

SERVING THE SLUMS [helping others — Psalm 82]

THIS WEEK

There are so many needy people—poor or homeless people in every suburb, city, and country around the world. Here are people who feel rejected. Here are people crying out for a mom or dad to love them—the oddballs, misfits, and others who don't fit with their peers. This TalkSheet will help your group recognize that they have an obligation to help those whom others would cast away.

OPENER

You may want to have someone unknown to the group impersonate a homeless person. This person should play and dress the part—and be able to address the issues of homelessness and answer difficult questions your kids might have. Some of these may include why they can't get a job or what made them homeless.

For a different twist, you could also ask the manager or someone from a homeless shelter to come in and talk about the problem with the group. Because they have first hand experience, they may be able to share stories about and discuss the problems of a homeless family—food, shelter, medical care, spiritual problems, life-threatening problems, and so on.

THE DISCUSSION, BY NUMBERS

1. Why do your kids think people become homeless? Ask the group to explain the reasons they chose. Give your kids a chance to argue their opinions with each other. What do your kids think is the most common reason that people become homeless?
2. What would your kids do in these situations? What do they think people most often do when someone approaches them for money or food? Why? Ask your group how they would get food and shelter if they found themselves in need.
3. Psalm 82 clearly states the duty of people to help the poor, helpless, and needy. Ask the group to explain their modern examples. How can your kids live out these verses today? You may want to make a list of their ideas on a whiteboard or poster board. Point out that people who are well fed and housed can also be weak, oppressed, or needy (for example, a kid without friends is socially needy). Is this the same as being homeless or hungry? Why or why not? How do your kids think Jesus would respond to both situations?
4. What is the most common reaction that your kids have? Why? Be sure not to make your kids feel guilty for the reactions—most teenagers aren't sure how to react or how to help these people.

THE CLOSE

Teenagers can't save the world, but they can start to think differently about those in need. Point out that homelessness and hurt aren't just problems on the street or in the slums—many kids at their school are crying out for friendship, encouragement, and acceptance. Challenge your group to think about how they can show the love of Christ to others around them. Communicate to your group that it's easy for people to stay comfortable and safe in their own group of friends. What would happen if they stepped out and helped someone outside of their comfort zone?

MORE

- Teenagers sometimes feel threatened when they step out of their comfort zones. Take a look with your group and the life of Jesus. He was the ultimate servant—never in a comfort zone, and always on a mission to help those in need. Check out some stories with your kids about the life of Jesus. You may want to split your group up into smaller groups and have them look for examples of how Jesus reached out to others. There are several stories in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Point out that Jesus didn't worry about fitting in the crowd or having the right friends—he hung out with sinners, lepers, and even a prostitute! He was a true rebel, in the sense that he dared to make a difference in the lives of others—and he was killed for it. How can your kids live like Jesus in their everyday lives? Are they willing to step out and help others in the name of Jesus?
- Try role-playing a homeless situation with your kids—give each of them a specific problem, such as losing their job, getting divorced, being a single parent, suffering from AIDS, being abused at home, hooked on cocaine, being forced into prostitution, and so on. How would they answer those who asked “what is wrong with you”? How would these situations affect their lives? You may want to have other kids question them and see what it's like for the homeless person to explain where they are and why.