

FOLLOWING GOD'S CALL:
SEEING THE NEGLECTED AND OPPRESSED
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Abstract:

While the Church is called to serve and care for creation according to the mission of God as described in Scriptures, an understanding and identity with the neglected and oppressed is first important. Without taking time to recognize the loss of life and value, renewal and reconciliation has no true meaning and cannot take its proper roots. Therefore, the Church's first steps towards following God's call and concern is to step out of the numbness of indifference and mourn with the neglected and oppressed by investing themselves and laying foundations for hope, renewal, and justice. A case study of the Northeast neighborhood of Kansas City, Missouri, serves as a local example of neglected space with the potential and need for justice and renewal.

Introduction

In Israel's history of oppression, "The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. God heard their groaning and remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them."¹ In the Year of the Lord's favor, God called out "to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners... and restore the places long devastated."² To leave out the tears of oppression undercuts the power of God's concern and rescue of those enslaved and oppressed. While we prefer to experience happiness and freedom, how can we rejoice unless we first acknowledge the oppression? How can we implement and experience social justice if we do not know what maintains the oppression? While we should embrace the promise and responsibility of participating in the redemption and reconciliation between God and creation and within creation itself, we cannot begin with the finished product. As the Church, we must first identify ourselves with the oppressed in order to understand and better implement justice in accordance with the mission of God.

Thus, the structure of this paper begins with seriously considering and recognizing the oppressed. While a variety of definitions and examples of oppression exist, Biblical examples and explanations will highlight socio-economic issues that caused concern in Biblical times. Through the weight of oppression and an understanding of the *Missio Dei*, we can understand and more appreciate the importance of liberation. Now, while there is a specific law of the Jubilee Year, I use the labels of liberation, freedom, justice, and jubilee interchangeably as they signify the opposite of oppression and injustice. Likewise, oppression and suffering will be used interchangeably as suffering is the result of oppression, and oppression cannot produce any other response than suffering. Finally, in order to help bring application into current times, I will narrow the focus of oppression and potential social actions through a case study of the Northeast neighborhood of Kansas City, Missouri. For this purpose, the Northeast neighborhood of Kansas City, Missouri, will be defined as the homes and businesses within the north-south borders of the Missouri River and Truman Road and within the east-west borders of Paseo and I-435.

¹ Exodus 2:23-25, Today's New International Version.

² Isaiah 61:1,4, New International Version.

Oppression

Why bother looking back?

During the reign of Communism in Russia, the daughter of Vera, an average Russian woman, loved bananas. However, bananas remained in short supply. Vera recounted, “suddenly bananas would appear without notice in the store. So I stood in line for hours to buy as many bananas as I could carry. And for a week or so, my Natasha would enjoy bananas.” With the fall of communism, people rejoiced for a heavy oppression no longer weighed on the people. Bananas were plentiful in every store and on every corner, but prices skyrocketed. So when Vera compared life before and after the fall of communism, she remarked, “the result for our family is the same; my Natasha rarely has bananas.”³

What if we ignored the oppressed? Or perhaps we acknowledge oppression, but what if we do not recognize suffering in our daily lives and worlds? What if we see the glass “half-full” and simply focused on the good times, the future promise? What causes so much harm in pushing forward? First, the problem lies with those who remove themselves from suffering and oppression also remove themselves from “real historical humanity in which we all live and which, theologically, is God’s own creation.”⁴ The disregard of suffering prevents long-lasting passion and concern for the oppressed and social justice. Similar to the example of when Jesus wept, the surprise within biblical faith is “only anguish leads to life, only grieving leads to joy, and only embraced endings permit new beginnings.”⁵ The process of grief and mourning enables people to move on towards life. Mourners have embraced what was, and so they are then able to appreciate what is to come.

Second, “theology itself never comes first... what comes first is the reality of revelation and faith.”⁶ In the story of Vera and Natasha, we can recognize the fact that changes in policies and strategies do not always result in a comprehensive freedom. Certain plans or standards do not guarantee equality of status or opportunity. Likewise, a strong belief in what “ought to be” does not guarantee lasting liberation. Again, with a “little understanding of oppression there’s little understanding of justice.”⁷ So, there must be an experience or at least recognition of suffering and oppression in order to develop a response.

