



Psalm 119.105

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The Cityward Mind of God

A Manifesto For City Transformation

Roderick Graciano

Upright citizens are good for a city and make it prosper, but the talk of the wicked tears it apart.

Proverbs 11.11 (NLT)

Should I not be concerned for this great city?

Jonah 4.11 (NIV)

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This treatise *is* about God’s perpetual interest in cities, and the biblical vision of City Transformation.¹ Its content emerges from the double inspiration of my deepening interaction with a great city, and my belated awakening to the Bible’s “city theology.” I invite you to explore the cityward bent of God’s mind with me, and the implications of this biblical revelation for us who live and work in cities.

Reproof and Redemption of Cities in Antiquity

In churches² of my acquaintance we have often preached of God’s concern for nations, families and individuals. However, we have barely addressed His pointed concern for cities *as the crucial cultural unit in society*. Our times demand that we now adopt that concern as our own. To this end, let’s review the biblical record pertaining to cities, and afterward we will quarry that record for its practical implications.

The First Cities

Scripture introduces us to cities³ with the building of Enoch (Gen 4.17).⁴ Erected by Cain and named after his son, Enoch was important as the city that birthed the culture of Cain’s descendants.⁵ From Enoch emerged “those who live in tents and raise livestock,” “all who play the harp and flute,” and a man “who forged all kinds of tools out of bronze and iron” (Gen 4.17-22).

¹ For a definition of *City*, see Appendix 1.

² I will use a capital C to designate the greater Church of the city, and generally use lower case to designate individual local churches.

³ Hebrew = *iy*.

⁴ I use the three-letter bible book abbreviations, sans period, utilized by the BibleWorks program. Biblical quotations are generally from the NIV unless otherwise indicated.

⁵ *Culture*: the interwoven fabric of knowledge, beliefs, values, and practices that both characterize a group and are transmitted by that group to their biological or social heirs.

What This Treatise Is Not

Not A Call to Inner-City Ministry

The Great Commission will draw many of God’s people to dedicated work in the older, poorer and more densely populated sections of major cities, but that is not what this document is about.

Not A Call to Political Activism

We need godly people in government now more than ever, but that is not what this document is about.

Not A Criticism of Suburban Living

God will call some who live in the country or suburbs to move to the city, but apart from clear guidance to pull up roots, Paul’s counsel applies: “Let every man remain in the calling in which he was called” (1Cor 7.20). Moving to the city is not what this document is about.



After the building of Enoch, cities undoubtedly proliferated but human culture degenerated. Those cities and their peoples perished in Noah's flood. After the flood, but while the memory of it remained fresh in the collective consciousness, Nimrod and his followers decided to "make a name" for themselves by building a city. As the brick laying proceeded, though, an astounding event occurred. Genesis 11.5 says, "But the LORD came down to see the city ..." The LORD *came down!* The next thing that God did after His final blessing of Noah, at least on the record, was to inspect a city.

The text does not explicitly state the offense of Babel. Perhaps the people were rebelling against God's mandate to "fill" or "replenish" the earth. They decided instead to stay in one place and "not be scattered" (Gen 11.4).⁶ Josephus writes that Nimrod's people *were indeed* resisting God's command to colonize, but adds that Nimrod's intent in building the tower was to preclude drowning by another flood and to "avenge himself on God for killing their forefathers!"⁷ Be that as it may, the Genesis text does tell us explicitly that

"the LORD said, 'If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them'" (Gen 11.6). The message for us, besides the obvious one of obeying our Maker, is that Scripture recognizes the innovative power of a people united by a common culture and geographically concentrated in a civic locale.

But the Lord
came down
to see
the city.

Genesis 11.5

Sodom and Gomorrah

God does not "come down" often, but He did so again in Abraham's time, not only to announce Sarah's pregnancy, but again to inspect cities. In the course of this second visitation, God surprised Abraham with His corporate view of cities. As recorded in Genesis 18, God told Abraham about His intent to bring Sodom and Gomorrah to account. Abraham, knowing the corruption of Sodom and that his righteous nephew Lot lived there (2Pet 2.7), was dismayed to realize that God was about to *judge the cities corporately* instead of meting out justice to individuals, person by person. Imagine the public outcry that would occur if *our* government penalized an entire city for the crimes of a percentage (even a high percentage) of its inhabitants! Abraham recognized God's right to judge cities, but the nomad's alarm over the impending consequences to a righteous minority prompted a bold plea:

Far be it from you to do such a thing — to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen 18.25)

Graciously, the Lord agreed to spare the city of Sodom if even *ten* righteous people could be found in it. Thus God assures us that He *does* concern himself with individuals. Nevertheless,

⁶ That God responded by scattering the Babelites (Gen 11.9), supports the idea that their centralization was at least part of the offense.

⁷ JOE, Ant, 1.110-114.

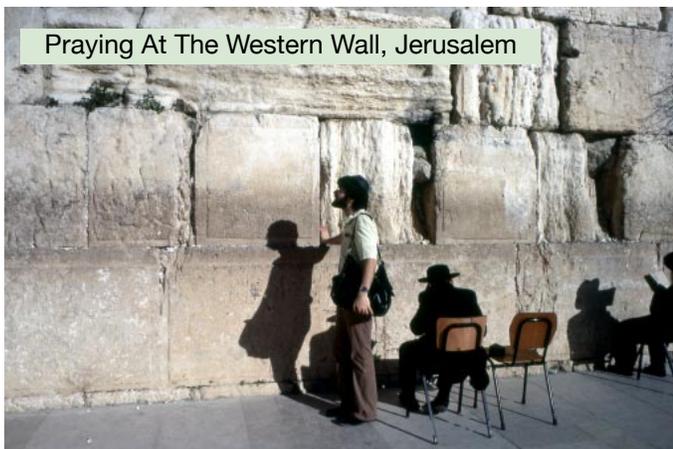
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He has a corporate perspective, viewing cities in the light of the individuals who inhabit them, and viewing individuals in relation to their real or potential influence upon their city.

