Many people enjoy making care packs for the homeless, and they have become one of the most popular items we give to our homeless friends. Some people call them “blessing bags,” and there are several websites that walk through the process of putting these homeless survival packs together. And while, in general, we can provide for most basic needs—food, shelter, clothing, hygiene items—below are some creative items we often don’t have in stock that homeless people love to receive in blessing bags.

If you decide to put together a care pack, remember that you don’t always have to buy new. You can recycle or up-cycle items from your house if you have things available. Also, collecting items and putting them together can be a great team-building project for coworkers, youth groups or even families. Keep in mind that here at the Rescue Mission, we don’t give things away to make homelessness more comfortable, but rather to show love and help keep people alive. Our goal is for this love to be the catalyst for someone to join our New Life Program and want a changed life. If you do decide to put together some care packs, you can drop them off at the Rescue Mission any time. If you do decide to put together some care packs, you can drop them off at the Rescue Mission any time.

**Backpack:** A durable backpack is an essential item for homeless individuals.

**Hand warmers:** Cheap and instant warmth is always welcome.

**Thermal cup:** This keeps liquids warm longer and doubles as a hand warmer.

**Flashlight:** Any kind of flashlight is helpful. Also, consider providing extra batteries.

**Warm socks:** Keeping feet warm and dry can save a life.

**Wool blanket:** This is one of the most essential items because even when wool is wet, it can still keep you warm.

**Water bottle:** Dehydration is a big problem among the homeless.

**PONCHO/UMBRELLA:** This is a smart and affordable item that is especially important in wet weather.

**Handwritten card:** A handwritten note (no personal information) of encouragement can brighten someone’s day.

**Lotion:** This can give relief from Utah’s dry weather.

**Ziplock bags:** These keep items organized and waterproof.

**Pad of paper & pen:** A handy-dandy notebook is helpful to write down addresses and phone numbers.

**Duct Tape:** Is there really anything duct-tape can’t fix?

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**Sunday**

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**God Intervenes**

That’s when this homeless couple came up to me in line. The woman, whom I had never met before, looked at me and said, “You don’t have to give up hope.” I stared back at her. How did she know I was hopeless? The couple went on to tell me about the Rescue Mission of Salt Lake. They said the help there was different than the basic food and shelter I was getting at the soup kitchen and the public housing shelter. They told me that the Rescue Mission wasn’t just focused on meeting physical needs, although they provided for those too, but was concerned with changing a person’s heart. The staff at the Mission taught about God and the Bible and showed a deeper love to broken people like me, who desperately needed help from the inside out.

And so, a few days later, I walked the few blocks to the Rescue Mission and joined the New Life Program. This may sound strange, but the biggest help I needed and I joined the program was motivation to live. I carried so much pain and depression inside that I didn’t care if I lived or died. Yet, at the same time, I didn’t seem to have the ability to kill myself. I had devised all these schemes to sort of indirectly end my life, but none had worked.

At the Mission, I started going to the daily Bible studies and talked to people who shared some of the same experiences I had. Like me, they had turned to daily drug use to numb the pain of life. I found that I could relate to people better, and began to experience an intimacy with God and other people that I had never known before. Prior to that point, I would describe myself as a hater of people. I had so much hate in my heart that I needed to get it out, and usually the outlet was another person.

**Deciding To Live**

But through the positive relationships I made at the Rescue Mission, I hated less and less. One day, I consciously told myself, “I want to stay on this Earth.” I made the decision that I would keep on living. That was an important and life-changing day for me.

With that decision made, I knew that real life could only be found in a relationship with God, so I invested in the New Life Program. Each morning, Chris Beane, one of the counselors at the Mission, held a Bible study that I attended. Then I had regular one-on-one counseling...
What Love Has Got To Do With It

February and its signature holiday invoke feelings of romance. And while appropriate romance is a true God-given blessing, we know that people often get romantic relationships so wrong.

Here at the Rescue Mission, we often find that bad romantic relationships have lasting negative impacts. From children who witness a messy divorce, to adults stung over infidelity and abuse, the breakdown of male-female relationships can lead to depression, hopelessness and substance abuse. This is the case for Raymond Dûmbrys, who shares his testimony in this month’s Rescuer. It was the infidelity and eventual loss of his fiancé that shaped his life of incarceration, homelessness and drug use over the past 25 years.

