

## **Sunday Breakfast Mission:**

### **A Christian Non-Medical Model Toward Addiction Homelessness Rehabilitation**

Reverend Tom Laymon

President/CEO/Senior Pastor, Sunday Breakfast Mission

On any given night over the past 129 years, the Sunday Breakfast Mission (SBM) has opened its doors to the homeless men—and now women and families—of Wilmington, Delaware. At first, there were a few dozen men who gathered on Sunday mornings for breakfast and church (thus the name), but soon after that first opening, like most early rescue missions, cots were borrowed from another mission in nearby Germantown, PA (Whosoever Gospel Mission) to accommodate the men for nightly shelter.

These efforts were a continuation of the movement that began in Glasgow, Scotland by David Naismith. As a young man, David had seen other young Scottish men come into the cities from the Highlands for work in the new Industrial Revolution, but get caught up in addiction and dissolution. Having been recently converted to Christianity himself, he began to reach out to rescue and disciple these men, starting the City Mission of Glasgow (1826) and then establishing works in Dublin, London and beyond in Europe, America and Africa.

From the start and continuing, we have witnessed a prominent connection between homelessness and addiction to alcohol or drugs among those served at SBM.<sup>1</sup> SBM started off as food, shelter and ministry to the soul. The role of volunteers from local churches in particular was preeminent. But also, early on, SBM worked to help participants in its long-term residential Christian program (called discipling) stop using substances, find work, and renew normal life. This was a defining characteristic of SBM, as it was with other gospel rescue missions around the nation and even the world.

Over the years, the emphasis on homeless men expanded to efforts to reach out to impoverished children and mothers in most missions by providing community meals both on holidays and regularly, Christmas gifts, and “mother’s clubs.” SBM had such outreaches throughout its history and even now. These were often facilitated by women’s auxiliaries.

The current work of SBM remains true to what was established in 1893. Nightly, SBM draws guests, anywhere from 130 to over 200 men, women, boys, and girls, for overnight lodging. All of these individuals have the opportunity to eat a full course hot meal together with others from the surrounding community, and a hearty breakfast the next morning. Showers, clothing, shoes, hygiene products, and the reception of mail are provided. Of course, the spiritual component begins with exercising God’s love toward all and providing nightly chapels through the cooperation of local churches.

While the nature and character of the work of SBM has remained the same, the population has changed some throughout the years. In a previous generation, the typical homeless adult was in his fifties, and there were not many women and children. But currently here and across the U.S., homeless women and children combined have become the majority, and the majority of adults are significantly younger. So, in 2010, while continuing to provide significant shelter and program space for homeless men, SBM opened a large facility to provide for women and women with children.

Along with providing overnight shelter, the other main portion of SBM's work is found in its rehabilitation program called the New Life Discipleship Program. This is a free, long-term residential program that is open to men, women, and women with children of any age, and who are homeless for any reason. The core of the program lasts eighteen to twenty-four months, and is divided into three stages. The first stage is a probationary stage of 30 days, during which Program residents participate in initial classes, work therapy, and AM/PM chapels. The second stage is composed of three levels, each with its own goals and objectives dealing with the processes of deconstructing the old life, reconstructing a new life, and rebuilding key relationships. Counseling (individual and group), program classes, education, work therapy, and recreation, as well as morning and evening chapels round out the Christian based rehabilitation program. The final stage of the Program is called Aftercare and is divided into two forms (Aftercare I and Aftercare II). Aftercare I allows the individual to find and begin work to save income for transportation and housing. If deferred, necessary legal fines and other obligations are paid during this time. After an agreed period of six to nine months, and after enough savings have been accumulated, the graduate may then move out and exit into independent living. Sometimes a further period to achieve more ambitious goals such as finishing a degree or a technical certificate, getting married, buying a house, etc. is desired. With approval of the plan and coaching, the resident may pay a modest monthly program fee and then live in Mission housing for up to two years to accomplish these goals. This is the core of Aftercare II. Graduates of these programs have been highly successful in breaking the cycles of addiction and homelessness.

The two primary activities of SBM represent the typical rescue and rehabilitation approaches offered by Christian-based, Rescue Missions world-wide. Particular to SBM is its studied understanding of the problem of homelessness.

The first part of this understanding is what homelessness is not. We understand homelessness to be something more than just a function of poverty. Furthermore, only supplementing poverty with additional material resources does not provide a path out of homelessness; someone may become or remain homeless despite available resources. Thus, SBM does not focus on the alleviation of the apparent lack of resources.

Similarly, we understand and approach homelessness as more than a function or outgrowth of "houselessness." We find that people come to us, not out of the lack of affordable housing, but rather because of a failure on the individual to maintain their housing and instead using available resources on other, less appropriate activities (e.g. substance use). We also find that many mentally ill or mentally disabled adults lack the capability to self-administer their affairs. In response, we work to prepare people to be ready to handle their own housing, not allowing for problematic habits and addictions to take priority over maintaining housing. Additionally, it is recognized that housing that is reasonable must be in neighborhoods that are not filled with sellers and users of drugs and is well-policed.

Thirdly, we work from an understanding that homelessness is neither solved solely through employment (e.g. "Why don't they just get a job?") nor occurs as a necessary result of a lack of employment opportunities. In other words, joblessness is not the prominent cause of homelessness nor is high unemployment a necessary correlation of such. In fact, we often need to encourage the homeless adult to end their particular employment in order to come into the full-time program. Often homeless men and women continue in both homelessness and

employment for years, using their income on inappropriate activities, activities that do not contribute to a functioning lifestyle.

The primary way we understand the situation of homeless individuals and families is one in which the relationships to family, friends, employers, church, government, school, landlords, and others have been severed. These key relationships are what typically prevent homelessness. Break all these relationships and, unless one is independently wealthy, an individual will inevitably become homeless.

Two things are prominent in the cases for these broken relationships: substance abuse and mental illness. The former we have found to be prominent in over 90% of those who utilize SBM. The latter is prominent but not nearly as prominent as substance abuse, nor with as clear of a delineation. Certainly, some of the substance use is self-medication for this other issue.

Finally, to reiterate, we approach rehabilitation from a Christian/Biblical counseling perspective open to all, not exclusive to those who identify as Christians. There is no requirement that participants affirm the Christian faith to join or remain in the official rehabilitation Program. However, all counseling and curriculum for classes are based in a God-centered understanding of human nature and a Christ-centered understanding of redemption from sin and the effects of sin like abuse and habitual destructive life patterns. This is carried out in a progressive series of counseling and classes in five levels from a probationary position, to peeling away layers of destructive attitudes and habits, to establishing a new foundation of attitudes, habits and internal personal renewal, to reconnecting broken relationships, and finally a time of practice in real world re-acclimation (Aftercare) where individuals can begin building resources. All of these rely on Biblically-based materials and Christian Counseling.

Rev. Laymon may be contacted at [tlaymon@sundaybreakfastmission.org](mailto:tlaymon@sundaybreakfastmission.org).

## References

1. Califano, J.A. (2007). High society: How substance abuse ravages America and what to do about it. Public Affairs.

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