Neighborliness: A Call to Racial and Socioeconomic Equity in Charlotte, North Carolina

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NEIGHBORLINESS:
A CALL TO RACIAL AND SOCIOECONOMIC EQUITY
IN CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA

By
David Daniel Docusen II

A Project Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of
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Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

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Abstract

In Mark 12:28-34, Jesus is challenged by an expert in religious law to identify the most important commandment. He replies that loving God and neighbors is the most important of the over six hundred commandments. This research project investigates how healing can come to communities that have been racially and socioeconomically divided when a spirit of biblical neighborliness is present. The ubiquity of this call to neighborliness throughout Scripture highlights the importance of this topic, but special emphasis is given to Mark 12:28-34 and Isaiah 58:1-14 in order to focus the effort and scope of this dissertation.

Chapter One surveys the biblical call to neighborliness in Mark 12:28-34 and Isaiah 58:1-14. Chapter Two explains the influences that cause individuals born into poverty to likely remain in poverty their entire life. The framework of stabilizing education, employment, healthcare, and housing is introduced as a strategy to break the cyclical pattern of generational poverty. Chapter Three moves to describing a seminar, titled “Neighborliness: A Seminar on Race, Economics, and Friendship,” hosted at Center City Church in Charlotte, North Carolina. Chapter Four then offers a reflective summary and analysis of the feedback from participants of the seminar. Lastly, Chapter Five reveals the desire of the researcher to continue to progress toward the study and practical expression of biblical neighborliness in cities across the world.
For Dara, Max, Mary, Jack, and Benjamin.

We choose Jesus and share his love with others.

I love you forever.
Chapter One
The Project Introduced

The purpose of this project is to develop a seminar entitled “Neighborliness: A Seminar on Race, Economics, and Friendship” to prepare participants to understand the theological and practical expression of racial and socioeconomic equity in the greater Charlotte community. The focus of this project is to develop four sessions that explore a biblical worldview that lead to tangible expressions of neighborliness.

Throughout this project, the topic of neighborliness will be examined in response to the Greatest Commandment. Chapter One is an overview of the context of the project and why it is important to address issues of racial and socioeconomic equity. Chapter Two is a thorough exploration of theological support for this topic found in Mark 12:28-34 and Isaiah 58:1-14. Jesus said the greatest commandment in all of the law is to love God and neighbors with full passion and commitment (Mark 12:28-34, New Living Translation). Isaiah highlighted the interaction the prophet Isaiah had with a worshiping community that lacked equitable treatment to their neighbors. He called the community to repentance and gave a preview of a rightly worshiping community. The second part of Chapter Two will explore research that explained reasons that families remain trapped in a cyclical pattern of generational poverty. The seminar will be developed and taught to participants who desire to
understand the theological and practical expressions of neighborliness across dividing lines of the impoverished urban communities and more affluent areas of Charlotte.

**Definition of Terms**

For the purposes of this dissertation, *neighborliness* is referred to as a central behavior of Christians who seek to embody the love, understanding, and care that Jesus displayed during his earthly ministry. A neighborly spirit leads members of the body of Christ to seek to understand the perspective of others from racial and socioeconomic backgrounds that are different from their personal experience. Theologian Walter Brueggemann wrote that a proper expression of biblical neighborliness extends beyond friendship into systemic economic practices in communities. He said, “Justice is the maintenance of neighborliness that permits all members of the community to flourish without the distortion or subversion of economic leverage.”

The term *race* is referred to as a human construct that has been created to aid in the ability to draw clear sociological lines between neighbors. Various ethnic backgrounds should be celebrated as showing the diversity of the image of God. Social systems have been put in categories of race that are then used to exert power from a dominant class to classes that are viewed as less valuable. For the purposes of this project, race is used to explain these social constructs that have divided communities, particularly along socioeconomic lines.

Christian civil rights leader John Perkins said, “Even though race might be a socially manufactured idea, it has had a very real impact on our lives.” He continued,

Race as we know it today is mostly a social theory that was devised and refined over the centuries to serve the economic and religious goals of a majority culture, first in European territory, then later in America. Whiteness, it turns out, is a very recent idea in the grand scheme of history, but it’s a powerful one that was used to create categories and systems that would place value, economically and otherwise, on skin color and the groups of people who were either blessed or burdened by it. If race could be used to indicate a group’s level of intelligence, its work ethic, and its tendency to do wrong, then the majority culture could justify all types of bigotries and discriminations.

The construct of race, and the economic division it breeds, is not supported by the call to neighborliness and oneness that is found throughout Scriptures. Academic researcher Dave Unander explored the historical and biblical concepts of race in his book *Shattering the Myth of Race*. He wrote, “As we survey the Bible, we find an absence of anything suggesting or supporting the concept of race.” In addition, Unander noted, “The Bible displays a remarkable lack of physical descriptions of any kind. There is a message in Scripture through what is not said.”

*Equity* is referred to as the ability for all neighbors to have access to opportunities that lead to a holistically healthy life. The Bible is clear that all humans are created equally in the image of God (Genesis 1:28). Individuals, as a divine image-bearers, should be given equitable opportunities to provide for themselves, their families, and enjoy relationships with

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3. Ibid., 45.

others in their community. Christian theologian Soong-Chan Rah said, “In the presence of God, we are all equal. We are equal in our disgrace and sin, but ultimately we are equal in how we are loved by God.”

Research Question

The terms defined above are used throughout this research project to help address matters of racial and socioeconomic equity. The major research question is: How does one effectively and accurately develop a neighborly worldview with appropriate theological motivation and practical response to racial and socioeconomic equity?

Subsidiary Questions

1. What is a theology of neighborliness?
2. Is God biased toward the poor?
3. What does the Bible say about neighborliness and caring for the poor?
4. How does neighborliness lead to equity for the poor and marginalized?
5. What are systemic inequities that lead to the marginalization of the poor?

6. What is a practical framework that would lead to disrupting generational poverty?

7. How can the body of Christ uniquely address generational poverty?

8. How do implicit bias and inattentional blindness hinder God’s call to neighborliness?

**Seminar Objectives**

The following objectives have been established for this seminar:

1. Introduce a theological framework that clearly depicts God as a benevolent advocate for the poor and marginalized.

2. Introduce and explain how systemic inequities lead to the marginalization of the poor in Charlotte, North Carolina.


4. Propose a clear response from the body of Christ—specifically Center City Church—in Charlotte, North Carolina.

5. Survey the participants at the beginning and ending of each session. They will be asked to express their understanding of the topics that will be taught in each session. The post-session survey will require participants to incorporate the new knowledge they have gained in each session. Each of the surveys will be one page in length.
Seminar Description

Utilizing the teaching of the Old and New Testament, four seminar sessions will focus on the biblical foundation for neighborliness, systemic inequities that lead to division in the Charlotte community, a framework for disrupting generational poverty, and the response of the body of Christ.

Intended Seminar Outcomes

Upon completion of this seminar, the student should be able to:

1. Construct a theological framework that informs their love and care for the poor and marginalized.

2. Identify and articulate systemic inequities that lead to marginalizing the poor.

3. Understand a framework for disrupting generational poverty that includes equitable access to housing, healthcare, employment, and education.

4. Develop an apologetic that calls the body of Christ to use their God-given gifts to practically respond to the plight of the poor and marginalized.
Seminar Schedule

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>TITLE</th>
<th>READING</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friday, February 1</td>
<td>Session 1: Theological Motivation for Neighborliness</td>
<td>Mark 12:28-13:2</td>
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<tr>
<td>February 1, 2019</td>
<td></td>
<td>Matthew 22:35-40</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Isaiah 58:1-14</td>
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<td>Session 2: Understanding Systemic Inequality in Cities</td>
<td>Old Testament - Pharaoh</td>
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<td>New Testament - Herod</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Includes excerpts from <em>How to Kill a City</em> by Peter Moskowitz, <em>The New Jim Crow</em> by Michelle Alexander, and <em>Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger</em> by Ronald Sider</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday,</td>
<td>Session 3: A Framework for Disrupting Generational Poverty</td>
<td>I Corinthians 11:17-33</td>
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<tr>
<td>February 2, 2019</td>
<td></td>
<td>Overview of Freedom Communities, Purpose Built Communities, Lawndale Christian Community Church, and Lift Orlando.</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Session 4: The Response of the Body of Christ</td>
<td>Ephesians 4:1-16</td>
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<td>I Corinthians 12</td>
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Relation to the Ministry of the Writer

Charlotte, North Carolina, is a community that prides itself on southern hospitality, a thriving business community, various entertainment opportunities that include professional sports franchises, and an active arts community. However, a research project completed in 2013 revealed another side. When exploring upward economic mobility opportunities in fifty cities across the United States, researchers at Harvard University and the University of California Berkeley found that Charlotte ranked 50th out of 50 regarding the ability of a child
born in the bottom income quintile to rise to the top income quintile as an adult. This study uncovered realities in this community that have created inequitable opportunities for individuals and families that live in affluence and those who are trapped in a pattern of generational poverty.

The focus of this research project will have three elements: to explore the theological motivation for neighborliness, to give a practical overview of generational poverty, and to describe the response from Center City Church in Charlotte, North Carolina, to these findings. This local church is creating opportunities for neighbors from various racial and socioeconomic backgrounds to learn and grow from each other as equitable members of the community. Special emphasis will be given directly to members of the body of Christ that live in affluent areas connecting on a meaningful level with individuals in the Camp Greene and Ashley Park neighborhoods, both of which are high poverty communities located approximately one mile west of the Uptown Charlotte business district.

Theologian and author Drew Hart wrote that church families in economically privileged communities need to bring more emphasis to the plight of their neighbors in economically distressed areas. He said, “We must learn to see a world Jesus has begun to flip right-side up so that those most despised as last and least valued are now first and most esteemed.” Jesus continually advocated for the poor to be included in the life and vitality of a community (Luke 14:13; Mark 10:21; Matthew 11:15). If Jesus placed this much emphasis

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on caring for the poor, it seems appropriate that churches in the Charlotte community should
give equal importance to this expression of their faith as well. He speaks to a different kind
of greatness that is defined by neighborliness and care for others. In their book *The Rich and
the Rest of Us*, Tavis Smiley and Cornel West challenge Christians living in America to
consider what greatness truly means, stating, “How can America be first if the least among us
are our last collective concern?” This question inspires the work of the Center City Church
family to engage in the work of bridging the gap in relationships between the rich and the
poor in Charlotte.

Christians must not underestimate the importance of their role in the lives of families
in poverty. Their faithful presence alone can be one of the factors that help others break this
suffocating pattern. Dr. Ruby Payne said, “Four reasons one leaves poverty are: It’s too
painful to stay, a vision or a goal, a key relationship, or a special talent or skill.” In these
scenarios, something or someone helps individuals see that there is another path that can be
chosen.

8. Tavis Smiley and Cornel West, *The Rich and the Rest of Us: A Poverty Manifesto*

The Significance of Center City Church’s Location

Charlotte is a city that has been referred to as a top ten city to live in America from multiple media outlets, including Forbes Magazine. This city has enjoyed the reputation as the number two banking capital in the nation and is home to multiple professional sports teams and a vibrant entrepreneurial community. However, the 2013 Harvard University/UC Berkeley research project exposed that Charlotte ranked last in economic mobility, highlighting inequitable circumstances for the rich and poor.

In response to these findings, local government and members of the business community commissioned a research project called *Opportunity Task Force* to explore strategies and solutions to raise access for residents in high poverty communities to upward economic mobility options. The task force consulted with over fifty national, regional, and local experts to explore the multiple, complex issues that impact generational poverty and access to opportunity. They shared evidence-based research, data, and well-informed perspectives. They also reached out to thousands of community members through listening sessions and community engagement strategies. Members of the task force began to refer to


Charlotte as “the tale of two cities” because of inequitable access to upward economic mobility opportunities.\(^{14}\)

The tension that has been present in Charlotte was highlighted when Keith Lamont Scott, an African-American man, was shot and killed by a Charlotte-Mecklenburg police officer on September 20, 2016. A multi-day protest ensued across the city and eventually concentrated in the heart of Uptown Charlotte. The reaction from the community was split between some who expressed outrage at limited instances of violent protesting and others that expressed broader outrage at the use of continued excessive force against African Americans.\(^{15}\) Shock and dismay were in equal parts expressed from many in more affluent areas. However, for residents who whose voices have been ignored, these long-standing frustrations that were protested in the streets were no revelation.\(^{16}\)

The Harvard/Berkeley study identified five correlating factors that are the strongest predictors of whether a person may or may not be able to change socio-economic status. The findings in this study highlight the frustrations that many in the community expressed during the protests when Scott was killed. These predictors include segregation, income inequality, school quality, social capital (networks and relationships that provide access to people, information and opportunities), and family structure. Of these, family structure was found to


\(^{16}\) “Context,” Leading on Opportunity.
be the most predictive of economic mobility. Each of these predictors are explored further in this research project.

The faith community also responded to the challenge of inequitable access to basic opportunities for the poor and marginalized. Churches across denominational lines galvanized their efforts to explore how the gospel can be applied to unifying divided communities. The For Charlotte Mission Network hosted an event called Movement Day that brought together over 1,000 people from a wide spectrum of racial and socioeconomic backgrounds in the community to explore matters related to the Harvard/Berkeley study. For Charlotte is a gospel-centered network of churches in the Greater Charlotte area working together to seek the peace of the Charlotte community. They have a stated conviction that when the church operates in unity, it can make the greatest possible impact for the good of the city. Drew Hart wrote, “When we can be honest about how our entire society is deeply racialized, we will be ready to move forward.” Movement Day was a day for the faith community in Charlotte to acknowledge dividing lines—both racially and socioeconomically—and rally around a unified effort to see the body of Christ come together with one voice.

The significance of Center City Church’s location, one mile west of the urban center of Uptown Charlotte, is that it rests on a dividing line between the rich and poor in Charlotte.

17. Ibid.

18. For a record of this event see https://movementdaycharlotte.com/.


20. Ibid.

The southwest border of the church campus touches Camp Greene, one of the highest poverty communities in Charlotte. The southeast border of the church campus faces a new community called Bryant Park, which boasts homes that range from $300,000 to $445,000.\(^2\) Bryant Park was created after developers assembled over 200 homes from the Camp Greene neighborhood and then razed the homes, displacing longtime residents of the community. The developers then created borders for this new community and renamed this neighborhood Bryant Park.

Camp Greene was originally developed in 1917 as a World War I site that housed and trained approximately sixty thousand troops.\(^2\) By 1919, the training facility closed, and the infrastructure of the camp was used to create the neighborhood just west of Uptown Charlotte.\(^2\) This community has since become one of the most segregated neighborhoods in the Charlotte community. The local school, Ashley Park PreK-8 School, which draws students from this neighborhood, reports that 88% of the children that attend their school are black.\(^2\)

As the student populations in Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools became less racially diverse due to white students moving out of the schools, the most highly qualified teachers

\(^{22}\) For current information see, for example, https://www.zillow.com/homes/for_sale/bryant-park-charlotte_rb/?fromHomePage=true&shouldFireSellPageImplicitClaimGA=false&fromHomePagePageTab=buy.


\(^{24}\) Ibid.

transferred out, leaving the segregated schools with less-qualified teachers.26 This is a sad reality for many schools like Ashley Park PreK-8 School that are trying to bring excellence to the classrooms of high poverty schools. If there are not qualified teachers in place, factors will continue to accumulate, perpetuating the cycle of poverty for students in segregated schools. Additionally, research has also shown that students from integrated schools demonstrate lower levels of racial fears and stereotypes, and experience less intergenerational perpetuation of racism and stereotypes across multiple institutional settings.27 Racial and socioeconomic dynamics must be considered when strategically planning for how churches in the Charlotte community can come alongside historically high poverty neighborhoods.

The Camp Greene neighborhood is also directly in the path of projected future growth as Uptown Charlotte’s development spreads west and investors search for areas they can redevelop near the city’s center.28 The rising cost of housing and continued tax increases are beginning to burden neighbors who have lived in this community for generations. “We’ve been neglected for a long time, and we want to see that change. We want development come in and do things that are positive,” said Cynthia Harrison, Camp Greene Neighborhood


Association’s vice president.” “We’re here to make more of what we have in our neighborhood.” Peter Moskowitz described what happens when new development comes into high poverty communities in his book *How to Kill a City: Gentrification, Inequality, and the Fight for the Neighborhood*. He said that gentrification includes displacement of families that have lived in communities for generations, loss of nuance and culture of historic neighborhoods, and an influx of wealth and whiteness into communities that had previously been inhabited by families from various racial backgrounds. Moskowitz said, “Gentrification is a trauma, one caused by the influx of massive amounts of capital into a city and the consequent destruction following in its wake.”

