

Poverty Challenge Reflections

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I went into this challenge thinking that I would not have anything to change in my mind about poverty and the SNAP program, but the truth is I found several things that caused me to think about things. The most significant change was the perception of eating healthy. There is no way to maintain a healthy lifestyle with the amount of money provided without supplementing the food from outside sources. Thankfully for food banks which often have fresh vegetables those living in poverty can obtain healthier choices in their food selections. When I was living on the streets bouncing around from 1992 and 1993. I do not recall eating healthy at all except for the occasions when someone would feed me. It was different for me then as I was not worried about healthy eating, I was more concerned about my day to day survival.

Technology, even though I feel every person regardless of income status has access to technology. What did cause me to think about is how they obtain and use that technology. We take technology for granted we can pull out one of many devices at any time and have access to a wealth of knowledge. We are always connected in my home, at my work, and even in my car, there is wireless internet. Those living in poverty can get government phones, which do have data, but it not the same. I tried to think about my life with only using a government phone with the cap of 1.5GB of data I concluded that this would be impossible if I wanted to maintain my level of connectedness to the internet. With that data limit, I would have a hard time even completing school work. There would be no room for any entertainment such as Netflix as one movie would use up that entire allowance of data.

Sleeping, when I saw the option to sleep on a floor as one of the extras in the challenge, I thought wow this is easy. I used to sleep any many places when I was on the streets, from under someone's bed (so their parents didn't know I was there) to bleachers at the fairgrounds. I

remember hard to sleep at times, but nothing that was overwhelming, but back then I also had a drug addiction. With the drug addiction, I can say with just the right amount and type of drugs sleeping anywhere would become comfortable. However, now trying to sleep on the floor with limited blankets was miserable, I missed my nice comfy bed, my six pillows, and my nice quilt. I tossed and turned and woke up so unrested that it was almost dangerous after two days. I found myself dozing off doing nothing and sometimes when doing something critical.

With these three things that I find concerning, it makes me realize how difficult it would be to climb out of poverty. It would take someone with a certain level of grit to reach deep down and beat the odds. Not eating healthy and having to eat the type of food that can be purchased with the daily allowance can lead to several health problems. High blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes are just some of the ailments that may plague someone with poor eating habits. This can cause issues with job performance, as well as keeping a positive mental outlook on life in general. When the only way you can job hunt effectively in this society is through online means, the lack of readily available technology can become a hindrance. The obvious answer is going to the library, but if I am not mistaken if you do not live in the city limits of most libraries you can only obtain a library card giving access to the libraries resources with a fee. Even though this fee is nominal, it may be seen as a luxury to those living in outlying areas. Finally with not able to get a good nights rest on a consistent basis job performance would greatly suffer which could ultimately end in termination of employment.

My personal faith was not tested or really did it help or hinder this challenge. With the mindset of knowing this is only temporarily how can one truly begin to look at and rely on their faith? Faith indicates that we believe and know that God will deliver us from the hardship, that God will protect us, and that God will ensure we have the food we need. I knew this would all be

happening in a short 72-hour period, so made analyzing how faith impacted this in my opinion impossible.

I do however have a strong opinion on faith and poverty, and I am reminded of the first message I ever delivered which was entitled the “The Great Omission.” As Christians, we are called to go out and make disciples of all people of all nations. This does not mean pick and choose who we want to deliver the gospel to or pick and choose who we want to help in their time of need. I see it all the time though, and myself is included in doing this, we are pulling up to a stoplight, and there is a homeless person with a sign. We turn and look the other way to avoid making any eye contact with this person. Think about this person as we drive by and they see some proclamation of Christianity on the back of our car, what has their perception of Christians become.

Somewhat unrelated to poverty, but I had an interesting conversation with a person recently where they stated they could never be a Christian due to the hypocrisy they have seen and even fell victim to. We talked and talked, and in our conversations, I realized this person may want to believe but was hung up on the word Christian. I changed the wording and told them would it make you feel better if I did not call myself a Christian but identified as just a believer in Christ would that change anything. By the end of the conversations that lasted a couple of hours, my friend told me that they were now a believer in Christ.

The previous story is true to so many people, but the difference is my story had a happy ending, where usually the conclusion for some is less faith, as well as thinking Christians, are nothing but hypocrites, and I want nothing to do with it. How easy is it to lose faith when we are beaten down and feel like we are unable to get up? How many time can one pray for help and not

asking for the right things in prayer, but then are turned away from Christians, before they begin to lose their faith?

In my times of homelessness, I had no faith; I could not understand how a supposedly loving God could allow someone to go through what I considered to be hell. I struggled day in and day out, trying to get out of my hell. Finally, on March 1, 1993, I stopped fighting to get out and started that morning off on fighting to end the hell that I had come accustomed to living. That day is mostly absent from my memory, but I know by that afternoon I had an intentional overdose, but through some miracle was thwarted. Once I awoke in the hospital did I start to understand God's power and presence and my faith began to develop. When I came out of the hospital, I was headed back to the same life, but through prayer and my new faith, I found a way to escape and have had a very successful life so far.