
A Prayer Guide for the Overlooked

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CARL SPAIN CENTER

RACE STUDIES & SPIRITUAL ACTION



Urban Low-income

Communities

"Poor people are forced to pay more for less. Living in conditions day in and day out where the whole area is constantly drained without being replenished. It becomes a kind of domestic colony. And the tragedy is, so often these people are invisible because America is so affluent, so rich. Because our expressways carry us from the ghetto, we don't see the poor. This ghetto Negro has been invisible so long and has become visible [only] through violence"

- Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., 1965



After the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, Dr. King and members of the Black Freedom Movement refused to consider these historic pieces of legislation as the apex of their efforts. Instead of limiting the movements focus to Black Americans in the south, they sought to expand and address the civil rights of all low-income Americans. This expansion illuminated one of the most admirable qualities of Dr. King and those within the movement; their ability to not overlook the vulnerable. In 1968, Dr. King stated that *"there is no more dangerous development in our nation than the constant building up of predominantly negro central cities ringed by white suburbs."* This development, he said, would do nothing but invite "social disaster" that could only be dealt with through legislation and education. 52 years later, Dr. King's words remain true for America's inner cities and the conditions he spoke of are being cruelly exposed by COVID-19. For Dr. Jerry Taylor, Founding Director of the Carl Spain Center, It was 17 years ago that he and his family did ministry in the inner city of Atlanta (Bankhead), Georgia.

"Most of the middle class churches had abandoned Jesus' original audience, the poor, and moved out to the suburbs. We could see firsthand the devastation caused as a result of good people that were left behind. The tax base, quality education, solid health care, and other tangible resources went with the white and black middle class flight from the inner city. When I hear the unbelievable amount of COVID-19 cases and deaths that are happening among African Americans in Atlanta I can't help but think about the fragile living conditions we witnessed when we lived there. May God help us see that poor people are dying in large numbers from the Coronavirus not because they don't care about their health, but many of them are dying because they are poor! I pray that we can acknowledge as a society in general, we have practiced social distancing from urban centers of poverty like inner city Atlanta, Chicago, Memphis, and New Orleans, way before the appearance of COVID-19."

A recent [story](#) from the New York Times shows just how hard low-income communities in America's inner cities are being impacted.

In New York City, the subway system has become a symbol inequality that has only amplified the divide between those with the means to safely shelter at home and those who must continue braving public transit to preserve their livelihoods. For many residents, there is no choice but to pile onto trains with strangers, potentially exposing themselves to the virus. Even worse, a reduction in service in response to plunging ridership has led, at times, to crowded conditions, making it impossible to maintain the social distancing that public health experts recommend. Subway ridership in Manhattan (where the median household income is \$80,000) fell around 75 percent, while ridership in the Bronx, which has the highest poverty rate of any of the boroughs and the lowest median income at \$38,000, dropped by around 55 percent.

The reality of those forced to choose between their health and livelihood is a stark reminder of the social disaster that is many of America's inner cities. As we continue in our social distancing, may we not overlook those in urban low-income communities who are unable to do the same.



Prayer and Lament are not inaction, it's work. When we pray and lament, we do so to a sovereign, omnipotent and omniscient God. Over the next week, we encourage you to practice total stillness and silence while making your sorrow and requests known to God (Philippians 4:6-7).

Prayers for urban low-income communities:

1. The Gospel would bring them comfort & hope in a time of despair.
2. Protection from the spread of the virus as they brave public transportation and more crowded living.
3. Access to quality healthcare for those who are sick.
4. Access to protective supplies.
5. Relief from historic income disparities perpetuated by racism.
6. Continued support and advocacy from the church and the government after the pandemic ends to address the social disasters that have taken place in their community.

Prayers for yourself:

1. That the posture of your heart would be humble & empathetic towards urban low-income communities & their experiences.
 2. For a desire to relieve all types of suffering on earth, especially eternal suffering.
 3. For opportunity to build relationships with those from the inner city.
 4. To better love those living in urban low-income communities.
 5. To advocate for urban low-income communities.
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The Center aims to share its emphasis on scholarly research by providing materials, educational opportunities, and other relevant resources to any who have a desire to deepen their understanding on race and its function in the church and broader society. Each prayer guide we will include recommended resources that we believe will help inform the work we are doing at the Carl Spain Center and the work you are doing with us.

- On Lament: [Dare to Hope in God](#)
- The Other America by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr: [Transcript](#) & [Video](#).
- [These Graphs Show How COVID-19 Is Ravaging New York City's Low-Income Neighborhoods](#)
- [The Myth of Innate Racial Differences Between White and Black People's Bodies: Lessons From the 1793 Yellow Fever Epidemic in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania](#)
- [Epidemics and African American Communities from 1793 to the Present](#); Presented by the Harvard Center for African & African American Research
- [Racial toll of virus grows even starker as more data emerges](#)

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