Jonah and Nineveh

Thankfully, God does not concern Himself with cities only to judge them. He also turns His attention to cities to redeem them. This is the overlooked message of Jonah's story. Does it not amaze us that God made miracles in the Mediterranean to deliver His prophet to the doorstep of an undeserving city? God brought Jonah from the depths of the sea and the belly of the fish to deliver a redemptive message of repentance to the city of Nineveh. Jonah, fearing the future political-military consequences for Israel, became disgruntled when God spared Nineveh. Jonah even threw a tantrum when a shady vine God had planted withered. God reproved the angry prophet saying,

“You have been concerned about this vine, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. *Should I not be concerned about that great city?*” (Jonah 4.10,11)



Praying At The Western Wall, Jerusalem

The Prophets' Unceasing Intercession

If God concerns Himself with wicked cities like Nineveh, He concerns Himself more with Jerusalem, the city where He caused His Name to dwell.⁸ For *His own sake* He watches over the destiny of this city and inclines His ear to prayers offered for her (Dan 9.19).

God's special concern for Jerusalem gave impetus to the prayers of the prophets for that city. At prayer meetings, Isaiah would not shut up about Jerusalem (Isa 62.1-7):

For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet, till her righteousness shines out like the dawn, her salvation like a blazing torch.

The nations will see your righteousness, and all kings your glory...

As a young man marries a maiden, so will your sons marry you...

You who call on the Lord, give yourselves no rest,

and give him no rest till he establishes Jerusalem and makes her the praise of the earth.⁹

Ezekiel's Vision of A City Abandoned And Transformed

Jerusalem is the city God loves, but to whom much is given shall much be required. When Jerusalem corrupted herself beyond ability to reflect God's Name to the nations, “the glory of the Lord departed” from her temple (Eze 10.18). Then, Nebuchadnezzar carried away her people into exile and Nebuzaradan reduced her buildings to rubble.

Nevertheless, God was not (nor is He) finished with Jerusalem. “God's gifts and His call are irrevocable,”¹⁰ and He will yet exalt His Name in that city.¹¹ Therefore, as both a reproof and an inspiration to the exiles of Judah, God gave the prophet Ezekiel a vision of *Jerusalem transformed*. Our eschatological studies of Ezekiel have often focused on the details of the new temple, but the vision is much broader and culminates in a description of the new city.

⁸ 1Ki 8.29.

⁹ Cf. Psa 48.1,2; Lam 2.15.

¹⁰ Rom 11.29.

¹¹ Isa 60.13; Eze 43.7.

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The city will be geometrically beautiful, justly apportioned to its inhabitants, logistically efficient, illustrative of God's faithfulness to His promises and most importantly, inhabited by God's glory *now returned*. No longer will we call it *Jerusalem*, "City of Peace"; we will know it as *YHWH Shammah*, "The Lord is There" (Eze 48.35).¹²

The City Focus of Ezra and Nehemiah

As the future temple of Ezekiel 40-44 has deflected our attention from the city significance of Ezekiel 48, other interests have distracted us from the city focus in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. From these scriptures, we have taught leadership, teamwork, vision and sacrifice, and rightly so, for these books teach such lessons in the context of Nehemiah's building program. However, we have missed the city for the buildings.

When the enemies of Israel resisted the re-establishment of the Jewish nation, they couched their complaint in city terms (Ezra 4):

"...the Jews...are rebuilding that rebellious and wicked city."
"...if this city is built...the royal revenues will suffer."
"...you will find this city is a rebellious city..."
"...if this city is built...you will be left with nothing..."
"...this city has a long history of revolt..."

Why didn't they express their arguments in racial or national terms? Why didn't they say, "these *Jews* are wicked and rebellious," or "this *nation* has a history of revolt"?

When Nehemiah explained his doleful countenance to the Persian king, he likewise explained his problem in city terms:

"Why should my face not look sad when the city...lies in ruins...?" (Neh 2.3)

Why didn't Nehemiah say, "my nation is in ruins," or "the people are disorganized and struggling"? When Nehemiah took up his governorship of Judea, he held a lottery to strategically bring people in from their farms and villages to settle *in the city* (Neh 11.1). Why?

The Meaning of Cities In Biblical Poetry

The Bible's wisdom books, in their songs and aphorisms, teach us about the strategic importance of cities. The books of Psalms and Proverbs underscore the military importance of cities, even as do the Bible's history books. In biblical times, cities were the first and final bastions of defense (Pro 18.19). During an invasion, the people made their stands in the cities: "Be strong and let us fight bravely for our people and *the cities of our God*" (2Sa 10.12). Nehemiah knew that the Judean farms and villages could not alone preserve the nation in the event

And the name
of the city
from that time
will be:
**THE LORD IS
THERE.**

Ezekiel 48.35

¹² And also as *Hephzibah*, "My Delight" (Isa 62.4), and *YHWH Tsidkenu*, "The Lord Our Righteousness" (Jer 33.16).

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of all-out war; the people had to refortify their most important city before all else. Once built or rebuilt, cities, like human character, had to be kept in good repair because of their defensive importance (Pro 25.28).

If cities were uprooted, it meant utter defeat for the nation (Psa 9.6). As the fall of cities signaled the destruction of a country, so the rebuilding of cities meant the restoration of a people: “for God will save Zion and rebuild the cities of Judah” (Psa 69.35). When God blesses a people “whose God is the LORD,” “there will be no breaching of walls, no going into captivity, no cry of distress in our streets” (Psa 144.14,15).

Cities are also the cultural centers of a country. As such, they should ideally serve as a strong pillar for both family and nation by dispensing God’s wisdom. “Wisdom calls aloud ... *in the gateways of the city*” (Pro 1.20,21). “Beside *the gates leading into the city*, at the entrance, she cries aloud: “To you, O men, I call out; I raise my voice to all mankind.” (Pro 8.1-3). “She calls out *from the highest point of the city*, ‘...the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom ...’” (Pro 9.3-10). This cultural importance of cities also motivated Nehemiah. He knew that a strong Jerusalem, built around the worship of the true God, was essential for the nation’s cultural cohesion.

