

Planting among the Urban Poor

Jason Thompson & Jeremy Stephens

Why the City

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Introduction

For 9 months, our intentional community of 9 adults and 10 children followed Jesus to serve among the urban poor in metro Manila, Philippines. Our desire was to serve and learn from those who have dedicated their lives to bringing transformation among the poor and to discover a new way of being the church in America. Our partners have been Missions Ministries Philippines (MMP), an indigenous ministry devoted to the building of the kingdom of God among the urban poor in Manila. Their vision is a church in every slum and their methods are holistic team based ministry. Throughout our time here, each of us was assigned to a slum area with a team of MMP staff who were laboring to plant a church. This paper represents much of what we have learned concerning church planting among the urban poor here in the Philippines and its application specifically to the place to which God has called us, Tampa Bay, FL. It is our desire to impart what we have learned and experienced and to equip those in the Underground to pursue the planting of micro churches.

Why the City taken from Brian Sanders

In the history of the world to our time, there are more people alive on earth now than have ever lived before. 6.5 billion souls crowding the earth. The result of the earth crowding is people are moving into cities, creating a new phenomenon among humanity.

To date at least 50% of humanity lives in a city, possibly more. We must recognize the significance of this as it has never happened before in human history. It changes the way we relate to each other the way we organize and the way we perceive the

world. It creates new dynamics and develops new problems. Can we be a church that works for this context?

To become this desperately needed church and to understand our current urban context we must look to the biblical text. The Bible begins with the setting of creation in a garden. Paradise is a garden. Walking with God, knowing God, working for God is all connected with nature. The bible ends with the city of God, the New Jerusalem. Eternal paradise is a city. Being with God, healing, eternal life are all connected with a city. But why does God not restore the garden?

For this we must understand who God is. God is a creator. Theologians call it 'Ex Nihilo'- "out of nothing" God creates. The first thing we learn about God outside of his power is that he is creative/artistic; rather than logical or a law of physics. He is unrestrained by laws, free to be creative and do what he wants. Why did God create humans? Because he wanted to. That's it, that's the final answer.

Humans are created in the image of God. based on what we know from Genesis 1 to be made in the image of God means we can choose to build and create things. No other animals can do this. But we are sinful, so we build things that are evil or broken. And these structures become idols to us, towers of Babel, which we worship and ignore God with.

God then does not destroy everything, because parts and themes of it remain connected to his original intent, rather he redeems by allowing the new Jerusalem to define eternity.

What does the city look like? Other than being a place without a sun or death, in Revelation 4, 5 the new Jerusalem is a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual city. The amazing truth is the world's cities already are moving towards that eternal reality.

Can we be a church that joins with this eternal reality now and proclaims the good news of Jesus to the city?

Why the Poor taken from Brian Sanders and Jeremy Stephens

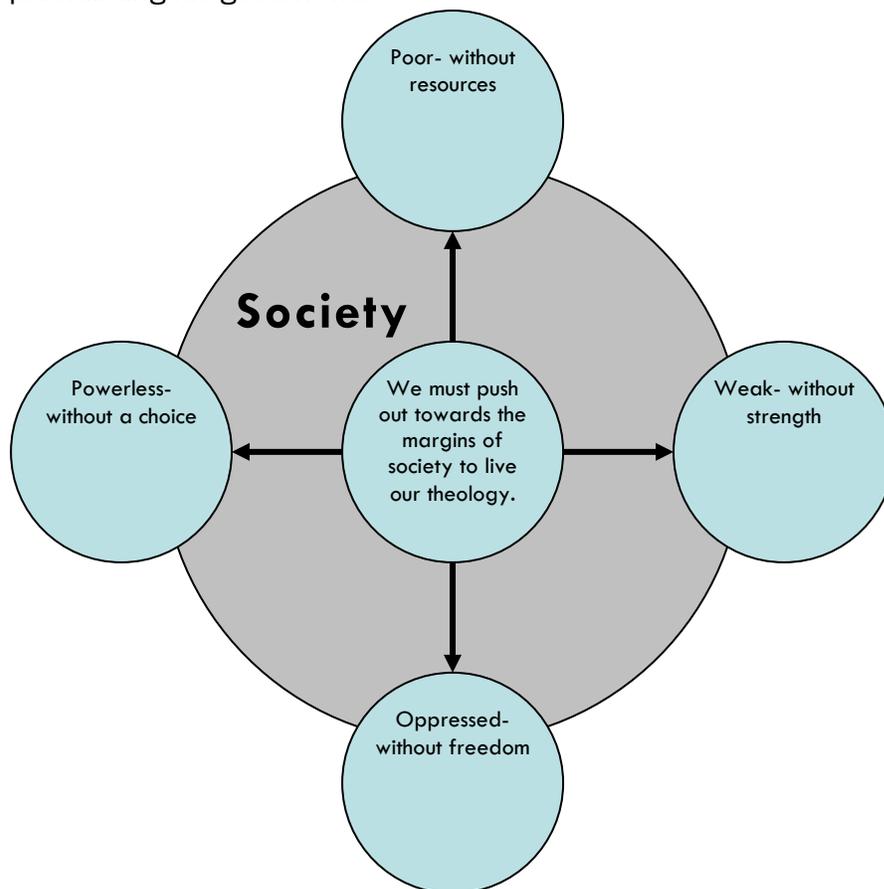
We must start with Jesus. In Matthew 25 he says anything you do to the least of these you do to me. He forever identifies himself with the outcasts, the poor, the oppressed, the marginalized. Typically when a person loses the ability to sustain themselves they are pushed to the margins of our society...forgotten, a blight on our peaceful existence, better to ignore than to love. In doing so every society dehumanizes the marginalized, treating them less than human, justifying our treatment (or lack thereof) towards them. You know how it feels to see a homeless man beg on the side of the road. Typically they are ignored. You know many people hear about the atrocities throughout the world and think "they did it to themselves", not realizing most humans would be in a "gutter" if someone didn't help them out. WE justify by not looking, therefore treating our brothers and sisters like they don't exist.

Jesus forever gives dignity to the marginalized, identifying himself with them...they are more than human they are children of God.

Significantly, Jesus did this same act as he incarnated into the margins of Heaven when he was born a man in the midst of a sinful, fallen world. We are all outcasts separated from God, but God didn't ignore us, he sent Jesus to give us true life (eternal life). Jesus has always gone to and dwelled in the margins...to earth, becoming a poor human so that true humanity might be brought back to the earth. Our salvation comes from faith in Jesus alone but our works of service are inextricably connected with the poor. There is a specific calling to love and care for the poor upon God's people. We are called to push past the cultural biases, lies and narcissism and to remember the poor. We are called to have a theology of the margins.

Jerusalem was the center of Jewish life and society. If you want to get closer to God you worked your way to the center, Jerusalem. But Jesus ministry always pushed out, away from the center, pushed to the edges of the society, to the margins. No matter where he was, even when he was among a "marginalized" people like the Samaritans he found the edges with the woman at the well. Or with the lepers, it was the outcast among the outcasts that Jesus makes the hero. Jesus pushes to the edges and margins no matter where his context is. And though he does not ignore the rich when they come, he never goes to them, but draws them into the margins. His focus was decisively on the margins of society.

We need an urban church that joins Jesus in the margins, among the poor, proclaiming his good news.



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Appreciative Inquiry: finding where God is

What is working, successful, and life changing about this community? What is God already doing? Our task of planting an urban poor church begins by appreciating the community for what God is doing and seeing the additional possibilities. In *Walking with the Poor* Bryant L. Myers terms this process as Appreciative Inquiry.

Know your hood

We have to know the community into which we feel called. Its one of those things that makes sense when you think about it but unfortunately the thinking is clouded by cultural assumptions or misinformation. Unfortunately we come with presumptions about the “true” needs and how we are critical in filling those community deficits. This egocentric approach to missions must be repented of, rather than denied as we begin to learn to appreciate the community independent of our mission. We need to know how God is working, what gifts already exist within the community itself before we come in with our assumptions on how God should work and what gifts we bring to the community.

Can we be involved in empowering and mobilizing the community for itself? How do we use its own resources and leadership to accomplish their perceived needs as we seek to proclaim the Kingdom of God together. We must be in mission together because if we think we are the only ones bringing resources to the mission then it will become myopic and stifle the overall development of the people in the community. This method of empowerment is an extension of the work of the Holy Spirit. God seeks to be with us and begins to transform us, from where we are when he finds us, using us uniquely according to the gifts poured into us from birth and some of those added in our rebirth. God uses us, even as we are still being transformed into his likeness. In the same way we come to the community, work with it according to what has been given to it, beginning where it is now and journey together towards transformation. The journey begins in knowing the community.

What assets are available

We should think wide when appreciating the community. Let’s ask and think about the available local parks, charity programs, school programs, schools, organized community leaders, natural community leaders, churches, ethnicities of people, types of businesses, local celebrations, local hobbies or interests, etc... the list could go on and on. Within the first year we should never stop asking questions about what happens on holidays or where does everyone shop or what cultural differences exist in the community that might not exist even ten miles away.