The Role of Churches in Gentrifying Communities

Churches can play an influential role in the Charlotte community by courageously acting as a bridge between racially and socioeconomically divided communities. Moskowitz visited Charlotte in April 2018 and spoke at Center City Church on the topic of gentrification. After the event, he said,

I have found that churches have the practical expression of being a place that can gather people across dividing lines to make a difference in gentrifying

30. Ibid.
32. Ibid., Location 110, Kindle.
communities. This dynamic is really interesting to me, and I am intrigued to see how I can engage more with churches in the future."

God can and will use pastors to motivate the business community to express generosity in their business practices in these rapidly changing communities. The market forces will continue to spawn new developments. Property values will respond in kind by consistently rising. Entrepreneurs will open new businesses to support the upward trend of economic growth. However, pastors have a unique opportunity to inspire the God-given gifts found in the church family to make room for neighbors that have lived in these communities for multiple generations. One resident recently said, “I never said I didn’t want to have nice things in my neighborhood. I just want to be able to still live here and enjoy it when it comes.”

Establish the Purpose for Addressing the Challenge

Neighborliness is an undeniable part of the equation that Jesus gave when discussing what it truly looked like to one of his disciples. Friendliness to those that make up all parts of a community is of utmost importance to Jesus. However, all too often the rich are favored in church communities, leaving poor neighbors neglected, marginalized, and on the outside looking into the feast that is offered at the table of God. Ronald Sider said, “When we want to effect change, we almost always contact people with influence, prestige, and power. When

33. Personal conversation, April 26, 2018.
34. Personal conversation, April 25, 2017.
God wants to save the world, he often selects slaves, prostitutes, and sundry other disadvantaged folk.”

Wayne Gordon started Lawndale Christian Community Church in the high poverty suburb of Chicago, Illinois, called North Lawndale in 1978. Gordon has invested into this community through listening to the needs of the community and responding to the desires of the community. Gordon saw the emphasis in Scriptures on loving God and neighbors and chose to create a church community that placed emphasis on both sides of the greatest commandment: loving God and neighbors (Matthew 22:36-40). Gordon reminds people that our neighbors include people who may require our time, and sometimes more of it than many are willing or able to give. He explained, “I suspect that some of our schedules and planning calendars are so full because we like the idea of staying busy, not because what we do is actually so important.”

Gordon and the Lawndale Christian Community Church family value all people created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). Each neighbor brings resources and giftedness to be shared at the table of God. This does not presume that a high poverty community will not need outside resources to reverse the economic trend. However, outside resources will be much more effectively used if the local community is fully mobilized and invested.


37. Ibid., 116.

The difficulty of connecting with neighbors across racial and socioeconomic lines should not be a deterrent to learning and growing together as a community. Gordon said, “Sometimes, because we can’t solve all the world’s problems, we get discouraged and give up. We fail to notice the situations in which those who need help are helpable. In summary, my neighbors are those whom I have both the opportunity and the ability to help.”

Dwight Hopkins gives hope for people of all racial and socioeconomic status in his book *Being Human*. He wrote,

> In order to achieve full humanity for all classes beyond a sinful asymmetry, the vocation to live out the fullest human capabilities hinges on liberating poor and working-class people from this harmful configuration that reproduces unbalanced social relations, deleterious emotional states, and wounded human personalities.

Walter Brueggemann gave an overview of the bible as it relates to the topic of his book *Money and Possessions*. Instead of focusing on one book of the bible that may speak to this topic, Brueggemann summarized the whole biblical record on economic justice and neighborly concern. God cares deeply about behaviors related to the way that his children steward their resources, and Brueggemann showed how Scriptures lay out a multitude of ways for this topic to be addressed and readdressed for the benefit of the believing community.

> Humans may have genuine desire for God, but distorted desires focus on lesser objects of affection that can interrupt a holistic expression of steadfast love toward God.


Unrelenting desire for more is a core temptation that is displayed throughout human history. Brueggemann said, “The God of the gospel does not intend that social life should consist in the unrestrained, addictive pursuit of commodities.” However, this cannot be remedied unless members of a community realize that they are a part of a much larger body in the family of God. The human condition has an insatiable appetite for money and possessions. The only anecdote for such a condition is the teaching of Jesus to love God with singular commitment and love for neighbors (Matthew 22:36-40; Mark 12:28-34). Acknowledgment of the neighbor’s presence and their role within a healthy community is indispensable for a viable social order.

The oppression of entire socioeconomic groups does not happen in isolation. There is a party mentality that must arise that brings a sense of elitism to a certain group that instinctively marginalizes other groups that have been deemed less than adequate due to their status in the community. Brueggemann powerfully addressed this, saying, “The abuse of the needy poor is accomplished by legislation. The practice of greed is not simply in common consumer practice, but in arrangements of loans, interest, credit, mortgages, and taxes. It is this that ‘robs’ the poor.” Moskowitz supported this sentiment, as well. He said,

In every gentrifying city there are always events, usually hidden from public view, that precede these street-level changes. The policies that cause cities to gentrify are crafted in the offices of real estate moguls and in the halls of city government. The coffee shop is the tip of the iceberg.

42. Ibid., 533.
43. Ibid., 538.
44. Ibid., 2844.
45. Moskowitz, How to Kill a City, Location 184, Kindle.
Harvey Cox explored the reach of capitalism into every facet of life in American culture in his book *The Market as God*. He observed that an acquisitive spirit has invaded popular culture and reached all the way into the Church. He also leveled an indictment on Christians that have allowed their theology to be influenced by greed and the insatiable desire for more. In a direct rebuke of the pursuit of happiness, he wrote, “The gospel of The Market is not a complicated one. True, it may be delivered in a staggering number of ways, but underneath, the content is the same. It says, simply: ‘buy this and you will be happy.’” The culture of acquisitiveness that has infiltrated the church has also widened the gap between the rich and the poor in church communities. The gospel levels the racial and socioeconomic divide and brings each person to the feet of Jesus as equals in the family of God. Chris Green explores the eucharist as a unifying meal that brings all followers of Jesus to the table as equitable partners that benefit from communion with God and each other. He wrote,

> In our celebration of the Lord’s Supper we are brought up together to participate in the Trinitarian life, a life of always-overflowing love and mutual delight. In Christ, who presents himself to us in this sacrament, we truly receive God and one another.⁴⁷

Additionally, it is important for each person to be reminded that God has intentionally created the body of Christ to fit together in a way that each member needs others to bring the fullness of their lives and the expression of their faith to maturity. Individuals in affluent communities may view the poor as people that need help from them because of their socioeconomic status, but the opposite may be true. Families that are living in poverty have

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learned how to lean into relationships with one another in order to sustain their families and their livelihood. Individuals that are from more affluent communities could learn a great deal from those that have had to embrace community in a way that leads to provision for their family.

A Research-Based Response in Orlando, Chicago, and Atlanta

Three communities were studied that have seen significant and measurable progress toward breaking cycles of generational poverty over a sustained period of time: Lift Orlando in Orlando, Florida; Lawndale Christian Community Church in Chicago, Illinois; and Purpose Built Communities in Atlanta, Georgia.

Orlando, Florida: Lift Orlando

Lift Orlando focuses their efforts on an historically high poverty community in Orlando, Florida, called West Lakes. Founded in 2012, Lift Orlando consists of business leaders partnering with residents to break the cycle of poverty in an area west of Downtown Orlando. Lift gathered a group of community-minded business leaders to pursue answering the question: Can the business community help solve some of our city’s most complex social problems? The hope was that by leveraging their influence and aligning their corporate social-responsibility efforts they could bring about lasting community transformation for Orlando’s most vulnerable citizens.
Lift uses a model of community engagement called collective impact in which cross-sector organizations work toward a common agenda. They also incorporate a philosophy of engagement called place-based initiatives. Eddy Moratin, Executive Director at Lift, said, “You have to acknowledge that you can’t fix poverty everywhere, but you can make a difference if you focus your time, energy, and resources on a smaller geographic area. Concentrated areas of poverty require concentrated investment.” Moratin also advocated for activating the business leaders in the community to use their gifts to engage in helping the poor and marginalized. He said, “Business leaders should not be relegated to simply writing checks.”

Focused effort on a concentrated area of poverty is key to the model at Lift Orlando. They operate within a ¾-mile radius that includes residential and commercial properties, abandoned lots, and foreclosed properties. When residents, business leaders, and non-profits bring their resources together to one area, it leads to an impact much more dramatic than if those same resources were spread throughout the region. Lift Orlando identified four areas in which they work directly with members of the West Lakes community: housing, education, health and wellness, and employment.


Moratin adheres to a framework called asset-based community development (ABCD). This approach maintains that each community boasts a unique combination of assets (gifts, skills, and capacities of the community members) with which to build its future.

Lift hired the Polis Institute to perform over 1,500 door-to-door interviews and dozens of community gatherings to assess this grouping. They collected data by hiring twelve residents of the West Lakes community and trained them to professionally document their research. This expedited trusting relationships as residents saw Lift Orlando employing their neighbors to conduct this work. Through this process, they were able to begin to identify the will of residents, engage neighborhood leaders, and strategically plan for a holistic effort to transform a high poverty community. They asked three questions:

1. What do you love about this neighborhood?
2. What do you want to stay the same in this neighborhood?
3. What do you want to see changed in this neighborhood?

They compiled a list of assets in the community that were important to the long-time residents such as parks, three beautiful lakes, favorite restaurants, shops, etc. They also learned about properties that residents wanted to see redeveloped because of their reputation.


for violent crime and drugs. These properties, which owners were allowing to fall into disrepair, were the first to be purchased and demolished, after which began the process of redevelopment into mixed-income housing and commercial developments.

Chicago, Illinois: Lawndale Christian Community Church

Another community making progress is the Lawndale Christian Community Church (LCCC) that was previously mentioned. LCCC is located in a historically high poverty community in Chicago, Illinois, called North Lawndale. Led by Wayne Gordon, LCCC has launched several organizations to holistically care for the residents of North Lawndale. They have identified several areas in which they work directly with their community: housing, education, community health and wellness, jobs training, entrepreneurship courses, and legal representation for teens in the community. LCCC holistically cares for 40,000 people per year across their various organizations. They recently completed a four-story building health center that includes a fitness gym, coffeeshop/café, rooftop garden, conference center and affordable healthcare center (which includes family medicine, pediatric dentistry, women’s health, and a walk-in clinic). Their scope of work includes focus on affordable housing, legal aid for teens facing felony charges, education programs for all ages, and career training.


56. Personal conversation with James Brooks, Chief Ministry Officer at Lawndale Christian Community Health Center, April 10, 2017.

The CEO of Lawndale Christian Health Center, Bruce Miller, said, “Listening and learning isn’t the only piece of this, though. If the total answer was in the community, it would have never gotten to this point. That’s why we all need each other, and we all bring different resources to the conversation.” This highlighted the theological motivation found in Ephesians 4 of the prevailing metaphor of the Church in scriptures: the body of Christ. William Hendriksen appealed to church leaders by stating, “It is the duty of the pastor to impress upon everyone under his care the duty and privilege of lay-ministry. Only when every member does his part is the body of Christ being built up as it should be.” Addressing the needs and concerns of residents in high-poverty communities requires a holistic approach. The philosophy of collective impact highlighted at Lift Orlando is also being used in Lawndale.

Atlanta, Georgia: Purpose Built Communities

Purpose Built Communities (PBC) is yet another example of an organization that has made measurable and sustained impact in high poverty communities. PBC was founded by three influential businessmen that were driven by a collective desire to transform communities, improve the lives of residents of underserved neighborhoods, end a cycle of intergenerational poverty, and set a new course for cities across the country. PBC is a non-profit consulting firm that works side-by-side with local leaders to plan and implement a


60. For more on this organization see http://www.purposebuiltcommunities.org.
holistic revitalization effort in high-poverty communities. Their efforts include equitable access for individuals and families living in poverty to affordable housing, education, and employment, enriching community wellness programs, all driven by a committed lead organization, similar to Lift Orlando and LCCC).

PBC is committed to place-based initiatives in the same way that Lift Orlando and LCCC describe this effort in their philosophy of engagement. Their focus area includes a one-mile radius from a central hub and all of their efforts are focused on this geographic boundary. Drew Charter School was founded in 2000 by a pioneering partnership that included parents, representatives of the Atlanta Board of Education, and PBC. Drew now serves more than 1,800 students in PreK-12 grades. This school is an integral part of PBC’s holistic neighborhood revitalization led by PBC and their associates.\textsuperscript{61}

\textsuperscript{61} See http://www.drewcharterschool.org/about_drew.
Chapter Two

The Project in Perspective

Part One: The Project in Perspective

The practical need for racial and socioeconomic equity were highlighted in Chapter One. Chapter Two theologically supports the practical needs of the first chapter by exposing God’s heart for neighborliness. The command from Jesus to love God with full commitment and to love others with the same dedication is a primary tenet of faith in the Christian community. Mark 12:28-34 motivates disciples of Christ to balance the personal and communal elements of Christian behavior. The theological review of the greatest commandment found in Mark’s gospel and a prophetic challenge from Isaiah 5:1-14 will highlight the relationship between expressing love for God and others in a way that leads to racial and socioeconomic equity for all neighbors.
Old Testament References to Neighborliness

Neighborliness is embedded in the central text of biblical law. The topic of neighborliness is not unique to the passages in the gospels of Mark and Luke. The entire narrative of scripture supports Jesus’ summary of the greatest commandment. One of the most striking features of the Ten Commandments is how often God’s concern for the welfare of the neighbor is prioritized. The holiness codes found in Leviticus 17-19 address the topic of neighborliness. Leviticus 19:18 says, “Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.”

Leviticus 19:33-34 advocates for neighborliness with even greater force: “When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God.” The term alien here does not necessarily mean a person that is a foreigner to a certain country. This can also apply to a person that has no family or who has nobody in their family that will advocate on their behalf.

The book of Exodus supports this narrative of neighborliness as well. In this case, however, expressing love to neighbors also includes showing kindness to enemies. Exodus 23:4-5 says, “If you come across your enemy’s ox or donkey wandering off, be sure to return


63. Ibid., 17.

64. Ibid., 20.
it. If you see the donkey of someone who hates you fallen down under its load, do not leave it
there; be sure you help them with it.” The expectation from God is that loving a neighbor
does not mean simply loving people from one’s own tribe or country. Loving neighbors
means loving each person that is created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27).

One of David’s psalms of ascent speaks to the joy and beauty that comes from being
unified in love with neighbors. Psalm 133:1-3 reads,

How good and pleasant it is when God’s people live together in unity! It is like
precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on
Aaron’s beard, down on the collar of his robe. It is as if the dew of Hermon were
falling on Mount Zion. For there the Lord bestows his blessing, even life
forevermore.

Isaiah speaks to neighborliness in his rebuke of the nation of Israel that has misdirected their
affection. Their zeal to express very public and animated acts of worship was detestable to
the Lord because of their lack of care for their neighbors. Isaiah 1:14-17 says,

Your New Moon feasts and your appointed festivals I hate with all my being. They
have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your
hands in prayer, I hide my eyes from you; even when you offer many prayers, I am
not listening. Your hands are full of blood! Wash and make yourselves clean. Take
your evil deeds out of my sight; stop doing wrong. Learn to do right; seek justice.
Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the
widow.

The sheer volume of historical context for the topic of neighborliness is unmistakably
woven throughout the entire biblical narrative. In light of this understanding, it is important
to give special attention to Mark 12:28-34 and recognize the centrality of love for God and
neighbor as a primary tenet of the Christian faith.
A Review of Mark 12:28-34

28 One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?” 29 “The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 30 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ 31 The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.” 32 “Well said, teacher,” the man replied. “You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. 33 To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.” 34 When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, ”You are not far from the kingdom of God.” And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.

Mark 12:28-34 stands as a concise call to disciples of Christ to model their behavior in a way that expresses passion and dedication to God first and foremost. The passage quickly transitions into the importance of our communal responsibility to love our neighbors with equal passion. This charge is given to ensure a balanced life of faith that is equal parts spiritual and physical. The intangible expression of faith meets the earthiness of loving fellow sons and daughters of God. Dallas Willard explained, “We can only love adequately by taking as our primary aim the integration of our rule with God’s. That is why love of neighbor is the second, not the first, commandment and why we are told to seek first the kingdom, or rule, of God.”

The scene was set immediately, with a teacher of religious law observing a debate that involved Jesus of Nazareth. The man recognized the intrinsic wisdom in which Jesus was engaging in this conversation, and he decided to join the debate himself. The motivation

of this question from the teacher is not known. Whether it was a question to trap Jesus or a
genuine inquiry of a faith-filled man, it is clear that this question sparked a response from
Jesus that brought striking simplicity to the complex system of laws,
regulations, and rules found in the contextual expression of faith that was common in this
day. Pharisaism included approximately six-hundred commandments.

Only Mark’s account has Jesus’ quote the opening words of the Shema (Deut. 6:4). By quoting this confession of faith, which pious Jews have repeated morning and evening
since the second century BC, Jesus affirmed, in common with his Jewish heritage, the
oneness of God. This oneness means that the Father, Son, and Spirit would all agree that
unity between God and man is of utmost importance. This unity would also extend to
oneness in the body of Christ between neighbors.

