

## S4E9 Jonathan Brooks Final

**Jonathan** [00:00:00] I think in churches, especially one of the things you want to do is you want to get those few people who recognize that our faith is about our present reality. So does you get those folks who recognize like my faith and what I believe is supposed to impact where I live in the world I live in right now? Those are the people who would jump on the bandwagon and want to see transformation where they are.

**Eric** [00:00:26] Welcome to the Embedded Church podcast, where we share stories about reliving the connections between the place, the built environment and the mission of God.

**Sara Joy** [00:00:36] Season four of the Embedded Church podcast is produced in partnership with the Ormond Center at Duke Divinity School. The mission of Ormond Center is to foster the imagination will and ability of congregations and communities to be agents of thriving.

**Eric** [00:00:50] I'm Eric Jacobson

**Sara Joy** [00:00:51] and I'm Sara Joy Proppe, i and will be your host. And today's episode of the Embedded Church podcast.

**Sara Joy** [00:01:03] Eric and I are really excited to share with y'all our interview with Jonathan Brooks today. Jonathan Brooks is a pastor based in Chicago, so we get to learn a bit about Chicago in our interview with him. And I think one thing that really stands out to me about the interview that we did is his emphasis on staying in your place and really changing the narrative of your place. So I was an English major and I actually came to urban planning by way of stories. And I think Jonathan talks a lot about how the story in both of the neighborhoods that he's been working in has really been one of disinvestment in so many ways, and that the media has really captured this idea of violence and just disinvestment in the neighborhood. And yet there is so much good that's happening there. And as he started to really uncover that and really see that, one of the things that would be really beneficial would be capture the good that is happening and to change that narrative and change the story to really give residents just an excitement about who they are and where they live.

**Eric** [00:02:04] Yeah, I love that as well. And I think, you know, it might sound like when we're talking about story and narrative that that's all kind of ephemeral and theoretical and all that stuff. But what I like about this interview, as we see through Jonathan's eyes, that that adopting a new narrative has real physical consequences. Like part of the narrative is if you want to succeed or you want to really make it, you got to get out of this place. And Jonathan really scripted that narrative by staying in his place, and he mentioned somewhere that don't move to a better neighborhood. Make your neighborhood better, you know, and rain boots on the ground. I love I love that tenacity and that really having skin in the game as that narrative develops and unfolds.

**Sara Joy** [00:02:45] Definitely. And just going to bring it back to Wendell Berry. You are time for our listeners here. But I think Wendell Berry does that so well in all of his writings as well. He is so focused on really investing in a place and being there for the long term, and even his fiction books are written about this community in Kentucky and his characters and their dedication to really being a part of a community and being rooted in a place. And so I think Jonathan speaks to that and Wendell Berry speaks to that. We have very many wise people speaking to that, so I think it's something we should listen to.

**Eric** [00:03:20] Yes, absolutely. We're here in the studio, I guess, as a studio, but we're in three different places with Jonathan Brooks here. So Jonathan, thank you for being on the Embedded Church podcast today.

**Jonathan** [00:03:40] Thank you so much, Eric. I appreciate you having me.

**Eric** [00:03:43] Absolutely. So help our listeners get a little context here. You were at Kanon Community Church, but now you're at Lawndale Community Christian Church. As that still happening or you made that transition already?

**Jonathan** [00:03:56] Yeah. So the transition happened fully the beginning of June. Okay? And so I've been about a month and over in Lawndale. But for those who have any context around Chicago, Inglewood and LA, they are not that far apart about a 15 minute drive apart. And I've been connected with both congregations for a long time and pastoring Lawndale has been like our sister church where I did. My seminary involvement is very deeply connected with the Christian Community Development Association, which is kind of my philosophy of ministry. So although I've switched churches, it's all one big, happy family, so

**Sara Joy** [00:04:31] that's great to hear. So can you talk to us a little bit about the difference in neighborhoods, though? I know you said that about a 15 minute drive apart, but are the neighborhood significantly different?

