

A man with grey hair, wearing a black polo shirt and khaki pants, is sitting on the ground in a homeless shelter. He is looking down and to the right with a thoughtful expression. The background shows a concrete wall with some graffiti and a pile of debris, including a red and white striped bag and a cardboard box. The lighting is natural, coming from the right side.

Lessons *from a* Homeless Shelter

Reflections on 30+ years in ministry

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Introduction

AS HUMANS, WE ARE INCLINED TO DIFFERENTIATE BETWEEN PEOPLE and assign them varying degrees of importance based on their looks, intelligence, athleticism or wealth. Not so with God.

“The rich and the poor have this in common: the Lord is the Maker of them all,” Proverbs 22:2.

To God, a person from Liberia surviving on less than \$1.25 per day is as important as Jeff Bezos, the CEO of Amazon; the crippled man has no less sway with Almighty God than the Olympic champion; and the child is welcomed into his presence along with the Nobel Prize winner. We are all created in his image and of infinite worth to him.

God knows, however, that sin has distorted the human mind and understanding, that we do not see individuals as he sees them. He knows that we are easily impressed by straight, white teeth, high IQs, strong muscles and fancy cars.

“But the Lord said to Samuel, ‘Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart,’” 1 Samuel 16:7.

And, so, throughout Scripture God commands us to fight our natural inclinations:

- “Defend the weak and the fatherless; uphold the cause of **the poor** and the oppressed,” Psalm 82:3.
- “You **protect the poor**; you protect the helpless when they are in danger. You are like a shelter from storms, like shade that protects them from the heat,” Isaiah 25:4.
- “Share your food with the hungry and bring **poor, homeless people** into your own homes. When you see someone who has no clothes, give him yours,” Isaiah 58:7.

He goes to great lengths in the Old Testament to ensure that the poor are cared for. He tells those harvesting their fields to deliberately leave some for the gleaners, the poor (Leviticus 19:10, 23:22 and Exodus 23:11). He commands that interest not be charged on their loans, (Exodus 22:25), and he makes allowance for them to make a less costly sacrifice when they come to the temple.

One of my favorite verses is Jeremiah 22:16: “‘He helped those who were poor and needy, so everything went well for him. That is what it means to know God,’ says the Lord.” To know God is to obey Him, to be about His business.

God goes even further, issuing a curse to those who do not care for the poor:

- “The one who ignores **the poor** will receive many **curses**,” Proverbs 28:27.

CONTINUE



- “Do not abuse poor people because they are **poor**, and do not take away the rights of the needy in court. The LORD will defend them in court and will take the life of those who take away their rights,” Proverbs 22:22-23.

The book of Ezekiel tells us that a lack of concern for the poor was the reason for Sodom’s destruction: *“This was the sin of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters were proud and had plenty of food and lived in great comfort, but she did not help the poor and needy. Sodom and her daughters were proud and did things I hate in front of me. So I got rid of them when I saw what they did” (Ezekiel 16:49-50).*

An even more extreme and vivid example can be found in the book of Amos (2:6,7 and 4:2,3).

At the same time, God promises his favor to those who care for the poor:

- “Being kind to the poor is like lending to the LORD; he will reward you for what you have done,” Proverbs 19:17.
- “Generous people will be blessed, because they share their food with the poor,” Proverbs 22:9.
- “Whoever gives to the poor will have everything he needs,” Proverbs 28:27.

At first glance, the New Testament may not seem to reflect the same concern for the poor, but consider the following:

- 1) Those who grew up in the Jewish tradition were well versed in the commands to care for the poor. As soon as Zacchaeus makes a proclamation of faith, he promises to give half his possessions to the poor. Judas scolds Mary for wasting a bottle of perfume that could have been sold and the money given to the poor. Paul takes an offering among the churches he visits for the poor in Jerusalem. And Jesus himself quotes the prophet Isaiah, “I have come to preach the good news to the poor.”
- 2) While the mentions of the poor may be fewer in the New Testament, the ones present are strong and clear: The rich, young ruler is commanded to sell his belongings and give the money to the poor. The man who builds more barns to store his wealth finds that his soul is required of him and his wealth is meaningless. The rich man who ignores Lazarus, the beggar at his gate, is cast into the lake of fire.

Scripture is extremely clear about God’s concern for the poor, but I confess I did not always see it like I do today. Straight out of college, I thought I was called to minister to the “best and brightest,” the influence makers. Don’t get me wrong, I believe that’s a worthwhile endeavor, but a study of God’s heart for the poor changed my life’s direction.

Thirty-two years later, I have no regrets. God has been incredibly faithful. This short book is a reflection on a few of the lessons I’ve learned on the way. I hope it will encourage you as you seek to honor him and love the poor in your own way. ●

WHAT I’VE LEARNED...





Everyone has a story.

“Everyone has a story that will break your heart.
And, if you’re really paying attention, most people have a
story that will bring you to your knees” – Brene Brown.

First Impressions

THIS STORY HAS BECOME A BIT OF AN URBAN LEGEND, but its veracity is authenticated by Snopes.com.

John Barrier had been banking with a Spokane institution for 30-plus years when one day in October 1988, dressed in grubby work clothes, he stopped in to cash a check. The teller refused to validate his parking.

Barrier, a millionaire, asked the teller to call a manager, who also refused.

The Spokesman Review quoted Barrier at the time: “He looked me up and down and stood back and gave me one of those kinds of looks.”

Barrier withdrew all his money and took it down the street to a different bank.

A pretty extreme story, but it shows the power of first impressions and just how wrong we can be when we form opinions based on a person’s outward appearance.

In Barrier’s case, the damage was limited; he moved his money from one bank to another. In everyday life, however, when we allow our impressions to become assumptions about people’s motives and character and then use those assumptions to determine people’s worth, the damage can be devastating. I struggle with this type of pre-judging all the time, and I have a feeling I’m not alone.

James described a scenario similar to Barrier’s bank experience two thousand years ago:

If a man enters your church wearing an expensive suit, and a street person wearing rags comes in right after him, and you say to the man in the suit, “Sit here, sir; this is the best seat in the house!” and either ignore the street person or say, “Better sit here in the back row,” haven’t you segregated God’s children and proved that you are judges who can’t be trusted?” (James 2:2-4, The Message)

God knows our nature so well. He knows how strongly we are influenced by what we see and how difficult it is for us to envision what we cannot see. He knows that we have a tendency to place more value on the state senator than the man bagging our groceries, that we love wealth and success and are quick to judge people for all the wrong things.