How is God working

God is always working. The image of God is in every community. This should never be in doubt for us as we seek to proclaim the Gospel. We are partnering with the Holy Spirit who is drawing people to himself. Jesus himself only did what he saw the Father doing, so likewise we too need to “see” what the Father is doing in the community. What Bible studies exist, what Christian programs have come and gone, what spiritual dreams do people have for the community? In what ways is God orchestrating peace, reconciliation? These questions and more can assist us in

spiritually mapping an area. Even understanding what people consider as spiritual activity and it's priority is important. Some people may see both Bible study and prayer as spiritual activity but prioritize prayer above Bible study so that without significant time devoted to prayer the community will perceive your spiritual activities as lacking God. Or maybe the community is very cynical about "church stuff" but perceives reading a few verses as intense spiritual activity, so to study a whole passage would be overwhelming. People do not come from the same place as God draws them. We have to find where they are at, meet them there and assist in bringing the message of reconciliation to them in accordance with how God is already working.

I was scheduled to preach on Sunday, a daunting task given I don't speak the language and they don't speak mine. The topic, though, was something I was very familiar with and drew confidence from, the Bible. More specifically, "what is the Bible", was my mandate. Easy I thought. I've been working with college students for over seven years and during that time when I discussed the Bible I always try to defend it's validity. Why should we listen to the Bible and other relevant questions were always helpful to young students. I know how to do this, I thought. Then I asked how important it was to discuss the validity of scripture. A very direct "it's not important at all" came in response. here in Manila very few will ask that question. The Bible is a sacred book. That's why it's valid. To discuss manuscripts, historical background and archeology would be irrelevant to the urban poor community we were working in. That was very good to know and set my message on a totally different course. But without that question me and my partners assumed I knew how to answer the question "what is the bible". It would have been a disaster.

What are the community's dreams for itself?

Hopes and dreams can shape you more than your past or current situations. Within the urban poor communities a culture of short term survival can be a characteristic which you will encounter. For so long families have lived pay check to paycheck, making ends meet and focused on it's own problems that dreams may be hard to come by. It can be our service to find and foster dreams in the urban poor context. The dreams can't come from us, the dreams are best when they come and evolve from within the community. We make their dreams our dreams. One question to help stir up dreams is that of "in two years what would you like to see happen within the community?" These questions and others allow us to begin where they are.

What does the community perceive as its problems?

We can never come with preconceived ideas on what the problems are in a community. Even if we are right, without the realization of the community, we will be wrong in our approach. So we start by understanding how the community itself wants to see change, what are the major issues to them.

Doing surveys

Some will love it. Some will hate it. But without this information a microchurch may, with no intention, create more problems than solutions in the urban poor context. It's time to hit the streets, asking questions and gathering essential data. This may feel

weird, or actually be weird, but there are few other options to help us truly get past our biases and understand the community's needs.

MMP does this in a given area before they even decide to plant in an area. They want to ensure the area is among the poorest of the poor, so they survey it. The questions range from members of household, income for each member, basic expenses (electric, water, transportation, food, school, medicine, cable), basic assets, dreams for area, church affiliation, common sicknesses and common medicines. The interesting way they introduced themselves during the survey was not as a church plant but as a Nonprofit, Nongovernmental Organization because sometimes there is suspicion towards government organizations and churches. They also had their main success when they went with someone from the community.

I remember the first day Pastor Jojo and I surveyed. It was a tough day. Many people were suspicious, hesitant to speak with us and some even said no. The contrast came the next time when Ate Helen, an elected community leader, walked with us to survey. Everyone said yes, invited into their homes, answered all our questions without any suspicion. What a difference it can make to go with someone who is trusted from the community.

We can also use other forms of information from Census, to other nongovernmental organizations, or maybe even other churches. A little bit of upfront work to gather pertinent information so the micro church can appreciate the community will go a long way in the long term proclamation of the kingdom.

Evaluating surveys

After the surveys your team has to evaluate, quantify the data and begin interpretations. I would suggest having someone from the community present to help with the interpretation. You want to feel like you know the neighborhood, know some of the families, some of the problems, some of the dreams...you want to use this information to prayerfully immerse yourself into the mission God has called you. After you've quantified and interpreted the data, the team can begin to prayerfully ask Jesus for strategy. "What is our place in your mission in this place?"

In Sauyo, the cost of medicines plus the cost of travel to procure medicine was a major source of expense to families. We took that data and began working to establish a drugstore cooperative within the community, cutting prices by 40%. This direct application from the surveys is a way to demonstrate a listening heart to the real problems that face a community.

Follow up your inquiry

One thing that surprised me in Manila is after the survey the pastors went back to the households to visit, follow up, pray and invite to bible studies. Our first contact was minimal spirituality and the second was similar...it was more about caring for these people than getting information or getting them to bible study. The pastors were looking for connections, sparks of a relationship that could last and if there was a connection established then the pastors would go back every week to pray and visit with the family. Over time most of these families came to bible studies and became Christians.

I think in the urban poor context within the US we have an opportunity to utilize surveys and prayer walks to foster connections with people. Even in the US most

people will not refuse prayer so after the survey we could easily follow up by going to people asking for prayer requests. Doing this consistently, I must emphasize consistently, will build the trust and offer connections upon which can be built the invitations to weekly gatherings and outreaches. Making our care and concern for people beyond invitations to our events is critical in reaching the urban poor.

Tampa

Areas to inquire about in Tampa:

What government services are available and where are they located?

What incomes are represented in your mission field?

What is the Health care status of your mission field, disease and care?

What parks, hobbies, entertainment are available and used by your mission field?

What do people think are the main problems?

What is some of the history of your mission field (physically and spiritually)?

What are commonalities within the community that bind them together? (common events, food, experience, jobs, history, etc...)

Biblical insights

Acts 17:22; Philippians 4:8-9; Act 2:17; Nehemiah 2:11-18

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Contextualization: flexing with the context

Any missional effort of the church, be it down the street or on the other side of the world must be done with the humility of a student of that culture. Cities around the world including the Tampa Bay area today are the gathering of nations and within nations, varying cultures. Literally going down the street can be like going to a different country. The modern city is a multi-cultural entity and we must be those that study and engage the culture to which we have been called. Culture is the lens that informs every factor of who we are in every interaction. Culture can be like an iceberg, most of it being unobservable but it lies beneath everything and if not given a significant amount of attention, can be the source of much difficulty.

Two Perspectives

Culture has two areas of perspective, the objective perspective and the subjective perspective. The objective is everything that can be observed...clothing, food, greetings and environment among other things. The subjective is that which is beneath the surface, those things that give meaning to what you see such as values, feelings, assumptions, gender roles, motivations and concepts of truth.

The following is a list of questions that can prompt you to begin the process of crossing culture, contextualization and being a person that is relevant to the culture and life rhythm of those that you have been called to serve.

Objective Perspective

- What is the rhythm of their day? Going to work, time with family, times of recreation etc.
- What kind of music do they collectively enjoy?
- How and where do they spend their free time?
- What are the unique foods and culinary tastes that they enjoy?
- What traditions or holidays do you observe being held or celebrated?
- What are the environmental (streets, homes, neighborhood, work area, local economy) observations that you make about the neighborhood, office, setting of those you are reaching?
- How do people use body language to communicate?
- Do people communicate directly or indirectly?
- What are the hopes and dreams of people in the office, neighborhood, among the homeless?
- What do you notice about the collective attire of people?
- How are the elderly and children regarded?
- What do you notice about family and parenting among those you are reaching?
- How open (sharing personally) do you notice people to be about their lives (think the culture not just individuals)?
- How do they lead and govern in the community (neighborhood associations etc)?

Subjective Perspective

- What is beautiful about the people and environment that Jesus has called you to reach, what do you appreciate?
- What is the perception of strangers, specifically those outside the culture and group?
- What are they collectively enthusiastic or passionate about?
- What are the shared dreams and hopes of people in the area you are called to?
- How do people respond to authority?
- How do people in this culture handle conflict?
- How open is the group to spiritual things...what is their perception of spiritual things...namely Jesus?
- How do they view leadership (communal or solitary)?

Finally asking the question....why? to those you are serving. Ask them why this, why that? Teach me and explain to me why?

How To

Contextualization is the experience of communication relevant to one's cultural setting. This concept is incredibly important for anyone crossing cultures and was often used by Jesus to communicate kingdom truths in every day life examples of which abound in the gospels (the kingdom of god is like...). A simple way to go about contextualizing is applying an inductive approach. The steps of inductivity are observe, interpret and apply.



An example of this principle in practice can be found in MMP's ministry in Montalban. The team gathered asking the question, "what is an event that can be held to gather people, introduce them to the church and share the gospel?". In the Philippines, basketball is by far the most popular sport not only for those that actively play but as a way of being entertained and spending time together. And so the ministry team decided to host a community basketball tournament. Much time and effort went into preparation and at the conclusion; a majority of the community came to support their team and in so doing were introduced to the local church.

So how does your church plant go about the process of contextualizing? It begins with simply making objective observations, acquiring an understanding of subjective perceptions through asking questions then applying your discovery in your church.

It is important to make the distinction that contextualization is not the abandonment of one's own culture and personal preferences entirely. Many mistakes have been made by people in missions as they make efforts to become something that they are

not nor will they ever be. To contextualize is not to abandon who Jesus has made you or ignoring the culture from which your own view of the world stems.