**Jonathan** [00:04:41] So actually, to be honest with you, there, there almost mirror images of one another. The difference, I would say, is there is a divide kind of economy that happens between Southside of Chicago and West Side of Chicago. Those two sides of town are the size that are typically deal with the most disproportionate amount of resources and disinvestment all of different things. So it is a similar story for both. But somewhere within Chicago history, it is. This kind of is, I guess you can say, crabs in a barrel mindset of who's worse off south out of work than if I do. And so people from the West Side are like, Oh man, a society so bad it's rough over there, you know, on the south side or the west side. And so, you know, so it's that attitude. But West Inglewood, which is the neighborhood that passed it in for 15 years and on the south side and in North Lawndale on the west side, literally, they're both majority African-American communities who have lost a huge number of this population due to people escaping and trying to get out and do something different there with kind of like a disproportionate amount of gun violence and poverty and all those different things, but also two of the most resilient and beautiful neighborhoods in the city, full of people with wisdom and love and joy. And I've never felt more cared for than in these two places. And so God gives me the great privilege of being able to live in in my lifetime in both. And pastor and both. So thankful.

**Eric** [00:06:13] That's awesome. There's no things that impressed me about you, Jonathan, but you have such a diverse background and things you've done. But tell us how you first got called to be a pastor. Yeah. How did that happen?

**Jonathan** [00:06:25] Yeah, that story of the crazy one. Yeah. So so like I said, I was in Inglewood and came in and as crazy as like I, I grew up in Inglewood and my my mindset growing up was always escape and get out of here, you know, go away, do something, whether that was become a great musician or athlete or do something. Either way, I was gonna move the economic ghetto from my family, be upwardly mobile and move away from this place. Right? And I achieved that when I went away to college and went away

and studied architecture at a big university in Alabama. So I got as far away as I could and went all the way to Alabama. Open up to come back and crazy ended up right back in Chicago because you study architecture was like the number one city in the. Yeah, end up back in Chicago with opportunity to work in architecture. I just didn't enjoy the field at all. I like it. The idea of it was much better, and I think the practice of that for me, that's what I found myself like a little discombobulated about what I wanted to do with my life because architecture wasn't what I thought it was. And I got this call it a ministry. When I was in college, I went all the way to Alabama thinking I was going to church to go to the Bible Belt know. So not the best decision ever to escape church and all that, but got to call it a ministry in two thousand, actually. And and I did my first sermon not expecting a pastor at all, but just like I was a preacher, know. But I'm going to be an architect. That preacher, that's my thing. Yeah, yeah. And then twenty six, I had been working at kind and kind of volunteering and youth ministry, and I had gone back to school, got a master's degree in education with actually teaching architecture and middle school. So I'm just trying to trying to get kids before they got into the field and spent all the money in college. You know where they really liked it or not? Right? So that was my plan. So in 2006, the pastor of the church came and basically came to me and said, I'm leaving. I'm going back to North Carolina, where my dad was a pastor for many years and pastor the church where he was. I've made the decision. I want you to be the next pastor you've grown I Youth Ministry leaps and bounds as a volunteer. And I think that you're ready for this. So here's what you either say yes to this or I'm going to close the church and tell the people, you didn't accept it and I got a phone call.

**Eric** [00:08:38] No pressure, Oprah. Yeah, seriously.

**Jonathan** [00:08:40] No, no whatsoever. And literally in one week he was like, Make a decision. In the next week I came back, he announced at a church that I was going to be the next pastor, and he already had his U-Haul truck packed that his family walked out the side door and drove off while I stood in front of the congregation at twenty six years old. One day I just happened. So wow, I tell people all the time some people get called into ministry and some people get for the

**Eric** [00:09:05] job until a little bit about that. He told me, I think it was your first sermon where some there were some activity outside of the church that day.

**Jonathan** [00:09:11] Yeah, it was crazy. So it wasn't my first one, but about three or four weeks into kind of haphazardly call myself a pastor. I guess it was Mother's Day at our church in Cannon is a traditionally black church. At the time, we were still suits. You know, all of that coming to church and Mother's Day to a special Sunday when a lot of people come to church that may not come the rest of the year. We call them CMG members. They come on Christmas, Mother's Day and Easter. So this is my opportunity to kind of show the congregation that I can handle this. I wanted to impress. A lot of people are going to be coming and bringing a mom. They want to be a great Sunday. So I really worked hard to prepare myself, practice good black preacher, preach and I was off with it and and God is good all the time. I had all that ready. And as I got up to preach one of the young people that have been a part of my youth ministry for many years, I saw him come in the back door or the front door of the church. Actually, I'm kind of facing a front from the pulpit and called another young man outside what he did that I just kind of step back for everybody, found a scripture. I was preached from four hours. Thirty one or something. And then when he got on the steps of the church, just as he stepped on the steps, about ten guys jumped on the steps of the church and started beating them up on the stairwell. And I was facing and the congregations are facing me and I'm like, Whoa, you know, telling everybody

