Housing First Overview

This guide is not intended to be an exhaustive overview or critique of Housing First, but a starting place in the conversation that provides the reader with a foundation of understanding for this theory and its practice implications.

THIS GUIDE IS INTENDED TO PROVIDE A PRIMARILY OBJECTIVE OVERVIEW OF HOUSING FIRST, BUT ALSO CONTAINS SUBJECTIVE ANALYSIS WITHIN ITS PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS AND THEOLOGICAL COMPARISONS ALONG WITH SOME LOCALIZED DATA AND INFORMATION SPECIFIC TO THE NORTHERN COLORADO REGION.

# Theory of Housing First

Housing First (HF) is a macro theory approach to ending homelessness and is an umbrella theory over several practice applications. As indicated by its name, Housing First prioritizes making housing available to individuals regardless of their readiness or participation. This theory holds the belief that housing is the antithesis of homelessness and must be obtained before other services are offered.

Like all social theories, it offers a set of values, beliefs, and frameworks for approaching homelessness. It’s main component of belief is that homelessness is a symptom of policy and social system failures now and historically, thus our best way to end homelessness is through local and national policy changes.

## **Key Terms and Phrases**

This section details some common terms and acronyms used in Housing First.

HOMELESSNESS

n. The state of having no home (Oxford Dictionary)

When a person lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, and if they sleep in a shelter designated for temporary living accommodations or in places not designated for human habitation. (HUD)

HOUSING IS THE SOLUTION TO HOMELESSNESS

The view among HF proponents is that if homelessness is the lack of housing, then the solution is the opposite, that providing enough housing will fix the identified problem of homelessness. This base assumption is the primary building block for housing and social policies related to addressing poverty and homelessness.

HOUSING IS HEALTHCARE

Those who are chronically homeless or experience homelessness for ongoing and periodic stretches are statistically more likely to make use of emergency rooms, have chronic illnesses, and have shorter life expectancy than those who are stably housed. Therefore, the phrase “housing is healthcare” has become common language for HF advocates that see housing as the solution to reducing healthcare costs and health issues associated with homelessness.

HOUSING PROBLEM SOLVING

An approach that is intended to keep housing solutions client-centered and to promote self-determination, lived experiences, and empowerment. The goal is to come up with creative solutions for families or individuals that are homeless or near homeless to find out-of-the-box solutions for housing while finding permanent housing. It focuses on coming up with a solution presented by the client and assisting the client with making the solution happen through assistance from local housing programs and services.

CONTINUUM OF CARE (CoC) / BALANCE OF STATE

A collection of nonprofit and government partners that meet and work on shared objectives and goals to end homelessness and create paths to quickly rehouse families and individuals. CoC(s) also receive federal funding according to their area size and homeless counts. The allocated federal funds they receive are directly channeled into local agencies. They are also primarily responsible in their area for conducting Point in Time Counts, understanding housing costs, knowing housing inventory and overseeing coordinated activities such as intaking clients and data collection / reporting.

Larimer and Weld Counties were approved as Colorado’s fourth CoC in 2020, making it one of 400 across the nation. For local Point in Time Count, Housing Inventory Counts and a list of local priorities, visit: <https://www.nocococ.org/> Larimer and Weld County CoC’s purpose statement is: “Regional human service agencies and local government leaders are dedicated to implementing high performing programs and coordinated services to help those experiencing homelessness. The Northern Colorado Continuum of Care ensures local control of federal funds”

The Balance of State is a Continuum of Care that gathers the less populated areas of a state and coordinates agencies that address homelessness, usually these areas are rural, spread out and have lower homeless counts.

HUD

The Department of Housing and Urban Development, a federal agency that oversees national policies and programs addressing housing needs and fair housing laws.

USICH

United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, nineteen agencies dedicated to preventing and ending homelessness using evidence based best practices: https://www.usich.gov/

HMIS

Homeless Management Information System, every CoC chooses a database software system (that meets federal requirements) for its area that collects client level data (demographics and services) and encourages all local agencies involved with addressing homelessness (except domestic violence agencies) to utilize the database.

POINT IN TIME COUNT

A federally mandated count of the sheltered and unsheltered homeless population during the last 10 days of January, to be conducted on a yearly basis. This yearly count allows for year over year analysis of trends to be assessed and top needs identified within a CoC boundary area.

HOUSING INVENTORY COUNT

A yearly count that shows the housing resources available to those experiencing homelessness within the CoC region. This includes counts of Rapid Rehousing projects, Permanent Supportive Housing units, Transitional Housing and Emergency Shelter Services.

CAHPS

Coordinated Assessment and Housing Placement System, also known as the Coordinated Entry System (CES). This is a community wide coordinated intake and assessment system that is intended to streamline services and connected homeless person to the most appropriate housing intervention. This system uses a trauma-informed approach, prioritization based on level of vulnerability, a person-centered approach, a housing first philosophy and a low barrier to entry approach.

VI-SPDAT

Vulnerability Index – Service Prioritization and Decision Assistance Tool. This is the assessment tool used by CAHPS and CoCs to prioritize those needing homelessness services. There are a different VI-SPDATs for families, individuals, those exiting justice systems, and youth.

## KEY CONCEPTS

This section details some common concepts and goals associated with Housing First (HF).

INCREASE AFFORDABLE HOUSING

In 2021, Fort Collins estimated that 60% of renters were cost burdened. The city also estimated that it is short 708 affordable housing units with a target to build 282 new units every year, a cost of $38,970 per housing unit to build. The “All In” 2025 Plan for the Biden Administration, following the example of previous administrations, has an emphasis on allocating HUD funds for creating affordable housing in communities. Every major city is behind in having enough affordable housing units to fully house those falling under self-sustainability lines and while the federal government is increasing grant budgets and allocations for affordable housing units, it is not enough to keep up with demand or fully fund all the affordable housing units needed in an individual city. Thus, many cities are looking at local policies and taxes so they can build and make more units available.

DECRIMINALIZE HOMELESSNESS

Since 2010 there has been country wide pushes to begin the process of decriminalizing homelessness. This push stems from the idea that homeless individuals would be penalized for something outside of their control (because homelessness is rooted in policy failures). Communities are encouraged to repeal local policies such as camping and panhandling bans. From a federal government level, they encourage communities to decriminalize homelessness by making decriminalization a requirement to receive higher levels of HUD funding.

IMPROVE HOMELESS RESPONSE SYSTEMS

Homeless Response Systems are considered the approaches practitioners take when working with homeless clients to find housing. The aim is to reduce and remove any programmatic or systemic regulations and barriers the delay or deny access for households and individuals with the highest needs. Key to improving response systems is prioritizing those who are chronically homeless or have multi-demographic vulnerability factors impacting them and then making sure they quickly access affordable housing. Access should be a given and not a result of any actions the individual needs to take (i.e. removing sobriety or employment requirements). This concept also includes having multiple options in a community for re-housing families, to make sure families exit homelessness as quickly as possible.

COORDINATED POINT OF ENTRY

Every community that wishes to receive HUD funding (CDBG grants, etc) will need to set up a centralized intake process for homelessness that quickly assesses those experiencing homelessness in a way that streamlines moving those most chronically homeless or vulnerable into affordable housing units while connecting those who are at risk of homelessness or situationally homeless to other community resources, such as rental assistance programs and housing voucher options. This is a coordinated system using the same intake and assessment across agencies, with tools for assessment being provided by the federal government and data collection stored in shared HMIS databases (Homeless Management Information System). This creates a uniform community agency approach to homelessness while providing data back to the federal level and allows for prioritization of services to those considered most vulnerable and chronically struggling with housing.

FOCUS ON EQUITY AND INCLUSION

In recent years, there has been a motivation to include assessing historical policies and their disproportionate impact on specific races and sexual orientations in the housing market and ability to access services. Local communities are encouraged to do internal audits of racist housing policies and ensuring no one is barred from shelters or services due to their sexual identity or race. Funding from HUD now includes criteria to be met by communities to offer more housing choices to BIPOC families or individuals and that communities would identify and change any policies that result in discrimination in the housing market or increase segregation in the community.

NON-CONGREGATE SHELTERING

The pandemic that began in 2020 forever changed how we approach congregate models, such as homeless shelters. Due to space restrictions, many communities turned to allowing undesignated or designated camping spaces for its homeless community. They also began to provide more motel vouchers and housing individuals in motel rooms when persons were sick. This historical context is combined with the belief of individuals and government agencies that people feel uncomfortable at shelters due to their gender, sexual identity or race and thus refuse to use congregate sheltering options. Many cities are now looking at solutions such as abandoned motels to convert into homeless sheltering options, increasing motel voucher options and are seeing increases in unsheltered populations (increases in camping).

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

A hallmark concept of HF is that there are no requirements for participation in any programs to receive or retain housing. As part of empowering clients and promoting self-determination, individuals are provided housing without being expected to take any action steps for sobriety, mental health treatment, budgetary management, employment, etc and will continue to retain housing regardless of individual choices made or participation in offered services. Some additional theories used within the HF framework, such as Trauma Informed Care and the Harm Reduction Model are based in the concept of voluntary participation of services.

LIVED EXPERIENCE

A newer concept within HF is an increasing emphasis on gaining feedback and stories from those who experience homelessness to influence policies and decisions made on local and federal levels. Homeless reports and recommendations now include stories of families and individuals along with survey results on housing access and improvements. Many local communities include homeless individuals or those who have used services on town council meetings or other housing decision making boards.

## **Practice Applications**

We turn now from outline key terms and concepts within the Housing First Theoretical Framework to its practice models. Practice models incorporate the values and ideas of a theory into practical applications of service delivery. It is of importance to note that not all communities implement all types of practice models and these approaches do not ensure there is enough affordable housing inventory or programs to meet the full housing needs of the community.

PRIORITIZATIONS

Within the centralized assessment process of HF, there is a standardization for whom will receive services first and what services are applicable to them. This is rated through tools like the VI-SPDAT, where individuals and families answer a series of questions and are then provided a score that shows at what level of vulnerability they are. Those with the highest vulnerability receive services first. Groups that receive first prioritization based upon rated vulnerability scores are listed as follows in order of priority: anyone meeting the criteria for chronically homeless; households with high service needs (ie physical or mental disability & illnesses; high use of crisis services, substance abuse disorders); single and non-chronically homeless; youth and non-chronically homeless; families and non-chronically homeless.

PERMANENT SUPPORTIVE HOUSING (PSH)

As its name implies, this practice model provides a housing unit to those identified by the VI-SPDAT as most vulnerable. There is no time limit placed on the housing provided and wraparound services are provided but participation is voluntary; retaining housing is not contingent on participation. Communities generally build PSH apartment projects as part of their HF strategy, but projects can be expensive. PSH sites have case workers present and are under the governance of local housing authorities or CoCs.

RAPID RE-HOUSING

This approach is also considered a permanent housing option; its difference is that it offers short and medium term (up to 2 years) rental assistance and offers case management wraparound services. While in PH / PSH there is a complex of units built for a designated population; RRH units are selected by the client and services providers are encouraged to have unit suggestions and connections that will allow clients to identify and pick a housing option that will be affordable for them in the long term. Some service providers have housing through their agency they can offer to families for RRH. Families are then placed in housing and provided ongoing rental assistance and offered case management services.

EMERGENCY SHELTERING

Emergency sheltering is typically referred to as a “homeless shelter” and provides communal overnight shelter options to families and individuals experiencing homelessness. Shelters can serve only one population such as families, women and men or serve all populations in segregated areas. Shelters generally offer extended stay programs where an individual or family has a guaranteed space at the shelter and is working on case management goals. Shelters also may offer dinner or breakfast meals but require clients to leave during the daytime hours and generally have a check in process each evening.

SUPPORTIVE SERVICES

(OUTREACH, HOUSING NAVIGATION, LANDLORD ENGAGEMENT, CASE MANAGEMENT)

Supportive services are non-housing placement programs that provide other components of care. These can include conducting street outreach to sheltered and unsheltered individuals to conduct assessments and provide services. This could also include activities such as building connection to local or corporate landlords that would be willing to partner with affordable housing objectives. There are clinical supportive services that could be accessed through agency partners such as substance abuse treatment or clinical mental health counseling. Other services are generally programs that are coordinated by traditional case management models such as goal setting, offering employment programs, budgeting assistance, life skills training, educational training, and childcare assistance.

HOUSING CHOICE VOUCHERS

Formerly known as Section 8 Housing Vouchers, these are financial supports that are processed through local housing authorities and provide people with a voucher that gives them a discounted rate of rent through an approved landlord. Most voucher programs have a wait list as the number of vouchers available is based upon government funding awards. The voucher provides a subsidy paid to the landlord and the family generally pays approximately 30% of their monthly income towards rent, typically the amount of rent difference between the subsidy provided to the landlord and what their true rent cost is.

RENTAL PREVENTION PROGRAMS (Homelessness Prevention)

Rental assistance is direct financial assistance used to help keep families in stable housing, it’s much cheaper to keep families in their current housing versus finding new housing. Most homeless prevention programs require documentation such as utility shut offs or eviction notices, along with meeting income qualifications to be considered for assistance. During the Covid-19 response, homeless prevention programs funded by the government received additional funding and offered it with few restrictions, as that special funding has ended, agencies are implementing standard requirements for assistance again.

TRANSITIONAL HOUSING

Unlike PSH projects or RRH, Transitional Housing is a temporary solution that provides a higher level of stability than a shelter while families look to secure stable, permanent housing. Often families or individuals will still have a lease or other signed agreements and a time limit of under 24 months placed on their stay while they are provided with supportive services to help achieve permanent housing.

Related Theories

# Other Related Theories

TRAUMA INFORMED CARE (TIC)

TIC is an approach of behavioral care that operates under the assumption that most individuals have experienced an event or series of events that impact their overall functioning (physically, emotionally, mentally, or spiritually). With this assumption in mind, services providers should be aware of how acute or chronic trauma impact how people process past and present events and thus avoid practices and policies that would re-traumatize individuals. TIC defines trauma as an event that produced a negative experience with lasting, adverse effects. The understanding of trauma is that your experience of an event/s has now changed how you understand yourself and process future events; with new triggers that often impact your daily functioning, feelings of safety and trust in the environment around you.

There are six key principles that come out of this practice model: safety; trustworthiness and transparency; peer support; collaboration and mutuality; empowerment, voice and choice; and cultural, historical and gender issues.

Safety is making sure the client feels physically and psychosocially safe. Transparency requires the organization to make decision in a transparent way to promote trust among the clients. Peer Support includes connecting the client to others who have experienced trauma or “trauma survivors.” Collaboration has the goal to balance power between all levels of staff in an organization and the clients to promote shared power and decision making. Empowerment, voice and choice are all ideas that assume a client has a history of their voice diminished historically and have lacked power in decision making. Power differentials are key in this principle, to make sure both clients and staff feel supported, have choices in their own decision making, learn self-advocacy and set their own goals for recovery. The principle of cultural, historical and gender issues has a goal to move past stereotypes, understand racial or gender needs of individuals and address historical trauma caused by race or gender.