Third, when we do not take the time to recognize our roles within the problem, we easily become entangled in excuses and practical situations. We become numb to the issue because we place what ‘ought to be’ out of reach and settle for ‘what is.’ We begin to treat symptoms instead of curing the disease, and so long as we do not identify and draw attention to the suffering but rather label the situation as ‘how things are,’ “even the oppressor will be able to speak out

³ Jay Sunberg, “A Review of the Bulgarian Food Distribution Program” (DMin paper, NTS, 2007), 6.

⁴ Jon Sobrino, “Theology in a Suffering World,” in *Pluralism and Oppression*, ed. Paul F. Knitter (Lanham: Annual Publications, 1988), 157.

⁵ Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001) 56.

⁶ Sobrino, “Theology in a Suffering World,” 157.

⁷ Lowell Noble, *From Oppression to Jubilee Justice* (Jackson: Llumina Press, 2007), 82.

against oppression.”⁸ Isaiah 61, the passage on the Year of the Lord’s Favor, challenges Christians today to take notice of and care for those covered in ashes, mourning, and lost in despair not simply because good Christians should love others but because God said, “I, the LORD, love justice; I hate robbery and wrongdoing. In my faithfulness I will reward my people and make an everlasting covenant with them.”⁹ Yet, are we engaged in God’s covenant if we become idle in the love of justice?

Types of oppression

Oppression is a broad term. Examples include: economic poverty, prostitution, racism, slavery, and genocide. In general, oppression “crushes, humiliates, animalizes, impoverishes, enslaves, and kills people created in the image of God.”¹⁰ Oppression then not only occurs in an instant, but it becomes a vicious cycle that can last through generations. Oppression also has an oppressor, but when oppression becomes a system and then systems, we all become responsible to respond, to be the voice for the voiceless. We may not be guilty of commission, but we can easily become guilty of omission.

As oppression evolves, it engrains itself into how people perceive and think about fellow human beings and the structure of society. Without examining Western logic, the Church can become stripped and numbed to the creative responses to God’s call. For instance, without analyzing Rousseau’s concept of freedom, we can state that Rousseau believed humanity was born free. However, his concept of freedom was not based on a status or class, but rather he meant “free primarily *from* one another” opposed to the Genesis account of freedom with God and “*with* other humans.”¹¹ A simple change of preposition- “from” to “with,” and two forces clash. They are the forces of state and Christianity. And without recognizing this conflict, “Christians have accepted the integrating role of the state on the assumption that the state... is a neutral apparatus for the working out of conflict among disparate interests.”¹² Christians then begin to accept whatever the state suggests or implements because it must be ‘what is best.’ Yet with acknowledgement and mourning of injustice in all of its forms, the Church can experience a renewal with the sense of urgency towards rebuilding.

⁸ Elsa Tamez, *Bible of the Oppressed* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1982) 31.

⁹ Isaiah 61:8, New International Version

¹⁰ Noble, *From Oppression to Jubilee Justice*, 59.

¹¹ William Cavanaugh, “The City: Beyond Secular Parodies.” in *Radical Orthodoxy*, ed. J. Milbank, C. Pickstock, and G. Ward (London: Routledge, 1999) 186. Emphasis added.

¹² *Ibid.*, 198.