what's going on. I turn around, it's complete ballet. All the men in the church run out on the steps, and this is a fight between these guys and the neighborhood members, our church. And it just goes crazy. And one of my deacons is an off duty police officer. He put his badge out, stopped it breeds, believes somebody punched him and facing fall to the ground. Nothing stops. Wow, that was just got wild and they eventually I was running to the back and try to stop it. And my mom gives me no baby, you the pastor of the church. Now you can't be out there fighting. And as I'm talking my mom, I just hear gunshots go off outside. I don't my oh no, no, no, no. I got to go run out there, but it's my deacon who's off duty police officer. He shot in the air to try to get him to stop all the guys run across the street and I'm trying to get everybody back in the church, but I don't know if they going to get something themselves or what's happening. So of course, sirens, police trucks, news media, everybody shows up at the church and I'm just trying to figure out what to do. I've been a pass on the three or four weeks, and so when ask my wife to stay outside and talk to the news people and tell them just misunderstanding after police officers shot you stay out and talk to the police because you know how to speak their language. You know, just do something, break a break one nine out as well. I know, do something like that. And then lastly, I just went back into the church and talked to the congregation and realized at that moment they were waiting on me as their pastor to to do something. And I'm like, What are you supposed to say when that just happened to say, You know, Jesus, love this. Happy Mother's Day. Like, I don't know what to say, and I just ultimately said, you know, we got to figure out why that was OK. What is place that we look at is so sacred and holy doesn't seem to be the same way the people outside look at it. And I began our journey to be in a different kind of church, so I love it.

**Sara Joy** [00:12:28] But you talked about transitioning from that architecture, career and dream to being a pastor and part of that to a feeling that kind of burden to go out and to pursue this career, to then be provide financially for your family and then coming back and being a pastor. I'm curious about kind of like reconciling that within yourself and then to even just thinking about as you pastor those within your own community who I'm sure kind of have some of that tension as well. What does that look like?

**Jonathan** [00:12:54] Yeah, we have great questions. So I think that that has been a big part of my story actually is actually having to discern where the story came from, the upward mobility escaping my neighborhood, you know, even aspiring towards a certain kind of career or things like that were markers of success or more even God's blessing. And I've done a lot of interrogation of that in my life because those things became idols for me. When architecture didn't work out and when I like, I felt like I had abandoned me. I felt like I failed and was trying to interrogate where those feelings were coming from. But what I've realized, and one of the things I even talk about as I preach, as I do ministry now, is we have to interrogate the narratives that we believe and the stories that we've been told now we've internalized and many people, especially those who come from marginalized communities like the ones that are pastoring and internalize this narrative of upward mobility, of getting away, of escapism, of something else being better than where they are or what they're doing. And what I love about kind of like pastoring in the same community I live in is I get a chance to be an embodiment of leaving was not what blessing looked like for me, right? Or the ability to take care of my family and provide, even though I still live in the same community that most people think they have to escape from to do that. So it's truly become a part of my mindset now to help people realize that it's not about escaping and leaving. That leads to even success or flourishing. It's really about being in the will of God and what God has for you. For some of us, that is to remain some of us, that is to be a part of the solution in the places where we are not necessarily to abandon them, because that just continues to perpetuate the cycles of abandonment that have led to

some of the struggles we see. So, yeah, now I don't preach just the scripture is I'm preaching my life. I'm preacher, I'm against narratives, I'm preaching against. I'm preaching community development and all these different things because of the story of my own life, not just because I heard somebody talk about it and I think that they have more power.

**Eric** [00:14:55] So, Jonathan, the way you made sense that internally is super interesting and powerful sounds like, though, that became kind of part of your public platform as well. Like this idea of changing the narrative of a place for the whole community to start to reimagine what their communities story is? Talk a little bit about that change narrative idea. I think that's really incredible.

