

light in dark places.

*The gospel has an address. It's your
neighborhood.*

Justice, mercy, and your block: civic engagement and social
justice as discipleship, from a church born in a walkout and
reborn in a nightclub.

Light in Dark Places: Faith That Shows Up. Justice, Mercy, and Your Neighborhood.
© 2026 Community of Hope AME Church. All rights reserved.

Sunday Worship: Crossland High School, 6901 Temple Hill Rd, Temple Hills, MD 20748.
Sundays at 10:00 AM
www.hiphopenation.com · Facebook @CmtyofHope · YouTube @hiphopenationtv

Scripture quotations taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version® NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

This book is discipleship, not partisan advocacy. Community of Hope AME Church does not endorse candidates or political parties, and nothing in these pages should be read as telling you how to vote. It will, however, keep telling you who to love.

The road map

PART ONE: JUSTICE IS WORSHIP

1 · What Does the Lord Require?

2 · The Fast God Chooses

3 · Turn Down the Music

4 · Jesus' First Sermon

PART TWO: BORN IN A WALKOUT

5 · The Sunday Richard Allen Walked Out

6 · A Church That Wouldn't Wait

7 · Your Inheritance

PART THREE: WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?

8 · The Question Behind the Question

9 · Seek the Peace of the City

10 · The Ballot Is a Love Letter

11 · Be in the Room

PART FOUR: SHOWING UP FOR YOUR BLOCK

12 · The Schools

13 · Coming Home

14 · The Table

15 · Peace on the Block

16 · The World Is Our Block

PART FIVE: WITHOUT LOSING YOUR SOUL

17 · The Donkey, the Elephant, and the Lamb

18 · Sent: Light in Dark Places

CLOSING

Prayers for the Block

A Closing Blessing

Scripture Index

You're Invited

“Then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.”

I S A I A H 5 8 : 1 0 (N I V)

From the Community of Hope family

This book comes to you from Community of Hope AME Church, the family God planted in the DMV in 2006, in a nightclub, with eight people who believed God meant every word. Twenty years in the making. Still going. Still on the block. Still convinced that everyone has a chance.

“Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.”

J E R E M I A H 2 9 : 7 (N I V)

Whoever picked up this book, whether you've been marching since before we were born or you've never once been to a community meeting, the welcome is the same. We don't care how you come to Community of Hope. We only care about the way you leave: awake, equipped, sent, and sure that your faith belongs on your street and not just in your seat. This book exists to put your discipleship in work boots.

Where Everyone Has a Chance.

A letter to the reader

You good? And is your block good? Those two questions belong together, and this book is about why.

Friend, somebody probably told you somewhere along the way that church should stay out of “all that.” Stay out of the school board fight. Stay out of the food line. Stay out of the reentry house and the voting drive and the vigil on the corner. Just sing, pray, and go home.

I have one problem with that advice: my Bible won't cooperate with it. Micah says God requires justice the way a landlord requires rent. Isaiah says God will skip our religious services when the oppressed stay chained. Amos says God will turn down our music. And Jesus stood up in His hometown synagogue, opened the scroll, and announced good news to the poor, freedom for the prisoners, and liberty for the oppressed as His own job description. That's not a politics section of Scripture. That's the spine of it.

I have a second problem: my denomination won't cooperate either. The African Methodist Episcopal Church didn't start over doctrine. It started when Richard Allen and his people were pulled off their knees mid-prayer because of the color of their skin, and they walked out and built a church where nobody would ever have to choose between their dignity and their God. Justice isn't something the AME church added on. It's in the birth certificate.

So no, this isn't a politics book. I will never tell you which party to join or which candidate to pick, and I'll spend a whole chapter warning you about what happens to disciples who let a party disciple them. But I will tell you this: your neighborhood is not a detour from your discipleship. It's the assignment. The chapters are short on purpose. Read one, then look out your window.

My only ask is the same as always: come hungry, and be willing to go where the light is needed. We've spent twenty years walking into dark

places and calling it being the light. This book is your invitation to walk with us.

It's never too late to start showing up.

With you on the block,

Pastor Tony Lee

SENIOR PASTOR, COMMUNITY OF HOPE AME CHURCH

justice is worship

What Does the Lord Require?

Micah chapter six opens like a courtroom. God has a case against the covenant people, and the mountains are called in as the jury. And the people respond the way religious people usually respond when they know something is wrong: they offer to upgrade the worship service. Shall I come with burnt offerings? With calves a year old? Would a thousand rams do it? Ten thousand rivers of olive oil? The bids keep climbing until they reach the unthinkable: shall I offer my firstborn?

Notice what they never offer: to change how they treat people. They will give God anything except justice. And God's answer cuts through all of it in one verse, one of the most famous in the Bible:

"He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

M I C A H 6 : 8 (N I V)

Sit with the first two words of the question: *He has shown you*. This was never a mystery. God isn't springing a surprise requirement on anybody. And then the word that should stop us cold: *require*. Not suggest. Not recommend for the especially committed. Require, the way a landlord requires rent. Justice is not extra credit for advanced Christians. It's the baseline.

The Hebrew underneath the verse is worth carrying with you. *Act justly* translates *mishpat*: putting things right, giving people what they are owed as image-bearers of God, standing up when they're denied it. *Love mercy* translates *hesed*: the stubborn, covenant-keeping love God shows us, aimed sideways at your neighbor. And *walk humbly* keeps the whole thing from curdling into self-righteousness, because a justice-worker who forgets their own need for grace becomes insufferable by Thursday.

Here's the reframe this whole book stands on: justice isn't what you do instead of worship, and it isn't what you do after worship. Justice is worship with its work boots on. The same God who receives your song on Sunday is watching how your neighbor gets treated on Tuesday, and calls both of them by the same name.

Everything else in this book is commentary on those three phrases. Act justly. Love mercy. Walk humbly. Simple. Not easy.

TRY IT: THREE NAMES

Pray Micah 6:8 out loud, slowly. Then write down three things: one place near you where something isn't right (*mishpat*), one person who needs stubborn kindness this week (*hesed*), and one area where you've been walking proud instead of humble. Keep the page. This book is going to come back for it.

The Fast God Chooses

Isaiah 58 opens with a church complaint. The people have been fasting, praying, seeking God day after day, and they want to know why God hasn't noticed. Why have we fasted, they say, and you have not seen it? It might be the oldest question in religion: God, we did the spiritual stuff. Where's our credit?

