At one point he saw a relative on the street. She looked straight at him but didn't even recognise him.

A fellow rough sleeper told him about Sydney City Mission's Campbell House (now the Mission Australia Centre Surry Hills) – a temporary accommodation service that helps people escape homelessness and become independent.

John was accepted, and remembers how good it was to have a shower – his first in six months. His clothes were so dirty that they couldn't be washed, they had to be burned. He also still remembers the feeling of sleeping in clean sheets.

John loved it there, and made a very good friend. Sadly, this friend had a stroke and died soon after, and this sent John into a downward spiral again.

Over the next little while John was in and out of Campbell House seven times.

On that seventh time, one of the staff arranged for him to stay at a longer-term temporary accommodation service. He received help from a case worker and after eight months there he was approved for a government housing property.

John went on to make a life for himself, and even fell in love and got married again. His wife, Phyllis, has now passed away.

John is convinced he would have been dead without Mission Australia and is eager to help others, particularly young people. He's shared his story with young people and has sponsored a young person through a rehab facility. John has even decided to leave a bequest to Mission Australia, as a way of saying thank you for the help he received in his life.

Mission Australia chaplain David spent a lot of time with John, encouraging him on his Christian walk, which has gone from a very individualistic faith to one where he's involved with his church, investing in others, and reaching out.

John said that even when he was on the street he prayed to God and he knew that he was keeping him safe.

Even since emerging from homelessness and establishing his new life in his new home, John still struggled to fit in well at church, and felt judged by people.

With David's help, and with a new, supportive church community around him, John is now a regular at Sunday services, weekly bible study, an overcomers group for people with present/past addictions, and a doorknocking evangelism ministry, where he sometimes gets to share his story with people.

David says John is going from strength to strength in his Christian life and is a real encouragement to others at his church. John's story is one of a life turned around, and someone who has relied on God to sustain him through hard times.

So what then is our response to homelessness?

Jesus responded to the untouchable leper, saying "I am willing!"

Jesus couldn't walk past a needy person and leave them the same.

Outsiders were hugged and healed.

The blind by the side of the road received sight.

The woman at the well was offered new direction in life.

Everywhere he went Jesus' eyes roamed looking for someone to bless, some way to help, something his Father wanted him to repair.

Why? Because God desperately loves all people and wants all people to know Him and to come to Him through faith.

- **1 John 3:16** - *"This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters."*

It's an inspiring verse that connects God's masterplan with our everyday lives. It is also a verse immediately followed by a rather sobering passage for believers...

- **1 John 3:17-18** - *If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? ¹⁸Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.*

So let's be people who love with actions and truth, not just words.

Let's be people who show Christ's love in our church, in our community and beyond.

Let's be people who are ready to share our hope in Jesus with others.

And it all starts with the words: I am willing!

Three ways you can be part of the answer to homelessness

1. **PRAY:** Pray for the homeless and for those working actively to help them. Pray for organisations such as Mission Australia that assisted 23,755 people in 2021-22 who were homeless or at risk of homelessness.⁴ Sign up to receive Mission Australia's prayer diary at missionaustralia.com.au/prayer
2. **VOLUNTEER:** There are many ways to help, from simply offering a smile and warm conversation to giving of your time and talents to bless others. You could volunteer at an op shop, get involved as a mentor to young people, help out in a soup kitchen or your church could serve alongside a Christian service organisation like Mission Australia. For ideas, go to missionaustralia.com.au/churches
3. **GIVE:** Give of your finances to support the work of God in this area. As Jesus said in **Matthew 25:35** *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.*

This could be through your local church's ministries or you can donate to Mission Australia securely online at missionaustralia.com.au or by phoning 1800 88 88 68.

Know someone who needs help?

Contact your relevant state-based information and referral service directly:

NSW/ACT	Link2home	1800 152 152
NT	ShelterMe	www.shelterme.org.au
QLD	Homeless Hotline	1800 474 753
SA	Homeless Connect	1800 003 308
TAS	Housing Connect	1800 800 588
VIC	Crisis Accommodation Service	1800 825 955

⁴ Mission Australia Annual Report, (2025) www.missionaustralia.com.au/who-we-are/our-governance/annual-report/

WA Crisis Care

1800 199 008

Mission Australia's services are available at missionaustralia.com.au/find-support.