

Homelessness

By [John Frame](#)

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Homelessness is poverty at its worst. I do not believe Christians should be concerned about poverty as a mere “gap between rich and poor.” Rather, Christians should be concerned when people don’t have the essentials of life: food, clothing, housing, health care. We have discussed world hunger in the outline. Health care is somewhat relative to culture. Nakedness is not a world problem. But homelessness, and its growing visibility, is a major concern.

There are different causes for homelessness. Some are homeless by choice, and that fact must not be overlooked. This choice may be a perfectly rational one. One student who attended Westminster during an August term years ago decided to live in his car while he was here. With the money he saved on rent, he joined a health club, where he had a locker for some belongings and facilities for bathing and so on.

Others are homeless for equally rational, but less admirable reasons. My wife and I invited four otherwise homeless people to stay with us for a while several years ago. All of these could have had homes elsewhere, had they been willing to live a “straight life.” They had preferred to get into drugs and various illegalities, and therefore could not return to their families. Now they were trying to turn their lives around with the help of God, and we were led to help them do this. I do believe that many of the homeless are homeless because they have rejected the values of families and others who care for them.

Another cause for homelessness is government policy. Rent control laws have, ironically, caused a shortage of housing in many places. Such laws discourage new rental housing and drive up the cost of home ownership. Other laws similarly affecting the housing market are zoning regulations, environmental and appearance regulations, and other building codes. Whether or not these laws are necessary to valid social goals, they do adversely affect the housing market, and Christians should take an interest in such things as part of their concern for the homeless.

Another cause is poverty as such which, of course, itself has many causes, governmental and otherwise. George Grant’s books offer some valuable suggestions for churches that seek to make an impact upon the problem at this level. Work, training and evangelization make a large impact here. The traditional “Rescue Mission” has a legitimate place here, and I certainly applaud the

compassion and courage of these ministries over many decades. But more helpful is the sort of institution which offers to the converted homeless job training, counseling and accountability, with the goal of a comprehensive change in lifestyle. Churches themselves can carry on this sort of ministry up to a point; but there is a need for cooperative efforts among churches to deal with the magnitude of the problem today.

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