God's answer is uncomfortable enough that most of us would have softened it. You fast, God says, and you still exploit your workers. Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife. You bow your heads like a reed and call it humility, and nothing changes for anybody around you. Then God describes the worship service that actually moves heaven:

"Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter— when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?"

I S A I A H 5 8 : 6 - 7 (N I V)

Read that list again. Chains loosed. Food shared. Wanderers sheltered. The naked clothed. God took the word *fasting*, a private spiritual discipline, and filled it with public, physical, neighborhood-shaped action. The fast God chooses doesn't just skip a meal. It hands the meal to somebody.

And then comes the promise, and it's the reason this book has its title:

“If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.”

I S A I A H 5 8 : 9 - 1 0 (N I V)

Your light will rise *in the darkness*. Not away from it. Not safely across town from it. In it. God's people were never promised a life without dark places. They were promised that when they spend themselves for the hungry and the oppressed, they become visible in exactly those places, like dawn breaking.

The chapter ends with God handing out new names to people who live this way: you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings (Isaiah 58:12). Look at what God names people after: not their theology, not their attendance. Their streets. There's a name in heaven that only your neighborhood can earn you.

T R Y I T : F A S T F O R W A R D

This week, fast one meal, Isaiah 58 style. Take the money the meal would have cost and the time it would have taken, and spend both on a neighbor: groceries for the family down the hall, an hour with somebody who's alone. Then pray:

“God, make my worship the kind You choose. Let my light rise where it's actually dark.”

Turn Down the Music

We need to talk about the most shocking worship review ever written. It comes from God, through a country preacher named Amos, to a nation that had perfected its praise and abandoned its poor:

“I hate, I despise your religious festivals; your assemblies are a stench to me. ... Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!”

A M O S 5 : 2 1 , 2 3 - 2 4 (N I V)

Hear it plainly: God said turn down the music. Not because the music was bad. Israel's worship was biblical, budgeted, and probably beautiful. God said turn it down because of what was happening outside the sanctuary while the harps played inside it. In Amos's day the courts were bought, the poor were sold for a pair of sandals, and the worshipers stepped over all of it on the way to the festival. God's verdict on that arrangement wasn't mild disappointment. It was *I hate, I despise, I will not listen*.

Now, this is a church that loves worship. We were born with a sound system. Praise is in our DNA, and nothing in this chapter is against the shout, the choir, or the mic. Amos isn't anti-worship. Amos is anti-disconnect. The offense isn't that the people sang. It's that the singing and the injustice had learned to live comfortably in the same city, and the worshipers had stopped noticing.

Look at what God asks for instead: not a trickle of charity when it's convenient, but justice that rolls *like a river*, righteousness like a stream that never fails. Rivers don't do occasional. Rivers run in every season, cut through rock, and reshape the land they pass through. That's the image: not a justice event once a year with a banner, but a current. A church whose compassion the neighborhood can set its watch by.

Dr. King stood on the steps in Montgomery and in Washington and reached for this exact verse, because the movement knew what Amos knew: God isn't flattered by worship that costs the singer nothing and changes the street nothing. Worship and justice aren't rivals fighting for the church calendar. They're one current, or they're neither.

So keep the music. Turn it all the way up. Just make sure something is rolling underneath it.

T R Y I T : T H E A U D I T

Take an honest inventory this week. Write two columns: what your worship costs you (time in service, the tithe, rehearsal) and what your neighbor-love costs you (hours, dollars, inconvenience). Don't tidy the numbers. Then pray:

"God, I don't want a stench where I meant a song. Show me where the river is dammed up in my life, and break it open."

Jesus' First Sermon

If you read *Breath and Fire* with us, you already know the scene. Jesus, fresh from the wilderness, returns to His hometown synagogue in Nazareth in the power of the Spirit. They hand Him the scroll of Isaiah. He finds the place He wants, and He reads His own mission statement out loud:

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

L U K E 4 : 1 8 - 1 9 (N I V)

In *Breath and Fire* we read this text for the anointing: the Son of God refusing to start ministry without the Spirit. Read it again now and watch the *direction* of that anointing. Every clause points outward, and points down the social ladder. The poor. The prisoners. The blind. The oppressed. The Spirit didn’t fall on Jesus so He could have a private glow. The Spirit fell on Him and immediately aimed Him at the people the empire had already written off.

And that last line is bigger than it sounds. “The year of the Lord’s favor” is Jubilee language, from Leviticus 25: the every-fiftieth-year reset when Israel was commanded to cancel debts, free servants, and return land, so that poverty could never become permanent and no family could be owned by its worst season forever. Jubilee is economics. It’s policy. It’s what mercy looks like when it gets organized. And Jesus opened His public ministry by declaring that season open, in Him, now.

Then He sat down and said the sentence that nearly got Him thrown off a cliff: today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing. Not one day. Today. Luke spends the rest of his Gospel showing what that fulfillment looked like: touching lepers, honoring women, eating with tax collectors, stopping for

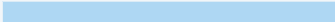
blind beggars everybody else shushed. Peter later summarized the whole ministry in seven words: “he went around doing good” (Acts 10:38).

Here's what this means for us, and it's the hinge of this whole book. If the Spirit in you is the same Spirit that was on Jesus, and it is, then the Spirit in you points the same direction. Toward the poor. Toward the prisoner. Toward the oppressed. A Spirit-filled life that never leaves the sanctuary is a contradiction in terms. Breath and fire were never meant to stay indoors.

TRY IT: YOUR ZIP CODE

Read Luke 4:18-19 out loud, slowly. Then ask one question and sit with it for five whole minutes: *if Jesus stood up to read this in my zip code, who would He be looking at?* Write down who came to mind. That list is your assignment forming.

born in a walkout



The Sunday Richard Allen Walked Out

Every family has an origin story. Here is ours, and once you know it, you'll understand why this book exists.

Richard Allen was born enslaved in 1760. He met Jesus as a teenager through Methodist preachers, taught himself to read, and preached with such power that his own enslaver was converted under his voice and agreed to let Allen purchase his freedom. Allen worked for years, cutting wood, hauling salt, preaching at every stop, until he bought himself out of bondage. A man who paid cash for his own body. Remember that when anybody tells you faith makes people passive.

By 1786 he was in Philadelphia, preaching 5 AM services at St. George's Methodist Episcopal Church, and Black membership grew under his ministry. Grew so much, in fact, that the white leadership got uncomfortable. First they moved the Black worshipers to the walls. Then to the gallery upstairs.