God knows that we are not like Him: *“The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7).*

I believe that’s why His Word includes so many reminders to love the poor. One commentator counted more than 300. God knows that we are inclined to be distracted by the greasy hair or the smell, the slurred speech or the drunken bravado. We are inclined to miss His image in our fellow man.

Solomon, celebrated for his wisdom, makes the point twice in the book of Proverbs: “Rich and poor have this in common: The LORD is the Maker of them all.”

So, here’s the challenge I’d like to make to you and to myself: The next time you see a person who is clearly homeless, before you make any assumptions about his/her situation, say to yourself: *That person has a name and a story. He/she was created in the image of God.* I wonder how that one thought might change us. ●



The heart has eyes.

SOMETIMES WE ARE BLIND.

The problem (for most of us) isn't with the function of our actual eyeballs, the cornea or the retina or the optical nerve. Even age isn't the major problem. In fact, you might say our physical sight is working all too well. We see – and judge – by appearances. We notice whether someone is well dressed or a bit ruffled. We notice if a man's gut hangs over his belt or a woman has put on a few pounds. We pay attention to tattoos and piercings, scraggly beards, whether someone is balding or gray, stooped over or walking with a lively step. We notice the cars people drive, whether their yards are well kept, the images they post on social media, and the letters behind their names.

No, the problem for most of us isn't with the health of our eyeballs. The problem is with the health of our hearts and how that affects our sight.

The Gospels tell a lot of stories about blindness – both physical and spiritual – and often a story about one sheds light on the other. Take this story from Luke 18: Jesus was walking to Jericho, and as usual, a huge crowd had gathered around him. The group came upon a blind man sitting on the side of the road, and when the man heard that Jesus was near, he started shouting: "Jesus! Master, have mercy on me. Mercy, Son of David!"

Now, think about this, this was late in Jesus' ministry. The crowd knew he was a healer. Many of them were following him for exactly that reason. Did they try to make way so this man could meet Jesus? No, Luke says, "They rebuked him and told him to be quiet." But Jesus ordered the man to be brought near and asked what he wanted. "Lord, I want to see," he said. Jesus replied, "Receive your sight; your faith has healed you." Immediately, the man could see. He got up and "followed Jesus, praising God."

So, who was blind in this story? The man on the side of the road, yes, but what about the crowd? Could they really see? Were the eyes of their hearts open? Did they recognize these men as "neighbors," fellow travelers created in the image of God?

On our own, we are like Jesus' followers. We lack compassion. We need Jesus to open the eyes of our hearts so that we might see people the way God created them – not as beggars on the side of the road – but as sons and daughters, brothers and sisters in the family of God.

One of the reasons I can be so bold in asking you to partner with this ministry is because of the stories of healing I see on a daily basis. The blind see. The broken are made whole. Jesus is touching people's lives. Miracles are happening. I am blessed to have a small part in the process, and I hope you are, too. ●



Communicating Grace

“THERE, BUT FOR THE GRACE OF GOD, GO I.”

I hear that statement – generally attributed to a 16th century evangelist named John Bradford – all the time. According to tradition, Bradford was watching criminals being led to their execution. The expression has lasted for close to 500 years because it hits on a basic truth: We are not all that different from the people panhandling on our street corners and filling our prisons. If not for God’s grace, we could be standing in their shoes, and the grace we have been given, we are called to share.

When we truly understand the gospel, we understand that everything good in our lives is a gift. Take my life for example. Because my father chose as a young man to give his life to Christ and married a woman who loved God with all her heart, my brothers and I were raised in a Christian home with values based on the teachings of Scripture. My mother prayed for us consistently throughout her life. We were taught to work, to love our neighbor, and to give generously to those who had less than we did. I grew up in a small town and had teachers, coaches, pastors and Sunday school teachers who encouraged me. I had the opportunity to go to college. I am who I am today because of the people who cared about me, believed in me and invested in my life. Had I not had all these gifts, I might have been a very different man. When I recognize God’s abundant grace in my life – knowing that I did nothing to earn it or deserve it – I am compelled to extend that grace to others.

At the Mission, grace takes the form of food, clothing, shelter and medical care, but more importantly, we seek to manifest God’s grace by creating an environment like the one described above – one which communicates to residents that they have value, that people care deeply and that life can be more than mere survival.

Through your partnership, we are inviting the poor and homeless of our community to partake of God’s abundant grace. Together we are saying, You are loved. Come into our home. Here, you will find healing and hope and the strength to begin again.

Because of your involvement, we have a highly skilled, compassionate staff and the resources to re-create some of what I experienced as a natural part of growing up. While nothing can ever make up for the neglect and abuse many of our residents have experienced, it is never too late to be introduced to – and changed by – God’s unconditional love. Thank you for making that possible. ●



Real change begins with the heart.

“It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye.” - Antoine de Saint-Exupery



The Truth of Easter

“If you, Lord, kept a record of sins, who could stand?”

This is the Gospel.

All of humanity is under a curse. No matter how hard we try, we can never be truly pure, kind and good. We are blind to the goodness of God. We rebel against His authority in our lives, and we care more about our own self-interest than the interests of others. The Bible calls us wicked, evil, lovers of darkness and describes our hearts as hard and our necks as stiff. And because of all this, we are separated from God, the author of love, beauty, truth and all good things.

Still, amazingly, He loves us. And, so, He created a way back into relationship with Himself. He became man, lived a perfect life, modeled faithfulness and obedience, and allowed Himself to be sacrificed in our place. He suffered the consequences of our wrongdoing, so that we might be forgiven, and in that place – where our sins are separated as far as the east is from the west – we fall into His arms, loved and treasured.

This is the good good news. It's good news for the people walking through our doors. And it's good news for you and me.

I am desperately in need of a Savior who enables me to live the life I've been called to live. I can't do it on my own. I need the love and power of

the Gospel, and on my journey, God has blessed me by allowing me to spend the last 32 years in a place where I see Him at work in the hearts of men and women every single day.

I am constantly reminded of the truth of Easter: Jesus is alive and well and moving in our midst.

He is risen. He is risen indeed. ●

“Put your hope in the Lord, for with the Lord is unfailing love and with him is full redemption” (from Psalm 130).



Why go to chapel?

FOR THE MAJORITY OF PEOPLE COMING THROUGH THE DOORS of the Union Gospel Mission, the most pressing issues are shelter from the cold, a warm meal, the opportunity to sleep without wondering if someone is going to attack them or steal their belongings in the night.

You make it possible for us to meet those needs in so many beautiful ways. You give us pillows, homemade quilts and hats, pajamas and hygiene items. You provide beds, food and medical care.

