

Whose story impacted you?

Take a few minutes to write your thoughts about this simulation experience-

In the section below commit to making some change in yourself...your thoughts, choices, behaviors

How will you change?

SIMULATION 2011



October 15-16, 2011



**For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat,
I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink,
I was a stranger and you invited me in."
Matthew 25:35**

INTRODUCTION

The following stories are true. They are written by real people from all different ages and walks of life. The thing they have in common? They all ended up homeless. Some remain hopeful and some have sunk into hopelessness.

Your task for this simulation is to put yourself in their shoes. Imagine you are them. After each person’s story you will be asked to discuss their situation. Pay close attention, as these are real people’s lives.

They are all created by and loved by the same God who created and loves you.

Steven/ 29 years old

I can hardly remember when I wasn’t homeless. Sometimes over the years I got a room, but mostly I was in the room a week or less. Then I would leave.

I got this mental illness. I can’t stay long. I can’t take the medicine because it makes me sick. I been hearing sounds since I was a teenager. Most of the time I get messages that I shouldn’t be somewhere or I should move on. So I go to a shelter and some case manager tries to get me on medication, but then I get sick again and leave and go live in a parked car or an old bus.

But I’m not unhappy. Sometimes the voices are like my friends and they might be better friends than those out here. I know the messages aren’t real now. I used to think they were real. Sometimes I still do, but when I got older I come to realize it was just a lot of noise in my head. But I got used to the noise and I looked forward to the messages. So I go to the library every day. I just can’t go to sleep there or else they ask you to leave. But I read books, look at travel pictures, listen to my friends in my head.

I think I will always be homeless. I don’t know where I would go. Even if I had a place to stay for free, I would get a message telling me to leave. Being homeless ain’t that bad. The only thing is to take a shower. Some places have showers you can do sometimes, then that’s good. Cause I don’t like being smelly. But I don’t do drugs—well, hardly ever—and hardly ever do drinking. I don’t have the money.

Talk about it...

- What does Steven mean by “mental illness”?
- How can Steven be happy being homeless?
- Why do some people want to be homeless?
- What is the right thing to do for Steven
 - Try to get him to stay in a shelter?
 - Help him be safe on the streets?

Keith/ 66 yrs old

I worked for Kraft Foods for 35 years. I took an early retirement and early social security. It didn't leave me with much to live on. I didn't have any insurance after that and I had to have a heart bypass. It took all my savings and I still have to pay for the hospital bill each month. I started drinking heavy after that. I was lonely too because I didn't have any kids and all my brothers had died. With the drinking and the low cash, I lost my house. I rented for a while and then ended up in a rooming house.

Now I live like six months homeless and six months in a rented room or something. I try and make sure the six months homeless are in warmer weather. I don't really care. I don't have nothing to do anyway. So I stay in my own little secret place, then I go to the meal site for breakfast. Then I go to the library and read about world religions. It's nice to read, but I wish my glasses was better. Most of the time I just gotta take them off and read real close. The library folks are nice to you as long as you don't stink or go to sleep or bother nobody. I try and keep clean so I don't look homeless. But they know I am.

Then in fall I have enough money saved to get a little place. It's okay the life I lead. I do a lot of praying and I feel real close to God. I am learning all about the ways that people in other lands worship God and it gives me a perspective. I learned that the Hindus do this—go out and leave their homes and seek the inner light. That is what I feel like. I don't regret nothing that is happened to me, because it all happens for a reason.

Talk about it...

How is it possible for Keith to not have any regrets?
He says that everything happens for a reason. Do you believe that?
What could be the reason that Keith's life is what it is?
Could the good from Keith's life be that you have a new understanding of it?

