

## THE VISION FOR LIFE PODCAST

Episode 83 | Loving Our Neighbors, Part 3: Poverty In Denver & Poverty Alleviation

Featuring: Autumn Gardner, Jason Janz, and Juan Peña



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**Autumn:** Welcome to the Vision for Life podcast, an ongoing conversation between the pastors of Fellowship Denver and the Church at-large. Each week we talk about life, faith, the Bible and how to follow Jesus as we go about our daily lives. I'm Autumn, host of the Vision for Life podcast, and today I have some special guests; Jason Janz and Juan Peña from Cross Purpose are joining me. Welcome, I'm so glad you guys are here.

**Jason:** Thank you, Autumn, for having us.

**Juan:** Good to be here.

**Jason:** Glad to be with you.

**Autumn:** Jason is contemplating launching a podcast so you can consider this your trial run.

**Jason:** Yeah, you're slowly convincing me I don't want to do this. So, the amount of work it takes to pull this off is amazing.

**Autumn:** Well, I am genuinely glad you're joining me, and first I would just ask that you introduce yourselves to our listeners, help us get to know you a little bit. You have freedom in that space—share whatever you would like.

**Jason:** Yeah. Jason, born in the Midwest, my family's- my dad's business collapsed in the mid-80s. We moved out here when I was 11 years old, and I've been here ever since. I'm 48 now. And I gave my life to the Lord, and ended up joining the ministry, and have been a pastor for the last 26 years—11 years in the suburbs and now 15 years downtown. And my wife and I and our four boys live there in the urban center and still pastor a church and am a CEO of a nonprofit called Cross Purpose.

**Juan:** Yeah, my name is Juan Pena. I think a quick part of my story is I'm actually an immigrant from Colombia, South America. So, came to the US when I was 14 years old, to the Boston area, and really learned a lot about what does it mean to be an immigrant that, you know, doesn't speak English, that experiences poverty, and that really deeply has shaped who I am and what I'm actually doing today. So, I'm really excited to have this conversation. But really, the short of it is I'm one of the, you would say, you know, lucky ones—Immigrants that were able to actually get to college—and, I was blessed to be able to finish with an engineering degree. Did engineering for 11 years, and now working with Jason for the last almost 15 years. I really call myself a social engineer; I'm really using the tools that I learned engineering, in society. And so, I love how that's how God has wired me and made me, and I get to really be thoughtful about how to come up with solutions that truly help and move the needle to help our neighbors, and that's what I've been doing for the last 15 years. So, super excited to be here and joining this conversation.

**Autumn:** How did the two of you get connected?

**Jason:** It was kind of crazy. I was a church- broke church planter with not really a good team, or any team, I should say. And so, put out a newsletter and a church planting mentor of mine put a link to an article in my newsletter. Juan was- that was also Juan's mentor, and he read it, called me one night for three hours and gave me the quiz over, and a couple weeks later was on a plane and spent a weekend together, and then they moved out here. So really a fluke providential

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moment, and it's been a friendship that's now lasted for 15 years, and we are partners in crime just trying to kick the devil in the head by abolishing the poverty system in our in our city.

**Juan:** And the crazy thing is, that trip that Jason mentioned about, we spent the weekend together after having a three-hour conversation back in 2008, it was the craziest experience. I picked up at the airport at DIA, I've never been in Denver in my life, and for four days all we did was eat, sleep, and talk. We had a four-day conversation, like, day two our voices were horse. But there was so much alignment—it's really about what this conversation that we're going to enter into—we had a four-day conversation where we realized that we were seeing the same things. We believe that this is what the gospel calls us to do, and that's why we moved out here four months later to start providence Bible church and to work together. But the genesis really is that four-day conversation, really everything we're doing now flowed from that four-day conversation.

**Jason:** I think, and Juan put words to- I think people think we went downtown to be like the Saviors, and I feel like Juan put it best when he said we moved downtown to save our own souls because we had been in the church, you know, through our childhood years in our twenties and early thirties and felt like if we had to keep living our faith like this, we're probably not going to continue with the church, and we need to figure out how to do church differently and live out our faith differently. And for us, we found that walking with the poor became that. The creation of the chaos in our lives to make us read our Bibles, pray, depend upon God because we did not know what we were doing. And then the poor have really transformed our lives, I would say.