The fact that cities dispense culture can result in either good or evil, though, because Wisdom and Folly are neighbors. Both gravitate to the city seat of power and influence. Just as Wisdom calls out *from the highest point of the city*, so “the woman Folly ... sits at the door of her house, on a seat *at the highest point of the city*, calling out to those who pass by ...” (Pro 9.13-18). If the influential heart of the city is righteous, the city will rejoice; if it is wicked, the city will be destroyed (Pro 11.10,11).

It is the larger cultural unit of the city that ultimately gives approbation to the behavior of families and individuals. It is the city that gives its blessing on the “Proverbs 31 woman,” and strengthens her in her righteous resolve (Pro 31.23,31). The city gives its stamp of approval on its inhabitants, thereby reinforcing the character of the individual as well as its own corporate



The Excavated Walls of Ancient Jericho

It is the city
that gives
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to the behavior
of families
and individuals.

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values, whether good or evil (Ecc 8.10 LXX; cf. Rom 1.32).

Cities are cultural centers because they are market centers. Even the agrarian culture of ancient Israel recognized cities as the source for material provision (Psa 107.4-9). True, the surrounding farms and ranches produced the goods, but the cities made those goods accessible to the larger populace. Cities hosted the marketplace for chickens, and thereby hatched the marketplace of ideas. Whether for commerce in potatoes or philosophy, all roads led to the city.



Sadly, in a fallen world, the marketplace of ideas tends to lead us astray. With all their potential for good, cities also spawn corruption (Psa 55.9,11; Pro 29.8). As in military warfare, so in spiritual warfare cities are the battlefield. For this reason, King David ceaselessly prayed for his own city. “In your good pleasure make Zion prosper,” he prayed, “build up the walls of Jerusalem” (Psa 51.18). Furthermore, he urged his fellow citizens to join him in intercession for their city (Psa 122.6-9):

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: “May those who love you be secure. May there be peace within your walls and security within your citadels.” For the sake of my brothers and friends, I will say, “Peace be within you.” For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek your prosperity.

Jerusalem remained secure in David’s time, but generations later it fell to the Babylonians who deported its citizens. Nevertheless, even in exile, the Judeans considered *the city* of Jerusalem their “highest joy” (Psa 137.6).

Christ’s Attention to Cities

Like His Father in the Old Testament epochs, Christ demonstrated his consciousness of cities as strategic cultural units. We see this in Jesus’ warnings to specific towns. We know that the towns Jesus reprovved had some righteous families in them. Peter’s family lived in Capernaum, for example. Nevertheless, Jesus assessed the corporate character of towns and cities and rebuked them accordingly:

Mat 11.20 Then Jesus began to denounce the cities in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent. 21 “Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. 22 But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. 23 And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths. If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. 24 But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you.”

As Jesus warned of judgment upon cities, He also yearned for their redemption, most of all — as the prophets would have expected — for the city of Jerusalem:

Mat 23.37 “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.

Pastoring the Nations

From Genesis to the Gospels, the Lord always concerned Himself with existing cities. However, a complete picture of His cityward mind must also include the Bible's eschatological declarations about cities of the future. We have already noted Ezekiel's vision of Jerusalem's future transformation, but there's more. For example, speaking of the eschatological Day of the LORD, God said through Isaiah:

In that day five cities in Egypt will speak the language of Canaan and swear allegiance to the LORD Almighty. One of them will be called the City of Destruction. (Isa 19.18)

Well done,
my good
servant!
Take charge of
ten cities.
Luke 19.17

The prophecy does not say simply, "many in Egypt will speak, etc." Rather, it indicates five cities explicitly, including one that God will rename because of the strategic victory involved in its conversion.¹³

Isaiah goes on to praise God for His coming victory over the nations, and declares His judgment and redemption *in terms of cities*:

Isa 25.1 O LORD, you are my God; I will exalt you and praise your name, for in perfect faithfulness you have done marvelous things, things planned long ago. 2 *You have made the city a heap of rubble, the fortified town a ruin, the foreigners' stronghold a city no more; it will never be rebuilt.* 3 Therefore strong peoples will honor you; *cities of ruthless nations will revere you.*

Congruent with this prophesied redemption of cities, Jesus taught that His servants would rule over *cities*. In one of his parables, Jesus related the decree of the returning king to a faithful servant:

"Well done, my good servant!" his master replied. "Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of *ten cities*." (Luk 19.17)

The promise of Jesus to His overcomers in Revelation 2.26 complements the parable's teaching.

¹³ [This passage is about the future conversion of Egyptian people.] Erlandsson (p. 78), following Kissane, understands it in this way and sees in the five cities an allusion to the original conquest of Canaan by the Israelites. After the capture of Jericho and Ai by Joshua's forces, their first great victory was over the kings of five important Canaanite cities, namely Jerusalem, Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish, and Eglon (Josh 10). This victory led to the conquest of the whole country. So, Kissane and Erlandsson maintain, the spiritual conquest of Egypt outlined in vv.19-22 starts with the conversion of five cities promised in v.18. This interpretation not only fits the context perfectly but would also furnish a further example of allusion to the Exodus-Conquest period that is such a feature of this oracle.

What then is "the City of Destruction"? The Hebrew *ir haheeres* seems like a play on ... the Hebrew equivalent of Heliopolis, the City of the Sun. The latter is actually read in some of the ancient sources of the text. If so, then, the conversion of the people of this stronghold of sun worship is perhaps treated as a major victory, decisive enough and significant enough as a great act of destruction at the time of the Conquest. (Gaebelein, Frank E., Ed.; *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, 1990, Electronic text hypertexted and prepared by OakTree Software, Inc.))

