

Shared Grace

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ERIC S., SHARED GRACE

DO YOU SEE THE CROWDS?

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I have this ideal that social work, particularly Christian social work, should be about helping people, making a difference, and changing lives. I found this profession after living through my own tough life experiences. I'm the kind of person for whom being a Christian and going to church brings meaning to my life, but my faith is more real when it is lived out through action. When I was doing direct practice, I found the experience of working with hurting people very rewarding and a direct extension of my faith.

I believe that being a Christian is, at its heart, being an imitator and follower of Christ. How many times do we read in scripture that Jesus saw someone—or a crowd—and had compassion for them? It's what he did every day of his ministry. He met them at their point of need, treated them with love, spoke truth, and went on to address their underlying needs. He loved them for who they were, but called them to become more. And he loves us and calls us to become more. That's what I call Christian social work!

But what do I spend much of my time doing? I'm busy with fundraising, measuring outcomes, budgets, accreditation, personnel issues, board and committee meetings, and so on. So what if my work at times seems mundane? Does what I do still matter if I'm not meeting with clients every day? There's no question that it does. When I am skillful and effective, I bring greater resources and new approaches to dealing with my community's challenges. Because the problems of hunger, poverty, and homelessness are much bigger than any agency or program, it takes even harder work, more prayer, and more partners to make a difference.

I'm finding a new calling in Matthew 9:36-38, which says:

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

My eyes may be more focused on crowds than individuals these days, and my work may be more focused on calling and equipping laborers, but at heart, it's still about serving that scared, hungry, desperate person that Jesus looked at and loved, and realizing that's how God still loves me.

*Eric Saunders received his MSW from Indiana University, is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker, is a sometimes adjunct instructor of social work at Messiah College, and serves as **executive director for New Hope Ministries** south-central Pennsylvania. In 2014, Eric was honored to receive the Frank Grady Outstanding Professional Award for human service.*
