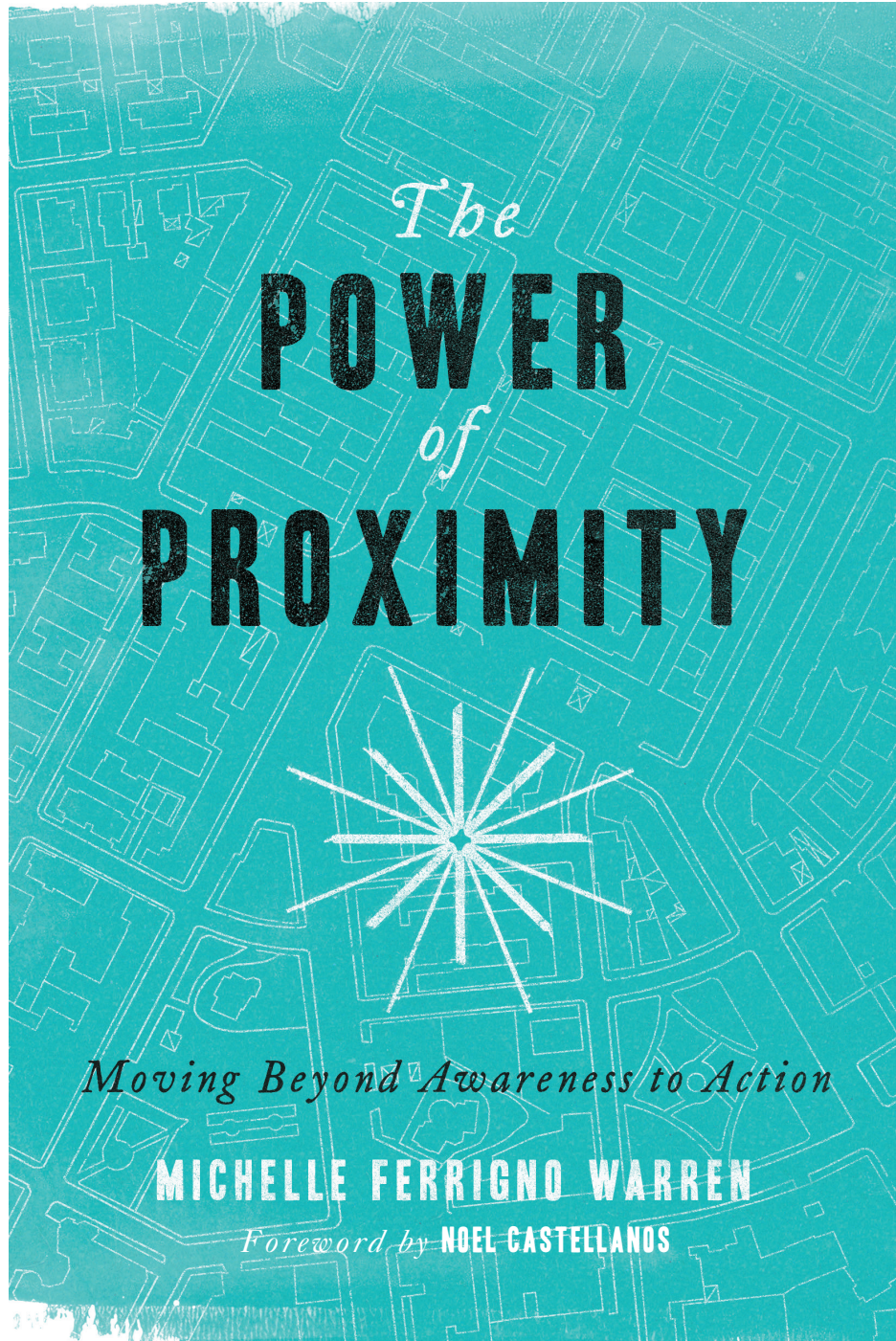


STUDY GUIDE



The Power of Proximity Study Guide **For Individual or Group Use**

Author Michelle Warren invites you deeper into her story and encourages you to think about moving past awareness toward living proximate lives on the Jericho Road. You may already be aware of what's happening in the news, of systemic issues that impact marginalized communities, and of the greater historical context which affects our current events today. If you are not aware, we encourage you to start learning in those areas. But part of this journey towards proximate living also involves listening to people's stories, engaging with people you may not normally talk to, and getting to know them personally. Begin to push beyond the familiar into a new way of seeing the world and asking how we as Christians are to engage it, and our hope is that this discussion guide will help you to do so.

