

“The Least, the Last, and the Lost is an incredible resource that speaks to an area that is often neglected and overlooked. There is nobody more credible than Dr Doug Logan, Jr., who has an extensive background in urban ministry in poor communities throughout America, to write and call Christians to care about the things that God cares about. This book is not only informative and practical, but it exudes the calling and command that God gives all Christians to care for the impoverished, meeting them where they are with the gospel that saves lives.”

ISAAC PETIT-FRERE,

Lead Pastor, Ru Tampa, FL

“In a world where the brokenness of our cities is often overlooked, Doug and Mez shine a crucial spotlight on the underserved communities that many have forgotten. During the church planting boom of twenty years ago, countless leaders chose more prosperous areas, avoiding the seemingly insurmountable challenges of ministering to the poor. However, Doug and Mez have not only reminded us of the need to engage meaningfully with those in need, but they have reignited the call. They remind us that the poor are not a problem to be solved but people to be served and uplifted. This book is compelling, revealing why engaging in such ministry is crucial for all communities. You will be inspired to see the transformative power of serving and investing in often-overlooked people as you read these pages.”

ERIC MASON,

Senior Pastor, Epiphany Fellowship, PA

“Poverty is pervasive and, as a kid from Camden, NJ, I know it well. However, liberation from poverty’s grasp is possible through the power of the gospel. This book lays the blueprint for navigating this great escape. This book proclaims that the lost can be found, the last will be first, and the least will see the Most High. As I pastor in Wilmington, DE, I’ve used these principles to lead and love well in my context.”

PASTOR R. DERRICK PARKS,

Lead Planter of Epiphany Church of Wilmington, DE

“Government policies and church mercy ministries often aim to serve the poor, but do they address the root of the problem or merely offer temporary relief? Without criticizing past efforts, Dr Doug Logan and Mez McConnell encourage us to rethink our approach, providing clear insights and practical strategies rooted in the gospel, sustained through discipleship, and implemented by the local church. *The Least, the Last, and the Lost* offers theological depth and practical tools from leaders who serve on the block, not from an ivory tower. I highly recommend it.”

TOMMY KIEDIS, Ph.D., D.Min.,

President, Lancaster Bible College, Capital Seminary & Graduate School

“I am the target audience for this book. I pastor at a center-city church that desires to serve our last, least, and lost neighbors but needs help to do so effectively. Doug Logan and Mez McConnell have provided just that help. They culturally educate. They biblically encourage. They pointedly exhort. And they practically instruct. This book is uncomfortable to read in the way many of us need, as it exposes misconceptions and apathy. But then it builds up and shows a way forward for churches. I am grateful for these trustworthy, committed men of God and this resource they have written for His church.”

BARNABAS PIPER,

Assistant Pastor, Immanuel Nashville

“There is perhaps no one more experienced with the realities of urban life and ministry than Doug Logan, Jr. and Mez McConnell. From childhood to church planting and pastoral ministry in the inner city, Doug and Mez have firsthand knowledge of ministry amongst the urban poor. Doug and Mez’s insights demonstrate how to be faithful to the Bible while showing the love of Jesus to those so often neglected. A must-read for those desiring to bring the good news of Jesus to life for the inner city.”

BRYAN LAUGHLIN,

Chancellor and CEO, Grimké Seminary

DOUG LOGAN, JR. & MEZ McCONNELL

THE
LEAST

THE
LAST

& THE
LOST

POVERTY IN AMERICA & THE LOCAL CHURCH



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FOREWORD

The Least, The Last, & The Lost is about poverty in America. Its aim is to inform Christians about the continued presence of poverty in one of the world's largest economies, and it seeks to engage believers in how they should approach and address the issue. While the problem is complex, there is no doubt that Scripture calls us to care for and about the poor. That call echoes God's own care and love for those who experience poverty. Many of us view poverty as a wholly individualized issue rather than something that is also connected to cultural dysfunction and socioeconomic circumstances. This book seeks to address and inform that debate while encouraging Christians to demonstrate gospel love and care to others.

And more than that, this book is not just a pragmatic manual to restructure mercy ministries within our churches and reorient our practices to serve the poor. Instead, it has been thoughtfully constructed to band together churches across the country and effectively transform minds and hearts to love those who are overlooked and under-served—and to see each individual as more than a product or project, but a person that is able to be saved, redeemed, and restored by our Savior. This book was never meant to save people—only Jesus can do that—but it is designed to inform and encourage the church to respond to the realities of the problem that millions of people across this country experience daily. We as the church must reconsider and listen to what God is calling us to do through his Word.

The Bible calls and teaches us to have a godly perspective and approach in how we address culture and society—and, more importantly, how we care for those who are experiencing poverty. Poverty is biblically understood as a result of not just personal sin and neglect but also cultural systems that have been sinfully polluted, resulting in brokenness and dysfunction that goes beyond a Band-Aid repair. Poverty needs cosmic surgery. We need a value system that disciples people out of poverty. The culture of dysfunctionality has nothing to do with character. Good people can be found in dysfunctional cultures, and bad people can be found in more “well-put-together” cultures. Our calling is not only to restore the practical felt needs of a person but also to transform the culture and value systems that have been destroying generations of people. Only the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ, can reach and restore impoverished communities across the globe.

Although we are given specific biblical instructions for our approach in ministering to those who are experiencing poverty, the local church in America has struggled to effectively address the issue. This book provides a gospel framework to practically meet the needs of those in poverty while giving readers the necessary information to properly and effectively address poverty in America. There are many voices and polarizing opinions that drive and inform our understanding of poverty, and these voices are often contrary to what God says through his Word. We need to take an honest and hard look at what is going on in our society, becoming biblical anthropologists—seeing our world with God’s perspective.