Biblical Perspectives

On Oppression

The Hebrew language provides detailed insight into the different forms of oppression within the Biblical context and culture. In *Bible of the Oppressed*, Elsa Tamez outlined nine Hebrew words that describe oppressors, the oppressed, and levels of oppression.¹³ First, *'anah* describes the degradation of the person as it affects the “inmost being.” It also includes sexual violation against women. Second, *'ashaq* includes ruthless violence and “consequently the impoverishment of the oppressed.” Third, *lahats* focuses on the result of oppression leading to the outcry of the oppressed. For example, in Judges when under the oppression of the various foreign rulers, the Israelites cried out to God in pain and suffering.¹⁴ Fourth, *nagash* also describes a violent exploitation but focuses more on the “pressure from the oppressor.” For instance, *nagash* described the Egyptians reign over the Israelite slaves.¹⁵ Fifth, *yanah* is the word for oppression in the form of enslavement and fraud. Sixth, *ratsats* describes the “crushing and despoiling” of the poor. Seventh, *daka* is the “grinding effect of oppression that penetrates the whole person.” It dehumanizes the poor as oppression consumed the whole person. Eighth, *dak* not only includes the repression of the poor but also the “persistent hope” for the new order. Ninth, *tok* describes the tyranny of the oppressor which is exercised in deceit. Although this word only appears four times in the Old Testament, this particular word explains why oppression is so closely linked with poverty because oppression often occurs in deceit profiting one party at the expense of the other.¹⁶

More Old Testament examples illustrate oppressors and oppression. For instance, on the side of the oppressed, the Israelites experienced excruciating oppression under the Egyptians. The Egyptians forced the Israelites into slavery leaving them with nothing but meager survival. From the perspective of the oppressor, Solomon’s wealth, once regarded as a clear blessing from God, honestly reflects the deterioration of jubilee and justice throughout Israel. Through heavy oppression, Solomon gained his wealth and kept his riches within the privileged.¹⁷ Illustrated in the account in 1 Kings 4, it is recorded:

Solomon’s daily provision were thirty cors of the finest flour and sixty cors of meal, ten head of stall-fed cattle, twenty of pasture-fed cattle and a hundred sheep and goats, as well as deer, gazelles, roebucks and choice of fowl... Solomon had four thousand stalls for chariot horses, and twelve thousand horses. The district governors, each in his month, supplied provisions for King Solomon... They saw to it that nothing was lacking.”¹⁸

¹³ Tamez, *Bible of the Oppressed*, 8-9.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 23, 26.

¹⁷ Bruce Birch, *Let Justice Roll Down* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1991) 221-222.

¹⁸ 1 Kings 4:22-23, 27, New International Version.

Yes, this proves Solomon's abundance, but no person requires so much for a daily intake, and certainly, Israelites strained their own survival in order to provide such sustenance for their king. Thus, general characteristics of oppressive characters include wealth. In the quest for wealth and success, others were forced to live with less. And with riches, oppressors gained power and dominion over others. With these two characteristics alone, we can deduce "the structures of violence are being condoned by the authorities or by influential persons such as rulers, prophets, priests, and the wealthy."¹⁹

The New Testament continues with responses to suffering. For example, in Luke 3, John the Baptist's responses to repentance were all economic in nature.²⁰ Each group of individuals including those from the crowd, the tax collectors, and soldiers were taught to share with those who have none and to refrain from taking more than deserved. With the fear of judgment, John the Baptist taught to live rightly through social and economic means. Furthermore, as recorded in Luke, in Jesus' announcement signaling the beginning of his ministry, he included the oppressed and acknowledged their suffering which then led to the hope of being set free. Finally, in the book of James, the rich are warned against the oppressive, lavish lifestyle, and their death is announced as a result of the death they caused amongst the innocent.

On Justice

Once oppression is recognized and called out, it can be easy to become overwhelmed and depressed. In order to combat despair, "the language of amazement" brings hope as powerfully as grief destroyed numbness.²¹

"The fact that God is righteous and exercises his justice especially on behalf of the weak and oppressed is closely linked with his providential care for the whole of creation."²² To begin, Isaiah 61 foreshadows Christ's announcement of ministry in Luke 4 and brings hope for the future. Throughout this chapter, there is a call to redeem and reconcile. As written in verse 3, Isaiah recognized the suffering and then ignited hope with what is to come- "to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair." Isaiah continued with liberation not only for individuals but also a renewal of entire cities. Communities would come together to rebuild and restore what was once intended. Just as despair can trickle down through generations so also will redemption and joy be felt by generations of descendants. And for generations, the neglected and oppressed will be redeemed and know God because of the joy experienced in right relationship with one another and with God.