Jasmine/ 35 yrs old

My story is simple, but you won't like it. I had a job and I made \$9 an hour. But one-third of what I had went to the childcare center and nearly half went to rent. The rest went to food and regular bills. I got five kids. I got no other money. You can't make it on that. I got skills. I went to school and learned to be a cook. I work good restaurants. I did what I was supposed to do. You just can't have kids and make it on \$9 an hour. When my daughter got pneumonia I had insurance, but the co-pay was high and the hospital wanted me to pay out \$300 a month. I couldn't give them but \$20 or \$30 and they took me to court. Then my boyfriend got married and wanted to get custody of my kids. I had to fight him in court. I paid \$200 a month for a lawyer and he didn't do nothin'. I had to get all the witnesses and do all the legwork. Then my car needed a new exhaust. And that was \$1,000. Comes a point where something's gotta give. With the car—I had to have that to work. The lawyer wouldn't stop getting after me for the money I owed him. There's just no way. I fell behind a little on my rent and got kicked out. Ain't no way you can do it. You figure the math. They tell you, you got a skill and you be making \$9 an hour. You can pay your bills—JUST pay your bills. Then anything come up and you're flat. You can't do it. I'm trying now to find a job that will pay me just a little more, but so far no good. The good salad and grill jobs are way out at the edge of the city. Then I'd have to have a better car and spend hours traveling and my daycare wouldn't keep the kids that late. I don't know what the solution is. I feel like it's just no use. Maybe I should let me boyfriend have the kids temporarily so I can get a better job, a better car, and a house for us? I can't bear the thought of it. I fought so hard to keep them. And what if he never gives them back to me? I suppose I can get me some boyfriend that will bring a little money into the house. But then I have to feed him too. All I know is that my kids deserve better than this.

Talk about it...

Your choice- Find a new boyfriend or give the kids to their dad?

What could go wrong with each choice?
What could go right?

Is there another choice?

Darryl/ 40 years old

I did everything right. I graduated from high school. I went college. I got married and had 2 kids. I worked hard and moved up in my company. I had a good job making \$40,000 a year, but the company downsized. Then I got into this traffic accident and was in the hospital for 13 months. It was so awful. I had no insurance and the bills are over \$400,000. I got out and my wife found someone else and that put me out on the streets. I was married 13 years.

I slept in garages, in cars, on one of those kid's slides. A lot of homeless people have to hide or you get a ticket. I've been on the streets 5 months. I've been looking for a job, but every time I get a job it's one of those temporary jobs and then they tell you they don't need you anymore. So I haven't tried to get a place until I get a full time job, because I want to be sure I can pay the rent.

I don't see my kids very often because I am so ashamed and don't want them to see me like this. I try to call but they always ask when they can come and stay with me. What am I supposed to tell them? If you are a man you should take care of your kids.

I'm not bitter. I just want to get back to my old life. I went to this church a few weeks back. I saw God then and it helped. I know I won't be on the streets much longer.

Talk about it...

Where would Darryl stay if there were no homeless shelter?
What should he do about his relationship with his kids?
Why did his visit to the local church give him hope?
How might you react if Darryl had walked into your church?

James/ 35 years old

I had a job and a family and things went okay. Then bad things started happening. My brother-in-law got killed. My sister who ain't married got pregnant. My mother died. All of it was too much. I started drinkin' a lot and taking drugs—all kinds of drugs—uppers, downers, heroine, crack, weed. I lost my job and my wife and kids moved in with her family. I stayed with my father for a while but we didn't get along because he was still grieving for my mother. Then I went to my brother's house but he didn't want me to be using around the kids, so he kicked me out.

I been staying mainly in parks because the weather is good. I do some work for a mechanic down the street. I can't do too many drugs because I ain't got no money. But I pray and I think that God will get me back to where I was. Maybe I wasn't supposed to be where I was. I think things happen for a reason and I will just let God lead me where I am supposed to go. I go to church every day when I'm clean and sober. Things happen for a reason, you know.

I applied for a couple of jobs, but it's kind of hard to get one, you know, when you are homeless and don't look too good, and you got no number they can get you at. But when the right one comes along, I will get it. I just got to take care of myself until the right time happens. In the meantime, I read the bible and go to church and get in touch with my spiritual side.

Talk about it...

Will James' faith in God get him off the street?
Why does James only go to church when he is clean and sober?
Imagine a scenario where James goes to church and
 Get's the clear message that he is not welcome there
 Get's the clear message that he is loved and valued by God's people
How would each scene play out?

Maria/ 25 years old

I was living at home. I had gotten pregnant at 18. My son and I lived with my parents. My boyfriend said he wouldn't marry me because- why should he buy the cow when the milk was free? My mother called me a whore and my dad beat me. They said they should keep my son because I wasn't worth him. I had never been married and the father deserted me. I had a job as a hairdresser. I went to school for that. I wanted to move out on my own but my parents kept saying that they would take my son away if I did. I didn't do no drugs but they kept saying that I did.