HARM REDUCTION MODEL

The practice model of Harm Reduction is to reduce the negative consequences associated with drug use. This mindset of reducing risks and consequences of actions can often be applied beyond drug use. Harm Reduction assumes that drug use will be a part of society and thus we need interventions and policies that create a safer environment for use. The client is included in policies and decision-making processes to ensure that they can give voice to their experiences. It is also recognized that a person’s ability to cope with drugs and its effects is influenced that racism, trauma, social isolation, and other social discriminations.

ASSERTIVE COMMUNITY TREATMENT (ACT)

ACT is a way bringing mental health care to those who won’t utilize traditional mental health systems and instead focuses on outreach to people in a community setting. The end goal is to assist those with serious mental health issues in their daily functioning, reduce their use of hospitals and to keep them in a community setting. ACT could be compared to outpatient mental health care that is coordinated by a team and focused on developing your own personal recovery goals that focus for all areas of the life.

CRITICAL TIME INTERVENTION (CTI)

This practice model is a time limited intervention intended to help vulnerable populations such as veterans, those with severe mental illness or homeless to transition into the community. The care worker observes the client in a community setting to assess what supports and case management will be needed to make a successful transition and then assists the client in accessing those community supports. This is a short intervention with the primary aim to assist a person in a time of transition and make sure their strengths are built on for long term success of goals while following the outreach model of ACT and including the Harm Reduction Model.

Postmodernism’s Influence on Housing First

I would argue that Housing First is its own theory that uniquely creates a worldview for responding to homelessness or poverty and like Feminism, Critical Race Theory and Colonization, it has been influenced by the Postmodernism metanarrative. A metanarrative is a worldview that answers the questions of who we are, our core problem, the solution, and what is our purpose (creation, fall, restoration, redemption).

This section is a critique and analysis of how Postmodernism influenced the development of the Housing First Theory. While some brief explanations of Postmodernism are provided; this is not an all-encompassing overview of the theory but a brief illustration of the ideas behind the theory that has become the primary way to approach homelessness. Two goals are to model critical thinking behind ideas influencing practices that sound helpful but are rooted in a false foundation and to better understand why these practices then progress past the original stated goal. We see a continual push to more extreme ends of ideas because progressivism cannot be satisfied until a utopian society is achieved through dismantling current systems.

TWO FOUNDATIONAL BELIEFS AND THEIR INFLUENCE

There are two foundational beliefs of postmodernism: truth is not objective but defined by culture and the other is that society is formed by structures of power. Its four themes are blurring binary boundaries, the power of language, cultural relativism, and loss of the individual.

The first belief is that truth isn’t objective but instead truth is understood by an individual’s experiences and their cultural context. This shifting foundation of what is true is like building our houses on sand instead of the rock of God’s word, the absolute truth that we build our lives and culture on (Matthew 7:24-27). We most see this principle at work in the key concepts of lived experiences, voluntary participation, and decriminalizing homelessness and the practice models of Trauma Informed Care and the Harm Reduction Model. In all these key concepts and models, the individual is placed at the center of what truth is; where what is good is defined by the created instead of the creator. More expansion on the nuance of autonomy vs empowerment will be below in the Theological Analysis Section.

The second foundational belief of postmodernism is that society is formed by structures of power; this belief puts us in a position to see an oppressor and oppressed in every aspect of society. Often, instead of seeing value, power, etc as something that God can expand to everyone one, we treat it as a fixed pie with only so many pieces to go around. Viewing people as either the oppressed or oppressor is also done by chosen group identities, which reduces people and their individual choices to group identity stereotypes; expansion of this idea will the in the Theological Analysis Section under identity and partiality. This second foundational belief is seen in the key concepts of improving housing response systems, focus on equity and inclusion, and non-congregate sheltering and in how CoCs provide or are granted funding, in the Harm Reduction Model, Trauma Informed Care, the Vulnerability Index, the Coordinated Assessments and Housing Placement System.

INTERSECTIONALITY

One defining characteristic of Postmodernism is the idea of intersectionality, this is a common concept through all critical theories and began in the legal system through viewing how outcomes varied by the defendant’s race. Intersectionality has expanded to view someone’s vulnerability or oppressed status through determining how many minority statuses one can ascribe to. For example, if you are transgender and black you are placed as more oppressed than someone who is only black.

We can see Intersectionality most at play within CAHPS, the VI-SPDAT, and Prioritization goals for placement into a housing response model. Before the Housing First Model, the main way to address homelessness was through Treatment First Models (TFM). TFM takes the approach that individuals should be ready to seek or seeking support services, such as employment programs; mental health treatment; and substance abuse treatment before being provided long term housing. Previously then, a main qualification for housing support was readiness for housing while under the HF model the main qualification for housing support is scoring higher on vulnerability and prioritization indexes, scored in line with the ideas of intersectionality.

Now, under the Housing First Model, service providers who screen by housing readiness and require utilizing services instead of scoring and prioritization based on intersectionality will see their funding reduced by government sources as a main priority is to reduce barriers to services; as shown in the key concept for Improving Homeless Response Systems.

OPPRESSOR VS OPPRESSED

Within national and local strategic plans to end homelessness, one will now find language such as “leading with equity”; “language justice”; “power balances” and analysis on historical policies such as red lining.

As a brief aside, language within a Postmodern theoretical framework is viewed as power. Those who control language, control the narrative, and thus have power and control. Since those who create language are the ones in power and culture creators, we need to pay attention to our definitions and seek clarity on what is meant by words as the same language / word choice could be interpreted differently by different groups of people. Another belief about language is that it is created by those in the dominant culture, so the dominant culture then creates the norms that control and judge minority groups.

This idea of language as power combined with a view of historical systems being the source of injustice leads to the emphasis of HF to correct power balances through the modes of organizational systems, legal system, housing policies and the language used by service providers.

We see the idea of the oppressor vs oppressed, power balances, and flipping dominant cultural norms at play in how the government makes CoC funding decision, decentralizing shelters, reducing barriers for service entry, decriminalizing homelessness, housing problem solving, CoC prioritization plans, Trauma Informed Care and the Harm Reduction Model.

To expand on how the oppressor vs oppressed view is demonstrated in one practice model, Trauma Informed Care, we can see in at least 3 of the 6 key principles various language about shifting power balances, giving voice to those who have been oppressed or victimized, assuming injustice in a person’s history and paying attention the other’s culture and not approaching care with your cultural values. Again, in the Harm Reduction Model we see language about including the user’s experience in policy making and the idea that a user’s coping has been impacted by race or other social discriminations. Within decriminalizing homelessness, the underlying idea is that as the dominant group is in control of cultural norms and are arbitrators of what is good, we cannot impose those ideas on the homeless and create consequences for them because of not living in accordance with those cultural values; therefore, they should be able to live as they please with no restrictions or punishments (camping, loitering, panhandling etc). A final example is to read proposals and homeless analysis reports by local CoCs or the federal government; language is continually included to refer to past discriminations in housing systems, sections are dedicated to assessing how different demographics are impacted, and areas of improvement in improving inclusion, diversity, and equity must be included in funding proposals from CoCs to receive higher levels of funding.

GROUP IDENTITY AND IDENTITY FORMATION

For postmodern ideas to work, humans must be split into group identities that are easy to place us in the dominant or minority culture; therefore, the individual is often not seen as separate from their group identity. This idea is also behind corporate guilt and divides us based upon attributes that are visible, such as race, gender, or sexuality. Viewing individuals within only their group context contributes to viewing people as the oppressor or oppressed.

Group Identity is most seen as a value when vulnerability indexes or prioritization goals are presented. Within these assessments and tools, one’s vulnerability rating is based on their various group identities to see what level of priority they receive. There are of course other factors that are included within assessment tools, but some of the biggest contributing factors beyond a chronically homeless label are other group identities.

LIVED EXPERIENCES

Lived experiences in Postmodern theory are more important and truer than empirical data. Your position with the intersectionality matrix validates your lived experiences. Knowledge is now seen as relative and culturally based upon one’s position in intersectionality and what lived experiences they have.

This concept is seen throughout Housing First and specifically in areas such as: the Harm Reduction Model, Trauma Informed Care, voluntary participation, lived experiences, decriminalizing homelessness, and housing problem solving. In treatments and services offered within Housing First the focus is on being client led and empowering individuals in what their treatment and goals are. There is value in services being client led, but when the mentality behind it is that services must be client led because they have access to different knowledge and truth, we should be cautious. More will be expanded on this subject within Autonomy and Empowerment of the Theological Analysis section.

There should also be caution when we elevate the voices of those experiencing homelessness in creating policies for system changes for a community. Experiences are important, but so is knowledge on economics, politics and how policies impact all classes of people within a community. To elevate one voice above others will create partiality within our policies. This elevation of the rights or opinions of one group is seen through decriminalizing homelessness, where one group is elevated over another, and often business owners and homeowners experience the consequences of allowing a specific group (those experiencing homelessness) to decide how they want to receive and access housing support services. Again, the principles of Postmodernism would say we cannot assert the dominant culture’s truth upon an individual’s choice on how they would like to live as the oppressed group, even if it creates a negative outcome for others.

WHY THIS MATTERS

This has been just a brief application of Postmodern Theory, it is of importance because these philosophical ideas of people like Freud, Marx and Hegel around social constructivism heavily influenced think tanks like the Frankfurt School and Institute for Social Research that gave birth to postmodern and critical theory thoughts within academia. Now academic theories are being applied to practical everyday life and incorporated into our worldview and belief systems to a subconscious level that we may not be aware. Not all academic theories should become our way of running society. For example, Plato’s Republic is an influential part to western thought and while there is interesting dialogue and ideas presented, having a society structured as Plato outlines and seeing philosophers as the best ones to guide society is disastrous when implemented in real life.

Let us also consider the progressivism has only the end goal of creating a utopian society of perfect justice, but it is being created by tearing down current systems without presenting a new system to put in its place. As Christians, we understand that the only utopia we will experience is in the new heavens and earth after Christ’s second coming. We must understand that progressivism is continual progress towards a goal of utopian society that is not based on a Scripturally rooted understanding of creation. While the current practice applications may use similar language and sound like good interventions, this progress will move past where it is now and will continue to deviate further from Biblical truths.

Two other concepts to highlight of importance now (because they highly influence how we interact with and view people) and that will be expanded upon in the upcoming theological analysis section are creating a worldview breaking people into groups of oppressed or oppressor and where truth is located and if we can know absolute, objective truth. These are the two foundational beliefs of Postmodernism, as outlined previously in the in beginning of this section.

The complexities of poverty and people are beyond oppressed and oppressor, when we focus all our energy and money on those we have deemed to be in the oppressed group, we are missing helping those falling into financial or spiritual poverty because they were identified as being in the oppressor grouping. While most of our traditional services and funding are being focused on a small percent of the population considered vulnerable or chronically homeless; many more families continue to fall into poverty from the working and middle classes and few resources continue to exist to provide necessary preventative support or even developmental support to move them beyond being at-risk for homelessness. We are training people to become as vulnerable as possible before they can receive help; the reality of this plays out daily when people come to request rental assistance and report that they were denied assistance elsewhere because they weren’t vulnerable enough. More on what Scripture has to say about these topics can be found in the sections of partiality and group identity in the Theological Analysis Section.

Postmodernism ideas when implemented become focused on building around one’s experiences and what they view as best for their selves based upon their truth and perception of past events. Those who have experienced something, such as being a woman or living in poverty are then assumed to have a greater truth to teach those who haven’t had a personal experience with an issue. When it is believed that truth is in the person who has the experience, practitioners are wary to insert any expertise that could be perceived as pushing dominant cultural views of what is just, good, or true on those they are receiving services. Good practitioners should listen to an individual’s experiences with empathy and understanding, but there are times when someone needs the expertise of someone outside of the experience or situation to guide the individual to greater, holistic flourishing. There is an absolute truth given to us in Scripture and individual experiences don’t trump this truth. This idea will be further expanded below in sections on truth and standpoint epistemology in the Theological Analysis section.

This section has provided a critique of how Postmodern ideas influence the Housing First Theory, a further analysis of these ideas, theological implications, how we should view these ideas from a Biblical perspective and what ideas of Biblical Justice and Poverty Care are will continue within the upcoming sections.

Non-Theological Results of Housing First

The primary purpose of this paper has been to lay out what Housing First is; to better understand the language of Housing First and associated theories; to explore why the theoretical ideas behind Housing First are faulty and most importantly, to explore ways in which Housing First conflicts with Scripture and where outcomes or goals sound the same as Biblical goals but aren’t. However, it would be remiss to not briefly present current findings on the outcomes of Housing First. While research is still limited, and much is to be discovered about outcomes; we should assess if it has been effective in its stated purpose of ending homelessness.

NON-THEOLOGICAL SHORTFALLS OF HOUSING FIRST

Stephen Eide in his report, Housing First and Homelessness: The Rhetoric and the Reality (Manhattan Institute, 2020), examines the outcomes of Housing First and finds that while HF does show increased housing retention rates on an individual level; it hasn’t resulted in decreasing homelessness overall from a community systems level. Overall HF hasn’t significantly increased health, criminal justice, or substance abuse outcomes in those experiencing homelessness but has shown greater housing retention rates for those without a substance abuse disorder (Eide, 2020).

The concern is that that Housing First is being presented as the primary policy for addressing homelessness in communities, but there is yet to be evidence that it reduces homelessness beyond an individual level; reducing homelessness on a community policy scale requires a multi-faceted approach. When one-fifth of the homeless population is chronically homeless (Eide, 2020) but the primary policy implemented is built to prioritize the chronically homeless; then we are missing the mark for the other four-fifths of the homeless population. More consideration should be given for policies that treat the homeless as fully human, reduces homelessness on a community level, improves the human condition for people, and is a success beyond housing retention for a small percentage of the homeless population.

Christopher Rufo (Domestic Policy Studies, 2020) summarizes this critique well by stating, “In the end, the tragic flaw of Housing First is that it reduces human beings to housing statistics. The only metric of success for Housing First is “housing retention”—if people are indoors, it is a success, even if they fall deeper into addiction, psychosis, and despair.” Another critic, Stephen Eide (2020) presents the same idea in this way, “Someone placed in permanent support housing may have ended his homelessness, but he is only managing his poverty.”

Along with HF’s ability to reduce homelessness from a policy level, it has also shown to be ineffective at reducing housing and health care costs as originally anticipated. An example of costs associated with permanent support housing units is Redtail Ponds in Fort Collins, costing $12.4 million to build; it can house 60 residents and in its first 5 years open provided housing to 126 residents. In San Francisco, one PSH unit can cost up to $750,000. Beyond the one-time cost to build a PSH unit, we should consider the cost associated with ongoing maintenance and support services. It’s also worth highlighting that one unit may house only one person for multiple years, yet more and more people are becoming homeless. The result is more affordable housing and permanent supportive housing units must be continuously built. For example, in Arizona there were 7,000 PSH units built within a 10-year period and this amount matched their existing unsheltered homeless counts, but their unsheltered homeless counts rose 50% during this time of building permanent housing (Glock, Cicero Institute; 2022).