Then came the Sunday, in November 1787 as our church has told it ever since. Prayer was called. Allen's friend Absalom Jones knelt where he'd apparently sat one section too far forward. Mid-prayer, eyes closed, talking to God, Jones felt hands on him. A white trustee was pulling him up off his knees, telling him he couldn't kneel there. Jones asked the man to wait until the prayer was over. The trustee called for help instead. In the house of God. During the prayer.

When the prayer ended, Allen, Jones, and the Black worshipers stood up and walked out together, all of them, one body. Allen wrote about it later with a line that still has smoke on it: "they were no more plagued with us in the church."

Now hear what that walkout was and wasn't. They did not walk out on Jesus. They did not walk out on Methodism; Allen loved its discipline and

preaching to his dying day. They walked out on the insult. They refused to keep confusing endurance of humiliation with faithfulness to God, because worship that requires your dehumanization was never worship. God does not need you degraded in order to be glorified.

“Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow.”

I S A I A H 1 : 1 7 (N I V)

Your denomination did not add justice to its gospel somewhere along the way. It was born refusing an injustice, on its knees, at prayer. Protest and praise came up the aisle together. They've been walking together ever since.

T R Y I T : N A M E T H E I N S U L T

Ask God one brave question this week: *where have I confused enduring what's wrong with being faithful to You?* In your workplace, your family, your city. Name it in prayer:

“God, give me the discernment to know what You're asking me to endure and what You're asking me to leave, and the courage to tell the difference.”

A Church That Wouldn't Wait

Here's the part of the story that should reorder how you think about church: what Allen and Jones built first, before they built a sanctuary, was a mutual aid society.

The Free African Society, founded in 1787, collected dues and used them to support widows, care for orphans, visit the sick, and bury the dead with dignity, for free Black people in Philadelphia whom no institution else would serve. Read that list again: food, care, burial, family support. The first structure our founders raised was a safety net. The steeple came later.

Then came 1793, and the yellow fever. The epidemic gutted Philadelphia; thousands died, and much of white leadership fled the city. Allen and Jones stayed, and organized Black Philadelphians to nurse the sick and bury the dead, at enormous personal risk, for the very city that had pulled them off their knees six years earlier. When a publisher afterward accused Black nurses of profiteering, Allen and Jones wrote a published defense, point by point. They served the city, and they corrected the record. Mercy and truth, together.

In 1794, Allen bought a blacksmith shop, had it hauled by horses to a lot on Sixth Street, and converted it into a sanctuary. Bethel. Mother Bethel, we call her now. For the next two decades white Methodist officials kept trying to control the building and the congregation, and Allen kept fighting, in the courts, until the Pennsylvania Supreme Court affirmed Bethel's independence. In 1816, Black congregations from several cities gathered in Philadelphia, organized the African Methodist Episcopal Church, and consecrated Richard Allen its first bishop: the first fully independent Black denomination in the United States.

And the work never separated from the worship. Mother Bethel became a station on the Underground Railroad. Sarah Allen, Richard's wife, fed and clothed freedom seekers in the church's own spaces. The building where they praised God on Sunday hid God's children on Monday night.

“Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.”

1 J O H N 3 : 1 8 (N I V)

So when somebody asks why our church does HIV testing, feeds people, walks blocks after shootings, and shows up at county meetings, the answer is: because that's what an AME church is. It has never been a church plus a community program. It's one thing. It was one thing in 1787. It's one thing now.

T R Y I T : T H E S U R V E Y

The Free African Society started by finding out who needed what. Do their first step: this week, learn one concrete need within a mile of where you live or worship. Not a guess, a fact. Ask a teacher, a neighbor, somebody at the corner store. Write it down and bring it to God. You're holding the start of an assignment.

Your Inheritance

The AME Church carries a motto, and it preaches by itself: *God Our Father, Christ Our Redeemer, the Holy Spirit Our Comforter, Humankind Our Family.* Look at that last phrase. Not our denomination our family. Not our race, our class, our party. Humankind. A church born from being excluded wrote the widest welcome it could find into its own name.

And the line from Mother Bethel runs straight to your seat. Two centuries of AME pulpits doubled as freedom schools, hush harbors, meeting halls, and movement headquarters. AME congregations taught people to read when it was dangerous, organized when it was illegal, buried the ones nobody would bury, and kept singing the whole time. The tradition has paid dearly for it, and has never once concluded that the answer was to love the neighborhood less.

Community of Hope is a young branch on that old tree. We started in 2006 in a nightclub, with eight people, because we believed church should meet people where they actually live. We've done HIV testing because our founders nursed a plague city. We work on violence prevention because our founders buried the dead with dignity. We show up for schools because our founders taught reading by candlelight. None of it is new. All of it is inheritance. We've said it around here for years: we go into dark places and call it being the light. That sentence is the whole family business, and now you know how far back the business goes.

"You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house."

M A T T H E W 5 : 1 4 - 1 5 (N I V)

Here's why this matters for the rest of this book. When we get to voting, schools, reentry, food, and violence prevention, some voice inside you or

beside you will whisper that this is “politics” and the church should stick to spiritual things. When that whisper comes, remember what you come from. You belong to a church whose founder bought his own freedom, sued for his congregation's independence, nursed an epidemic, and hid freedom seekers under the floor of his praise. Sticking to spiritual things, as our tradition understands it, has always included the block.

You didn't join a brand. You joined a bloodline.

TRY IT: WRITE YOURS

Richard Allen's story can be told in one sentence: *bought his freedom, walked out, built a church that never stopped serving.* Draft your own one-sentence inheritance statement: what do you want the people after you to say your faith did for the place you lived? Write it down and date it. Then pray it back to God as an offer.

who is my neighbor?

The Question Behind the Question

A lawyer once stood up to test Jesus and ended up in the most famous story ever told. He knew the right answer to his own question; he recited it himself: love God with everything, and love your neighbor as yourself. But Luke tells us he wanted to justify himself, so he asked a follow-up: *and who is my neighbor?*

Understand what that question was really asking. It was asking for a boundary. Where does my obligation end? Who can I safely not love? He wanted the list short. Jesus answered with a road.

The road from Jerusalem down to Jericho was seventeen miles of ambush country, and a man traveling it got jumped, stripped, beaten, and left half dead. A priest came by and crossed to the other side. A Levite did the same. Church men, both of them, possibly with religious reasons ready: purity concerns, schedules, safety. The text doesn't dignify the excuses by recording them. It just records the crossing over.