**Juan:** Yeah, just to maybe add a little bit to that is, you know, the language that we use is, you know, the integrity of our walk with God, according to the Gospel, is really dependent on the integrity of our work with the poor. And I think that's- that kind of encapsulates why we moved downtown. For us—that's what it meant for us—it doesn't mean for everybody, but we realized we're not living lives of integrity. And we- that was not okay with us. And so, we wanted to give our lives to figure that out.

**Autumn:** That is what is underpinning this series of conversations that, one of which we're having today, but we're jumping into this series of episodes in which we're asking, 'who are our vulnerable neighbors?' and 'how is it that we should actually take on this biblical call to love them?'

There's a statement in some of the Cross Purpose materials that I pulled out and it caught my attention because, as I was thinking about developing this series of episodes for the podcast, I wanted to connect those ideas because I sense that same thing when you said it so well, this sense of integrity, the call in the Bible too do justice in this way that is loving the poor is so clear and so repeated. And, obviously, currently the American Church is not doing a good job at it. And so, we do have to address this question of integrity in our own lives and then in our churches as well. So, the statement that caught my attention was, 'The Cross Purpose journey began in 2008 when we set out to learn what it really meant to love our neighbor.' And I'm going to back up a step here; Cross purpose is the name of the nonprofit. So, you talked about in your introduction planting a church, and that church is providence Bible church that exists here, in Denver. And then the nonprofit that we partner with as one of our Serve Denver partners with Fellowship Denver Church is called

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Cross Purpose. So, shifting into talking about Cross Purpose specifically, and you asked that question what it really meant to love our neighbor, and that's the question that I want to ask too.

**Jason:** Yeah, I would say one of the early mentors of mine in the urban core was Ted Travis who ran a Neighborhood Ministries, an African American man who helped found the Christian Community Development Association thinking how the church can actually operate in a development way in our cities. And he said to me, 'Jason, the Church has figured out how to do the love God thing, but they are all thumbs when it comes to loving their neighbor.' Going to the Christian bookstore, 95% of the stuff is all love God stuff and the love neighbor is usually a shelf on international missions, but we don't really have a good theology around neighbor and a practice. And, I don't know because I think Christians historically have always been the forerunners on good charity, but I think with the war on poverty in the 60's, with all that the government became involved in, that I think a lot of people just backed away and it's like, 'hey, I'm gonna pay extra taxes and that's how I'm gonna solve it,' thinking that our fundamental interaction with the poor was economic, versus the fact that it was actually the picture of the Kingdom of God where that became the lab for human transformation.

So, I think a passage that became seminal to me was we have to then start with the basic definition of who is my neighbor? and, do I have a responsibility to help them? Because I think in a culture of wealth we subtly think that's not my problem. So I think first of all defining neighbor, most people when I say neighbor, they think about their geographic neighbor, the person who lives on my cul-de-sac. That is not the biblical definition. The good Samaritan is a guy who walked on the Jericho Road, saw someone he did not know, but he was in proximity to, and was in pain, and he wrapped around him with care and love, paid for his lodging, his healthcare, and said, 'I'll be back,' and the relationship began—that is neighbor. So, I say neighbor is somebody who's near you who's in pain. That, I think, changes the entire view of how we look at that word. And then, do we have a responsibility to them? I think, absolutely. The problems—every church can be consumed with the quote-unquote “problems” inside their four walls, but as Christians we must take gospel responsibility for the issues in our neighborhood where the fall has done its most deep work.

**Juan:** Yeah, and I would say too as well when, maybe 2008, when we moved into the neighborhood, um, we really began to listen a lot, right? We had, you know, like I mentioned, we had this four-day conversation, we were theologically aligned in the same desire, but when you move to a new community, a new neighborhood, you gotta spend a lot of time just listening. And I like to add the words, like through relationships, right? And so, for me what that looked like is, I actually got a job in the neighborhood as a truancy officer. I left my mechanical engineering career, and every day for two years I was going to our local elementary school and getting a list of kids that were not in school. And I got to sit in hundreds of living rooms in my neighborhood, and got to talk to grandma's, and single dads, and single moms and single dads just came out of prison, and just got to hear all the reasons why Carlos or Johnny was not in school. And truly, as we were listening, we began to now understand the pain that our neighbors were feeling, right? And then out of that we began to ask the Lord, what? So how can we help our neighbors thrive? How can our church play a role in showing them that there is a new Kingdom, there is a new city that will have no poverty, no injustice, and how can we begin to show that to our neighborhood? And so, I think that's kind of the beginnings of our wrestling with how do we do that. And then Cross Purpose, for us, was kind of like our answer to it in our very localized context.