In 2020, under the Trump Administration, USICH presented an approach to homelessness called “Expanding the Toolbox,” a response like the previous primary approach of Treatment First. In expanding the Toolbox (2020) it is reported that federal funding for homelessness is 200% more than in 2010, yet homelessness in various subgroups is increasing. For example, unsheltered homeless counts rose 20.5% nationally from 2014-2019. This strategy of USICH was built because “federal funding increases for homelessness assistance programs have failed to reduce the number of people experiencing homeless” and asserted that “Housing first should be considered as one tool in the toolbox, but not the only tool in the toolbox.” (USICH, 2020). This “Expanded Toolbox” strategy was never fully implemented before the Biden Administration switched USICH’s priorities back to Housing First, as outlined in the Administrations “All In 2025” plan.

Theological Analysis of Housing First

We will now examine how key concepts of Housing First (HF) conflict with Biblical Care Principles (BCP) and what care or justice does look like in Scripture. The purpose of this section is to view Housing First through the lens of Scripture and to present a different framework for how to approach poverty and homelessness. Yet, it will only be an overview to present initial ideas and critiques that can be further built upon. Resources that have been used to inform this section and can be used to deepen knowledge on this subject are listed at the end of this document.

WHY THEOLOGY

Our modern way of viewing the world has become more and more bifurcated into what is science or reason and what is faith or religion; but the two don’t need to be separate. In fact, it is harmful to how we provide care for people if we separate our theology from our anthropology. When we keep the two separate, we end up with what is commonly known as works-based theology; where what good things we do is more important that how or why we do them. The “how” and “why” matter very much when it comes to the results and outcomes that care produces in an individual person and society; a faulty worldview that is not rooted in Christ will not produce the same fruit.

**5**“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. **6**If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. John 15:5-6

**17**And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Colossians 3:17

**22**Claiming to be wise, they became fools, **23**and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things; **25**because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. Romans 1:22-23;25

Scripture presents to us a way to view science, reason, man’s problems, cultural issues, etc beyond what the world and its best philosophers, scientists and psychologists can. This view of man, or anthropology, will be presented in the following section. For now, it’s important to recognize that the Bible isn’t a second-place way to approach care and homelessness; God and his Word and his Spirit (the Triune God) should be our foundation that we root ourselves in if we want to see full human and societal flourishing. If we can accept the truth that God gave us a guide to our world’s biggest questions and problems, we can recognize that the people of God should be leading the way on every justice issue (and more!) instead of following the footsteps of those who are acting in worldly wisdom.

For a man who called God dead, even Nietzsche understood that Christianity was a complete system that begins to fall apart when we give up one piece of our faith. As we’ll go over in the Anthropology section, Christianity is a whole worldview for how we understand and see the world; theology is important because if our lens is broken, our engagement with the world is broken.

“When one gives up the Christian faith, one pulls the right to Christian morality out from under one's feet. This morality is by no means self-evident. Christianity is a system, a whole view of things thought out together. By breaking one main concept out of it, the faith in God, one breaks the whole. It stands or falls with faith in God.” Fredrich Nietzsche, Twilight of the Idols

PARTNERSHIP VS PARALLEL

After this brief case built on why theology matters in how to approach humanity and God’s creation, let’s look at a couple of practical examples of why having a level of separation in approach matters.

14Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? 15What accord has Christ with Belial?[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2%20Corinthians%206&version=ESV#fen-ESV-28897b)] Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? 16What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God. 2 Corinthians 6:14-16a

When you are in partnership with someone, or yoked to them, you generally in agreement that you have the same goal that you are working towards and are willing to do certain actions together to achieve that goal. As we laid out in the previous section on Housing First as a postmodern theory, however, we discover that while some of our language and terms for care may sound the same, our goals to achieve human flourishing are different from a Christian vs non-Christian point of view. Therefore, we should be cautious of entering into a partnership of shared activities and goals with those who do not share our same worldview. Conflict will arise once one realizes the results each party is looking for is different and then the partnership will break, or one party must compromise.

Unfortunately, when it comes issues such as Housing First; it isn’t an equal partnership but Christian entities entering a partnership with Governmental and non-profit organizations that hold an authority over them. Which is why when goals no longer align (which in HF, they didn’t align from the beginning) it is the Christian organization or church that will have to make the decision to compromise or separate. For example, for Christian Counselors who receive their licensure from the state governing bodies, they find themselves increasingly at conflict with counseling goals that differ from Scripture and must decide whether to stop counseling in a way that could point people back to God or give up their license (i.e., cases of homosexuality and perceived conversion therapy). Likewise in Housing First, the government is the authority in what you can and cannot do and they often enforce this through funding restrictions. As it is with progressivism, where you may say the requirements today don’t seem so bad, you cannot control what they will become. We can wisely predict that they will progress past their goals and morality of today and to a place that further conflicts with Scripture and your ability to advance the Kingdom of God will be at risk (it will be further explored in this section that Housing First as a theory does conflict with Scripture).

**24**“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money. Matthew 6:24

Instead of working in partnership on issues, such as homelessness, we can work in parallel. When working in parallel we can recognize other organizations that are doing good works, communicate and refer people when necessary but not be held under the same governing authorities. To continue the Christian Counseling example from before, we can examine the growing approach of Biblical Counseling. Within the discipline of Biblical Counseling, there are accredited institutions that provide training and ongoing support for counselors who want Scripture to be the governing authority in addressing mental health needs. This allows Christians to provide care aligned with their beliefs, with oversight and in parallel with other organizations, such as referring a client to a physician for medical treatments or prescriptions.

We can follow this example in caring for those who are homeless or experiencing poverty. The key to walking in parallel is keeping the relationship with a person and referring or using other organizations in the gap of practical care you don’t have the capacity to provide. For example, you may not have enough funding to fully assist someone with their rent for the month, so you refer the client to a secular organization for assistance. You don’t pass their case over though, they come back to you for check-ins on goal progress and community building. From an organizational level, you may get together with other nonprofit leaders to discuss what top needs in a community are and communicate how you are addressing needs; but not joining together on shared action steps to solve them.

## **ANTHROPOLOGY**

Anthropology is defined as the science of human beings or theology dealing with origin, nature and destiny of human beings (Merriam Webster Dictionary). It derives from the Latin word “anthropologia,” the study of humanity and the Greek word “anthropos,” human being. Our anthropology makes all the difference in how we approach people and the social or personal issues they face.

“The study of human experience is theological at its core, since we are made like God to respond to Him.” (Kelleman, Forrey; Scripture in Counseling)

Who is man then? We can examine this question through the metanarrative of Christianity. Every worldview offers an answer of who man is through these four questions: who are we, what is our problem, what is the solution and what is our purpose? The answers to these four questions are found in the four stages of scripture that make up the Christian metanarrative, or way of understanding humanity.

**Creation**

**Who We Are**

**We are created in God’s image.**

**Fall**

**Our Problem**

**Sin entered the world – original sin exists.**

**Redemption**

**Our Solution**

**Jesus offers salvation and reconciliation.**

**New Creation**

**Our Purpose**

**To glorify God and enjoy him forever.**

The Four Stages of Scripture Expanded

Creation:Within Genesis 1 & 2 we see the outline of how our four foundational relationships (God, Self, Others and Creation) were intended to be. We see man created in the likeness of God, yet still a created being without full knowledge of good and evil. There was also a harmony in humans stewarding the earth while the earth produced food and life for humans.

So, God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground. Genesis 1:27-28

Fall:When Adam and Eve took a bite of the apple from the Tree of Knowledge, it brought in a separation from God. With that separation came broken relationships with ourselves, others and creation. With Genesis 3, sin entered the world, and all our perfect relationships were marred.

Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, in this way death spread to all men, because all sinned. Romans 5:12

For I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my flesh. For the desire to do what is good is with me but there is no ability to do it. Romans 8:18

Redemption:In Moses we were then given the law to help us learn how to relate to God, self and other’s again through the 10 commandments and Levitical laws. As we recurringly see in Scripture, humans are incapable of perfectly upholding the law. Yet a perfect man did come – fully God and fully human to come as the final sacrifice for our sins to reconcile us back God and to overcome the power of sin over our lives.

We have now been declared righteous by His blood, we will be saved through Him from wrath. For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, then how more, having been reconciled, will we also be saved by His life. Romans 5:6-11

Nevertheless, death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who did not sin in the likeness of Adam’s transgression. He is a protype of the Coming One. Romans 5:14

For just as through one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so also through the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous. Romans 5:19

For we know that our old self was crucified with Him in order that sin’s dominion over the body may be abolished, so that we may no longer be enslaved to sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe we will also live with Him. Romans 6:6;8

New Creation:After Christ’s death on the cross, He gave the disciples the Great Commission and then ascended into heaven. This leaves us living in the Kingdom already / not yet where we are reconciled to God and receive new life in Christ but live in a world that still experiences the results of the fall while we wait for Christ’s second coming that ushers in the final New Creation. The New Creation is where those who believed in Christ by faith are resurrected with Him to live in the new Eden, bringing us back to how creation and humans were intended to live in perfect harmony in all 4 foundational relationships (Revelation 21-22)

No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and His servants will serve Him. Revelation 22:3

For I consider the suffering of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly but because of Him who subjected it in the hope that creation itself will be also set free from the bondage of corruption into the glorious freedom of God’s children. Romans 8:18, 8:28-21

Our Four Relationships

In the four stages of the Christian metanarrative, we find how the four foundational relationships are impacted within each stage of the metanarrative. In the fall stage, our relationships with God, ourselves, creation, and others fell out of alignment with how God originally created and intended. These relationships are only restored through being reconciled back to God; then our beliefs, thoughts and actions begin the renewal process and how we approach the four relationships heads towards the ideals of the new creation stage.

**15**The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. **16**For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. **17**He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. **18**And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. **19**For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, **20**and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. **21**Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because ofyour evil behavior. **22**But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation— **23**if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant. Colossians 1:15-23

Before reviewing the two diagrams of our four foundational relationships, let’s do a quick explanation in what the four relationships are.

God: He is our creator, sustainer, and redeemer. He is triune, holy, just, righteous, wisdom, goodness, and the standard to hold our thoughts and actions to.

Self: We are the created images of God with innate worth and dignity and holistic beings; mind, body, and spirit. We can be defined by the world or by God.

Others: Systems and people that we interact with; we can’t control how they treat us, but we can interact with policies, social structures and other people in a God honoring way and by following what His Word teaches.

Creation: Humans are only one piece of creation, on the other 5 days God made animals, plants, and nature and told us to steward these well. Creation involves what we can see outside of humanity in the sciences like biology and involves our command to steward well. Natural disasters and human disease are also effects of the fall.

16To the woman he said, “I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labor you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.” 17To Adam he said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat from it,’ “Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life.18It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field.19By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return. ; 22And the Lord God said, “The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat and live forever.” 23So the Lord God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken.  Genesis 3:16-19; 22-23

**Text

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As shown in the above diagrams, when we are operating apart from God, then our worldview and interactions are informed by scientific theories, postmodernism theories, etc and how we view interpret the world and Scripture is through those lenses. Alternatively, when we are reconciled to God through Christ, we become a new creation and we view the world and its theories through the lens of Scripture. We become these new creations through heart change, also known as the sanctification process, more specifics on how this works are in the Heart and Change Theory section. We can’t disregard heart change in societal change because when we are operating in the broken relationship model, our belief and thought systems will result in broken actions. Some may still look like good results are being produced, but without heart change we won’t see individuals healed and changed in how they interact with and create society systems, other people, or creation. All we are left with is trying to legislate what we can, a person’s actions instead of modifying their care beliefs and if the Old Testament taught us anything, it’s that we’re incapable of following laws and justice is often perverted.

There will be more on the mission of the church, but it’s also important to keep in mind that besides heart change resulting in a more just society; the mission of the church results from God telling us to join him in spreading His word and creating disciples. We can’t remove evangelism and discipleship from care because God tells us to do it; but its fruit happens to be a more just society.

**16**So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. **17**Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come:[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2+corinthians+5&version=NIV#fen-NIV-28895a)] The old has gone, the new is here! **18**All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: **19**that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. **20**We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God. 2 Corinthians 5:16-20

“Second, a Christian comes to others only through Jesus Christ. Among men there is strife. ‘He is our peace’, says Paul of Jesus Christ (Eph. 2.14). Without Christ there is discord between God and man and between man and man. Christ became the Mediator and made peace with God and among men. Without Christ we should not know God and could not call upon him, nor come to him. But without Christ we would also not know our brother, nor could we come to him. The way is blocked by our own ego. Christ opened up the way to God and to our brother. Now Christians can live with one another in peace; they can love and serve one another; they can become one. But they can continue to do so only by way of Jesus Christ. Only in Jesus Christ are we one, only through him are we bound together. To eternity he remains the one Mediator.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Life Together

Heart & Change Theory

The Heart

When discussing who man is, Scripture outlines that man is complex in being both a physical, mental, and spiritual being. In the same way, Scripture offers a robust view of man in how he relates to himself through his “heart.” This section zooms in on our relationship with “self,” one of the four foundational relationships.

Modern language equates the heart with just our emotions, but the Scriptural definition of the heart goes beyond emotions and shows how man relates to himself holistically. When we talk about the Gospel producing heart change, we are talking about re-orienting and changing our beliefs, thoughts, and actions. This re-orientation in ourselves will extend out to changing how we relate to others and creation. The heart is indeed the crux of salvation, sanctification and social systems change.

Craig Troxell in “With all Your Heart” emphasizes the importance of understanding our heart and the command to “love the Lord your God with all your heart” (Matt 22:27) by stating it this way, “The heart is central to the Christian faith, as it is for other religions, but that is where the similarities end. The Bible reveals subtlety, range, and depth in its distinctive message about the heart—one that diverges sharply from ancient Greek philosophy, as well as from modern and postmodern philosophies.”

The three moving pieces of the heart include your beliefs (what you put your faith in, morals, desires, feelings); your thoughts (knowledge, imagination, memories, ideas); and your actions (choices, behavior, resisting / submitting, exterior choices. There are over 1,000 mentions of the heart in Scripture, here are a few of the passage that illustrate the how comprehensive the Bible’s view of the heart is.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight. Proverbs 3:5-6

I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you. Psalm 119:11

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. Hebrews 4:12

But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person. Matthew 15:18-20a

The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit. Psalm 34:18

These three components, while having separate purposes, also influence each other. What we desire and believe to be true, will impact the thoughts we have, which in turn will impact our external behavior. However, our choices can also begin to influence our thoughts and change what we desire or believe. How these three components work together is shown even in developing studies of neuroscience, where we see that different pathways in our brain can be re-routed through not just experiences that happen to us, but even experiences we imagine and replay in our head are incorporated into new pathways. (Pratt, Neuroscience of You, 2022) This can lead us to re-wire our brain in various micro ways. See how your belief system and desires changing can influence your thought life and then change how you respond to external environment through actions?