"But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him."

L U K E 1 0 : 3 3 - 3 4 (N I V)

Jesus made the hero a Samaritan on purpose: the wrong ethnicity, the wrong religion, the man His audience was raised to despise. And look at what the Samaritan's compassion actually consisted of. Oil. Wine. Bandages. His own animal while he walked. A night of care. Two denarii, roughly two days' wages, left with the innkeeper, plus a signed blank check:

whatever more it costs, I'll repay you when I come back. Mercy, in Jesus' telling, has line items. It shows up in receipts, not sentiments.

Then Jesus flipped the lawyer's question. The lawyer asked, who qualifies as my neighbor? Jesus asked, who *acted* like one? "The one who had mercy on him," the lawyer answered, apparently unable to even say *the Samaritan* out loud. Jesus said: go and do likewise. Dr. King preached that the priest and Levite asked, if I stop to help this man, what will happen to me? The Samaritan reversed the question: if I don't stop, what will happen to him? That reversal is the whole curriculum.

Neighbor was never a category. It's a verb wearing a noun's clothes. The question this book keeps asking isn't who your neighbor is. It's whether you're being one.

TRY IT: YOUR JERICH O ROAD

Everybody has a Jericho road: the route you travel so often you've stopped seeing what's on it. This week, take your usual drive or walk and actually look. Who's on the side of your road? Name one need you've been passing. Then ask the Samaritan's question, out loud: *if I don't stop, what happens to them?*

Seek the Peace of the City

Everybody at Community of Hope knows Jeremiah 29:11. It's our anchor verse: plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. We've prayed it over graduates, new believers, and hard seasons for twenty years. But most of us have never read the letter it came in, and the letter changes everything.

Jeremiah 29 is a pastoral letter to exiles. God's people had been dragged to Babylon, a city they didn't choose, run by an empire that didn't love them. False prophets were telling them to keep their bags packed; this would all be over soon; don't get invested. And God wrote through Jeremiah to say the opposite: build houses. Settle down. Plant gardens. Marry, raise children, increase. You're going to be here a while. And then the instruction that should reorganize how every believer sees their address:

"Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper."

J E R E M I A H 2 9 : 7 (N I V)

The Hebrew word under "peace" is *shalom*, and it means far more than quiet. Shalom is wholeness: things working the way God intended. Safe streets and honest scales, kids learning, elders honored, doors that lock because you choose to and not because you have to. God told the exiles to seek *that*, for Babylon. Pray for the city that captured you. Work for the flourishing of neighbors who don't share your faith, your story, or your interests. Because your welfare and theirs were never separable. If it prospers, you prosper. One block, one fate.

This verse dismantles the most spiritual-sounding excuse for disengagement: *this world is not my home; I'm just passing through*. True enough, eternally speaking. But God's own instruction to people who were

literally not home was: plant gardens anyway. Love the city you're standing in. Passing through was never permission to pass by.

And here's the part that should give you chills. Four verses later comes our anchor: for I know the plans I have for you. Hope and a future, verse 11, was mailed in the same envelope as seek the city's peace, verse 7. The promise we've claimed for twenty years lives inside an assignment. You don't get to keep quoting the plans while skipping the planting.

T R Y I T : T H E P R A Y E R W A L K

Take one slow walk around your block or building this week, and pray for what you actually see, by name. The school. The corner. The house with the overgrown yard. The bus stop. Finish with:

"God, You planted me here on purpose. Show me what shalom looks like on this street, and give me a corner of it to carry."

The Ballot Is a Love Letter

Let's settle something before this chapter says another word: this book will never tell you who to vote for. Not this year, not any year. No party owns this church, and chapter sixteen is a whole warning about what happens when one tries. But *whether* you show up, that we're going to talk about, because for us, voting was never merely politics. It's memory, it's stewardship, and it's neighbor-love.

Memory first. You come from people who were counted as three-fifths and told the ballot wasn't for them. People who were asked to count the jelly beans in a jar, recite constitutions, and pay poll taxes designed to be unpayable. People who marched across a bridge in Selma in March of 1965 and were beaten on the other side for wanting a voice in their own lives. Some of them died: church people, deacons, mothers, a preacher or two. When you skip an election because of long lines or little enthusiasm, somebody's blood asks a quiet question. Voting, for us, is partly an act of honoring the dead.

Stewardship second. A vote is influence God placed in your hand, and Scripture has one consistent word for people with influence:

“Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.”

P R O V E R B S 31: 8 - 9 (N I V)

Children can't vote. Neither can many returning citizens, or the undocumented mother whose kids play with yours. Your ballot can speak where their voices aren't admitted. Mordecai's word to Esther fits every believer holding unused influence: who knows but that you have come to your position for such a time as this (Esther 4:14)? Silence, Esther learned, is also a vote.

Neighbor-love third, and here's the reframe: a ballot is one of the cheapest acts of neighbor-love available to you. Twenty minutes, and you've weighed in on your neighbor's school funding, the clinic that treats her mother, the buses that carry him to work. And lean in close for this part: the elections that shape your block most aren't usually the loud national ones. School board. County council. State's attorney. Judges. The races nobody makes movies about decide the textbooks, the potholes, and the sentencing on your street. Low turnout means a handful of people are making those calls. Love your neighbor enough to be one of them.

TRY IT: TWENTY MINUTES

Three moves this week. One: check your voter registration today; it takes two minutes online. Two: find the date of your next *local* election and put it in your phone. Three: pick one person, a first-timer, an elder who needs a ride, and commit to getting them there with you. Souls to the polls. It's a family tradition.

Be in the Room

Voting is twenty minutes a year. The rest of civic life happens in rooms, and most of those rooms are half empty.

Nehemiah is the Bible's masterclass on this. He was a believer with a government job, cupbearer to the king of Persia, when word reached him that Jerusalem's walls were rubble and its people were exposed. Watch his sequence, because it's a discipleship pattern. First he wept and prayed and fasted, for days. Then he used his position: he asked the king, out loud, at personal risk, for authorization and resources. Then he traveled and surveyed the damage himself, at night, before saying a word. Only after praying, asking, and looking did he gather the people:

*"Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace."
... They replied, "Let us start rebuilding." So they began this good work.*

NEHEMIAH 2:17-18 (NIV)

Prayer, position, presence, then proposal. Nehemiah didn't just feel bad about the walls from a distance, and he didn't just tweet about Persia either. He got in the room where the decision could be made, and he came prepared.