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**Jason:** And I think the reason that the poor- it matters is because, first of all, it's- you know, 20% of all Denverites live in poverty. That's for a single mom with one kid making about \$17,000 a year or less. I think sometimes we don't necessarily see what that pain feels like, but it is bad. There should be no child in our city that lacks a mother and father who cares about them there. It is not okay to be the church of Jesus Christ and have a foster care issue. We have 2000 refugees that relocate here every year. And you know, I visited a family in the hospital where, you know, a boy stepped out of the school bus, didn't look the right way, and got hit by a car and just got a broken leg, family doesn't have health insurance. And, you know, there is a real pain there. And then to see the families that we interact with every day, I mean Juan, one of his neighbors, I remember him telling the story, they didn't have lights on in their home, and so they're trying to heat the home with candles, and the kids are trying to do their homework. I think when you feel that- you know, I helped a guy coming out of incarceration and I sat with him at his first probation officer meeting, and there was no way he could accomplish everything the system was requiring of him. And this is why God compels us; no, this is not just a social issue, this is neighbors in pain today, next-door, that God's people, we can walk alongside people, and it transforms us on the journey.

**Autumn:** Jason, I want to go back to something that you mentioned just a minute ago and that we normally think of poverty in economic terms, and we see that the government is attempting in ways to address that. And so, we may think that our responsibility is fulfilled because we pay taxes or even because we might support different charitable institutions or programs in terms of giving, and so, that that piece of it, the economic piece of it feels in a sense satisfied to the extent that we want to engage it kind of intellectually and with our monetary resources. But there's a statement also in Cross Purposes materials that says—and I believe it's your mission statement; you can correct me if that's not the case—but 'Cross Purpose is a nonprofit organization abolishing relational, economic, and spiritual poverty through career and community development.' And I want to ask, how do you think we can better understand those other two aspects that you've identified in your mission statement, relational poverty and spiritual poverty?

**Jason:** Yeah, I think we realized really quickly that while money could solve economic poverty, sometimes the reason that people are in poverty is because of the relational and spiritual aspects of that. I think Tim Keller says, you know, 'most people think of a bad choices model of poverty—people made bad choices, now they're in poverty. But really the biblical model is that poverty actually causes bad choices.' And so, we had to sit there and go, okay, we can't just throwing money—that doesn't always work. And I like what Father Boyle says, 'If you don't help people heal from their core wound of their life, they will get a job and actually technically get out of poverty, but then their boss will trigger that wound. They'll get mad and walk out the door, and now they're back in poverty, not because of an economic problem, but because their heart has not healed from the core wound of their life.' So, I think that's why at Cross Purpose we try to create a therapeutic environment of tenderness and care to help people heal, because love does heal people. But also, thinking that poverty is only in those in economic poverty, we tell all of our volunteers we all walk in and we first identify our own poverty. Even listeners, do you have relational poverty in your life, brokenness in your family? Do you have some spiritual poverty? I've found with people in the middle and upper class in society, they often have a poverty of meaning like, 'why am I doing this?' And I have found meaning in my journey with the poor. So, I think that also puts us all on an equal level. We are all walking with forms of poverty showing up and together. We're going to come together and form a kinship community of love and family to help solve that. But I would like to go back, Juan to you, I want to flip the mic over to you and just say, I think something that she mentioned was we tend to think that the government's

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involved in economic relief and so therefore that's solved. And I think it's a myth, right, that we can live on government benefits, but you're the expert at that.