Jesus gave a concise response to the inquiry of the curious teacher of religious law. In
Mark 12:30-31, he said, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul
and with all your mind and with all your strength.” However, he did not stop
there. Unprovoked and unprompted, this passage continued, “The second is this: ‘Love your
neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”

N. T. Wright wrote, “If we truly lived like that (expressing the greatest
commandment) for a single day, God’s kingdom would have come on earth as it is in
heaven.” Additionally, James K. A. Smith said, “To be human is to love, and it is what we


67. N. T. Wright, *Mark for Everyone* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox,
2015), 170.
love that defines who we are.” The call to loving God with full passion and commitment is paired with recognition that behavior toward one’s neighbor is of utmost importance to Jesus. As Smith affirms, the object of our affection will shape our lives in various ways. Jesus’ call to loving God and others produces both spiritual and relational health for residents of the kingdom of God.

Nancy Duff said, “It seems that distilling all commandments to one that requires us to love God would have been sufficient. But there is hardly a pause before Jesus establishes the second great commandment: Love your neighbor as yourself.” Colin Ambrose added a very important caveat to the statement that Jesus makes about loving neighbors. He wrote, “Neighbors are not isolated to one’s ethnic and religious group, but extend to anyone we meet in need, to whom we show mercy and kindness.”

Additionally, the call to loving neighbors well extends beyond those that may belong to groups of people that share the same racial or socioeconomic status. Samuel L. Adams explained, “The justice imperative in Scripture extends beyond the avoidance of unfair interest charges or bribes, since all persons have an obligation to care actively for those on the margins.”


Neighborliness is explored further in Luke 10 as the parable of the Good Samaritan immediately followed another reference to the greatest commandment. Arland Hultgren explored the primary application of the story of the Good Samaritan that fits nicely with this command to loving God and neighbor. He said, “One should not be concerned about defining the meaning of the word ‘neighbor’ and deciding who is in and who is out. One’s concern should be: How can I be a neighbor to anyone in need?”

God’s presence is palpably among us in when we enter into experiences unexpected, with people deemed unaccepted. Hillel the Elder (ca. 40 B.C.–A.D. 10) said, “What you yourself hate, do not do to your neighbor: this is the whole Law, the rest is commentary. Go and learn it.”

Loving God and loving neighbors are to be understood as distinct from one another yet inseparable. At the surface, this commandment of Jesus seems incredibly simple. On one hand, it seems clear that showing love to others is not interrelated to expressing affection directly toward God. However, the overall arc of the narrative of the New Testament shows life is to be lived in community and in the context of relationships with others. Love toward God is not intended occur in isolation but demands love of neighbor as well. Duff explained, “The two commandments cannot be understood as interchangeable, but neither can they be severed.”


Jesus' reply to the question regarding the greatest commandment established a foundation for Christian ethics, but it is only when the first and second great commandments are joined together that the foundation for the life Jesus described is laid. Jesus did not simply command his disciples to love their neighbor, but that they are to love God with their whole being in combination with loving their neighbor. Ben Witherington summarized the call to neighborliness by stating, “Jesus proclaimed a radical ethic that had as its central tenet love of God and neighbor, even if that neighbor happened to be a hated enemy.”

This triad of focus—God, self, and neighbor—for Christian life has been explored in contemporary psychology, reaching all the way back to and continuing a line of interpretation that includes Tertullian, Chrysotom, Augustine, and Thomas Aquinas. Loving a neighbor in the same way individuals would love themselves is seen as giving a certain priority to self-love. The summary of this line of thought is that self-love leads to loving neighbors rightly from a healthy place of confidence and security.

Conversely, Karl Barth argues that self-love can never be right or good but must be reversed and turned into love of God and neighbor. “God will never think of blowing on this fire which is bright enough already.” In response to Barth, Lamar Williamson claims that

76. Ibid., 18.
77. Ben Witherington, Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1997), Location 1898, Kindle.
78. Williamson, Mark, 228.
79. Ibid., 228.
that self-love is not to be altogether condemned. Rather, he posits that the text clearly and concretely commands that we love others in the same way that we love ourselves.\footnote{Williamson, \textit{Mark}, 387.}

Jesus’ answer to the expert in religious law establishes love as the ground of Christian faith and life. Asked about the one greatest commandment, Jesus answers with two, but the operative verb is love, stated in the imperative.\footnote{Ibid., 226.} Walter Brueggemann wrote, “Of course, the commandment has not only a critical function against our dominant ideologies. It is also an affirmative call to an emancipated life with the God of the covenant.”\footnote{Walter Brueggemann, “The First Great Commandment,” \textit{Journal For Preachers} 34, no. 4 (2011): 16.}

Mark 12:32-33 revealed the scribe’s response to Jesus by his affirmation of Jesus’ reference to the Shema and the oneness of God. He continues to push the conversation forward by bringing up rituals of religious practice that would fall underneath the priority of loving God and neighbors. He said, “To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.” Mark’s is the only gospel that depicts an affirming response made by the scribe. He concludes that these two commands are much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.\footnote{Wendell Lee Willis, “Three Perspectives on the Great Commandment,” \textit{Restoration Quarterly} 57, no. 3 (2015): 174.}
It is important to remember that this interaction is happening in the last week of the life of Jesus before his crucifixion. His teaching continued to provoke anger in the hearts of the religious leaders. They felt threatened by the redefinition of what true religion would consist of after the simplification of the law into this charge to love God and neighbor. In short, Jesus is insisting that fulfilling the laws of the Torah would no longer be necessary for those who seek to serve God. Love of God and neighbor supersede them all.\(^\text{85}\)

Larry Hurtado said, “We may note again that at Jesus’ crucifixion the curtain of the temple is ripped in two, giving us the final indication that Jesus’ ministry really did bring to an end the validity of the temple and its ritual as the prescribed place and way of meeting with God.”\(^\text{86}\) He continues, “Mark’s readers would have seen the scribe as anticipating their belief that the temple rituals were expendable and thoroughly secondary to the higher obligations reflected in the two commandments cited.”\(^\text{86}\)

The imagery of Psalm 1:3 likened a healthy disciple to that of a tree that is planted alongside a riverbank. Such a tree is not bothered by the elements that may come with each season, and the psalmist explained that it produces fruit in every season. The imagery of a healthy tree producing fruit implied that there is enough fruit for both the individual and others to enjoy as well. The call to neighborliness from Jesus in Mark 12:28-34 showed that his disciples are not to simply aim all of their affection to God while neglecting their neighbors. The fruit that came from loving God and staying intimately connected to him

\(^{85}\) Duff, “The Second Great Commandment,” 19.


\(^{87}\) Ibid.
resulted in the ability to share that love with others.

Verse 34 depicted Jesus acknowledging that the scribe had answered with wisdom in this interaction. His statement “You are not far from the Kingdom” is deliberately ambiguous and was intended to provoke reflection. The open-ended conclusion to this conversation undoubtedly leaves the scribe with much to consider in light of the context of the religious customs that were in place in this day. Jesus is not simply asking for outward expression of affection to God. He is asking for a holistic life of faith that includes both inward and outward expressions of affection. William Lane said, “Because the whole man is the object of God’s covenant love, the whole man is claimed by God for himself.” He continued, “To love God in the way defined by the great commandment is to seek God for his own sake, to have pleasure in him and to strive impulsively after him.”

This passage began with the inquisitive questions of curious onlookers and ends with silence as they consider a whole new paradigm for life that is to be expressed in equal parts affection toward God and members of their community. Lamar Williamson explained, “The reader of this passage, identifying with this sympathetic scribe, is the one who will supply the response to the text’s unanswered invitation.”

N. T. Wright said that the way this passage ends with such a call to reflection is actually an encouraging sign for the scribe. He argued that through his kingdom work and the

89. Ibid.
90. Ibid.
91. Ibid., 229.
simplification of these commands, the command to love God and others with equal passion is well within reach."

In summarizing the Gospel of Mark, Brian Blount wrote, “The narrative conclusion, therefore, must be that the present representation of the future kingdom of God took place in Jesus’ shattering of oppressive and divisive human boundaries.” The division that is represented in addressing this request to identify the greatest commandment is the work of the enemy to steal, kill, and destroy (John 10:10) right relationships within the Christian community. Jesus asked his disciples to integrate their lives in a way that they are tolerant of, have time for, express interest in, make excuses for, and deeply desire the welfare of their neighbor in the way that they have those attitudes toward themselves.” For Jesus, the whole Law is summarized in the will of God, which calls for the love that is a whole-hearted response to God and to the neighbor."

A Review of Isaiah 58:1-14

Approximately seven hundred years before the earthly life and ministry of Jesus, the prophet Isaiah provided a powerful perspective into the relationship between a worshiping


community and the way in which they behaved toward their neighbors in Isaiah 58:1-14. In this passage, the prophet called the nation of Israel to genuinely seek God in a way that reflected the call to neighborliness in Mark 12:28-34. Isaiah did not simply long for their pursuit of God through worship and fasting; he desires their expression of love to God and neighbors to be equally present.

The passage of scripture being explored is directed toward people who seem to genuinely desire to know God and express faithfulness to him. However, further examination of this text shows that Isaiah asked the people of Israel to devalue the practice of fasting food and outward expressions of corporate worship. He challenged them to replace these practices by fasting inequitable behaviors that brought division to God’s people and marginalized the most vulnerable members of the community.

Isaiah 58:1 began by emphatically stating, “Shout with the voice of a trumpet blast. Shout aloud! Don’t be timid. Tell my people Israel of their sins!” The prophet is not attempting to speak calmly and quietly about the situation. Rather, he is shouting at the top of his voice for all to hear.” God is using Isaiah to call the worshiping community into a deeper understanding of his heart for an inclusive and neighborly community that makes room for all that long to worship with the corporate body. He is also sounding an alarm that this is a matter of life and death.”


Verse 2 described the sinful behaviors that were keeping them from truly expressing the heart of God. Isaiah continued,

Yet they act so pious. They come to the Temple every day and seem delighted to learn all about me. They act like a righteous nation that would never abandon the laws of its God. They ask me to take action on their behalf, pretending they want to be near me.

Isaiah called out the community of believers for neglecting their marginalized neighbors as they concurrently declared their commitment to God. Brueggemann said, “These two verses establish the core problem of the community, namely, a hypocritical gap between the actual conduct of the community and the intention of the community expressed in worship.” The language in this passage is direct and offers biting criticism toward people that truly felt that they were offering acceptable sacrifices to God. However, God is forcefully showing that he does not want worship that stops at the surface and never reaches the heart. This passage echoes Amos 4:4-5, in which the poet chided his contemporaries for turning worship into an act of self-indulgence void of ethical content.

Isaiah opened this address with both urgency and passion to make sure the community understood that this was no small matter. John Oswald observed, “It is nothing short of rebellion, which calls for the most dramatic action.” One of the more pressing reasons for this call to repentance was that God had stopped responding to the religious activity of his people. He chose to instead focus his attention on the fact that during their

98. Ibid., 186.
99. Ibid., 187.
pious exercises, they were still involved in the exploitation and ill treatment of their employees.  

Human ethical behavior is not called for to obtain God’s favor but to enter into God’s work of service and love.

The people responded to this harsh critique of their behavior by defending their activities. They presented multiple observations and questions to God. The response that was given by God through the prophet in verse 3 left nothing to the imagination in what he was expecting from his people. Verse 3 continued,

“We have fasted before you!” they say. “Why aren’t you impressed? We have been very hard on ourselves, and you don’t even notice it!” “I will tell you why!” I respond. “It’s because you are fasting to please yourselves. Even while you fast, you keep oppressing your workers.”

This question and response showed that God was not interested in their pretentious displays of affection. He longed for their hearts to match his heart, and ritualistic public expressions of love would never replace his desire for shalom and justice for neighbors in their community that have been oppressed. Walter Brueggemann said, “The religious act of fasting, which can indeed be a serious act of faith, is here only a calculation.” God does not want our spiritual disciplines to be acts of addition and subtraction. God’s economy does not use normal equations. Jesus demonstrated this when he stated that the last will come first and the first will come last in his kingdom (Matthew 20:16). God reiterates his consistent theme throughout scripture that he can see what people are doing with their lives, not just their


103. Brueggemann, Isaiah 40-66, 188.
words. This type of worship offers no access to God, because God will not be moved by calculated manipulation.\textsuperscript{104}

Richard Foster described his journey from outward expression of faith to the inward transformation of genuine relationship with Jesus in his book \textit{The Freedom of Simplicity}. He wrote, “For years I loved him and sought to obey him, but he remained on the periphery of my life. God and Christ were extremely important to me but certainly not the center.”\textsuperscript{105} He added, “I was deeply committed, but I was not integrated or unified.”\textsuperscript{106} In the same way, the worshipping community in Isaiah 58 thought that they were expressing great devotion to God, only to come to the startling realization that their relationship with him was not integrated or unified. Foster was touched by God’s desire to be at the center of his heart. He described, “But slowly I came to see that God desired to be not on the outskirts, but at the heart of my experience.”\textsuperscript{107}

The passage clearly showed why God is displeased with these acts of worship. As John Goldingay observed, “There was a mismatch between people’s spiritual practice and the rest of their lives.”\textsuperscript{108} The incongruity of the manner in which the people of Israel expressed their faith and treated their neighbors was so egregious, God sent Isaiah to deliver this

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., 188.
\textsuperscript{106} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid.
\end{flushright}
concise and poignant message of correction. Ultimately, this rebuke was in response to the tension between the interest of man and the interest of God.  

Isaiah’s challenge to the worshiping community added to the overarching narrative in the Bible that religious practices such as fasting are useless unless they are accompanied by work for a just and compassionate social order.

Isaiah 58:4-5 continued to paint a dire picture for this worshipping community. The poet gave colorful language to the state of their hearts while calling into question the way that they expected him to respond to their behavior. The prophet declares, “You humble yourselves by going through the motions of penance, bowing your heads like reeds bending in the wind. You dress in burlap and cover yourselves with ashes. Is this what you call fasting? Do you really think this will please the Lord?”

God communicated through Isaiah, in no uncertain terms, that he saw past their religious activity and into their sin-filled hearts. Even though the people genuinely believed that these acts of worship should win them special favor with God, their real purpose was to gain ground in the struggle for power, position, and possessions. God saw past all outward activity and to the hearts and motives of his children. Through Isaiah, he lovingly and forcefully called them to repentance.


Richard Foster observed the way Jesus called out another worshipping community in the New Testament that used fasting to try to curry favor with God, but their hearts were misguided in their affection. He said, “It is sobering to realize that the very first statement Jesus made about fasting dealt with the question of motive (Matthew 6:16-18). To use good things to our own ends is always the sign of false religion.”

Jesus taught his disciples on a hillside, and a large crowd began to gather to hear this teaching. He used part of this time to address pure and genuine acts of discipline that led to the heart of the Father. In Matthew 6:16-18, Jesus taught,

When you fast, don’t make it obvious, as the hypocrites do, for they try to look miserable and disheveled so people will admire them for their fasting. I tell you the truth, that is the only reward they will ever get. But when you fast, comb your hair and wash your face. Then no one will notice that you are fasting, except your Father, who knows what you do in private. And your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.

The fact that God did not respond to the disciplined act of fasting of this community did not mean that he was incapable of doing so or that his ears were deaf to their cries; it simply meant that God was deliberately looking past their behavior to get to the heart of the matter. Renovation of the heart is what God longs for in interaction with his people, not modification of their behavior. God does not respond to fasting; God responds to faith and faithfulness. Richard Foster declared, “Fasting must forever center on God. It must be God-initiated and God-ordained.”


114. Foster, Celebration of Discipline, 54.
Isaiah 58:6-11: A Fast of Inequitable Practices

Isaiah moved on to describe the type of fasting and behavior that the Lord truly desired after putting the community on notice in the first five verses of Isaiah 58. Verses 6-7 state,

No, this is the kind of fasting I want: Free those who are wrongly imprisoned; lighten the burden of those who work for you. Let the oppressed go free, and remove the chains that bind people. Share your food with the hungry, and give shelter to the homeless. Give clothes to those who need them, and do not hide from relatives who need your help.

The prophet encouraged the community to devalue the personal act of fasting from food and embrace the corporate act of fasting from inequitable practices that target those that are oppressed. Yahweh challenged the powerful members of the community not only to free people from bondage to debt but also to avoid practices that can get people into more bondage.

The poet asked the God-centered community to treat their employees in a way that valued them as human beings, not just as agents that could bring profitability to their organization. He asked those who reside in the position of power to allow those that have been oppressed to go free. He was requiring that the worshipping community would care about justice and establishment of shalom for all to be a reality.

John Oswalt wrote, “If they want to deprive themselves, let them do it for the sake of the oppressed, the needy, and the helpless, not for the sake of their own religiosity.”


continued, “The prophet says God would much rather we show our devotion to him by alleviating hunger in others.”" The neglect of the poor and oppressed has historically wounded our communities, yet the words of Isaiah give us the directions for healing and for creating the possibility of health for all through the true fast God desires.