Scriptural Precedent

Acts 17:22-23, Acts 16:3, Mathew 13; John 1:14

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Incarnation: making a presence

Emmanuel, God with us. When Jesus came he “tabernacled” with us or dwelt among us. He lived with us. He came from heaven and walk the streets, shopped the stores, used the public facilities. He had dirty feet. He entered our reality, our world and though we did not recognize him he came all the same. He put on flesh and became “real” to us. He came alongside us. In the Philippines there is a concept called Kapwa meaning to be together or intertwine lives with one another. Jesus came to us, came alongside us to be with us and have Kapwa.

We too need to become real, to move away from the two dimensional Christianity that keeps lives at a distance. We need to get dirty feet.

Moving in

The incarnation is one of the most significant events in all of human history. God became man in Jesus. If his way is our way then we should move in, walk alongside and form Kapwa where we seek to proclaim his kingdom. We should seek to go where we are called and become, as much as we can, like those to whom we serve. Moving into the mission field allows us to directly be influenced by that mission field. It affects us, we affect it. We help people because we are there. The storm affects us all the same way, the crime concerns us all the same way, the spiritual environment affects us all. Moving in allows us to speak into the environment without needing a forum. Our lives are the forums. The little moments become a megaphone for God’s grace. It’s real life and Jesus wants us to get mixed up into the messiness of it.

What if you can't

Sometimes physically moving in is not an option. Our mission field (ie. Homeless, business related, public school related) or other circumstances (ie. Financial considerations) prevent us from moving directly into the community we are trying to reach. Or maybe some of our team can but others can not. Does this mean the mission is over, have we heard God incorrectly?

We believe because the nature of commutability present in our current cities, not living in a particular area does not exclude that area from possible mission. The difficulties still remain and are clear, selfishness and distractions will constantly pull you away from your mission. But let’s be honest, how is that different if you lived there? It is critical to intentionally insert yourself into your mission field regardless of your living situation.

Making an intentional presence in Tampa

Whether you live in the community or are coming from outside the community it is critical that your team find a way to tie themselves to the mission field. Bind your lives with the community. Diversify your contact points within the community: participate in programs, little leagues, shop at the community stores, local meetings, etc... Any way you can begin to make a presence, do it. If you are driving home from work, drive by the park where you know homeless men hang out. Stop by say hi, ask if you can pray for them. Any way to make your presence known, even if it’s for 10 minutes do it. Take kids to the local park, play sports with the local league, shop at

the local stores. It is possible to live within a community but continually travel outside so as in all practical purposes not live out your life in the community. But I saw how the pastors in Manila were unable to live in the community where the church was planted but they began to make a presence. Faced with this disconnection, the team began to buy rice, fruits and fish from the community stores, though there were closer stores to their houses. We played basketball, a community favorite, with the youth in the area. Some pastors would walk through the community on their way home even though there was a shorter route available to them. By doing this everyone you see counts, you try to remember peoples names, use the same stores, further relationships through your presence. By doing this in addition to bible studies and services allowed many people to recognize this small church trying to reach the community with the gospel.

Scriptural Precedent

John 1:14; Philipians 2:6-8; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Colossians 2:9, 10; Hebrews 2:14,15

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Community Blessing: finding a gatekeeper

When Jesus sends out the 72 he asks them to find a “person of peace” to whom they can stay with and allow their peace to rest as they reach the village with the gospel. This underemphasized concept in missions can be very important for the urban poor context, given many of these communities are highly exploited and deceived by outsiders. As a result a culture of suspicion for the sake of survival can develop. Understanding this we approach planting a church knowing we will not be immediately accepted, trusted or welcomed. There are two ways to overcome this barrier: time in the community and a person of peace who can vouch for you. Jesus recommends we find someone to validate us, go before us and vouch for our place to proclaim the gospel.

Another way to look at it is we need a gate keeper. Someone who is on the inside. Someone who lets people into the community, who is trusted but usually doesn't have the greatest authority yet if you come into the community without going through a gatekeeper you can be perceived as a threat. We must find our gatekeepers. Even where there are strongholds God has placed someone on the inside to open the gates.

In every MMP church plant there was someone, independent of MMP, already in the area, living there, longing for God to do something. MMP finds these people and begins to discern what God's Spirit is doing, linking arms with these “people of peace”. These people introduce MMP to critical leaders and interested members. They are the fertilized ground into which the Word of God is planted in the urban poor community.

Asking for permission

As we developed momentum to plant a church in the poor community of Sauyo it was critical for us to meet with community leaders: formal and informal. The Formal leaders are those voted into position, chair community committees and are the public face of the community. They are easier to find and we wanted to inform them of our plans, ask for advice and receive their permission and blessing. The Informal leaders are those people who have influence but no position. They usually have been in the community for a while and you can tell who they are because they are the ones others call for help if there is a problem. They are much harder to find. What we did was ask around who was respected in the community, if there was a problem in the community who could counted on?

Tampa

Who is someone you can begin building a relationship with to be your gatekeeper? Are there people in local churches that might be interested in your mission that could open gates for you? (There are people in local churches who are concerned and interested in your mission, yet their church sits idle. Going to them may offer a new way to express their faith by unlocking the gates for your mission in a way their church does not allow them.)

Scriptural Precedent

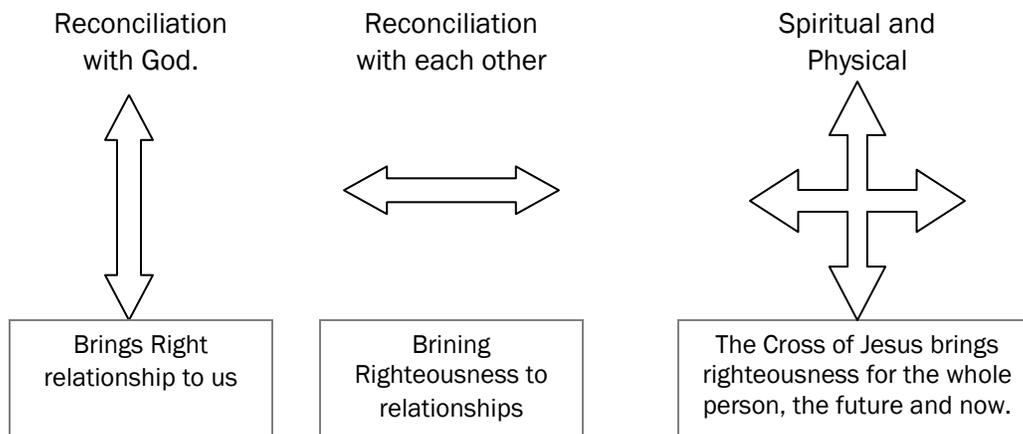
Luke 10:5-7; Acts 16:14, 15; John 4:39

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Holistic Ministry: caring for the whole person

What makes up a person? Are they a soul, a body, a heart, a mind, a stomach? What do we really care for? A person is more than a soul. In *Bring Forth Justice*, Waldron Scott deals with the apparent dichotomy developed by a theology that only considers eternal salvation important. On page 52 “The popular modern conception of individualism [pertaining to salvation] owes much more to Greek thought than to the Bible. It may even be regarded as anti-biblical. Professor George Eldon Ladd comments, “The Old Testament nowhere holds forth the hope of a bodiless, nonmaterial, purely ‘spiritual’ redemption...” Passages such as Deuteronomy 11:26-32 and Zechariah 8:9-13 illustrate this well, as do Exodus 14:13 and Isaiah 25:6-9. This difference in emphasis is important to keep in mind. Equally important to note, however, is that this difference does not amount to a dichotomy...both emphases are complementary within the context of the total biblical mission.”

We are convinced that within the urban poor context we must care for the whole person, all of it, their entire lives. In fact, we are called by God to care for the whole person. The total biblical mission is what we are asking for in the urban church plant. To do both things: extend the gospel of salvation through the atonement of Jesus and to give aid in the day to day lives of the poor. Our gospel can not only be psychological, helping a persons self worth and eternity but the God of creation, of the incarnation, calls us to also root good news in the details of everyday life. In this way we will “incarnate” the gospel by getting it dirty with the affairs and problems of regular people as we care for the whole person.



Discerning the needs

Holistic ministry considers the whole person. Unfortunately, the lives of the urban poor can often resemble that of a prison. The poor survive but are caged. The poor live but make few choices to direct their own lives. It's the same in the jail. If you go to a prison you see caged humans everywhere, their lives are scheduled and there are no choices for them to make. They are captives. But if you want to truly free them you will need more than just a key to the cage. Environment, skills, stages of recovery need to be considered when releasing prisoners.

