

Friends,

Thank you in advance for taking the time to read this long newsletter. Try as I might, but this month I need a lot of words to communicate the situation we are in and what we can do about it.

When thinking about homelessness it is helpful to answer the following **change** questions:

- Can people **change**?
- What do we do when people don't want to **change**?
- How do we respond when people can't **change**?

These questions are at the crux of the homeless challenges, not only locally, but across the state and nation as well. And the way these questions are answered typically falls into two opposing camps: **Housing First** and **Safer City**. It is important to understand these two approaches so we can truly understand how to think about the problem within a Christian world view that helps us respond in a God-glorifying way.

Housing First: This approach is referred to by its detractors as the *Homeless Industrial Complex* (a) because it has turned homelessness into a government funded industry that carries out its ideologically driven public policies. Our President's *All in Plan* (b) that I wrote about last month, and our new Governor's *Homeless State of Emergency* (c) are both exclusively **Housing First** policies on steroids. Our Governor's *Homeless State of Emergency* plans on spending at least \$130 million in state taxpayer dollars to get 1,200 people, some Oregon transplants, off the streets at a cost of more than \$100,000 per person.(d)

When our Governor presented this *Homeless State of Emergency* she stated, "This is a man-made disaster. This is a humanitarian crisis." (e) I agree with her statement, but our conclusions about how those things happened are worlds apart.

This *man-made disaster* was created at least in part by **Housing First** policies in the first place. The problem is a polemic one and these policies actually get in the way of healthy, creative, local community solutions that rely on the entire community's assets, including proven, faith-based ones, rather than a one size fits all approach to the problem.

Housing First sounds fine at first because most sensible people don't think it is a good idea to have people living on the streets, parks, and public spaces. But this approach has ultimately created much of the disaster we are dealing with today because it incentivizes people to live in poverty instead of breaking free from it. At the same time, it disincentivizes and even demoralizes people that try to break free from poverty and enslavement to entitlements. These housing policies are a true example of hurting people instead of helping, and when they do that, it is a *man-made humanitarian crisis*.

Recent history testifies that **Housing First** strategies have had detrimental effects on communities throughout our state. As fictional character Sherlock Holmes once said, "It is a capital mistake to theorize before one has data. Insensibly one begins to twist facts to suit theories, instead of theories to suit facts." (f)



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It doesn't take a Sherlock Holmes investigation to realize that **Housing First** is a *capital mistake*. The data from the *State of Emergency* itself states that unsheltered homelessness in Oregon has increased by 50% from 2017-2022 while funding exclusive **Housing First** strategies. If you think that's bad, the data from Jackson County paints a much grimmer picture. Homelessness has increased by 132% during that same period of time.(g)

In addition to that, graphic stories of violent crime committed by homeless individuals have riddled the headlines

as of late. Two disturbing violent stories within the past month effected the young and the old citizens of Oregon. In Portland a homeless women pushed a three-year-old child onto the metro train tracks [h] and a recently relocated homeless man chewed off part of a 78 year old mans face in Gresham. [i] Violent crime is not just limited to Portland. In Medford, a local homeless man was recently sentenced for a brutal hammer attack committed on the Bear Creek greenway. [j]

On a federal level, during the last administration, the USICH concluded that exclusive **Housing First** policies do not work. *"Despite significant increases in funding and beds, overall homelessness has been increasing in the United States. The federal government's policy shift in 2013 to prioritizing housing first as a one-size-fits-all approach has not worked to reduce homelessness for all populations and communities. Policies that do not address the real root causes of homelessness combined with high housing costs in over-regulated markets have exacerbated the homelessness condition in America."* (k)

At least three longstanding think tanks are pressing to change government policy because according to them **Housing First** just doesn't work. *Given that hundreds of localities have adopted Housing First, one might have expected at least a handful of examples of communities where Housing First has eliminated or drastically reduced homelessness in a manner noticeable to the broader public. That has not been the case. (l) There was once some hope that housing alone could help reduce drug use and mental health problems. Yet studies have now shown that simply providing people subsidized housing does not reduce drug use, and often encourages it. (m) Federal government forbids taxpayer funding for any homeless housing assistance project that requires anything in return from participants. For example, taxpayer-funded housing programs cannot require recipients to stop taking drugs—which is often the reason they are homeless in the first place. Nor can a program require that the mentally ill take their medications. Those receiving free housing cannot be compelled to search for work or receive job training, or even, obey the law. In other words, it is all "quid," with no "pro quo."*(n)

Then finally, there are the words from the streets themselves. One women living on the streets of Portland was asked what it was like to live on the streets of Portland. She responded, *"It's a piece of cake... that's why you have so many out here because they feed you three meals a day... you don't have to do \$#%! but stay in your tent or party... you wake up, you go eat, get high, go eat lunch, get high, go eat dinner, get high, that's all you do all day long, every day, I'm being honest"* Then she's asked, *does it seem like its helping anybody? She responds, "It's not, that's why you see all the tents, people are up all night and sleep all day."* (o)

Housing First advocates typically answer the **change** questions this way:

- Can people **change**? Possibly but they shouldn't be expected to until they have housing and then only if they want to.
- What do we do when people don't want to **change**? Provide housing.
- How do we respond when people can't **change**? Provide housing with additional services only if desired.