Verse 8 introduced an important transition that referred back to the initial challenge while offering hope for the future. The prophet said, “Then your salvation will come like the dawn, and your wounds will quickly heal. Your godliness will lead you forward, and the glory of the Lord will protect you from behind.” It is important to highlight the fact that the Lord was ignoring the religious activity of the community when it did not also include a genuine spirit. However, he responded quickly when their hearts turned toward the full expression of loving God and neighbors with equal force and passion.

*If* and *then* are two words that are important to consider when exegeting scripture. This means that something has preceded the words on the page and also carries a consequence toward the matter being addressed. This particular use of *then* refers to the challenge that God gave the Israelites through Isaiah to come to him with purity and proper motives in their worship. Verse 8 introduces the image of light that breaks through darkness to illuminate the path to genuinely please God. The light that is promised here is not the light of absolute certainty, but one of hope, confidence, trust, and self-giving love, and no darkness can put it out." When people share their food, homes, and clothes, they will find

117. Ibid., Location 9963, Kindle.


light and healing according to God’s path that he is laying before the Israelite community in this passage.\(^{120}\)

The imagery of light is introduced here, as well, breaking through the darkness like the sun illuminating a new day. This newfound fixation of their hearts upon God brought the benefits of healing, faithful direction, and protection from the Lord. Coming directly after a full-voiced affront on their religious activity, this passage is pregnant with promise and hope for the future if they choose the path that God has prepared. John Oswalt said, “Coupled with the promise of light in the dark is the promise of guidance and sustenance in the desert.”\(^ {121}\)

God clearly chose to willfully ignore the cries of the Israelites when they were engaging in self-serving worship. However, the language of verse 9 showed the speed in which God responds to the things that align with his passion and love. It said, “Then when you call, the Lord will answer; Yes, I am here,’ he will quickly reply. Remove the heavy yoke of oppression. Stop pointing your finger and spreading vicious rumors!” God will not move toward outward piety that is not accompanied by a genuine heart.

The poet reminded the Israelites that they had a responsibility to their neighbors by addressing their need to abstain from oppressive activities, blaming others unjustly, and spreading needless and harmful gossip among their community. The heartfelt worship of God will produce neighborliness that will impact the entire community and encourage unity and joy. Any other behavior is divisive and harmful. Kwesi Dickson noted that this type of behavior “encompasses the symbolic and verbal means of disparaging one's fellow human

\(^{120}\) Goldingay, *The Theology of the Book of Isaiah*, 133.

\(^ {121}\) Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40-66*, Location 9979, Kindle.
beings; to behave in this way towards others is to treat them as if they were not children of God.”

Isaiah turned his attention to highlighting behavior that honored God and displayed a spirit of neighborliness. Verses 10-11 read,

Feed the hungry and help those in trouble. Then your light will shine out from the darkness, and the darkness around you will be as bright as noon. The Lord will guide you continually, giving you water when you are dry and restoring your strength. You will be like a well-watered garden, like an ever-flowing spring.

Leon Morris said, “The function of light is to shine precisely in the darkness, to oppose darkness, to dispel darkness.” This charge from the prophet accurately assessed the inequities in the community between the powerful and those that are less privileged; it requested that their beliefs inform their behavior in a way that brought equal opportunity for each member of the Israelite family. The promise that was present in this passage was that Yahweh would give light to a community that was full of justice and compassion.

Additionally, Isaiah was asking the community to reframe their view toward the poor and marginalized. He longed for the less fortunate among them to be seen as a part of the family, not as a burden—or worse, a lower class that can be oppressed for their personal gain. Oppression of the poor and the weak will not stop ultimately until they are no longer seen as objects of scorn and contempt or as pitiable victims.


Isaiah 58:12-14: Restorers, Rebuilders, and Rest

The imagery was changed in verse 12 to address the topic of community-wide reform. Isaiah declared, “Some of you will rebuild the deserted ruins of your cities. Then you will be known as a rebuildor of walls and a restorer of homes.” Isaiah began this hope-filled verse by clarifying that God would only use some in a way that is so full of influence and power that they are able to bring lasting change to entire cities. This is a powerful reminder that each person has the ability to choose whether or not they will allow God to captivate every part of their heart, life, and spirit. If they were to choose this God-ordained path of personal accountability and commitment, God clearly showed that the entire community might look at them as a corporate body that established shalom by their behavior and actions. The people addressed in this passage would have the energy, fortitude, and resources from God that arise from genuine neighborly investment in the community.126

Isaiah’s challenge could be wrongly viewed simply as a call to social justice. While it is clear that God cares about inequities that were dividing this community, this passage carried a nuanced call to accountability that led the worshiping community back to the heart of Yahweh. Isaiah called out their disingenuous worship because it was self-serving as opposed to God-honoring. He highlighted the cause to care for the poor as a way of showing how much more he valued each individual rather than elaborate expressions of faithfulness through corporate fasting of meals.

The worshipers would surely eat again, but their temporary fast did nothing to care for the poor that were perpetually hungry for both food and justice. The path continued to

unfold as Isaiah said that there are some that were so closely attuned to the heart of Yahweh that he called them to lead efforts that brought hope and healing to entire cities. The poet forcefully admonished the worshiping community as a way of showing them that if they chose God personally, he would use some of them to lead a citywide restoration project that brought peace and justice to broken and divided communities. The imagery of shalom was introduced in the form of rebuilt cities and homes that had been restored.

The final portion of this passage takes an unexpected turn by addressing the discipline of observing the Sabbath. Verses 13-14 continue to say,

Keep the Sabbath day holy. Don’t pursue your own interests on that day, but enjoy the Sabbath and speak of it with delight as the Lord’s holy day. Honor the Sabbath in everything you do on that day, and don’t follow your own desires or talk idly. Then the Lord will be your delight. I will give you great honor and satisfy you with the inheritance I promised to your ancestor Jacob. I, the Lord, have spoken!

In the preceding verses, Isaiah forcefully asked the Israelites to push aside the practice of disciplines that did not carry a genuine expression that pleased Yahweh. Instead, he asked them to fast oppressive behaviors that keep members of their community in the devastating cycle of poverty. He highlighted promises to his people that ruin and destruction are not the last word for the fallen human race. He painted a picture of citywide renewal that would spring forth through their God-honoring behaviors and practices. Finally, after such a thrilling journey from repentance to joy, God lovingly reminded them that they should not attempt to do all of this reparation work without choosing the discipline of setting aside time to rest, reflect, and allow the Spirit to reenergize their work. The Sabbath, therefore, became a delight, not a legalistic requirement.


Misguided Affection

The people that Isaiah addressed in this passage of scripture were keenly committed to expressing their devotion to God. The trouble was that they were blindly doing so in a way that lacked a holistic expression of devotion to God and others. Isaiah’s rebuke of the worshiping community should stand as a clear warning to contemporary Christians to examine the state of racial and socioeconomic equity in their personal lives and communities as a whole. The rebels and sinners that are referred to in Isaiah 58:1-14 sought God with devotion every day. This is a startling reminder that each follower of Christ should follow the humble example of King David. Psalm 51:10 showed his request to God: “Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a loyal spirit within me.”

Spiritual disciplines awaken the senses and heal the spiritual awareness of disciples of Christ. Finding places of quiet reflection allow for God to highlight areas of our lives that can be identified as misguided affection. Every disciple who longs to be a rebuilders of cities and a restorer of homes must allow God to impact them in a way that brings personal healing through repentance. Thomas à Kempis spoke to the practice of spiritual disciplines in his book The Imitation of Christ. He explained,

The more a man hath unity and simplicity in himself, the more things and the deeper things he understandeth; and that without labour, because he receiveth the light of understanding from above. The spirit which is pure, sincere, and steadfast is not

129. Goldingay, Isaiah, 325.

distracted though it hath many works to do, because it doth all things to the honor of God, and striveth to be free from all thoughts of self-seeking.\textsuperscript{131}

Moments of intimacy between the Father and his children recalibrate their lives and allow God to remain at the center of all religious activity. Isaiah challenged the Israelites to understand that God cared more about their treatment of others than he did about their vigorous public expressions of worship. Better to share their food (and their homes and clothes) than forgo their food in their expression of worship to God.\textsuperscript{132}

It would be an egregious error to read Isaiah 58:1-14 and arrive at the conclusion that God does not take interest in the spiritual discipline of fasting. If this passage is an affront on misguided affection, it also highlights the way that God responds quickly to those that genuinely pursue him. The act of abstaining from something to focus attention on God can only be viewed as a benefit to spiritual growth if that is also accompanied by a willingness to behave in a way that promotes neighborliness and joy. Dallas Willard described the discipline of fasting, saying, “This discipline teaches us a lot about ourselves very quickly. It will certainly prove humiliating to us, as it reveals to us how much our peace depends upon the pleasures of eating.”\textsuperscript{133}

Additionally, a group fast can be a wonderful and powerful experience, provided there is a prepared people who are of one mind in these matters.\textsuperscript{134} Isaiah 58:1-14 clearly

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{131. Thomas à Kempis, \textit{The Imitation of Christ} (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2005), 94.}
\footnotetext{132. Goldingay, \textit{The Theology of the Book of Isaiah}, 112.}
\footnotetext{134. Foster, \textit{The Celebration of Discipline}, 50.}
\end{footnotes}
showed, however, that God does not want spiritual fervor without a proper expression of simply loving neighbors and treating people with equity and kindness.

Influence, Power, and Equity

Isaiah had forceful words for those in the worshiping community that sat in positions of influence and power yet chose to impose inequitable work conditions upon their neighbors that were poor and marginalized. John Goldingay observes that employers lack spiritual discipline seems to have a direct link to their instinct to ill-treat their employees. It seems as if those that offered jobs viewed the poor as less than an equal part of the family. This is not only an offense to these individuals; this is an offense to God. All of God’s children carry the same distinct family trait: They were created in the image of the Father (Genesis 1:27).

Wealthy individuals should not feel guilty for being successful. Willard spoke to this topic by addressing the rich and powerful. He said, “No one can give what they do not possess. If giving is good, having is also good—providing one’s spiritual balance is retained. If giving much is good, having much is also good. If giving more is good, having more is also good.”

God can and will use influential people in any given culture if they are willing to participate in his plan for a neighborly economy. Spiritual disciplines afford influential leaders of society the privilege of listening for God’s direction in distributing wealth and opportunity equitably to all neighbors.


Those that hold positions of power and influence have the ability to equitably distribute the elemental resources that are necessary to life.\textsuperscript{137} Isaiah 58 addressed the temptations that are still present in modern-day society, particularly business owners who lack a spirit of biblical neighborliness.\textsuperscript{138} The reality is that few people are rich and powerful, while many are poor and weak.\textsuperscript{139}

Jesus said that it is extremely difficult for a rich man to truly grasp the holistic message of the Gospel (Mark 10:25). An expectation of residing in the counter-culture Kingdom of God is the willingness to share resources (Acts 2:42-47). One great issue at the heart of Isaiah 58 is that the community receives the grace of God, and then it is expected to flow out of the worshipers onto everyone around.\textsuperscript{140} This is an important message for those who have the ability to allow the Holy Spirit to lead them to create equitable opportunities that result in various resources flowing into high poverty neighborhoods.

Isaiah 58:1-14 gave a powerful admonition to a community of worshipers that were zealous and boisterous in their spiritual disciplines. However, the act of fasting is not what moved God to advocate on their behalf. God is drawn to individuals—to communities—whose hearts are willing and open to learn about matters that are close to his heart. Simply stated, God would rather a person fast inequitable behavior toward neighbors rather than a lavish food-fast. However, when the worshiping community is genuinely engaged with the

\textsuperscript{137} Brueggemann, \textit{Isaiah 40-66}, 189.

\textsuperscript{138} Ibid., 190.

\textsuperscript{139} Willard, \textit{The Spirit of the Disciplines}, 195.

\textsuperscript{140} Oswalt, \textit{The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40-66}, Location 9746, Kindle.
heart of the Father, a natural reaction will be for that community to care for each other well. Neighborliness is a natural outflow of time spent with God. Equitable practices flow downstream when the river of God is allowed to flow unimpeded in and through the lives of his children.

God’s nature has always been to give himself away to those who can never repay him. There is no clearer evidence of the presence of God in a person’s life than a replication of that same behavior. Spiritual practices inspire disciples of Christ to joyfully take on unnatural behaviors that result in unnatural wisdom, understanding, and power from God.

Jesus spoke to this natural pattern of inward growth that led to an outward expression of genuine faith. John 15:5 recorded Jesus saying, “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.” Healthy spiritual disciplines point individuals and communities to the heart of the Father, producing fruit privately and publicly for the glory of God and the benefit of their neighbors.

Part Two: An Overview of Generational Poverty

The theological review of Part One explored the call toward racial and socioeconomic equity through the practice of neighborliness that is highlighted in Mark 12:28-34 and Isaiah 58:1-14. The spiritual imperative to love and care for neighbors—in spite of the differences in ethnic background and economic status—is a primary element of the Christian faith. The second part of Chapter Two uncovered research that explained why families born into high-

poverty communities tend to stay in poverty generation after generation. The call of scriptures, paired with current academic research, should lead all members of the body of Christ to explore their role in understanding how they can bring influence racial and socioeconomic equity in their communities.

Due to the complexity of economic and social systems in our country, the topic of generational poverty has been largely overlooked by politicians, city leaders, and the body of Christ. The intent of this research project is to highlight important issues that have kept families in poverty for multiple generations. While race is not the only determinant in issues of poverty, the findings of diligent research cannot be ignored when systemic inequalities are present for individuals and families from minority racial backgrounds.

This research project was conducted from two distinct vantage points: quantitative research of the facts pertaining to poverty and the biblical narrative in relation the plight of the poor. The cyclical effect of generational poverty keeps families in a perpetual pattern that must be broken for families to achieve financial, physical, emotional, and spiritual health.

In his book *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, Ronald Sider challenged church leaders and parishioners to evaluate themselves regarding their care for those who are poor and marginalized. He said, “Is there the same balance and emphasis on justice for the poor and oppressed in our programs as there is in Scripture?”142 Sadly, all too often the answer to that question is a resounding no. The Gospel’s call to neighborliness demands attention. This research project aims to shed light on inequities that are present for those trapped in the

devastating cycle of generational poverty and offer hope for all members of the body of Christ who are willing to answer the call of neighborliness.

Defining Generational Poverty

Dr. Ruby Payne wrote a practical treatise exploring the major issues surrounding generational poverty in her book *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*. Payne gave a working definition that brought clarity to two different types of poverty: generational and situational. She noted, “Generational poverty and situational poverty are different. Generational poverty is defined as being in poverty for two generations or longer. Situational poverty is a shorter time and is caused by circumstance (i.e., death, illness, divorce, etc.).”

The focus of this paper explored issues pertaining to generational poverty. Poverty is relative to the socioeconomic class in which they are positioned. Payne said, “If everyone around a person has similar circumstances, the notion of poverty and wealth is vague. Poverty or wealth only exists in relationship to known quantities or expectations.” Some families in poverty do not even acknowledge that there is a problem, making it hard for others from different socioeconomic classes to understand.

Payne declared that there are four reasons one that a person will find a way to escape the cyclical pattern of generational poverty: It is too painful to stay; they have created a


144. Ibid., 2.
vision or a goal; a key relationship has helped them find a pathway to economic stability; they possess a special talent, or skill that allows them to create a sustainable economic situation. In these scenarios, something or someone helps an individual imagine another path that can be chosen. Christians must not underestimate the importance of their role in the lives of families living in generational poverty. Their presence alone can be one factor that helps others break this pattern.

Along with definitions of the types of poverty, it is imperative to understand the role of money for individuals in poverty. Where a middle- or upper-class family may view money as a source of security, families in poverty have a much different perspective. Dr. Payne explained, “Money is seen in poverty as an expression of personality and is used for entertainment and relationships.” She continued, “The notion of using money for security is truly grounded in the middle and wealthy classes.” This is yet another example of how important it is to listen and learn long enough to understand the mindset of people in poverty in order to have constructive conversations that lead to mutual understanding and growth for all involved.

145. Ibid., 3.
146. Ibid., 44.
147. Ibid.
148. Ibid.
Is God on the Side of the Poor?

The Scriptures are full of stories about God’s heart for the poor. Does this mean, however, that God shows favoritism to those that are in poverty? Ronald Sider posits that while God has equal love for all people, he is not neutral in his passionate advocacy for those that are poor. He wrote,

God, however, is not neutral. His freedom from bias does not mean that he maintains neutrality in the struggle for justice. The Bible clearly and repeatedly teaches that God is at work in history exalting the poor and casting down the rich who got that way by oppressing or neglecting the poor. In that sense, God is on the side of the poor. He has a special concern for them because of their vulnerability.”

