

Neglected neighborhoods can experience extraordinary revival

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SAN ANTONIO—When ordinary Christians in ordinary places open themselves to the dynamic power of the Holy Spirit, they will see extraordinary transformation in their neighborhoods, Jonathan Brooks said.

Brooks, pastor of Canaan Community Church in Chicago's West Englewood neighborhood, challenged participants at the No Need Among You Conference to embrace a holistic gospel that can "spark revival" in neglected neighborhoods.

Revival will occur when God's people fall in love with the places where God has planted them and make several significant shifts, Brooks told the statewide event, sponsored by the [Texas Christian Community Development Network](#).

'From being commuters to being community'

Brooks, author of [Church Forsaken: Practicing Presence in Neglected Neighborhoods](#), pointed to the experience of the early church in Acts 2:43-47, after the coming of the Holy Spirit.

First, he challenged Christians today to move "from fragmented isolation to neighborhood presence."

When the Scripture speaks of "signs and wonders" in verse 43, they are explained in the passage that follows, he asserted. The first was that "all who believed were together and had all things in common," Brooks said.

The early Christians were “in the place together and loving Jesus,” he said. Neighborhoods change when “we all live here, and we all love Jesus,” he insisted.

“We need to move from being commuters to being community,” he said.

‘Everybody has needs’

Next, Brooks urged churches in neglected neighborhoods to shift “from religious consumerism to collaborative participation.”

The early Christians willingly sold their possessions and gave the proceeds to “as any had need,” he noted.

“Everybody has needs. They just look different,” Brooks insisted. That means every Christian humbly should recognize he or she is both a service provider and a service recipient, and needs are met only when everyone participates.

“When we all bring our resources together, we are able to give what we have and receive what we need,” he said.

The cares of the community become our cares



Jonathan Brooks urged churches to “be present” in neighborhoods most people fear and flee. (Photo / Ken Camp)

Christians also must move “from unrecognized privilege to equitable inclusion,” Brooks said. “Day by day,” early Christians created community as they spent time together in worship and sharing meals in the homes of each other, he noted.

“It was everyday activity ... from the temple to the table, and from the table to the temple,” he said. “The more I sit at your table, the more I see who God created you to be. ... It’s breaking bread in each other’s homes—ordinary people in ordinary places doing ordinary practices.”

Next, Christians should shift from seeing through “a scarcity lens to an abundant ecology,” Brooks asserted. As the early Christians “ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God,” their neighbors noticed, and those first century Christians “gained the goodwill of all the people,” he noted.

“It’s not about what you say. It’s about what people see,” Brooks insisted.

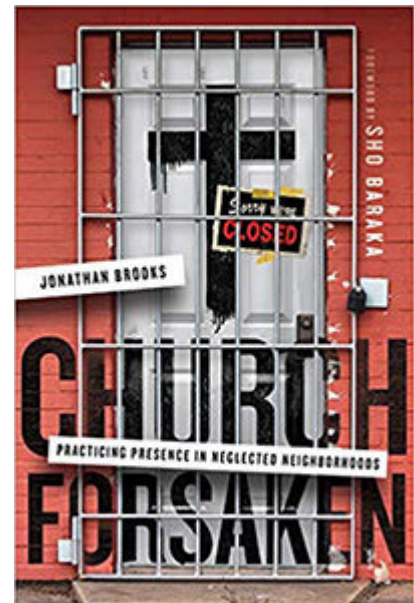
Neighbors may not initially understand Christians' theology or accept their claims about Christ, but they will say, "I like what I see."

Finally, Christians in neglected neighborhoods need to move "from toxic charity to community caring," he asserted.

"The cares of the community become our cares," he said.

How to practice presence

In a related workshop, Brooks urged churches to "be present" in neighborhoods most people fear and flee, basing his approach on Jeremiah 29:4-11. Rather than forsaking neglected neighborhoods, he recommended seven practices:



- **"Reside where you don't want to be."**

The Jewish exiles in Babylon had to face the fact God placed them in a far-off country for a reason. Rather than relocate where life is more comfortable, Brooks advised churches to recognize that "where God has placed you is where you are supposed to be."

Brooks grew up in Englewood, and like most of his peers, he dreamed of leaving and never returning. However, God called him to return with his family to minister in a community he has grown to love.

“God has called us to be people who love the places in which we dwell,” he said.

- **“Return to previously forsaken places.”**

Enter the community not with a desire to “fix” it as an outsider but rather “understand that you are part of the community,” he said.

“There are no God-forsaken places, only church-forsaken places.”

- **“Reconnect to the whole gospel.”**

Like the exiles who were commanded to “plant gardens and eat what they produce,” churches need to “contribute to the thriving of the community,” he asserted.

- **“Re-establish the value of place.”**

Just as the Jewish exiles were commanded to “take wives and have sons and daughters” in the land of exile, churches should grow to “have a generational love for the place,” he said.

- **“Remember the poor and the marginalized.”**

Rather than treating the poor as objects of charity who must receive help on their benefactors’ terms, recognize the marginalized as members of the community who have their own contributions to make, he urged.

- **“Remind one another of our collective power.”**

Recognize the power of partnerships. Not everything good that happens in a community has to happen because the church led the initiative, but nothing good in the community should happen without the church’s involvement, he said.

- **“Reorient our vision to see like God.”**

“Every place and every person displays both the glory of God and the brokenness of humanity,” he said.