Your county has rooms like that, and they're more open than you think. The school board meets in public. The county council meets in public. Your civic association, your PTA, the police accountability meetings, the zoning hearings that decide whether your neighborhood gets a grocery store or another liquor store: public, public, public. Decisions about your block are being made on Tuesday nights by whoever bothered to come. An empty seat is a kind of vote too.

We're not asking you to become a professional activist by Friday. Presence works in stages. First you attend and just listen; you'd be amazed what you

learn about your own neighborhood in one evening. Then you learn the rhythms: when public comment happens, who represents your district, what's actually on the agenda. Eventually, maybe, you speak: two minutes at a microphone about the crosswalk by the elementary school, said plainly by a resident, moves more than you'd believe. And through all of it, you pray, because we don't attend those rooms instead of praying. We attend them praying.

Daniel served in Babylon's government without bowing to Babylon's gods. Joseph ran Pharaoh's food program and fed nations. Esther walked into a throne room uninvited. God has a long history of putting faithful people in official rooms. Yours is probably closer than theirs. It has folding chairs.

T R Y I T : O N E M E E T I N G

Find one public meeting this month: school board, county council, or civic association. Go with no agenda except Nehemiah's first two steps: pray beforehand, and survey. Just listen and take notes. Afterward, tell one person what you learned. That's it. You're building the muscle.

showing up for your block

The Schools

Start here, because the children can't start anywhere. Kids don't vote, don't testify at council meetings, don't organize. Every other cause in this book has some voice of its own. The third grader who can't read yet has only whoever decides to show up for him.

Jesus' posture toward children was not sentimental; it was fierce. When the disciples treated kids as an interruption to the real ministry, He was indignant, took the children in His arms, and blessed them. He put a child in the middle of a status argument and said unless you become like this, you don't even enter the kingdom. And He reserved one of His most frightening warnings, the millstone, for anyone who causes a little one to stumble. Heaven watches what happens to children with particular attention. So should heaven's people.

Now look at the schools within two miles of your seat on Sunday. Some are excellent. Some are asked to do the impossible daily: teachers buying supplies out of pocket, classrooms where half the kids carry weight no child should carry, reading scores that tell you exactly which blocks the future is being quietly closed to. That last part matters: a child who can't read proficiently by third grade is fighting uphill for decades. If we want to interrupt what's broken on our blocks, the school building is the earliest place the interruption can happen.

And here's the good news: schools are the single easiest place for a believer to show up. They want you there. Every school near you needs mentors and tutors, an hour a week, no expertise required beyond patience and presence. They need supply drives in August and coats in January. They need adults at the PTA who don't even have kids in the building, because somebody has to speak for the school at the county budget hearing. They need men, especially, standing in hallways at drop-off, greeting kids by name; ask any principal what that alone changes.

“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.”

G A L A T I A N S 6 : 9 - 1 0 (N I V)

One rule as you go: every child in the building is “our kids.” Not just the ones from church families. Not just the ones who behave. The harvest Galatians promises is a long game measured in school years, and some of it you'll never see. Sow anyway.

T R Y I T : O N E H O U R , O N E S C H O O L

Call or visit the front office of the school nearest your home this week and ask one question: *what do you actually need?* Not what you assume they need. Then pick one thing on their list you can do this month. One hour, one school, one child at a time is how blocks change.

Coming Home

Somebody is coming home from prison to your neighborhood this month. That's not a guess; it's arithmetic. The question this chapter asks is simple: what will they find when they get here?

Here's what they usually find. A world that moved on. Housing applications with a box that ends the conversation. Job applications with the same box. No ID, no credit, sometimes no license. Family relationships that need rebuilding and no manual for it. And everywhere, a label: felon, offender, ex-con, as if a person could be permanently renamed by their worst season. Within that first stretch home, the road forks hard, and what's waiting at the fork, or who, makes much of the difference.

Now hear what Scripture does with this. It doesn't treat prisoners as a distant category. It issues a command with unusual wording:

"Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering."

H E B R E W S 1 3 : 3 (N I V)

As if you were together with them. Not pity from a distance: identification. And Jesus went further in Matthew 25, listing prison visits alongside feeding the hungry as things done to *Him*: I was in prison and you came to visit me. Say the quiet part plainly: our Savior was arrested, tried in a rigged proceeding, and executed by the state, between two convicts, promising one of them paradise. We worship a Savior with a record. The church that forgets that has forgotten its own Lord's file.

And remember Zacchaeus. When Jesus invited himself to the house of Jericho's most notorious offender, the crowd muttered the sentence every returning citizen has heard in some form: he has gone to be the guest of a sinner. Jesus went anyway, and restoration followed, and notice that it

included economics: Zacchaeus repaid, four times over, and gave half he owned to the poor. Real restoration always has practical parts.

So the church's reentry ministry is gloriously unglamorous: a ride from the gate. Clothes that fit. Help with the ID office and the resume. An employer in the congregation willing to look past the box. A seat on Sunday where you're a name, not a number. We've said it from the beginning: it's never too late. Reentry is that sentence with skin on it.

TRY IT: LEARN ONE NAME

Do one of three things this month: write to somebody inside (your church can connect you), welcome somebody home (a meal, a ride, a real welcome), or, if you're an employer, look hard at the box on your own application. Start with one name. Everybody coming home needs one person who says it like it matters.

The Table

When the crowd of five thousand got hungry at the end of a long day of teaching, the disciples brought Jesus a reasonable plan: send the people away to buy themselves food. Reasonable, responsible, and completely rejected. Jesus answered with five words that have been assigning homework to the church ever since: *you give them something to eat.*

Notice He didn't ask them for what they lacked. He asked what they had. Five loaves, two fish, one boy's lunch. Jesus has a long habit of feeding multitudes out of what somebody almost didn't bother to bring.

Hunger on our blocks doesn't usually look like the commercials. It looks like the last week of the month at a house where the money ran out before the days did. It looks like a senior choosing between prescriptions and protein. It looks like whole neighborhoods, some right here in our county, where you can buy liquor and lottery tickets within a five-minute walk but not a fresh vegetable; they call them food deserts, and they are man-made. Hunger in a wealthy region isn't a supply problem. It's a distribution problem, which means it's a neighbor problem, which means it's ours.

The earliest church understood food as core business. The first church fight in Acts 6 was about food distribution, and the apostles' solution wasn't to cancel the program; it was to invent a whole new office, deacons, full of Spirit and wisdom, to run it right. Feeding people made the org chart before most theology did. And James refuses to let us spiritualize it:

“Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.”