It is imperative for Christians to have a robust framework in their understanding of poverty. A spirit of neighborliness leads to love, care, and concern for everyone created in the image of God. Healthy expressions of neighborliness do simply just talk about the love of Christ, but intentionally show the love of Christ to others through friendship and love. The book of Proverbs supports the cause of the poor by revealing God’s heart for those who have been marginalized and cast aside from the prevailing culture of excess and success. Proverbs 14:31 reads, “Those who oppress the poor insult their Maker, but helping the poor honors him.” Furthermore, Proverbs 19:17 says, “If you help the Lord, you are lending to the Lord—and he will repay you!” The form of repayment is not always found in financial gain. Conversely, it is rare that helping someone in need would increase an individual’s net wealth. However, the implication of these verses is that the blessings of God will be upon those who turn their attention to the poor and work toward their benefit.

Christian theologian N. T. Wright said, “In a world of systematic injustice, bullying, violence, arrogance, and oppression, the thought that there might come a day when the wicked are firmly put in their place and the poor and weak are given their due is the best news there can be.” The overwhelming nature of challenging issues that are present for individuals living in poverty can be overwhelming. However, the Christian response must be one of hope for the future. Revelation 21 gave a beautiful picture that raises awareness about the coming day in which Jesus will establish his kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. Revelation 21:4 says, “He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever.” There is no room for tears, death, sorrow, crying, or pain because the earth will be full of the perfection of the Lord’s presence.

Christians believe that God revealed himself in the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. To understand God’s work in the world, Christians must understand how the Incarnate One defined his mission. Loving others was given equal weight to loving God in the opinion of Jesus. This should cause us to truly consider the holistic message of the Gospel in relation to the day-to-day realities of those living in poverty. Additionally, Jesus seemed to actually embody the plight of the poor as he told his disciples that any time they gave to the poor, they were actually giving to Jesus himself (Matthew 25:31-46). This does not sound like the words of a distant deity that is aloof or disconnected to the cries of the


poor. This sounds like God himself is present with the poor, and if Christians want to be present with their Creator, they can find him among the weak and the marginalized.

Howard Thurman’s book *Jesus and the Disinherited* explored the topic of God’s presence with those that trapped in cyclical patterns of poverty, fear, and discouragement. He said, “What does our religion say to them? The issue is not what it counsels them to do for others whose need may be greater, but what religion offers to meet their own needs.” The conclusion Thurman came to in his book is as described in the final sentences of this book. He said,

What, then, is the word of religion of Jesus to those who stand with their backs against the wall? There must be the clearest possible understanding of the anatomy of the issues facing them. They must recognize fear, deception, hatred, each for what it is. Once having done this, they must learn how to destroy these or to render themselves immune to their domination. In so great an undertaking it will become increasingly clear that the contradictions of life are not ultimate. The disinherited will know for themselves that there is a Spirit at work in life and in the hearts of men which is committed to overcoming the world.

Each person—rich or poor—draws immeasurable confidence and security from embracing the truth of God for their lives. Many individuals that live in poverty need to experience the truth and freedom that is found in Jesus. Sound biblical teaching is necessary to accept the true narrative of their lives: They are immeasurably valuable, and the Holy Spirit will lead them into all truth in order to see that they are free from the cycle of poverty, fear, and discouragement.

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153. Ibid., 98.
The advocacy of God in the scriptures toward the plight of the poor should lead Christians to care deeply about the current state of the culture in which they live. One way to understand the reality present in culture is to explore academic research that accurately represents racial and socioeconomic equity—or lack thereof—in communities across America.

The joint study between Harvard and University of California Berkeley uncovered some uncomfortable truths about Charlotte.\(^\text{154}\) As stated previously in Chapter One, Charlotte ranked fiftieth out of fifty large cities studied in America in relation to the ability for a person born into poverty to achieve upward mobility.\(^\text{155}\) To highlight this point, their research showed that a child born into poverty in Charlotte has a 4% chance of escaping poverty and reaching the top economic class in the city.\(^\text{156}\) There have been seemingly endless opportunities for those that are from the middle and upper class to enjoy economic mobility. Conversely, those born in lower-income areas have been found to remain in a pattern of generational poverty for their entire lives.


\[^{156}\text{Ibid.}\]
Five Determining Factors of Generational Poverty

Five determining factors rose to the surface as to why a child that is born into poverty has a high likelihood of living in poverty their entire life. These factors are presented in more detail in the following sections of this project. The determining factors found in this study are segregation, inequality, education, social capital, and family structure.

**Segregation**

The first determining factor in generational poverty is segregation. America remains a deeply divided country, yet many people lack the willingness or courage to acknowledge this reality. Jim Wallis wrote a book that explored the presence of racism that has run rampant in American culture called *America’s Original Sin*. He suggested that many people in America choose to ignore this topic rather than courageously addressing it and therefore experiencing reconciliation and healing. He said, “Are we hiding behind untruths that help make us feel more comfortable, or are we willing to seek the truth, even if that is uncomfortable?” He continued, “Only by seeking the truth are we made free, and that hanging on to untruths can keep us captive to comfortable illusions.” Attempting to fix something that people refuse to admit is broken leads to frustration, anger, and disappointment.

Thurman discussed the emotional response of many people that have grown up as a part of racial minority groups. He stated “The child of the disinherited is likely to live a heavy life. A ceiling is placed on his dreaming by the counsel of despair coming from his


158. Ibid.
elders, whom experience has taught to expect little and to hope for less.” 159

Segregation extracts the valuable experience of enjoying friendship with others that come from various backgrounds and leads to a homogenous expression of life that lacks nuance and diversity.

The ability for any society to move toward reconciliation is predicated upon relationships that are built upon trust. Genuine relationships lead to meaningful conversations that help individuals from different racial and socioeconomic groups to understand each other and find common ground upon which they can stand. University of California-Berkeley professor Richard Rothstein explored the topic of segregation in America in his book *The Color of Law*. He made the observation that a culture of segregation in America has added a layer of complexity to normal societal discourse by dividing communities along racial lines. He said, “We have greater political and social conflict because we must add unfamiliarity with fellow citizens of different racial backgrounds to the challenges we confront in resolving legitimate disagreements about public issues.” 166

Segregation can come in various forms, but racial and socioeconomic segregation is the focus of this research project. Drew Hart addressed issues of segregation in his book *Trouble I’ve Seen*. He wrote, “When we can be honest about how our entire society is deeply racialized, we will be ready to move forward.” 160 The body of Christ must be willing to acknowledge that segregation has infiltrated Christian communities and there is a great deal of work that must be done to remedy this ailment.


Segregation in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) have been on the forefront of national news for many years for their efforts toward desegregating (and subsequently re-segregating) their schools. Few school reforms have been as fully implemented and successful as the desegregation plan that was implemented by CMS.\textsuperscript{161} President Ronald Reagan drew extensive criticism for a speech he gave in Charlotte denouncing the desegregation of the public schools as “a social experiment that nobody wants.”\textsuperscript{162} The local newspaper strongly denounced the president by publishing a scathing article titled “You Were Wrong, Mr. President.” In this article, they stated, ”CMS’s greatest achievement of the past twenty years is not the city’s impressive new skyline or its strong, growing economy. Its’ proudest achievement is its fully integrated school system.”\textsuperscript{163} Within two years of the president’s visit, CMS began a slow drift toward resegregation that continued until the end of the last century and rapidly accelerated in the first decade of the twenty-first century\textsuperscript{164}

Another ambitious effort has been spearheaded by CMS. Project LIFT (Project Leadership & Investment for Transformation) was launched in 2011 by involving local foundations that raised $55 million over a five-year period to improve educational outcomes in the district. Their strategy targeted the West Charlotte corridor, defined as West Charlotte High School and the elementary and middle schools that feed into it, for intensive


\textsuperscript{162} Ibid., 2.

\textsuperscript{163} Ibid., 3.

\textsuperscript{164} Ibid.
intervention-based teaching and learning reforms that could ultimately be replicated across the district. Each of these schools were hyper-segregated racially and socioeconomically.

Ashley Park PreK-8 School is the neighborhood school that is located less than one mile from Center City Church. Ashley Park has been a recipient of this generous partnership between individuals and the state. Even with an influx of resources flowing toward this school, it still remains one of the most racially segregated schools in North Carolina. The research that has been completed on segregation in high-poverty communities is viscerally on display at Ashley Park.

The reality that Ashley Park students experience is that most of the interaction they have throughout their week are with other peers who have grown up in the same racial and socioeconomic status. Experiencing a homogenous expression of life limits the ability for children to see possibilities outside of their own experiences. Theologian Soong-Chan Rah discussed the importance of cross-cultural relationships in his book *Many Colors*. He said, “By engaging in relationships across the cultural divide and learning from others, we create the possibility of expanding our cultural worldview.”

**Inequality**

The second determining factor of generational poverty is inequality. Author Ta-Nehisi Coates highlighted the realities his father experienced raising a black child in the segregated culture of America. He implored Ta-Nehisi to look at the realities around him and


vigilantly defend himself against the inequities that are present toward black families. He declared, “I would not have you descend into your own dream. I would have you be a conscious citizen of this terrible and beautiful world.” He asked his son to be aware of the systematic inequities present in our society and to rise above them.

The United States is often hailed as the “land of opportunity,” a society in which a child's chances of success depend little on his or her family background. The reality of this statement can be questioned upon further examination. Tavis Smiley and Cornel West refer to this as “poverty of opportunity.” They state, “The myth of American exceptionalism, of being the best of the best, overshadows an inconvenient truth. We are a nation where poverty of opportunity is dangerously close to becoming a permanent reality.”

Being in poverty is rarely about a lack of intelligence or ability. Many people today are poor and hungry largely because a few people with enormous power neglect and mistreat the powerless. Using their unequal power, they create structures that benefit themselves and benefit others. Inequitable systems that are present in our society today continue to widen the gap between the rich and the poor. Poor countries are poor because those that have been placed in positions of influence make choices that create poverty. In order for balance to be recovered, individuals that reside in positions of power and influence must be willing to


create favorable circumstances for members of minority groups and lower socioeconomic classes to have equitable opportunities to basic education, housing, employment, and healthcare.

Joseph Stiglitz won the Nobel Prize in Economics in 2001. He explored the topic of socioeconomic inequality in America in his book *The Price of Inequality*. He affirmed the same sentiment of Smiley and West when he bluntly said, “America is no longer the land of opportunity.” Equitable societies include a neighborly expression of economic practices. Stiglitz continues, “A more efficient economy and fairer society will also come from making markets work like markets—more competitive, less exploitive—and tempering their excesses.”

*Schools*

The third determining factor in generational poverty is the quality of education that children receive in their school. Education should carry a sense of equity and innocence for America’s youth. However, the imbalance of resources given to public schools located in the affluent areas as opposed to high poverty communities is nothing short of staggering. Michelle Alexander wrote a book highlighting the enormous inequities in the sentencing of minorities when compared to equal crimes committed by white individuals. She refers to the incredible amount of money being poured into the prison system instead of using that money for more valuable investments into areas like education for America’s youth. She said,


173. Ibid., 334.
“There is something warped about a society that has invested $300 billion for the expansion of the prison industrial complex’s jails, prisons, and juvenile justice institutions while claiming it has no money for schools.”

Payne made the straightforward statement: “An education is the key to getting out of, and staying out of, generational poverty.”

One of the underlying issues of the education system is non-verbal communication. Payne referred to students living in poverty as having “hidden rules.” She declared that schools and business operate from a set of rules that are present in the middle class. These are assumptions about life, access to technology, and support in the family structure. A public school can be one of the only places that a child born into poverty can learn the hidden rules of various socioeconomic classes through exposure to others that have grown up in a different reality than themselves.

Jonathan Kozol spent time with students in a high poverty community of St. Louis, Missouri. During his time with this community, he made an enlightening observation about the unfairness of children growing up in the unequal system of schools in poor communities. He observed,

Almost anyone who visits in the schools of East St. Louis, even for a short time, comes away profoundly shaken. These are innocent children, after all. They have done nothing wrong. They have committed no crime. They are too young to have offended us in any way at all.


176. Ibid., 3.

177. Ibid., 62.

All too often, children are paying the price of inequities that have been dictated by those that sit in the seats of power. The innocence and brilliance of these children is at stake as communities across America blindly continue to pursue capitalistic endeavors that extract from the poor to increase their own influence, power, and wealth.

Another factor in school systems is the difficulty in retaining top-level teachers in poor communities. Meaghan Loftus is the principal at Ashley Park PreK-8 school. She said that her school, and many other high poverty schools, battle a high percentage of turnovers among their faculty.179 The reasons vary, but the inequitable distribution of funds makes teaching in poor communities less attractive for teachers whose performance is based largely on standardized testing scores of their students.

Robert Putnam is the Malkin Professor of Public Policy at Harvard University and recipient of the 2006 Skytte Prize, the world’s highest honor for a political scientist. He advocates for better hiring practices for teachers in high poverty communities in his book Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis. He wrote, “Hiring more and better teachers at higher salaries to teach in high poverty schools would be a very good way to narrow class disparities.”180

Richard Rothstein discussed the importance of schools that have a diverse representation of families across racial and socioeconomic lines in his book The Color of Law. He came to the conclusion that children need to be exposed to others that are not in the


same difficult situation as them in order to have a more robust worldview. He said,

The concentration of many disadvantaged children in the same classroom deprives each child of the special attention needed to be successful. All these challenges are added to those from which poor children suffer in any neighborhood—instability and stress resulting from parental unemployment, fewer literacy experiences when parents are poorly educated, more overcrowded living arrangements that offer few quiet corners to study, and less adequate health care, all of which contribute to worse average school performance, and as a result, less occupational success as adults.”

Social Capital

The fourth determining factor in generational poverty is a person’s ability to access various opportunities through social capital. Raj Chetty and a team of researchers from Harvard University conducted a study on the effect that relationships have on individuals and families in high poverty communities. The results showed that exposure to relationships with people who are not living in poverty greatly increase the likelihood of breaking the cycle of poverty themselves. In a summary of their research, he said, “Our findings suggest that efforts to integrate disadvantaged families into mixed-income communities are likely to reduce the persistence of poverty across generations.” This research clearly shows that the environment of an individual is directly related to their likelihood to escape poverty.

The power of mentoring is not to be underestimated for children that are born into poverty. U.S. News and World Report explores the topic of relationships for children in poor neighborhoods, and they found that mentorship from someone that is not living in poverty is one of the most important elements involved in upward mobility. They stated, “ Locate a


People who do not live in poverty should take interest and try to listen and learn long enough to understand there is a problem with a lack of social capital for individuals in poor communities.

The relational chasm between Caucasian and minority races was explored in a 2014 article in the Washington Post. They reported that three quarters of white people do not have any close friends that are non-white. This homogenous expression of friendship lacks the valuable experience that comes along with diversity in relationships. The implication here is that racial division leads to a lack of relationship between whites and minorities. Until this chasm is bridged, there will continue to be a lack of social capital for minorities living in poverty.

Another factor leading to a lack of social capital is the criminalization of African-Americans in our criminal justice system. It is almost impossible to build relationships that will lead to equitable employment opportunities while individuals are incarcerated. Michelle Alexander exposed an alarming disparity in the number of African Americans in prison as compared to other races. Furthermore, once convicted of a felony, a person’s chances of receiving the opportunity to interview for a job decreases. Alexander claims


that these offenses and blemishes on their records often make it almost impossible for ex-offenders to integrate into the mainstream society and economy upon release.\footnote{Alexander, \textit{The New Jim Crow}, 143.}

\textit{Family Structure}

The fifth determining factor in generational poverty is family structure. Educators can do everything in their power to encourage students to achieve the fullness of their potential, but this must be reinforced within the context of a healthy family structure in order to realize the full potential of students.

The faculty, staff, and administration of Ashley Park PreK-8 School encourage their students to think critically, engage problems with creativity, and to become scholars that uniquely solve problems. Each day, the team at Ashley Park is working toward raising up the future leaders of Charlotte, North Carolina. However, this support is all too often not present in the form of parental engagement. This includes helping their children with homework, forming a vibrant parent-teacher association, and asking their children about friendships at school. All elements of a healthy family structure are associated with higher academic performance, better socioemotional skills, and other facets of student behavior.\footnote{Putnam, \textit{Our Kids}, 167.} Educational researchers Anne Henderson and Nancy Berla said, “When parents are involved at school, their children go further in school, and the schools they go to are better.”\footnote{Ibid.}

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{Alexander} Alexander, \textit{The New Jim Crow}, 143.
\bibitem{Putnam} Putnam, \textit{Our Kids}, 167.
\bibitem{Ibid} Ibid.
\end{thebibliography}
Challenges associated with being a single parent can also lead to instability in family structure that can negatively impact children. Putnam observed, “Children who grow up without their biological father perform worse on standardized tests, earn lower grades, and stay in school for fewer years, regardless of race and class.” A holistic view of the impact that family structure has on education outcomes for students is imperative to consider when assessing students in high poverty communities. Family specialist Isabel Sawhill said, “Generalizations are dangerous; many single parents are doing a terrific job under difficult circumstances. But on average, children from single-parent families do worse in school and in life.”