We too need to do the work of not only asking God for “keys” for people’s oppression but also allow God to show us how we need to empower the whole person to live in

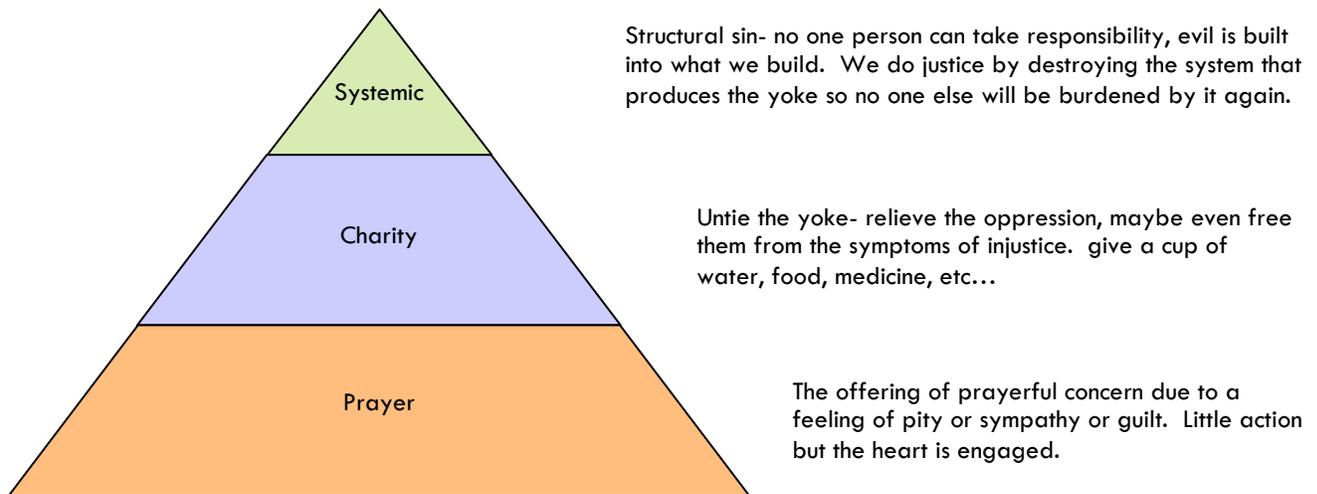
this world. Again this is a place where the survey or appreciative inquiry directly assists the mission of your team. From it you can gather from your observations of the communities' own responses what the most pressing needs are. Is it sanitation, crime, schools, police relations, neighborhood lighting, after school programs, cost of medicines, etc... Be prayerfully realistic in which need you address. There are so many needs and so many people to help but you must remember to go where God is leading your team.

In our work with MMP, one of the continuing concerns of the missionary staff was creating opportunities for livelihood among the poor they were serving and to find ways to improve their quality of life. In Jovil, Montalban, a relocation community of some of the poorest in Quezon City running water is available to the 1000 people in the community for 15 minutes every 2 or 3 days. Of course the situation was intolerable, the local governing body was unable to do anything because of lack of resources and so people in the community were forced to purchase water that was often not the cleanest at incredibly inflated prices. One of the dreams of the MMP team was to dig a well in vicinity of a local creek that would provide clean water once treated and livelihood for church members through delivering of the water. In partnership with a church in Canada, MMP was able to drill a well, treat the water and begin delivering throughout the community. Today, over 100 families a day receive clean, safe water and members of the church who deliver the water earn a daily wage from their partnership in the program. This water project has had a huge impact in the community and has created new opportunities for relationship building and the preaching of the gospel that were not possible before.

Beyond the bag meal give-away in Tampa

Think beyond the simple. Not to pick apart a good work, but the church needs to add to it's repertoire of concern for the poor beyond giving food away. Things are interconnected, issues concerning education affect crime and crime affects police relations. Your church plant should consider how to, not replace, but to build upon the foundations of prayer and charity so that the structures are affected with the gospel of Jesus. Yes, this may require you to visit the mayor. Why not? People who advocate for the stip clubs of Tampa see the mayor and city council frequently, so where can the church of Jesus be advocating for the poor? Our city is not too big. We can affect changes on policies for parks, libraries, homelessness, schools, etc... What about joining PTAs for local schools, developing tutoring partnerships, or developing an understanding between the relationship of housing ownership and poverty? The church has much to offer and if we seek transformation of our city we must move beyond the food give-ways.

Levels of Concern for the Poor



MMP designed a grocery store cooperative for the slum communities while we were in the Philippines. It was brilliant. The idea centers around buying enough from food distributors to gain a discount of up to 40% off retail price. To initiate the program MMP had to supplement it through donations until the demand could be enough to gain the wholesale discount. With this discount, MMP then turns around and becomes the “middle man” for the community. They only increase the price enough to sustain the pastor’s family and for a monthly membership fee, anyone in the community can come make purchases through the cooperative store. Individuals and businesses both can participate in cutting their costs for food. Doing this frees money up for the poor to spend on medicine, school and housing needs. Better yet the monthly membership fee is recorded and kept as a savings program, so an individual can loan that money out, use it for an emergency or cash out if they move. It empowers them to save immediately through lower food costs but also save for the future. Thinking beyond food give-aways empowers the whole community.

Using partners

If we seek justice for the whole person as a church we will need partners who have resources beyond our own in terms of expertise, money and sweat-equity. Without these partners our impact will be adversely affected. With them we can bring transformation.

Now we have to understand that some partners may have views different from our own concerning the poor or the city but this should not close our relationship to them. If God has intersected two paths then maybe he has done that for a reason. In our partnerships a heart of expectation and gratefulness should define us rather than competition and superiority.

Scriptural Precedent

Matthew 9:35; 1 John 3:17; James 2:15; John 5:6

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Team Leadership: making the team work

You need each other. You need each other for decisions, discernment, prayer, support, encouragement, love and inspiration. We were not created to be separated; Jesus did not send us alone.

Before the Philippines I never played basketball but during our stay it was required activity. Everyone was playing it. And though I was not good at playing basketball I did learn a few things about team leadership.

In basketball and church planting a team requires:

Clear Leadership- even on the court there are those players who call the plays, set the pace, they are the leaders but the whole team executes the plays. Our ministry teams must have a sense of clear leadership that also allows everyone to participate in achieving the team's mission.

Clear Positions- though every player should participate proactively all the time, it is extremely helpful to give everyone clear positions/tasks that allow them to succeed. We have to consider each person's strengths and how as a team we can work together to allow each person to employ those strengths in mission.

Coach- despite experience or talent there is always a need for an outside voice to speak into problems and give a fresh perspective. We as teams need to find coaches, those outside the ministry whom we can call to assist us.

Time outs- meetings are essential to clarify goals, solve problems and celebrate victories. Our teams must have regular intervals where we take time to meet, clarify vision and the direction of our mission, give clear positions to each member and motivate each other to proclaim God's kingdom.

Fundamentals- no matter the talent of your ministry team your fundamentals of devotions, prayer, the word, must be in place in every individual. The team has to work on making sure each member is solid on the fundamentals of the faith.

Consensus building

One of the greatest examples given to us from doing ministry with MMP was the energy given towards consensus building. It was very important to them to solicit everyone for their opinion and input on almost every topic. We always want to include everyone on the team, especially the quiet ones. This of course does not need to mean the leaders put their opinions in the back seat or be afraid of taking a strong stand in their leadership. The idea is to include everyone, listen to everyone and together make the best decision for the mission Jesus has given you.

The only caveat is there may be a time and a decision where they team is divide and the leader must make a call. They should do this unashamedly and with the authority God and the group have given them. They make the play call and the team should follow.

Giving Vision and maintaining vision

Every team will need a regular infusion of vision. Where is the team going, what are they hoping to do? This picture needs to be clear so that the team knows why they want to sacrifice, sweat, pray, cry and worship Jesus in this way.

Vision Retreats are a great way to initiate and maintain the vision for your mission. We need time, for the day or overnight, to discuss the mission, the vision and the goals of what we want to see through your team.

To Develop a team vision it might be helpful to spend time actually drawing a picture as a group or in pairs that answers, "What are our dreams, what do we want to see happen?" remembering to take into account the appreciative inquiry. Then as the group's vision emerges (though a leader may need to clarify it), allow each team member to articulate the vision, say it, preach it, in pairs or to the whole group. Saying the vision is helpful in two ways: it helps solidify in the hearts of each person the unified vision. It also helps expose places where the vision is not coherent or fully accepted by the team. It is possible that on paper the team has one vision but as they speak the vision in their heart comes out different. If the team has something else come out then the vision may need to be adjusted to match more closely their hearts.

Once the vision was established MMP used the "SMART" analysis to develop goals of that vision. SMART is an acronym meaning : Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Time bound.

These goals will assist the team greatly in evaluation but also pushing towards a direction. Without goals most team members will not know what to do or where the group is going.

Scriptural Precedents

Acts 15; Acts 6:3; Acts 16:4; Exodus 18:17-23; Acts 20:28; Mark 6:30-44

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Team Building: sustaining the team

An essential component to the health and productivity of any ministry to the poor is team building or what we in Tampa would describe as building community. The team is defined here as MMP delegated leaders and core “workers” that enable the ministry to be done on a regular basis. For our worker in Tampa it is simply the micro church leaders and the core team that is gathered with them for the sake of the mission. As experienced in the ministry of MMP, team building is reflective of the priority of relationships and secondarily tasks. This is not to suggest that task or mission is unimportant, in fact it is the very reason the team has been assembled but it argues that a healthy team produces healthy results. Team building in this context has a few very practical facets namely involvement in one another’s life beyond the task assigned, spirituality and the meeting process.