**Jonathan** [00:15:14] Yeah, absolutely. It not only became like part of my platform, it probably became the crux and the foundation of my platform and one that I didn't even know I was going to have, who knew I was building a platform like that. I was just doing kind of living life based off of my own experiences and trying to make sense of the world. And as I was trying to make sense of the world, I started to see not only my life, but I started to even read the Bible differently because I was reading it from the context of the place I was in and the life that I was living. And I really believe that when we do the work of pastoring equity in our neighborhoods, of trying to live in the world in a way that can cause change or transformation, it really does cause us to read and look at the Bible and our faith and practices differently instead of just kind of following the the path. That's kind of the labor for force by generation before. And so the narrative shift became this main thing for me. It became like, Oh, wait a minute, I actually like being in my neighborhood or actually love like like this made me a great place. Where did the narrative that this is a place to escape and never a place where best? Where did that even come from? Why did I believe that when I wasn't even a lived experience, I was had? And what I've learned is is that what happens is if the narratives that are perpetuated by media and by stories that typically come from outside the community, those narratives really affect the people who live in the community far more than the people who are driving through them because they scared of them or whatever. I like somebody who lives in a neighborhood will perpetuate that. This is a place of violence and degradation, far more than somebody who lives far away from it and is only looking at it from a distance. And so those narratives have to be shifted internally. So we started working in my church and in community organizations. I partnered with resident associations in the neighborhood by working on creating new narratives for the people who live in the community. Because once your views change about where you live, so do your actions and your beliefs about what that place can be. So, yeah, that became my platform, that God has called us to be here. A good friend of my neighbor, Joe Carter, who lives in New York and has that new development all over, I really kind of grabbed hold of this quote that she said that you don't have to move to a new. Neighborhoods live in a better. Right, right? Well, that truly believe that where you live right now can be better if you invest in it. You don't have to leave. So that's really what we're talking about,

**Sara Joy** [00:17:38] empowering people and giving them that vision to like, lean into and to live and to associate that. And I was curious if you have examples of ways that that happened in Englewood.

**Jonathan** [00:17:49] So you wrote a whole book about it, but

**Sara Joy** [00:17:53] we haven't gotten to your book yet. Every time we do or

**Jonathan** [00:17:57] it's all right, though. Yeah, there are lots of tangible examples I can give. And I tell people all the time, like our congregation is not a very big congregation. Clinton has about 150 members of the congregation of people who walk the church in the neighborhood and just regular people. But the impact that the church has been able to make has been because we've decided to partner with our neighborhood versus to try to reinvent the wheel as a church. And so things like we don't use the word outreach, right, like outreach is a bad word in our congregation because it assumes that there's something that we have to give to our neighborhood. That neighborhood does have verses saying, we're a part of this community and whatever we do, it's something we need to do collectively. So we actually do community work that's allowed us to do such amazing things. A lot of it in the field of food access because that was what our community said they wanted to do, not because we as church were experts on food equity and access. So little things like we started the food co-op that meets at our church has been meeting for the last nine years where there were food patches all over where people are getting nonperishable items. But there wasn't a place for people to get fresh fruits and vegetables using the language of food as what we hear talking about in communities like Inglewood all the time. So we started meeting at our church and various people taking three or four busses and probably trying patient to get to a store where I could get that. We started having it in the basement of a church so some people would grow in their backyards. We started getting donations from places like Trader Joe's and was a USDA grain farm only four blocks away from us called Growing Home that we started purchasing from the beer stand. And what we do is we pull all of our resources together, so everybody will bring some money and put it together, and then we will go shop and bring that to the church. Everybody was shopping the church together. We done that for nine years now, and it's become the most sustainable way for people to supplement their groceries with fresh fruits and vegetables. But then that grew to us having a five loaves co-op buy like someone from the two fish and five little story with Jesus. But now we have the fabulous co-op garden because people were like, Well, we can start growing our own stuff as well. It's cheaper to buy seeds in ways to buy the food. One of the members of our co-op purchased a vacant lot next door to our home, and we just a fabulous co-op got it. So we grow our own food and then shop for it in our own co-op. And from there, people started getting more creative. So now we have to barbecue Sandy Cafe Okusanya Cafe as a locally owned cafe that came out of the neighborhood. It's owned by people who live here and was started by and built by people who live here. And so now we go get a sandwich and a smoothie and a latte in a cafe in Inglewood, the Co-op and our gardens. And and from that live in DBU. And about five years ago, we were able to open up a full scale healthy food grocery store. A Whole Foods came to our community that is started by, run by and completely held accountable by the community,