**Juan:** Yeah. So, a little bit on that one. I think for me personally, one of the things the pandemic, that it gave me, I found myself all of a sudden now, like every night, I'm home. Which usually, before the pandemic, we were doing something three nights a week and my weekends were a little quieter. And so, for me personally, I began to ask the question, what happens when we help a neighbor that's unemployed to Cross Purpose? And you know, on average, we help our neighbors, we're really good at taking somebody who's unemployed and in six months getting an entry level career job making \$18 an hour. But you and I know, I think we know, intuitively, a single mom with two kids—that's not still a pretty picture. And I wanted to kind of like, 'what is that picture?' Right? And so, through the pandemic, I found myself with a little more space to design a computer program to actually map out and actually provide answers to what's really happening. And so, one of the things that that we discovered is that, when we take our neighbors that are unemployed in our city, there's this myth that—I still meet people every week—believe that People in poverty, that are unemployed, can live a cushy life; they're getting a \$5,000 check every month, and they're just living off of that, and they're just lazy, and of course I wouldn't give that up, right? The truth is that if you're unemployed in our city, on average- if you, on average is negative \$11,000. So, whatever the government's giving you; food benefits; TANF, which is like the old welfare check type of stuff; childcare subsidies, you're still at negative \$11,000. And if you don't have Section 8 or housing subsidies—you know, there's this whole conversation about, 'we need to help people get affordable housing,' —if you don't, if you're not one of the lucky ones—about only 15% of people in poverty have that—you're actually a negative \$22,000. You cannot budget your way out of a \$22,000 hole when you have zero income, right? So, when people come to our program, that's their reality; I call it hair on fire, right? And so, now all of a sudden I think we as a church, if we begin to understand those realities, now we begin to actually have some more empathy. I have a lot of empathy for my neighbors that are in the situation, and now it's time to begin to understand why maybe a single mom may move in with a boyfriend that is drunk, you know, every night. She's literally- it's either that or 'I'm homeless,' and I actually had that situation happen in my community group this past year with somebody in our community group was in exactly that situation. And I could go, 'hey, actually that's morally wrong. That's, you know, that's sinful, you should not.' Okay, great. And biblically I can say that, but then am I ready then to help pay for her rent so she can actually live on her own because she can't, right? So, now all of a sudden when we intersect our lives with our neighbors and begin to see the reality of what they're feeling, all of a sudden I'm asking different questions. I have a lot more empathy for my neighbor. And I find that that is actually what- that's the main, one of the main, reasons that God wants us to interact with our neighbors, and poverty is actually for our own benefit.

And I think the other thing I wanted to add about spiritual poverty is we have found, for example, James actually says that God has gifted the poor to be rich in what? Faith. So, I interpret that to mean, if I'm living a life of comfort, you know, of wealth and I don't have interaction with neighbors who are in poverty, I'm actually- I'm in spiritual poverty because God said I need the poor to actually learn what faith looks like from them. If I don't have the poor in my life teaching me faith, I actually have- I'm bankrupt spiritually in that sense because I'm way too comfortable. And so, that's kind of, you know, why we said we need to really build relationships with our poor neighbors for our own sakes, to save our own souls, because apart from that we're stuck

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**Jason:** And I think definition is important here too; when we say poor, most people think homeless. But the homeless are only 1.7% of the poverty population in the Denver Metro area. So, we work the 98.3%. There's 52 nonprofits helping the 1.7%, spending about \$80,000 of public and private dollars a year to maintain homelessness. So, poverty is far bigger than the homeless issue, although they tend to get most of the attention in the media. Secondly is also defining the poor and the rich. When I say this to church crowds, most people think, 'I'm not rich—someone who's rich is the one who has more money than me.' But Jesus only had two social classes, poor and rich. So, I think if you—if you're an American, you live above the federal poverty guidelines, which for a family of four is \$22K—you're rich. And so, those verses then apply to you. We can't- Jesus did not have any verses to the middle class in Scripture

**Juan:** And that is so true, right? Because, if we believe we're in the middle class- whenever I read the Bible and see rich and poor, I'm like, 'oh, great news, doesn't apply to me, I don't have to do anything. I can check out of this. I'm not in that group,' and that is so true, we do that all the time.

**Autumn:** To this aspect of spiritual poverty, Juan, I want to ask you another question because you said something earlier in our conversation about the image of the Kingdom of God and that there is no poverty, there is no hunger. There are these images in the New Testament of abundance in the Kingdom and the Church is to be the representation of that now on earth. So, how does this factor into this discussion in the alleviation or addressing this aspect of spiritual poverty?