Housing First, although the most popular solution to homelessness it isn't the only solution, so let's look at the **Safer City** approach before thinking about how to respond as Christians.

Safer City: (p) This is the other side of the coin. Unlike **Housing First** these advocates believe the problem must be solved by a balance of motivating the homeless by providing a wide range of services and police the problem when necessary. Think tanks like the ones mentioned earlier are pushing to change government policy.(q)(r)(s) These policy changes propose drastically eliminating street-level homelessness by providing services aimed at addressing the root causes. These policies would focus more on spending taxpayer dollars on untreated mental illness and substance abuse to reduce homelessness. They would incentivize government funded non-profits to offer and possibly even require addiction treatment and job counseling services to homeless individuals seeking services. And for those not seeking services, these policies would empower local municipalities to police public camping.

The cost of these policy proposals on the taxpayer is unclear but I'm sure they won't be inexpensive. And at the end of the day, they might simply create another *Homeless Industrial Complex* that is treatment focused rather than housing focused.

Safer City advocates typically answer the **change** questions this way:

- Can people **change**? Yes, if support services are provided.
- What do we do when people don't want to **change**? Eliminate unhealthy choices through policies and policing.
- How do we respond when people can't **change**? Provide mandatory support services.

Now that we have covered the two main approaches to the homeless, it is obvious that both Housing First and Safer City approaches are very polemic. As different as they are, they both have one thing in common: they both rely on taxpayer dollars to carry out their agendas.

This limits how para-church ministries like the Medford Gospel Mission can effectively participate in their community's solutions. When para-church ministries take government funding they have to apply **Housing First** principles to their programs and services. This is something we simply won't do because the strings attached to those principles are not biblical, and they would have a detrimental effect on the people we serve. The government isn't our employer. We are a para-church ministry, and being so, we are equipped by the local churches to reach the lost and gather the reached.

As Christians, we can answer the **change** questions this way:

- Can people **change**? Yes, people can change because they are created in the image of God with dignity and worth and ultimately, God cares for what he has created. God has the ability to make a much greater lasting effect on a person's life than \$100,000 taxpayer dollars could ever make.
- What do we do when people don't want to **change**? If someone isn't interested in changing for the better, we don't give up on them. The bible doesn't give us an option not to love our neighbors; rather God commands us to love our neighbors as ourselves. We demonstrate our love for our neighbors, even though they might not be interested in change, through building relationships with them. *Because the heart is at the center of the human being, humans are necessarily relational creatures; love must be expressed towards someone or something. As creatures who reflect the triune God, human beings are hard-wired for relationship. We are not created to live as autonomous individuals. In fact, when humans live in isolation from others, the effects are devastating.* (t) We certainly can play a role in encouraging people to change, but ultimately true restoration requires the work of our sovereign God.
- How do we respond when people can't **change**? With compassion, grace, and prayer. Some people, because of the unique challenges that they face, aren't able to engage in a healthy relationship with us. In these instances, we seek to connect them with services that are equipped to provide the specialized help that they need.

Romans 12:2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

You see, we are different because we see people differently than the world does. With that said, how do we respond to the Governor's *Homeless State of Emergency*? We don't respond by changing who we are and adopt the methods of the world; rather, we continue to help one another as we all strive to live out our faith in our community.

There are about 75 local churches that have equipped the Mission to reach the lost and gather the reached over the last 64 years. We want to work closer with them so we can equip each other to make a bigger difference for Christ in our community.

This spring and throughout the year we are going to be holding poverty alleviation workshops with local churches, so please pray about joining us as we not only stand together, but work together to love our neighbors, especially our neighbors in poverty for the glory of God.

