



A Growing Vocabulary for Matthew 25

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A word is gaining popularity in our Matthew 25 discussions: wraparound. I first heard it used in a Presbyterian Mission Agency webinar on housing, in which churches described their different mission projects. In its outreach to people who were homeless, one church identified a need for “wraparound services.”

I next heard this word during our Friday noon conversations on the Netflix series *Time: The Kalief Browder Story*. (Please [register](#) and join us by Zoom for a challenging discussion about criminal justice. You’re free to come for one in the series or for all remaining in April.) We were delighted to have the Honorable Reyna Morales, a Milwaukee County Children’s Court judge, join the discussion. She, too, described the need for “wraparound services” for those who appear before her.

Simply put, a wraparound service or project surrounds the person with all the care they need, in one location or agency. I am reminded that people in shock are often wrapped in a blanket to stabilize body temperature and create a sense of safety. An embrace. In the comfort language of Isaiah 40, verse 11 becomes our Biblical image of wraparound services,

“He will feed his flock like a shepherd;
he will gather the lambs in his arms,
and carry them in his bosom,
and gently lead the mother sheep.”

Just as God’s embrace offers peace and protection, how we can embrace our neighbors in the same way?

Through our Matthew 25 work, we’ve seen how poverty deepens and lives are destroyed because of an illness or injury leading to crushing medical debt, eviction or foreclosure, lengthy pretrial detention without an ability to pay bail, and (upcoming) unfair housing practices. Any one can cause a cascade of problems. Pretrial detention can lead to a loss of employment, which causes homelessness, and which leads to deterioration of health. Or, in another order, a serious medical problem can lead to loss of employment and, in turn, an inability to pay a fine that leads to pretrial detention without the ability to afford bail.

Examining the role of the church in the midst of such need, we might decide to focus on one area to which we feel called or have expertise. Then, we watch how other of these themes hinder the desired outcomes. The possibility of tackling every issue together, however, can feel overwhelming on a systemic basis. Our ability and knowledge to offer wraparound care – God’s complete embrace – is limited.

A good option is partnering with other organizations. I’ve written about Apostle Presbyterian Church’s Wednesday program that has grown from food distribution to include physical and mental health services, clothing donations, and more. On the sidewalk, they wrap people in needed services by partnering with local organizations and agencies.

Because of your recognized Matthew 25 efforts, I was invited to brainstorm with a group of ruling elders from Cayuga-Syracuse Presbytery about an initiative to prevent eviction of single-parent families. As we talked, we learned of grants and agencies focused on the same issue. The conversation turned to how this team could partner with them, rather than replicate what is already provided. Their unique role in that collaboration began to emerge, opening even greater possibilities. Breaking down unfair systems is daunting work; it requires partnership and collaboration. Like a warm blanket, may we cover our neighbors with compassion and care. Like God’s embrace, may we love one another completely.