

# **Social work in line with biblical principles, HPU educator insists**

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BROWNWOOD—After working eight years in secular social work higher education, Rachel Derrington knew she was called to something more.

“I always recognized the parallels between social work values and ethics and Jesus’ teachings, but I couldn’t figure out a way to combine the two,” she said.

After praying about the situation for two years, she received a call from Toni Damron, assistant professor of social work at Howard Payne University.

“She got my number from a friend of a friend and told me she heard I had moved to the area from a colleague I had only met once,” Derrington said. “It was quite serendipitous.”

Derrington joined the HPU faculty in 2018, moving from the University of Denver where she was an adjunct faculty member and curriculum developer.

Previously, she worked in child welfare, helping to place children with adoptive families and providing the families with post-adoptive support. She also worked for the federal government in child welfare policy analysis and marriage/family strengthening activities, and for the state government in Colorado providing policy communications for the state regulatory agency.

## **Need to be ‘rooted in Christ’**

Now, as assistant professor of social work and director of HPU’s social work program, Derrington is teaching students how they can lean on Christ to make a kingdom impact in their future careers.

Social workers deal often with the darkest forces humanity has to offer—abuse, trauma and addictions among others, she noted.

“Social workers are always dealing with the fallouts of evil in the world,” Derrington said. “If they are not rooted in Christ, are not relying on Jesus to empower them, it’s really hard to maintain a healthy balance in their lives and avoid burnout.”

Social work principles are in line with Christian values and the teachings of Jesus, she insisted.

“Jesus taught us to take care of the vulnerable, the oppressed, orphans, displaced people,” she said. “One of the values of social work is holding people in unconditional positive regard and protecting human dignity and the worth of people. That’s all in line with what the Bible tells us.”

Derrington spoke with her pastor, Sam Crosby of First Baptist Church of San Saba, about Jesus’ teachings.

“He said there are 13 references in the King James Version of the Gospels involving Jesus blessing or ministering to the poor,” she said. “Though opinions differ based on interpretations, some scholars argue that the Bible commands compassion toward those in need some 300 times.”

## **Seeing God’s redemptive power at**

## **work**

Christian social workers are better positioned to see God's redemptive powers at work in the lives of the people with which they interact, she added.

"Secularly, social work promotes the idea of empowering others to reach their full potential," Derrington said. "When you add the Christian influences, social work is about reaching this potential within an individual's relationship with Christ."

Although social work often can be incredibly challenging, it is equally rewarding, she asserted.

"Your entire life is centered around the principles of Jesus' teachings," Derrington said. "Your career, the way you relate to people in your personal life—even who you are in the community and in the world. Folks who have it in their hearts to serve and really want to model the life of Jesus will find that the social work field is a good way to accomplish that."

## **Promoting positive development and healthy families**

It is also important, Derrington noted, to understand that social work is as much about preventing evil in the world as it is about dealing with the fallout of it.

"Social work is also about promoting positive youth development and healthy relationships and strengthening marriages and parenting skills," she said.

A social work education prepares students to practice in organizations or

institutions or to work with small groups or families, she explained. Careers include positions with adult protective services, child welfare, community organizations, schools, correctional facilities, prisons, hospitals and treatment facilities among many others. Social workers may also choose to go into politics, research, policy analysis or administrative roles.

“There are also opportunities to do international social work in any type of setting anywhere in the world,” said Derrington.

Many may wonder if they have “what it takes” for a career in social work, but Derrington is certain Christians do.

“You need a solid relationship with Jesus and a good understanding of how he taught us to treat others,” she said. “When put together with the concrete tools that social workers develop in higher education, there are really no limits on how you can impact positive changes in individuals, families, organizations and communities.”