**Eric** [00:20:50] like like a real Whole Foods like

**Jonathan** [00:20:53] really not like our own like, yeah, like he did moves. You didn't spell it differently. Like, I know it's not Joe early. But the story of that I tell it really well in the second book. But like the story of that is that the neighborhood was the initiator. We decided we want to help the food grocery store. We decided where we wanted it. We decided what the price point would be in the store. We decided, like a lot of people are, like, how do you do that? And what happens is this community began to understand its power when we collectively work together and stood up and were empowered to realize this is our store. So our Whole Foods building the Inglewood Whole Foods like you, everybody calls the Inglewood Whole Foods, you get a stop a bad guy there. This Inglewood Whole Foods, right? Like it is so much of ours. All the artwork on the walls, no African-Americans to apples. We have a community room in there where we meet. We

have on Friday is five after five or we have a wine tasting, a b day and a party and a community with them because it's ours and that's what we wanted to do. So this has been exciting to watch the movie come alive and recognize that we can shift the narrative our own place if we just believe it.

**Eric** [00:22:07] I do want our listeners to hear about the Inglewood Rising project, and I think that was really exciting and started changing narratives.

**Jonathan** [00:22:14] Yeah, yeah, it's probably one of the most important ones as narrative shift we've done. So I do a quick version of it. There's a resident association ethanol community called the Resident Association of Greater Inglewood and Neighborhood to split into two side. Inglewood in West Inglewood is what we call ourselves greater Inglewood, and the acronym is rage. If you didn't pay attention to their Resident Association of Greater Inglewood and so rage work together along with community organizations, churches and others to try to help workers narrative work. And one of the things that and really was involved in was the Inglewood Rising campaign. What we did was we created our own hashtag and campaign to complete the narrative. I don't say, complete with the negative stereotypes, that some of those are true. But we want to complete it and talk about some of the positive and beautiful things of our neighborhood. So one of the main components of Bengal advertising campaign was we did a community kind of investment fund and different residents deposited funds into that and which we bought billboards in our community and on these billboards. One of our photographers in the neighborhood, a local photographer, Seneca Johnson, took pictures at different community events and different things. Kids going off to prom. People who are open businesses. And what we do is we just plastered these billboards all over our community with phrases like There's love in Inglewood. There's hope in Inglewood. I am Inglewood. And one of beautiful things is they took pictures of people who were like staples in the community. So I woke up on my birthday, November 9th, 2019, and my face is on a billboard of Inglewood next to it, and it was just like the greatest gift ever my community gave me. It's so cool, and I just remind people that when you really invest in your place, I really believe that your place can invest in you. I'm Pastor J with a book speaking all over the country because of what my neighborhood has invested in. Show me. And so it's a reciprocal thing when you love your place, whether they'll love you back.

**Sara Joy** [00:24:06] And I want our listeners to hear that he has written a book, we haven't really referenced that very clearly yet, that it's a book called Church Forsaken and I've read it and it's a great book that

**Eric** [00:24:15] is a great book. We're going to put it in our show notes to so folks can have a way to get it. So that's awesome.

**Sara Joy** [00:24:30] I feel like investment in the neighborhood, and I love the way you present it because it's a very different picture of investment. But I think, you know, so often even our listeners, the responses, well, what about gentrification and all of these other things that can happen and displacement? And so I would love to get your thoughts on gentrification and how do you respond to those types of questions?

**Jonathan** [00:24:49] Yes, yes. Yes, that's my favorite question. So. So you heard me talking your continuously hear me using the words like resident initiated or resident homes or resident sustained. And to me, those are the key words. Those are the entire gentrification markers. A lot of people ask me about gentrification, but they ask me about it, and I feel too like they ask me about it when gentrification begins. If you really want to

