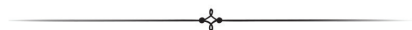


INTRODUCTION

Fighting an Epidemic

Is there a hidden opportunity?



Social isolation has become a crushing plague in our world today. Increasingly, neighborhoods are filled with people who lack healthy human connection for various reasons and face the devastating consequences.

While I've written and spoken about this epidemic many times, I've come to realize that isolation is simply the tip of the iceberg. It's actually just one of the symptoms of a bigger evil with a catastrophic scope known as *relational poverty*. Sadly, this tragedy goes far beyond people experiencing loneliness.

Relational poverty has become an unwanted cultural constant fueled by changing norms, and it can impact virtually anyone in our communities.

Society today encourages independence, self-sufficiency, and privacy, which inadvertently leaves people struggling to survive on their own without any support systems or emotional connections. They often end up cut off from family, friends, and neighbors.

*It's a serious crisis, and it's everywhere. Even worse,
this extreme disconnection goes against all that
God wants for our lives.*

Here's the good news. As Christians, we collectively hold the keys to solving this enormous problem. That's what this book is about. It's designed to explain why this crisis is so urgent and to help you uncover God's solution.

Who exactly is this written for? I have tried to make this book helpful for both ministry leaders and any person who wants to make a difference in this battle: individual Christians, concerned neighbors, community volunteers. In later chapters, I'll be sharing specific strategies that apply to those who lead churches and Christian ministries. But the relationships that drive the solution to this tragedy are formed one person at a time.

Even if you aren't part of an official organization or ministry, you can be a catalyst for change in your community. This book will give you a solid blueprint for how to begin fighting relational poverty within your own context. It's your game plan.

The starting point for this journey? Be willing to hit pause on the way you have always viewed serving and, instead, think about this challenge with fresh eyes.

Changing Your Perspective

Sometimes we can look at the same thing a hundred times but suddenly see something completely different.

Imagine that you've passed by an abstract painting in the hall of your office building every weekday for five years. Then one morning, a colleague casually mentions how much she likes that painting and the way the artist cleverly inserted heart shapes throughout the design. You have absolutely no idea what she is talking about.

When you look at the painting again, something that should have been obvious (but wasn't) immediately jumps out at you. How could you have missed all those hearts? Now you can't un-see them. From that point on, every time you pass the painting, your focus is naturally drawn to the underlying meaning the artist intended to share. *You just didn't see it before.*

A shift in perspective and understanding literally changes what our eyes see.

The same thing can happen with the Bible. We might have read it so many times, we are almost on auto-pilot. And then one day, something new emerges from the pages and leaves us thinking, *"How could I have missed that?"* I can personally attest to the power of that phenomenon.