Other marks of justice throughout the Old Testament include Leviticus, Jeremiah, and Nehemiah. In Leviticus 25, the Jubilee passage builds the arch of the law to cover all public transaction- not only private contracts between Israelites.²³ It stretched out the grace of liberation to non-Israelite slaves, and the Jubilee Year also included how to treat land in respect to

¹⁹ Tamez, *Bible of the Oppressed*, 22.

²⁰ Lowell Noble, *Sociotheology* (USA: BookCrafters, 1987), 51.

²¹ Brueggeman, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 68.

²² Christopher J. H. Wright, *An Eye for an Eye* (Downer's Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1983), 137.

²³ *Ibid.*, 27.

agriculture and personal ownership. Jubilee does not favor one economic system over another; rather it is its own economic structure as “the means of producing wealth was to be equalized- up to the point of every family having the resources to earn a decent living.”²⁴ God’s plan for liberation began with the chosen people and then spread to all creation. Unfortunately, no records exist indicating that the Covenant Code or Jubilee Year was practiced regularly. In Jeremiah 34, Zedekiah implemented the freeing of slaves in order to relieve the transgressions committed and receive God’s protection in the threat of attack although the implementation was short-lived to the point of security.²⁵ Therefore, Jeremiah’s prophetic denunciation of Israel’s sin would include the oppressors experiencing “pestilence, famine, exile, and destruction.”²⁶ Lastly, Nehemiah was a community developer who was not only responsible for rallying Jerusalem to rebuild the wall, but he also implemented specific religious and social practices. Again, the Israelites were short of meeting Nehemiah’s expectations, but Nehemiah remains an example of leadership who tried to follow God’s plan for justice and community.²⁷

Missio Dei

Scripture illustrates God’s plan of redemption, but the mission of God is more than an objective. While God’s mission incorporates the redemption of humanity, the mission of God is also “rooted in creation... not simply a corrective to sin” but as a part of what God created humans to do.²⁸ Scholars labeled this larger picture *Missio Dei*, translated mission of God, to include “everything that God himself does in establishing his kingdom on earth.”²⁹ It also incorporates God’s continued work “through the Holy’s Spirit’s empowering of God’s people.”³⁰ While the Church’s mission depends on a theology, no theology stands in accordance with God unless it falls within *Missio Dei*.

Therefore, when we build a foundation within Scriptures and when we develop a passion in alignment with God’s, we accept our identity within the *Missio Dei*. We become responsible to act as God would. We are in charge of caring for God’s creation. That means we take seriously the words of the prophets such as Isaiah and the passages of Jubilee in Leviticus. The church is not to wait apathetically for God to “fix” everything. As it is written in the Lord’s Prayer, “thy kingdom come thy will be done *on earth* as it is in heaven.” This is our charge. This is what the church is called to do- to participate in the mission of God which includes recognizing the oppression we have determined to be ‘reality’ and instead implementing justice. We are to be like Isaiah proclaiming good news to the poor.

²⁴ Ronald Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 68.

²⁵ Ringe, *Jesus, Liberation, and the Biblical Jubilee*, 22.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 23.

²⁷ Noble, *From Oppression to Jubilee Justice*, 84.

²⁸ David Livermore, *Serving with Eyes Wide Open: Doing Short Term Missions with Cultural Intelligence*, (United States: Baker Books, 2006), 164.

²⁹ A. Scott Moreau, Gary Corwin, and Gary McGee, *Introducing World Missions: A Biblical, Historical, and Practical Survey*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 73.

³⁰ James Engel and William Dyrness, *Changing the Mind of Missions: Where have we gone wrong?*. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 36.