**Juan:** No Autumn, that is a great, great, great point. And I think that's what we are seeking to do through Cross Purpose and our church, and I know you also have the same heart. Theologically, eschatologically we know that there's this future kingdom. We all believe that this future Kingdom exists, this beautiful city where there will be no injustices, right? Revelation talks about there will be no more tears, and that picture is just so beautiful of what we believe, that the city exists. We all live in local contexts where that is completely broken, right? Because of sin and the brokenness that exists in the world as a result of that. And so, yeah, we- I very practically see how we as a Church, our job is in some way, and it's gonna look different for every church, it's gonna look different for every community, but we ask, the people of God should be asking the question, how can we live such compelling lives? How can we be so involved in the needs of our neighborhood that in some way we're showing our neighborhood that we truly believe that that city exists and we want to show you what that looks like here? And I'll never forget many years ago I was driving in my car and I heard a Keller sermon. And he said something that rocked my world. He said, 'every time you undo an injustice here on earth, a little piece of the Kingdom comes down. And I was like, 'oh my God, that is exactly what we're trying to do. When I help-anytime I help one single mom get an entry level career job where she can begin to actually have some extra money in her house, like that's a little piece of the kingdom is coming in, right? It's not perfect, but we can now begin to point, and if you start doing that hundreds of times over years, we can begin to kind of point and say, 'hey this is what the Kingdom kind of looks like.' It's broken, but we're doing all this expensively because we believe that kingdom exists. And now all of a sudden the story makes sense to our neighbors.

To me, actually, I've moved evangelism. Whenever share the gospel with my neighbors, it's about the story. And I just basically go from Genesis, God created a good world, sin broke it down, Jesus came to, you know, pay the penalty for our sins, but not just our sins. He has- God has not given up on the original project. He has not thrown that product away. He's going to restore all things, and this is why providence and we- here's why we live, because we want to show you



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that that is real, right? And all of a sudden I find my neighbor's house and go, that story makes sense. I had one neighbor say after explaining that story to him, he said, 'I now understand. My story is I believe more in the Walking Dead.' And basically what he's saying is, I like your story better than mine right now. We can begin to have a conversation, but it's all born of the practicality of how we're living our lives, right? So, anyways,

**Autumn:** Yeah, back to that question of integrity. So you've taken the reality of the state of the poor in Denver; that's one stream that informs your work. The other is this understanding of how relational and spiritual poverty exists in the lives of people perhaps living in economic poverty, but also in our lives, and the lives of the people in the Church, in the lives of this category that Jesus created, the rich. And so, both of those dreams have influenced what it is that you've worked to institute at Cross Purpose. Can you explain how the Cross Purpose program works and what it looks like today?

**Jason:** Yeah, we started out doing a lot of relief work, is how I'd categorize it. And it's how typical Christians I think tend to think, at least evangelical Christians—Catholics have this really drilled in way deeper than we do—but evangelicals, by and large, think of work with the poor first of all is it's charity that we should do, but they don't really think very deeply about it. So it ends up devolving into basically backpack giveaways, Christmas, gifts, turkey dinners, bikes for the kids, all that kind of stuff. Food banks are that way. But most churches I speak in, there is a resistance against the government's endless distribution of benefits. But we work with our state government in the distribution of benefits to our families through the food stamp program and cash welfare. They require 10 times more accountability than the local church steps. The church does far more, what Robert Lupton calls in his book 'toxic charity' or 'when helping hurts'—we could actually create these programs of dependence in our churches without thinking about our values here. We will say, 'don't give a man a fish, teach a man to fish,' and then all the churches generally do is give away fish. So, we wanted to think more deeply, moving from relief model. And relief can be good in certain situations, but it can't be the only thing you do. The lion's share of our efforts need to be in development. The American solution to poverty is far deeper and says, 'how do we actually really teach the person to fish so they can actually maybe one day even actually own the pond,' right? -is kind of the thought.

