

New York: Stopping to learn one homeless man's story

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Working in New York City has been a challenge and a blessing. From working in a community garden to working in a part of the city where not everyone is willing to go to, God has been at work—from the little children I have worked with, to the homeless man I shared a conversation and a bottle of water with.



Eric Aguinaga Challenges began as soon as I got off the plane. I discovered the hustle and bustle of LaGuardia can affect your image of the city in a heartbeat if you haven't been here before. People push and shove to be in line first at the cab pickup, and it's easy to see the different walks of life from tourists from Italy, to natives returning home for the first time in months. You realize you aren't home and that this place works differently.

The guy behind you may have just lost his job and he doesn't know how to tell his wife who is expecting. The couple in front of you may be rude because they lost their only son and don't know how to cope with the loss, and do not want contact from anyone at the moment. These are the things you never know, so as a follower of Christ, we should be kind with a hello and a quick smile.

This city can grind you down if you aren't in your Bible daily and in constant prayer. I have struggled to realize the homeless guy across the aisle from me may smell bad, but he has a story for why he is homeless, and he is still a human being. The person who cut me off in line at the local corner store may be in a hurry to get home to feed her son, who hasn't eaten in almost two days. The hidden things we may not know about are the things we never take the time to talk to people about, to find out their needs.

Opening the door

That's not easy. How should I approach someone who is homeless? How do I come off as kind and loving instead of just trying to make myself feel good? What I learned was that just approach them with a smile, and be sure to have something that you both can partake in, whether it's some granola bars or a bottle of water—just be sure that you have one for them, and one for you. This opens the door that is sometimes hard to walk into.

Walking through the city one day after getting off at the wrong stop, I came upon a man sitting on Lexington Avenue, near Columbus Circle. He had a sign that said he was a veteran and could use some help. I had a spare MetroCard that had been given to me by a mission team I knew, so I stopped and asked him if he needed one.

When he looked up, he looked like he was going to cry. He told me this one was of the more challenging things to get, and he hated asking people for a swipe to enter the train to go home. He was grateful that I was giving him one, even if it was only good for a couple of days. I was going to walk away, but something told me not to. I decided to sit down next to him and just talk with him for a few minutes. I learned he was a Vietnam veteran. He was a recovering addict and has been clean for a couple of years now, but because of the things he saw in the war and the drugs, his mind had been messed up. He wasn't able to work and had to be on the streets to get

money to eat and pay his bills.

My giving him the card allowed him to save around \$3, and he was so grateful because now he either could buy a slice of pizza or a sandwich from a corner store in the Bronx, where he lived.

My heart broke for him

My heart broke for him. God opened my eyes that day and showed me I take things for granted—my family, my house, my phone, a hot shower. I take all of this for granted. God showed me not everyone is as blessed as I am. Not everyone is capable to go work.

The homeless are people, too, and we should treat them as such. Jesus associated with all people from all walks of life, from tax collectors to prostitutes, and somewhere in the middle were the homeless. We need to love them as we love Jesus, for he is with them as he is with us. We should take a minute to learn their story, for it may make a deeper impact than we will ever know.

Eric Aguinaga, a student at Paris Junior College, served with [Go Now Missions](#) in New York City.

EDITOR'S NOTE: When originally posted, the article was attributed to the wrong author. Eric Aguinaga is the writer of this blog. We regret the error.