see justification, get push back against it. For those who might be listening, wondering what that means is when neighborhoods are shifted and the cultural make up of them is shifted from one culture to another. Culture, or the economic make up is shifted through like people moving in, property taxes going up and people who are poor are being pushed out and displaced. And they are more wealthy folks being able to move in. And what we've done in Inglewood to try to fight against that is the work of everything being resident initiated. Some of the things we do, even the Whole Foods, they're like most people when I see a Whole Foods coming out like, Oh, that's not for the people that are here, that's for the people that are coming. But we made sure that all of our demands for the people who live here now were met when when Whole Foods came. So we want 90 percent of the staff that works in this Whole Foods to be resident now, right? Like they have to live here, the things that are in the store. We even chose the kind of foods that we like to eat, the people who live here, right? The artwork of the store represent the people who live here now. The price point in which we ask you to put your food at represent the people who live here now. So you're not pricing us out. We're actually pricing you in. Right, right. Yeah, we're telling you how you're going to stay. But if you don't do that, then there's a whole nother part of our narrative that can keep you away. I. Go. I won't go too deep into that, but there's a whole nother part of our community that to make sure that Whole Foods doesn't remain. And so we do that kind of work with around housing is also another way we do it around housing. What we do is we've done things like something called a large lot program and everybody told you one of our members of our co-op bought a vacant lot next to our home. We bought it for one dollar because what we did was we went to the city and say, there are all these city owned vacant lots in our community, as we see in our population decrease. We think that the people who own homes on this block should have first dibs of buying them, not investors coming from the outside. So little Miss Montgomery, who lives on the line and holds for lots of land on her block. One of the best attractive columns, she has equity on the block. She gets to run until that person. What will happen and what? We've seen it happen over and over again. So we try to make sure that the residents feel empowered to they know you are the main stakeholders in your plan, so they become the gatekeepers. So when an investor wants to buy a property, they say, Aha, this is not how we do things here. If you're not going to live in it, we don't want you to buy it right or this is the price point of what you need to sell that we want you to put this kind of family in the heart, right? Or so-and-so who live on the block also could be a problem for your property, like those type of things happen in our community or we lose. We choose the full narrative to our advantage. So to me, sustainability is the key actually to anti gentrification markers. Whoever owns whatever is happening in the community, other people who have to sustain it will always challenge organizations, communities, churches all that do not own everything but to be a part of and let the community own it last longer than you. My church fell apart and was no longer a church because I knew Cafe would be just fine because it's owned by the neighborhood. Co-op will be just fine. It because all about the neighborhood. And so that's the way we fight. Gentrification breeds sustainability that's led by a resident owned, operated and initiated event. And and and I think that's awesome.

**Eric** [00:28:33] So can I go a slightly different direction here, real quick? But do you feel like the message from your book is mostly targeted towards underinvested neighborhoods? Or is there something you would say that more middle class neighborhoods, upper class neighborhoods?

**Jonathan** [00:28:46] I think my story pushes more towards marginalized communities. What my book does not. Yeah, all of my book was to actually make sure everybody understood that every neighborhood in some way is forsaken. That's why I named the



church forsaken. Yeah, yeah. And a lot of times can lead to these office thinking, especially about churches, not because they're marginalized, but because they're not because they're middle class, because they're wealthy. We think they need nothing. And so we act as if everything's great out there. And so one of the things I push churches to do is to complete the narrative in any community. If the main narrative of a neighborhood that is broken and marginalized and poor, then you need to push the other side of the narrative that it's beautiful. Resilient and the people there are great. But if the main narrative of a neighborhood is that is the place to be, it's great. There's nothing wrong. Then you as a church have to actually complete the narrative and say Actually no behind these three car garages balances, big houses and fancy cars are broken homes, people with drug addiction, all of bad things that happen that we expose in the inner city and in marginal communities also present out here. And we stop acting as if we travel somewhere to actually do missions when we live in the suburbs or the more middle class neighborhood. All of the same things that are happening in my community are happening there. They're just not exposed. They're covered up. And so I really try to push people to see what what I call bifocals being seen the world the way God does. God doesn't see a middle class neighborhood. And now that's what I was thinking about when I said, All things are good. I guess what? I want it. No, God sees the fullness of every place. He doesn't look at Inglewood or Lawndale and go, Oh God, I need to get it together. That place is horrible. No, this is the fullness of it, right? God. And Bullis knows the beauty and the brokenness, and we need to be able to see the world that way as well.

**Sara Joy** [00:30:28] Amazing. Though I'm curious to to hear about identifying the people who can really take that charge in the neighborhood. I assume that doesn't come quickly or easily. Are there ways that you feel like you've been able to identify? Who are those people and those partners that can really be the change agents in the neighborhood, but to be empowered in these places?