In One Another’s Lives

First and foremost, each team member is involved in the lives of one another. An important way of displaying this is concern for and participation in the lives of one another’s families. Team members simply ask often how their respective families are doing. This is not a formality but rather a question that indicates respect, interest in one another’s lives and care. Another example of being involved in one another’s life is family celebrations. These include birthday and anniversary celebrations of team members or the family of team members. If a son or daughter of a team member is having a birthday then the team will come to celebrate with the team member. This is a way of valuing the other team members and their families as well as having shared times of celebration.

Spirituality

Secondly, the team regularly schedules prayer retreats and team devotionals. This is an important part of team building as it cares for the soul of each individual and provides also for the spiritual care and vision of the team as a community. Prayer retreats can be scheduled as the team decides. This could involve a once a month prayer day to a once every two months. In the Tampa context, one could implement a prayer evening wherein the team gathers for dinner and then an extended time of intercession for the lost, the needs and the dreams in the ministry. Another possibility for building the team in the midst of a prayer retreat could include a picnic, games or a purposefully chosen movie. Whatever choice is made be it a whole day of prayer or just an evening, it should be agreed on by the team and put in everyone’s schedule so that it will be kept. The schedules of the prayer day can vary from an overnight prayer day at a retreat center to a whole day of prayer beginning early in the morning and ending in the afternoon to a two or three hour prayer meeting. Prayer retreats should have various expressions of prayer but do not necessarily need to have multiple expressions in one prayer meeting. Our experience in MMP in prayer has weighed heavily on the side of silence and solitude to foster an open and attentive heart to the voice of Jesus. (A few example prayer day schedules and topics have been included in the [appendix](#)). Another aspect of spirituality in the team building process has been devotionals. This has been a strategic part of MMP’s ministry for shepherding and envisioning for the immediate task of the day. It is

important to note that there need not be one person in charge of the devotionals. Instead, with shared leadership each member of the team can bring a word of encouragement or challenge for the team along with leadership in prayer. Devotionals can vary in time dependent upon that which is available to the team. These times of meetings should always be rooted in Scripture. A devotional can be as simple as a team member reading a short text and sharing with the group an insight they have received to the devotional leader picking a text and facilitating a discussion with the rest of the team.

Meetings

As with any team in ministry, meetings must be held for the sake of the ministry. However, meetings need not be boring and secondly can be yet another manner in which the team grows in relationship and support. A few important details to generate team building in the midst of meetings is creating an atmosphere that is comfortable and inclusive, everyone coming prepared to meetings, involving everyone in the generating of plans and decision making process (everyone on the team shares their thoughts, opinions and ideas) and a team defined plan of action for carrying out plans and decisions. Meetings in MMP have been as much about being together as they have been about making decisions. MMP staff do not mind meetings as much because being together is the value along with executing the plans or choices made. Of course, the presence of snacks at any meeting is helpful.

Another essential meeting for the planning, growth and vitality of the church plant is an annual planning day or planning retreat. This is a time for the team to gather for an extended period of time praying, discussing and deciding upon goals for the church plant. The team leadership section does a great job of outlining more of what these planning times could look like. All members of the team should be in attendance with each of them contributing to the process. This time of meeting and planning is not to be neglected since if it is not taken then the church plant can stagnate and wither without proper direction and growth. Practically speaking, a planning day or retreat can take place in a single day or could be over night, preferably on a weekend to accommodate people's work and family schedules. It is important to designate someone to facilitate the discussion and another to record the discussion. Questions such as: what does each person on the team see as needs for the church plant? What are quantitative goals the team has for the church plant? What are the dreams each member has for the church plant? What course of action must be taken or what changes need to be made? are helpful in generating the discussion.

It is important to mention that meetings should not be excessive. We do not want people sitting in meetings rather than doing the work that God has called them to. However, we do not want to meet less than needed. A good measure of whether or not you are meeting too little is if people feel informed and prepared for the work that lies before them.

In many respects the church in the west has taken strides in team building having learned from our brothers and sisters laboring in other parts of the world who

innately value relationship over task. The mission is completed and yet relationship is not lost but rather honored and maintained.

Scriptural Precedent:

Acts 13:2, 3, Romans 16:1-16, Luke 9:1-2, Luke 10:1, Acts 2:42-47; 1 Corinthians 1:27-29

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Empowered Leadership: sharing power

Jesus is the quintessential model of empowerment. His ministry was characterized by the empowering of others examples of such instances can be seen in the sending of the 12 and 72 (Luke 9-10) to the commissioning of the disciples for world transformation as seen in Matthew 28. It is our commissioning and the work of the Holy Spirit in us to bring that work to completion that not only empowers us but models empowerment for us. Ministry to the poor or any ministry for that matter must take the same approach not only for the growth of those included as aspiring leaders or current leaders but also for the expansion of the team's productivity and mission. Simply put, the more people empowered to do ministry, the more ministry that takes place. Empowerment as defined here is the sharing of leadership and power among members of the team. Far too often, leadership and power is held by a single person or a choice few, however, in a situation of true empowerment, team members seek to raise up other leaders and deliberately give power away. This power can be found in decision making, planning and the allocation and management of resources. In our experience here with MMP, empowerment is the foundation of the team and leadership not only for the staff of MMP but also includes those members of MMP's partnering church and lay leaders in the area of the church plant. All members are seen as equals and contributors to the ministry. In an effort to be practical, we will discuss empowerment as evidenced in raising up of other leaders and modeling, delegation and accountability.

Raising Up Leaders

The raising up of leaders is an essential part of the empowerment process. Too often ministry is left to the "experienced or the experts" when there are those in our ministry eager and willing to serve but are overlooked for what are to often unwarranted reasons. Despite the fact that the Lord asserts through the apostle Paul that He uses the foolish and weak things of the world to shame the wise and strong (1 Cor. 1:27) we delegate the young or uneducated to menial tasks so that those who know can do the "real" ministry. Individuals, regardless of age or gender involved in bible studies, youth groups etc. that demonstrate a commitment to the group, time available for the ministry and a desire to learn are invited to participate in a three stage process.

Stage 1 Mentorship

The first stage is finding connections between the core team and noncore members of the church. Through this relational connection the protégée begins to shadow learning alongside the core team. During this stage, the protégée shadows the mentor and observes how they conduct bible studies, share the gospel, visit and build relationships with people in the community, pray and offer advice/suggestions to people that are being ministered to, attends leadership meetings and participates in some leadership capacities during worship services (ex. Opening prayer, reading of Scripture, receiving the tithe etc.) It is important to recognize the time constraints that such an approach can place on the team. It is important to be mindful of time for both the mentor and protégée as you begin the process of raising up leaders.

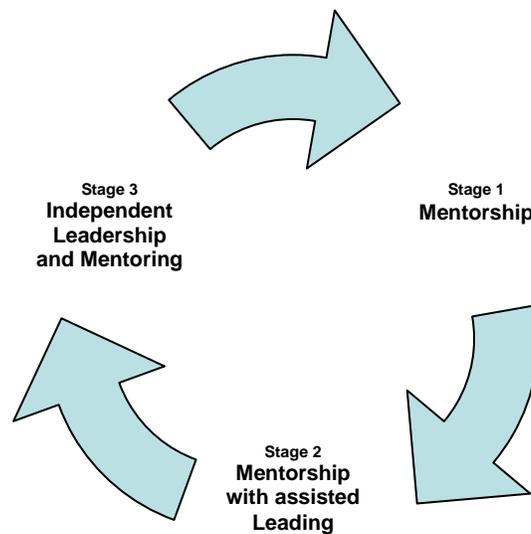
However, much of ministry time will be spent together doing the work that is felt to be necessary in serving the community.

Stage 2 Mentorship with Assisted Leading

The second stage is leading with the core members. At this stage the protégée is encouraged to lead bible studies on their own with the presence and if needed assistance of a coach. This is true of all the responsibilities once modeled by the mentor and now being assumed by the protégée. This stage is important in that the coach is available for suggestion and advice as well as to offer feedback.

Stage 3 Independent Leadership and Mentoring

The protégée is now functioning in a leadership capacity that has been modeled by their mentor. They operate in a day to day capacity that is independent of their mentor however they do have access to a coach for questions and advice. Also, the protégée can now take on a similar relationship with another person being raised up as a leader.



A few things to consider when using this process of staging are time and contextualization to one's own ministry in Tampa. Regarding time, each stage can be determined by the mentor. Some people need more time than others in each stage. It is important that the mentor and protégée discuss how things are progressing and when to transition into each stage. Regarding contextualization, one should consider the nature of their own ministry and mission in Tampa and how to adapt this three stage process to the raising up of leaders.

Shared Responsibilities / Delegation

To empower can be evidenced in the ability of a leader and/or team of leaders to delegate. Much more can be accomplished and the quality of those accomplishments can be greater if responsibilities are not all kept to one person but rather distributed to others. Early in the church plant, power as seen in responsibilities must be shared. To delegate to members of the team is to

communicate trust and respect. In delegation the leaders must ask, who can do this task best? Who is eager to serve or serve particularly in this capacity? How can members of the team be freed up for other tasks as someone is given responsibilities? What tasks must be given away now to prepare people for long term service in that area?