J A M E S 2 : 1 5 - 1 7 (N I V)

One more thing, and it's about posture. There's a difference between a food line and a table. A line has a front and a back, a giver and a taker. A table has seats. When you feed people, sit down and eat too. Learn names. Receive the conversation they offer; food ministry runs both directions. Jesus didn't just feed people; He ate with them, constantly, scandalously. Charity from above wounds pride. A shared table restores it.

TRY IT: THE DOUBLE BAG

This week, buy double of five staples you're already buying: rice, beans, pasta, oil, canned protein. Hand-deliver the second bag: to a neighbor you know is stretched, or to the food ministry. Then take the harder step sometime this month: share an actual meal, at an actual table, with somebody who usually only sees the line.

Peace on the Block

We've stood at too many vigils. Teddy bears zip-tied to a fence. Candles in the rain. A mother held up by two aunties because her legs stopped working when the news came. If you've lived in the DMV any length of time, you know the scene, and if you're tired of it, good. Tired is where peacemaking starts.

Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God" (Matthew 5:9). Read the word carefully: *peacemakers*, not *peacekeepers*. Peacekeeping is staying quiet, staying inside, minding your business while the block bleeds. Peacemaking is active. It builds something where violence used to have a vacancy. The Bible's shalom isn't the absence of gunshots. It's the presence of what makes gunshots unthinkable: relationships, opportunity, watchfulness, love with its sleeves rolled up.

So what does a church actually do? More than you'd think, and we've spent years learning it. Peacemaking looks like being present after a shooting, not just at the vigil but in the weeks after, when the cameras leave and the retaliation clock is ticking. It looks like violence interruption: credible messengers, often men who used to be in the life, talking a beef down before it becomes a body. It looks like mentoring the fourteen-year-old everybody else has already labeled, because the most effective violence prevention on earth is an adult who won't give up on a kid. It looks like summer jobs, rec leagues, and open gyms, because idle heartbreak is flammable. And it looks like partnership with police where partnership serves the neighborhood, and honest accountability where it doesn't; we've done both, sometimes in the same month, and we make no apology for either. The goal was never to be anti-anybody. The goal is a block where nobody's mother gets that call.

“I looked for someone among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found no one.”

E Z E K I E L 2 2 : 3 0 (N I V)

God's grief in that verse isn't that the city had problems. It's that nobody would stand in the gap. Gaps don't need committees; they need somebody standing in them. On some block near you there's a gap shaped approximately like you.

This work is slow, and some of it will break your heart. Do it anyway. Every peacemaker in Scripture worked outnumbered. They were still called children of God, which is the best name on the list.

T R Y I T : O N E Y O U N G P E R S O N

Learn the name of one young person on your block or in your building, and let them learn yours. Show up once to something that matters to them: a game, a performance, a birthday. If your neighborhood holds a vigil this year, be there, and still be around a month later. Presence before programs. Names before numbers.

The World Is Our Block

Somebody always raises the hand: Pastor, we've got enough trouble within a mile of this building. Why is the church talking about Gaza, Sudan, Congo, Haiti? Fair question. Here's the answer, and it starts where every question in this book starts, with the Book:

"The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it."

P S A L M 2 4 : 1 (N I V)

Everything in it. All who live in it. There's no border clause in that verse, and there's no border clause in Micah 6:8 either. The Lord who requires justice on Temple Hill Road requires it in Khartoum. And remember who Jesus cast as the hero when He answered the neighbor question: a foreigner. The mercy in that story crossed an ethnic line, a religious line, and a border of contempt to get to the man in the ditch. Neighbor-love that stops at the water's edge isn't the Samaritan's kind.

There's also this, and it lands harder in our generation than any before it:

"Rescue those being led away to death; hold back those staggering toward slaughter. If you say, 'But we knew nothing about this,' does not he who weighs the heart perceive it?"

P R O V E R B S 2 4 : 1 1 - 1 2 (N I V)

Our grandparents could sometimes say they didn't know. We can't. The suffering livestreams now. It's in your pocket, between the recipes and the memes. Once you've seen, "we knew nothing about this" is no longer available, and God weighs hearts, not time zones. Cain asked if he was his brother's keeper. God's answer has never changed.

And our own story settles it. When our people were being lynched, it mattered that voices across oceans said so out loud. When apartheid strangled South Africa, it was global pressure, churches very much included, that helped break it. We know from the receiving end what distant silence costs and what distant witness is worth. Besides, the AME church isn't an American church with a foreign mission. It's a global family, with districts across Africa and the Caribbean. When Congo bleeds, that's not a headline to us. That's pews.

So we've spoken, on the record, and we'd do it again. In November 2023 I joined more than nine hundred Black clergy in an open letter to the President, a full page in the New York Times, calling for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, the return of every hostage, and humanitarian relief, mourning Palestinian and Israeli dead together, because image-bearers don't cancel each other out. On a Good Friday I preached at a student encampment about what empire does, because Good Friday is what empire does, and I told those students what I'll tell you: do not get weary in calling for justice and liberation and freedom, and if the prophets are more worried about profits than prophecy, then you have to be the prophetic voices of this moment. And from our own pulpit we've kept saying what conscience requires about Gaza, and about Sudan, where war and engineered famine have displaced millions while the world barely looks; about Congo, where the violence runs partly on minerals riding inside the phone in your hand; about Haiti, the first Black republic, punished for its freedom for two centuries and bleeding now while the world shrugs.

How do you stand from your seat? The same way this book taught you, just wider. Lament publicly; grief prayed out loud is witness. Learn before you speak, from the people who live it, not just the loudest account online. Give through vetted relief that actually reaches the ground. Advocate; your representatives vote on aid, arms, and asylum, so chapter eleven's folding chairs have global consequences. Welcome the diaspora, because the DMV is full of Congolese, Sudanese, Haitian, and Palestinian neighbors; the world already lives on your block. And hold every stand with the next chapter's guardrails, because global suffering is not a team sport and hatred of anybody, Jew or Palestinian, is not available to disciples.

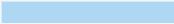
John saw where all this ends: a multitude no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, before the throne and before the Lamb (Revelation 7:9). Every stand you take for a far-off neighbor is choir rehearsal.

We go into dark places and call it being the light. Some dark places have area codes. Some have time zones. Same light.