To describe this in a tangible example, imagine you had a bad experience with a friend hurting you and now you find yourself having personal trust issues. Your belief became that you can’t let people become close to you because they will hurt you, as shown in a singular or multiple experiences. However, you now have become a follower of Christ and you learn more about relational boundaries, forgiveness, and have a better understanding of the complexities of human sin and placing our full trust only in Christ alone. Now you have different core beliefs to influence your thoughts and actions. These beliefs were also influenced by new knowledge you gained from Scripture. Next, new beliefs begin to transform your actions, such as you choosing to risk beginning a new relationship with a friend and trusting them with personal information because you have new knowledge and beliefs. Then, as you have more positive experiences with friends, your internal thoughts of not trusting others will be replaced with positive memories. With your transformed beliefs you may also practice conversations or interactions in your brain where you have positive friend experiences. As shown in this one example, the three components of the heart all work together in a way where all three can influence and build upon each other to create change. In this example not just our relationship with self was transformed, but also how our relationships with others. For most people, how this transformation of our heart happens isn’t given much consideration or even noticed, but this is always happening on a subconscious level.

Shape

Description automatically generated with low confidence Diagram of Self & Heart Cycle: our relation to ourselves is influenced by our Heart (beliefs, thoughts and actions)

Change Theory

The complexity and capacity of how God created us, and our heart is astounding, but theology teaches us that as Christians become a new creation (through this process of the heart), it is done with the help of the Holy Spirit.

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. Ezekiel 36:26

**5**Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. **6**The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. Romans 8:5-6

In many ways the sanctification process we go through with the power of the Holy Spirit is in line with the traditional Motivations to Change Model. This model can give us a framework that is commonly used in the social sciences to explain a Biblical teaching. While in this model we can see the stages of change that take place in people, this secular model misses the key component of why and how we maintain change through becoming a new creation and in the power and truth we receive from the Holy Spirit. This model believes that the power to create change and recognize what is good lies within only us, while Christians understand they need to rely on God to understand what truth is, what is good, and to make new choices (Romans 7:14-25).

Below is the Motivations to Change diagram traditionally used and we will go through each stage and how it can be applied to receiving the Gospel message.

Shape

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Sin Not Recognized Spirit Conviction Accepting the Spirit Spirit Empowerment

Precontemplation: this is the stage where one doesn’t yet believe change is needed. This would be our life before Christ when we don’t understand that we need the Gospel.

Contemplation: this is the stage where we recognize that a change may need to take place. There are several reasons someone may want to make a change, but it is generally an internal factor (new knowledge) or external factor (something happened to us, crisis, etc.). In this stage, Christianity would teach us that we are being drawn to Christ by the Spirit and we are beginning to understand that we need the Gospel message, this could be because of internal or external factors happening to us.

But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. John 15:26

Preparation: Next, we are in the stage of change where we are getting ourselves to choose to make a change. We could think of this stage as when someone counts the cost to follow Christ (Luke 14:28-30). You are really considering if you are ready to turn for your desires to want to fully follow Christ.

Action: This is when you are actively making a change in your life and have decided that to stay the same would be worse than to change, therefor you will begin to make active choices to live in a new way. This is where the Spirit begins to move in our lives, as we repent and receive the Spirit, our heart will be transformed.

Repent, and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Acts 2:38

Maintenance: This is where you make continual choices to keep your change active. We rely on the power of the Spirit to overcome our fleshly desires and become new creations; this is where we can see the changes of heart occurring as our beliefs, thoughts, and actions are continually transformed (Ephesians 6:10-20; Colossians 3:1-17; Romans 8:26-27).

Not only do these stages of change apply to our acceptance of the Gospel message and reception of the Holy Spirit, but you can apply these stages to when the Spirit convicts you of a specific sin and prompts you to change. When our lives are being sanctified, some areas will outpace others. For example, you may not think casual lies are a problem (pre-contemplation); but then you start to feel conviction from the Spirit that they are against what Scripture teaches (contemplation); you now need to weigh the cost of the benefits of lying with what it means to follow Christ (preparation); then you begin to re-orient your heart to make different choices (action); you continue to make these new positive choices to be honest, even if you occasionally lie again, you are still keeping your desires and thoughts directed towards choosing to be honest (maintenance).

Scripture also shows us practical ways people were changed by the Spirit and how it impacted the economy; we have examples of this theory of change and its success. In the Gospels we see the story of Zacchaeus who followed Christ and experiences a heart change and gave back the tax money to people he’d unfairly charged (Luke 19:1-10); In Acts we see the city of Ephesus break out in riots because of the economic threat to the idol system when Christians no longer took part in the idol trade (Acts 19:23-41); and in Acts when Paul and Silas cast out the demons from a young girl and her master became enraged at losing his income (Acts 16:16-24).

Throughout this section, I hope you have come to an understanding that Christianity does have a system of change that can be explained using the framework of the Motivations to Change Model but also understanding that the power to create and maintain change is done through the Holy Spirit. Additionally, we know that change first needs to take place in our heart (beliefs, thoughts, and actions), thus societal change won’t occur without individual heart change and individual heart change won’t happen apart from accepting the Gospel message.

COMMON KNOWLEDGE

God created everything – nature, animals, and humans and the Bible even claims that all of creation testifies to it’s Creator and that we should be able to know Him by what he’s created (Romans 1; Psalm 19). He created people with a special role to look over the rest of creation and steward it. To steward creation means to use the skills and knowledge we were born with to invent new things, to work, advance technology to help people, to bring out the best of creation to help others, etc. It shouldn’t surprise us, just as good things fall on believers and unbelievers (Luke 6:25-26), that unbelievers also are able to observe, become knowledgeable, invent, and steward creation; they were made with the same mandate as believers. They just don’t yet understand that the purposes of their work should be used to glorify God.

While there is common grace and knowledge bestowed on all people; we should be aware that there is room for their knowledge to be used for un-Godly purposes and in ways that aren’t in line with His values. We can learn a lot from experts in areas of economics, biology, neuroscience and even psychology and sociology; but we still need to have critical thinking to ask if this is in line with or conflicts with Scripture. In modern culture we like to think of the sciences and religion as two separate entities, but God create everything, and His truths and creation can be observed in the sciences as well. Religion isn’t just a moral code for us while everything else we need to know about humans is learned through the sciences, God is over both realms – they physical and spiritual. We also know there are many theories and debates humans have in psychology, biology, evolution, economics, neuroscience, philosophy, sociology and with so many ideas and changing information out there, we must ask ourselves, what is true? We know the Scripture is true and accurate and if you don’t currently believe that then this whole section is a moot point for you. If we believe Scripture is the only unchanging truth we have and we believe God did create everything; then it follows that we must hold secular observations and discoveries up to Scripture. This is even more important when it relates to humans because they were made in God’s image and our misunderstanding of people can create eternal consequences for their souls.

Again, if your foundation is not in Christ, then you risk your whole house collapsing as you are not understanding people based on what is true. We need to be more critical of if secular truths and observations of humans are producing fruit that is in line with how God made man and His purposes. If they aren’t, and we can’t find a defense for a theory in Scripture or it contradicts Scripture, we need to set it down and pick up a theory that is. Christians don’t need to settle for trying to redeem a faulty theory or practice model. We can rely on the teachings of Scripture while incorporating knowledge that doesn’t contradict Scripture and using wisdom to know how to integrate multiple disciplines of the sciences together in a way that is God honoring and cares for people as God’s image bearers and eternal, holistic beings.

When we look at what is wise, we should be careful that we are listening to God and not people giving advice like Job’s friends. People have good intentions but apart from the wisdom of God, they will offer us faulty answers. While there is common knowledge and grace, we can’t interpret findings or fully understand creation apart from God.

**12**But where can wisdom be found? Where does understanding dwell? **13**No mortal comprehends its worth; it cannot be found in the land of the living. Job 28:13-14

**4**“Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation. Tell me if you understand. **5**Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it? **6**On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone— **7**while the morning stars sang together and all the angels[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Job%2038&version=NIV#fen-NIV-13801a)] shouted for joy? Job 38:4-7

You asked, ‘Who is this that obscures my plans without knowledge?’ Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. Job 42:3

**Other Theology Principles**   
  
This section will be both an explanation of Biblical Care Principles and a critique of how HF practice applications conflict with BCPs.

PARTIALITY

Within Housing First and Postmodernism there are several examples of partiality. Partiality is when we favor one group of individuals over another; in Scripture this looks like not favoring someone because of their economic status or showing favor based on what they can do for you (Leviticus 19:15; James 2:1-9). While no policy can create equal outcomes for all people, we should be hesitant of practice models that so drastically ignore the rights of businesses, employers, and landlords and encourages emphasizing the rights of the homeless population by giving nonprofits and local government more money for doing so. We should also be concerned about partiality in how people are screened for services as intersectionality is applied more and more in who is prioritized for housing; we will begin to see partiality towards certain groups based upon exterior qualities. Again, going along with this way of prioritizing is incentivized by the federal government by providing for funding to communities screening in this way.

MORAL PROXIMITY

While prioritization of services and policy creation is leaning towards partiality in the Housing First Model. While the creation of our modern welfare system encourages people and churches to outsource care to the government, God has other ideas on our individual responsibility and the churches’ responsibility to care for others. As we step into our call to care for others, we need some guides on who is our first responsibility to help, which is what we learn from Moral Proximity.

Icon

Description automatically generated Diagram: Moral Proximity, also known as Concentric Circles of Care

Our first circle of care responsibility should be to people we are in personal relationship with, our family, friends, those we interact with on a high level but especially our biological family members. The second circle of responsibility is to take care of our Christian family members / Church body and our final circle of care responsibility is to all others who are not part of the Church.

**8**Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. Timothy 5:8

**10**Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers. Gal 6:10

**6**In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=acts+6&version=NIV#fen-NIV-27103a)] among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. **2**So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. **3**Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them Acts 6:1-3

**17**If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? 1 John 3:17

We don’t want to participate in unjust, partial systems by determining who we help by where we get the most personal gain; we want to look at all the need in front of us and know where God asks us to first invest our resources and time. If each of us practiced the principle of moral proximity and took care of the needs of our neighbors and family, we would see a reduced need for corporate and government assistance programs. Sometimes another’s need is beyond our capacity, and we need to call on the larger Church body (Acts 4:32-35) to share its resources. There is also a beautiful testament the Church has to non-believers when they see us doing care and community well; then the Church really does shine like the lamp on a hill and draws people in to see how Christ cares for them.

**34**“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. **35**By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” John 13:34-35

VOLUNTARY PRINCIPLE

Some will use passages like Acts 2 and 4 or Leviticus 25 to teach that Jubilee and Christians selling property means that wealth should be redistributed by the government. This is an inaccurate interpretation of passages demonstrating how God’s community cared for each other and trying to apply it to government law. There is also a misunderstanding in that neither of these New or Old Testament examples show forced wealth redistribution or even wealth distribution, because Jubilee was the end of a debt / crop lease and keeping land in a family, not a complete forgiveness of debts or changing of property from one family to another.

Both examples do show Christians (or the Israelites) voluntarily following a path that God has laid out to care for one another well and to meet the needs of our neighbors by creating just ministries and policies that provide temporary assistance to our brothers and sisters facing financial poverty.

The Voluntary Principle is demonstrated well in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, or the collection for the Jerusalem churches. In these two chapters we see Paul reminding churches that God loves a cheerful giver, that giving is a conviction between you and God, the joy of assisting our brothers and sisters in Christ and giving is mutual based upon need. The application of the Voluntary Principle is to allow the Holy Spirit to change the hearts of people to want to give and meet the needs of others, this isn’t something that can be forced but people must recognize their role in stewarding the resources God blessed with them and recognizing they can share their abundance and even stretch themselves to give more, trusting God to continue to meet their daily needs.

**2**In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. **3**For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, **4**they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord’s people. 2 Corinthians 8:2-4

**12**For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have. 2 Corinthians 9:12

**13**Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. **14**At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. The goal is equality, 2 Corinthians 8:13-14

**6**Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. **7**Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 2 Corinthians 9:6-7

The early church found joy in giving because they did it of their own free will and in line with the Spirit. Today, people would still agree, it feels better to voluntarily give to others and organizations than to pay taxes, although it is still our responsibility as Christian citizens to pay taxes and submit to government. Beyond being a cheerful giver, 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 challenge us in our views of generosity, stewardship, and trusting God with our financial resources. These are heart change and sanctification lessons that don’t happen in systems of forced wealth redistribution. Yet, we see in the Early Church the impact in people’s lives because of the Christian’s voluntary and radical heart changed generosity.

There are two conflicts of the voluntary principle within Housing First. The first we should assess is the benefits of local or federal governments heavily regulating business owners or landlords on how they interact with the homeless population. Not only does this lack individual nuance by creating mass policies, but it also takes away the ability of employers and landlords to work on a voluntary, individual basis with those experiencing poverty to seek solutions that work for both parties. There is another conflict of the voluntary principle in participation of services. As shown in the Motivation to Change model, the significant piece missing from understanding the motivation to change is the Holy Spirit. Within a secular practice model this leaves you with forcing people to follow rules or a voluntary participation model where people have no real catalyst for change. When we bring the Gospel into our care of people though, we see business owners, landlords, and those receiving services going through the sanctification process to voluntarily participate in a solution, to give generously, to think about how they use their businesses, and to have the motivation to find help for their addiction, mental health, or finances.

EMPOWERMENT OF GLEANING

Building upon the Voluntary Principle, we look now at the Old Testament concept of Gleaning. This practice fulfills a Levitical law of how the Israelites were to live and treat each other in their community. It requires both the giver and the receiver to participate; for the landowner to not reap their full harvest and income and for the marginalized to come collect what was left to meet the needs for their selves and their family (Deuteronomy 24:19-22; Leviticus 19-9:10; Ruth 2).

**19**When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. **20**When you beat the olives from your trees, do not go over the branches a second time. Leave what remains for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow. **21**When you harvest the grapes in your vineyard, do not go over the vines again. Leave what remains for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow. **22**Remember that you were slaves in Egypt. That is why I command you to do this. Deuteronomy 24:19-22

Christians then have an example of what God’s heart looks like in terms of our individual responsibility to care for other and to share our earnings with others; but in a way that empowers others to participate in providing for their family by using their own abilities.

Our approach then in homelessness and poverty ministry should not be a system only approach and it shouldn’t include an individual responsibility only approach. A gospel-centered solution won’t get stuck in the binary of politics but bring together the idea of all people to have role and responsibility in caring for those experiencing poverty. A conflict with Housing First and a gospel-centered approach is that with a focus on homelessness being caused by systems alone; they disregard individual responsibility. Gleaning teaches us that both play a role, and neither can be neglected. While the term empowerment is used in Housing First and related theories, its definition is more in line with autonomy than the Christian view of free will and empowerment.

