

God, the Bible and Homelessness

Home... Home is where the heart is... East West homes best...

Home is more than a house. It is a place, our place of nurture and nurturing, acceptance and intimacy. It is the place which gives us access to the wider supportive community of which our homes are a part. But to have no house, or a very inadequate one, often results in homelessness.

In South Africa, an estimated 200 000 live rough every night. In Cape Town, an estimated 20% of people live in household poverty (set at less than R2 455 per month for a household of 4) which leads to many people being Inadequately housed. Poverty impacts directly on the quality of home life because of factors such as overcrowding, inadequate sanitation, unsafe structures and distance from work. These conditions also move people to live on the streets.

Jesus experienced homelessness. He said "Foxes have dens and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head" (Luke 9:58). We know that one of his go-to places was the Mount of Olives (e.g. Luke 21:37; Luke 22:39) which was a place frequented, we are told, by those who were poor and homeless, especially the out of town poor who came to sacrifice at the Temple. The night before his crucifixion, Jesus and his disciples needed to use space in someone else's home for their Passover meal (Matthew 26: 17-19). Despite his own often homeless state, Jesus described our future as in the Father's house, a home with many rooms (John 14:2). Jesus rails against the teachers of the law who "devour widows' houses" (Luke 20:47). Even on the cross, he was concerned that his widowed mother should not be without a home and he entrusted her to his beloved disciple John who, we are told "took her into his home" from that moment on (John 19:25-27).

God, through the prophet Isaiah, talks about the what the world looks like when his Kingdom comes. He says "They will build houses and inhabit them... They will not build and another inhabit" (Isaiah 65:21-22). We hear God's heart for the homeless when he says that the type of religious devotion he requires is to "provide the poor wanderer with shelter" (Isaiah 58:7). He cares about the homes of widows and orphans when he says: "Do not move an ancient boundary stone or encroach on the fields of the fatherless" (Proverbs 23:10) and "The LORD will tear down the house of the proud, but he will establish the boundary of the widow" (Proverbs 25:15).

Let us have God's heart for homes!

Lord, thank you for the homes that we have which sometimes we take for granted or see as our hard earned "right". We are so grateful for these places of safety, acceptance, nurture and intimacy - the place from which our wellbeing flows. We are not unaware that there are people in Cape Town living on our streets and without a place to call home. We are also aware that many more are inadequately housed in tiny, unsafe structures with very limited access to water and sanitation. We know that people's home life is damaged by long commutes and costs so that time, money and energy to be homemakers and enjoy their homes is severely limited. Jesus, we know that you experienced homelessness and are with to those suffering without homes. Soften our hearts, Lord, open our eyes to see things as you do and to respond obediently as your people through acts of both compassion and justice. Amen.
