

12 neighbors Discussion Guide

Week Two : Spend Yourself

Pre-Film Question

Many people, especially those in wealthy developed nations, view poverty primarily as a material problem (lack of money or resources) and often respond to needs by donating money. Donating is a great thing, but money alone doesn't solve poverty. In fact, a material-only approach to poverty can cause harm by

- (a) presuming we know what people need and misdiagnosing the situation,
- (b) increasing feelings of shame and low self worth by jumping in with money to solve the problem, and inadvertently communicating that they don't have any assets/strengths worth building upon, and
- (c) directing them toward dependence, and delaying the path to a sustainable solution that breaks the cycle of poverty.

Pre-film discussion question: **What do you think it means to "spend yourself"?**

Watch the "Spend Yourself" episodes 2A + 2B

Discussion Questions

1. What are your initial thoughts, impressions or takeaways from the film?
2. In the film, Andy says, "*the biggest problem these kids face is a lack of expectations*". Why is this a problem and why might it be connected to material poverty (living in a low income community)?
3. Amir says "*money is not going to fix their vulnerability; love is going to fix their vulnerability.*" and, "*building a relationship with them is really important.*"

Jenny says, "*we didn't need money to go into the neighborhood. We needed to spend ourselves.*"

Compare and contrast the benefits and challenges of spending yourself versus taking a material or financial approach to helping? What is the cost? What are the benefits?

Consider how a material-only handout, i.e. giving food, without relationship, might heighten someone's feelings of shame and disgrace. Consider how listening and getting to know someone might help someone feel valued and heard.

4. Sarah says, "It's not that I'm an expert on anything, really. It's just that I can talk to them and tell them that I'm there."

Josh and Jenny said, "How do you create a plan for people you don't know?"

Amir started out with a plan: "At first my idea was..." but then changed, "so we had the format the way they wanted."

Why is it our tendency to feel that we need to be the experts and to propose solutions ourselves? How might listening & encouraging people set their own goals, to find their own solutions be valuable?

5. Can you share any thoughts or experiences about the impact and benefit to our own life when we "**spend ourselves**"?

Assessment

Assess in your own life, what "**spend yourself**" investments you are making at the moment. Are you mostly giving financially or giving relationally? Are you stepping outside your relational circle to connect with those who are "outside the camp" (hungry, oppressed, marginalized)? What gets in our way and keeps us from helping others? Discuss as a group.

Action

Take some time out of your week to intentionally go out of your way to "**spend yourself**" by making time to just listen and learn about someone else's story or situation. Try to apply the principles from the film: listening and learning, not prescribing any solutions, and putting aside any assumptions or prejudices you might carry with you into this conversation. Just listen, and demonstrate that they are worth you stopping and listening to their story.