So, we've moved to this development philosophy where now we work with about 300 neighbors a year; we started with a dozen. But now we take them through a six-month robust program where we build in soft skills training. They pick one of 15 careers. We pay for their career training. Then we get them a job. Hopefully- this last class got just over \$20 an hour. Then we build in, not just economic capital, but social capital. So, it's not what you know, it's who you know. We said there's no significant change without a significant relationship. So, we build family. We so appreciate Fellowship's partner with us; you sent allies down to our campus down here, and they volunteer, and we have a family dinner every Wednesday night. And then we build spiritual capital. That's the healing of the heart. You know, journaling exercises, they get eight hours of therapy and identity development, optional faith-based classes they can take as well if they're believers in Christ and they want to fortify that. So, about six months. But we actually say, once you enter the Cross Purpose family, we're part of a family forever. So, we have an alumni program to where we now want to—not just move beyond wage growth—we want to help them build wealth, and build assets, and become homeowners, and have investments, and own businesses. So that's the front edge of creation now at Cross Purposes, this forever family here that we're building of radical lovers.

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**Autumn:** What's the nature of the general pool of applicants you get? What is the state that many of these people are coming in? And how do those referrals work? In other words, if I, Autumn, do know a neighbor, can I simply send them to Cross Purpose?

**Juan:** Yeah, totally. So yes, about a third of our neighbors come through just regular digital marketing and advertising through Facebook and YouTube and all that. A third of them come from referrals with other partner agencies. So, we- there's also a lot of different organizations in our city. Many of them are faith based, and they're doing really good work around housing, and, you know, addiction recovery and all that. And so, we partner with them. And when those organizations that kinda have stabilized their participants, we're a great hand off to now help them get that career job. So, a third of our participants come from that, and then another third is just like you said, like, 'hey, my neighbor is in poverty that could benefit from Cross Purpose.' And I talk directly to them and make a referral through the website. And then we have a whole recruitment team that, within 12 hours of the interest form coming in, we follow up with them and do a really good job of answering their questions and doing everything that they need to do to get into our program.

**Autumn:** At the beginning of the conversation, I said one theme that I was going to weave together, several of these different topics as we talk about different groups of vulnerable people. And then, Jason, you used the term, 'who in your life is in pain.' Your neighbor is someone who is, within the context of the good Samaritan story, someone who is in pain and has a need. And then the response was a call to action, a sacrificial sort of deliberate step to love that person, and you said to wrap around them. And another theme that ties all these together is that long-term change is affected in the life of someone who is in pain, or someone who is in a vulnerable state, when we weave our lives together with theirs. And so, you have a particular way—I think you said that Jason—can you say that phrase again about relational?

**Jason:** Yeah—there's no significant change without a significant relationship. We often think about that in the person that I'm serving, but it's actually with myself as well. Like, if I'm gonna change my views on issues of race, class, social welfare, you know, that's going to happen through a relationship versus a 10-hour class I take on racial reconciliation, although those things can be profitable. I think, you know, there's very few passages in Scripture that show us how the church looked like almost like a canvas you could paint. We have a lot of letters, we have a lot of instructions, we have a lot of doctrinal treatises, but there's two pictures, Acts 2:42-47, then the last part of Acts 4, to me, that kind of show us this picture of the church. And it's when Barnabas sells his land, he gives the money to the elders. The elders then are the ones who distribute it to the people in the congregation in need, and it says there's not a needy person among them. In other words, they solved poverty within the covenant community. And I've had debates with people about, 'is this socialism?' or 'what is this?' 'is this compassionate capitalism?' And I think bottom line is, I don't really care, wouldn't you want to go to that church? And I think the reason Barnabas sold the land was because he probably was sitting on the third row next to a single mom that he kind of developed a relationship with, and said, 'you know, I don't need that second home in Vale as much as she needs a career.' So, I just think we can recapture that spirit in the church.