Reflection

These covenant laws, Sabbath remembrances, and Jubilee structures were not to be kept simply to follow protocol. God called the Israelites to follow the Sabbath Law and Year of Jubilee as a way of “knowing God,” for “law was indeed life.”³¹ No longer were people to experience the degradation of ‘*anah*, the violence of ‘*ashaw* and *nagash*, the trickery of *yanah* or *tok*. Yet without recognizing the oppression of greed and manipulation as illustrated in the reign of Solomon and Zedekiah, we cannot appreciate how God had originally intended Israel to be. We would not be able to rejoice in the proclamation of the good news. We could not experience the glory of a closing social and economic gap. We could not experience the wonderment of freedom after working six years to repay a debt. It would be similar to telling the story of the Israelites leaving Egypt without mentioning the generations of slavery endured under the Egyptians or Moses’ proclamation and demonstrations against the “royal consciousness” through the Ten Plagues.³² Acknowledging oppression is not about experiencing guilt, but it is about humanizing and giving identities to those who were crushed and humiliated. Recognizing oppression also leads to destroying the oppressive systems by “bringing hurt to public expression” permitting a “new reality, theological and social, to emerge.”³³

Case Study- Oppression in Northeast KCMO

The Neighborhood

In a market study of Independence Avenue, a main road which stretches across the Northeast neighborhood, the neighborhood received assessment on its status compared to the general shopping experience across the United States.³⁴ Surprisingly, in 2008, the traffic count for this neighborhood was 19,600 vehicles per day- a lot of traffic for businesses. The study also discovered good public transportation, many independently owned businesses, and some business draws from outside of the neighborhood. However, the study also discovered the citywide negative image and perception of Northeast Kansas City as unsafe preventing much growth and draw. Independence Avenue is also known for visible loitering by prostitutes and drug dealers which negatively adds to the many unattractive store fronts. And while the culturally diversity of businesses is positive, “there does not appear to be strong organization/unity among business” which continues to keep the neighborhood segmented and broken.³⁵

In 2010, the number of people groups continues to increase yet without connectivity to others. In an interview with a NE Kansas City resident and co-pastor of Grace Church of the Nazarene, Pastor Tammy Condon explained the growing tensions amongst the different ethnicities in the neighborhood. She believed the core of this tension was a result of the

³¹ Wright, *An Eye for an Eye*, 159.

³² Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 21.

³³ *Ibid.*, 12.

³⁴ LISC of Greater Kansas City. *Independence Avenue Business District: Market Study* (Kansas City: Fine Point Associates, 2008), ii.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

neighborhood being in “constant transition.”³⁶ With a current estimate of 30% Hispanics and 20% Arabs, immigrants from a variety of countries make their first place of residency in the Northeast neighborhood of Kansas City, Missouri. However, as they become established, they move to better neighborhoods leaving remnants of businesses and run-down housing. A drive down Independence Avenue highlights these remnants. A Vietnamese restaurant stands next to an African store and then a Spanish grocery store. On the next block, new Hispanic stores emerge near a different African store, a tax service, an African food store, and then a Haitian restaurant. In between blocks, stands Cambodian restaurants, Mayflower Cleaners, and a pharmacy, which has been present for years but still stands out from the rest.

The Northeast neighborhood offers a large variety of ethnic restaurants and a few mainline chain fast food locations. The neighborhood also has four grocery store chains and several independently owned food/convenient stores, yet the Northeast neighborhood lacks basic necessities. Compared to the “typical US shopping center,” only 2.5% of the Northeast neighborhood mix of businesses offer general merchandise versus the typical 22% offered. Furthermore, from the businesses in the Northeast neighborhood, only 2.5% offer home furnishings, 0% offer shoes, and 1% offers hobbies/special interests versus the typical 6% for home furnishings, 3% for shoes, and 5% for hobbies/special interests.³⁷

Following the pattern of moving out, churches are leaving the Northeast neighborhood of Kansas City. In 2009 alone, eight churches closed down within the Northeast neighborhood either as a result of better accommodations in a different neighborhood or financially no longer able to keep doors open. Yet, in 2010, a new mosque has been renovated, and a Buddhist temple has broken ground.

Beyond Independence Avenue, the entire Northeast neighborhood reflects a conglomeration of mixed people groups. Nearest the river, the northern border of this neighborhood, mansions serve as housing and museums to old elites. Three blocks south house mini-mansions. Some mini-mansions have been renovated by young urban people and look as nearly astounding as the large mansions, but others remain worn and vacant. Within and between these mini-mansions live a lower middle class of blue collar families. The other business street, St. John, also lies between the mansions and Independence Avenue. This street continues the trend of multicultural stores, but there is a stronger reflection of the Arab community. In fact, as a reflection of the neighborhood one store, located on St. John near Jackson, named Banadir Grocery/Abarrotes has signs catering to Arabs and Hispanics. Three more blocks south is Independence Avenue, and just across the street of Grace Church between Independence and Truman, lower income residents cram into smaller streets with uniform government housing lining the eastern border of Paseo.