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In the Revelation, Christ promises to give His servants authority over *the nations*.¹⁴ Jesus is preparing his servants to reign over the nations,¹⁵ and His parables reveal that this reign will be expressed in *the pastoring of cities*.¹⁶

The City God Loves (Earthly Jerusalem)

But let us return to the vision of Jerusalem transformed, for Ezekiel was not the only prophet to speak of it. When the darkness of cosmic upheaval has covered the earth as a prelude to the apocalypse, the dawning light of glory will blaze upon one city in particular, “Zion of the Holy One of Israel” (Isa 60.14). “Arise, shine,” cries Isaiah (60.1), “for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you.” In Isaiah’s vision of Jerusalem transformed he foretold:

Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.
... you will be radiant, your heart will throb and swell with joy;
... to you ... all ... will come ... proclaiming the praise of the LORD.
Foreigners will rebuild your walls ...
Your gates will always stand open, they will never be shut, day or night ...



“The city streets will be filled with boys and girls...”

Youth of Jerusalem's Jewish Quarter, Feb. 1978

... and I will glorify the place of my feet.
... I will make peace your governor and
righteousness your ruler.
... you will call your walls Salvation and
your gates Praise.
... the LORD will be your everlasting light,
and your God will be your glory.

All this is about a city, “the city of the LORD” (Isa 60.14). It is not about “the Church” of Replacement Theology, but about a literal city that it will serve as a visible expression of the Church’s invisible realities.

This is the same city that Zechariah said the Lord would transform by His coming into “the City of Truth” (Zec 8.3). In this city “men and women of ripe old age will sit in the streets ... the city streets will be filled with boys and girls playing there” (Zec 8.4,5).

This is the same transformed and exalted city against which Satan will aim his final assault. No wonder that fire will fall from heaven and devour the devil’s hordes, for this is “the city [God] loves” (Rev 20.9).

Amazingly, this beloved, transformed, earthly Jerusalem mirrors a greater city still, a city not of this planet. This wonderful fact brings us to the crowning revelation of God’s cityward mind.

¹⁴ No wonder Paul taught that “godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and *also* the life to come” (1Tim. 4.8).

¹⁵ Cf. 2Tim. 2.12; Rev. 5.10; 20.4.

¹⁶ The Greek word translated *rule* in Rev 2.27 is actually the verb *to shepherd* or *to pastor*.

The City With *The* Foundations (Heavenly Jerusalem)

Hebrews 11.10 tells us that Abraham lived as a sojourner precisely because “he looked for the city which hath the foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” I quote the ASV of 1901 here because it preserves the dual articles of the Greek: *the* city with *the* foundations. What city has *the* foundations? What city has any foundation, for that matter, let alone the foundations (plural)? None other than New Jerusalem, the city described as having 12 foundations (Rev 21.14), and identified as the Bride of the Lamb (Rev. 21.9, 10).

Wait! The Bride of Christ is a *city*? Yes, John saw “the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband” (Rev 21.2).¹⁷ One of the seven angels directs John’s attention to the city saying, “Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb” (Rev 21.9). The Bride of Christ is a city. We may not emphasize this fact in our teaching and preaching, but with it I rest my case. *God’s mind not only bends cityward, it does so with profound purpose and love!*

Adopting God’s Concern: Principles For City Transformation

1. City Transformation Defined



population living authentically devoted lives to Jesus Christ and His Kingdom.

Transformed Communities

What would *my* city look like if 80% of the whole community really lived for Jesus Christ? First of all, authentic devotion to Christ on that demographic magnitude would generate a predominately biblical worldview in the city. A biblical worldview, widely held, would in turn

¹⁷ This is not the first revelation of someone marrying a city: Isa 62.5.

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directly influence city policies. As a city we would then place a high value on human life, becoming an abortion-free and euthanasia-free zone. My city in particular would begin to value people more than material profit, continuing to distance itself from a history of persecuting minorities for the sake of “the bottom line.”¹⁸ The city would continue to prioritize practical, constructive, common-sense services for the socially, and economically disenfranchised, and prayerfully dispense real justice in the court system. We would pass zoning laws to discourage every kind of vice and smut. We would see integrity insisted upon in city government and in local business, and a return of shame in response to ungodliness.

Biblical public policies would result in the diminishing of every kind of crime, and the lowering of our prison population. Biblical attitudes in the marketplace would result in a slower, more patient, pace of life and better all around health, which would rein in health care costs.

Our city would become hospitable, ready to perform acts of kindness to strangers and refugees. Isaiah 58.6-12 leads me to believe that our hospitality and genuine concern for the needy would result in more frequent demonstrations of God’s supernatural power. This in turn should generate a continuing openness to the gospel among the yet non-Christian city natives and visitors (in spite of a percentage whose hearts would be hardened).

We would see a distinctly Christian culture develop in the city. A shift would occur in the arts toward glorifying God, a shift that would manifest itself in local architecture and artwork installations, as well as in film and music intended for wider distribution. We might even see a return to modesty in public dress.

Transformed Neighborhoods

A transformed city would allow for a much greater sense of community in the city’s subdivisions. Practical love for neighbor would produce a sense of security and a return to the day when we could leave our homes unlocked. Neighbors helping one another with needs would keep properties neat, and real estate values high. We would see happy children, playing in safe environments, and police once again able to walk a beat, getting to know the citizens they serve.