Chapter 1: Becoming Proximate

"As Christians we must not simply settle for awareness of the broken people on roads far away. Instead, we as the church must move together toward a proximate, informed response that moves toward the alleviation of injustice." (p. 16)

In order to seek awareness, embrace proximity, and lean into the life of justice, we must constantly be paying attention to who we are, what we bring, why we react the way we do, and what our history is. If we can cultivate this self-awareness and humility it will allow us to further embrace other's stories and see our own role in the road to justice.

Reflection and Discussion Questions:

1. Learning about those who might be different from you helps to deepen your self understanding. Consider this question: who are you? How would you describe your identity and what factors have shaped it?
2. Think about your race, gender, ethnicity, religion, primary language, ability, socio-economic status, education level, and sexual orientation. How do these specific aspects of your identity influence how you interact with others?
3. What are the stereotypes you hold of the "other?" Why do you think you have those stereotypes? Is there room for a different narrative and perspective?

(For further growth: read authors, blogs, and news articles from people who identify in the "other" group. See how your perspective changes as you listen to others stories and learn how they see the world.)

4. Have you had a vision-broadening experience? A missions trip or opportunity to travel either domestically or internationally to a different cultural context? What did you learn from it?
5. Do we or do we not see the church valuing the imago dei in people, and if not, what can we do to change this in our church context?
6. What does rootedness look like in our generation? Is it something we need to reclaim and if so, what does that look like?

*"You don't think your way into a new kind of living.
You live your way into a new kind of thinking."*

-Henri Nouwen

Chapter 2: Deeper and Higher

"A true revolution of values will soon cause us to question the fairness and justice of many of our past and present policies. On the one hand, we are called to play the Good Samaritan on life's roadside, but that will be only an initial act. One day we must come to see that the whole Jericho Road must be transformed so that men and women will not be constantly beaten and robbed as they make their journey on life's highway. True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar. It comes to see that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring.—Martin Luther King, Jr." (p. 41)

Reflection and Discussion Questions:

1. Think about a time someone has challenged a social construct in your life. When did your perspective shift based on hearing a new story, seeing something from a different point of view, simply engaging in a different way?
2. What is a social construct you hold tightly to now that you don't ever foresee changing? What are ways in which you can demonstrate a listening posture to others that see differently?
3. How have the places where you have lived shaped your theology? Are there certain practices and rules that you live by but may or may not be "truth?"
4. Do you think one political party is more morally grounded than the other, and if so, why?
5. How much is a person responsible only for him- or herself, and how much does each person bear some communal responsibility?

6. What is your response to the statement: “In essence, God’s justice recognizes that the poor need special attention. The poor need to be restored to their productive place so that the community can move forward together. If they are unable to move forward, we as agents of God’s justice are not doing what we are called to do” (p. 29). Do you feel that the biblical teachings you have absorbed resonate with God giving special attention to the poor? If not, how would accepting this teaching potentially have an impact on you?
7. Immigration and gentrification are two examples of systemic injustice mentioned in the chapter. What manifestations of systemic injustice have you encountered or witnessed, and how have those experiences shaped your perspective?
8. What has participating in individual, social, and systematic restoration meant thus far in your experience as a Christian?

“Friendship with people who live on the margins of the larger society, who are generally feared, excluded or overlooked, invites us to reconsider the meaning and practice of mission. Many of these folks dwell in what have been called “over-evangelized, under-Christianized” communities. They have heard lots about Jesus, but haven’t often seen him. When communities have been saturated with missional activity but the good news has not been embodied in a consistent presence of love and concern, folks know that they have been targets of one more program. And most of us resent being “targets,” no matter how well intentioned the effort might be.”
(Friendships at the Margins, Christine D. Pohl & Christopher L. Heuertz)

Chapter 3: Embracing Brokenness

“As a Christian justice advocate, I tell people that you cannot journey alongside broken people if you don’t recognize your own brokenness. The reality is that all people are broken. Brokenness has a way of revealing brokenness” (p. 45).

“A commitment to social justice ministry and restorative action will reveal that we are not the ones who can fix problems. We are simply the ones who share the journey, offering what we have and allowing God to transform us in the process” (p. 51).

