

The Greatest Thanksgiving Ever



One of our Board members was asked recently, 'How do you gauge your success with the ministry? How do you know you are making an impact with the homeless population you serve?' The confirmation to the above question is in the following events which happened this Thanksgiving Day. You see, God measures success differently than the world does.

I woke up to a broken cell phone and the repair stores were all closed; Manna of Life's communication had broken down. Proof that God was about to move in a way that only he can. Those of us in ministry understand how even though the Devil is already defeated, he always tries to disrupt God's plan any chance he gets.

Twelve vehicles arrived at Fellowship Chapel Church to prepare 200 multi-cultural Thanksgiving Day meals to be distributed throughout the colonies and shelters homeless people call home. Our caravan of cars arrived at 'The Garage' or 'The Brick Yards,' as most homeless in the area call it. There they were, 4 homeless people staring at 12 vehicles, 40 strong and carrying enough food to feed a small army. I love this moment because it gives me the chance to say, 'Wow you guys must have been praying pretty hard because look at what God has sent just for you.' I say this every year and most people are tired of hearing it. Nevertheless, it's my way of saying, God hasn't forgotten you. We took a group picture with our 4 lone homeless friends and 40 volunteers and then headed to our next location, The Living Room, a drop-in center for the homeless.



The Living Room rents a small area in a huge building that used to be the Penny Factory. The parking lot is also big enough to fit our caravan. We waited in the lot trying to decide weather we would serve the food outside or in the facility. Then with no warning, barreling through the entrance came what looked to be a fire truck with blaring sirens and lights. When I looked closer it seemed to be the Red Cross. I was wrong on both counts, it was the Salvation Army. I felt intimidated by the awesomeness of the moment and decided to direct everyone inside before I embarrassed myself or the ministry. When we walked in, the clients were having breakfast that some other organization had brought to them. We determined that we should pass out the food we brought and some handmade scarves that were sent to us from Mississippi.

I made my way around the tables saying hello to clients I was accustomed to seeing. Suddenly, I saw someone who has been the longest lasting resident of a place we call 'The Black Hole,' a rat infested place under the highway next to the Bronx River. I knew him as Junior. He had lived in and out of The Black Hole as long as Manna of Life has existed as a ministry, which is currently 13 years. Junior looked healthy, clean and sober, for the first time in the 13 years that I have known him. I hugged him and felt that I was

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holding on to tangible evidence that there is success in this God driven ministry. Junior and I tried covering over a decade of experiences in a few short minutes. I asked how he was doing and he said he was drug free and had his own apartment. He decided to come to The Living Room because he knew Manna would be there. He wanted to thank us. He went on to say, 'I wish I would of listened to you guys years ago.'

I thought this is the time to ask the big question. 'Junior, how in the world did you live under the bridge with all those rats, by the freezing water, all alone, for all those years?' I had been homeless myself but I could never have lived their, not even for one day. Junior gave me this response, 'I ask myself the same question when I walk by that area. The only answer I can give you is the demons that drugs kept in my mind blinded me.'

While I was talking to Junior one of our volunteers informed me that the Salvation Army had come in. One of their staff mentioned how he was once also homeless and a client at The Living Room. I quickly walked towards him. When I approached I noticed the Salvation Army wool hat and jacket which displayed the organization's name. I looked at his face and remembered him from The Brick Yards. He looked like he could have done an Ivory Soap commercial. He stood erect as a soldier. He was also clean as the Board of Health (as we say when someone is drug free). He also had his own apartment.

This seemed like a dream come true. We made a prayer circle and I grabbed the hands of both these miracles. God wasn't finished yet, He wanted me to declare His victory to everyone in that room. I felt that familiar feeling of God draping His holiness all around us. It made me cry with happiness. I honestly don't remember what I said, I just remember hugging my two miracle brothers and watching Junior cry too. Truly, I believe this was the Greatest Thanksgiving ever.

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