



The Power of Rescue and the Ministry of Grace

A presentation by Nathan Long of The Geauga Faith Rescue Mission

Isaiah 58:6-11

April 27, 2005

Matthew 25:31-46

Good morning, and thank you for the opportunity to come and share with you today.

There's good news for those of you in Geauga County: there is a place of hope. Geauga Faith Rescue Mission is a ministry dedicated to helping individuals escape homelessness—not simply to enable them to survive, but to experience true life transformation. Our goal isn't to create dependency, but to help people break free from the destructive cycles that led them to homelessness. Through the grace of God, the preaching of the gospel, and a commitment to love, support, and encourage those in crisis, we aim to restore hope.

The Story of Geauga Faith Rescue Mission

Let me begin by sharing the origin of our rescue mission. It was founded in 2014 by a man named Mike Farrell. I love telling Mike's story because it reminds us of how powerful it can be to step into someone's life—you never know what kind of impact it might have years down the road.

Mike was homeless as a child. He, his mother, and sister lived under overpasses and stayed at the Orlando Rescue Mission when they could. Mike was only about 10 or 12 years old. Because of a lack of space, he was placed in the men's section while his mother and sister were in the women's side. One night, lying in bed at that mission, he prayed a prayer he never forgot. He asked God for a dog. He also prayed for a wife—down to the color of her hair—and for a family with deep roots in a community. You see, Mike never stayed in one school for longer than six months. He longed for stability.

God answered every part of that prayer. Mike eventually married into the Armstrong family, one of the founding families of Geauga County. He got the wife, the dog, and a sense of belonging. That experience inspired him to give back—and he launched Geauga Faith Rescue Mission as a grassroots effort to bring shelter to a county that, at the time, had no homeless services.

My Journey into Rescue Ministry

I was invited to join the board in 2015. I had moved to Ohio from Kentucky to work with orphaned children and in juvenile detention centers. I never imagined myself working in homeless ministry, but I soon realized that many children in the foster system end up

homeless within just a few years of aging out. That connection opened my heart to the mission.

Geauga Faith Rescue Mission is part of the Citygate Network, the largest association of gospel-centered rescue missions in the United States. About 75–80% of all homeless services in the U.S. come from the faith-based community, which is a powerful testament to God working through His people. Being part of that network, I began traveling and visiting other rescue missions, interviewing former clients and learning from their experiences.

The Power of a Rescue Mission

I remember visiting the Mahoning Valley Rescue Mission in Youngstown and speaking to a man who had been a client there. He told me how he stood outside the rescue mission, torn between two choices. He knew where the drug dealer's house was—and he'd walk that way—then turn around and head back toward the mission. He paced for hours. He said, "I knew if I walked through those doors, my life would change." And it did.

At our mission, we painted our front door red. In colonial times, a red door symbolized hospitality. If you were traveling and saw a red door, you knew it was a safe place to go. We wanted our guests to know that they were welcome, that this was a place of safety, hope, and transformation.

Transformation Through the Gospel

Another story that touched my heart came from a rescue mission in Roanoke. A staff member, once a homeless guest himself, gave me a tour. As he brought me into the sanctuary, he said, "For almost 100 years, the gospel has been preached here every night." What a powerful testimony—that for a century, God's Word has gone forth to those most in need.

Right here in Geauga County, there are people who are hurting—who need food, shelter, and hope. In 2019, we purchased a house in Chardon and began renovations to open our first men's shelter. COVID hit soon after, halting progress, but by 2022 we were able to fully renovate and open the shelter, offering six beds and a therapeutic, Christ-centered environment.

Our shelter is not a place where people simply sleep and leave. Our guests stay with us throughout the day. We invest in their wellness and healing. It's not always easy, but it is always worth it.

Greg's Story: Grace in Action

One of our early guests, Greg, became a dear friend. He struggled with alcohol addiction and had lost his family, including his son, due to his choices. He came to us when everyone else had turned their backs on him.

When I picked him up, he had just left the hospital and could barely walk. As soon as he got in our van, a torrential downpour began. It felt like God had timed it perfectly—like He wanted Greg to know he wasn't forgotten. Our mission became home for him. Eventually, he got his own place and a job, but the battle with addiction continued. He passed away last year, but we were able to host a memorial for him—attended by people who, like him, had no one else. It reminded me that the ones who often seem to deserve help the least are the ones who need grace the most. And isn't that true of all of us?

We don't minister to people because they deserve it. We minister because Christ extended grace to us. If we got what we deserved, it would be judgment. But Christ gave us grace—and He calls us to do the same.

Healthy Charity and Gospel Intentionality

There is a right way to serve people. I highly recommend the book *Toxic Charity*, which talks about how well-meaning help can sometimes harm. The author shares a story about a wealthy man who gives \$100 to someone in need. The first time, the man is grateful. The second time, he starts to expect it. The third time, he becomes dependent. And the fourth time, he feels entitled. When charity leads to dependency and entitlement, we're no longer helping—we're hurting.

So at Geauga Faith Rescue Mission, we seek to build a culture of **rescue and accountability**. Our goal is to offer both grace and structure—to help people rediscover purpose and value through Christ.

Why We Serve

We do not serve people based on their potential. We serve them because Christ loved them first. In Matthew 25, Jesus tells us that when we serve the least of these, we serve Him. That's why we persevere—even when it's hard. Even when people are ungrateful, angry, or unwilling to change. We serve for Christ's sake, not for a specific outcome.

Ministry in Action

Before we had our men's shelter, we would help in any way we could. I remember lying under a broken-down truck, helping a man put his driveshaft back in. As I worked, I shared the gospel with him. That man had grown bitter toward the church—but in his moment of need, he was willing to listen.

This is what we do: we meet people where they are, provide for their basic needs, and point them to Christ. We begin and end each weekday with Bible study. It's not always easy—try getting six tired, sometimes grumpy men to Bible study at 7 AM! But we're establishing rhythm and purpose in their lives.

We typically give guests a 90-day stay and work with them to rebuild their lives. If they're struggling with addiction, we refer them to recovery programs. If they need work, we help

them get ID, apply for jobs, and access mental health support. Many of them carry trauma and rejection that has followed them since childhood.

Looking Ahead: A Women's Shelter

We're excited to be opening a **women's shelter** right next to our men's shelter. Currently, there's no shelter in Geauga County for single women without dependents. We often place women in hotels temporarily, but that's not sustainable. So we purchased the house next door and are in the renovation process—praying for the city's approval to expand it with a second floor to serve even more women in the future.

How You Can Get Involved

Gauga Faith Rescue Mission is a community collaboration. Before someone runs out of resources, they run out of relationships. We invite you to be part of those relationships.

- **Volunteer to provide a meal:** We have a meal train calendar. Meals for 6–8 people can be dropped off at the shelter.
- **Lead a Bible study:** We need teachers for evening sessions.
- **Donate time or skills:** From renovations to fundraising, there are many ways to serve.
- **Give financially:** If God has laid it on your heart, become a financial partner in this work.

God doesn't call the equipped—He equips those He calls. If you have a willing heart, He will give you the ability to serve.

Final Encouragement

Thank you again for letting me share the story of rescue taking place in our county. I want to encourage you: your greatest ministry may be right in your own home. Be a light there first. And then, go out and shine the grace of God to others in your community. Let your love be evident—through your words, your actions, and your life.

Let us open our voices and our hands, and share the goodness of God.