The National Academy of Sciences released a landmark study on the way the brain works and how it affects human behavior. In their findings, they stated that environments and experiences from the womb through early childhood years affect virtually every aspect of early human development. Stated more simply, early life experiences impact a person’s life in a most powerful way. Thus, a healthy family structure creates a healthy atmosphere for a child to grow with confidence and accountability.

Putnam, however, refers to the interconnected relationship between the need for healthy family structure and access to economic security. He said, “Even ideal parenting cannot compensate for all the ill effects of poverty on children and even incompetent

188. Ibid., 78.


parenting cannot nullify the advantages conferred by parental influence and education.” His statement confirmed the research from Harvard and UC-Berkeley which describes an ecosystem of health that is required for an individual to break the cycle of generational poverty.

**Conclusion**

The theological motivation to care for the poor is clearly defined in Mark 12:28-34 and Isaiah 58:1-14. Academicians from Harvard University and University of California-Berkeley and various sociological experts highlighted in the previous chapters have methodically presented the harsh reality that communities have been divided by racial and socioeconomic inequities in America. When these realities are paired together, Christians must look inward to examine their role in achieving equity for all neighbors, no matter their racial or socioeconomic status.

Drawing upon further New Testament motivation, the book of Acts presents a fascinating picture of the early Church in her infancy. Wildly growing and awkwardly expanding like a wildfire that could not be contained, the message of freedom in Jesus rapidly spread across the city of Jerusalem and beyond. In the early days of the formation of the local church, a uniquely beautiful narrative of genuine love, care, and concern for each other began to form. Acts 2:44 gave a brief glimpse of the way the disciples looked for the good of each person in their community, regardless of race, class, or social standing. It said,

191. Ibid., 134.
“All the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need.”

This is a beautiful picture for the American church in the twenty-first century. The call to neighborliness extends beyond homogenous communities of race and economic status. Communities that are blessed with financial resources should use their influence to care for those who are poor, marginalized, and feeling a unique sense of hopelessness that only can be understood by those living under the bondage of poverty. Tavis Smiley and Cornel West gave a compelling picture of a preferred future. They declared, “If Americans cultivated a surplus of compassion, our children would not be without food, shelter, and quality healthcare.” They continued, “With a surplus of love, the untapped potential of our youth would not rot away in our nation’s prisons.”

Neighborliness calls for an awakening of the body of Christ to embody the actions and priorities of Jesus that are displayed in his love for the poor and marginalized. He walked with the poor, conversed with outcasts, and shared his life with theirs. He laid down his life for the rich and the poor alike. He rose from the grave to be the living Savior for all mankind, not just a privileged few. If the Church is going to continue to lift high the name of Jesus, she must also lift the arms of the poor. Neighborliness means that everyone has an equitable share in their inheritance of the Kingdom of God. The answers will not come easily, and mistakes will be made. However, the missteps of individuals willing to engage across racial and socioeconomic dividing lines are much more palatable than willful ignorance to the plight of our neighbors that are living in poverty.

Ronald Sider challenged the Church by asking, “Is there the same balance and emphasis on justice for the poor and oppressed in our programs as there is in Scripture?” The answer to this question could change the Charlotte community and lead to a neighborly economy that is equitable to all residents. More importantly, a response to this question that includes the spiritual act of neighborliness could tangibly impact the life of a friend created in the image of God.

Chapter Three
The Project Narrative

Introduction

The biblical concept of neighborliness is embedded into the greatest commandment in Mark 12:28-34. If Jesus considered love for neighbors on equal level as love for God, then Christians who long to embody the love of Christ must explore how they can express this type of love, care, and concern for others. The aim of the seminar titled “Neighborliness: A Seminar on Race, Economics, and Friendship” is to educate and inspire participants toward a healthy expression of loving God and neighbors with equal passion.

The seminar will be open to anyone interested in exploring the concept of biblical neighborliness. A maximum of 110 participants will be welcomed to listen, learn, and discuss matters relating to this topic. The maximum number of people at the event is due to the desire for participants to sit at round tables to encourage discussion and interaction with fellow participants. A total of 225 could fit into the venue if round tables were not used, but that would not encourage a setting that would allow for convenient interaction with the others in attendance. Additionally, the participants will choose their own tables but asked to sit at the same table for all sessions so that they can build camaraderie, trust, and understanding with
others at their table. Four sessions will be held over Friday, February 1 (7:00 p.m.–8:30 p.m.) and Saturday, February 2 (9:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m.).

The seminar was created because of the context in which Center City Church is doing ministry in Charlotte, North Carolina. The demographics directly around the church include some of the wealthiest residents of the city neighboring some of the highest poverty communities in Charlotte. The racial demographics include a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds that are co-existing in the same community. The seminar has registrants from various ethnic and economic backgrounds and will be taught in a way that will lead to robust conversation and consideration of each person’s point of view in the room.

Online promotion of the seminar was accomplished by announcing the event on the researcher’s Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram accounts. The researcher asked family and friends to share the event on their social media channels as well. Additionally, live promotion was used by announcing the seminar on Sunday mornings at Center City Church and at the Camp Greene Neighborhood Association meeting. Additionally, the researcher sent special invitations via email to four groups of people:

1. Business leaders in the community that have been actively engaged in relationship and ongoing conversations with the researcher.

2. The Executive Leadership team from the Camp Greene Neighborhood Association.

3. Leaders from nonprofit organizations in the Charlotte community that focus on high poverty communities.

4. Local church pastors.

The invitations that were sent out were received with enthusiasm from each of the recipients. Several people from each category responded to the invitation and participated in the seminar.
Research Design

Before the sessions begin, participants will be given the opportunity to complete a pre-seminar questionnaire that will ask them various questions regarding the things that they are about to learn in the seminar. The use of qualitative questions will allow participants to be more descriptive in their answers, allowing the researcher to see a progression in their thought processes regarding their understanding of biblical neighborliness. The following topics will be discussed in a conversational and qualitative setting: These questions include:

1. Why did you decide to come to this seminar?

2. How would you define these terms in your own words?
   a. Neighbor
   b. Neighborliness
   c. Privilege
   d. Race
   e. Socioeconomics
   f. Inattentional Blindness
   g. Inclusion
   h. Racism
   i. Generational Poverty
   j. Gentrification
   k. Friendship
1. Implicit Bias

3. What does it mean to you to “clean up a neighborhood?”

4. What does “blind privilege” mean?

5. How can a person living in poverty help a person living in affluence?

6. How can a person living in affluence help a person living in poverty?

Participants will have an opportunity to complete a document that will include post-seminar questions that have been designed to see how they have grown in their understanding of biblical neighborliness over the course of the seminar. These questions include:

1. What will some of your initial take-aways from this seminar include?

2. How would you define these terms in your own words?
   a. Neighbor
   b. Neighborliness
   c. Privilege
   d. Race
   e. Socioeconomics
   f. Inattentional Blindness
   g. Inclusion
   h. Racism
   i. Generational Poverty
   j. Gentrification
   k. Friendship
   l. Implicit Bias

3. What does it mean to you to “clean up a neighborhood?”
4. What does “blind privilege” mean?

5. How can a person living in poverty help a person living in affluence?

6. How can a person living in affluence help a person living in poverty?

Participants will be given the opportunity to submit their responses to the researcher via email at the conclusion of the seminar. This method of qualitative feedback is preferred over a quantitative study because the aim of the Neighborliness seminar is to impact hearts and lives toward the call to loving God and neighbors.

Conversations will take place around tables during the seminar. The researcher will set up these conversations by asking a series of questions to be discussed at the tables.

1. What did you hear during the teaching?

2. What did you feel during the teaching?

3. What part of the teaching struck you as significant or uncomfortable?

**Context of the Study**

Center City Church is located one mile west of the downtown corridor of Charlotte, North Carolina (referred to as Uptown Charlotte). The demographics of the community include a wide-ranging representation of racial and economic backgrounds. The immediate context of the location of the church is directly related to the purpose of this seminar. Historically high-poverty neighborhoods are located within a short walk to neighborhoods that have transitioned quickly into affluent communities that are conveniently located within a mile of the Uptown Charlotte business community.
Participants

Residents of the neighborhood surrounding Center City Church come from any of a variety of racial or economic backgrounds due to the proximity of the city and the diversity represented in these neighborhoods. Thus, people of different circumstances are physical neighbors to each other. Participants will be coming from various backgrounds, many of them from the neighborhoods surrounding Center City Church. Additionally, individuals from the greater Charlotte community will be attending the seminar as well. Any person who desires to explore the topic of biblical neighborliness is welcome to attend. The topic of biblical neighborliness is key to ensuring that people understand their role in communities that have a diverse makeup of neighbors.

Measures for Ethical Protection

The questions and procedures used in the qualitative study for the focus group were approved by Southeastern University’s Institutional Review Board. Participants will sign a consent form to assure that they are aware that their responses will be used in a confidential manner for the purposes of this dissertation. Paper versions of the raw data from the observation sheets will be destroyed after they are transferred to electronic versions. All
written data will be stored digitally on the researcher’s computer for one year and then deleted permanently from the hard drive.

**Role of the Researcher**

The researcher has 20 years of ministry experience, ranging from associate pastoral roles at various size churches (ranging from one hundred people to over three thousand). The current role of the researcher is lead pastor at Center City Church, which was founded by the researcher in 2010. The researcher has also served on the Board of Trustees at Southeastern University for six years and has guest lectured at the university on various occasions. Additionally, the researcher has been involved in several community organizations in the Uptown Charlotte community for over ten years and has an extensive relational network that spans racial and economic lines that have aided the depth and understanding of the topic of neighborliness for the purposes of this dissertation.

Focused effort was given to high-poverty communities in the researcher’s previous ministry positions, as well. Place-based ministry efforts were formative during middle school and high school as the researcher spent a significant amount of time in a the Paramore neighborhood in Orlando, Florida engaging in relationships with children and families on a weekly basis. When the researcher accepted a full-time ministry position at Calvary Assembly of God in Winter Park, Florida, he established a relationship with the administration at Evans High School. The researcher set up a weekly opportunity for students from Evans to be picked up after school on Wednesdays and attend the weekly youth service
at Calvary. The researcher was engaged in active relationships with the students that were coming from high-poverty communities in the neighborhoods surrounding the school.

The researcher has traveled to several cities across the United States that have had measurable progress in helping families to break the cycle of generational poverty. The most significant site visit was to Chicago, Illinois, in a community called North Lawndale. Lawndale Christian Community Church (LCCC) proved to be a helpful model that the researcher drew upon for designing the holistic framework that will be presented in the research portion of the dissertation and the seminar. Credit must also be given to the work being accomplished by Purpose Built Communities in Atlanta, Georgia, and their affiliates around the country. Families do not end up in poverty due to one situation or circumstance, and they will not break the cycle of poverty by one strategy. Holistic care is required, and the trips taken by the researcher were valuable to see the work being accomplished firsthand.

**Instruments Used in Data Collection**

Due to the personal and emotional responses that are evoked when discussing matters of race and economics, the researcher decided to use two methods to collect data from the focus group. The first method is a document created to gather pre- and post-seminar information. The questionnaire participants receive will include space below each research question for written responses. The second method is an audio recording of the seminar that will be used for evaluation upon the conclusion of the gathering.
Data Analysis

The main sources of data for analyzing the content of the focus groups are the pre- and post-seminar questions that will be reviewed upon the conclusion of the seminar. Data from the questionnaires will be evaluated individually by the researcher to aid in future teaching settings for this seminar.

Overview of Seminar Sessions

The title of the seminar is Neighborliness: A Seminar on Race, Economics, and Friendship. Four sessions will be taught:

1. Neighborliness: The Other Half of the Greatest Commandment
2. Understanding Systemic Inequality
3. Breaking the Cycle of Generational Poverty
4. The Response of the Body of Christ

The first session, Neighborliness: The Other Half of the Greatest Commandment, will be held on February 1, 2019, and will explore the theological motivation toward neighborliness. The decision was made to have this stand-alone teaching on Friday night so that participants can enter into the discussion on biblical neighborliness by learning the theological motivation first and then have the opportunity to rest and process the call toward
loving God and neighbors. Additionally, the following three sessions will be much more data-driven and require the participants to engage information that may challenge their pre-conceived ideas. Laying a proper theological foundation on the first evening will be an important step in preparing hearts to explore racial and economic matters on a deep level. The remaining sessions will be held on Saturday and will build upon the theological motivation while adding a research-driven overview of the topics being explored.

The second session, *Understanding Systemic Injustice*, will explore research that shows the systems and structures of American culture that have favored wealthy (and predominantly white) members of the community over others since the inception of the country. The topics of systemic racism, inequitable practices in the legal and prison system, and economic practices that have favored the wealth will be presented. It is disingenuous for individuals to attempt to address issues that they have not taken the time to understand. The topics of racial and economic division are brimming with volatile energy and emotion that must be handled with understanding, patience, and care. Taking the time to understand the systems behind the injustice will lead to a greater understanding of the topic, which will then produce a more compassionate response when it is time to address how to move forward.

The third session, *Breaking the Cycle of Generational Poverty*, will cover various models that were found across the United States throughout the research conducted in this project. The model of collective impact (various organizations coming together for a common purpose) will be introduced and highlighted as a key element in breaking the cycle of generational poverty. Place-based initiatives will be taught to show that focused effort over a long period of time in a specific community has shown great benefits in many cities across the United States. The framework of housing, healthcare, education, and employment
will act as four “pillars” that are required for high-poverty individuals to access to break the cycle of poverty.

The fourth session, *The Response of the Body of Christ*, will focus on how members of the Christian community can embody neighborliness in their lives and their expressions of faith. Ephesians 4 will be explored as the Apostle Paul gives the imagery of a body working together with equal members. He clearly states that everyone participates in the body, but that Jesus is at the head. The first three sessions will be addressed during this final teaching, and the closing charge will be for participants to then combine the theological motivation with the research-driven data to then engage their communities with the love of Christ motivating their actions toward their neighbors.

**Significance of the Order**

The order in which these sessions have been arranged is intentional and important to understand the flow of the seminar. The theological motivation will give a baseline for the spiritual aspect that drives each person to the call to neighborly love. Understanding systemic injustice will build upon the spiritual imperative, while adding a social and personal dynamic that aims to help participants see that opportunities to achieve economic vitality are not the same for all members of their community based on racial and socioeconomic indicators. Breaking the cycle of generational poverty is not accomplished alone. When participants understand how the four pillars of education, employment, healthcare, and housing work together they can profoundly impact their community. The fourth session will propose a
response of the body of Christ. This final session will be used to encourage all participants to engage in relationships and use their God-given gifts for the benefit of all residents of the kingdom of God.

**Framework Thinking**

Each of the four sessions will include the same framework for engaging the various topics. Sessions will begin with an introductory overview of the topic that will include research-based information, anecdotes to help them understand the information, and a clear presentation of why the topic is important. The researcher will then analyze responses regarding participants’ perceptions that have been built about each topic. Reconstruction will take place through a biblical lens that will ensure that all participants see that this is first and foremost gospel-oriented work that is important to the kingdom of God, as well as beneficial to neighbors from all spiritual backgrounds. Finally, each session will close with suggestions toward practical application of the information presented.

**Post-Seminar Focus Group**

Upon the conclusion of the seminar, the focus group will convene again to explore the same questions that were presented in the pre-session forum. The discussion will be audio-recorded and analyzed to understand the value of the information presented and to
improve upon the delivery for future participants in the Neighborliness seminar. A final question will be added that will ask the participants to give feedback on how the seminar can be improved.

**Pedagogy**

The pedagogy that will be used will incorporate a blend of lecture-style information that is disseminated and a casual, Socratic method that will ask participants to engage in the exploration of the topic of biblical neighborliness. Each participant will be given a document that will have room for personal notes and thoughts to be written down for future consideration. The combination of lecture-style teaching and Socratic interaction will be used because it is important for the researcher to deliver prepared content and see the participants transformed through learning, understanding, and processing the information for themselves and among the larger group of participants.

**Conclusion**

The motivation for this seminar is not fulfilled by simply delivering information about the topic of neighborliness. The aim of the seminar is to impact hearts and lives with the message of the Gospel that transforms a person from the inside out. Loving God will be given proper attention, because John 15 gives the imagery that people must first remain in
Jesus before they will produce much fruit. The imagery of fruit being produced in every season logically means that there would be enough for the individual and many others in the community. The Neighborliness seminar has been designed to draw people into a more robust understanding of the call toward loving God and neighbors. The hope is to see lives transformed by the power of God and practical lessons learned that will encourage others to engage in work across racial and socioeconomic lines that have divided communities for far too long.
Chapter Four

The Project Evaluated

Introduction

The Neighborliness seminar was the culmination of three years of academic study in the area of generational poverty, theological review of God’s heart toward neighborliness, and the practical expression of leading Center City Church in Charlotte, North Carolina. The seminar was hosted on February 1-2, 2019, and 105 people pre-registered. Due to circumstances unknown to the researcher, 15 people were not able to attend, and 90 people participated in the seminar. The following section is an evaluation of the effectiveness of the seminar. The SWOT analysis was used as a framework for this evaluation.