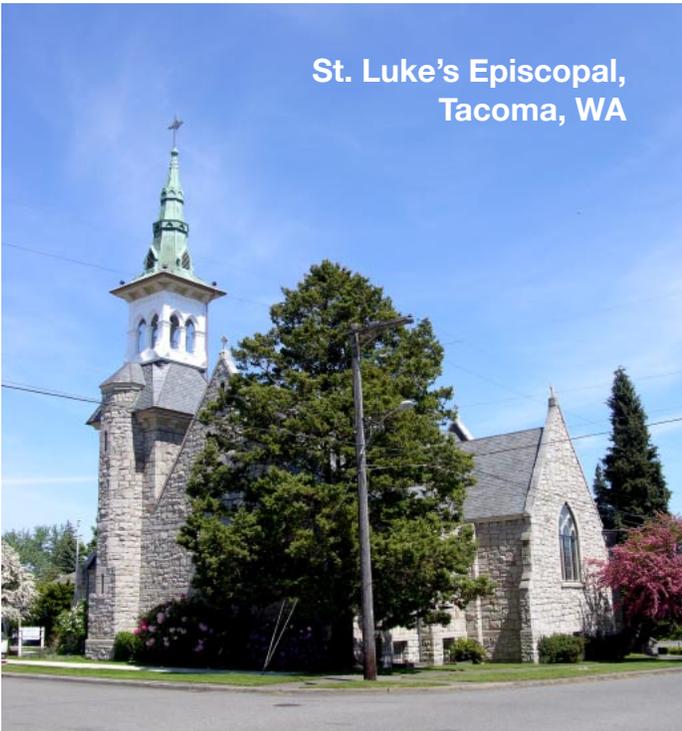
Transformed Homes

A transformed city would profoundly impact families (more on that below). We would see a new freedom from selfishness and self-indulgence. Forgiveness would reign in the family, and spouses would honor one another. Parents would have time for children and children would once again respect parents and grandparents.



¹⁸ Thankfully, we have already renounced, by public Mayoral proclamation, our past persecution of Chinese immigrant workers.

St. Luke's Episcopal,
Tacoma, WA



Transformed Churches

Transformed families would transform our churches. Christians would authentically love one another within their own congregations, and graciously embrace needy outsiders (cf. Luk 14.21). They would shuck their independent spirits and put a high priority upon spiritual community. Obedience to the Scriptures would replace willfulness, and both individuals and congregations would work together without rivalry.

Church leaders would shepherd sacrificially, and no longer promote self-serving agendas and programs. Congregations would more consistently respect the authority of their leaders, not only because of the leaders' positions, but because the leaders would have actually learned to watch over

the souls of their people "as men who must give an account" (Heb 13.17). Cults would experience mass conversions to biblical Christianity, main-line churches would regain a high-view of biblical inspiration, and evangelical and fundamentalist churches would pull back from "the danger zone" through which many are sliding toward cultishness (see Appendix 2).

A majority of "lay people" would take up ministry responsibility, dedicating themselves to discipling (mentoring) those younger in the faith. They would passionately share the joy of the Christian life with non-Christians, at home and abroad. More frequent demonstrations of God's supernatural power would accompany their evangelism and missionary work. We would see a return to "true religion," namely, sacrificial care for the orphan, widow, single-mom and *anyone* who is in need (Jam 1.27).

Transformed Schools

Perhaps no institution would be more radically affected by city transformation than our public schools.¹⁹ A biblically transformed city with a Christian worldview and emerging Christian culture would diametrically change the underlying philosophies of our educational system. For one thing, teachers would once again affirm antithetical truth (without negating the relational and story-telling strengths of postmodernism). The lingering vestiges of modernism, with its worship of science, would be

Sherman Elementary School,
Tacoma, WA



¹⁹ In fact, future ministry strategies will probably involve concerted outreach and service to subcommunities in our larger cities, rather than to the whole city at once. The natural subcommunities in which this should occur are the city's school districts.

A prayer for
the Kingdom to
come,
is a prayer
for the
transformation
of cities.

replaced by the biblical foundations for rationality, scientific endeavor and wise stewardship of the environment. Biblical purpose, character and moral values would be taught, and the hopelessness of Darwinism with its nihilistic fruit would be finally ejected from the curriculum (except as a cautionary tale of our societies past foolishness). The restoration of *meaningful life purpose* as an element of education would result in diminishing at least some drug abuse on the one hand, while increasing creative social vision on the other.

Is there anything not to like in this imaginary picture?

2. The Biblical Mandate for City Transformation

“Sure,” someone might object, “a culture operating with a biblical worldview sounds wonderful, but where in the Bible are we told to prioritize city transformation?” That’s an excellent question. The answer has been right before our eyes and on our lips for 2,000 years. We have repeated it

every time we have recited the Lord’s prayer.

Matthew 6.10: On Earth As It Is In Heaven

We have just been imagining what our city would look like if 80% of the population were authentically devoted to Christ. All we have been doing is imagining the answer to our prayer, “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” Of course, many of us grew up thinking this was an eschatological petition. We figured we were reminding Jesus to return and rule someday. “Kingdom come” even became a metaphor for the distant future. The entire Lord’s prayer, however, concerns the *present* exigencies of the believer’s life. When we pray, therefore, “Thy Kingdom come,” we ask God to advance His rule in our world *now*.

Look at the prayer again. We don’t ask, “Thy will be done *only* in my life, *just* in my family and my congregation.” We ask, “Thy will be done *on earth!*” We ask God to rule our world, and now we understand that His rule will advance city by city. We ask God to come rule our cities *today*. Logically, that means we are asking Him to transform them, for they will not submit to His rule apart from transformation. *A prayer for the Kingdom to come is a prayer for city transformation.*

Jeremiah 29: What Is Good For The City Is Good For God’s People

Our mandate to pursue city transformation did not suddenly appear in the New Testament, however. The wise among God’s people have always known that what was good for the city, was good for them. Still, when the Judeans were taken into exile, the principle of blessing one’s city became somewhat counterintuitive: should we really work for the good of a pagan city full of our enemies? Therefore, God spoke through Jeremiah and said:

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This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: “Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, *because if it prospers, you too will prosper.*” (Jer. 29.4-7)

This instruction from the prophet applies directly to us, who like our spiritual father Abraham, live like strangers “in a foreign country ... looking forward to the city with foundations whose architect and builder is God.” As spiritual “sojourners and exiles” (1Pe 2.11, ESV), we too must “seek the peace and prosperity of the city,” because if it prospers, *we will prosper.*

Isaiah 58.6-12: God’s Chosen Fast

To seek the prosperity of our city is to do nothing but engage in the kind of “fasting” that God has chosen for us. It is to:

loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke ... to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter — when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood ... [to] do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, and ... spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed ... (Isa 58.6-10).