When these basic needs are met, our guests' minds often turn to deeper issues – addiction, estranged children, unpaid bills, legal troubles, evictions, past mistakes and untreated medical conditions...Once again, because of your compassionate generosity, UGM is able to connect them to a variety of resources to help them face these problems head on. But if the whole process stopped there, we would not have done our job. To paraphrase UGM founder, Albert Arend: *A man can walk through our doors and we can give him a hot shower, a warm meal, a change of clothing and a bed for the night, but when he walks out the door, he's still the same man, unless we address the issues of the heart.*

THE ISSUES OF THE HEART. Part of what makes UGM unique in terms of homeless and recovery services in our area is our stance

on the foundational nature of the gospel. For more than 65 years, we have held firmly to our belief that it is God who heals and transforms lives. He is the only one who can change the heart, and as Albert Arend said, heart change is the key to true life change. The Bible's foremost book of wisdom states it like this: "Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it" (Proverbs 4:23). Jesus himself tied his purpose in coming to heart change: "I have not come to invite good people but sinners to change their hearts and lives."

And so, while UGM certainly wants to provide food, shelter, medical care, job training, and every resource we can to address the underlying causes of homelessness and addiction, we must not neglect the heart.

UGM's chapel service is one expression of this core value. We know that men and women, previously unaware of any spiritual need in their lives, often have their eyes opened during chapel. And with that fresh perspective of being loved and valued, with the new belief that their lives have purpose and meaning, individuals are motivated to put an end to destructive patterns of behavior and pursue recovery.

"God tells all people in the world to change their hearts and lives," (Acts 17:30). Your partnership assists people to do just that by providing holistic recovery – physical, emotional, social, intellectual and *spiritual* healing. ●



We are in the heart business.

“Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it”

– Proverbs 4:23.

THE HEART. WHAT AN IMPORTANT, COMPLICATED, MYSTERIOUS THING.

Physically, we know it's the hardest-working muscle in the body, beating 100,000 times and pumping 2,500 gallons every single day. Our lives depend upon its proper functioning.

Spiritually, the Bible uses the heart to indicate both the center of the emotions/the intellect/the personality and that which is hidden or inaccessible. It encompasses our connection with God, the spiritual, the unseen – the seat from which flow both love and trust. As is the case with the physical body, our spiritual lives depend upon its proper functioning.

Here's what we want you to know about your partnership with Union Gospel Mission: We are in the heart business. Almost to a person, the men and women coming through our doors have damaged hearts. Their sense of who they are and who God created them to be is skewed. They're suspicious and slow to trust. They're full of shame and regret.

The lies they have been told about themselves and their worth have distorted their view of the world and themselves.

Proverbs 23:7 in the King James Version reads: “As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he,” acknowledging the intimate relationship between thoughts and identity. What we as humans believe about God and His relationship to the world shapes our hearts, and our hearts shape our behavior.

Take another look at the verse at the beginning of this section: God says everything you and I do flows from our hearts – words, choices, behavior, everything. Healthy hearts spread love and joy. **Damaged hearts spread damage.**

And that's why UGM is as concerned about the heart as the body. Food and shelter are good things, but in and of themselves, they will not end homelessness. We must address the issues of the heart and offer the healing that comes from knowing Jesus Christ. The Creator of the universe sees us, loves us and gave His life so that we might live a life of meaning and purpose. That's where healing for a damaged heart begins, and that is the foundation of the Union Gospel Mission. ●



The Only Number That Matters

SOMETIMES IT'S TEMPTING TO DEFINE HOMELESSNESS, and even this ministry, by the numbers: 1,245 people on the streets. 113,447 nights of shelter. 312,593 meals. 2,710 medical clinic appointments. Numbers are important – they help to show the magnitude of the need as well as the impact you're making – but sometimes numbers tend to blur the faces.

Bill, 60, was a big man, bald, looked a bit like an old sailor. The men who knew him while he lived at UGM described him as friendly, easy to get along with, eager to help. He liked detective fiction and frequently exchanged books with another guest. Bill had a lifelong struggle with alcohol. The last time he came to the Mission he said his doctor had told him if he drank any more, he would die. Bill had a clear choice before him – drink and die or stop drinking and live. Bill chose to drink, and in August of 2012, he died on the streets of downtown Spokane.

It doesn't seem like much of a choice. Why would anyone choose death over life? Curses over blessings? It doesn't make sense. And yet, we do, in big and small ways, every single day.

Michael Dye, who wrote one of the foundational texts for our recovery programs, said that human beings are the only creatures who willingly choose self-destruction. In the Bible, Paul asks, *Why do we do what we don't want to do?* Something is terribly wrong – with our hearts.

Here's where the numbers can be dangerous. Big numbers make us start to think in the direction of sweeping solutions, but in matters of the heart, sweeping solutions won't work and the only number that matters is one. One person searching for meaning and purpose and love. One wounded heart. One God with the power to heal. ●

IN DEUTERONOMY 30, GOD SAYS: “I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now, choose life, so that you and your children may live.”



Life Transformation

I REMEMBER THE DAY VERY CLEARLY. I was a junior at Northwest Nazarene University, walking across campus...I can even tell you the spot on campus where I stood when I just said, “I’m through. I surrender to you, Lord,” and I just dropped everything. That’s the point at which my whole life changed – my focus, my career trajectory, my plans for the future. That’s when Christ became real for me, and I did “the 180,” so to speak. I set aside the things I was doing that I knew were wrong and not pleasing to God, and I decided I wanted to please Him more than anything else.

God was not new to me. I grew up in a loving, caring, Christian home. My mom was a prayer warrior. My dad modeled righteousness and hard work. I grew up in the church. We came down to the old mission as a family and conducted chapel services. But it was at that moment during my junior year of college when my faith became my own. It was no longer my parents’ faith or the religion of my childhood. My decisions, my path, began to align with my heart, and my heart was committed to following Christ.

I have often heard the counselors in the UGM recovery programs refer to their work as “re-parenting.” The parallels are clear. Christian parents strive to raise their children and give them the tools they need to move on in life. They lay a foundation. They love and forgive. They attempt to model God-dependence, a healthy marriage and conflict resolution. They set standards and teach discipline. UGM recovery programs have a similar structure. Classes and relationships are modeled on Christ-likeness.

But here’s the thing. We cannot fix anyone. Life transformation is between the person and God. Only God can change a heart, and only the individual can decide whether or not he/she wants to surrender to His great plan for their lives.

UGM provides broken people with a time out, an opportunity to start over, to develop new ways of thinking and acting, new disciplines, and we trust that, with the Lord’s strength, those new habits and tools will serve them well when they leave.