AUTONOMY VS EMPOWERMENT – FREE WILL

Empowerment is more than the ability to make decisions for yourself, it is an opportunity to use how God created you to achieve His purposes. Making decisions for ourselves should be informed by our view of God. When this vertical relationship isn’t healed, we are making decisions for ourselves out of our fallen nature and understanding of the world. God created free will, which means we are free to make decisions in line with His will or not. As He gives everyone choice and free will, we are to allow others the freedom to choose to follow Christ or not and if they choose not to participate in services.

What free will and empowerment don’t mean is lack of negative consequences because of our choices. This is the conflict of the Christian view of empowerment / free will and autonomy within Housing First. Within Housing First and ideas like the Harm Reduction Model, we see the thought that someone can make any choice and we will reduce or remove the negative consequences and thus reduce one’s understanding of their need to follow Christ or be changed by the Spirit. This is principle is autonomy (self-government) and not empowerment, the ability and opportunity given to us from the Spirit to answer yes to the will of God. As followers of Christ, we give up our autonomy and self-rule to submit ourselves to the teaching of Christ; but Housing First keeps people in a position of self-rulership without submission to an absolute truth that exists outside of their autonomy and knowledge.

One major concern of removing the consequences of free will is taking away the motivation to want to see change in people’s actions; but it also takes away the recognition that they need God too. If we look at Parable the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32), we see a son who thought the best choice was to receive his inheritance and live how he chose, this of course results in negative consequences and brought him to a place of understanding that he needed to return to his father. When he was in the pig pen, he realized what depravity he had chosen for his life and recognized his need for the father.

Many times, people make the decision to live how they choose, but then we keep them comfortable enough in the pig pen of consequences to never recognize that there is holistic flourishing available to them through Christ. Instead Housing First is overly focused on decriminalizing homelessness, removing expectations of behavior at shelters, permanent housing without using support services, and putting more effort into street outreach than the homeless put into accessing support services. This example of interrupting the lessons of the prodigal; is what Eide meant when he said that you ended someone’s homelessness but are only managing their poverty. Because HF only sees a house as the solution the problem, they lack to see a person’s humanity and need for holistic flourishing.

Our response to poverty, because we recognize humans as holistic beings, should be to meet physical needs and to share the Gospel, that results eternal salvation and heart change now. Therefore, we need to work in models that allow us to provide crisis and development ministries that include preaching, teaching, and discipling people into right relationship with God and others while respecting their free will to choose to follow Christ and his teachings.

**9**if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials and to hold the unrighteous for punishment on the day of judgment. **10**This is especially true of those who follow the corrupt desire of the flesh[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2+Peter+2&version=NIV#fen-NIV-30511c)] and despise authority. 2 Peter 2:9-10

Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. Galatians 6:7-8

VICTIM VS FREEDOM IN CHRIST

The insistence of Housing First and other Postmodern Theories to use intersectionality and to emphasize autonomy of decision making; is creating a mindset of those receiving services to keep their focus on their victim status and doesn’t present the opportunity of true freedom in Christ. Christ provides us the example of suffering with and caring for the marginalized, the victimized, and the oppressed while also sharing the freedom He could bring to their lives.

As society pendulum swings back from an emphasis of legalistic holiness, we now can swing too far into embracing our brokenness. Instead, our theology is both suffering and freedom. We can recognize we are broken sinner or victims of oppression without it becoming our identity and moving forward to accept freedom in becoming who God created us to be (Galatians 5; Romans 8:31-39; Luke 4:18-19; 2 Peter 2:18-22; Colossians 1:22; Ephesians 2:1-10).

The critique of postmodernism is that it views people as the oppressor or oppressed; but God sees us in two different groups: slaves to sin or slaves to righteousness. We can approach poverty by recognizing that people have be oppressed by human systems and unjust individuals while pointing them to where true freedom is – Christ. Christ didn’t come into the world to bring in a new political system, he came to bring people back to God, provide freedom from sin, and make a path to live as a new creation (or the creation we were originally intended to be). People are more than victims; they are conquerors in Christ; they are sons and daughters of a King; they are full of worth and dignity as creations of God. Biblical trauma care will be expanded withing the Understanding Trauma section.

**10**For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. Galatians 2:10

**17**Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! 2 Corinthians 5:17

**17**and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: **18**“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, **19** to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” **20**Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. **21**He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” Matthew 4:17-21

**12**Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— **13**children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God. **14**The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:12-14

GROUP IDENTITY AND GUILT

Understanding our identity is another dichotomous teaching of Scripture. For Christians, our identity is found in being the image bearer of God and while we experience individual salvation, we become part of a group and family (Ephesians 4). Scripture also provides us with a view of generational consequences (the splitting of Israel into two nations because of Solomon and his son’s continuation of heavy taxes, 1 Kings 12) and teaching that we won’t be held for responsible for our parent’s sins (Ezekiel 18).

Postmodernism would say, you belong to a group based upon external characteristics and when you belong to that group you are responsible for all the actions of the rest of group, or you are a victim because of the group you belong to. Your understanding of who you are is also defined by the group you have been placed in. This contradicts Scripture in that we were made in unique images of God, we held responsible for only our sins, and our group identity is built around being the body of Christ, which includes people of every demographic and nation. Scripture also shows examples of how decisions of previous generations still impact us. This is the tension: we are individuals but are still impacted by others and belong to a Christian group identity. Once we understand that tension, we can understand that a policy such as red lining impacted several following generations without holding an entire group (that didn’t participate in these policy formations) as guilty for the impacts the policy created.

As we’ve seen, Housing First is influenced by postmodern theory and we should expect to see a continuation and increase in determining who receives services based up the group they belong to instead of looking at their individual situation. With the emphasis in equity and inclusion in policy making, awarding money, and housing policy, we need to pay attention to if vulnerable groups of people are unable to access assistance because while they may have experienced oppression as an individual; they socially belong to the guilty group instead and aren’t prioritized to receive assistance. We should be cautious of participating in practice models that don’t see people as unique image bearers of Christ, but as defined by and held guilty or free according to their external group qualities.

STANDPOINT EPISTEMOLOGY

“…Theology, as revealed in Scripture, supplies the categories for people to understand their own experience. Theology is the standard by which people should measure their experience, not human experience the standard by which people measure theology.” (Pierre; [**The Dynamic Heart in Daily Life: Connecting Christ to Human Experience**](https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/52080914)**)**

Epistemology is our theory of knowledge and how we know things. Standpoint Epistemology then is gaining our knowledge through our experiences instead of from God. Instead of theology informing us, we use our experiences to interpret Scripture and make it fit our definition of what is true and good. Trends of HF show that more emphasis is being placed on knowledge of truth only coming from those who have experiences poverty or homelessness.

Lived Experience is increasingly included as the primary feedback for creating policies on a local and national level that will inform how we address poverty, homelessness and focus government funding. It is a value to assess our policies and their impact on individual lives to see if the desired effects are occurring; but it is also difficult to develop large scale social policies based upon unique, individual experiences of people who will all interpret their circumstances and experiences differently. We need to rely on experts that understand large scale economics and community policies while paying attention to feedback from those with lived experience. For example, when you report results of a research study, you don’t take the qualitative experiences of 20 interviews and expound those out to report results and impact on a whole population in the same way you would with quantitative research that had a sample size of thousands of participants. Both can work together to tell a holistic story including data and stories to share a complete picture; this is how experts creating social policies and individual experiences should work together.

Again, the issue is not with including lived experiences, it is over valuing them as the sole proprietor of truth, especially when developing large scale policies that need to produce a result that benefits the most people or if their understanding of truth contradicts theology.

This leads to the next issue of standpoint epistemology and lived experiences in HF and its related practice theories deriving from postmodern thinking. If each person is their own source of truth; this directly conflicts with the Christian view that God is the source of truth. If the vertical relationship between a person and the Father isn’t healed, their understanding of truth won’t be rooted in God’s word. In HF, with so many goals and treatment plans being directed and chosen to be followed at the will of the individual needing assistance; they may not be able to create a treatment plan that leads them to holistic flourishing because their arrow of truth and what is best isn’t pointing in the right direction.

Think of it like this, Jesus said, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.” (Mark 2:17). How did people know they were sick? Jesus told them, he told them of their sin and the solution and those who recognized their problem sought his truth for the solution. In the medical realm, we go in for physicals or tests when we’re sick and then doctors or other experts provide us with a treatment plan, which we can of choose to follow of our own free will, but we must recognize that we don’t have all the answers for our health and need some guidance if we’re going to choose to make a change. Likewise in poverty, mental health, or spiritual health; we can know something is wrong but need expert guidance and support in creating a treatment plan – we aren’t always the sole holder of knowledge, and our flourishing comes from conferring with others who have multiple perspectives and disciplines that can speak into solutions for our complex problems. We only need to be open to being told that we are sick and that we need a Healer that has an objective truth that exists outside of our experiences.

OTHER ECONOMIC PRINCIPLES  
Work

The creation mandate given in Genesis included work and stewarding creation; one of our core purposes is to develop, create and work. Unfortunately, work has become equated with the unfulfilling way we have to make money to do the things we enjoy and meet out basic needs. The Work Life Training by the Chalmers Center state’s this view like this

If even the thief is called to work with his hands in order to have something to give (Ephesians 4:28), then surelyGod has called all of His people to do good work—not out of some ethic of independence—but as God's chosen means by which people participate in and contribute to the life of the community. Work is good; it was a part of creation in the Garden of Eden and will be a part of abundant life in the new heavens and the new earth. However, in North America today, both low-income and higher-income communities have broken views of work (Work Life, Chalmers Center)

Paul emphasizes this teaching in both 2 Thessalonians 3:16-24 and 1 Timothy 5:11-15; lack of participating in purposeful work turns humans into idle beings who cause issues in the community and don’t participate in providing for their selves or others. We can’t disregard purposeful work because of broken views of others and creation, although we should prioritize the vertical relationship to God as the way to change individual hearts and their view of using their resources for others and creation. Non-perfect job markets and employers aren’t a reason to not fulfill our call from God to participate in our community and economy to create and steward our resources, including our talents and treasures.

**8**nor did we eat anyone’s food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. **9**We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you to imitate. 2 Thess 3:8-9

Christians should seek homelessness and poverty solutions that include the encouragement of purposeful work instead of providing a house or benefits that discourage gaining meaningful employment. We should also create opportunities for unemployed or underemployed individuals to steward their resource and uphold their dignity and worth as an image bearer that was created to participate in their community.

Talents & Gifts

Everyone has been granted a unique skillset and gifts from God; in the context of Christian community, we are told to use our spiritual gifts to build the Church and in the Parable of the Talents we learn to invest what God has entrusted to us. Scripture doesn’t teach that we will have the same or equal talents, gifts, or resources. We are taught to use what we have been blessed with to bless and build up others. Whether it’s in a ministry empowerment model, providing volunteer opportunities, seeking shared financial investment, or running a job ministry; we must include work and gift stewardship as part of our response to poverty. At the risk of becoming a broken record, Housing First focuses on providing a house to the homeless but once they have a stable roof over their head and stability is achieved; looking for a meaningful way to steward their resources or to find purposeful work isn’t included. Paul warns us that this idleness isn’t good for individuals or their community.

**4**For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, **5**so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. **6**We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=romans+12&version=NIV#fen-NIV-28252a)] faith; **7**if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; **8**if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead,[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=romans+12&version=NIV#fen-NIV-28254b)] do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully. Romans 12:4-8

**4**There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. **5**There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. **6**There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work. **7**Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. 2 Corinthians 12:4-7

**26**But his master answered him, ‘You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? **27**Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. **28**So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. **29**For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. Matthew 24:14-30

Lending & Interest

Scripture has much more to say about justice in economics, and most of those principles involve how to treat each other well in our business dealings by not creating a larger profit for ourselves by taking advantage of the poor; to be fair in charging all people for goods or services; and not to charge outrageous interest rates that create an added burden to the poor (Nehemiah 5:1-15; Amos 8:3-7; Isaiah 58). Some modern-day examples (in a non-exhaustive list) that would be considered unjust by these standards would be places like pay day lenders; rent to own businesses; contractors taking advantage of disaster victims in the recovery process by charging more for rebuilds when every day contractors take money for a promised services and don’t complete the work and even individuals price gouging online.

If you lend money to any of my people with you who is poor, you shall not be like a moneylender to him, and you shall not exact interest from him. Exodus 22:25

It is well with the man who deals generously and lends; who conducts his affairs with justice. Psalm 112:5

You shall do no wrong in judgment, in measurement of weight, or capacity. You shall have just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin; I am the Lord your God, who brought you out from the land of Egypt. Leviticus 19:35-36

In Housing First, there is recognition that part of the affordable housing shortage is unfair policies and practices of landlords and lending practices. We can acknowledge there have been and continue to be slumlords and lending practices that are further disadvantaging the poor and not providing them opportunities for wealth creation and progress. Again, the biggest shortfall of HF and the postmodern view of poverty is that it has single focus on mass policies to fix unjust landlord and lenders without consideration of the Gospel message that can transforms hearts. Christians leaders and pastors should consider how they can participate in models and solutions that will allow them to include the Gospel message and discipleship of landlords, employers, and lenders to participate in just economics practices and not participating in models where the solution to unjust housing practices doesn’t allow for Christian teaching or preaching. Better yet if they can provide affordable housing and include discipleship on economic justice as the Church and work in parallel with government affordable housing solutions.

UNDERSTANDING TRAUMA

Being trauma-informed may seem like the new buzz word around; but trauma has been in the Christian worldview since Genesis 4 when Cain murdered Abel and it continues through lives of people in the Old and New Testament. Science can share with us knowledge and observations of physical and mental impacts of trauma to learn from; but Scripture gives us a theology of suffering and care; Tim Keller argues that the Christian worldview offers the best answer to why we suffer.

“So suffering is at the very heart of the Christian faith. It is not only the way Christ became like and redeemed us, but it is one of the main ways we become like him and experience his redemption. And that means that our suffering, despite its painfulness, is also filled with purpose and usefulness.” Tim Keller, Walking with God through Pain and Suffering

Darcy Strickland offers a great perspective on being trauma-informed in Biblical Counseling:

We want Scripture to be the controlling lens we use. We need to study Scripture widely and deeply in order to bring words that refresh a weary, troubled soul. We want to make case-specific, biblical applications for traumatized individuals. However, we need to be on guard against taking on a worldview that is centered around trauma. Though trauma is important to identify and understand, it cannot be the sole lens by which we approach or understand a suffering person. Our doctrine of man, God, salvation, and sanctification must be robust and remain in view as we learn more about trauma. Our beliefs also lead us to the kind of humility that seeks wisdom. For example, we consider: What do I need to learn, understand, and know about the experience of trauma before I care for this tender soul? How has the person in front of me been impacted by trauma? And how does Scripture speak to their heart and situation? To proceed in counseling in such ways is to be both trauma-informed and biblical.

