

GRACE CAN LEAD US HOME

A
CHRISTIAN
CALL TO END
HOMELESSNESS

KEVIN NYE

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HERALD
P R E S S

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INTRODUCTION

1. Kevin Nye describes his interaction with an unhoused man in a church parking lot, writing that “often enough, people simply want to be heard” (p. 17). Is the desire to be heard something you have experienced? How does it feel to be heard?
2. On page 22, the author writes, “God has declared that we are worthy; not on our own terms, but on God’s.” Do you believe that God finds you worthy? Does embracing our own worth help us see the worth of others?
3. A recent poll conducted by the *Washington Post* and Kaiser Research found that “Christians are more than *twice* as likely as non-Christians to associate poverty with a lack of effort, as opposed to difficult circumstances” (p. 24). Have you been guilty of this? What kinds of theology lead to this mindset?

CHAPTER 1: SEEING AND BEING SEEN

THIS FIRST CHAPTER is all about perspective, detailing Nye’s own journey in understanding and relating to unhoused people, and challenging the reader to see unhoused neighbors through new eyes.

1. What are some of the lenses that affect how you see unhoused people in your community?
2. Nye describes the congregation at Penn Avenue as “salt-of-the-earth adults, including elderly folks” (p. 29), who decided that being in community with the unhoused people whom Penn Avenue supported was central to their faith and practice. What would this look like in your church context?
3. Nye writes about how as a young adult, he didn’t question the sociopolitical realities surrounding homelessness in Oklahoma City. What aspects of homelessness in your community could you spend time researching?
4. The eighth- and seventh-century BCE prophets wrote about God’s desire for justice and compassion for the poor (see p. 32). Why does the church tend to avoid these passages?
5. Nye writes about how it was important for him to get past his own savior complex (see pp. 33–34). What are ways to address homelessness in your community without centering yourself?
6. What does it mean to bear each other’s burdens? How does that apply to the homelessness crisis?

CHAPTER 2: HOUSING

“HOUSING IS A consistent theme in Scripture, and the language of ‘home’ and ‘dwelling place’ permeates our songs and liturgies. Yet the actual realities of housing are so often ignored by churches, which prefer to consider this language spiritually rather than literally” (p. 50).

1. In this chapter, Nye writes about safety nets and how people who fall into homelessness often lack a social safety net. What is your safety net like? Who in your life would step in to keep you from falling into homelessness?
2. What has grace looked like in your life? How can you connect that experience to Nye’s points about Housing First?
3. This question comes from the author directly: “What values and outcomes will dictate how we spend our money on homelessness?” (p. 57).
4. On page 58, Nye provides a list of Housing First principles: it focuses on consumer choice, being community-based, offering mobile support services, providing permanent housing, and harm reduction. Did any of these surprise you? How could your own biases be affecting how you view these principles?
5. What does it mean to manage land (and our own property) as “an arena for justice and freedom” (see p. 62)?
6. How can Christians and churches get involved in stopping evictions (see pp. 63–65)?
7. What does it mean for churches and for Christians to steward their land and property with Christian values?

CHAPTER 3: ISOLATION AND CONNECTION

CONNECTION IS CENTRAL to human flourishing. In this chapter, Nye talks about the importance of developing friendships with unhoused neighbors.

1. At the beginning of the chapter, Nye writes that “there are people . . . with a variety of needs too urgent to wait for these larger structural changes to take place” (p. 69). What steps could you take to address some of your neighbors’ needs now?
2. When in your life have you experienced solidarity? What did it feel like?
3. What is the church’s role in dismantling systemic injustice (see p. 73)? Is dismantling injustice a primary focus of the church in the United States today? How has your church engaged in this work? If your church has not engaged in justice work, how have you engaged in justice work outside the church?
4. Throughout this chapter, Nye talks about the need for low barriers when interacting with people experiencing homelessness. What barriers might an unhoused person encounter if they came to your church?
5. What would it mean for you to view unhoused people in your community with “unconditional positive regard” (p. 80)?

CHAPTER 4: COMMUNITY AND SOLIDARITY

IN THIS CHAPTER, Nye discusses how Jesus calls us to draw near to the poor, and he also draws parallels between encampment communities and church communities.

1. Where have you experienced community? How did that community support you during tough times in your life?
2. What are some of the church’s communal traditions? What role have those traditions played in your life?
3. What does it mean to honor other people’s communities? How would you honor an encampment?
4. Would you feel comfortable if there were an encampment in your neighborhood?
5. Are you a homeowner or a renter? How does your housing status affect how you interact with the world around you?
6. What steps can you take in your life to be “nearer” to the poor?