At the same time, we are encouraging them and helping them to build a support group outside of our shelters. We were not created to do life alone, and we have seen time and time again that the recovery graduates who succeed long-term are those who have built connections within the church and with other healthy, caring individuals.

Because of a generous, caring community, UGM is able to provide a foundation for people who often did not receive the love and structure they needed as children. When they leave, they build on that foundation, but they desperately need people to come alongside them as they continue in ongoing recovery. Mentors and welcoming churches are key. If you’d like to know more, I encourage you to reach out to Mike Doggett, our Aftercare Manager (mike.doggett@uniongospelmission.org).

Together, we give people the opportunity for a whole new life. ●



The Work of Recovery is the Work of Discipleship.

“Nothing teaches us about the preciousness of the Creator as much as when we learn the emptiness of everything else.” — Charles Haddon Spurgeon



Go and make disciples.

Myth: To be a person who discipled others, you have to have it all together.

Truth: No one has it all together.

Myth: Only a select group of Christians are called to disciple others.

Truth: Everyone is called to love like God loves. Everyone is called to tell the story of what God has done and is doing in his life. Put those together and you have something close to discipleship or, as one of our residents described it, “intentional, authentic relationship.”

Myth: You have to be a Bible scholar to disciple others.

Truth: When you are a lover of the Word, a lover of Christ, and a lover of other people, Christ’s love flows through you. Henrietta Mears, who had a profound impact on Billy Graham, Bill Bright (Campus Crusade), Dawson Troutman (Navigators) and Jim Rayburn (Young Life), once said: “You teach a little by what you say; you teach most by what you are.”

Discipleship is a subject near and dear to my heart – both for the impact it has had in my life and the impact I see it having on the men and women who come through our doors.

When I look back, I recognize clear times when God brought certain individuals into my life who had a profound influence, literally changing the trajectory of my future. One of the most significant was a professor I had in college. I had to take his class to graduate, and it was a tough class. Through that class, we began to meet one-on-one, and he took the time to invest in me personally.

We went together to a neighboring university, where he modeled how to share the faith and encouraged me to do the same. His influence got me excited about evangelism. I was majoring in social work at the time (which has certainly proved valuable in my life’s work), but I discovered I had a passion for sharing my faith. Seeing people grow was exciting to me. After college, I went to work for Campus Crusade, and I wrote my graduate thesis on discipleship, a process which reinforced what I already knew: **God uses relationships to change us.**

Sometimes we think this has to be some kind of magical connection, but it doesn’t. God will use you if you’re available. When you invest in another person – particularly someone who has not had that kind of investment in their life – God will use it. You may not see the impact immediately. You may not ever see it. But we are commanded to love, and we can trust God to make it count.

The Book of Matthew closes with Jesus’ command: *“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20).*

In a sense recovery is all about discipleship – investing in lives, teaching the truth, demonstrating grace and challenging people to live in a way that reflects their identity in Christ. ●



Both Kinds of Bread

THE WORD “BREAD” IS OFTEN USED AS A SYNONYM FOR SUSTENANCE. “Bread and water” describe the bare minimum given to prisoners in dungeons of old. The manna that kept the Israelites alive in the desert after they left Egypt was called “bread from heaven.” When Jesus fed the 5,000, he started with five loaves of bread and two fish. Bread, relatively easy and inexpensive to make, is considered a mainstay of the human diet, the “staff of life.”

With this idea in mind, consider Jesus’ words in John 6: *“I am the bread of life.”* Jesus is the mainstay, the sustenance without which we cannot really live.

Here at the Union Gospel Mission, we seek to hold two important Scriptural truths in balance: The first is represented by this verse from James 2: *“If one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it?”* Because of your generous support, UGM shelters provide lodging, warmth and food to more than 300 people a night. Your gifts allow our homeless guests to experience the love of Christ in tangible ways. That’s why we often say, “It all starts with a meal.”

However, it doesn’t end there. Jesus expresses the second truth in Matthew 4 when he quotes a passage from the Old Testament:

“Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”

From day one, the Union Gospel Mission has sought to provide both physical and spiritual bread. This will always be our distinctive, and it is what keeps us from accepting government funding. We want the freedom to reach the poor **with the love and power of the gospel.**

Jesus fed His followers both physically and spiritually. We are committed to doing the same. Thank you for partnering with us.

“For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world.”

– John 6:33



Why work?

“There are no secrets to success. It is the result of preparation, hard work, and learning from failure.” – Colin Powell



A Gift in Disguise

THE BEST GIFTS ARE OFTEN DISGUISED.

Growing up on a farm, there was always work to do – weeding the garden, cleaning out the barn, caring for the animals. It was just standard. You didn't think about playing until your work was done. One of my first paying jobs – and one of the toughest jobs I ever had – was hauling hay. The bales were heavy, the hours were long, but I was up to the challenge because my parents had taught me how to work. Today, I realize that was a tremendous gift.

Joblessness and homelessness are interconnected. People need money to live. If they can't find a job, they're either going to be forced to depend on others or go without. Additionally, people who have struggled with addiction issues need the tools to keep their job and personal life in balance. Otherwise, work itself can become part of the problem – driving up stress levels, damaging relationships, and increasing the desire to escape.

Work is meant to be a good gift – not a hated chore, not a consuming obsession, not a definition of personal worth. God created us for a purpose – to glorify and enjoy Him. For most of us, that involves some type of work.

“For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do,” Ephesians 2:10.

Work brings a number of rewards: a sense of being part of something bigger than ourselves; the opportunity to engage our minds, bodies, talents and skills; satisfaction in a job well done; and the ability to provide the necessities for ourselves and those we love. Our desire is for the majority of people leaving our shelters to find meaningful work, but again, the obstacles for our residents are significant. That’s why we’ve boosted our support in this area through Vocational Advancement and the Business Practicum experience.

More than 100 local businesses are already partnering with us to provide real-world job experience and training to the men and women in our Recovery programs – just one more example of this community collaborating with the Mission to impact the poor and help them become God-dependent, contributing members of society. ●



Meaningful Work

“THE BEST SOCIAL PROGRAM IS A JOB.”

I saw this quote on a reader board near the Mission recently. When I looked it up on Google, I discovered it was attributed to Ronald Reagan. The complete quote: “The best social program is a productive job for anyone who’s willing to work.”

Like a lot of quotes that are taken out of context, this one is a bit simplistic, but it makes a solid point, one I’m prepared to defend. We cannot break the cycle of homelessness in this community until we find ways to help people get back to work. Let me be clear: The solution to homelessness is complex and must involve an individualized, whole-person approach – healing for adverse childhood experiences, addiction recovery, education, counseling, medical care and support for the mentally ill – but work is a significant piece of the puzzle.

