

Voices: Is gentrification good for all, or just good for some?

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Over the years, there's been a slow change in Waco, where I currently live.

More and more tourists are coming in and out. Thousands come to see renovated houses and eat at fancy restaurants. People can even pay \$80 to go on a bus tour that just takes them to see houses and go to a coffee shop. A couple of weeks ago, over 100,000 visitors from all over came for [Magnolia's](#) spring celebration.

All of this may seem like a good thing, but how is this really affecting the community?

The sinister reality of gentrification

I've had many conversations with people about the topic of gentrification. Many factors need to be addressed when it comes to that conversation. Broken welfare systems, systemic racism, broken business models, and many other contributing factors play into exactly why gentrification happens and why it affects communities.

My goal is not to explain the nuanced details. There are many books and articles related to the subject anyone can readily find.

My goal is to elevate the conversation for the church as a gospel issue.

Isn't getting new businesses a good

thing?

As people see new businesses come into town and change the landscape of a community, many think new businesses are a good thing. Yes, I believe it is a good thing to start new businesses that generate income for communities. However, what makes gentrification so sinister is that it gives the appearance that the fresh, new businesses are generating income for those who are less fortunate when, in reality, it only helps those who are already wealthy and pushes people out who are already there.

For example, a few years ago I went to London. There's a community just outside the city called Brixton where a lot of Jamaican and African immigrants live. While there, a battle raged where wealthy tenants were thinking about raising the rent on these arches where people already owned and ran businesses. The only reason for raising their rents was new businesses, leading tenants to want to pursue higher rent because there more people were now willing to pay it.

Rethinking our understanding of poverty

Before moving on, it is important to look theologically at our understanding of poverty. Bryant Myers, a professor at Fuller and author of "Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development," put forth a principle for holistic community development and helps to frame a theological understanding of poverty.

Myers argues that poverty is an outcome of broken relationships which came from the fall. He sets out a paradigm of four relationships that has been established since creation: God, others, self and creation. For Myers, God's work in the world is to restore these four relationships.

The problem with gentrification is that it solely tries to solve physical poverty. Yes, this is extremely important, but, if we aren't careful, it is easy to fix problems with money without seeing the bigger picture of what is going on.

The foundation for a biblical and theological vision of transformational development is relationship. People rush in with their new business ideas thinking it will help their communities — without building relationships with the people around them and asking what they need.

Forming our imaginations to a holistic ministry

A couple of years ago, I lived among refugees in Vickery Meadow, a small community of resettled refugees in Dallas. Changes have been made to the apartment complexes with recent renovations. I can only hope that the rent isn't raised to the point where these refugees are displaced.

Is that the holistic vision of *shalom* God has set out for us?

God's vision for his people is to participate in bringing people into right relationship with God, others, self and creation. Gentrification is only helping those who are already wealthy by providing resources only the wealthy can afford and pushing out those who can't afford to stay.

A more biblical model would be to walk alongside those in poverty.

Ask them what they need.

Look for local businesses that are already there to help out.

Love them as Christ loves us.

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