Stricklands words echo a concern about the secular trauma-informed care (TIC) model in that it lends itself to be the sole way in which we view people and leads to treatment that doesn’t provide healing to trauma and instead promotes feelings of ongoing victimization. Like all secular theories, such as the Model of Change previously reviewed, the healing of trauma in TIC is provided only through human efforts and lacks the biblical view of Christ being with us in our suffering, a Christian view of the purpose of suffering; and the healing provided to us in the power of the Spirit.

“We need to recognize that we indeed are competent, not because of our knowledge of trauma or because of our experience of trauma, or because of a certain technique, but because of God within us, because of the Word that He has given us, because of the fact that the Holy Spirit is with us.” John Babler, ACBC Podcast: Biblically Informed Trauma Care

Christianity, because it has a holistic view of people, extends its trauma informed care beyond only biological or neurological solutions. We can’t disregard the four foundational relationships or the importance of bringing in a Christian worldview and framework to understand trauma, pain, our experiences, and the path for healing.

“Suffering can never be reduced to mere physiological events that can be reprogrammed. Instead, suffering is connected to the meaning we ascribe to the events” “The same event, even the same trauma, means different things to different people. Meanwhile, new experiences bring challenges to the way we make sense out of life. When it brings challenges that confront our old ways of seeing, we can become wobbly and must either reaffirm and deepen our old worldview, or the old shatters as we make way for something new” Ed Welch, EMDR and the Meaning of Suffering

Going into the details of how to provide Biblically Informed Trauma Care goes beyond the scope of this guide on Housing First; but the goal of this HF Guide would be to understand that we don’t need to feel ill equipped without answers for the trauma and suffering of individuals experiencing homelessness; we have a more robust view / solution of trauma and have counseling options beyond only secular theories.

Resources about Biblically informed trauma care will be listed at the end of this guide, but briefly listed here are three foundations for trauma care. Any believer can assess the impact of trauma and safety, be aware of the impacts of trauma, and build a trusting relationship and point back to Jesus / Scripture. Be aware of your personal skill level and training in Biblical counseling or pastoral care when creating plans and providing ongoing care. Refer to those with more experience and training as the care needed goes beyond your knowledge or capabilities and learn under certified Biblical Counselors or Pastors if you want to grow in your abilities to provide a safety or treatment plan.

1. **Discover the impact** of trauma in someone’s life by asking specific and ongoing questions about physical impact (sleep, appetite, panic attacks); shame or guilt; questioning faith; hypervigilance; intrusive thoughts; overwhelming emotions; and avoidance.
2. **Assess and establish safety and stability**: safe home environment; physical safety; relationally stable; spiritual stability; assess self-harm or suicidal risk. Create a safety and stability plan after assessment.
3. **Work to build trust** and consistency in the relationship as a guide by understanding healing isn’t linear, knowing when to refer to others, having a plan with goals, hear the needs of others, having humility and relying on our ultimate trustworthy guide – Jesus.

(Stickland; Foundations of Trauma Care for Biblical Counselors).

BIBLICAL JUSTICE

My argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. But how had I got this idea of just and unjust? A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line. What was I comparing this universe with when I called it unjust? C.S. Lewis

To adequately address Biblical Justice or what poverty is according to Scripture would take longer than space provides in this handout (see resources at end for learning recommendations), but it is an important concept to highlight as we talk about the justice issues of homelessness, poverty, and vulnerable populations.

A secular view of justice and social activism has no root in morality or a reason to exist without an absolute truth basis for righteousness, which in our cultural postmodern views, doesn’t exist. A secular view lends itself to either seeking an idealistic utopian and facing disappointment when the disillusionments of our inability to achieve a perfect society is realized, alternatively, one disengages with the world completely with a fatalist view of society as something unredeemable and a lost cause. Christianity offers us a middle ground of “cynical idealism” (Watkins, Critical Biblical Theory). Under cynical idealism we have an understanding that we live in between the Kingdom now and the Kingdom to come; we believe in incomplete redemptive change now but ultimate completion of a new heavens and earth in its perfected glory at the second coming of Christ (Revelation 21).

**3**And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. **4**‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Revelation%2021&version=NIV#fen-NIV-31059b)] or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. Revelation 21:3-4

Christianity does offer us a basis of what is good, true, righteous, and just – God tells us to seek these things under His definitions. We understand what is right and good by reading the whole of Scripture and understanding how we should treat both fellow believers and the rest of humanity. We understand justice as receiving what we are due. Which in the Christian faith is being owed death and eternal separation from God due to our sinful nature. In the Biblical economic sense of justice, we can reference back to the principles we covered on providing opportunities for gleaning, jubilee, paying fair wages, not charging interest, not showing partiality etc.

“Justice is not something God has. Justice is something that God is. AW Tozer

A Biblical view of justice also views our root problem as sin not systems; people and systems are corrupted by sin and redeemable only through being reconciled through Christ back to God and receiving the power of the Holy Spirit to experience new life and heart change. In this way, we see grace in not receiving a just punishment for our sins and being empowered to treat people righteously and justly. We end this section with a few passages speaking about God’s love for justice, mercy and righteousness and the reminder that we engage with social issues because God has a heart for the vulnerable and oppressed; but we also must base our response out of His Word and heart; for it is the only true basis for a just society.

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[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=micah+6&version=NIV#fen-NIV-22657a)] with your God. Micah 6:8

“I, the Lord, love justice; I hate robbery and dishonesty. I will faithfully give them their wage and make with them an enduring covenant.” Isaiah 61:8

**9**“This is what the Lord Almighty said: ‘Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. **10**Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the foreigner or the poor. Do not plot evil against each other.’ Zechariah 7:9-10

“Your throne is built on righteousness and justice; loyal love and faithfulness stand in front of you.” Psalm 89:14

**4**For the word of the Lord is upright, and all his work is done in faithfulness. **5**He loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the steadfast love of the Lord. Psalm 33:4-5

**12**Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, **13**bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. **14**And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. **15**And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Colossians 3:12-15

**3**Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, **2**to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people. **3**For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. **4**But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, **5**he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, **6**whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, **7**so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. Titus 3:1-7

GOVERNMENT VS CHURCH ROLE

The role of government versus church is a large and historic question that requires wisdom to navigate. There is a complicated past and many opinions on different types of governing society and the implications of having a government sanctioned Christian society. For the sake of this guide, we will focus on what Scripture does say about the roles of government and Church without the debate of what it has been.

Before Samuel 8 and the appointment of Saul as King, God’s people operated under a theocracy with God as the ultimate King leading His people through priests and judges (1 Samuel 8). With the appointment of a human King, we are warned about the negatives of having a human King who won’t be fully just or righteous,

“He will take the tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and to his servants” 1 Samuel 8:15

**14**he followed the advice of the young men and said, “My father made your yoke heavy; I will make it even heavier. My father scourged you with whips; I will scourge you with scorpions.” **15**So the king did not listen to the people, for this turn of events was from God, to fulfill the word the Lord had spoken to Jeroboam son of Nebat through Ahijah the Shilonite. 2 Chronicles 10:14-15

Even with the warning that a man led government will come with corruption and incomplete justice; Israel still wanted a King so **“**that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles.” (1 Samuel 8:20). This focus of government, regardless of type, rings true today. Government has a primary role to execute justice: to reward what is good and punish what is wrong; to hold evildoers accountable and to keep people safe.

**13**Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution,[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Peter+2&version=ESV#fen-ESV-30396b)] whether it be to the emperor[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Peter+2&version=ESV#fen-ESV-30396c)] as supreme, **14**or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. 1 Peter 2:13-14

**4**For the one in authority is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God’s servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Romans 13:4

What this looks like is what is often debated, but we know regardless of our personal feelings of how much government is needed to provide a framework for safety and justice for its people; we as Christians are asked to honor and pray for our authorities.

**7**Give to everyone what you owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor. Romans 13:7

**17**Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor. 2 Peter 2:17

No matter what government system we have and if we feel they have gone too far in the power and scope of purpose, the purpose of the Church remains. The purpose of the Church can flourish under any type of government system. We can’t abandon our mission and commission to share the Gospel message and be ambassadors of Christ to people because we disagree with the reach of government, and we can’t ignore our mission because the government has a system set up of safety net policies. Before we reach our final section of how the Church can respond to homelessness, we will discuss what the mission of the Church is.

MISSION OF THE CHURCH

Between social policies of the past 100 years and the Enlightenment period starting the separation religion and reason; our view of man has been split between the spiritual and material. From Josephus commenting on how the Christians cared for infants and the sick to Thomas Chalmers advocating for the poor and creating new schools; Christianity has historically held a central role in the holistic care of people. Slowly our philosophies and policies began to say, the government will take care of the material needs of people and the Church can take care of spiritual matters. As previously established; God created us as holistic beings (mind, body, spirit) and the Church is responsible and commissioned to love people in word and deed; to care for people’s physical and spiritual needs.

Evangelism and Discipleship

**19**Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+28&version=ESV#fen-ESV-24211b)] the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **20**teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Matthew 28:19-20

From the Gospels to the Epistles, we see this message. When we ourselves are reconciled to God, our journey doesn’t end. We are now on mission with God. Like the workers Christ sent out to preach the good news and performs healings in towns; we are invited to follow and be a part of what God is doing to redeem creation. The book of Acts has many examples of what it looks like to join in this mission to preach the Gospel. We don’t stop working with people when they choose to follow Christ; we also provide discipleship on how.

Not only does Housing First not allow evangelism, or proselytization as the government calls it, it also doesn’t leave space for discipleship. There is no eternal or temporal transformation offered. Discipleship is how one becomes matures and learns how they have been living doesn’t line up with God’s will. This process applies to all people, rich or poor, but we’ve left it behind in our homeless and poverty alleviation programs. We need to bring back the view that people are physical and spiritual; our modern programs have only been addressing physical needs (a house; more money from welfare) and not spiritual needs.

**18**As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. **19**For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified John 17:18-19

**2**He told them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. Luke 10:2

**14**Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. **15**Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. Ephesians 4:14-15

**20**We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God. 2 Corinthians 5:20

Word and Deed - Spirit and Physical

Poverty alleviation systems, like Housing First, focuses only on the physical / tangible needs of people and thus when it asks for the Church to partner, it means give us your deeds and leave the Word behind. Scripture is clear that word and deeds go hand in hand.

Throughout the four Gospels we see stories of Jesus healing people physically and meeting felt needs while sharing a larger truth of who He is and His purposes. Let’s examine just one of Jesus’s teachings on using meeting physical needs to point to a larger truth – the feeding of the 5,000. Jesus got everyone’s attention by performing a physical miracle; but He says we’re missing it if we don’t see who He is and where our true fulfillment comes from.

**26**Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. **27**Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal.” **28**Then they said to him, “What must we do, to be doing the works of God?” **29**Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.” **35**Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.” John 6:26-29; 35

Similarly, he tells the woman at the well:

**13**Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, **14**but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” John 5:13-14

The word / spirit portion of our ministry is critical; Jesus really cared about the oppressed and their physical needs, but He didn’t perform miracles without teaching about God and our eternal need for Him. We should be modeling our care of the oppressed and vulnerable after Jesus’s ministry. Our compassion to see healings and tangible needs met is rooted in God’s love of humanity which this leads us to want “comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God” (2 Corinthians 1:4b) and “weep with those who weep” (Romans 12:15b). Our response also embodies compassion by incorporating Jesus’s example in viewing people as eternal beings in need of a Savior for holistic, eternal flourishing that goes beyond temporary physical needs.

**16**Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. **17**For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. **18**So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

**17**And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Colossians 3:17

**22**But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. **23**For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. **24**For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. James 1:22-24

To do ministry as Jesus did, includes seeing people as holistic beings with physical and spiritual needs and therefor participating in models that care for people in word and deed. When the Church partners with organizations within the Housing First Model; they will be asked to provide resources such as money and people but asked to leave their Gospel behind. The Church can do word and deed ministry to care for the poor again; we can respond with a parallel system that meets the needs of people with the competency and power brought to us by the Spirit & Word.

How the Church can Respond

SUMMARY

Before we answer the question of how the Church can look at responding to homelessness through its body and ministries, let’s outline what’s been previously expanded on for the core reasons Housing First and Christian Theology conflict.

From a basis of worldview, Christianity and Housing First operate out of different framework systems for understanding who man is, his problem, the solution, and what man’s purpose is. These different ideas of Christian vs Postmodern systems of understanding anthropology and sociology result in conflicting practice approaches.

At its core, Christianity believes that man is a holistic image-bearer that first needs their vertical relationship to God healed through following Christ and receive the power of truth and change through the Holy Spirit. Then their horizontal relationships with self, other and creation will be impacted and aimed towards the mission, truth, righteousness, and justice of God. This conflicts with the idea of Postmodernism where man is autonomous and the arbitrator of mission, truth, righteousness, and justice and where man’s problem and solution are seen solely through systems of oppression.

With different understandings of anthropology and sociology, Housing First has the goal of providing affordable or free housing without requirements to those rated as most vulnerable and changing housing policies to favor permanent supportive housing projects, resulting in decreased funding for preventative and support services. A Christian view sees the solution to homelessness as more than providing housing, but seeking holistic flourishing through a Gospel-centered approach that incorporates principles such as reconciliation to God, gleaning, moral proximity, free will, work, fair economic principles, voluntary principle, using talents and gifts, avoiding partiality, and seeing everyone as an image bearer of God with inherent worth, dignity, and capability.

Conflicting practices of the two theories also include differing views of what empowerment means, free will and consequences, suffering and trauma, victimization, and motivation to change. These result in conflicts of upholding treatment models such as Trauma Informed Care or the Harm Reduction Model. Conflict of the two theories also occurs with Key Concepts of Housing First such as: decriminalizing homelessness (free will and consequences, partiality, standpoint epistemology, work); improving homeless response systems by removing barriers (work; talents and gifts; group identity); coordinated points of entry (moral proximity, group identity); lived experiences (standpoint epistemology); focus on equity and inclusion (partiality, victim vs freedom in Christ, group identity); and voluntary participation (work, talents and gifts, free will and consequences, gleaning and empowerment).

From a non-theological stance, there is still debate whether Housing First has produced any results that have decreased homelessness. This one size fits all policy approach has been hyper focused on a singular population and solution. More money is being spent by the government to implement this approach and we are initially seeing higher housing retention rates for those provided permeant supportive housing but aren’t seeing an overall decrease homelessness nor overall improvement of quality of life for those experiencing poverty.

If the proposed housing solution isn’t resulting in its goals for homelessness reduction and it conflicts with the Christian worldview and poverty alleviation principles; we must ask if it’s a system we want to participate in as a Church or if we could take a different approach where we freely share the Gospel and don’t reduce our participation to handing over our money and / or people resources. As we explore building a new church system and ministries, we keep in mind that our aim isn’t the same as the government’s in creating a top - down policy that is applied to all communities, but to create ministries that allow for an individual and community contextualized approach.