The SWOT analysis is a strategic planning tool used to evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of a project or organization. The following are definitions for these terms with regard to the seminar:

1. Strengths: Elements of the seminar that were received well by the participants and will be reproduced and used in future teaching settings.

2. Weaknesses: Elements of the seminar that did not go as planned or were not executed in the manner in which I had hoped.

3. Opportunities: Lessons learned after teaching this seminar for the first time that can be incorporated as new elements of the seminar for future teaching settings.

4. Threats: Interior and exterior threats to the work proposed in this seminar being thwarted or stalling for various reasons.

The prevailing metaphor throughout the seminar was my grandmother’s gumbo. This dish is made up of many ingredients that have to be present in order for her gumbo to be made to perfection. Each session acknowledged the relationship to the topics mentioned in the other sessions, showing that the content of each of the four sessions had to be present in order for biblical neighborliness to be expressed regarding race, economics, and friendship.

**Strengths**

The seminar was organized into four distinct sessions that began with a Friday night gathering that introduced the participants to the theological motivation toward biblical neighborliness. An introduction to the overall dissertation project was given at the beginning of the evening and then I taught for approximately one hour on the topic of biblical neighborliness.

This was followed by a time of worship (led by a local worship leader) and prayer. This gave participants an opportunity to process the scriptural motivation that had just been presented to them in the teaching. I also encouraged the participants to make room in their hearts for the Holy Spirit to lead them and guide them into a deeper understanding of neighborliness over the course of the entire seminar.

The decision to start with a one-session introduction of this topic on Friday evening was received very well by the participants and gave them a chance to receive biblical teaching on the need for members of the body of Christ to genuinely love and care for each
other. The participants were able to spend time reflecting on Friday evening before returning on Saturday morning for three sessions that focused on practical teaching on the cultural dynamics of race and economics that have historically divided communities.

The pre-session questions that were included in the Neighborliness Handout gave the participants an opportunity to begin engaging with key terms that would be used throughout the seminar. Many participants were not familiar with the terms that were being used in the seminar, so this document allowed participants to have their vocabulary grow and their interest pique from the start of the seminar while also highlighting the importance of those terms when they were introduced throughout the entire seminar. Mark 12:28-34 (the greatest commandment) and Isaiah 58:1-14 (the prophet corrects a worshiping community) were used as primary biblical texts in this teaching toward biblical neighborliness. The participants were engaged and thoughtfully taking notes throughout the entire teaching. I will use these two texts as the basis for future writing and teaching because of the positive response I received from the participants. One participant stated that they learned “the relationship between Christ and the Church is embodied between supporting and loving each other.”

Incorporating a time of worship proved to be a helpful element that separated the introduction of the dissertation project and the teaching of the primary biblical texts. The topics of race, economics, and friendship are deeply personal, and the time of corporate worship gave the participants time to ease any tension that was present after the introduction, fix their eyes on Jesus, and prepare their hearts for receiving the teaching from the scriptures.

Saturday morning’s session began with the participants listening to a hip-hop song called “Gentrify” by Propaganda. This song was selected because of my strong belief that

195. Response from a post-seminar questionnaire.
music is a powerful way to describe cultural division and give words to express how people are feeling about various topics. The participants were given the lyrics to this song and asked to circle words that stood out to them as significant. I asked them to focus on things that they wanted to discuss at their tables and take notes as the song played. This led to robust conversations around each table for about ten minutes to start the morning and set a great tone for the day. Propaganda’s music was also used before the third session. I played a song called I Hate Cats for the participants and asked them to do the same exercise. Similar response was observed from the participants as they discussed this song that highlighted the response of white parents toward their daughter when she wanted to date a black man. I will absolutely use music in future settings because of the respond that came from the group in both of these settings.

Defining terms at the beginning of the seminar was helpful because it gave each person a base line for understanding what was meant by each term. I presented definitions for the following terms to ensure that everyone was unified in what was meant by key words being used throughout the seminar:

1. Neighborliness: A primary behavior of Christians that seek to embody the love, understanding, and care displayed by Jesus during his earthly ministry.

2. Race: A human construct that has been created to aid in the ability to draw clear sociological lines between neighbors.

3. Equity: The ability for all neighbors to have access to opportunities that lead to a holistically healthy life.

The use of visual aids throughout the seminar allowed various ways for the participants to be exposed to important information. The following are various visual aids used during the seminar:
1. Informational graphics projected onto the screens in the venue and used during the presentation to support the teaching.

2. Large maps of the city of Charlotte that were printed and put on display throughout the venue for participants to examine during breaks.

3. A video that I produced that showed how quickly a person could drive between affluent and high-poverty communities in Charlotte.

One of the key elements of the seminar that I emphasized throughout the entire weekend was a spirit of curiosity. One of the participants said in their pre-seminar questionnaire that they were there because they were “curious to see how this teaching can be practically applied.” An inquisitive nature will lead each one of us to start asking better questions about the disparities in our communities, as opposed to making quick assessments of complex matters.

There seems to be measurable growth in understanding of these important topics when the pre-seminar questions are compared to the post-seminar questions. Some questions were purposely posed as exactly the same question with the desire to see how participants might answer them differently before and after the seminar. For instance, the question was posed, “What does it mean to ‘clean up a neighborhood?’” The first response from one participant read, “This often looks like forcing people out of their homes and communities.” By the end of the seminar their answer was much more nuanced. They responded to the same question by saying, “It is not a good idea without consulting members of the neighborhood. Find out if they even want to do anything in the first place. It is dangerous to assume the needs of a community you know nothing about.”

196. Pre-seminar questionnaire.
The diversity of age, racial, and socioeconomic representation in the room was strength of the seminar. The participants represented a wide spectrum of backgrounds that produced conversations around the tables that included various perspectives. One of the interesting dynamics that was present in the room was found in the fact that residents of the historically high-poverty Camp Greene neighborhood were next to residents of the Bryant Park neighborhood. Bryant Park was recently created by developers that purchased over two-hundred homes in Camp Greene, razed the homes, and created a new neighborhood with high-end homes. I addressed this from the stage and acknowledged that this highlighted the unity that is found when community members—no matter their background—gather around the message of Jesus.

The seminar included a wide range of ages from teenagers involved in Center City Church’s youth group to retired members of the neighborhood in their seventies. There was wide representation from different generations, but it seemed that the majority of the participants were 25-40 years old. The presence of younger and older participants presented an opportunity for robust conversations between multiple generations.

Another powerful moment came when I presented five large maps across the venue (see Appendix 3) and gave the participants fifteen minutes to walk around the room and explore the visual representation of how Charlotte is divided demographically in five areas:

1. Race
2. Social capital
3. Education
4. Income and Wealth
5. Family structure
I asked the participants to view each map and take notes on how they felt after seeing them. They were encouraged to make some educated guesses on why many of the same areas were highlighted similarly in different parts of the community. They were then given the opportunity to discuss what they saw and felt around the tables with other participants. This was a personal highlight of the seminar because I was able to observe many of the participants being viscerally impacted by the sight of such division in our community.

Weaknesses

An unexpected family emergency two weeks prior to the seminar impacted my ability to prepare everything the way that I desired. Instead of spending time that had been set aside to make final notes on my teaching script and prepare graphic slides, I spent almost the entire two weeks leading into the seminar at the hospital caring for a family member who was severely injured. As such, I did not have everything as perfectly planned out as I would have hoped for such a significant moment in the journey of this dissertation project. However, the seminar went well in spite of not having everything that I had hoped to present ready.

After processing the various elements of the seminar that were presented, I have been able to identify things that did not work as well as I would have hoped. The following weaknesses that have been identified will be used as a learning moment in presenting this seminar for future participants.

The notes that I used for the seminar were not organized as well as I would have liked because of the lack of time to make final preparations. As such, I found that I stumbled or
stammered during transitions from one section to another. I will need to have a much clearer outline prepared for future settings so that I can more naturally move between topics throughout the seminar. The amount of information being disseminated can be overwhelming, and I can learn from presenting this information for the first time and have a better plan to present the information as I move forward.

The timing of each seminar session will need to be adjusted to give more time for breaks for the participants. The first session had one hour of teaching and thirty minutes that were used for discussion, worship, and prayer. The second session was almost two hours of teaching, which proved to be too long. I did not realize how much I had to say on the topic of this session, Understanding Systemic Injustice, and I went too long. The third session included approximately one of teaching, and the final session was about 45 minutes of teaching. I will adjust the schedule of the seminar to organize the timing better. One immediate change that I will make is to break the second seminar up into two sections and allow the participants to take a break halfway through the teaching.

Conversations around the tables proved to be more robust than I anticipated when preparing for this element of the seminar. One participant stated, “I wish that we had more time during the table discussions because we were just getting into conversation when you said that it was time to move on to the next topic. We were learning from each other and gaining so much from discussing with each other.” I gave the participants 5-10 minutes for each discussion, but I will adjust that to incorporate about 15 minutes for these discussions in the future because of the feedback stating that participants wanted to have more time.

Additionally, I will incorporate table captains as I prepare for future teaching settings of this seminar. These individuals will be identified as having at least a basic understanding of the topics being discussed and the ability to lead their table in conversation. A participant stated, “One person at my table continued to dominate conversation and made controversial comments that introduced unnecessary tension to the table.” Other participants stated that the conversations were incredibly helpful when they were led by individuals at the table who already seemed to have experience leading these conversations. This adjustment to the seminar preparation will lead to greater value being attained for each participant because there will be a better plan for the discussion portions around the tables. I will also incorporate specific questions to be discussed around the tables instead of leaving it up to each table to discuss whatever comes to mind. One of the participants said, “Create more clarity and focus on the discussion around the table. I didn’t feel like the times around the table were as productive as they could have been. Maybe include a couple of questions to lead the discussions.”

**Opportunities**

The experience that was gained by teaching this seminar for the first time will lead to opportunities to teach on the topic of biblical neighborliness in various settings. The


The following section highlights opportunities to take the research that has been done and share it in different settings to continue the conversation.

I will create a pre-seminar training for individuals who can be used as table captains. We will discuss how to handle difficult conversations and gently direct conversations away from contentious interaction to a healthier expression of processing the information that is being discussed. This will also include pre-reading for table captains on books that give a good overview of the topics that will be discussed around the tables. Additionally, resources on conflict resolution will be offered to the table captains so that they are equipped to handle the conversations that tend to arise in these settings that evoke emotional responses from participants.

I will begin to explore the opportunity to develop this seminar and adapt the content to make it applicable to any setting. The format will be similar to what was done at the first seminar, with adjustments made to incorporate feedback from participants that will make it better for future participants. The topic of neighborliness is embedded into the core of what Jesus referred to as the greatest commandment of loving God and neighbors in Mark 12:28-34. As such, the basic premise of neighborliness can be taught in any city across the world.

I would also like to pursue the opportunity to adapt the research that has been done into multiple popular-level books that will be easily accessible to individuals who desire to learn more about the topic of neighborliness. The addition of personal stories and anecdotes will make the information easier for readers to digest than keeping the information in the form of academic writing for this dissertation project. I can envision writing books that will address cultural issues from a biblical perspective, how to have conversations with children...
about these topics, and how to engage influential business and political leaders in the work of expressing their faith through biblical neighborliness.

I am going to explore the opportunity to adapt the research in this project into a curriculum that can be used by colleges and universities at the undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral levels of education. I believe it is imperative for the current and future leaders of our culture who are being trained at universities to have a deep understanding of the way division across racial and economic lines are impacting communities. Rich Stearns is the former CEO of a nonprofit called WorldVision that has impacted millions of people around the world who are living in poverty. While referencing the way the body of Christ has responded to being educated about extreme poverty, he said, “Once the church understood the facts, they did the right things.”

I have been asked by a national church planting organization to create a curriculum based off of this seminar to train church planters that are moving to large cities. The topic of neighborliness is a key element for pastors to understand as they explore their call to love and serve diverse neighborhoods. The need for pastors to have a sound theological foundation regarding the greatest commandment grows in direct proportion to the rate that cities continue to grow in population.

Opportunities also exist for participants of the seminar to take what they have learned and bring a new level of understanding and expression of neighborliness into their everyday lives. One participant was encouraged to remember “that my work matters. It’s easy to be in

justice circles that are almost all non-Christian and begin to feel like justice work isn’t God’s work. Pastor David reminding me with all passion and emotion that it’s not true was life-affirming.”201 They made the connection between biblical neighborliness and their vocational effort to care for the poor. That is a major step in the right direction. This is God’s work, and He cares about our engagement in our vocational circles.

Additionally, I had a personal conversation with a seminar participant that stated that they are involved in a major commercial development that will be inviting businesses to join them in a large-scale project in the near future. He said, “I am encouraged to look for small business owners from high-poverty communities and give them access to this project because we could benefit so much from having a diverse background of business owners for this project.”202

The participants were given a list of organizations that they could follow up with at the end of the seminar if they were interested in continuing their effort in this area of study. I took time at the end of the final session to talk about a spirit of curiosity and courage that would lead participants toward further learning. One particular moment struck me as a significant opportunity for the participants to understand and carry forward after the conclusion of the seminar. I told them that many people feel as if listening and learning is equal to non-action. However, I explained that it is disingenuous for a person to try to address a perceived problem that they have not taken the time to understand. The opportunity presented to participants included a spirit of curiosity and courage that would help them learn and grow as they continue to explore their next steps. I included the names of organizations

201. Post-seminar questionnaire.
and their websites so that the participants could explore volunteer opportunities in areas in which they expressed interest.

There remains an opportunity to continue to host this seminar in various settings in the Charlotte community and across the country. I believe that the message of neighborliness is a biblical command that has been overlooked by many in the contemporary Christian community. The path forward includes a significant opportunity to highlight the need for the body of Christ to respond to division that exists in communities across the country, and this seminar will be a tool that can be used by churches and organizations to give research-based information to participants regarding how they can understand and respond to division in their community.

**Threats**

I believe that several threats present themselves as the topic of neighborliness has been presented at this seminar. The first is simply complacency. I told the participants of the seminar, “You have two choices after receiving this information this weekend: choose to engage further or choose to ignore what you have learned.” When an individual learns of the systemic injustices that are present within American culture, it is impossible to passively move forward. A person must choose to engage further through curious learning, reading, and building relationships, or they must choose to ignore what they see as they go about their daily lives.
Additionally, overcoming fear and timidity is vital in this work. The conversations that are produced by genuine interest and curiosity regarding these topics can lead to individuals being crippled by fear because of the volatility that are present in honest conversations about such emotional and intimate topics. The bible addresses this in 2 Timothy 1:7, reminding us that “God has not given us a spirit of fear or timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline.” Howard Thurman addressed the power that fear has in an individual’s life in his book *Jesus and the Disinherited*. He said, “He who fears is literally delivered to destruction.” Fear is a tool of the enemy that impacts the rich and poor alike, crippling individuals that otherwise would be willing to work toward healing relationships that are accomplished through mutuality and understanding. Instead of achieving unity, fear brings destruction to relationships because of a lack of understanding of other people’s perspectives.

A striking example of how fear can keep us from making progress was highlighted by a participant’s answer to a question in the pre-session questionnaire. The question read, “How can a person living in affluence help a person living in poverty?” The participant responded, “I’m afraid to answer this question because it’s most likely going to be wrong.” Even in the context of an anonymous survey, this individual was still afraid to answer because of their fear of being wrong about such an important topic.

Another threat that is present in exploring race, economics, and friendship is that relationships can be impacted when a person starts to have honest conversations about topics that can make others uncomfortable. The seen or unseen biases that people carry with them can incite anger and frustration when the topic arises about a more equitable society. Some

people may be fearful of losing friendships because conversations about equitable access to opportunities mean that the dominant culture has to start letting go of influence, finances, and power to allow others in to express their own ideas of what an equitable society will require.

A serious threat to genuine progress toward developing neighborliness is the desire for comfort. There is very little that is comfortable about learning to cross lines that have historically divided communities and individuals across racial and economic lines. The temptation to live a comfortable, undisturbed life is particularly present for people that are living with the trappings of wealth, power, and influence. Harvey Cox said, “The false comfort wealth brings can cause those who hold it to forget their responsibilities for the poor, the orphans, and the widows.”

Conclusion

One of the participants responded to the post-seminar questions by highlighting the type of love that is to be present as an expression of biblical neighborliness. They said, “We, as a collective Church, need to put an active effort toward loving each and every neighbor according to how Christ loves the Church.” If this is to be a true expression of our faith toward others, it would be valuable to remember the way in which Jesus expressed his love toward us. First John 3:16 said, “We know what real love is because Jesus gave up his life for us. So we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters.”


