

## **Overview**

Seeing Jesus in East Harlem: What Happens When Churches Show up and Stay Put (IVP PRAXIS 2018) is an excellent book. This masterpiece was written by the Reverend Jose Humphries, a Pastor of Puerto Rican descent who was led by the Holy Spirit to plant a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural church in East Harlem with his wife Mayra Lopez Humphries over 10 years ago. Reverend Humphries is serving in a historically urban environment and neighborhood currently in the process of gentrification. He shares his experiences and spirit led wisdom with a refreshing transparency and clarity of thought. East Harlem is in the context of urban poor. Reverend Humphrey's points out on page 113 of his book this statistic when he writes: "In our community the average median income for a house hold of four is less than 35,000, yet there are new luxury high rises being developed." He speaks a truth with the totality of the Gospel. He stands in the gap for the poor and the marginalized. I love how he expressed and articulates the Gospel transforms communities' at its breaches.

The main objective and purpose of this very important work is to share a biblical framework. A framework of tireless love, creativity and expressions of faith. Reverend Humphries shares that as churches Show up, Stay put and See in the communities they are planted, transformations and redemptive hope can take place in individuals and business that are in poor proximities and in need of hope to survive. In the introduction of this book Reverend Humphries opens up with these thoughts of how he loves the local church with all its dreams and hopes, and compares it to a dojo which reminds me of a combat with one another in close proximity. As a guide for his writing he goes on to share in his words: " the church

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can be a space of experiment as we follow the spirits lead into new approaches to living, sharing and showing signs of Gods good news in our world.” The aim is to Love others well in such a way where it is felt right where they are so that they will see the power of God move in collaborative and intentional ways. This overview is gives an amazing picture of the work that Reverend Humphries and his Church Metro Hope is doing as he shares his experience, and God’s sovereign hand through testimonies of miracles, demonstrations (or practices) of intentional love, and frameworks given by the Holy Spirit ( being intentional in helping small business/ confronting racial and cultural diversity ). Through this book, the spirit has re-affirmed to me when we follow in obedience what God’s intended purpose of hope, grace, mercy and love looks like towards the broken breaches of society.

**Analysis**

It is my understanding that the targeted audience of this book is directed to church leaders and any person who aspire to be obedient to what God is doing in their lives especially those who God has called to plant a church and /or ministry. With the uncertainty of the next steps of his journey coupled with the belief in the imagination and purpose of biblical scriptures he is able to exhort, inspire and guide the current and next generations of pastors, chaplains and lay leaders in the Body of Christ to unite to bring heaven on earth one individual at a time. Reverend Humphreys writing style and exposition is appropriate and his content is transformational. As I read this book it was a guide in my own thoughts in my work as a Chaplain.

In the first Chapter of his book, it is easily discernible in identifying the first strength of being an overcomer. In the chapter titled “Show up” he begins sharing

his testimony about his childhood on the Lower Eastside of Manhattan. He mentioned he was not another hood story but instead his story about grace and hope even with his neighbor being killed. It is apparent that his strength provides hope in God despite adversity. I thought as I pondered what a strength that is, in reflection of ones journey we see how grace and hope is a foundation of faith even in the beginning of our lives. The beginning of growing up around so much pain and suffering and still having hope resonates with me as that is a part of my testimony as well. The strength to show up to join the lord in his work is redemptive, As we invite Christ in our life daily Reverend Humphries gives us strength and inspires in this chapter when he uses Jesus Christ as our example of hope and articulates that “Christ shows up in places of wholeness and places of unraveling and we see his grace and mercy everywhere “(PG.17).

The second strength that I found in this book which the authors points out so well is that each person in the world is an image bearer of God our creator. I believe that this is a very important strength to understand. Many people in this world do not have that perspective. From my own experience working as a Chaplain, there are many in our communities that feel they are just a product of their communal atmosphere rather than an image bearer of the God who created all. A totally different perspective is shared in this work and I believe we should continuously have this eternal perspective as we live here in the physical realm in this time and space that God has planted us in. There is strength and a peace of mind when you understand who created us and for what purpose.

