



Discerning the Needs of Street People

As God leads you in helping people off the street one question that you will probably ask yourself time after time is, "How do I know this person is being up front and honest with me?". In Matthew 10:16, Jesus warns His disciples to be as shrewd (wise) as serpents but as innocent (gentle) as doves. I found in my life that if I don't heed this warning in my heart then what often happens is I become as wise (naïve) as a dove and as gentle (resentful) as a serpent after I've been pounced upon. So the warning here is for us to have discernment as we reach out and help those in need. The following are some rules of thumb that may prove to be helpful.

1. If you meet someone who has some basic needs and you desire to share Christ with them make sure your actions are speaking your words.
2. If someone needs food, clothing, or shelter and you want to help, buy it for them. You'll be running a big risk if you just give them money.
3. If a person seems ripe in committing their life to Christ go on and meet their need first. This will alleviate any conditional response they may feel.
4. Don't be naïve in what people tell you. When in doubt, doubt. For many street people, conning is a way of life. This is not to say, don't receive and listen to what their saying but realize that many are artists in playing on those who will sympathize.

To verify a story you may ask them to repeat a portion of it or have them tell the same story to a third party while you listen. If a person rambles about all of their accomplishments, adventures, or experiences usually the less likely they are to be true. A person of this type may be starving for acceptance.

5. In helping people, Jesus almost always challenged them to respond in faith i.e. washing the mud off at the pool, standing up, taking hold of his hand, and going and showing themselves to the priests, etc. In the same way we can challenge people by having them work for a meal or you may have them meet you some place at an appointed time. This will often let you know how sincere they are in wanting help.



6. In bringing a person to your house be careful in leaving them alone if you have to go out you may be relieved of all your earthly possessions. Be careful not to create a source of temptation. If you can only allow them to borrow clothes make sure they know it's a loan and then too, prepare your heart possibly to part with it. Matthew 6:28. Usually clothes and loose change laying around and things that may not be immediately missed are the largest temptations for people. If the individual is going to stay with you for a while make sure their time is productive in either job hunting or doing chores around the house. Also don't be afraid to help them get on a schedule and stick to it. It's also important to have regular devotional time with them. Topics such as salvation, forgiveness, faith and responsibility along with Biblical examples (i.e. forgiveness – the woman caught in adultery) are good to begin with in your devotions.
7. In speaking to street people it is always good to:
 1. Cut out big words.
 2. Use analogies.
 3. Use humor.
 4. Don't preach but, do be straight forward.
8. Be careful not to judge them on minor things. You can win the battle but lose the war. Think through, ways to compliment and encourage them on their victories and successes. (No matter how small they seem to you, to them it may be a BIG step.)
9. If you're not sure how to deal with an individual contact someone who does.
10. Remember the three basics, your helping them to:
LOVE JESUS, HATE SIN, and SERVE OTHERS.