We can lay down some general principles, but there can be no automatic application. If we are truly personal, as created by God, then each individual will differ from everyone else. Therefore, each person must be dealt with as an individual, not a case or statistic or machine. If we would work with these people, we cannot apply the things we have dealt with in this book mechanically. We must look to the Lord in prayer and to the work of the Holy Spirit, for the effective use of these things. (Francis Shaeffer, The God Who is There pg. 130)

BUILDING A CHURCH SYSTEM

The Christian sociological position is that the sociological problems which exist, regardless of what they may be, are a result of the separation that has come between men because of sin. Now the world should be able to see in the Church external marks which exhibit that there is a substantial sociological healing possible in the present generation….It is not enough for the Church to be engaged with the State in healing social ills; though this is important at times. But when the world can turn around and see a group of God’s people exhibiting substantial healing in the area of human relationships in their present life, then the world will take notice. Each group of Christians is, as it where, a pilot plant, showing that something can be done in the present situation, if only we begin the right way. (Francis Shaeffer, the God Who is There)

Let’s continue on this idea of building a Church led care system that recognizes people as individuals, applies Biblical poverty alleviation principles, recognizes systems as impacted by sin, and exemplifies healing of vertical and horizontal relationships.

The Church does have valuable resources of finances, people and knowledge of humanity and care to create a comprehensive system of care for the most vulnerable in a community. It will cost a church more energy and work to create programmatic and organic local mission opportunities than to send money to secular nonprofits already doing work. Churches should be encouraged though; they have no lack of capability within their congregation and resources that if they want to take this step to be more involved in homelessness and poverty; they can create effective and holistic ministries that operate in parallel with organizations in the Housing First Model. More details on what ministries can look like will be explored in following sections.

We know that when we say yes to Gospel ministry and following Christ that there will be a cost to following. While there are many Biblical examples of the cost of dedicating your life to the ministry of God, Paul gives us consistent teaching on counting the cost and earthly suffering experienced to live in full obedience to Christ.

**23**I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. **24**However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God’s grace. **35**In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’ Acts 20:23-24; 35

A modern example of living the cost of discipleship, in the face of death because of advocating for the vulnerable in World War II, along being a great teacher on living in Christian community is Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

“[Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life...Grace is costly because it compels a man to submit to the yoke of Christ and follow him; it is grace because Jesus says: "My yoke is easy and my burden is light.](https://quotes.pub/q/such-grace-is-emcostlyem-because-it-calls-us-to-follow-and-i-443528)” Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Cost of Discipleship

Yet even knowing there will be a cost to fully dedicating ourselves to Gospel preaching and discipleship in missions, Bonhoeffer and Paul both encourage us that the work as already been completed in Christ. Our fruit of ministry and endurance in the face of suffering come from obedience and living in the grace of Christ.

# “Great will be our astonishment in that day, and we shall then realize that it is not our works which remain, but the work which God has wrought through us in his good time without any effort of will and intention on our part. Once again we simply are to look away from ourselves to him who has himself accomplished all things for us and to follow him.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Cost of Discipleship

We take this time to reflect on the cost of Gospel ministry and creating parallel church systems because we recognize this is a hard road of going against culture, of investing more into discipleship and volunteer leaders, more time investing in equipping the saints for every good work, more finances required, re-allocating building space, experiencing ministry failures, being critiqued by local organizations on how you’re providing care in a Christ-centric way, etc. Writing a check and sending people to other existing organizations is an easier road, but we must ask if that is the road God commissioned and called us for. Investing in secular models is good work, but it’s not Gospel work. One could even look at our analysis of Housing First presented and argue that this specific secular model isn’t doing good work within its stated goals to end homelessness and it directly and consistently conflicts with Biblical poverty alleviation principles.

Instead, what would it look like to re-direct the resources we are sending out and kept them in the Church body and building something new (or expanding what is already being done)? Within the pews of our congregations are every type of person needed to care for the homeless and poor in our community. From lawyers, doctors, nurses, dentists, teachers, employers, landlords, financial advisors, volunteers, donors, pastoral leaders, counselors, etc; we have people waiting to be equipped and discipled into how to use their talents and treasures to serve others. When we combine all our people resources with money resources and add in our knowledge of who man is, his problem, solution, and purpose – the Church is well positioned to make an impact for the Kingdom and truly reduce homelessness and financial poverty while also meeting spiritual needs. If you’ve ever doubted if a Church can make an impact, ask yourself why other organizations and government partners so often ask churches for help or resources; because even they recognize that the Church has a large and valuable resource pool. This section has all been intended to say, the Church needs to recognize the resources and capabilities it has for itself and decide if they are ready to go all in on changing their paradigm of outsourcing elements of care and instead take on its call to Gospel-centered local missions, knowing it will be a harder journey.

WALKING IN PARALLEL

Before we get into some practical examples and ideas of ministry churches could do; it’s worth expanding on the idea of working in parallel with government and secular partners. To add clarity to this conversation, this handout has been a guide for the corporate Church and as we talk about partnerships, we are specifically talking about partnerships created between organizations on the corporate level. There are many people in various professions that work in secular settings and part of our approach is equipping them on how to live by Christian values and use their professional call to serve the poor.

Instead of entering partnerships with secular organizations that are operating under the Housing First Model, we can create ministries that work in parallel. This means that we are not working together per se, but we communicate and are open about what we can offer people in the community and ensure that others know of our dedication to be a part of the homelessness solution, but we will do it under our own leadership and finances.

One example of what this looks like can be seen in the Disaster Response Model. Within long-term recovery groups for a community there is the Disaster Case Management committee that often oversees extra government funding and other community financial resources as part of their case management for survivors. To walk in parallel, the Church may sit on the DCM committee and discuss overlapping cases and share knowledge of available community resources, but the Church has its own system for intaking requests, care teams to look at all needs, prayer teams, project teams and financial pools to provide care for survivors. A church may refer a family to the DCM if they need extra financial resources, but they keep the relationship and provide care and follow ups for the family. Within this same long-term recovery group, the Church may also choose to sit on volunteer or project committees in the same way but decide not to participate in the Spiritual Care committee. This would be wise as the Spiritual Care committee promotes many religions in its outreach and as Christians, we believe that the only truth and way back to God is through Christ and it would harm our message if we made our religion just one option of equal importance to others. In this example of walking in parallel, the Church and its representatives are still a part of the community disaster response and recovery efforts; sharing what it is doing and what it can provide to families, but setting up a separate system to intake and provide ongoing care to families that allows the Church to be in direct relationship and providing holistic resources to as many families as possible.

There may be a season where you feel like your church needs to support another organization that operates within the Housing First Model. This may because they have more financial capacity to build large housing complexes or affordable housing units, which is an advantage that government funding does provide to a community. A church may then want to be involved in providing affordable housing but aren’t able to build or manage any units, but are able to work with the people placed in affordable housing. In this example, we work to find ways to outreach and build relationships with families that allow us to provide other wrap around support ministries separate from other involved organizations. If you are working with a housing complex owned by a nonprofit; approach with what you can provide for their residents and be creative in how you serve to gain relationship. Keep the end goal in mind, that you want to bring families into a setting where you can provide Gospel-centered care. Be willing to have the conversation and even negotiate that if secular organizations would like your resources that you will be bringing the Gospel into your care and helping as Christians. When we are clear about who we are and how we can help at the beginning, we can have expectations set about each organization’s role.

In an ideal world, the Church would be able to create care systems that worked cooperatively and in parallel with the Housing First system. However, there may be specific circumstance that you still work directly with organizations under the HF Model; this requires wisdom, advocacy for relationships, and seeking ways to still preach the Gospel. We will next look at some practical applications of care ministries churches can offer. (See separate Church Care Guide for more details on ministry development)

BENEVOLENCE VS OUTREACH MINISTRIES

As a church looks at forming and growing its care systems, it is beneficial to develop two strategies and ministry assessments for internal and external care. Typically, churches would call this their Benevolence and Local Outreach or Missions ministries. While many of overarching care principles apply to both, there are a few applications and decision-making processes that are different between internal and external care ministries. There also should be a level of differentiation on financial resource allocation between internal and external care to follow the Moral Proximity Principle, which teaches us that we should prioritize the needs of the Church body.

Before focusing on your local missions and outreach strategies; make sure you’ve done an internal assessment of needs and processes for church members to make assistance requests and for how they will be reviewed and answered. It’s okay to focus first on developing your internal system; not only will you be following the principle of moral proximity, but you’ll also develop leaders, culture and systems that can be used in local outreach ministries.

Another way that internal and external ministries differ is the emphasis placed on evangelism and discipleship. Within the context of Benevolence or internal care ministries, your team will likely take a discipleship approach as they are members of your church body. For those just connecting to your church or that you’re outreaching, often you are going to take an evangelistic approach. What’s the difference? Discipleship requires teaching, correction, and encouragement to be obedient to the teachings of Christ and bear spiritual fruit while evangelism includes preaching, apologetics and reaching out to share the Gospel to those who don’t follow Christ yet.

PRACTICAL MINISTRIES

Whether developing internal or external ministries of care, there are several principles that have been outlined to keep in consideration. Creating ministries doesn’t haven’t to be overwhelming and there isn’t an exact formula. Consider resource mapping your church; what’s your budget, what talents do you have in your body and what key goals you want to focus on first. Never be afraid to start something and keep working on it as you go, there’s no perfect ministry but that doesn’t mean there aren’t guidelines to consider when creating care ministries.

What Ministries Should Include / Recap - Principles to Include

Here’s a few overarching principles to keep in mind in any ministry you do. First, have a Biblical view of humanity; both in your volunteers and those you are serving. View them as holistic creations of God who operate within the four foundational relationships. How you understand people will impact every conversation and ministry approach you have. Second, no matter what physical need you are meeting through a ministry, always include opportunities for evangelism and discipleship. Third, remember the Biblical Poverty Alleviation Principles we outlined previously, incorporate ideas of empowerment, work, gleaning, partiality, moral proximity, emotional and spiritual care, the voluntary principle, freedom in Christ, placing your identity in Christ, encouraging people to use their gifts, fair money practices and the authority of Scripture for all of life.

When it comes to how these principles are applied; there is a lot of flexibility and ways to create a ministry with them. You may also not place as much emphasis on them equally through all your activities. For example, if a family has just experienced a crisis (job loss, home loss, family death) then you will use principles such as identity in Christ and providing emotional care, but you won’t be as worried about gleaning, work, and empowerment. In that moment when immediate relief is needed, you can meet the felt needs and then as you continue to work with the family and they are no longer in crisis, increase your use of the principles for work, gleaning, using gifts, etc.

Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world. James 1:27

**15**Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. **16**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? **17**In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. James 2:15-17

Because every circumstance is different; we work in relationship and apply our guidelines for ministry based on the person in front of us. It’s helpful to remember the mantra, relationships over rules. With rules we operate in a way that tries to moderate human behavior to get our desired outcomes and we sway towards treating people as a statistic we see on paper instead of treating them as a holistic human. Not leading with rules first does not mean your ministry won’t have boundaries, expectations, or consequences involved. The idea of the mantra is to keep people the focus of what you’re doing, to be relationship centric instead of letting a set rule dictate your ability to show grace or flexibility to respond in a way that could be more beneficial to the flourishing of the family you’re working with.

Instead, we create a care system that is so strongly rooted in Scriptural principles that we have the freedom to care for every person as a unique and loved being that God created. Housing First takes a top-down approach, of creating a system of rules that people need to fit nicely in to achieve the desired outcomes. The secret of ministry success is that success comes from a messy, intentional relationships approach.

Here is another example of how a messy, relational ministry that incorporates Biblical principles may look. Let’s look a clothing closet ministry and some of the people you may encounter. For the sake of this example, let’s assume the Church has decided they want to implement a clothing thrift store as part of their empowerment and gleaning model. Family A visits and they have a new foster child placed with them, so they receive a shopping couple to give an even bigger discount at the thrift store to purchase a new wardrobe for the addition to their family. Family B just lost both incomes and is working with your financial care team to create goals for re-employment, budgeting and exploring benefits, so you team provides a free shopping voucher to get needed winter gear for their family. Family C is a low-income working family and not seeking other services, but they want to save money in their budget, so they shop at the thrift store for extra clothing items. Family D was trying to sneak additional items out without paying, so you collect the items and ask them not to return and inform them that can’t come back to shop until they sit down with the Director to talk about stealing resources and how trust can be rebuilt to allow them to shop at the thrift store again.

How did you know that each of these shoppers had a different life circumstance and needed a different response? At some point, someone had to build a relationship and start a conversation to learn more about what was going on in the family’s and learn what they needed in that moment. It is also worth highlighting that while their physical needs were met in different ways; each family should have their spiritual needs considered and to be approached with love that points back to God, encouragement to join a Church community or to seek assistance from their existing Church community, and surrounded by a body of Believers that continually shares the truths and freedom in Christ. In these three examples, that could look like comforting the family who lost jobs, listening to the struggles of the family learning to incorporate a foster child, reminding the families of how to steward their resources in a God-honoring way, providing encouragement and praise for using their gifts to seek work, or inviting any of the families to join you at a church service or group.

Developing a ministry by using guiding principles instead of a specific step by step formula will be difficult for many people; there is a tension to walking alongside people in a messy, nonlinear relationship. It seeks more from us and asks us to confront our own relationship with God. It is worth the effort when you see the joy and excitement in volunteers who feel empowered and equipped to provide care to others and see the changes of those being served as they feel understood and like someone believes in them. As a final reminder, people don’t want to feel like a project being built by someone else following an instruction manual. People want to be in mutual, respecting relationships that build and fill them up. We are created to belong to a community that is founded in the characteristics of God; this is what everyone is longing for and needs to be invited into.

“Christian brotherhood is not an ideal which we must realize; it is rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate. The more clearly we learn to recognize that the ground and strength and promise of all our fellowship is in Jesus Christ alone, the more serenely shall we think of our fellowship and pray and hope for it.” **Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Life Together**

Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. Galatians 6:2

**24**And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, **25**not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. Hebrews 10:24-25

**9**Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. **10**As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: **11**whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. 1 Peter 4:9-11

Equipping Leaders

For your ministry to survive, it is important that you also focus on your leaders and volunteers. Not only do they also need care and discipleship; but the role of the pastor and church leader is to equip them for their own personal ministry. A Senior Pastor or Missions Director may set the vision and culture for a ministry, but their role also includes building up and releasing the church body to participate in the Great Commission.