Reflection and Discussion Questions:

1. Have you ever been around people who seem as though they have it all together? How easy is it to open up to them and trust them with your own needs?
2. In contrast, how does it feel to share with people who are vulnerable and able to share both the good and the bad, who can sit with pain and not try and change it or fix it?

3. What are examples in which you have experienced people authentically sharing pain with you? What is your natural tendency when someone comes to you in pain? Are you inclined to a) offer solutions; b) say, "God is good, it will be ok," or 3) simply listen and create space for suffering?
4. On page 50, we see in Philippians 2 how Christ emptied himself of privilege and perfection to share in solidarity with the poor and the suffering in the world. What does that look like for Christians? For you?
5. Have you seen God use brokenness in your own life to make you more effective? What has it been like to come to an awareness of your own brokenness?
6. To what extent have you experienced the emotions described in the passage below:
"The closer we get to the pain of others, the bigger and more unfixable their problems seem. The prospect of dealing with these problems is scary. It's scary because we don't have much to offer in terms of guarantees for the effectiveness of our ministry in their lives. It's scary because of the chaos we experience in our own thoughts and how this plays into our fears and inadequacies."
7. On page 51, Michelle writes, "Just as Christ emptied himself to come restore what was broken by sin here on earth, we as his followers need to have the same attitude and willingly empty ourselves of our demands, privileges, and perspectives of wholeness to join the poor and share in solidarity of presence – not because they can't live without us but because we cannot live without them." What spiritual practices, teachings or disciplines have you learned that help you "empty yourself"?
8. When you have experienced the tension of desiring to fix things for others who are suffering and instead of leaning into the call to watch, listen, and learn without solving the problem? Have you seen people running to fix situations or fix others? How has that been effective or not?
9. If you have had the chance to participate in the practice of lament, where and how did you do so, and what was the experience like for you?

There is no thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives."

Audre Lorde

Chapter 4: Leaning into Love

"We are invited to follow [Jesus'] lead, to lean into love by turning our talk of loving and rescuing the world into redemptive action. We journey with Jesus on his mission to rescue a broken world" (p. 85).

Reflection and Discussion Questions:

1. What intimidates you about leaning into love and embracing God's calling for your life?
2. When you think about living a proximate life (whatever that might look like for you), what are the sacrifices that you would have to make? How do you feel about making those sacrifices?
3. As you have been reading this book, where have you sensed God calling you to a "deeper response"? Take time to journal and/or share, and ask God what this response may look like your life.
4. What are the idols that you hold, the version of you that you like, that could be barriers to a deeper engagement in a life of proximity (p. 84)?

Contemplative prayer is a spiritual practice that uses meditation to be still and empty one's self before God. As Michelle has become more involved in walking alongside friends in poverty and in advocating for justice, contemplative prayer has become an important practice to let go of the desire to be the one who makes a difference, overcome disillusionment, and take the focus on her own or an advocacy-based agenda. She invites you to read *The Welcoming Prayer* by Thomas Keating and try it as a entry into contemplative prayer. Set a timer for five or ten minutes, read the prayer, then find a word or phrase in the prayer to come back to and repeat in your mind every time you get distracted during your set time for stillness.

The Welcoming Prayer by Father Thomas Keating

Welcome, welcome, welcome.
I welcome everything that comes to me today
because I know it's for my healing.
I welcome all thoughts, feelings, emotions, persons,
situations, and conditions.
I let go of my desire for power and control.
I let go of my desire for affection, esteem,
approval and pleasure.
I let go of my desire for survival and security.
I let go of my desire to change any situation,
condition, person or myself.
I open to the love and presence of God and
God's action within. Amen.

Chapter 5: Race Matters

“When people ask me how to build bridges to people of color I tell them...to begin to listen to the voices of color. Seek out their books, their sermons, their teaching. Begin to allow your intellect to be shaped by the way they see the world. Respect their instruction as leaders and sit under their teaching—not as an anomaly but as a way of life” (p. 88).