The third strength of this book is in the chapter titled “Seeing”. As Humphries points out so brilliantly in Part 3 of his writing, when he explains through

discernment in details of the strength of seeing like Christ and applying that principle by putting it into practice. Jesus did encounter many who were knowledgeable about him but blind to his essence and he would confront and tell the people who were religious to honor people with their sight, don't look down on people who you don't understand and to ask questions, to inquire through what Rev. Humphries acknowledges as sacred curiosity and honoring a person's story and testimony with generous eyes. As I read this work, its framework is biblical and Rev. Humphries stays true to his expressions of faith. Staying obedient to engaging people from all walks of life, race and perspectives is very clear. My only one academic critique and based on interpretation might not be considered a critique is that the level of writing is challenging for one who might be starting this journey. I believe it's just written for a specific audience, the audience I pointed out to above in this paper. I believe this work and transparency should be written for anyone who just doesn't have an interest in urban missions. It can be transformational as a curriculum for children attending Sunday school as well as a devotional for youth. The overall usefulness of this book for individuals who are on mission to disciple others for Christ is transcending. It's helpful as a guide. It inspires new ideas and creativity. It points out to use our imaginations to reach out to the poor and those marginalized and on the breaches of society, the broken places. Going forward I am certainly recommending this book as I pass on the wisdom of this important work to future and current servants of the Lord Jesus Christ.

**Take - a-ways- Conceptual**

Gentrification is taking place here in NYC in many traditionally urban poor communities and is a challenge for churches that are planted in close proximity to each other. As we have discussed in class and what Humphries also acknowledges in his book there are many churches in urban poor neighborhoods that should close! How do we respond to Gentrification as people of color? As image bearers of Christ it is our responsibility as Rev. Humphries points out on page 68 and 69 that the church is entrusted with the ministry of reconciliation. He points out brilliantly how as brothers and sisters in Christ we should continuously exercise our God given authority and take the posture of learners. He actually speaks of the Caucasian and what he calls the white gaze as they come into black and brown spaces of poverty looking too make it respectable as certainly is a goal of gentrification. I interpreted this section of his writing as he is addressing all of humanity and as image bearers we should find creative ways to bridge those gaps. The issue I have is and we have discussed it in our context in class that if seven churches are on the same block and gentrification is taking place the churches should be about our fathers business and reconcile the hurts of the past and address the change of moment.

I'm impressed how Metro Hope has challenged diversity in and outside of their church walls. Pastor Humphries expressed on page 29 "people unite mostly around commonalities such as race, class and common ways of looking at faith tradition." He goes onto acknowledge that challenging any of those areas leads to disorientation. Many Churches in the urban poor communities often speak about ways to unite that would lead to reconciliation but don't act on it as Metro Hope has done and are seeing the results of Gods hand in their community. 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 4:3 states: 'For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine.

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Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear". This scripture leads to my 3<sup>rd</sup> conceptual take away from Humphries work when he speaks to engaging many who state they are "Spiritual but not religious". I believe because the church has hurt many people and because the Good News come to disrupt, disorientation takes place and many are led away by the enemy's scheme. Many want to be comfortable in what they are learning, a feel good narrative and I live now and when I die because I was a good person I will go to heaven. But heaven is God's presence and if we don't seek his presence in the here and now how will we be prepared to be in his presence for eternity. Those who have an authentic relationship with the spirit of God have to join the Lord in his work as Rev. Humphries has done and shares with us in this classic work.

**Significance for Ministry- Application**

My home church Harvest Fields Community Church the ministry where me and my family are practicing our faith live out our Motto of the 3 R'S Revealing God- Reaching People -Restoring Lives. Our Ministry is in the Bronx NY. The community that we are planted in is a diverse place where we are seeing a growth in Muslim and Hindu populations. We are located in a traditionally urban poor context with family small business owners in our community as well. We feed and clothe the poor and needy and we do many intentional outreaches to include all from different race, class, cultures and different perspective and Love on them through the grace of God. We have ministries that go around the 5 boroughs of NYC such as the Ministry that God has placed on me and my wife Rebecca's heart to lead DAAD (Developing Adolescents Attitudes and Destinies). We use Basketball and the Arts to plant the

seed of eternity into the hearts of young people throughout our city specifically in East and West Harlem where we conduct outreaches 12 weeks throughout the calendar year. For the many people who God gives us the privilege to engage, the individuals and youth who are in the midst of a gentrification in Harlem we will continue to show up with the resources of education and vocational trade opportunities so that our future generations can have ways to have careers in the future and remain in the communities that they are being raised in and not displaced. For those who are disorientated by what's taking place in the church we will continue to be ambassadors and image bearers of Christ's Good News by how we live our lives out in faith so that racial divides can be countered with Love and humility. And for those who don't want anything to do with the church and say that are spiritual we will continue to be authentic and genuine and praying for each person that loves the idea of God but don't see that his presence is always current. We will introduce Christ and allow the Holy Spirit to be the evangelist.

In Conclusion this book and the ideas and biblical framework that is shared in it will play a significant role in Showing up, Staying Put and Seeing along with Revealing God Reaching people and Restoring Lives. We will continue being sensitive to the Holy Spirit as Pastor Humphries has done and shown in his work and use discernment and obedience to follow what God has for us to get done in this life and where he has planted us for such a time as this.