Obviously this is much more than just inviting people to accept Jesus into their heart; it is to create the active setting for true discipleship by directly impacting the city. The rewards of blessing the needy of the city in these ways are abundant:

Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I. ... then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday. The LORD will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail. Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings. (Isa 58.8-12; see also Isa 61.4)

Notice the closing promise: “you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings.” *To live as God has chosen for us, is to repair and restore city communities.*

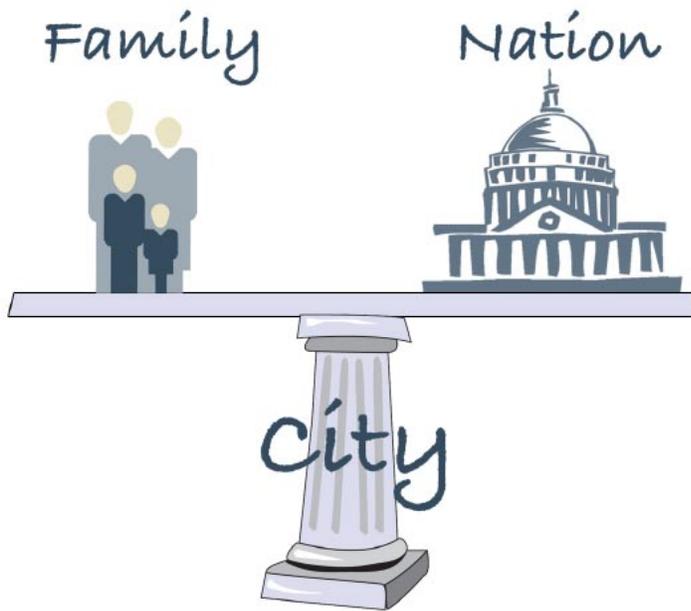
Matthew 28.19: Making Disciples of Jesus

Finally, let’s recall that the core imperative of Matthew’s Great Commission passage is the command to make disciples. Our mandate is to follow Jesus ourselves, and thereby help others become like Him (1Co 11.1). Therefore, if Jesus sought city transformation, we must as well. Did Jesus help towns and cities understand the Kingdom of God (Luk 4.43)? Then we must help our city understand the Kingdom. Did Jesus address the spiritual needs of specific cities (Mat 11.20-24)? Then we must also. Did Jesus weep over His city (Luk 19.41)? Then we must weep over ours. *To become like Jesus is to minister to both individuals and cities.*

3. Recognize The City As The Cultural Pillar

What then is the next step in ministering to cities? It is to recognize the supreme cultural influence that cities have. Just as Enoch, the first city of biblical record, birthed an antediluvian culture, Psalms and Proverbs confirm that present cities, by their very nature are the pillars of regional culture. It is the culture first fostered in cities that subsequently permeates the smaller cultural unit of the family on one hand, and the larger cultural entity of the nation on

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the other. Once family and nation have absorbed the culture of the city, the city continues to support and reinforce its cultural values in these two entities.

The Church, rather than the city, *should be* the greater cultural influence, at least for Christian families, but this is not the case. Historically the church has usually been more strongly influenced by the city, than the city by the church. Most professing Christians spend a few hours a week on the church premises and live the vast majority of their lives in the city (or absorbing the city's culture in front of the TV). Whose cultural cadence will they march to? Thanks to pollsters

like George Barna, we have long known in America that professing Christians are, generally speaking, no different from unbelievers in their lifestyles and divorce statistics. This is due in part to the fact that the city has a greater cultural impact than the church, even upon those claiming to be “born again.”

When we pray for national revival, we'd like to believe that strong families make a strong nation, and that the church is up to the task of producing the strong families. The reality is that *strong cities* make strong families and strong nations, while *corrupt cities* weaken both families and their nation. Currently, influential cities like Hollywood and New York, promoting an unbiblical worldview, are undermining both family and nation faster than the church can hope to keep up.

Therefore, we must stop living in denial of this dynamic and begin to give at least equal attention to city transformation as we do to our focus on the family. We must recognize that, just as for Nimrod's Babel, “nothing they plan to do will be impossible,” culturally speaking, for a city united in its dismissal of God. Only two possible futures await us: either the city will continue to transform society and the church with it, or God will transform the city as the church reprioritizes its strategies. *We must devote spiritual attention to our most strategic cultural entity, the city.*



4. Minister To The City As A Corporate Entity²⁰

Once having recognized the city as our most strategic spiritual target, we must creatively minister to the city *as a corporate entity*. This will involve a paradigm shift, because the Evangelical church in America has become almost exclusively concerned with individuals and families. Our main concern has been to get Lot's family out of Sodom and safely ensconced within the four walls of our sanctuary. Had it been up to us, Nineveh would have perished while we hoped the Ninevites would read our ad in the Saturday paper and visit our church some day. We have hoped for change in our cities, but have assumed that the only way to transformation was one conversion at a time. When individual congregations or parachurch ministries have endeavored to minister to *the city*, we have criticized their workers for watering down the truth with a social gospel.

Ultimate cultural change *will come* one conversion at a time, and we must never lose sight of the gospel that is “the power of salvation.” But our predominately one-on-one approach to the Great Commission isn't working. While we witness to individuals, cities are influencing the masses! We must engage in both personal evangelism *and* ministry to the city as a corporate whole.

Take a look at the commission to the disciples in Luke 10.8-12:

Luke 10.8 “When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is set before you. 9 Heal the sick who are there and tell them, ‘The kingdom of God is near you.’ 10 But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say, 11 ‘Even the dust of your town that sticks to our feet we wipe off against you. Yet be sure of this: The kingdom of God is near.’ 12 I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.

Our predominately
one-on-one
approach to the
Great
Commission
isn't working.

We cannot miss the corporate emphasis of this mandate. Sure, we minister to individuals, but the commission is to assess the corporate spirit of the town or city, and minister to it accordingly.