Reflection and Discussion Questions:

1. What are the barriers that keep you from engaging with people of a different racial/ethnic background?
2. Have you ever had an experience of sitting under the teaching of someone from another racial/ethnic background and respected his/her instruction as a leader? If so, what made it possible for you to do so? If not, why not?
3. When you hear the words “white supremacy,” what comes to mind?
4. Have you ever engaged in a process of understanding your cultural/racial identity? When did you first become aware of your own ethnic and racial heritage?
5. How have your experiences crossing the racial divide been similar to or different than Michelle’s? Do you see generational differences in how racial divides are crossed?
6. As you see divisions in the church, do you believe race plays a role in those divisions? In what ways?
7. How can we lean into the unity in the body of Christ beyond public displays and prayers? What do you feel is needed for the church to truly embrace racial and ethnic diversity?

“Show me the suffering of the most miserable; So I will know my people’s plight.

Free me to pray for others;

For you are present in every person.

Help me take responsibility for my own life; So that I can be free at last.

Grant me courage to serve others; For in service there is true life.

Give me honesty and patience;

So that I can work with other workers.

Bring forth song and celebration;

So that his Spirit will be alive among us.

Let the Spirit flourish and grow;

So that we will never tire of the struggle.

Let us remember those who have died for justice; For they have given us life.

Help us love even those who hate us; So we can change the world.

Amen. “

Chapter 6: Privilege Needs to Take a Side

“Regardless of our ethnic identity, if our proximity to the poor is a choice, we are privileged” (p. 10).

“What are you going to do with what you have?” (p. 109).

Reflection and Discussion Questions:

1. Have you ever participated in a public rally for a justice issue? What was it like? How did it make you feel? Why did you do it?
2. Do you think laws in the United States are just? Why or why not? If this is question you have not considered before, why or why not?
3. In Isaiah 1:16-17 we are told to seek justice, rebuke the oppressor, defend the fatherless, and plead for the widow. Do you see the church doing this as a way of life, and how or how not?
4. What do you think the role of the church is in seeking justice?
5. How do you think Christians should choose sides when it comes to issues of injustice?
6. How do you do this and deal with the “political nature” of choosing and fighting for an issue with those you care about?
7. How far should we go to in standing up for those impacted by injustice?
8. Michelle describes two steps for those in the dominant culture to take in addressing racism: 1. Recognize that we cannot fully understand the pain of racism 2. Offer our support with open arms and a posture that asks, “What would you have me do?” Where in your life is there space to take these steps? If you can’t think of how you could apply these steps, what might be some barriers to you in addressing racism in your own sphere of influence (p.101)?

“If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.”

Lila Watson

Chapter 7: Fear, Courage, Redemption

Proximity is powerful because it makes us stronger. It enables us to have strength perfected in weakness. In this we allow God's grace to bring us to unimaginable places, for his kingdom and to his credit. Strong people are made because of strong decisions to move forward in weakness" (p. 131).

Reflection and Discussion Questions:

1. Do you consider yourself naturally brave or fearful? What is an example when you have displayed either or both?
2. When have you had to embrace courage and move beyond fear? What was the result in your heart and mind? Did this experience change the way you engaged fear the next time?
3. Do you think the church responds with fear or courage? In what ways?
4. How can we as Christians help each other move past our fears and lead with passion and conviction?
5. Michelle's articulation of examples when our faith puts justice above the law, and then when it leads us to challenging whether a law needs to be changed, is such a consensus-building argument for use within the church. Have you participated in discussions or heard of rationales that help highlight the need for the church to challenge unjust laws?
6. Have you seen or experienced leaders who shy away from hard things because of fear of a reaction? How does that make you feel about their leadership?
7. What kind of leader do you think the church needs? How might we be called to rise to that challenge?

"Courage is not the absence of fear. It is living your convictions in the face of fear!"
Dr. John Perkins

Chapter 8: *Solvitur Ambulando*

"In proximity, our relationships enable us to stay committed for the long haul. We're not fighting for issues; we are fighting alongside the people we love. However even when we're fighting...the timeline of justice work is long and we can easily become discouraged. We like quick and easy fixes but that's not the kind of work we're doing. We're on a long journey that began lifetimes before we arrived and may resolve lifetimes beyond our own" (p. 149).

Reflection and Discussion Questions:

1. Have you had an experience on a journey you felt as though you took a wrong turn and landed in an unfamiliar place? What did you learn about yourself? Others? God?
2. Considering the long work of justice, what are examples you see in society or the church that display instead a more results-driven approach? What is your feeling about those examples?
3. Have you sat at a “table” where you have been uncomfortable listening to someone who thinks differently than you or the group? How does that make you feel?
4. When has your perspective been transformed by collaborating with people with beliefs different than yours?
5. Have you ever experienced a moment in which those impacted by injustice communicated understanding of your solidarity with them? What was the impact that it had on you?
6. How can we learn from the story of Jonah regarding our heart toward our enemies?
7. What do you think of the idea of confident pluralism, and how do you think it should/shouldn’t shape the way we interact with people who are different than us?