Meaningful work is part of the God-designed plan for life. I think of Ryan Brown, UGM Youth Outreach Director. Ryan came to UGM as a guest back in the 90s. He was lost, without purpose, an addict, a deadbeat dad. A staff member recognized his work stacking chairs in the dining room and affirmed him for his work ethic and positive attitude. Ryan still refers to that incident, 20+ years later, as a defining moment for him. He recognized that he had a contribution to make. And undeniably, Ryan has gone on to make a significant difference in the lives of so many

young people – first as a youth pastor and now as a trailblazer in the area of youth ministry here at UGM.

Rachael is another great example. In her youth, she was in and out of domestic violence shelters with her mom. She suffered from PTSD, depression and addiction. Even toward the end of her recovery, Rachael had no real desire to work. She didn’t have any work experience or a high school diploma. She was collecting a disability check and thought that would keep her afloat for the rest of her life, but as part of her program, she did her business practicum at a domestic violence shelter. Eventually, she was hired full-time as an advocate for women and children facing the same trauma she did as a child. She’s collecting a pay check, paying taxes and giving back. She believes passionately in what she does.

Succeeding at a job gives a person the knowledge that she has something to offer, that he can make a difference in his corner of the world.

Work is a good thing, designed by God, and with your help, UGM is helping people get back to it! ●



Good Work

THERE'S A GOOD KIND OF TIRED. You know what I mean? That kind of tired where you've put in a full day of hard, physical work. You got dirty. You sweat. And now your muscles hurt. When you finally crawl into bed, you're pretty sure you'll be asleep before your head hits the pillow. I like that kind of tired because it means I used this body God gave me to do something productive.

I've been hauling and baling hay since I was in high school. It's not what I'd call "fun," and it's certainly not easy. And yet, there's something very satisfying about looking out over a mowed field and seeing those bales, knowing that I did the work – either by myself or as part of a team.

We often talk as though the "good life" would be one where we never had to work, where we lay on a beach somewhere and had someone wait on us hand and foot. Hey, nothing wrong with a vacation once in a while, but frankly, the Bible does not describe the good life as a life of leisure.

Consider the following:

1. God Himself works. He creates. He sustains. He builds. He teaches and counsels. He heals. Genesis 2:2 says, "By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he

rested from all his work." As His image-bearers, we were also meant to work.

2. God gave humans work to do before the fall. It was part of His original design (Gen. 1:26-28).
3. The commandment to rest on the Sabbath implies that the other six days are devoted to work.
4. The Proverbs repeatedly commend hard work: "Consider the ant, you sluggard; consider her ways and be wise!" (Proverbs 6:6)

Don't get me wrong. I look forward to the weekend and a little R & R as much as the next guy, but rest and relaxation would not be meaningful or enjoyable without a steady diet of work.

Here at UGM, the reason we put a strong emphasis on work within our shelters and programs is because we know it's a part of God's design. He has equipped each of these men and women with skills and abilities, and when they discover a place where they can use those to contribute to society, they experience one of life's great joys. ●



In it Together

“I am capable of the worst sin I have seen my neighbor commit.”
(quote commonly attributed to Saint Augustine)



What do you have in common with a drug addict?

“ADDICTION” IS A STRONG WORD. Most of us probably wouldn’t use it in reference to ourselves or we’d use it in a joking manner like, “Yeah, my chocolate addiction is out of control.” Over the course of the past 30 years, however, I’ve come to see addiction in much broader terms and to recognize the commonality between the struggles I face and the struggles faced by the men and women coming through our doors.

Some people define addiction as a disease, but I think that’s too narrow because either you have it or you don’t, like diabetes or cancer. In her book, *The Last Addiction*, Sharon Hersh offers up another definition and then expands on it: “Much of the literature about addiction defines it as ‘a state of compulsion and obsession, focusing on one element that will supposedly satisfy.’ This definition is incomplete, however, because it leaves out the heart of addiction. Addiction goes deeper than obsession and compulsion. **It is worship.** It is giving my heart and soul over to something that I believe will ease my pain and provide an outlet for my fury at being out of control in a world that hurts me, scares me or leaves me alone.”

Who hasn’t been angry about what we can’t control? Who hasn’t been hurt or scared and wanted to turn to someone/something other than God to ease the pain? Who hasn’t sought happiness in a book or a movie, work or a tub of ice cream? Maybe not all the time. Maybe we’re not obsessed. But you can see the attraction...and the connection to the

people we would traditionally label as “addicts.”

We are all tempted to seek pleasure, joy and relief from pain in behaviors and objects that cannot ultimately satisfy, and their failure to satisfy only drives us either to try harder or to seek escape. To paraphrase Hersh, my addiction makes everything better until it makes everything worse.

The other way in which our struggles mirror those of addicts is the end result: shame. When we indulge in fantasy or overeat or work excessive hours, we usually end up feeling worse about ourselves, not better. And to silence that shame, we delve deeper into our addiction. It’s a never-ending cycle of destruction, and James shows us the way out: “Confess your [struggles/addictions/mistakes] to each other and pray for each other, so that you may be healed.”

Friends, set a goal for the months ahead to find someone to whom you can confess and be completely honest, someone who will hold you accountable without judging you. Build for yourself the same kind of environment we are working to create for our guests. You recognize what wounded people need and have come alongside UGM to wrap them in safe-and-healing, loving environments. Consider doing the same for yourself. ●



Where Grace Gets in

RECOVERY PERTAINS TO ALL OF US BECAUSE WE'RE ALL BROKEN. Maybe that brokenness isn't readily apparent. You've never experienced the physical anguish of withdrawal, never seen your life fall to pieces before your eyes, never known the desperation of being unable to feed your children or never had doubts about where you're going to sleep at night. I'm still confident of your brokenness. Why? Because it's what happened during the fall. Our relationship with God was broken. Our relationship with others was broken. Our relationship with ourselves was broken.

To understand our brokenness is to understand our flesh and our inclination to find our identity in something other than the God who created us. I mentioned Sharon Hersh's book, *The Last Addiction*, in the last section. Here's another great quote: *"We all risk trying to soothe the deep cravings of our souls by our own efforts."* Whether those efforts take the form of discipline and hard work, thrill seeking, performance, the pursuit of pleasure or something else, our goal is generally the approval of men, rather than God.

Personally, I am susceptible to defining myself by my work. It feels good to be the executive director of the Union Gospel Mission because people tend to value and esteem me in this role, but what would my identity be if I wasn't the head of this organization? I would still be a child of God. Christ living in me would still be what defines me. But sometimes, like the people who come through our doors, I forget that.