Oppression

Without recognizing oppressions in the neighborhood, blame easily shifts between a variety of people and places. We can blame the local pimps as we drive down the street confirming the sexual oppression on woman and men through the heavy presence of prostitution.

³⁶ Tammy Condon, interview by Cassandra Lara, 3 December 2010, Kansas City, MO.

³⁷ LISC of Greater Kansas City. *Independence Avenue Business District: Market Study*, 1-27.

One summer Friday night, my heart was broken as I witnessed this oppression. Directly across the street from Grace Church of the Nazarene, which is located on Independence Avenue, a woman stood waiting for someone to purchase her body for a short amount of time. Just as a friend and I turned to go and talk with her in hopes of deterring some business, a white car pulled up to her corner. She chatted with the driver for a few seconds and then got into the car. I wanted to cry knowing what was to take place between them- momentary pleasure in exchange for money but at the greater cost of dignity and value. We can also blame owners and promoters of strip clubs. Another sexual oppression found a little farther down Independence Avenue. Just before Van Brunt stands a strip club known for activities beyond the legal boundary. While it serves as an oppressor, its affected group expands beyond the people who enter the building, for less than a block away stands the neighborhood middle school and a block from that stands Northeast High School. Finally, we can blame ‘white flight’ for the abandoned buildings that illustrate the economic oppression while run-down homes represent the social oppression on immigrants and people of lower social classes who now live in the area. Without taking away from these real experiences, awareness needs to shed light on these situations in order for justice to occur. While we need to know the oppressors to uproot the oppression, we also need to recognize our involvement in maintaining the oppression.

However, as just demonstrated, lower income, minority populated residents struggle to survive within entangled, complex webs of broken systems. It can be overwhelming to not know where to start for the systems become so intertwined. Yet with specific focus on the Northeast neighborhood of Kansas City, Missouri, the undertone of oppression which maintains the others is simply the disunity of the neighborhood.

While ethnicity and culture stand as strong barriers, it is the constant flux and change of minorities and businesses that prevent the neighborhood from experiencing positive change. It is the lack of common voice and unity that sustains the oppression of the other systems. In comparison to other neighborhoods, communities east of Troost may experience more physical violence, yet a strong unity amongst African Americans allows a vocal opposition against the violence within their neighborhoods. Likewise, in the southern parts of Kansas City, the people have poor economic status in common and can rally to raise the standard of living for their community. Yet, the Northeast neighborhood is, again, in “constant transition.”³⁸ The inconsistency and unreliability undercuts any movements against injustice. While the government and outsiders can offer relief points, their aid exist as a false sense of unity and peace, for the “state assumes individuals have no common ground and the best is to limit rights infringement.”³⁹ It is not about settling issues or relieving symptoms; we need to recognize the flow of people coming in and going out maintains isolation and need for self-sufficiency- two numb-causing obstacles towards justice. An anchor of consistency is needed to provide a voice amongst the noise of transition.

The Church’s Needed Response

As individuals within the church and society, we cannot fight all the battles, but “as a community, we can transcend our individual limitations and become a concrete realization of the

³⁸ Condon, interview by Lara.

³⁹ Cavanaugh, “The City: Beyond Secular Parodies,” 193.

self-emptying way of Christ.”⁴⁰ As a community, development can occur and leaders can grow. As a community, collaboration and participation invest people in their neighborhoods countering the usual tactic of people entering to impose their ideas.⁴¹ While God is not calling everyone to participate in the intended jubilee of this neighborhood, there may be some who are called to tithe themselves as Nehemiah had asked people to again live in Jerusalem to help rebuild community. There may be some called to bring stability and a voice to this shattered neighborhood. This relocation is the first step of John Perkins’ discovered solution towards community development.⁴² Perkins believed in relocation’s necessity because when “the community’s needs are their needs, they are offering a service that really ministers to the community.”⁴³ Therefore, in order to truly ignite reconciliation and tear down the underlying oppression of disunity which upholds the other oppressions within the neighborhood, we must become invested. The Church, who is called by God, must invest not only their time but their identities and lives by becoming part of the community. Then, relationships can begin and initiate a healthier, just cycle for God’s creation.