Let’s reconsider together. Let’s reconsider biblically. Let’s reconsider theologically. Let’s reconsider ecclesialogically. The first-century church would have been completely different to the churches in America today. We must rethink our churches in the inner city and other impoverished communities. What

we have today is a case of cultural circumcision. Some people are allergic to church, but not to God. We must be more flexible to reach the least, the last, and the lost. We need to see the church as a place where people can find God.

A lot of the law of Moses was bound to a sense of economic development. Likewise, if we are really going to help the poor, we need to have economic development in the name of Jesus. If the church is functioning rightly, then there would be no poverty in the church. We would live and teach in line with kingdom of God principles. This is what we find at the end of Acts 2. After Jesus had ascended into heaven and the Holy Spirit had come, the early church was generous and growing: “they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer” (Acts 2:42, CSB). Later, Luke records, “They sold their possessions and property and distributed the proceeds to all, as any had need” (v. 45). If you were in need, those needs were met! The community’s culture and values were aligned with the Scriptures and with God’s heart for the poor.

Dr Carl Ellis, Jr.

INTRODUCTION

I first met Mez McConnell while I was on the board of Acts 29. We had a few mutual friends who encouraged us to meet, thinking that he would be a good fit to lead a new initiative within Acts 29 to reach poor urban communities with the gospel. At first, I wasn't sure how well we would be able to connect. In my mind, I didn't think we would have much in common—I was a black man from a poor urban community in the US, while Mez was from a completely different world: a white working-class life in Scotland. However, when we met to share each other's experiences and vision for the least, the last, and the lost, we naturally hit it off. I saw he had an incredible warmth and fervor for reaching hard places through gospel mission.

In 2016, Mez invited me to preach at his church in Scotland and I stayed at his home with his family. While I was with him, I witnessed a passion for mission that had more than a bark but also a strong bite. Mez didn't just have a public persona of a rough guy who loved Jesus and loved people. He was a man who practiced what he preached. Even though we were from different parts of the world, the reality is that poverty doesn't recognize geographic boundaries. When I talked with him, I thought to myself: *This guy gets it.* Mez quickly became my brother and not just a ministry partner. When he shared his heart, he spoke my heart. There were no words I had to add when he spoke about his heart for impoverished communities.

His passion and relational connectivity for his community was encouraging and inspiring to my soul.

On one hand, we each have somewhat different and unique experiences growing up in the hood. On the other hand, we both have had tremendous heartache, unforgettable brokenness, and lasting suffering that bond us. Furthermore, we both have a common Savior in Jesus that unifies us through his blood. Not only are we brought into oneness through common suffering but we become family because of a common Savior. Mez and I are unified in heart, aligned in doctrine, and together in our vision to advance the gospel in our communities. When Mez first spoke to me about joining arms, I felt the weight and the burden of needing to plant healthy churches in the most neglected neighborhoods throughout the world. Although we haven't been friends for long, it feels like I've known him a lifetime because of our common vision.

Mez asked me, "How well are evangelical churches doing in reaching out to the poor communities of North America?" On a scale from bad to worse, it can't be any worse. There are few churches that actually seek to reach out to the projects, trailer parks, and impoverished communities throughout America. Most churches are not equipped and lack resources for the task. Nor do they have an authentic gospel-centered vision to accomplish the goal of reaching the poor and planting churches in poor communities.

When I think of the least, the last, and the lost, my mind always drifts to Jesus' teaching in Matthew's gospel about the plentiful harvest. I look around the neglected communities of the US and I see people who are ripe for the harvest. But as someone who has pastored in some of the poorest and most dangerous neighborhoods for the past two decades, I have come to realize that the evangelical church lacks a harvest

vision in these areas. Why is it that so few Christians in the US are interested in planting in these communities? A large part of the answer is that they aren't aware of the true nature of poverty in our country. There is also a tremendous lack of understanding and awareness of how God wants his church to engage with the poor. This, alongside a pervasive cultural negativity toward those on welfare or experiencing poverty, has polluted the church's thinking. Many Christians in America read the Bible with their own personal bias and experiences rather than allowing Scripture to interpret Scripture. Therefore, much of their approach to responding to poverty is based on a political understanding rather than the wisdom of God. Once we address our hermeneutics, we can properly address the problems of poverty with the Savior as the solution. This is this book's aim.

For that reason, Mez and I sensed God's calling to produce a book for two types of readers. First, we want to supplement the ministries of under-served and under-resourced church leaders who are on the frontlines of gospel ministry to impoverished communities. But second—and perhaps more importantly—we want to provide a harvest vision for the church; a polemic that argues that Christians in more affluent parts of our country should seize a God-sized vision for gospel ministry among the poor in our country. We, therefore, humbly offer this book to fill that void. May God use it to move the needle toward a lasting gospel-centered church-planting movement among impoverished communities.

While I know that this book in itself will not fix all the problems and all the challenges that come with ministering in impoverished communities, I am hopeful that it will become a primary resource for all Christians to participate and invest in so that the gospel advances in *all* communities throughout the world.

I want to highlight something that God has already shined his light on; to spark a revival for the overall church; and to see churches across America commit to poor neighborhoods that are challenging to reach.

We need a movement of gospel people planting gospel churches in neighborhoods that are in desperate need of gospel hope.

Doug Logan, Jr.