Then one day I slept late when my son was crying and they just kicked me out. They locked my son in the room so I couldn't get him with me. I moved into the Hope House shelter. I could get in here because I had a job, but I still can't get my son back. I got a lawyer through Hope House and I am going to sue them to get my son back. The people here know I don't do drugs and they think my parents are just unreasonable, so I get a lot of support from them. If I get my son back I will move to another state because I think they will kidnap my son. The whole thing is that I didn't get married and I had a baby so they think I am a whore and because of that they think I am not worthy to raise my child. I see a lot of girls here who had 2, 3 kids and weren't married and no one tells them they can't raise their kids. My dad thinks that if a woman isn't a virgin until she dies then she ain't worth nothing. But I waited a long time and no one asked me to marry them. [She points to a large birthmark on her neck.] See, this is why. They think I look hideous because of this, so I am just worth sleeping with, but not worth marrying.

But I will do okay. I always worked and I will do okay. I will get my son and I will go away and I will tell my son that his father died and no one will ever know. I will do okay.

Talk about it...

Why do you think Maria's mother called her a whore?
Do you know any young single moms?
Why did they not end up homeless like Maria?
Do you think that Maria will be able to get her son back?
Should she take him and run, or try to make peace and move back home with her parents in order to be with her son?

Jeffrey/ 32 years old

I was homeless once. I had a bad apartment and I kept telling the landlord. The toilet didn't flush and the bathroom sink was plugged up. I had to keep the bathroom door closed because it smelled like an outhouse. So I said I wouldn't pay the rent and he tells me to leave. I refused until they called the sheriff. My brother took me in. But the wife didn't want me to stay, so three days later he dropped me off in front of the shelter. But they were full. He never even brought my clothes with me, so I couldn't change for work. I had a job at McDonalds. I used to take the bus to get there. The first night I'm homeless it's pretty warm—it's October, so I find a park bench and sleep there. So I go to work but I didn't shave and the boss asks me why and I say I'm homeless. So he says I got to do something to look better for the customers. And I try again at the shelter. They take me in, but I don't get woken up early enough for my job and then they tell me to wait until I've got my life together and I should come back to work.

I started panhandling on the local streets just to save up money to rent a room. It took me so long but now I have a place. Then my brother brings my clothes and I get cleaned up and the job takes me back. I been able to figure out things—where to go to get the good rent and the free food and clothes. If you work it out well enough you can live on almost anything. But I won't ever deal with no landlord like that one again. And I aint spoken to my brother's wife. What they done to me shouldn't happen to no brother. My brother, he felt bad, but she never said she was sorry.

Talk about it...

Why might the wife have said no to her brother-in-law staying with them?
Is it his brother's responsibility to take him in?
Why or why not?
What circumstances might make it hard?

Lisa/ 41 yrs old

Before I was homeless I was abandoned by my husband. I had three babies, working a job, struggling, no help, no welfare, no child support or anything. I managed to work on my own for four years with no help. Jobs went from \$7 an hour to \$8 an hour, very hard. My parents helped as much as they could but they are retired and living on very little. There were some harsh housing conditions- rat infested, roaches, but it was all I could afford. I'm working AND I have no money. That just isn't right. All my money goes toward rent, light, gas, phone. And then I have 60 cents left over and feel less than a human being.

So I had to make a decision- keep paying \$400 a month to live where there are rats, roaches, and mice are running around all day or try to better my situation. I refused to pay the rent any longer in that condition. And that's why I ended up at the shelter. My plan is to live here long enough to save up money to get a better place for me and my kids. I hope my plan works.

Talk about it...

Why would Lisa CHOOSE to be homeless?
 Could you make that choice?
 What might be the downside to having your kids live at a shelter?
 Do you think the good would outweigh the bad?

Carrie/ 54 years old

Before I was homeless I was, um, an alcoholic and drinking a lot. The money was coming from disability. I had gotten hurt really bad at my job. I used to sit in my room and drink 40-ouncer after 40-ouncer, and that was the first thing I do in the morning. I was so depressed, I would just sit there and drink and drink until I would pass out and forget about life. My life meant absolutely nothing. I didn't really want to die, I just didn't want to live. I tried every type of care I could find to get treatment for my alcoholism, but when I got through with the programs I would just start drinking over again, even though I had a place to stay and stuff--a place to go home to.

Now look at me. What a loser I am. I was in intensive care three times from internal bleeding from alcohol. They told me if I touch another drink I would die. And yet here I sit with another drink in my hand. Why can't I stop drinking? I want to but what's the point? My life is already ruined.

Talk about it...

What has made Carrie so hopeless?
 Do you think that most homeless people are alcoholics or addicts?
 How do you become an alcoholic/addict?
 Why can't Carrie just stop drinking?
 Where might she find some hope?