**Jonathan** [00:30:49] Yeah, absolutely. So I always say one of the things you don't want to do is to think that you're going to start with a huge group of people like the majority of folks are not, you know what they call those people first by people who come on board first adopters or adopters. Yeah, like most people are not first adopters, they want to see some things moving fast. Yeah, but the people that you're looking for, other people who recognize the fullness of the community right off the bat, like the people who can see who say, Hey, I love it here, this is where I'm supposed to be. And sometimes it takes you to voice that yourself for people to start realizing that that's who they are. But when you find those few people in a neighborhood or like, this is a beautiful place, it doesn't. It's an issue. This is a yeah, I said, it's a beautiful place, but there's some problems there, too when you find those people. Yeah, those are the people that you want to really push to get engaged in community work and to start just planning small things that really started doing small things. You know, having events like taking over the parks and our community and just having an outdoor event, something that we can get more people saying, Oh, wait a minute, there's other people who want to do good stuff here. I think in churches, especially, one of the things you want to do is you want to get those few people who recognize that our faith is about our present reality. So as you get those folks to recognize like my faith and what I believe is supposed to impact where I live in the world I live in right now, those are the people who will jump on the bandwagon and want to see transformation where they are. So those are the people to look for. And the key is just to push them to say, Hey, it's only a few of us. But we believe that the more that that we push into kind of making peace happen or doing things, I'm one of those people who says, don't walk into a room and say, Let's turn off the dark. I never say stuff like stop the violence or or stop it. Now that I can't stop bad people from doing bad things, I can't stop people from

being confused. But the hopeful people and peaceful people of my community who want to be peacemakers, I can push us to do more. I can't stop a bullet, but I can plan a garden, you know? And so those are kind of things that ask people to do, make things happen versus trying to stop and darkness. Turn on the light.

**Eric** [00:32:59] That's awesome. I wonder if I could squeeze in one more question here, because I feel like it's kind of important. We've been talking about economics primarily in terms of switching the narrative. But, you know, race is pretty unavoidable out there. So how does out of race play out in self-understanding neighborhood or the kind of disinvestment that you're experiencing?

**Jonathan** [00:33:16] Absolutely, absolutely. And I think geographical context has a lot to do with that. Chicago, for me, is a great testing place because of the segregation that Chicago is known for. So neighborhoods can be all African-American, all next, all age and all whatever. You don't see that in a lot of the city, but race is a main marker because race is actually a greater marker of disinvestment and things of that nature than poverty level is. A lot of people struggle with that. But it's the truth, right? Like, I can look at racial maps in most cities and back and find out life expectancy based off racial match faster than I can on markers of financial vitality or whatever. So economic disparities are often led by race things like life expectancy by race, and so, so are erroneous narratives where you see more people of color, you often see more disproportionate, erroneous narratives or incomplete narratives. And so in my book, I lay out also that one of the reasons I use the language of neglected neighborhoods not like the resource I use neglected because I want people to recognize that a lot of what we see marginalized communities is intentional decisions made by government officials based off of racism. And so I'm trying to walk down this tunnel of racism, everything from redlining to land contracts that took people's land from them. All those different things. We talk about that to kind of set up how we've gotten into the church, not being someone coming to fix things, but actually recognizing we need to repent of our involvement in racial disparities and racial injustice that have led to a disproportionate distribution of resources. Massive.

**Sara Joy** [00:35:00] Do you have some thoughts or recommendations for churches of how they kind of press into that repentance and you're hunting some of that?

**Jonathan** [00:35:08] I do. And the main one is to recognize that none of us come into this thing as innocent. A lot of times people who do this kind of work have this theology behind of like this incarnation of theology, of coming in like Jesus, move into the neighborhood and job one. And we want to be that. But I think that's actually an erroneous place to start. We don't get to start from where Jesus is because we're sinful and we're part of the problem, and we actually start from the opposite direction. And we begin with this repentant attitude of I am a part of the problem. I haven't been concerned about others. I've only adopted the American dream, which is all about me and my family at all costs. And I have to repent of some of that first and then recognize that repentance also leads to confession. Confession leads to a change of heart. The change of behavior, which includes swearing that Americans really struggle with, which is reparation, but like, there needs to be some fixing. And I think churches need to get into the act of reparation, whether that be financial, whether it be the lack of relationship with churches that they haven't connected with communities. They haven't been honest about their own history and complacency and racial injustice and trying to make some reparation event through the way they participate in the neighborhood and their community. So what are some first steps?