We all fail. We get hurt. We're disappointed, and rather than run to the God of all comfort, we turn to something temporal – food, more work, better performance, drugs, alcohol, pornography . . . then we feel ashamed of our behavior and we hide. But there is no healing in isolation. Healing comes through healthy relationships – with the God who loves us unconditionally and with His children who reflect that love.

Recovery is about bringing our longings, our failures and our disappointments out into the open and discovering that *"wounds, no matter how painful or unsightly, are where Love gets in with the healing gifts of mercy and forgiveness"* (Hersh). I am realizing that the more I understand recovery, the more I understand God's grace. ●

For more on the subject of recovery, these books might interest you:

The Last Addiction by Sharon Hersh
Search for Significance by Robert McGee



Perfectionism is the Enemy of Recovery

WHEN IT COMES TO FAILURE, THE QUESTION IS NOT IF BUT WHEN. We all fail. Every. Single. Day. Sometimes those failures are the result of taking healthy risks. We tried something new and the learning curve was steeper than we expected, so we failed. But sometimes, we knowingly, willfully choose to do the wrong thing. We break resolutions. We fall back into old habits. We believe a lie and act on it. We forget that God loves us, so we fret and worry and scheme. Some of these failures hurt us. Some of them hurt those around us, quite often the people we love most. All of them hurt God.

Relapse is a particular kind of failure – a returning to old methods of comfort or escape that the person long ago recognized as destructive – but it's not exclusive to addicts. When I'm being completely honest, I have to admit that I'm all too familiar with relapse. We have all used something other than God to bring us the meaning, the sense of well-being, the joy that only God can provide. When, after experiencing the love of Christ, we return to those things, that's relapse.

I know what it is to walk in the peace and confidence that come from obeying God, but I also know what it feels like to stray from that path. It can be as easy as slipping on an old shoe, one formed to the shape of my foot because I'm the one who formed it. I don't always recognize it immediately, but in time, the peace is gone, the confidence is gone, and

I realize I've relapsed into old patterns of behavior. The truly important piece of this discussion is this: *What do I do next?*

I have a few options, right? 1) Pretend it's no big deal. Everyone messes up. I just need to try harder. 2) Hide my mistakes. Cover them up. All the while continuing in the same wrong direction. 3) Stop and confess. Seek help from the people who love and care about me. Ask someone to hold me accountable.

Friends, I think we can make it easier to choose #3 by being a community of grace, by not expecting perfection from each other, by being quick to forgive. People who confess their failures are saying, *Hey, I messed up, but I don't want to stay stuck in my old ways. I want to change, and I need your help.*

When we expect each other to be perfect, we encourage each other to hide, to cover up, to pretend. When we acknowledge our own weaknesses and failures, we create an environment where others can be honest and ask for help. People in ongoing recovery need environments like that. We all do. ●



Righteousness and Mercy Kiss

“Whoever pursues righteousness and love finds life, prosperity and honor.”

Proverbs 21:21



Equal Measures

I HAVE AN ANTIQUE BRASS LEVEL SITTING IN MY OFFICE where I will see it frequently and be reminded of the importance of balancing two essential components of the gospel: grace and truth.

Jesus Christ is the gospel, the good news, and John 1:14 tells us that he “came full of grace and truth.” We are often tempted to emphasize one over the other or to think of grace as the good bit and truth as the hard pill that must be swallowed with a generous spoonful of grace. But Scripture paints a completely different picture. Jesus himself says that He is the way, **the truth** and the life and promises that the truth will set us free.

Consider the story of Christ’s encounter with the woman at the well in Samaria. He knows the **truth** of her life and speaks it: “You have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband.” There’s no need for her to pretend to be something she is not. Christ knows **the truth** and that makes his *grace*-full offer of living water all the more meaningful. When the woman shares her experience with the other townspeople, she says: “He told me everything I ever did.” She is fully known (truth) and loved (grace).

Occasionally, I’ll take the level from my office on speaking engagements to make the point that when we get truth and grace out of balance, a distorted picture of the Christian walk results, and we risk building

on a skewed foundation. Specifically with regard to rescue and recovery, truth without grace translates into shame and encourages outward compliance without inner transformation. Grace without truth diminishes personal responsibility and makes people dependent. Both errors obscure the beauty of the gospel: God knows you completely (the good, the bad and the ugly) and loves you unconditionally. When you believe and trust in Him, He promises to work in you, change you, make you more like Him.

The good news is the best news when we realize that Jesus Christ is the perfect marriage between grace and truth.

“Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other,” Psalm 85:10.

Please pray for us here at the Union Gospel Mission that we will keep that level balanced and build on a solid foundation – being honest with each other, holding up the mirror of Scripture, confessing our sins, forgiving one another, and reflecting the love of Christ in grace and truth. ●



Love and Power

“WHAT THE WORLD NEEDS NOW IS LOVE, SWEET LOVE.”*

We couldn't agree more, but not the wimpy, conditional love the world has to offer – not love based on performance, celebrity, looks or birthright, not love that ebbs and flows based on feelings. The world needs the unconditional love of Jesus Christ, love with the power to turn hearts of stone into hearts of flesh, love with the power to erase shame and self-hatred, love with the power to bring a person into right relationship with his/her Creator, love with the power to turn enemies into sons and daughters.

“No not just for some but for everyone.”

Jesus came that everyone – the poor, the rich, the downtrodden, the rebellious, the prideful, the felon – might experience this big, powerful love; discover who he/she was meant to be; turn from a life devoted to self and grasp hold of a meaningful relationship with God.

This love message is the gospel at the center of our name – Union Gospel Mission – and the core of our purpose statement: “...to reach the poor with the love and power of the gospel.”

Love and Power. As I write this, the snow melt and rain have made the Spokane River at the park outside our door as high as I can ever

remember it being. Its power is perhaps most evident when you stand at the Monroe Street Falls where 42,843 cubic feet (or 321,000 gallons) of water are rushing past every second, generating up to 14.8 megawatts of electricity, enough to power 11,100 homes.

The Bible likens the Holy Spirit to a mighty river who generates the power to transform lives, and it has been my privilege to witness that power at work every day for the past 30-plus years. When a person entrusts his life to Jesus, he receives the gift of the Holy Spirit and begins to change from the inside out.

The gospel brings you, me and the guests who walk through our doors face to face with Jesus, and in His face we find, not the condemnation we expect, but love and forgiveness. We find a sense of belonging and purpose, and through the gift of the Holy Spirit, we find the power to live a life that pleases Him.

The Union Gospel Mission is committed to keeping the gospel at the center of everything we do.