Address the City's Corporate Needs

If a city is willing to receive our ministries offered in the name of Jesus, then we should identify the corporate, felt needs of the city and address them sacrificially. Again, this is simply to engage in the social ministries delineated in Isaiah 58, to “loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke ... to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter” — but to do so with post-Pentecost power. Living as we do in the age of the Spirit, we can and must add Luke 10.9 to Isaiah 58: “Heal the sick who are there and tell them, ‘The kingdom of God

²⁰ In this treatise, undergirding prayer for every spiritual endeavor is assumed. I have been unable to disprove John Wesley's claim that “God does nothing but in answer to prayer,” and so take it as my working assumption. In Pierce County, Washington, we are blessed to have a growing network of laypersons called to the ministry of intercession for our cities and county. The Pastors of our county have also long recognized that the only way to Unbreak the Church (principle 5 in this treatise) is to pray for and with one another.

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Masonic Temple,
St. Helen's Ave, Tacoma, WA

is near you.” A fruitful exercise of the gifts and disciplines of the Holy Spirit, along with a clear proclamation of God’s kingdom, must accompany our ministries to the city.

Address the City’s Strongholds

Not the least of those ministries will be to pull down the city’s spiritual strongholds. We will have to do this because the influential nature of cities makes them the primary battlefronts for the war between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Satan. History confirms what the Bible tells us both in metaphor and example:

cities wield cultural and spiritual influence over their populace, and both the Holy Spirit and the spirit of Evil seek the reins of that influence.²¹ Where Satan has gained a foothold and built a stronghold, we must address it.

Both Christians and non-Christians wish to live in denial of this spiritual urban warfare. We enjoy the myth of the “secular city,” a neutral entity that has nothing to do with any god. Unfortunately, while many cities are Godless, none of them are godless. Every city has its lord. It’s easy and tempting to lose sight of this reality now, but from the creation of the world there has never been a city (or nation) that thought of itself as religiously unaffiliated until the time of the French Revolution.

In antiquity one could hardly separate the social from religious facets of society. It was unacceptable for members of the Greek cities that the Jews wanted to live as members of the civil society of a city, but did not want to fulfill religious duties, such as the veneration of the gods of the city (cf. *Jos. Antiq.* II:125f ; *Ap.* II:65, 79). The refusal to honour the gods of the people amongst whom they lived caused the Gentiles to consider the Jews to be “irreligious” (*Jos. Ap.* II:148, 291).²²

Only since around 1795, has society promulgated the idea of a secular city, i.e., a city without its own tutelary deity. Since that time, cities have been founded, or rededicated, as secular federations devoted to secular purposes, without allegiance or even reference to any particular deity. However, the spiritual realm abhors a vacuum.²³ When we imagine that no god rules over our present-day cities, we deceive ourselves. There is a ruling spiritual influence over each and every city, and when that influence

While many cities
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Every city has
its lord.

²¹ Consider Rev. 2.13.

²² du Toit, A.; *The New Testament Milieu* (hbnt.3.1191) (Halfway House, Orion, 1998).

²³ Consider Mat. 12.43-45.

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is evil it will fight to maintain its authority over the populace. The Kingdom of God can only advance as it takes territory from the Kingdom of Evil, and it is at the city level — as well as at the individual level — that this exchange occurs strategically.

In many of our cities, Satan seems to be winning. Nevertheless, “a wise man attacks the city of the mighty and pulls down the strongholds in which they trust” (Pro 21.22). We can do this because, “though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds” (2Co 10.3,4).

What do I mean by spiritual strongholds? *Not* some unverifiable geographical concentrations of evil spirits, but rather those established and enduring organizations and institutions that exert a contra-biblical — and no doubt demonic — influence in the city. We must identify these institutions and address them vigorously! Doing so will not only require the power of the Holy Spirit, but also the wisdom of the Holy Spirit,²⁴ for much of the battle will take place in the arena of ideas. “We demolish *arguments* and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive *every thought* to make it obedient to Christ” (2Co 10.5). Bringing down the strongholds in our city involves, among other things, changing the way people think about key issues and questions.

5. *Unbreak The Church*²⁵

The secular population is not alone in needing a change of perspective. The Church also must experience a paradigm shift, particularly in our understanding of unity, before we can adequately address the needs and strongholds of a city. A fractured Church made up of independent congregations acting unilaterally will never bring transformation. We must first transform our own minds.

The City’s Fishnet

The starting point is to turn from an exclusive focus on the success of our own local church and toward the success of the multi-congregation Church of our city. Historically, local churches have been competitive in seeking to draw attendees, and often controlling in guarding “their sheep” from straying to other fellowships. The local church is still too often characterized by



²⁴ “Wisdom makes one wise man more powerful than ten rulers in a city” (Ecc 7.19). “Wisdom is better than strength . . . wisdom is better than weapons of war” (Ecc 9.14-18).

²⁵ In Pierce County, Washington, we have long recognized the Altar-Temple-Wall principle: Prayer (The Altar) must lead to authentic relationship within the church (The Temple) before we can effectively reach out to the unbelieving community (The Wall). With regard to the City Transformation vision, we have summarized the steps as (1) Transformation Prayer, (2) Authentic Relationship, and (3) Anointed Activism. Prayer for City Transformation and Authentic Relationship within the greater Church must occur before we launch into Anointed Activism in the secular community. The fact that I present *Unbreak The Church* as principle 5 in this treatise does not imply that principle 5 is a “step” that can wait until we’ve done the other 4. On the contrary, a degree of unity within the greater Church of the city must occur *before* we properly think about the other four principles — and the unity of the greater Church must *continue to increase* as we launch into the Anointed Activism of principle 4.

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self-protectiveness. At Timothy Ministries, we were recently saddened to receive an “anti-church-at-large” letter from a pastor, which included the following paragraphs:

I see the idea/theology of the “church at large” spreading in ways that I find unscriptural, and dangerous. Here’s what I have personally experienced happening. Spreading the theology that all churches are the “body” and that we can serve where ever, is in my opinion, dangerous. It is true without doubt that we all (Believers, not matter where we are) make up the body of Christ. In this there is not debate. But focusing on this takes away from the unity that should exist in the individual bodies. It does not promote the growth of the individual church bodies (and therefore the individuals that attend) and weakens individual congregations by encouraging the congregants to be loosy-goosy about where they attend, and even more dangerously, why they attend.