205. Post-seminar questionnaire.
includes giving up preference, privilege, and comfort in order for each person to experience equal opportunities to live a holistically healthy life.

Another response of one of the participants of the seminar summed up one of the most important points of the entire weekend. The question was posed in the post-seminar questionnaire, “What will some of your initial take-aways from the seminar include?” Their response said, “God cares about how we treat people. Maybe the greatest goal of the enemy is to keep us from loving God and neighbors.”

I was deeply encouraged to see the nuanced way in which people were able to grow in their understanding of complex issues. This was highlighted by one participant’s response to the definition for the word inclusion. Their pre-seminar definition of inclusion was very positive and stated, “Making people feel a part of something.” However, their post-seminar answer was much more nuanced. Their definition was nuanced: “Inclusion makes the assumption that we are going to ‘let you be’ a part of something that has already been established.” That is a subtle yet important distinction, as inclusion presupposes that there is someone in a position of power that is allowing someone else into an established system. While it may seem like a small adjustment to their vocabulary, it is a step toward understanding and growth in the area of expressing neighborliness because they are able to understand the way in which the world operates and how they can choose their words carefully and with compassion toward their neighbors.
Chapter Five
The Project Conclusions

The journey of this dissertation process started in 2015 when I looked across our congregation at Center City Church and I saw a predominantly white congregation in a city that was brimming with cultural diversity. I prayed a private prayer to the Lord after a Sunday morning service and asked him to teach me how to see the beauty of the diverse kingdom of God expressed at Center City Church. I had no idea what I was praying, and, even more so, I could have never anticipated the beauty and the challenge of seeing this prayer answered. I have been deeply touched and changed by the rigor of this academic and theological journey, but immeasurably more by the friendships that have filled my life over the past four years. I am forever changed by the neighborliness that has been expressed to me by the pastors that have faithfully served the West Charlotte community for years and the residents of the Camp Greene neighborhood that have welcomed our church family with open arms. I am a better son of God, husband to Dara, father to Max, Mary, Jack, and Ben, and pastor for Center City Church because of the experiences that have been afforded to me on this academic and relational journey.

As a son of God, my eyes have been opened to the beauty of God’s diverse creation across racial and economic lines. I have learned how to patiently listen to the stories of others without insisting on interjecting my own personal opinions or biased outlook on life. I have learned the value of humbly placing myself at the feet of others that may not have personal
riches (as measured by the dominant culture) and learning from a different level of faithfulness and trust in the Lord that is sharpened by trials and tribulation that I may never experience myself.

As a husband to Dara and father to my children, I have learned how to engage in meaningful conversation around our dinner table about culture and the dynamics that are ever-present in our society that our family, as middle-class and white, may never have addressed if I had not been afforded this opportunity to explore race, economics, and friendship at such an intimate level. I will never forget the first time that my oldest son, Max (fifteen years old at the time), and I listened to Propaganda’s album and discussed the meaning of the lyrics in-depth that explored dynamics that my son had never had to address. I saw a spark in his eyes that day that has grown into a fire for justice and compassion today.

As a pastor at Center City Church, I have witnessed beauty that is forged through conflict, forgiveness, misunderstanding, grace, and faithfully journeying together toward a beautiful expression of neighborliness that was described by Jesus as the greatest of all the commandments. We are an imperfect Christian community genuinely pursuing the perfection of Jesus on a daily basis. I will continue to choose Jesus daily and share his love with others, and I expect nothing less from this beautiful and courageous community that is embodying the message of Jesus in Charlotte, North Carolina.

As I look toward the future of where I envision this field of study will continue, I can envision two areas that I would hope that either myself or others will explore to add to the work that has been explored in this dissertation project. The first would be a practical examination of how affluent and influential leaders in the community—business and political leaders, in particular—can genuinely use their positions of power to engage in a meaningful
way in the work of creating a more equitable society for all residents of Charlotte and cities
like it across the world. There are countless men and women of God that I have met in the
past four years that genuinely want to share their influence and resources with neighbors in
Charlotte. However, the unknown or unseen landmines of racial and economic complexity
that have been set by the enemy have produced fear and timidity and hindered them from
using their influential positions to bring true equity to high-poverty communities. I believe
that someone will take on this mantle and courageously engage in making a submission that
will have an incredible impact by bring reconciliation and healing between neighbors from
vastly different economic realities that are all created in the same image of our beautiful God.

I have a personal desire to explore the topic of the spirit of mammon that is
referenced in Matthew 6:24 and how it has infiltrated our culture—in cities as a whole and
the church community. The New Living Translation does not mention this spirit specifically
as mammon. It reads, “No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the
other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and be
enslaved to money.” However, the King James Version does refer to this spirit specifically:
“No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he
will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.”

This spirit seems to be insatiable and without satisfaction. I have met countless
businessfolks that have achieved the highest levels of success as defined by the popular
economic measurables of our society. However, so many feel like they do not have enough
and they continue to work harder and harder to achieve some sort of satisfaction that always
seems out of reach. Sadly, I also recognize this same spirit in popular church culture, as well.
Church leaders insatiably chasing after astronomic levels of numeric and financial growth in
churches, never satisfied with what God has given them and chasing after a sense of peace and tranquility that will only be found at the feet of Jesus. Instead of finding security in their status as a son or daughter of the king, the unattainable pursuit of satisfaction by notoriety or fame has them trapped. The spirit of mammon has ensnared entire communities and churches with the false promises of peace and security through influence, power, and financial gain. Jesus provides the antidote to the spirit of mammon in Matthew 6:33. He says, “Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.”

The biblical spirit of neighborliness stands in stark contrast to the insatiable spirit of mammon. Loving, compassionate, and caring communities that are focused on and gathered around Jesus will not be overcome by the temptation to acquire money and possessions at the expense of their neighbors. Jesus addressed this spirit of neighborliness when he was challenged by the lawyer in Mark 12:28-34. The lawyer asked him to identify the greatest of all the commandments. He concisely and powerfully replied that we should love God and neighbors. If this was the central commandment of Jesus, I believe that the aim of the body of Christ should be to love God with full passion and embody a spirit neighborliness to communities that are in need of reconciliation.
Bibliography


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http://polisinstitute.org/City-Profile-Orlando.pdf


Appendix 1

Neighborliness Seminar Handout

A Seminar on Race, Economics, and Friendship.

Hosted by David Docusen

February 1-2, 2019 | Center City Church
www.centercity.church
“It is the role of the body of Christ to identify cultural boundaries that are in need of kingdom trespass.”

DR. BRIAN BLOUNT
Thanks for joining us at the Neighborliness seminar. Over the next two days, we will explore the topics of race, economics, and friendship together. The greatest impact that I have experienced in these areas has come from listening to others and vulnerably exploring my own thoughts in the context of community. We will do the same around these tables tonight and tomorrow. I have been praying for you and asking God to give us space to pause, listen, learn, and grow as we seek to understand the call of Jesus toward neighborliness on a deeper level and express that same love to others.

When Jesus was asked to pick the most important of all of the commandments, he stated that loving God and neighbors was the most important of the 600+ religious laws of his time. If it's that important to Jesus, we should aim for the same thing. Truly, if you love God with all of your heart, a natural outflow will be to love and care for others. (Mark 12:28-34; John 15). The past three years of my life have included the practical expression of our ministry in West Charlotte and my academic studies on the topic of generational poverty (Doctor of Ministry program at Southeastern University). I’m excited to host this seminar on Neighborliness that has come out of this season of friendship, prayer, and learning.

The Neighborliness seminar has been designed as a practical learning experience for anyone that wants to understand the call of Jesus toward loving God and neighbors. We will explore how that can be practically expressed among neighbors in our city (or any city, for that matter).

I am so grateful that you have decided to join us for a time of worship, prayer, learning, and listening to the Spirit as we aim to love God and neighbors with full commitment and passion. Let’s take some time to pause, listen, learn, and grow as we explore the greatest commandment: loving God and neighbors.
Q: Why did you decide to come to this seminar?
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Q: How would you define these terms in your own words?

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Implicit Bias

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Q: What does it mean to you to “clean up a neighborhood?”

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Q: What does “blind privilege” mean?

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Q: How can a person living in poverty help a person living in affluence?

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Q: How can a person living in affluence help a person living in poverty?

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PROPAGANDA: I HATE CATS

What's up? How y'all feeling tonight? Y'all good?
Well, check this out, man, let me tell y'all a lil' story

See, when I would leave for tour, my wife and my daughter---
(Well, this was before like, my baby daughter was born)
They would -- they would bond by going to these animal shelters
And playing with the cats and see, here's the thing:

I hate cats

Well, hate is a strong word
It's just that I'm a dog person
And cats -- demon spawn, see I don't trust 'em
They always looking like they planning a murder, right?
Like cats be putting in work. You ever watched a movie?
What does the weird old lady have?
What about the villain's pet? They evil!
See, ancient Egyptians, they knew that and they built the pyramids
So they was on to something, right?

Well, I would receive these -- these terrifying pictures in my texts
Of my daughter smiling in the throes of full bliss
Holding what has to be the biggest letdown of a cousin
I mean, cats are related to lions
You share taxonomy with tigers -- tigers!
Why are you so cupcake?
Why does my daughter wanna bring you home?
Of all things, a cat!

See, I hate cats!
Well, hate is a strong word, you know what I'm saying?

Don't get me wrong, I'm not like a-- like a bigot or nothing
I mean, it's not like I like... I mean, I don't see species, you know what I mean?
My babysitter, when I was a kid, see, she had a cat
And I'm sure there are nice God-fearing people that have cats in they house
It's just not in my home, see, they stink
They be rubbing they terrible pheromones all over my furniture
But alas, kicking and screaming,
I forced a smile on my face when my daughter brings this terrible thing home

I'm gonna be honest: I thought I raised her better than that!
See, we are a dog family, we stick to our own kind
Why couldn't you love a dog? This is just the voice of a concerned father, see
See, people may think a certain way about her when she walk down the street
And why you walking a cat anyway?
They gon' think I ain't raised my child well
And it's not like this cat has done anything to me personally
I just know they kind, I mean, I seen 'em on the news
They be tearing up the homes they owners provide for 'em
Why would you tear up your own home?
How come cats can't be grateful?
Why are all cats lazy?

They be complaining about they oppression, you see it in they eyes
Don't the people that take care of you take care of you well?
Haven't we had cats in the White House? Ain't that enough?

But then this cat got in my house and, to be honest, it was kind of different
I actually enjoyed my time with him, but, but, but
But the -- but the point is I love my daughter
And I've already made my decision and it's not the cat's fault
I just hate they kind... well... hate is a strong word

It's just my heritage, I come from a dog family
It's heritage, not hate, right?
Hate's a strong word

---

We still talking about cats, right?
SESSION ONE: NEIGHBORLINESS -  
THE OTHER HALF OF THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT

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Gentrification is something we can, we can do something about it
We can use policy, but it really comes down to what we value,
Who we value, and how we want to act upon it (Ándale, puedes / Mírale!)

And when you see them billboards yelling “cash for homes” (Gentrify)
They finna double your rent in the construction zone (Gentrify)
They slick but be slicker, help me welcome the hipsters
Microbrew, coffee shop, Trader Joes, Whole Foods! / Gentrify, baby, gentrify

Man, them gastropubs and clean streets ain't good enough, they want yours
Despite y'all crime rate, y'all got prime real estate
Continuing Columbus and they coming for your porch and
Planting they flag like “that's my land, I licked it”

Brother, it's just business, your economy could use a boost
You know the truth, your unemployment through the roof
And the mayor say the crime rate is dropped in L.A
And robbery and homicide are down in a real way
And gang life and poverty are gone some say
Why you ain't celebrating? Why you feel a kind of way?
Boy you finna not fit in in the hood you was made in
The same corner rolling twenty stole your Jordans

Hopeless little boys used to hold the town for hostage
It's complex, both guilty and victims, I guess
Better learn to invest 'fore investors come and get yours
We locals, we loyal, we hopeful, we home

And when you see them billboards yelling “cash for homes” (Gentrify)
They finna double your rent in the construction zone (Gentrify)
They slick but be slicker, help me welcome the hipsters
Microbrew, coffee shop, Trader Joes, Whole Foods

Gentrify, baby, gentrify
Look, look they tryna parent ya
Exterminate the hood, boy their plan's apparent, huh?
What happened when we handed hip-hop to the vultures?
An esoteric estuary mixture of culture
Not a convoluted Angelou of thoughts, it's torture
A quintessential hipster, bike lane's a fixture
I ain't sayin' you ain't welcome, please be our guest
Just know the city limits beat in our chest
Hoping you hope for the best, I believe in us
Locally I invest, I ain't leavin' us
Overly I protect, these are our seeds with us
Told you we know what's best if you agree with us
Welcome home

And when you see them billboards yelling “cash for homes” (Gentrify)
They finna double your rent in the construction zone (Gentrify)
They slick but be slicker, help me welcome the hipsters
Microbrew, coffee shop, Trader Joes, Whole Foods
Gentrify, baby, gentrify

Yeah, that commute increased an hour
But got the down payment thanks to them housing vouchers
Slave to the mortgage rate, better not send it late
Better not miss a payment (ayy!) better not cross with Jake
Stranger in the zip code, what you doing here, boy?
You lowering our house value, it's becoming clear, boy
You ain't welcome here, boy, you ain't helping here, boy
You ain't got the wealth to help yourself, so why you here, boy?

But kids are in a good school and they tell 'em here, boy
College is for everyone if you follow the rules
You, you know they stare at you, you know they scared of you
I know this is all new, but they better get used to you

You home!
SESSION TWO: UNDERSTANDING SYSTEMIC INJUSTICE

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SESSION FOUR: THE RESPONSE OF THE BODY OF CHRIST

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Impacting a community requires the effort of various individuals and organizations. Neighborliness calls us to celebrate each other, work together, and find our success in shared victories. The following organizations are doing great work in the Charlotte community (this is not an exhaustive list, however, any of these organizations would be a great place to start).

**A Better World**: Uplifting Underserved Youth in West Charlotte  
www.abetterworldcharlotte.org

**C4 Counseling**: Inner-City Biblical Counseling & Mental Health Awareness  
www.c4counseling.com

**City Dive**: Transforming Lives Within Challenged Communities  
www.citydive.org

**Common Wealth Charlotte**: Uncommon Solutions for Low-Income Families  
www.commonwealthcharlotte.org

**Congregations for Kids**: The Church United for Foster Care & Adoption  
www.cfknc.org/

**Freedom Communities**: Education, Economic Impact, Housing & Wellness.  
www.freedomcommunities.com

**The Harvest Center**: Serving Individuals Impacted by Homelessness  
www.theharvestcenter.org

**Right Moves for Youth**: Turning Obstacles Into Opportunities  
www.rightmovesforyouth.org

**The ROC**: An Accredited Youth Apprenticeship Program  
www.rocharris.org

**QC Family Tree**: Kinfolk Rooted in Discipleship in West Charlotte  
www.qcfamilytree.org

**UrbanPromise Charlotte**: Reach a Child, Raise a Leader, Impact a Community. -  
www.urbanpromisecharlotte.org

**West Charlotte Economic Initiative**: Resourcing Small Business Owners in West CLT—  
www.smallbizsilverlining.com/wcedi

Other organizations not listed (ask seminar participants):
Q: What will some of your initial take-aways from this seminar include?

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Q: How would you define these terms in your own words?

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Inclusion
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Racism
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Generational Poverty

Gentrification

Friendship

Implicit Bias

Q: What does it mean to you to “clean up a neighborhood?”

Q: What does “blind privilege” mean?

Q: How can a person living in poverty help a person living in affluence?

Q: How can a person living in affluence help a person living in poverty?


Some of you will rebuild
the deserted ruins of your cities.
Then you will be known
as a rebuilders of walls
and a restorer of homes.

- Isaiah 58:12 -
Appendix 2

Release Of Liability

Center City Church
2225 Freedom Drive
Charlotte, NC 28208
(704) 208-4282

By signing this document, I give permission to David Docusen, Center City Church and any affiliated organizations to print or duplicate my comments and any images created of me and my personal property during the Neighborliness Seminar held at Center City Church on February 1, 2019 and February 2, 2019.

This data may be used with or without my name included for the purposes of research, doctoral study and communication in print, video, or electronic/social media, without charge. I release David Docusen, Center City Church and any affiliated organizations from any liability in exercising any of these rights I give to these individuals and organizations.

I have read and understand this release.

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Appendix 3

Charlotte Divided Maps

206. The originals of all maps in this section may be found at https://forcharlotte.org/resources/mapping.
Charlotte Divided: Education

Elementary School Performance 2014-15 (NC SBE)

- Green: A or B
- Yellow: C
- Red: D or F

FORCHARLOTTE

THE MISSION: UNITED FOR THE CITY
Charlotte Divided: Family Structure

% Single Parent Families (Census 2010)

- >56% to 91%
- >38% to 56%
- >21% to 38%
- >7% to 21%