Scriptural Precedent

Luke 9: 1-2, Luke 10:1, Acts 2:42-47, Romans 16:1-16

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Evangelism: proclaiming the Gospel as central

Your church plant is characterized by three parts: worship, community and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom. In this section we assert that the gospel should be priority in all that we say and do as we dream and walk through the process of establishing churches. It is important that every church plant has a clear vision and steps of action for sharing the gospel throughout their ministry. This does not negate the call to preach the good news of the Kingdom through holistic approaches; rather they are both used to bring the full Kingdom of God. Our experience in MMP has been an internship in “evangelism boot camp”. At every function, the gospel is shared. Bible studies, worship services, community outreaches, one-one conversations, work projects and visitations (namely everything that MMP does) are all forums in which the gospel is shared, never is an opportunity missed as the gospel and its proclamation is first. For us in the west, we approach the gospel as an add on to our relationship and friendships however in MMP’s ministry to share the gospel is the most friendly and relational act there is. The ethos for sharing the gospel in MMP is one of love, it is out of love for others that the gospel is shared for it is a message of love and hope that all in particular the poor need to hear. Jesus asserts that the “poor will be rich in faith” and it is our task to make them wealthy by offering the gospel and an opportunity to respond to it.

One such occasion, I accompanied Pastor Julius a partner pastor of MMP throughout the Jovil community. Our desire was to meet more people and to share the good news of Jesus. Pastor Julius’ leadership was fascinating to watch. He was highly relational as he genuinely asked people about their lives, their family and work yet he was direct and deliberate in his desire to share the gospel. After a time of sharing about their lives, Julius would simply ask, “Can I tell you about the love of God?” Each time, the response was positive either agreeing or being told perhaps another time. It was a real privilege to be a part of observing and learning from an approach to evangelism that was highly relational yet not abandoning the priority of the gospel. This was the manner in which we heard the gospel presented relational yet direct, “Can I share something with you. I care for you and your family. Is it ok if I share with you about Jesus and what he means for me?” repeatedly reminding us that the message that we herald is one of love.

Therefore, any church planting effort in Tampa must have a philosophy and plan for the gospel at every function. It need not look the same every time and can be left to the team to be creatively integrated into functions and gatherings.

Moment vs Process

Much discussion has taken place concerning evangelism approaches for some time. One camp argues that to proclaim the gospel in the moment is the best approach as they can assert they have been faithful in preaching the gospel time and time again (you never know that this could be a person’s last opportunity to respond to the gospel). Another camp argues that a process approach to sharing the gospel is best because people hear the gospel several times and understand better its implications and the call on their life. For example, a pastor here in Manila said that it takes having at minimum 6 bible studies before someone is even ready to consider saying

“yes” to the gospel in his context. So, which should it be for us in Tampa, in the moment or over time? Both have their merits and both lend themselves to different personality temperaments and evangelistic styles. But, what if we fully embraced both? What if both characterized our approach to sharing the gospel? In some instances, sharing the gospel in the moment may be the first and last time with someone we meet and for others we will tie our lives in with them, with the gospel at the forefront of our relationship over time.

Visitation and Relationship Building

An important aspect of ministry here in MMP has been relationship building. This is a reflection of the Filipino priority of relationship over task. However, it is not simply building relationship for the sake of relationship rather it is a strategic means of evangelism and pre-Christian discipleship. It communicates to people that they are valued and loved, the very message of the gospel that we are preaching. In MMP visitations and relationship building are done throughout the day at a person’s home. For us in Tampa, this will not always be the case. We must begin to think of how to build relationships with non-Christians that are the object of our mission. Questions such as, “where do they spend their time?”, “what do they enjoy doing?” , “what are the concerns of their life?” , and “how can the rhythm or priorities of my own life change so as to integrate myself more with those I am reaching?” are all needed to be asked as we begin our relationship building in our respective church plants in Tampa. Having people attend our once a week meeting is a small part of the relationship building process. However, contextualizing this facet of ministry is important. You may not do home visits at 3pm as it is done in MMP but if you are reaching the homeless in Tampa you may want to consider where and when do they spend their time and how can you orient your schedule to stopping by and spending time with them or if you are reaching a group of little league moms then time spent together after a game can be strategic for building relationships and sharing the gospel. Other opportunities for initiating evangelism can include going home to home and asking people if they have prayer needs and praying with them, offering to pray for people in your workplace, cookie give-aways and invitations to varying functions at church.

Scriptural Precedent

Acts 17:22-23; Acts 8; Romans 1:16; Acts 4:12; John 14:6

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Bible Study: sharing God's Word

In planting an urban church the Bible must be infused in everything we seek to do and hope to be. The Bible is our guidance, our foundation, our life. This should not be a mere platitude hoped for or said lightly. The Bible leads us to care for the poor, empower the least of these and sacrifice for the name of Jesus. We empower the poor to hear the words of Jesus for themselves and to build their lives on his commandments. We seek to make disciples, obeying the words of God by studying what he said.

The inductive method

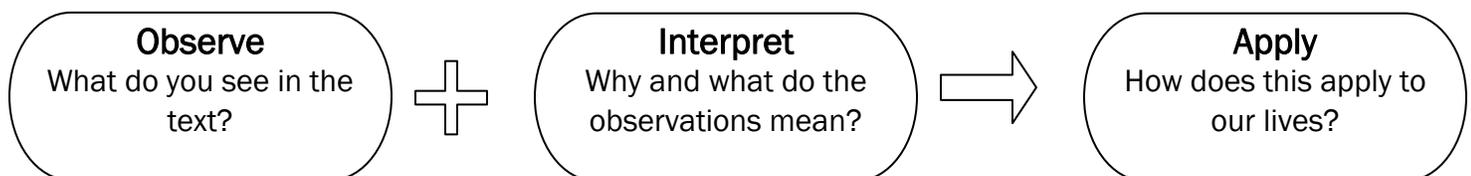
There are many methods to deliver the Bible to our communities: tracks, Bible giveaways, preaching, video and printed bible devotions. You must think carefully which method works in your given context, decide as a team and be flexible to diversify, mixing your approaches to building Bible studies.

Our recommendation is to work towards the inductive method as the primary form of Bible study.

The Inductive method begins with the specifics of life, scripture, etc and works it's way to general truths about God. Taking the specific and attempting to determine the general is a great way to approach Scripture. Although to some extent we all read into the passage (deductive), we have to work to avoid this. The best way to understand Scripture is to let it speak to our experience, instead of letting our experience shape what Scripture is saying.

This method empowers the poor to begin to interpret scripture themselves, they too can understand the Bible, hear from God through scripture and allow it to specifically shape their lives.

There are three phases of inductive bible study: Observation, Interpretation, and Application. Essentially, three questions: what do you see? What does it mean? And what should we do?



If we don't respect these three phases we will come to bad conclusions.

(This is process is still true for those who are illiterate, especially with narratives. Just hear it, listen to it, enter the passage and the same process can apply. Read passage multiple times. Have group to picture themselves as a character in narrative and use their senses, feelings, hearing, time of day, etc... Then you can proceed to asking Interpretation and Application questions.)

Short and sweet

Often in the US urban poor context time is limited. Environmental factors, attention spans, fatigue, family responsibilities all work against us having a thorough Bible discussion. One of the best ways to supersede these barriers is to make the

discussion short and sweet. Use shorter passages, narratives and be prepared so your leadership is sharp. Also, consider the environment, where people will sit, make enough room, change the temperature all can greatly increase the effectiveness of your Bible study.

Make a Connection

Of course in making the discussion short and sweet don't forget the relational connections. Ask about the families and personal life. Be vulnerable and share your own struggles and prayer requests and show real interest in theirs. Also, consider sharing a snack with each other as a way to break the ice and connect at a fundamental social level.

Be flexible

Things will never go the way you want it. It's like one of the laws of physics. Be on your toes, be flexible and be prayerful. The temptation is to use the "interruption" of the schedule as an excuse to stop the spiritual activity, maybe postpone it for next week or think it's not God's will.

In MMP the pastors encountered countless interruptions every Bible study. They became experts in adjusting their plans, sharing a verse rather than a passage, tell a testimony rather than preached, ask spiritual questions rather than bible study...they had plan 'B' ready to go. We too should be ready at all times to adjust, flex with the environment so the gospel goes forth.

ESL- English as second language

English may be the second language in the urban poor context. Some suggestions may be to print passages in the language of the members. This is especially true if you want a discussion of any kind. With a primary language text you may be able to have translated questions to ask, allow them to discuss (sometimes without you knowing exactly what's being said) then move onto the next question. This provides a great opportunity to trust the Word of God and his Spirit to be enough to lead the discussion. A discussion like this works even better when you bring a bridge builder or a trusted bi-lingual partner who can help you communicate or even translate for you.

Beyond having the passage in the primary language and having a bridge builder present tangible illustrations can prove a valuable asset. During my experience in a foreign country, illustrations became my life line for communicating the gospel at Bible studies. During the Bible study I looked for one tangible illustration that I could relate to the passage with minimal language required. This forced me think creatively. I would look for objects in the house or bringing some of my own. I used cups, seeds, pictures of my kids, house of cards, dirty water, electric fans all to communicate the main truth about the passages. With my limited language skills this still allowed me to share Jesus with the people in the community. This technique could, and maybe should, be used in all your Bible studies regardless of language acuity but it will take thought and practice to really capture the meaning of the text via a prop or illustration. This is something the team can work on together so that in every situation you will be prepared, with or without, words to share Jesus with the community.

