Viewpoint

Culture Shock: a challenge to examine our presumptions

By Kasey Carty-Campbell
Columnist

“Hey man. Can you spare me 65 cents for a beer?”

This started my first conversation with a homeless person during my twelve hours of nomadic living in the streets of Nashville with my 6’6” protector, William.

We wandered through the streets as ghosts into the waves of hockey fans flocking to their cars, our identities shrouded in three-sizes-too-big sweatpants and greasy hair.

A clock on a building on 2nd Avenue, our watch for the night, announced to us the midnight hour.

John and his buddy, he never gave his name, sat on a park bench, illuminated by the glaring lights of the TigerMart Exxon station, and the dying lights of the McDonalds next door.

A crumpled brown paper bag disguised the thirty-two ounces of canned Bud Light that he had hoped we would replenish.

As we walked away after a brief conversation, John’s voice rose behind us, “Do ya’ll have any money to eat with?”

Around one that night, we sat on the ground a few stores down from the Liquid Lounge, a club on 2nd Avenue; the parade of people was never-ending.

Many quickly glanced at us, and then looked away. Others looked straight into our eyes if we were two case studies or interesting objects to be further scrutinized.

My first reaction was to be offended, but then I noticed a trend on the busy sidewalk. Those that passed the “bums” on the street without a glance did the same to everyone else on the road. They brushed by us, not seeing the same truths that exist in both places.

Regardless of the actual amount of sincerity, at least unknowing observers that others are worth spending a breath in a conversation.

Now take these same students and place them on the Nashville streets, do they react? How about in line at Kroger, or at a booth in O’Charley’s?

One of the most common complaints I hear from those around me is about the overbearing “Union Bubble” that they must endure.

Although sleeping on the street seems to have nothing to do with living under the “Union Bubble,” my eyes were opened to truths that exist in both places.

We all live in our own bubbles, only interacting with others when it is convenient.

In the “big” areas of our lives: our major, our church family, our salvation, we can stand out as being different from the world.

But when it comes down to how we react when someone cuts us off on the highway or how we treat that person who drives you crazy every time you even look at them, maybe we aren’t so different.

We aren’t different in the details.

While searching for a major last year, I felt the pressure of finding what my “calling” was, and in doing so, I realized that I was missing the calling that God had for me in the little things every day.

How hard is it to write a note to someone who is having a hard week?

Or to actually look a person in the eye on the street?

Or to spend two hours a week with an underprivileged child who actually rewards you a million times more than the three dollars you spend on a Happy Meal?

I admit to failing every day at these little details.

I John 4:20 says, “If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?”

In most cases, the problem isn’t hate, it is the absence of love.

Love serves no good simply as a thought in my mind. I must act out my love in all seasons.

This is true whether I am able to communicate true feelings to my roommate when all I feel like doing is going to bed, or acknowledging the presence of a homeless man on the street. I have the same calling to step out of myself and into God.

Loving my neighbor comes not in handing five dollars to a person who showers in a river. But this love is only seen through letting my actions and words reflect the love of Christ that undoubtedly exists in my life, on this campus and on the streets of Nashville.

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