TRY IT: ADOPT ONE PLACE

Pick one place that breaks your heart: Gaza, Sudan, Congo, Haiti, or wherever God points you. Then commit to four things for a year: learn its story from its own people, pray for it weekly by name, give to vetted relief quarterly, and speak up when it falls out of the news, because that's exactly when witness matters most.

without losing your soul



The Donkey, the Elephant, and the Lamb

Before the battle of Jericho, Joshua looked up and saw a warrior with a drawn sword, and asked the question every partisan asks: are you for us or for our enemies? The answer came back: “Neither, but as commander of the army of the LORD I have now come” (Joshua 5:14). Joshua fell on his face. He had asked whose side God was on, and heaven answered a different question: the real issue is whether *you’re* on *God’s* side.

Everything this book has asked of you, voting, meetings, advocacy, showing up, happens in a country that wants to sort you into a jersey first and hear your convictions second. So hear the warning of this chapter plainly: engage everything, and be owned by nothing. The moment a political party owns your discipleship, it stops being discipleship.

Look at who Jesus recruited. Simon the Zealot came from the movement that wanted Rome overthrown, by blade if necessary. Matthew the tax collector had been collecting revenue *for* Rome. The insurgent and the collaborator, called by the same Lord, seated at the same table, sent out in the same mission. Jesus didn’t make them agree politically. He made them family. If your church can’t hold what Jesus’ twelve held, the problem isn’t the church’s politics; it’s ours.

“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”

E P H E S I A N S 6 : 1 2 (N I V)

That verse is a targeting correction. The neighbor with the other yard sign is not your enemy; he’s your mission field and your fellow image-bearer. The forces that profit from your hatred of him, those are closer to the real

opponent. Any voice, on any channel, that needs you to despise your neighbor to keep your attention is discipling you away from Jesus, one hour at a time. Do the math on your week: if cable news and the algorithm get ten hours and the Word gets two, don't be surprised whose accent your soul picks up.

So here are the guardrails we live by. The pulpit endorses no candidate, ever; we are chaplain to no party and prophet to every party, which means both donkeys and elephants will hear Micah 6:8 here and neither will hear a campaign ad. Issues, yes: Scripture speaks about the poor, the prisoner, the stranger, and the child, and so will we, whoever it inconveniences. People, always: you can disagree at the ballot box and still carry each other's burdens on Wednesday. And citizenship, held loosely: our passport is real, but Philippians 3:20 says our citizenship is in heaven. We vote like residents and worship like exiles who know where home is.

The donkey and the elephant are both temporary. The Lamb has a permanent throne. Don't trade your birthright for a mascot.

T R Y I T : T H E S W A P

For seven days, trade one hour of news or scrolling for this: Isaiah 58 read slowly, and a walk on your block praying for what you see. At the end of the week, notice what changed: your anxiety, your opinions of your neighbors, your sense of assignment. Whatever is discipling you most gets your future. Choose the teacher.

Sent: Light in Dark Places

Let's walk the road we came. Justice is worship; God said so through Micah, Isaiah, and Amos, and Jesus read it out loud in Nazareth. Your denomination was born living it, out of a walkout, into a mutual aid society, an epidemic, a courtroom, and a pulpit. Your neighbor is anyone your mercy can reach, your city is your assignment, your ballot is a love letter, and the rooms where decisions get made have empty chairs with your name on them. The schools, the ones coming home, the hungry, the block that needs peace: four lanes, all open, and a world beyond them that's still our block, because mercy doesn't check passports. And none of it, not one inch, belongs to a political party.

One thing remains, and it's the sending. Hear the Lord's own commissioning words again, this time as marching orders:

"In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."

MATTHEW 5:16 (NIV)

Notice the mechanism. Light doesn't argue with darkness. It doesn't hold a debate or write a strongly worded post. It shines, and darkness simply loses. John said it at the top of his Gospel: "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:5). Has not. Present tense, still true, undefeated record. Every tutoring hour, every welcome-home meal, every grocery bag, every vigil, every two-minute testimony at a county mic is light doing what light does. And people see it, Jesus said, and glorify God. Your good deeds on the block are apologetics the neighborhood can taste.

Now, some instructions for the road. Pick one lane. This book named schools, reentry, food, peace, the civic rooms, and the world's witness; choose the one that made your chest tighten when you read it, and go deep for a year. Go with others; Jesus sent them two by two, and burnout

mostly harvests soloists. Stay humble; Micah put “walk humbly” in the requirement because justice work without humility becomes performance, and we’ve all seen that show. Stay worshiping; the river of Amos runs *from* the sanctuary, not instead of it. And stay hopeful, stubbornly, professionally hopeful, because hope is literally our name.

Isaiah 58 made you a promise and this book has been walking toward it the whole time: spend yourself for the hungry and the oppressed, and your light will rise in the darkness. Rise, like it can’t help it. Like dawn.

We go into dark places and call it being the light. Your block is waiting.

Go.

TRY IT: CHOOSE YOUR LANE

Tonight, write one sentence: “For the next year, my lane is _____.” Schools, reentry, food, peace, or the rooms. Tell one person at church this Sunday so it becomes real, and take the first step within thirty days. Then pray:

“God, You planted me on purpose, in this place, for such a time as this. I’m reporting for duty on my own block. Let my light rise. Amen.”

Prayers for the block

Some days the work needs words, right now. Borrow these. Say them exactly as written, or change them until they sound like you. Borrowed prayers count.

B E F O R E A P U B L I C M E E T I N G

“God, I’m walking into a room where decisions get made. Give me Nehemiah’s preparation, Esther’s courage, and Daniel’s calm. Let me listen more than I speak, and when I speak, let it be for somebody who couldn’t be here. Amen.”

F O R E L E C T I O N D A Y

“God, I vote today in honor of the ones who couldn’t and the ones who died trying. Guide my hand toward my neighbor’s good and not just my own. And whatever the results, keep my hope in You, because thrones change and Yours doesn’t. Amen.”

W H E N T H E N E W S B R E A K S Y O U R H E A R T

“God, I’ve seen too much today and I can feel my heart trying to go numb. Don’t let it. Keep me soft without leaving me crushed. Show me the one thing that’s mine to do, and give me the strength to do just that, instead of grieving everything and doing nothing. Amen.”

F O R T H E O N E C O M I N G H O M E

“God, somebody is coming home this week to a world that moved on without them. Go ahead of them: to the ID office, the interview, the family table. Send them one person who says their name like it matters. If that person is me, I’m willing. Amen.”