CHAPTER 5: MENTAL HEALTH

IN RECENT YEARS, the church has begun to do better in engaging the conversation around destigmatizing mental illness. But in the same vein, Christians are some of the first people to blame homelessness on mental illness. In this chapter, Nye challenges us to think more holistically about mental health and the role it plays in the lives of unsheltered people.

1. How can you address stereotypes about mental illness and homelessness? Is there an opportunity in your life to have these conversations with the people around you?
2. How does your own mental health affect your interactions with others?
3. What has helped you work through the trauma in your own life?
4. What practices in your daily life have improved your mental health? How could you share these practices with unhoused neighbors?
5. How can churches advocate for people experiencing severe mental illness? How can churches reallocate resources to support these people?

CHAPTER 6: SUBSTANCE USE AND OVERDOSE

IN THIS CHAPTER, Nye tackles some of the misconceptions around homelessness and drug use, as well as the increasing frequency of deaths caused by overdose.

1. What has the conversation around opioid addiction looked like in your church? Is it something that has been mentioned at all?
2. Nye writes, “Our neighbors and friends living on the streets are at imminent risk of overdose as we debate how much money their lives might be worth—or if they’re even worth saving at all” (p. 129). This seems to be a common sentiment among many housed people with regard to their unhoused neighbors. What are some first steps to changing the conversation?
3. How could we view the lives of our unhoused neighbors the way Jesus views us? How many times do we expect to receive mercy from Jesus? How could (or should) this shape our response to others, including our unhoused neighbors?
4. How could you introduce the principles of harm reduction (see pp. 134–36) at your church?
5. How does Jesus’ interaction with the woman caught in adultery shape the way we view others’ sins and shortcomings (see pp. 135–36)?
6. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote that we must “learn to regard people . . . in light of what they suffer” (see p. 137). How can we use this concept to shape the conversation in the church about drug use and overdose?

CHAPTER 7: ADDICTION AND RECOVERY

MANY OF US who have grown up in or spent much time in the church are familiar with recovery ministries and programs. In this chapter, Nye challenges us to think beyond the traditional (AA) models of recovery to a more holistic view of recovery.

1. What is your experience with or view of programs like Alcoholics Anonymous or Celebrate Recovery? How do those views and experiences shape how you view people with substance use disorders?
2. On page 145, Nye quotes 1 Thessalonians 5:12: “Test everything; hold fast to what is good.” How can we let that verse shape how we interact with people who use drugs and the recovery options available to them?
3. Had you previously heard of adverse childhood experiences (p. 147)? What was your reaction to reading about how ACEs affect brain development?
4. “Knowing that opioids numb pain and provide relaxation helps explain why someone experiencing homelessness might use them,” Nye writes on page 149. How do you feel about this statement? Does it change how you view people who use opioids?
5. How could churches get involved in medically assisted recovery (see pp. 152–54)?
6. How can you be in community with people with substance use disorders? How can you include unhoused neighbors with substance use disorders in your church community?

CHAPTER 8: **ABUNDANCE, BEAUTY, AND CELEBRATION**

IN THIS CHAPTER, Nye charts a more hopeful course for celebrating with unhoused neighbors.

1. At the beginning of the chapter, Nye uses the phrase “mindset of scarcity” (p. 159) to describe some of the pitfalls of thinking when it comes to homelessness. Where in your own life have you experienced a mindset of scarcity?
2. What does it mean to fight for “a meaningful and beautiful life in the midst of impossible circumstances” (p. 159)?
3. On page 161, Nye points out how throughout Jesus’ ministry we see that “whenever there was not enough, Jesus provided in excess.” Where have you experienced the excess of Jesus in your own life?
4. What does it mean to celebrate our unhoused neighbors—to love them abundantly—rather than working simply from a mindset of scarcity?
5. At the end of the chapter, Nye cites Isaiah 25, a passage often read at funerals (see pp. 173–74). How can we read Isaiah 25 in light of our current contexts and apply it to the homelessness crisis?

CONCLUSION

1. What does it mean to love someone regardless of their labels (see p. 176)? Is that an easy task? What can make it difficult?
2. What does it mean to get into “some holy trouble on behalf of the unhoused” (p. 179)?
3. How can the church together with the broader community compel change in the area of homelessness?