**11**And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=ephesians+4&version=ESV#fen-ESV-29267c)] and teachers,[[d](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=ephesians+4&version=ESV#fen-ESV-29267d)] **12**to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, **13**until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood,[[e](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=ephesians+4&version=ESV#fen-ESV-29269e)] to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, **14**so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. **15**Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, **16**from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. Ephesians 4:11-16

“Let every man abide in the calling wherein he is called, and his work will be as sacred as the work of the ministry. It is not what a man does that determines whether his work is sacred or secular, it is why he does it.” **A.W. Tozer, The Pursuit of God**

Building a system of leaders in care can be called the Jethro Principle and is also seen in the way the apostles split up responsibilities within the Book of Acts and the daily bread disbursement to the widows. Ministries need to practice leadership principles such as equipping members into using their gifts, creating space for all members of the body to serve, figuring out how the parts of the body can work together and creating a sustainable care system that shares the burden with trained leaders.

**17**Moses’ father-in-law replied, “What you are doing is not good. **18**You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone. **19**Listen now to me and I will give you some advice, and may God be with you. You must be the people’s representative before God and bring their disputes to him. **20**Teach them his decrees and instructions, and show them the way they are to live and how they are to behave. **21**But select capable men from all the people—men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain—and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. **22**Have them serve as judges for the people at all times, but have them bring every difficult case to you; the simple cases they can decide themselves. That will make your load lighter, because they will share it with you. **23**If you do this and God so commands, you will be able to stand the strain, and all these people will go home satisfied.” Exodus 18:17-23

Programmatic vs Organic

Most of this handout has focused on what would be considered programmatic ministries. Within a church you may develop formal programs, but you will also likely also see a lot of organic care ministry. Since every member of the body should be equipped to participate in the Great Commission, we should expect them to build relationships with those around them and create care and ministry opportunities in their regular, everyday spheres of life.

Programmatic ministries are those that are primarily developed and sanctioned by a Church with clear goals, expectations, and purpose. Within homeless ministries, some programmatic ministries you could develop are: a food market, a clothing closet, a jobs ministry (such as Jobs 4 Life), a Benevolence request team, a prayer team, Stephen’s Ministers, internal Biblical Counseling, operating affordable housing units, housing homeless families on a rotating basis, providing trained care mentors who provide case management activities, home repair projects, yard work, helping with moves, financial and loan education, organizing a medical clinic, providing holiday assistance such as meals or gifts, offering nutrition and cooking classes or providing educational training options.

Organic ministries are those that happens when the members of your Church serve where they are and in the relationships they have. This could look like lawyers offering pro bono services, landlords offering a sliding scale fee to families getting back on their feet, employers taking a chance on a new hire, referrals to trained Biblical Counselors, a neighbor seeing an elderly couple that needs their driveway shoveled, create a welcome basket for new neighbors, helping a member of your small group Bible study move, offering child care to a mom working overnight, watching children for a parent who wants to go back to school, listening to a coworker going through a divorce, comforting a family who experienced the death of a loved one, helping a friend make a rental payment, running a sober living home, or supporting a neighbor as they decide to seek treatment for an addiction.

There are so many programmatic and organic ministry opportunities to name, the above lists are simply the first ideas that came to mind within a few minutes of typing, but the lists could go on and on. The larger section of this handout is “How the Church Can Respond,” but it may be better to ask the question, how can’t the Church respond? Truly, Christians reach every sphere of our society. They are in every profession and neighborhood, the Church body unleashed and working together can create a significant impact on not just poverty and homelessness but flourishing in every aspect of people and society.

Can you imagine a day when less rental assistance is needed from the government because neighbors were supporting each other not just with financial payments, but also connecting people to employers, helping make a way to get a better education, or offering sliding scale housing? The journey may feel daunting now at the beginning, but JRR Tolkien in Lord of the Rings wrote and shared wisdom about the hard adventure ahead and how ordinary people can be used. There are many ministry lessons we can learn from this classic series on perseverance and endurance, to do what is right in the face of evil, to keep going when you feel like evil is winning, going on the adventure with a team, and counting the cost to take the difficult road.

Even the smallest person can change the course of the future. JRR Tolkien, Lord of the Rings

“I wish it need not have happened in my time,’ said Frodo. ‘So do I,’ said Gandalf, ‘and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us.”

We recognize that as we ask how the Church can respond, we are joining a difficult journey with other saints to seek transformation for people and society that requires perseverance, patience, and complete reliance on Christ. In many ways it is the road less travelled, it is easier to let the current government system operate without giving a thought to how the Church can create parallel ministries. The lists of ministries ideas might feel out of reach an overwhelming, but Francis Shaeffer reminds us of the extraordinary advantage we have in the Spirit.

“Is it not amazing: though we know the power of the Holy Spirit can be ours, we still ape the world’s wisdom, trust its forms of publicity and its noise, and imitate its ways of manipulating men! If we try to influence the world by using its methods, we are doing the Lord’s work in the flesh. If we put activity, even good activity, at the center rather than trusting God, then there may be the power of the world, but we will lack the power of the Holy Spirit. The key question is this: As we work for God in this fallen world, what are we trusting in? To trust in particular methods is to copy the world and to remove ourselves from the tremendous promise that we have something different—the power of the Holy Spirit rather than the power of human technique.” **Francis A. Schaeffer,**[**No Little People**](https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/631990)

Dynamic Neighboring (Gathering & Meeting Needs)

Now we’ve looked at the different purposes of internal and external ministries, what programmatic and organic ministries are, and reminded ourselves that the Church can make an impact on homelessness because of the power of the Holy Spirit. This is all good information, but many churches don’t want more ministries to operate, but they could consider offering a structure for dynamic neighboring, which is a combination of organic and programmatic ministry.

Dynamic Neighboring is coordinated and responsive holistic care through ongoing, responsive relationships that leads to mutual Christ-centered flourishing and draws on the resources of the larger Church body to meet physical and spiritual needs.

What is programmatic would be creating a team of care leaders who could act as mentors, trainers, and resource guides for those who are participating in organic care. The care team would be overseen by leadership and at church, so there is accountability and pastoral oversight. This is one way to implement the Jethro Principle. It relies heavily on the art of neighboring, people out building relationships in all spheres of their life and looking at how they can meet the needs in front of them. They might get to a place though where the need is more than they can meet with their own finances or maybe they’ve never known someone with anxiety before and don’t know how to respond. This is where the Church Care Team comes in, they can share how to make a financial request, help provide other church and community resource referrals or provide guidance to the Church Member on how to respond. Then if the Care Team is unsure how to respond or what other resources are available, they reach out to the Church Lead for feedback. If the Church Lead is unsure, they can reach out to the pastor providing oversight.

The Right Ministry for your Church

Throughout this section, we have taken a high level look at how the Church can engage with ministries and principles to keep in mind. These have only been ideas on how a church can get involved, there are many various ways for a Church to respond. If people are unique, so is each church body. Discover the culture and resources of your individual Church for clues on how to best engage. If you seem to have a lot of people with pastoral giftings, consider including counseling ministries. If you have high giving you can allocate towards direct care, then offer rental and utility assistance to the community. If you have a lot of business leaders, get them into a group and encourage them to use their business to serve others. If you have a lot of handymen, offer a small home repair projects ministry. There are countless ways to get involved, but that doesn’t mean a Church has to do all things. Do a few things faithfully and see the fruit that comes. Obedience isn’t about doing everything, but faithfully doing what God has put before us.

**5**What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. **6**I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. **7**So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. **8**The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor. **9**For we are co-workers in God’s service; you are God’s field, God’s building. 1 Corinthians 3:5-8

A Community Church Care System

A Church doesn’t have to do everything because each individual church is also a part of the universal Church body. Churches could look at partnering with other churches instead of first looking at what nonprofit organizations they could support. There are a lot of churches that are doing great ministry work, we could partner together and do more. We could build on each other’s strengths as individual churches to create an even larger impact in a community as the universal church, collectively responding.

Collaborating could look like partnering with other churches in the community to adopt specific schools and coordinate geographically on which schools a church will adopt. It could look like collaborating with other churches by starting a clothing ministry because another one is already hosting a food pantry, or even providing both together. It could be finding out a church member needs help with childcare, so you are able to refer to another church body that offers discounted preschool options.

Again, as there are many different organic and programmatic ways to respond to homelessness through care ministry, there are countless ways to partner with other churches in our community. The point is to have a collaborative, unified Gospel-centered approach to care as the Church in your community. Being humble enough to recognize one church may not be able to do everything, but we are part of the Kingdom work being done and to turn first to other Bible-believing and Christ-Centered churches and organizations to partner with before partnering with secular organizations.

LAST THOUGHTS

This guide has been focused on explaining what Housing First is, it’s clashing worldviews with Christianity, and to provide encouragement to the Church to build a parallel church care system. Let’s use this analogy as continued encouragement to consider creating a parallel system instead of partnering with Housing First. Think of your position as being an investor in the business sector and a company comes to ask for funding from you. However, this company doesn’t align with your mission or values, and they haven’t presented you with data that shows they are profitable, and when you dig into their finances you find that other investors are seeing a diminished return on their investment. You wouldn’t invest in this business just because you thought they were good people trying to sell a product that was theoretically good, you would ask hard questions about their business plan and look at investing in another company. Another analogy is this, a Buddhist comes to you to partner on a community outreach but told you that it must be done under than banner of their religion and you can’t preach the Gospel. You wouldn’t agree to do outreach if you had to represent yourself as a Buddhist instead of a Christian, yet this is what we do when we partner with Housing First Models. It has a set of beliefs and a postmodern worldview that does conflict with Christianity. Secularism isn’t devoid of religion, it provides its own framework to answer who man is, his problem and the solution and we need to exercise wisdom on how to interact with it and how we can preach the Gospel to win people from secularism to Christ.

Finally, the hope is, as you finish this guide, you would be reminded that the Church has a call from God to care for people in body, mind, and spirit. That the Church is competent to provide care through belief in God, the word of Scripture, and power and truth of the Holy Spirit. Not only does the Church have the competency and ability to lead in homelessness and poverty alleviation, but we do it with a Gospel message that meets the needs of people now while providing freedom from this world and for eternity. The Gospel is the light on a hill, the answer to the darkness of our world.

**14**“You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. **15**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. **16**In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. Matthew 5:14-16

**23**His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’ Matthew 25:23

Ending Cultural Apologetic Theologian Quotes

It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree helping each other to one or the other of these destinations. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all of our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations - these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit - immortal horrors or everlasting splendors.” **C.S. Lewis,**[**The Weight of Glory**](https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/1629232)

“God did not make this person as I would have made him. He did not give him to me as a brother for me to dominate and control, but in order that I might find above him the Creator. Now the other person, in the freedom with which he was created, becomes the occasion of joy, whereas before he was only a nuisance and an affliction. God does not will that I should fashion the other person according to the image that seems good to me, that is, in my own image; rather in his very freedom from me God made this person in His image. I can never know beforehand how God's image should appear in others. That image always manifests a completely new and unique form that comes solely from God's free and sovereign creation. To me the sight may seem strange, even ungodly. But God creates every man in the likeness of His Son, the Crucified. After all, even that image certainly looked strange and ungodly to me before I grasped it.” **Dietrich Bonhoeffer,**[**Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian Community**](https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/168889)

“When man fell, various divisions took place. The first and basic division is between man who has revolted and God. All other divisions flow from that. We are separated from God by our guilt—true moral guilt. Hence we need to be justified upon the basis of the finished substitutionary work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet it is quite plain form the Scriptures and from general observation that the separations did not stop with the separation of man from God. For, secondly, man was separated form himself. This gives rise to the psychological problems of life. Thirdly, man was separated from other men, leading to the sociological problems of life. Fourthly, man was separated from nature.”

“The Bible says that in the moment that we accept Christ we pass from death to life. This is total antithesis at the level of the individual man. Once we begin to slip over into the other methodology – a failure to hold on to an absolute which can be known by the whole man including what is logical and rational in him – historic Christianity is destroyed, even if it seems to keep going for a time. We may not know it, but when this occurs, the marks of death are upon it and it will soon be one more museum piece….Finally and with due reverence, may I emphasize that not only should we have genuine compassion for the lost among whom we live, but also concern for our God. We are His people, and if we get caught up in the other methodology, we have already blasphemed, discredited and dishonored Him – for the greatest antithesis of all is that God exists as opposed to his not existing; He is the God who is there.” Francis Shaeffer, The God Who is There

Resources

Helpful Websites

Federal USICH website: <https://www.usich.gov/>

Federal Hud website: <https://www.hud.gov/>

Northern Colorado Continuum of Care: <https://www.nocococ.org/>

PDF Collection of Articles, Homelessness Plans, etc used in this Guide: serve68.org/references

Books and Articles

While there are many additional books on the topics listed, the below are some top recommendations.

Biblical Poverty Alleviation

The Least, The Last, the Lost of Mez McConnell

Loving your Community: Proven Practices for Community-Based Outreach Practices

Church in Hard Places: How the Local Church Brings Life to the Poor and Needy

Discrimination and Disparities by Thomas Sowell

Wealth, Poverty and Politics by Thomas Sowell

The Trellis and the Vine: The Ministry Mindshift that Changes Everything by Colin Marshall

Work and our Labor in the Lord by James Hamilton

What is the Mission of the Church: Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom and the Great Commission by Kevin DeYoung

Becoming Whole: Why the Opposite of Poverty isn’t the American Dream by Brian Fikkert

When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty without Hurting the Poor and Yourself by Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert

For the Least of These: A Biblical Answer to Poverty by Anne Bradley

Counting the Cost: Christian Perspectives on Capitalism by Art Lindsley

The Tragedy of America Compassion by Marvin Olasky

Counseling & Soul Care

The Gospel for Disordered Lives: an Introduction to Christ Centered Biblical Counseling by Robert D Jones

Hearts and Habits: How We Change for Good by Greg Gifford

Side by Side: Walking with Others in Wisdom and Love by Edward Welch

The Church as a Culture for Care: Finding Hope in Biblical Community by T Dale Johnson

Scripture and Counseling: God’s Word for Life in a Broken World by Robert Kelleman

Biblical Counseling and the Church: God’s Care Through God’s People by Robert Kelleman

With All Your Heart: Orienting your Minds, Desires, and Will Towards Christ by Craig Troxel

The Dynamic Heart in Daily Life: Conneting Christ to Human Experiences by Jeremey Pierre

Gospel Centered Counseling: How Christ Changes Lives by Robert Kelleman

Walking with God through Pain and Suffering by Timothy Keller

Theological Culture and Social Theory

Sanctorum Communio by Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Cynical Theories: How Activist Scholarship Made Everything about Race, Gender and Identity – and Why this Harms Everybody by Helen Pluckrose & James Lindsay

Confronting Injustice without Compromising Truth: 12 Questions Christian Should Ask about Social Justice by Thaddeaus Williams

The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism and the Road to Sexual Revolution by Carl R Trueman

Why Biblical Justice is not Social Justice: An Urgent Appeal to Fellow Christians in a time of Social Crisis by Scott David Allen

The God Who is There by Francis Shaeffer

How Then Shall We Live by Francis Shaeffer

Death in the City by Francis Shaeffer

The Consequences of Ideas: Understanding Concepts that Shaped our World by RC Sproul

Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian Community by Dietrich Bonhoeffer

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