B E F O R E Y O U S E R V E F O O D

“God, You fed multitudes out of one lunch, so take these bags and these hands and multiply. Help me serve a table, not a line. Give me names instead of numbers, conversation instead of distance, and the humility to remember I’m always one hard season from the other side of it. Amen.”

A F T E R V I O L E N C E O N T H E B L O C K

“God, it happened again, and we are tired in a way sleep doesn’t fix. Be close to the mother, close to the block, close to the angry ones before the anger decides for them. Raise up somebody to stand in this gap, and if it’s supposed to be me, say so plainly. We refuse to accept this as normal. Amen.”

W H E N P O L I T I C S D I V I D E S Y O U R T A B L E

“God, I love people who vote against everything I believe helps my neighbor, and it’s hard. Remind me they’re not my enemy; my struggle isn’t against flesh and blood. Keep me honest without cruelty, convinced without contempt, and family before faction. Amen.”

W H E N T H E W O R L D I S O N F I R E

“God, the earth is Yours and everything in it, and right now parts of it are burning: Gaza, Sudan, Congo, Haiti, places whose names I’m still learning. I can’t fix a war from my kitchen, but I refuse to look away, because You weigh hearts, not distances. Keep the far-off suffering human to me. Show me my one piece: the prayer, the gift, the call, the neighbor from there who lives here. And until the multitude from every nation stands together before Your throne, don’t let me get used to any of it. Amen.”

W H E N Y O U ’ R E T I R E D O F D O I N G G O O D

“God, You said we’d reap a harvest if we don’t give up, and I want the receipt, because I’m tired. Renew me the way You renewed Elijah: rest, bread, honesty, company, and one small next thing. I’m not quitting. I just need You to carry the part I can’t. Amen.”

For the ones who show up

Friend, you made it through a book that asked more of you than agreement. Before you go, receive this blessing from your Community of Hope family. We mean every word.

May you never again be able to separate the song from the street, and may every hallelujah you raise on Sunday roll like a river by Tuesday.

May you carry the walkout in your blood: too loved by God to accept degradation, too sure of God to leave the faith, too much of Richard Allen's kin to wait for permission to build.

May your Jericho road never go invisible again. May you see the one on the side of it, and may the question that moves you always be the Samaritan's: if I don't stop, what happens to them?

May you plant gardens in whatever Babylon holds your mailbox. May your ballot be a love letter, your folding chair a ministry, and your two minutes at the microphone worth twenty sermons.

May the schools know your name, the ones coming home find your door, the hungry find your table with a seat and not just a line, and the block find you still there when the cameras leave.

May your mercy carry a passport. May the far-off suffering stay human to you, may you never again say you didn't know, and may the multitude from every nation, tribe, people and language already recognize your voice when you get there.

And may you engage everything and be owned by nothing, chaplain to no party, prophet wherever sent, citizen of a kingdom that doesn't come up for reelection.

To whatever tired, willing, still-here soul the Lord placed this book in front of: your light will rise in the darkness. That's not a wish. That's a promise with a chapter and verse.

Where everyone has a chance.

Simple.

In the name of Jesus, who read the scroll and meant it, by the power of the Holy Spirit, who aims us outward, to the glory of the Father, who requires what is good: amen.

Scripture index

A handful of the most important passages behind this book. Bookmark them. Read them in context, and let them find you before the next meeting, the next election, the next knock on the door.

- Genesis 4:9–10
- Leviticus 25 (the Jubilee)
- Joshua 5:13–14
- Nehemiah 1:1–11; 2:11–18
- Esther 4:12–14
- Psalm 24:1; 146:7–9
- Proverbs 24:11–12; 31:8–9
- Isaiah 1:17; 58:1–12
- Jeremiah 29:4–11
- Ezekiel 22:30
- Amos 5:21–24
- Micah 6:1–8
- Matthew 5:9, 14–16; 22:37–40; 23:23; 25:31–46
- Luke 4:14–30; 10:25–37; 19:1–10
- John 1:5
- Acts 2:42–47; 6:1–7; 10:38
- Galatians 6:2, 9–10
- Ephesians 6:10–18
- Philippians 3:20
- Hebrews 13:1–3
- James 2:14–17
- 1 John 3:16–18
- Revelation 7:9–10

Soli Deo Gloria

You're invited

Showing up for your block was never meant to be done alone.

You can absolutely take everything in these pages and run with it solo: God will honor every grocery bag and every folding chair. But something happens when a whole church decides its neighborhood is its assignment that doesn't happen any other way. Tutors who pray together. Vigil-standers who don't stand alone. A congregation that shows up at the county building deep enough to need extra chairs.

That's what we are. Community of Hope AME Church started in 2006 in a nightclub with eight people, because we believe church should meet people where they actually live, including the hard corners. Twenty years in the making, that hasn't changed. We preach and teach Jesus unapologetically. We go into dark places and call it being the light. And we mean our name: this is a community where everyone, everyone, has a chance.

We don't care how you come. Come skeptical about churches and politics both. Come fired up from a lifetime of this work, or come never having done a single thing in this book. We only care about the way you leave.

P U L L U P S U N D A Y

Sundays at 10:00 AM
Crossland High School
6901 Temple Hill Rd, Temple Hills, MD 20748

C A N ' T M A K E I T I N P E R S O N ?

Watch live on YouTube: @hiphopenationtv
Facebook: @CmtyofHope · Web: www.hiphopenation.com

READY TO FIND YOUR LANE?

Reach us at info@hiphopenation.com or 240-273-9115 and tell us the lane you chose in chapter eighteen: schools, reentry, food, peace, the civic rooms, or the world's witness. We'll connect you with the ministries already working it. You don't have to be an expert to start. You just have to show up.

KEEP READING: THE REST OF THE SERIES

Start Here: What Just Happened When You Said Yes, your first steps as a new believer

Just Talk: A Simple Guide to Prayer, your conversation with God

Reading the Text, Reading Your Life, how to study Scripture and your seasons

Breath and Fire: A Spirit-Filled Life for Ordinary Disciples, the Person and power inside you

When Life Falls Apart, suffering, lament, and holding on

We'll save you a seat.

— Rev. Tony Lee & the Community of Hope family

where everyone has a chance.

We'll save you a seat.

W W W . H I P H O P E N A T I O N . C O M

C O M M U N I T Y O F H O P E A M E C H U R C H

Sundays 10 AM · Crossland High School