Here’s another example. I recently spoke to one of our New Life Program members about her relationship expectations. She told me that, until coming to the Rescue Mission, she never knew that most women expect in a relationship. It was hard to hear that most women expect in a relationship. We work to heal hearts by focusing on the one person—God through his Son, Jesus Christ—who will never hurt us in a relationship.

We teach about who God is and how He loves us. God not only created us, but also made a way for us to be with him in Heaven. He gave up his Son for us when we were completely uninterested in Him. We were lost and He came and found us. That is His love for us.

When we understand how much God sacrificed just to have a relationship with us, we can begin to realize what love really is. This love can help when other people let us down or treat us poorly. And when we experience love from God, we are better able to forgive and show love to others.

So as we look forward to celebrating Valentine’s Day, join me in seeking a loving relationship with God above all others. When we have a right relationship with God, all of our other relationships—even our romantic ones—fall into their right place. And even if all our romantic relationships in the past have been off track, with God, there is always hope for the true heart change that will lead to God-blessed relationships in the future.

Thank you for supporting our work, praying for us and praying for those we serve.

Chris D. Crosswhite
Executive Director

Raymond: Continued from Page 1

Ready to God Me To Help

I can’t really describe how devastating this news was to me. In a very real way, I lost the will to keep living. I already knew some people who were into illegal activities in Las Vegas. I started working more with them. They sold drugs and I would often take the job of assaulting people who owed money and weren’t paying. I had so much hate towards the people who killed my fiancé that it felt good to take it out on delinquent drug users.

I was so wrapped up in my addictions that I was often arrested and spent about 15 of the next 20 years in prison. When I wasn’t in prison, I turned to drugs to numb the pain. Once, I checked myself into a psychiatric hospital and convinced the staff I was insane. I wasn’t really crazy, but they pumped me with drugs that took away all my pain. I was mostly in a vegetative state until I was released a few years ago.

Eventually, however, the staff realized I was faking it and they kicked me out. When I wasn’t locked up, I was a vagabond drug user. I was fine being homeless or crashing on friends' couches. I had nowhere to go. I had no job, no Alcohols or Narcotics Anonymous just to hang out and get free coffee and pastries. Even though I wasn’t sober, people there had sympathy for me. A few years ago, I met in AA invited me to come up to Salt Lake City. We had decided that we needed to get out of Vegas if we were ever going to change our lives.

We got an apartment in Draper, but soon had a falling out and I was homeless again. I tried a few rehab facilities, but eventually I started using drugs daily and slept on the streets. I used to live with me in Las Vegas in the early ’90s. My fiancé was still in Southern California while I went to Vegas for a job. I had called her to talk about our upcoming wedding and how she would come to live with me in Las Vegas.

That’s when she told me she had cheated on me. I was so enraged that I yelled at her. I told her I wished she was dead and hung up. About ten days later I tried to call her and tell her I was sorry. I still loved her and was ready to forgive. I couldn’t get through and eventually found out from a friend that my fiancé had been murdered. She was a waitress at a bar in Hollywood, where we originally met and our argument, three men had taken her home and killed her.

I started going to church at Capitol Church near the University of Utah and I learned to worship God through song and by listening to His Word from the past. And through it all, I had the support of the entire Mission staff.

I found that I could stay sober and not hate people. I called my mother and told her how well I was doing. She had traveled a lot for work. One of the things he really showed me was that even though I was a driver. As I write this, the Sundance Film Festival is under way and I have been busy for weeks picking people up at the Salt Lake International Airport and transporting them up to Park City.

Having this job has helped give me a sense of purpose. I feel like I am a part of a good team of drivers who are working together to serve people. It’s interesting, because as part of the New Life Program, I was assigned a mentor, or “disciple.” My mentor was a businessman who traveled a lot for work. One of the things he really showed me was that even though I was living a messy life until the day when that couple came up to me in line at the soup kitchen and told me about the Rescue Mission.

I guess it was God who directed those people (who knows, maybe they were angels) to come and talk to me. I thank him so much for leading me to the Rescue Mission. I will be here for the Mission for a couple more months as I save up some money to purchase my own car. I now forward with the future. I look forward to talking to my mom on the phone a couple of times a week and hearing the excitement in her voice. I look forward to staying connected with my church, doing well at work and actually enjoying other people. Please pray that God’s hand would continue to guide me and encourage my heart.

I can’t thank God, the Rescue Mission and you, the Mission’s faithful supporters, enough. I wish you all could have seen me a year ago and then see me today. You would be amazed at the transformation God has done!