What the world needs now is love – the powerful love of the gospel. ●

*lyrics by Hal David, ©1965

Compassion and Accountability

AFTER 30+ YEARS IN HOMELESS MINISTRY, you'd think I would have it all figured out, that I could coast along to retirement. I'm chuckling at the thought. No doubt, I've learned a lot over the years, but one of the things I love about this job is that I'm still learning. Every single day.

Right now, I'm wrestling and praying over what appear to be two conflicting themes in Scripture: compassion and accountability. As you've most likely heard me say time and time again, God commands us to love the poor. Here at UGM, that is our clear purpose. But what does that purpose look like translated into everyday activities?

Certainly, it looks like providing meals, clothing, shelter and medical care. I John 3:17 says, *"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?"* No ambiguity there.

James says something similar: *"Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it?"*

Jesus himself is quoted in rescue missions throughout the country: *"Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me." He praises people for feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless and visiting prisoners.*

Everything seems pretty clear so far, right? But now consider these words from Paul: *"For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: 'The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat.'" In admonishing the thief, he says, "He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing good with his own hands, that he may have something to share with the one in need."* (Ephesians 4:28)

And this, again from Jesus: *"It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"*

Scripture says to love the poor and give to them freely. It also says that work is good and the goal is to become a giver, not a taker only. It calls us to share the gospel along with the tomato soup and grilled cheese. And the message of repentance and change runs from Genesis to Revelation.

The book, *Toxic Charity* by Robert Lupton, has challenged me recently. Lupton says that much of charitable giving "is either wasted or actually harms the people it is targeted to help." He argues that repeated handouts to people capable of helping themselves creates dependency and diminishes dignity.

I hope you are beginning to see my heart and why we here at UGM are wrestling with these issues. I would encourage you to consider these questions along with me: What is "need"? What is enablement? What does it look like to believe in a person, to bring out his/her God-given talents and all that God created that person to be? When does helping actually hurt?

I end where I began. Without all the answers, but standing on a few fundamentals: UGM has always existed to meet both physical and spiritual needs. We unashamedly proclaim the gospel along with making beds and ladling soup. The end goal for us is to see a person return to society as a God-dependent, contributing member. Please pray for us as we seek to hold and balance these challenging truths. ●



It Takes a Community.

“The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness
and the world’s deep hunger meet.” – Frederick Buechner



Partnering with the Inland Northwest

IN 2010, UGM LEADERSHIP UNDERTOOK THE MONUMENTAL TASK OF creating our first strategic plan. We started by taking a hard look at our purpose statement: Was it accurate? Did it clearly define who we are, what we do? And after some serious thought, we decided there was an important piece missing: partnership. That's when we added that initial phrase: *"Partnering with the Inland Northwest..."*

We recognized that our purpose statement needed to reflect what we all knew to be true: UGM could not exist without you. Every single thing we do is dependent upon a supportive, compassionate community who gives generously of their time, talent and treasure.

Because sharing the gospel without restriction is a high priority, UGM does not accept any government funding. 85% of our revenue comes from individuals like you. You give cash and stocks and cars. You shop at the UGM Thrift Stores and have your car serviced at UGM Motors. You ask and respond to our top needs. From one boy's prize turkey to two tons of chicken breasts, you give generously and sacrificially.

Our partnership, however, goes way beyond financial support. More than 1,000 volunteers serve throughout this ministry. From fundraising swimmers to dermatologists, from outdoorsmen to IT specialists, you give your unique skills to provide opportunities for people you don't even know.

A partnership can't exist for long though if the giving is all one way, so we are always delighted to hear from partners who have been blessed by the experience of giving their time, talent and treasure.

Shirley volunteered as a mentor and was delighted to find out she had a valuable contribution to make. "I thought maybe I was over the hill too far, but they assured me, no, there's a need for women of all ages and walks of life." Shirley's life has been enriched by participating in meaningful ministry, and I hear that story over and over again. People dip their toe in the water and end up being so blessed by the experience that they dive all the way in. It's a living example of the principle in Luke 6: "Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over."

So, I say again, we are partners. You are moved to care for the less fortunate. That's been UGM's bread and butter for 65 years. Together we "reach the poor with the love and power of the gospel so they may become God-dependent, contributing members of society." And we are all blessed in the process. ●

There is always hope.

WE HAVE BEEN USING THE SLOGAN “HOPE STARTS HERE” for years now, and I’ve always thought I got it, but after I took a business trip to a major metropolitan area, I began to see that phrase in a whole new way.

Almost from the moment I stepped off the plane in this city, I felt the oppression: Garbage-strewn streets. Graffiti everywhere. The lawn at one of the charter schools was two-feet high; it hadn’t been mowed all summer. 40,000 vacant homes. Countless businesses boarded up, windows broken out. Unemployment sky high. Men and women sitting on stoops and curbs in the middle of the day all over the city. I thought to myself, it’s hopeless. Why would anyone invest a penny in this situation? How is it ever going to get better?

Then it hit me – that’s what many of the men and women coming through our doors feel like. There’s too much damage, too many hurdles. It’s never going to get better. Turning their lives around seems like an insurmountable task. Why try? They have no hope.

The problem of homelessness in general is similarly daunting. Let’s say you build enough affordable housing for every homeless person in the Inland Northwest. Would it solve the problem? Would they be able to pay their rent? Do they have the skills to get a job? Did they finish high school? If you give them money, do they have the skills to manage that money? Do they have felonies preventing them from getting housing and employment? If they can get a job, is it going to pay enough for child care? Is their driver’s license suspended? If they have mental health issues, do they have access to the care and medication they need?

Homelessness is a big, complicated problem, and generally, the deeper you go, the more complicated it gets.

But the message for the city I visited, the people who come through our doors, and us as a community facing the formidable problem of homelessness is the same: **There is hope** because we serve a mighty God for whom nothing is impossible.

The Bible tells the story of an exiled people coming back to a city in far worse shape than the one I mentioned above. Jerusalem’s walls had been broken down by their Babylonian conquerors and its gates destroyed by fire. It lay in ruin, but Nehemiah prayed and fasted and entreated God to let him be part of rebuilding the city he loved. And God answered.

The most encouraging part of this story for me is the way he answered. It wasn’t magical. He didn’t send a troop of stone masons and builders. He used ordinary members of the community – each one working on his own small section of the wall – side by side by side. Chapter 3 is full of the phrase “and next to him...” as it lists the people and groups who made repairs. I especially like this line in verse 8: “And next to him, Hananiah, one of the perfumers, made repairs.” I’m guessing, as a perfumer, Hananiah didn’t know a whole lot about construction.