“All life is interrelated, that somehow we're caught in an inescapable network of mutuality tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. For some strange reason, I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be.

You can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be.

This is the interrelated structure of reality.”

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Chapter 9: Joining the Collective Engagement

“A life of proximity to the poor is powerful because its story cannot be wrapped up in one small individual package; it is a collective, faith-filled life lived day after day alongside the pain and suffering of others. We do not simply desire the elimination of pain but a renewed spirit and a refined heart as we share it together” (p.162).

Reflection and Discussion Questions:

1. What role do you think leaders play in justice? Where have you seen this done well? Where have you seen it done poorly, and how can we learn from those mistakes?

2. How have you seen the effects of ego impact a collective work? How can we champion more collaborative efforts, and what are the benefits of doing so?
3. What have you encountered on your journey that have required the choice to hope? How can you resonate with the “big glass of hope” illustration that Michelle describes?
4. Michelle shared that her journey into a life of proximity to the poor began with moving into an under-resourced neighborhood in Dallas. But the journey can begin many different ways. As you’ve been reading this book, what are the collective ways you have begun dreaming about and feeling called to in your own journey on the Jericho path? And of course this walk isn’t a solo journey, so with whom are you feeling called to partner? How do you want to have your journey defined?
5. How has cynicism derailed any previous efforts you have been a part of? How has a results-driven culture played into cynicism in the church? How can we move past that to a faith-filled perspective?
6. What is your dream for the church today? How do you see yourself helping to shape that dream?

*“Hope has two beautiful daughters; their names are Anger and Courage.
Anger at the way things are, and Courage to see that they do not remain as they are.”
St. Augustine*

From the Author...

After finishing the final edits of The Power of Proximity, I wanted to take a few months before its release to connect with a group of Denver women who had a shared passion for proximate living to the poor and who were actively engaging alongside our city of Denver in a variety of vocations. For several months, we gathered each week and spent time in reflective prayer and contemplation, discussed the book, shared our grief and hopes for the church, and dreamed and committed to be the leaders needed to help shape its future. This complimentary guide is one of the results of our time together. Whether you are using this guide personally or in a group, we all hope that it is used to deeply stir your thoughts so that it can move to the action we so desperately need in our world today.

Below are the women whose shared journey with me for this season has helped make mine a bit richer. I trust that you recognize the need for a collection of voices to support yours and work to join others to move forward from awareness of injustice toward action in its alleviation.

~Michelle Warren

Study Guide Contributors:

Ericka Andersen



My passion for justice is linked to my heritage. I grew up as an only child within a warm, large extended Latin family of immigrants. I learned Spanish and English side by side, still, as a small girl I remember going to a party with my godmother and overhearing some adults there say, “Mira la Gringita” or “Look at the little American girl.” My blonde hair and fair skin from my Danish father made me an outsider at that moment, and introduced me to the feeling of being excluded based on appearance. Yet throughout my life I have benefitted from the privilege my dominant culture appearance affords me, and I have struggled with feelings of betrayal and uncertainty more and more as I have witnessed the prejudice the Latino community often experiences.

As a Christian, these tensions of privilege and solidarity along with the call to follow a Savior who is both a rebel and an outcast have led me to a life time of questions. Seeking to “live the questions” as one of my favorite poets, Rilke, encourages, has brought me into relationship with friends whose lives are characterized by lack of choices, and whose experiences with the underside of broken systems is a place where hope doesn’t seem to exist. My vocation is a low vision therapist where I support folks dealing with visual disability, but my role in the

community and passion for justice has become much more reflective of the factors of poverty and injustice impacting my friends and their extended communities, and the belief that standing with them is the context for how believers live out their faith.