Scriptural Precedent

2 timothy 3:16; Acts 17:11; Matthew 7:24; Psalm 119; Psalm 19:1-8

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Appendix

Books to Read

Bring Forth Justice by Waldron Scott

Walking with the Poor by Bryant Myers

Urban Christian by Ray Bakke

Journey to the Center of the City by Randy White

Bring Forth Justice by Waldron Scott

I though these notes could be helpful for anyone furthering a theology of the poor as they plant an urban poor church.

Pg 49 “Two observations must be made here. the first is that ‘righteousness and justice’ in Hebrew language (tsedeqah u mishpat) is a hendiadys; that is, a figure of speech in which two words connected by a conjunction are used to express a single complex idea. Theologians also call it a technical phrase and as such, it is synonymous with social justice. This has been established by a careful reading of the thirty-one instances of the phrase (Genesis 18:19, 2 Samuel 8:15, 1 Kings 10:9, Isaiah 9:7, 33:5, Jeremiah 4:2, 9:24, 22:3, 22:15, 23:5, 33:15, Hosea 2:19, Ezekiel 18:5, 18:19, 18:21, 18:27, 33:14, 33:16, 33:19, 45:9, Psalm 33:5, 89:14, 97:2, 99:4, 119:21, Proverbs 1:3, 2:9, 21:3, Ecclesiastes 5:8, 1Chronicles 18:14, 2 Chronicles 9:8), as well as the twenty-three instances where the two words occur in poetic parallelism (Isaiah 1:27, 5:7, 5:16, 28:17, 32:16, 54:17, 56:1, 59:9, 59:14, Amos 5:7, 5:24, 6:12, Micah 7:9, Psalm 36:6, 47:6, 72:1, 99:4, 106:3, Job 35:2, 37:23, Proverbs 8:20, 16:8), and thirty-two other instances where they are paired together (Leviticus 19:15, Deuteronomy 1:16, 16:18, 25:1, 1 Samuel 12:7, 2 Samuel 15:4, 1 Kings 8:32, Isaiah 1:26, 11:4, 16:5, 43:26, 49:4, 51:5, Jeremiah 11:20, Ezekiel 23:45, Psalm 7:9, 7:11, 9:4, 9:8, 35:24, 50:6, 51:4, 58:1, 58:11, 82:3, 96:13, 98:9, Job 9:15, Proverbs 8:16, 31:9, Ecclesiastes 3:17, 2 Chronicles 6:23)...The Old Testament authors consistently emphasize that social justice reflects the very character of God: “He loves righteousness and justice [tsedeqah u mishpat] (psalm 33:5); “For the Lord loves justice” (Psalm 99:4). It comes as no surprise, therefore, that “to do righteousness and justice [tsedeqah u mishpat] is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice” (Proverbs 21:3)”

Pg 52 “The popular modern conception of individualism {pertaining to salvation} owes much more to Greek thought than to the Bible. It may even be regarded as anti-biblical. Professor George Eldon Ladd comments, “The Old Testament nowhere holds forth the hope of a bodiless, nonmaterial, purely ‘spiritual’ redemption...” Passages such as Deuteronomy 11:26-32 and Zechariah 8:9-13 illustrate this well, as do Exodus 14:13 and Isaiah 25:6-9. This difference in emphasis is important to keep in mind. Equally important to note, however, is that this difference does not amount to a dichotomy...both emphases are complementary within the context of the total biblical mission.”

Pg 150 “The word “poor” has several meanings and the Old Testament handles this complexity by using six different terms. *Rash* simply means destitute, without money. *Dal* reflects the weak social position of those who are destitute. These are the “marginalized” of the world. *Ebyon* designates the needy, those who do not receive a reasonable share of life’s goods. *Ani* and *anaw* refer to the oppressed, the powerless, those who are wrongfully impoverished by the rich and powerful. *Mishken* indicates a dependent person. Four of the terms occur in a single passage which makes it a good aide-memoire: *Give justice to the weak [dal] and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted [ani] and the destitute*

[rash]. Rescue the weak [dal] and the needy [ebyon]; deliver them from the hand of the wicked. (Psalm 82:3-4) Because the weak are so utterly dependent upon God to be materially poor can lead to being “poor in spirit.” Because the poor man is a slave to others, the notion of being poor came to mean, in the Old Testament, someone who is like a slave before God, obeying God as a servant obeys his master. It also came to mean one who waits patiently for the Lord’s salvation (Psalm 40:1). The weak and poor constitute the “remnant”...”

Pg 151 “The New Testament continues the Old Testament tradition with respect to the poor and powerless. Mary, the mother of Jesus, sang “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for...he has put down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of low degree; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away” (Luke 1:46-47, 52-53)...John the Baptist sent messenger to Jesus to inquire whether he was really the Messiah. Jesus replied not with a doctrinal statement about his Sonship, but with these words: “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them” (Matthew 11:4-5).”

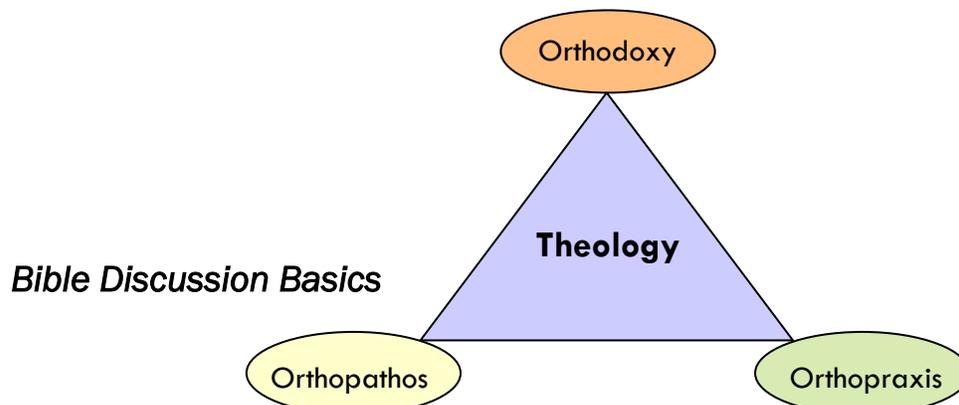
Pg 153”The “cursed” to whom Jesus refers [in Mathew 25] are precisely the reshaim, the evildoers, of numerous Old Testament passages. The Psalmists say the reshaim practice violence against the weak (Psalm 72:13-14; 18:48), exploit the orphan and the widow (94:3-6), are bloodthirsty (64:1-6), accept bribes (26:10), do not pay back what they borrow (37:21), are ruthlessly unmerciful (109:16), and practice injustice (43:1).

Pg 153 in reference to Romans 2:6-11 “Note Paul’s references to those who do evil and those who do good: both phrases are technical terms, that is, they are used in Scripture in a specific way. To do evil is to oppress the poor, as we have observed in previous discussion. To do good is to love one’s neighbor as oneself, and the neighbor, as Jesus’ story of the Good Samaritan clarifies, is the victim of injustice (Luke 10:25-37).

A Harmonious Theology

(Orthodoxy- right thinking, orthopraxis- right action, orthopathos- right feeling = all three matter to God)

These three areas need to come into harmony with each other as we plant an urban poor church. To only tell a mother whose baby died the truth about God’s love (orthodoxy) but not mourn with her (orthopathos) or attend the funeral (orthopraxis) would betray our concern for the community.



Preparation

Take the time to pray and ask God to open His word to you. Pray for people in your bible discussion that they would receive the word. Also it is important that we study the passage of our bible discussion on our own before leading others. Take the time to reflect on every aspect of the passage before looking up commentaries and background commentaries on the passage in order to understand the fuller meaning.

Opening Question

An opening question is one asked before the reading and discussion of the bible passage. This question allows people to become more comfortable with the discussion setting and to share more of their life with others.

An opening question should have 3 elements:

- Personal
- Spark interest / generate some discussion
- Relevant to the passage that will be discussed

For example if you are studying Jesus calming the storm in Mark 4:35-41 you might begin with the following question to each person in the group:

- *Could each of us share a time in your life when you were in a difficult situation?*

Or if you are studying John 15 you might begin with the following question:

- *What is the secret to motherhood or marriage?*

Types of Questions:

- Observation
- Interpretation
- Application

Good Questions always promote discussion and reflection and anticipate the questions of those in the discussion

Not so Good Questions are quickly answered with no discussion.

Good Bible study questions have the following characteristics:

- open-ended: promote discussion, have multiple answers
- real questions, answer is not totally obvious
- gets the studiers to look back into the text
- highlight relationships
- use the language of the group and the text
- help studiers to identify with emotion in the text or link their own experience to the text
- short and concise
- startling or unexpected
- variety of type and breadth

Observation

Observation is the act of helping those in your bible discussion acquire all of the details of the passage. This is simply the process of answering the following questions:

Who? What? Where? When?

