



EXCERPT



I See You

How Love Opens Our Eyes to Invisible People

August 13, 2019 | \$16, 184 pages, paperback | 978-0-8308-4572-9

"Lester has followed the Spirit into abandoned buildings, under highway bridges, and into homeless shelters to find community among forgotten and abandoned populations. . . . In a fashion that invokes the prophetic fire of Martin Luther King Jr. and the compassionate solidarity of Jesus Christ, Lester centralizes love as the key factor to dismantling evil and creating a more equal world."

Neichelle R. Guidry, Dean of the Chapel, Spelman College, creator, shepreaches

How Do You See the Poor?

The reality of poverty and homelessness is difficult to grasp. It's wrapped up in politics, economics, systems, formulas for solutions, and a hundred other seemingly complicated barriers. On one hand, systemic poverty *is* complicated. There are hundreds of contributing factors. On the other hand, poverty can be simple.

According to the government, poverty includes any family of four making less than \$28,290 a year. But it doesn't include that same family if they make \$28,291. While we assign a particular number to what qualifies as "poverty," we miss the greater humanity and complexity tied to these situations. I propose we redefine poverty. Poverty is a *lack of access*.

People experience different levels of poverty when they lack access to good education, clean water, job opportunities, resources, health care, healthy food, and other basic needs, including money, but not limited to that. In *Jesus and the Disinherited* Howard Thurman gives some definition to those who have their backs against the wall in society and culture. He identified those persons as the poor, the disinherited, and the dispossessed. He writes,

I can count on the fingers of one hand the number of times that I have heard a sermon on the meaning of religion, of Christianity, to the man who stands with his back against the wall. It is urgent that my meaning be crystal clear. The masses of men live with their backs constantly against the wall. They are the poor, the disinherited, the dispossessed. What does our religion say to them? The issue is not what it counsels them to do for others whose need may be greater, but what religion offers to meet their own needs. The search for an answer to this question is perhaps the most important religious quest of modern life.

It's true that impoverished people have their backs against the wall. But a greater truth is that this kind of poverty does not exclude people from finding home in the family of God.

Over the last fifteen years of working closely with those experiencing poverty and homelessness, I've found that one of the greatest hindrances to helping them overcome their circumstances is how others perceive them.

Most common assumptions about the poor are:

- They are lazy and uneducated.
- They chose to be poor. They could pick themselves up by their bootstraps and get out of it if they really wanted to.
- The poor are the government's responsibility.
- I can't understand or relate to the poor.
- The poor are criminals.
- It's their own fault they're poor.



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- I don't know how to help them.
- There's nothing we can do. There will always be homeless and poor people.
- They have great spiritual and moral issues.

In *The Rich and the Rest of Us*, Cornel West and Tavis Smiley quote Barbara Ehrenreich to help us to see how negative misconceptions of the poor have always been a factor in why the poor are mistreated and demonized. Ehrenreich says, "The theory for a long time—coming not only from the right but also from some Democrats—is that poverty means that there is something wrong with your character, that you've got bad habits, you've got a bad lifestyle, you've made the wrong choices."

In this book I want to help deconstruct some of the misconceptions we have about the poor and tell you the stories of those who are experiencing poverty. Take a moment and ask yourself, *How do I see the poor? What do I believe to be true of those experiencing homelessness and poverty?* And maybe even more importantly, evaluate where those beliefs came from.

—Taken from the introduction, "Searching for Home"



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Q & A



I See You

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It can be easy to overlook the poor and homeless. But truly seeing leads us to act with compassion and justice. Sharing personal encounters and real-life stories, Terence Lester calls us to see the invisible people around us through God's eyes, restoring their dignity and helping them flourish. And when we recognize our own inner spiritual poverty, we have greater empathy for others, no matter their circumstances.

Do You Feel Empathy Toward the Poor and Homeless?

What motivated you to write *I See You*?

Terence Lester: I would say that my primary reason for writing the book was to help people become more empathetic toward those who are wrestling with material poverty. I also wanted people to have an understanding of their own internal poverty as a way of building a bridge with people who are materially poor. It is my hope for people to have a more humane view of people who are suffering with homelessness or poverty. I believe we need to normalize the church's response to helping the poor because it honors the Lord. Lastly, I hope to show people how ordinary Christians can make a difference in the lives of those that they befriend once they move past their fear and bias.

What is the message at the heart of this book?

Terence: I am addressing the need for everyday people to see people who are invisible because of social structures, bias, and classism. I am hoping to help people see how they can make a difference in the world through relationships. Essential to any life change is relationship.

I'm also helping people to see people going through problems as people that have worth and value instead of having a false narrative in their minds that the person is the problem.

I would say that the basic premise of the book is that we affirm the worth and value of those who are invisible when they are seen and included.

We must also see people the way that God sees them, and then respond. I think what is distinctive about this book is that it is written to people who have problems with seeing others who are poor as being worthy because of their poverty. It also helps to practically explain the suffering of others in a respectful way.

How do you hope readers are impacted by *I See You*?

Terence:

- I would like people to walk away having their perspective changed of the poor.
- I would like for people to move past their fear to engage in relationships with people who are not like them.
- I would like for people to make serving in their local communities a normal part of their lives.
- I would love for the church to make loving those who are disinherited a normal rhythm of the church.
- I would like people to understand how their talents can be used by God to make a difference.



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BIO



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Thought Leader on Homelessness, Poverty, and Economic Inequality

“Privilege has a way of blinding us to the realities faced by those society has made invisible, and in true incarnational fashion, Terence takes us with him on a journey to uncover the true experiences of our most vulnerable neighbors. I pray folks will approach this book with a heart open to the call of Christ to love our neighbors as ourselves and with eyes open to see others for the divine image they inherently bear.”

—**Chad Wright-Pittman**, associate pastor of congregational care and community outreach, First Presbyterian Church, Anderson, SC

Terence Lester is a speaker, activist, author, and founder of Love Beyond Walls, a nonprofit organization focused on poverty awareness and community mobilization. He’s known for nationwide campaigns that bring awareness to issues surrounding homelessness, poverty, and economic inequality.

His awareness campaigns have been featured on MLK50, TVONE, Creative Mornings, *USA Today*, NBC, AJC, Black Enterprise, Rolling Out, Upworthy, and have been viewed by millions of people worldwide. In 2018, Terence led the March Against Poverty as he walked from Atlanta to Memphis (386 miles). He finished the march and spoke at the historic Lorraine Motel for the fiftieth anniversary of MLK’s assassination.

He has spoken on the same platform as other civil rights activists such as Bernice King, Roland Martin, Gina Belafonte, Michael Eric Dyson, Tamika D. Mallory, and many others. Terence’s unique approach combines storytelling and digital media to help illustrate social justice issues and holistic approaches to solving these ailments.

Terence has written four books, including his new book, *I See You: How Love Opens Our Eyes to Invisible People*. He also holds four degrees and is working toward his doctorate.

He is happily married to his best friend, Cecilia Lester, and they have two amazing children, Zion Joy and Terence II.



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