We have to look at homelessness, life change, city restoration, in bite-sized pieces. We break the cycle and change the culture one person, one mom, one dad, one child, one family at a time. And, as we see God work, we are changed as well. We gain excitement. We look forward to what He’s going to do next. Hope is renewed. ●



Charity That Works

SPOKANE IS AN EXTREMELY COMPASSIONATE CITY, giving generously to a variety of charities working to care for those on the fringes of our society. I am grateful to live in a community where those who have been blessed freely share what they have with those who are hurting.

The Union Gospel Mission operates on the principle that each individual is created in the image of God and has the potential to live a meaningful life, something much better than mere survival on the street.

To bring about real change, we must address the problem of homelessness at its roots: family breakdown, substance abuse, mental illness, joblessness and a lack of affordable housing. And we must ask ourselves repeatedly if what we're doing is working.

- Are we reducing homelessness?
- Are people returning to society as contributing members?
- What are the measurable outcomes of our efforts?

Providing food and shelter is a great first step, but as a standalone, it can also lead to dependence and erode personal responsibility. Poverty is more than a lack of money; it is a belief that one cannot take care of oneself and must depend on others to do so. As Robert Lupton says in his book, *Toxic Charity*, "When we do for those in need what they have the capacity to do for themselves, we disempower them."

Since President Lyndon Johnson declared "an unconditional war on poverty" in 1964, the US government has spent \$22 trillion on anti-poverty programs, according to The Heritage Foundation.

In addition to government spending, individuals give a mind-boggling amount to charity. According to the National Philanthropic Trust, Americans gave \$373 billion in 2015, more than \$1 billion a day; \$45 billion to human services. After all this spending, the impact on the poverty rate has been minimal.

Locally, Spokane citizens give an average of 4.7% of their annual income to charity, as reported in the *Chronicle of Philanthropy*, for a total of \$148,267,676. And yet, last year's Point-in-Time Count revealed an increase in the number of homeless individuals.

As the leader of a local nonprofit working with the poor, I take these numbers very seriously. America is a generous country. Spokane is a generous city. People are entrusting us with a significant portion of their hard-earned money. We must be accountable— not just for the temporary relief of immediate suffering but for long-term change.

I'll be the first one to admit that we've had varying levels of success over the past 66 years. Homelessness is a complicated problem, and each homeless individual has a unique history. There are no quick fixes, which

is why it's critical that local government and nonprofits serving the same population work together and not duplicate efforts. Each of us must find our niche and continually measure our effectiveness.

Here's where UGM has discovered we can make the biggest impact: 1) share the life-changing news of the gospel; 2) holistic healing for the trauma that often underlies addiction; combined with 3) job training and employment readiness.

Recent research with regard to Adverse Childhood Experiences has borne out what those of us in social services have sensed for a long time: Individuals who suffer childhood trauma are more inclined to self-destructive behavior. The greater and more frequent the trauma, the greater the tendency toward self-destruction in adulthood.

Recovery must go beyond
sobriety to whole-person healing,
addressing the causes of the
addiction, not just the symptoms.

Hurt by people, addicts often isolate when what they actually need is a community where they are loved and accepted.

Meaningful work goes hand in hand with recovery. In 2017, 186 men and women left UGM for jobs. People need to see that they have something valuable to offer the world. Too often, homeless individuals have been treated as though they are stupid and worthless. Something as simple as a chore well done begins to combat that false belief. A paycheck is important, but the value of a job extends beyond the financial. Meaningful work brings dignity and self-respect.

Having served on the board of the Association of Gospel Rescue Missions and as president of the Northwest District Conference, I've visited cities and homeless shelters all over the country. Cities with permissive policies toward street living, such as Seattle and Portland, have seen the number of homeless individuals increase and budget demands rise significantly.

As I said at the outset, Spokane is a fantastic community that gives generously to help those in need. Those of us who have been entrusted with those funds have a responsibility to honor their investment by asking the tough questions about what's working and having the courage to change what's not. ●

What I Know

I am the man I am in large part due to the influences of other people in my life. (So often, our residents come from broken and damaged homes.) My father was a man who exuded love and acceptance. My mother was a prayer warrior. Together, they were formidable in their passion for the poor and hurting. For most of my childhood, I remember coming to the Mission on a monthly basis to do the chapel service. Later, after I had left for college, both my parents gave up enjoyable careers, my dad became the director, and they moved into an apartment at the old Mission. By example, they taught me that we do not exist merely for ourselves. We exist to impact the lives of other people. Along that journey, however, we need the care and loving kindness of others. For 37 years, I have been blessed and encouraged by the support of my wife, Caryl. The stability and love she provides for me and our four children makes it possible to spend my life in service to others.

Homelessness can happen to anyone. My father had five sons, and he used to say, “Any of these homeless men could’ve been one of my boys.” I carry that perspective with me. We can all be wounded. We can all make bad choices. Over the years, I have seen men with whom I went to grade school, high school and college walk through the doors of the Mission needing help. Successful businessmen, professionals, children from good, solid families, college graduates – no one is immune.

Forgiveness is the most powerful gift a person can either give or receive. Over and over, I’ve seen it release people from bondage and

facilitate healing. Eddie and his wife, Kim, are a great example. Eddie chose meth and the party life over Kim and their four children, but when Eddie started to turn his life around in the Mission’s recovery program, Kim forgave him and patiently stood by him – allowing Eddie the time to work on his addiction and holding the family together on her own. Ten years later, Eddie is clean and sober, their family is reunited, Eddie owns his own painting business, and Kim says she has the husband she always knew Eddie could be.

I have my dream job. Every day I get to participate in a work that is dear to the heart of God. Every day I witness the miracle of heart change. And every day, I am surrounded by a small army of people – staff, volunteers, board members, investors – who share the same vision, passion and dedication for helping the poor.

We know God loves people like Earl. An alcoholic, Earl lost his job, walked away from his family and spent 25 years drunk and homeless, traveling from one city to another. But God took hold of Earl’s life while he was staying at the Union Gospel Mission, and he began to do the hard work of change. His son, meanwhile, had been faithfully carrying Earl’s picture in his wallet all those years, longing to reconnect with his dad. When Earl went to meet him at the airport, he had to hold up a sign with his name so his son would know who he was, and in his son’s embrace, he was overcome by the love and forgiveness he received. Every day, in big and small ways, I see lives transformed and families restored. ●

My closing words must be those of overwhelming gratitude. God has been very good to me. It is by His grace that I am where I am today. He has directed my steps and given me the privilege of serving the poor in the midst of an amazing community. I am grateful.



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