Shant'a Johnson



I am well acquainted with systemic barriers. As a black single mother, raised up out of generational urban poverty, I have experienced how these barriers have for far too long influenced the structures and systems of Christian ministries and church institutions. In God's redemption, having the opportunity to work in the public education sector advocating for the educational rights of students experiencing homelessness with specific focus to Spanish-speaking families while also volunteering in the community to increase the quality of life for black children and their families through with the Denver Chapter of the Black Child Development Institute; I was honored to share my heart and experiences alongside a group of amazing women to discover what it may look like to live out redemption from the sin-sickness of hate and partiality as is spoken about in James 2:1, "My brothers,[a] show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory." I am excited to have walked this journey, and lift up in prayer this work along with the efforts of many others in the Body that are shedding light onto dark spaces in the Church.

Jenny Medrano



My name is Jenny Medrano and I am a passionate educator, community developer and youth worker. After graduating from Wheaton College in 2013 with a B.S. in Elementary Education, I moved to Denver for an Urban Leadership Program. Here in Denver, I have found ways to utilize my education degree in my community development work. As a Mexican- American, I am very passionate about connecting with and empowering the Latino community of Denver. I love

developing people of all ages in leadership and I have done so through cultural intelligence trainings and leadership development curriculum.

Rebecca Mendoza Nunziato



I'm a Colorado born and raised millennial passionate about transformation and reconciliation through unlikely friendships. As a mixed-race woman I seek to be a bridge builder and peacemaker and consider it a calling to pursue wholeness and beauty in hard and forgotten places.

After graduating college, I found myself invited to be a neighbor in one of Denver's public housing communities and have been learning how to listen, love and be loved since. One of the most profound spiritual practices I have integrated into my life is one of presence, simply being among the poor and marginalized. This is an embodied solidarity that is rooted in friendship and mutuality, it allows for authenticity, growth, giving and receiving – an experience that cannot be had from a distance. While I am often unsure of the most appropriate methodology as a neighbor, I continue to put one foot in front of another, apologizing when I fumble a friendship or offend an acquaintance and allowing myself to be healed by the laughter of children, the wisdom of mothers and the strength of the community.

I currently work at Mile High Ministries as a part of the Community Development team, where I have been learning to blend my activism with contemplative spirituality. I lead City Exploration retreats, support new peacemaking projects and coordinate wide variety events for our staff, partners and volunteers. I'm married to Michael, who enjoys urban gardening and soccer, and together we love our city.

Alexandria Newton (pictured with husband Tim Newton)



I currently work as a Licensed Clinical Social Worker in Denver, Colorado doing primary adult individual and group therapy. As a bilingual therapist (English/Spanish), I work with many immigrant adults and families and daily see the impacts of our failing immigration system on families. As a social worker it is my responsible to not only work on micro (individual) levels but also work to address meso (small groups/ local community) and macro (large system/institutional work) level issues. My focus as I listen to the daily stories of clients being impacted by our immigration, health care, education, and other systems is to ensure I am also working to advocate for change in policies that promote human dignity, self-determination, and social justice. As a Christian working in the field, I have often found that the church is less active in these levels and it has been difficult for me to figure out my place in church. Being a part of this group has enabled me to find a unique place with other Christians to grieve my own failings but also those of the church and greater systems and to hope for a growing, collective vision of the body of Christ through contemplation and action.

Cassandra Pugh



I hail from Dallas, Texas where I spent seven years in full-time ministry at a multi-site church. While there, I was a children's pastor and the trainer for the children's ministry curriculum that was developed by the church. In 2015 I transitioned into a two-year Fellowship in Denver, Colorado where my passion for working with adults was realized. Currently I am in Nashville, Tennessee helping a local church jump-start a ministry to better serve their neighbors through a career readiness and development program.

I am passionate about making sure all God's people are seen and treated with the love, value, & care He intended. I strive to challenge views that would present any people group as inferior. Some of my many loves are Spanish music, world cuisine, and seeing the church stand united in Christ. After Nashville, I plan to move to Guatemala to work on my Spanish fluency. This is not only a desire of my heart, but believe it is a necessity to better equip me to love my neighbors to serve in the ways that God calls me.

Jamie Rosenberry



I am a California native happily transplanted into the glorious state of Colorado. I currently serve with Open Door Ministries in Denver as a job coach and resource navigator for folks who are coming out of homelessness and addiction and seeking to making positive changes in life. Additionally, I also co-supervise Open Door's screen-printing business, Street2Life, which provides transitional employment for street youth. Prior to this assignment, I served on staff with Church Resource Ministries for nine years, in various roles. My deepest passion is seeing the Kingdom manifest among the poor and accompanying the broken and oppressed in their spiritual journeys with Jesus.