

Overcoming Depression by Helping Homeless

Weighing about 100 pounds and facing hospitalization, award-winning vocalist Candy Christmas, former member of southern gospel group The Hemphills, says she hit rock bottom.

In 2004 her doctor, seeing Christmas' depression was winning the war inside and out, suggested medication or admittance to a hospital. But deep inside, Christmas knew there was another way to overcome the darkness in her life.

"I knew that the Word of God says that Jesus Christ is the Prince of Peace, and so I told my doctor ... either my religion works for me or it doesn't, and I'm just not going to go that direction," Christmas says.

Rather, she found healing under the Jefferson Street Bridge in Nashville, Tenn.

When asked to help feed the homeless under the bridge one chilly night, Christmas decided she had nothing to lose. Raised in Louisiana, Christmas knew she could at least make a pot of jambalaya.

"The first night I went was just life-changing," Christmas says. Though there were only a handful of homeless people there, Christmas noticed most had no socks and gloves. She began to shop for clothing and toiletry items to hand out once a week.

"From there on out, the homeless people started telling their friends ... and I started telling my friends ... and so right now we serve somewhere between 300 and 500 homeless people every Tuesday night," Christmas says. And so was born The Bridge Ministry.

The Bridge aims to first address people's physical hunger, but there is also a time of worship and ministering. Christmas says new believers are born each week.

Today it's not unusual for Christmas to run into people she met under the bridge who have since turned their lives around. They thank her for what she did for them.

For Christmas, however, the homeless did as much for her as she did for them: "I literally gave my way out of depression, and so it has totally changed my life."