However, we want people in our discussion to engage themselves in observation as fully as possible in the passage. We do not want to ask “Who is in the passage?” as those in your bible study already know...they did just read the passage☺. The following are suggestions to creatively help people make observations in the passage:

- Imagine you are a reporter telling this story to someone else. What are all the details from the passage you would need to communicate to them?
- Imagine you are a person in the passage you are reading. What do you see, hear, smell and feel? What would it be like to be that person in the passage?
- What are repeated words or phrases that you notice in the passage?
- Compare and contrast: Example... How are the two brothers in Luke 15 the same? How are they different?
- Look for “Conditional Statements”.....if, then, therefore, so that, so then, for this reason, for this cause

Interpretation

Interpretation is the act of interpreting and reflecting upon the differing ideas in the passage. This is simply answering the following questions: How? Why?

Interpretation can come from thinking through the meaning of the passage and connecting your personal life with the passage. Here are a few suggestions for interpretation questions:

- Why do you think.....
- How would you feel if.....
- Have you ever felt like....
- Describe a time when you felt like this.....
- What do you think of
- What does it mean when....

Application

Application is the process of putting into practice either in action or thought the truth/truth of the passage studied. This is the most important part of the study and must always be a part of the bible discussion.

Application questions should be specific and encourage transformation in action and thought in every member of the bible discussion. The bible discussion leader should always be prepared with 2 or 3 application questions for the group.

Internet Resources

www.biblegateway.com

www.preceptaustin.org/inductive_bible_study.htm

Suggested Prayer Evening (A)

Meditation and Intercession

The Venue

The team needs to establish a home or venue for this evening prayer meeting. Two options for dinner could be a potluck or someone on the team offering to cook the meal.

The team can also go about creating an atmosphere that would help facilitate prayer. This could include worship music or instrumental music in the background along with candles placed throughout the room. This is merely a suggestion....just make efforts to create a prayerful environment.

The Meal

During the meal the team can spend time catching up personally sharing how they and those in relationship with them are doing.

Scripture Meditation

In this Meditation and Intercession prayer meeting the team can begin with a time of Scripture based meditative reading. The following is an example of what can be done. We would recommend reading through the instructions below and familiarizing everyone in the group with what will happen. This exercise can be as short as 10 minutes or as long as 20.

Choose a Text

Choose a text of the Scriptures that seems relevant to the group at this time. It is better if the passage is shorter so that people can reflect on less material.

Silence

Have everyone in the group get comfortable and allow them time to become silent.

Reading

Turn to the text and read it slowly and aloud for the group. Savor each portion of the reading, encouraging them to be constantly listening for the "still, small voice" of a word or phrase that strikes them. Do not expect lightening or ecstasies. In this exercise God is teaching us to listen to Him, to seek Him in silence. He does not reach out and grab us; rather, He softly, gently invites us ever more deeply into His presence.

Reflection and Silence

Encourage each person in the group to take the word or phrase and internalize it. Memorize it or slowly repeat it to themselves, allowing it to interact with their inner world of concerns, memories and ideas. Do not be afraid of "distractions." Memories or thoughts are simply parts of yourself which, when they rise up during this exercise, are asking to be given to God along with the rest of your inner self. Allow this inner pondering, this rumination, to invite you into dialogue with God.

2nd Reading and Silence

Read the passage once again. Slowly and aloud. Allow time for silence once again at the completion of the reading.

Community Prayer

After a few minutes of silence, encourage each member of the group to pray out loud in response to what they feel the Lord was speaking to them or to the group during the reading.

Break / Dessert

At this point allow time for a break. Dessert would be a good idea and could allow time for people to share more of what they were hearing from the Lord in Scripture

Intercession

Now, each member of the team is encouraged to share what they see as needs in the team's ministry, prayer for non-Christians, prayer for one another's needs and concerns. I would encourage everyone to share and also allow freedom for people to pray as they feel led by the Holy Spirit.

Lord's Prayer and Blessing

As the time of intercession comes to an end, the leader of the evening prayer can invite everyone to pray the Lord's prayer together. At the conclusion of the prayer, the prayer leader can close the evening of prayer with a blessing or benediction.

Suggested Prayer Evening (B)

The Lord's Prayer as Guide

The Venue

The team needs to establish a home or venue for this evening prayer meeting. Two options for dinner could be a potluck or someone on the team offering to cook the meal.

The team can also go about creating an atmosphere that would help facilitate prayer. This could include worship music or instrumental music in the background along with candles placed throughout the room. This is merely a suggestion....just make efforts to create a prayerful environment.

The Meal

During the meal the team can spend time catching up personally sharing how they and those in relationship with them are doing.

Prayer: The Lord's Prayer

When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, he provided them with a guide in prayer for worship, intercession and petition....what we know today as the Lord's Prayer.

Matthew 6:9-13

9" This, then, is how you should pray:

" Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,

10 your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

11 Give us today our daily bread.

12 Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one

Over the next hour, use each line as a springboard of prayer for the team. For example,

"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,

The prayer leader would read the first line of the prayer and then each team member is invited to pray prayers of worship and honor to God who is their Father...they can even use the terms expressed in the line of prayer. As everyone is finished praying this line then proceed to the next line of the prayer. Dependent upon the size of the group, this could take 45 minutes to an hour.

Prayer for Team Members

At the conclusion of the Lord's prayer, allow time for personal prayer for members of the team. It is important that we lift one another up in prayer as we minister together.

Lord's Prayer and Blessing

As the time of intercession comes to an end, the leader of the evening prayer can invite everyone to pray the Lord's prayer together or the prayer leader can simply read it as people sit quietly and listen, praying in their hearts. At the conclusion of the prayer, the prayer leader can close the evening of prayer with a blessing or benediction.

All Day Prayer Retreat

Scheduling

It will be important to give people on the team advanced notice (a month or so) to plan to participate in an all day team prayer retreat. The team needs to coordinate schedules deciding which day works best for everyone.

The day can begin at 9am (or as the team decides) and be concluded at 4pm.

A possible schedule for the day could be as follows:

9am-11:30am	Arrive at Outdoor Venue for Silent Prayer and Solitude. Team disperses to spend the next 2 ½ hours in prayer alone (see guide below)
1130am	Team reconvenes and has a short time of prayer ending the solitude and silence
12pm	Picnic Lunch or go to the house of the team member hosting the afternoon
1-2:30pm	Rest, take a nap...relax.
2:30-4pm	Prayer as a team

3:30pm

End

The Venue

The team needs to establish two venues to host an all day prayer retreat. For the beginning of the retreat we would recommend something outdoors where people can spend time in solitude, alone in the outdoors. Two suggestions would be the beach or a local park. The second venue could be the home of one of the team members, where the afternoon of the prayer day is spent.

At the home of the team member hosting the afternoon block, the team should go about creating an atmosphere that would help facilitate prayer. This could include worship music or instrumental music in the background along with candles placed throughout the room. This is merely a suggestion....just make efforts to create a prayerful environment.

Morning Prayer (Silence and Solitude)

The following is a guide that can be printed out and provided for each member of the team in their time alone. The guide can be given as is allowing people the freedom to spend this time with the Lord as he leads them or the prayer leader can choose a passage of scripture and encourage people to spend time reading and reflecting on that passage throughout the morning.

Personal Prayer Retreat

Here are some suggestions. It's not a checklist or strict guide, but some hints on things that might help you communicate with the Lord.

You will need:

Something to write with

A notebook with plenty of paper to journal, ask questions and reflect

Bible

Pick a place that is quiet and serene where you know you will not be disturbed

Bottle of water (or whatever drink you want)

Snack (in case you are hungry)

Relax – take a few minutes to slow down both physically and mentally. You have a long time to be with God, so take a deep breath, relax and enjoy it.

Reflect – think about what's been going on in your life. What are the biggest events to happen in your life? Any patterns in your life (academic/work, emotional, mental, spiritual) How do you feel about where you are at in your life right now (just answering, "Yeah, good." Is not good enough ☺) What do you think God may be saying to you?

Repent – Are there areas in your life where you know you are not doing what God wants? Have you dishonored the Lord in your thoughts, speech or actions? Take time to confess those things to the Lord, ask His forgiveness and bask in His grace.

Release – we can waste time and energy being anxious about things that we can't control. Release those things to the Lord and trust Him to work. If you have repented of sin, release any lingering guilt or shame that you may be feeling. **YOU ARE FORGIVEN!**

Receive – receive God's love. Just take time to sit back and meditate on God's great love for you and his demonstration of that love to you.

Review – Read passages in the Bible that speak to where you find yourself now, or spend time in the Bible on things you are currently studying. Think about what you've learned this past season of ministry

Respond – respond to God in worship and praise. Write Him a letter, song, or poem. Do something overt as an expression of your love to Him.

Request - ask the Lord for your needs

Gathering

At 11:30, have everyone on the team meet at a spot at the beach or park. Take the time to pray together thanking the Lord for His presence and the occasion to spend with him.

Lunch and Rest

Lunch could be as a picnic there at the beach/park or everyone can go to the home of a team member. It is important that this be casual and people on the team have time to be together, resting and enjoying one another's company.

Team Prayer

At the conclusion of a nice lunch and rest, the team should gather once more to pray for the lost that the team is reaching out to, the needs of the team's ministry and for one another's personal needs.

Lord's Prayer and Blessing

As the time of intercession comes to an end, the leader of the prayer retreat can invite everyone to pray the Lord's prayer together or the prayer leader can simply read it as people sit quietly and listen, praying in their hearts. At the conclusion of the prayer, the prayer leader can close the day of prayer with a blessing or benediction.

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