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Citations

- (a) <https://nationalpolice.org/the-homeless-industrial-complex-making-it-tough-for-cops/>
- (b) https://www.usich.gov/All_In_The_Federal_Strategic_Plan_to_Prevent_and_End_Homelessness.pdf
- (c) <https://www.oregon.gov/gov/eo/eo-23-02.pdf>
- (d) <https://oregoncapitalchronicle.com/2023/01/11/oregon-gov-kotek-declares-homelessness-state-of-emergency-signs-housing-executive-orders/>
- (e) <https://oregoncapitalchronicle.com/2023/01/11/oregon-gov-kotek-declares-homelessness-state-of-emergency-signs-housing-executive-orders/>
- (f) Arthur Conan Doyle, book The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes
- (g) <https://www.oregon.gov/gov/eo/eo-23-02.pdf>
- (h) <https://www.kptv.com/2022/12/29/woman-arrested-after-pushing-three-year-old-onto-max-tracks-ne-portland/>
- (i) <https://nypost.com/2023/01/04/elderly-man-has-part-of-his-face-ear-chewed-off-in-attack/>
- (j) <https://medfordalert.com/2023/01/14/local-homeless-man-sentenced-for-greenway-hammer-attack>
- (k) The USICH, a government agency established to coordinate the Federal response to homelessness in order to maximize the effectiveness of Federal resources to address the root causes of homelessness concluded in 2020: https://www.usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/USICH-Expanding-the-Toolbox.pdf
- (l) Manhattan Institute has been an important force in shaping American political culture and developing ideas that foster economic choice and individual responsibility. <https://www.manhattan-institute.org/housing-first-effectiveness>
- (m) The Cicero Institute, a nonpartisan group of policy innovators develop, and fight for policies that apply the principles of a free society and solve problems at the state level, impacting millions of Americans <https://ciceroinstitute.org/research/housing-first-is-a-failure/>
- (n) The Discovery Institute, a think tank that focuses on advancing a culture of purpose, creativity, and innovation <https://www.discovery.org/a/housing-first-caused-the-homelessness-catastrophe/>
- (o) <https://twitter.com/kevinvdahlgren/status/1609300954112987137>
- (p) There isn't a agreed upon name for the policies that different think tanks and studies but they all conclude that Housing First poses a danger to all communities where it exists and their proposed policies would produce safer cities. Therefore I referred to them as Safer City advocates.
- (q) <https://ciceroinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Solving-Texas-Street-Homelessness-Problem.pdf>
- (r) <https://www.discovery.org/m/securepdfs/2022/10/How-Congress-Can-Reform-Governments-Misguided-Homelessness-Policies-20221011.pdf>
- (s) <https://media4.manhattan-institute.org/sites/default/files/housing-first-and-homelessness-SE.pdf>
- (t) Adapted from Becoming Whole: Why the Opposite of Poverty Isn't the American Dream, by Brian Fikkert and Kelly M. Kapic, pp. 43-52 <https://chalmers.org/resources/blog/what-are-people-for/>

Clickable links available online at:
www.medfordgospelmission.org/citations/

GIFTS FROM THE HEART

In memory of Earl Best
by Nickolas & Lindsay Boosalis
In memory of Brien Blankenship
by Janice Blankenship
In memory of Melvin Boyd
by Judith Boyd
In memory of Brice Brandt
by Frances Brandt
In memory of Wallace & Lucille Brill
by Judy Addington
In memory of My Brother Bruce
by Ellene Lynn Baker
In memory of Jami Anne Burk
by Roberta Hawkins
In memory of Erwin & Della Carls
by Wayne & Sharon Christian
In memory of Vernon Carse
by Barbara Carse
In memory of Donna Cauli
by Tom Cook
In memory of Roy Lance Eyman II
by Samantha Eyman
In memory of Buck & Steve Fixsen
by Patricia Fixsen
In memory of Ernie Gallo
by Muriel Gallo

In memory of Richard Gordon
by Rhonda Gordon
In memory of Jim & Dee Hampton
by Gary & Nancy Payton
In memory of Norman Homeier, Sr.
by Margo Homeier
In memory of Billie Joe & Joan Hunter
by Dusty & Debbie Hoffman
In memory of Curtis Kelley
by Jim & Marilyn Kelley
In memory of Pat Lee
by Robert Phillips
In memory of Suzy Legget
by James & Barbara Hubbard
In memory of Kim Lewis
by Ginny Lewis
In memory of Don Mitchell
by Eunice Mitchell
In memory of Phyllis Murray
by Rolf Murray
In memory of Mary Myrick
by Nancy Mitchell
In memory of Billie Ray Nering
by Ken & Diane Capp
In memory of Susan Penwell
by Nancy Day
In memory of Patricia Piter
by Steve Piter

In memory of Helen Prince
by Cheryl Schmidt
In memory of Zach Russell
by John & Debra Russell
In memory of Jack Salter
by Judy Salter
In memory of Nancy Scafani
by David Scafani
In memory of Jerry Scheid
by Jackie Scheid
In memory of Dorothee Shadad
by Michelle Hobbs
In memory of Duane Shinn
by Dianne Carter
and by Garland & Roberta Shinn
In memory of Ted Stanfield
by Rebecca Perkins
In memory of Don Straw
by Floyd & Julia Grimes
In memory of Lane Tesdal
by Marlene Tesdal
In memory of Horst & Margaret Wauer
by David & Helene Uhreen
In memory of Garry Wilson
by Arline Wilson
In memory of Mark
by LeRoy Romero