**Eric** [00:36:22] That's awesome. Can we end with just a couple of resources that we know your book? We're going to push your book on this podcast and help out all of our listeners by it. I know I did. Just just from our first conversation. You got me so intrigued I when I bought it right away. But other books or resources you'd point our listeners to to to learn more about what you're thinking about.

**Jonathan** [00:36:39] Now I point people to a couple of organizations that I'm connected with, and I think would be good starting points, especially for churches. One is the Christian Community Development Association website at WW W Dot CD, a dot org organization that really focuses on working in marginalized communities and trying to reclaim them with the gospel of Jesus Christ. So if you're interested in trying to understand a little bit more of my philosophy of ministry, that's that's the one. The main handbook for that is a book written by Dr. John Perkins and Wayne Gordon called Making Neighborhoods Whole. That's a good book. That's a good starter. And any other organization I'll give you is the Parish Collective, which is the organization that actually the board chair of the board for Parish Collective dot org. And our goal is to see the church come a lot in the neighborhood and to be an example of what it looks like when the church is alive and active and doing things in its community. And so there are a couple of books, but the first is the new parish written by the founders of the Parish Collective and so on. And so I appreciate and whole missing perspective. Thank you, Sara, for a couple of examples, but there are tons of folks out here talking about this. Follow me at Pastor Jay Pastie H. H.J. on our social media platforms, and I can point you to some more places.

**Sara Joy** [00:38:00] That's awesome. Jamie, thank you so much. Great. A wealth of knowledge and good experiences to share and such a heart for this meal.

**Jonathan** [00:38:09] Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

**Speaker 5** [00:38:18] Today's and Better Church podcast was brought to you by the fire hydrant manufacturers of Shalom, the dispensers of flash flowing truth and wisdom about hard won Christian discipleship community and Christian placemaking. I don't know about you, but that's how I felt listening to Pastor Brooks. It was an overwhelming torrent of goodness and inspiration. I've known Jonathan for several years and consider him a friend, although we live in different cities and only get to see each other a few times every year. In other words, we're still getting to know each other. And that's why I was really excited for him to be a guest this season and to listen to his interview. I always learn something new about him. And when we talk about our experiences, insights and the burning questions we have regarding how to love our neighbors placemaking and community development, from a Christian perspective, I always learn something and I frequently challenge. I listened to Jonathan Interview three times before writing this coda, the most this season. I took a lot of notes and recorded many quotes, all of which could bear repeating. They are so good. Outreach is a bad word. We can only do community work. Interrogate with biblical truth, the narratives and stories we believe and internalize. Complete the narrative of every community, see with bifocals, the neighborhood, as God sees it in all its fullness. Anti gentrification markers, resident initiated, resident owned resident sustained when you leave your place, they will love you back. I can't turn off the dark, but I can turn on the light. I can't stop a bullet, but I can plant the garden. That's just a smattering. But what challenged me the most was a conversation about racial disparity and injustice in our communities, specifically the challenge to Christians and churches to intentionally face the present day experience of racial injustice and its history repenting, confessing and then acting on reparations or finding ways for fixing our racial brokenness. That's a tall Christian challenge, but one that rings true to me. This has big implications for

Christian placemaking. Dove into the show notes to find resources that will help you prayerfully think and work through this issue. As I know I am, thanks for listening.

**Sara Joy** [00:40:53] Thanks for tuning in to another episode of the Embedded Church podcast. Be sure to check out the episode show notes for links to resources and other helpful information related to this episode. If you'd like to connect with us to share comments or ideas about the work we're doing, we'd love to hear from you. You can send us an email at Info Embedded Church Dot Com or leave a voice message on our feedback line by dialing seven six zero five two seven three two six zero. Follow us on Instagram. Embedded Church podcast or visit our website. WW w that embedded church icon. Finally, thank you to our season four partners at Ormond Center and to all of our faithful listeners and supporters who have helped us make it to season four. We are honored and encouraged. Until next time. Be well.