It happened with me, serendipitously, but my next door neighbor was basically changing oil at the local Walmart, and my relationship with her is actually what kind of began this whole idea that one person just loving one person, and change can happen. She went on to manage a Starbucks store. Now she's the number seven most profitable FedEx store in the country. First black woman to run a Fedex store in Colorado, and now she's on our board and technically she's my boss,



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right? So, she's taught me so much. We've been able to use my leverage to help provide opportunities, and we're living in this community together. And I just feel like, all we're trying to do with Cross Purpose is scale that. I think there's a lot of good people sitting in churches today that just say, 'just show me how to do this and I would do it.' And that's my heart for the church, is to rekindle this love for neighbor. And there's there's 85 million evangelical Christians in the country. If we had one-to-one love, we could solve poverty, foster care, addiction, and still I think have 12 million Evangelicals doing nothing. It takes 73 million evangelicals to wipe out the top-eight social ills we have in our country. That's just with the church of Jesus Christ. That's my heart.

**Juan:** Yeah, I think J, like you mentioned that issue of we really can't change without relationships, for me personally, during the pandemic—my other pandemic project—as I saw America being in the middle of this racial reckoning moment, right? Where we can't really have conversations with each other about really important issues that are affecting our nation. So, one of the things that I'm doing personally, just in my own neighborhood as a neighbor is, I basically built—I live in a corner a lot overseeing- next to a park—and, on a 20 by 35 ft part of my- on the east side of my property, I basically built a big pergola and a big patio with a cement pad and an outdoor kitchen and a fire pit that sits about 20 people underneath that. And my neighbors actually saw me build this with my own hands for the last 18 months. And now that it's done, that to me is gonna be my little contribution as a Christian to my neighborhood to go like, hey, we need a different solution, and I'm just building this patio where we can just kind of have- let's cook together, let's sit around this fire, let's have conversations, let's live different together because we need a new solution, right?

And so, I think in your congregation, there are probably a lot of people sitting there going like, 'yeah, what can I do,' and Cross Purpose is one solution. My patio is my personal, like, I think we should be so creative in coming up with all kinds of innovative ways to actually bring people together to have conversations. And we just really believe that that's how we actually will bring about change in our city. So, we should be the leaders in our neighborhoods of bringing people together, and it doesn't have to look like a Sunday morning service. It actually shouldn't look like a Sunday morning service all the time, right? So, those are just some ideas here for the listening audience to kind of ponder on and maybe see what they can come up with.

**Autumn:** I think that your story of your- the area that you can share with your neighbors goes, again, it invokes this idea of sitting around a shared table with food, plenty for everyone who is there and gathered, and everyone can come in whatever state they are with their differences of opinion and backgrounds, and sit together and share a meal. And that is this image of abundance and bringing, again, a little bit of the kingdom to the place that you are, to the lives of your neighbors.

So, I think let's end with these two direct sort of challenges to our listeners. One is to do this, to look around you in your immediate circle; who is already in your life that may be a neighbor who is in pain, and ask how can you build a relationship with them such that maybe the need that you see in their life will be met, but undoubtedly in a relationship you will experience the richness of that as well. The second really practical component of this is, if you are interested in finding out about Cross Purpose, their work, or how you can be involved—they have a website. What is your exact website?

## THE VISION FOR LIFE PODCAST

Episode 83 | Loving Our Neighbors, Part 3: Poverty In Denver & Poverty Alleviation

Featuring: Autumn Gardner, Jason Janz, and Juan Peña



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**Jason:** [Crosspurpose.org](https://crosspurpose.org)

**Autumn:** [Crosspurpose.org](https://crosspurpose.org), so you can check that out. There are various ways to be involved with the organization personally and to join in this effort with them as an institution as well. And our heart is that we in our churches are this kind of representation of the kingdom, that we do love our neighbors, and really that we see our city thrive. So Jason, Juan, thanks so much for joining me today on the podcast.

**Juan:** Thank you.

**Jason:** Thank you Autumn for this, and thanks also for the partnership with Fellowship and the area churches here to launch the second campus down here this past year. The buildings being remodeled right now, but we'll start a new class there in August.

**Autumn:** Alright. That location that Jason mentioned is just south of Fellowship's location, a little bit off of Broadway. So it is also actually in our immediate kind of communal context. If you have questions or suggestions about today's episode, or have a suggestion for what you would like to hear us discuss in the future, you can send any of those things anytime to [podcast@fellowshipdenver.org](mailto:podcast@fellowshipdenver.org).

Thanks for joining us on the vision for Life podcast. Thanks to Adam Anglin for our theme music, and to our producer, Jesse Cowan.