



FEBRUARY 2012

The BSHOP is a missional community surrendered to the love of Jesus working in us and through us to bring transformation to our neighborhood that will multiply in the city of Grand Rapids through communities of prayer.

GOOD NEWS FOR THE POOR

Isaiah 61:1

***The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me,
because the LORD has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.***

Here at the Bridge Street House of Payer we live and minister in a neighborhood that is characterized as "poor." But, what does that mean... poor? If we are called to proclaim good news to the poor, then who are the poor? The initial response to this question by most of us is one of economic circumstance. In our neighborhood close to 20% of the people are classified unemployed, and over 30% aren't even looking (yeah, that means 50% of our friends here are not working). Over 50% of the houses in our area are either rentals or vacant. The vast majority of students that graduate from high school never make it to college, and less than 25% of those that do don't make it through. Many people are surviving on some sort of government assistance. Stable families are rare. Houses falling apart. Foreclosures. Drugs. Alcohol. Homelessness... Poor.

Many people see these circumstances and are moved with godly compassion and begin to take action to address the physical needs of a neighborhood like the West Side. Food banks. Housing programs. Education initiatives. Employment training... improving circumstances.

All of these are good things. Things that we work to address in our neighborhood. As Christians, the gospel should affect us in such a way that we are moved to compassion by the desperate circumstances of those around us. In fact, the BSHOP also aims toward holistic gospel work. We sometimes provide food for our neighbors. We are working with other local churches and ministries to address the educational needs of our neighborhood. We are working to develop a housing renovation initiative that could employ some local laborers as well as restore beauty in this neighborhood. All things that will address the physical disadvantages that our West Side friends face.

Yet, there is a much deeper form of poverty that we face in this neighborhood. There is a poverty that has far more

devastating effects than unemployment or foreclosure. It is a poverty that I believe actually catalyzes the physical despair that we see. You see, the greatest problem that we face in the West Side is not a financial or economic one. It is a spiritual one. The greatest poverty that we face here is a poverty of the soul. To put it bluntly, our neighbors here on the West Side of Grand Rapids have largely forsaken the knowledge of God and are reaping the consequences of several generations of godlessness (I say with with a great love and a great burden for our friends here). And this is a poverty that will not be lifted by government programs, social welfare programs, or even well stocked food banks. There is only one remedy for the devastation of this kind of poverty: the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

I believe that this is one of the greatest responsibilities of the Church, and our greatest role here on Bridge Street. Proclaiming the gospel. We believe in and practice holistic ministry. The message of Jesus is inherently powerful and should impact the way that we live in such a way that the gospel should be on display through our actions. Yet... yet... not to the exclusion of the necessity to *proclaim* the good news. Jesus fed and He touched and He healed. But, He also *proclaimed*. It is not enough that we simply do nice things for our neighbors. There are many that are living in darkness, watching how we live, and waiting to hear about the hope that we have in Jesus. So, we are committed to not only living the gospel, but we are committed to opening our mouths and proclaiming the good news of Jesus.

Who are the poor around you? Who is watching you? Who is your neighbor that needs to hear about Jesus? Go... proclaim the good news to the poor!

ryan waaalkes

REBUILDING THE ANCIENT RUINS

For some, the description of “ancient ruins” may seem out of place for the West Side. But, when reading Isaiah 61, I’m filled with hope in knowing that God is rebuilding a broken neighborhood. We’re told in Isaiah that the captives, the poor, and the brokenhearted that are set free by the Gospel will **“rebuild the ancient ruins, they shall raise up for the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations.”** I’m excited to say that we’re beginning to see this in beautiful ways within the Pavilion.

Recently, I’ve been challenged that in order to see community transformation, we must empower youth, as well as invite the community into the transforming work. Thus, our West Side friends have joined our volunteer team at the Pavilion. In the few months that we’ve been intentionally partnering with the West Siders in the Pavilion, we’re witnessing their work ethic, customer service, and pride in their responsibilities.

I feel that this is only the start of witnessing our West Side friends take ownership of the work happening in the Pavilion. Ultimately, our greatest desire is to see our friends receive the Spirit of the Lord and accept Jesus Christ as their personal Savior. And, when they experience the life-giving work of the Gospel, we believe that they will bring new life to the West Side.

Please join us in prayer for the salvation of our West Side friends. Pray that they would partner with us and become messengers of the Gospel. Pray that they would be part of the fulfillment of rebuilding the ancient ruins.

lindsay sisson



PRAYER

Thank you for praying. Here are some things you can be praying for:

- Pray for salvation among the young people of the West Side.
- Pray for grace, protection, and boldness for BSHOP staff and community.
- Pray for discipleship opportunities with our neighbors.
- Pray for real transformation in our neighborhood.

KNOW JESUS: MAKE HIM KNOWN

We must be giving young people not only cognitive understanding of the nature and character of God, but also leading them into genuine encounter with Him. Knowing *about* God is important, but not at the cost of *knowing* God. It’s kind of like the difference between reading a book about your spouse in your private study and sharing a meal with them. You could dedicate a lifetime to learning about someone without ever really getting to know them.

In Isaiah 61, we get a glimpse of God’s heart that breaks for the poor, imprisoned, mourning, desolate hearts and lives of all people. His heart is not one of despair, but of infinite hope. His prophet Isaiah has been given a message of good news, liberty, comfort, and favor for these shattered lives.

This message of hope is for us not only to receive for ourselves, but to proclaim to those who are poor, bound, grieving, and destitute. It is a message not only to be lived out and experienced, but proclaimed with our tongues. We are being called to speak good news. What is this good news? The good news is that in Christ, you have a new identity. All the things that you thought defined you: poverty, imprisonment, mourning, desolation are actually fading away. And there is a man who’s blood has purchased your life, and you are being adopted into a new family. In exchange for ashes, you are getting beauty; instead of despair, you’re getting a garment of praise. You once were bound, but now are liberated. You are actually created to display the splendor of God. You are an oak of righteousness.

I remember the zeal of the youth group from Kainay church last summer as we walked downtown to pray for people. They carried signs that read, “Free Prayer” that were meant to bring people to them. They might as well have left the signs at home because they literally approached every person they saw and, with the love of Christ inside them, offered prayer. The leaders and staff were incredibly encouraged as we watched these young people step out and boldly proclaim good news to people who desperately needed to hear it.

These students didn’t have a highly intellectual understanding of the knowledge of God, but they understood enough about God’s heart for the poor and the lost to do something about it. As they obeyed the Spirit, they experienced the love of God in a way that perhaps some of the finest scholars never will by simply knowing Jesus and making known.

derek stenberg

The Bridge Street House of Prayer is a registered 501(c)3 non-profit organization. Donations are tax-deductible and can be sent to the Bridge Street House of Prayer at 1055 Bridge Street NW Grand Rapids, MI 49504.

The Pavilion @ 1056 Bridge is open from noon - 5 pm Monday - Friday
Our Saturday Evening Worship Gatherings begin at 7 pm every Saturday in the Tabernacle @ 1054 Bridge Church is at 10 am Sundays in the Tabernacle