The second step is reconciliation. When we recognize the Church’s absence and our ignorance of the neighborhood’s instability, we can grieve the loss of community and then find hope in redemption and reconciliation. The process of wailing and mourning then serves as the “first sign of openness to the new and hopeful expectation that oppression is not the last word.”⁴⁴ Of course, tensions currently remain between people groups not only as they move in and out but as people live near one another; therefore, positive relationships are needed in order to overcome the many boundaries inhibiting justice. Long-term dwellers are uncommon especially within immigrant groups; therefore, it is crucial not to force justice. We cannot bring justice to people. We can work towards reconciliation, and “out of that reconciliation, justice would flow.”⁴⁵ And what is needed more amongst a fragmented identity than reconciliation?

The third step is redistribution. As reconciliation occurs and redistribution begins, collaboration amongst residents is crucial in order to prevent dependency and removing the very identity and dignity beginning to form through reconciliation. People know how to work the welfare system in their favor; they know how to make just enough but not too much in order to receive the most aid. Therefore, the best collaborators are great listeners and, thus also, respect people from beginning to ‘end.’⁴⁶ From listening to residents, the Market Research study discovered the most “sought after improvement” was a crime watch program.⁴⁷ Almost half of the residents also desired “improved sidewalks/streetscape and stricter health code enforcement.”⁴⁸ In developing a community that can have enough camaraderie and identity to sustain a crime watch group, a visible beginning would emerge.

⁴⁰ Henri Nouwen and others. *Compassion* (New York: Doubleday, 1982), 56.

⁴¹ Thomas Friedman, Lecture by author, 15 April 2005, New Haven, CT.

⁴² Noble, *Sociotheology*, 106.

⁴³ John Perkins, *With Justice for All* (Ventura: Regal, 1982), 132.

⁴⁴ Birch, *Let Justice Roll Down*, 116.

⁴⁵ Perkins, *With Justice for All*, 111.

⁴⁶ Friedman, Lecture.

⁴⁷ LISC of Greater Kansas City. *Independence Avenue Business District: Market Study*, 2-10.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

With the Church's embrace of Perkins' 3 Rs- relocation, reconciliation, and redemption, the Church will be actively identified and living the *Missio Dei*. Christians will not be among those who flee from change, who cover their eyes to the unwanted, or who accept 'the less' as 'the norm.' Christ's fulfillment will flow through us as we invest ourselves in the neglected and oppressed serving as lights of God replacing shame and disgrace with double portions and joy as described by Isaiah.

Conclusion

We need to recognize and identify those who are neglected and oppressed. We need to mourn with them not to evoke sympathy but to acknowledge the existence and identities of humans created in the image of God. We also should acknowledge the power of oppression because then we are able to better appreciate and experience the justice and freedom of God. The assumption that change in policies and structure automatically demolish oppression and encourage justice is false. While changes in policies and structure are a part of the jubilee lifestyle, the disruption of oppression occurs when awareness of its evil is brought to light. When we recognize our loss, we can experience God's hope and grace. We can experience jubilee and justice in our lives and in the lives of others.

The Bible illustrates the power of oppression and justice. Sadly, the power and greed of a few individuals led the way for a strong numbness to how God intended creation to live, of how God intended the Church to respond. Kings and rulers focused on growing larger; people became distracted by pleasures and profits. Yet, as Christ proclaimed in Luke 4, the Year of the Lord's Favor is fulfilled. So in our neighborhoods and in the Northeast neighborhood of Kansas City, Missouri, we must practice the power of bringing feeling to the numbness and hope to the despair by identifying with those who are oppressed in order to appreciate and implement justice.

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