

AUGUST 2024

GATEWAY

RESCUE MISSION



INSIDE JACKSON'S
HOMELESS CAMPS

OUR MISSION *To offer life changing hope through the Gospel of Jesus Christ to men, women, and children through programs to deliver food, shelter, counseling and discipleship*



FROM THE DIRECTOR

"Some want to live within the sound of church or chapel bell. I want to run a rescue shop within a yard of hell."

– C.T. Studd



REX BAKER

I often get asked a difficult question. "Rex, what about these homeless people living in the woods near my neighborhood or business?" I got tired of having to stammer out speculative answers and decided to find out for myself. So, we recently took a Gateway ministry team out to some of the homeless camps in Jackson. We delivered water, snacks, and prayers to folks living in tents. Some of our Gateway staff have previously done this, but I had never tagged along.

What I saw cannot be unseen. In a camp under an I-20 bridge in Jackson, we met Kelo and LeAnn. "I was in prison for 17 years and I got out and met her (LeAnn). I've been helping her and she helps me. I love that lady and she loves me," says Kelo. LeAnn says she grew up in Alabama. "I grew up with another identity. I've been out here for about 12 years. I chose this. I got to meet some of the girls and guys in the streets and I felt it was a calling for me to help them", says LeAnn.

At a nearby tent, we met Mark and Rose. Mark tinkers on bicycles and appeared to have a job of sorts. Rose claimed to be a musician from Denver and was clearly high, probably on crystal-meth. One thing that struck me was how open they were to talking with us once they realized we were there to help.

At a different location, I met DeWayne and Melissa. DeWayne said "Brother Rex, I remember you. I used to come to the mission years ago." He began to tear up and talked about a bad hip that needed medical attention. Melissa had no teeth and also became emotional. We gave them water and snacks and I prayed with them. As I prayed, they each took my hand and Melissa kissed my hand. Folks, that blew me away.

I'm a sinner saved by grace and am not sharing this to

brag. I'm sharing this to show that many of these people are starved of any type of human affection or touch, as we can so easily view them as modern-day lepers.

Homelessness is no longer a problem in the bad part of town. Camps don't exist just in California. Right here at home, an alternate universe exists of incomprehensible third-world squalor in little camps right under our noses. Incredibly, many of these people see their lives as normal, at least as they define normal.

At still another location, we handed out snacks and water to Brandy and Katy, who eyed us suspiciously and didn't say much. Later, our ministry team of New Life Program graduates reflected on how fortunate they are to have a clean, safe place to stay and good food.

Most of these people won't tell you the truth on the first visit about why they are homeless. Some make up stories to gain sympathy and help, such as a malnourished woman with signs of drug use who told us with a flat stomach and a straight face that she was seven months pregnant.

That same woman had "John 15:13" tattooed on her arm. In this verse, Jesus says "Greater love has no one that this, that one lay down his life for his friends." God's ways are much deeper than mine. The blood of Jesus and the grace of God extend to those living in tents, under the bridge, or tucked away one block from a route I travel daily.

I believe if Jesus came to Jackson today, He'd be down there under that bridge with Kelo, LeAnn, Mark, and Rose. However, I learned from our ministry trip that broken though we are, when we step out in faith under that bridge near us, we may be the closest thing to Jesus someone will see today. And if we don't go, who will?

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rex M. Baker". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rex Baker
Executive Director
Gateway Rescue Mission

VISIT GATEWAYMISSION.ORG
FOR MORE INFORMATION ON HOW
YOU CAN HELP SOMEONE TODAY



Homeless Camp Ministry Tips

- Do not go into any encampment alone. Take a small team of people with you. 2-4 people is a good number. Remember, Paul had Silas, Jesus had the disciples, and even the Lone Ranger had Tonto.
- Stay in an open area where you can be seen from the street.
- When you arrive, announce loudly “we’re with a ministry team.” For us, we announce “we’re with Gateway Rescue Mission” several times before entering an area. “We’ve got water if y’all need it” is a great attention-getter in these summer months.
- Give the folks a few minutes to respond. They may be inside their tents and a bit nervous about strangers showing up.
- Introduce yourself using your first name. “Hi, I’m Rex, what’s your name?” Exchanging names brings a human element to the interaction. In that moment, you are both on equal footing. (If possible, ask for their real name, not their street name.)
- Do not take pictures with your phone without first asking for permission.
- Do not give out your personal contact information or address.
- Take along a few cases of bottled water, snacks, hygiene supplies, etc. to give out.

- Do not promise things you cannot deliver.
- Do not try to rescue them from their situation.
- Do be ready to express kindness and God’s love in the moment.
- Do be willing and ready to pray with people. You don’t have to be Saint Francis of Assisi to effectively pray with someone. Your simple, heartfelt prayer will do just fine.

Here we show a few pictures of homeless camp life. Remember that what we see as squalid living conditions, some people call home. Shown here is Jeremy, one of our ministry team members, talking with Rose. Brad, our Program Coordinator and animal lover, can be seen petting a dog tied up at one of the tents. Yes, homeless people have pets too.



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Ministry to the homeless can take different forms. While we are still serving three meals a day and offering shelter to the homeless each night this summer, we realize that not all homeless people will choose to stay in a shelter. Pictured here, you can see Brad giving Mark some snacks at his tent. At another location, "Pop" shows us bite marks on his arm from bugs and asks if we have any bug spray. (We didn't have bug spray, but learned that we need it for future trips.)

I want to thank all of you who support our ministry at Gateway Rescue Mission. Your support does a lot of things. It helps buy food for the hungry, pay the light bill, provide water for homeless people, pay our insurance, and gas up our vehicles. Most of all, your prayers and support help shine the light of Jesus into dark places. Thank you!!



CURRENT NEEDS

- **Hygiene packets for people in homeless camps.** This can include hand sanitizer, body wipes, garbage bags, etc. (think of what you'd need if you went camping for a week.)
- **Bug spray, insect repellent, or whatever you wish to call it.** People living outside need it.
- **Anti-bacterial creams** for body sores.
- **Hydrocortisone cream** for skin rashes.
- **Sunscreen lotion.** We do have requests for this during the summer.
- **Ziploc bags** for hygiene packets.
- **Dry cat and dog food** for the pets in the camps.

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