In the process, church members do not become firmly rooted in any body. Leadership suffers because members do not stick out the rough weather and follow the lead of the church and/or pastor through trials that will come. Additionally, there is no loyalty established for the growth of that body. Perhaps more importantly what happens is that the new attendees, and new believers that come to visit your church see no continuity among the members, let alone the leadership. This is then viewed as instability, which does not encourage one to stay and grow in the Lord. Instead, they find this fact rather discouraging, and they go on their way to the next church on their shopping list.

In response to this potpourri of concerns, let me be clear: *personal commitment to a specific spiritual community is essential and I loathe church-hopping.* However, the dear pastor behind this letter makes some unbiblical assumptions. Contrary to his own analysis of why people are “loosy-goosy” (sic) about their church commitments, it is not because they have been taught a City-Church theology, but rather because they haven’t! It is precisely *the lack of relationship* between local congregations and their leadership that allows church members — and seekers — to slip away. Pastor’s wife, Sherry Varkonyi, recently shared a compelling insight with a number of our county’s pastors. She compared the *network* of our local churches to God’s *fishnet* in our county. Christ has called us to be fishers of men (Mat 4.19), but if there are holes in our net, i.e., broken or missing relationships in our network of churches, it’s no wonder that so many fish get away.

What is good for
the Church of
the city,
will be good
for our
congregation.

The Requisite Revelation

The Church of the city *must* unite in authentic relationship. Yet, as Pierce County pastor, Ralph Simmons, has taught us, Christian leaders will not be persuaded of this truth by human eloquence; they must receive it by revelation from the Lord. The requisite revelation includes at least two vital truths: (1) *As ministers and congregations we need one another*, and (2) *what is good for the Church of the city will be good for our own congregation.*

For many years I served on a pastoral team that resisted cooperation with other congregations on the grounds that the doctrine of the other fellowships was not up to standard. I regret that I was seduced by this thinking for too many years before the hypocrisy of it dawned upon me: *if we have the truth, and the other congregations don’t, how are they ever going to get straightened out by our isolating ourselves from them?* Did I say *hypocrisy?* Add *arrogance.*

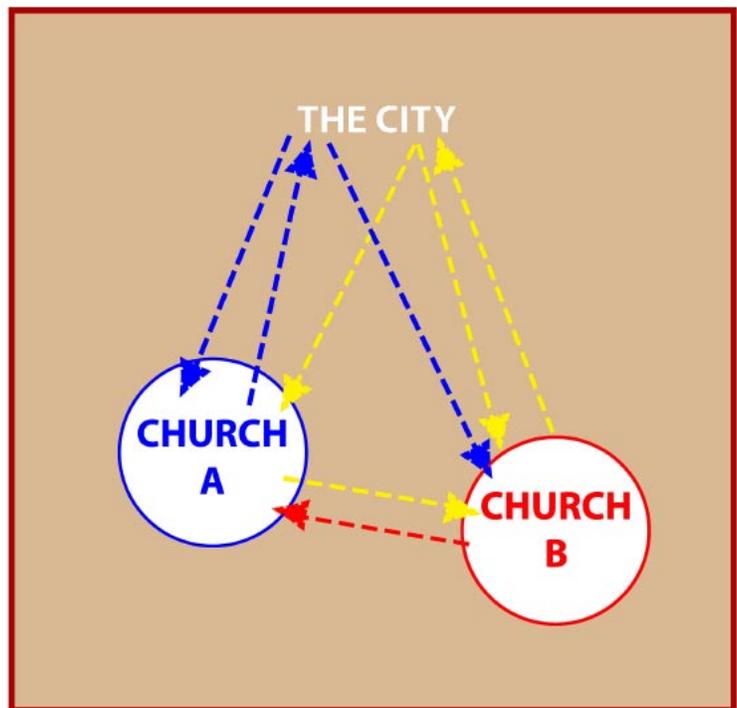
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What makes us so certain that we're the ones who have found the best bread? Supposing for the moment that we *are blessed* more than others with a fuller understanding of God's truth, *how will we explain to Him why we kept it to ourselves?* Will we tell the One who touched lepers, "Lord, we didn't want false doctrine to rub off on us so we kept our distance from the other churches in town"? God help us. We need to see that we are so insecure about our own way of thinking and doing things that we're deathly afraid our people are going to find a better feast down the road! We have protected *ourselves* at the risk of keeping our sheep on a poorer diet than we think.

If we share with the apostle Paul the conviction that we've not yet arrived at spiritual perfection (Phi 3.8), then we must confess our need for one another. Not only do we need doctrinal and philosophical cross-pollination, we also need the unique personal encouragement that can only come through co-laborers who minister *in our same city*. Until we give one another that support, we will never sound convincing to those we evangelize. Jesus said that it is *our love for one another* that will demonstrate the authenticity of our discipleship to the world (Joh 13.34,35). We need one another for Jesus' sake.

Quadrupling Our Blessing

We not only need mutual encouragement from one another, we need the multiplied blessing that results from the reciprocity principle (Pro 11.25). The idea that *what is good for the church of the city will be good for our own congregation* is simply a specific application of Jeremiah's letter: *seek the peace and prosperity of the city ... because if it prospers, you too will prosper* (Jer 29.7). In this more specific application, we seek the peace and prosperity of the city, not only directly, but indirectly by seeking the peace and prosperity of the church down the road. Consider the following diagram illustrating how, by recognizing the reciprocity principle, we can *quadruple* the blessing upon our congregation. The large square represents the city, within which reside two local churches, A and B.



Church A, a once isolationist congregation, decides to bless the city directly (outgoing blue arrow). Perhaps Church A holds a special event to illustrate biblical grace by offering to pay any citizen's parking ticket, no strings attached.²⁶ Recipient citizens gain a new appreciation for the church as a giving entity, and the city appreciates the church for saving it man-hours that would have been spent chasing down scoff-laws, and for bolstering city coffers. Local businessmen, who have come to see the church as a competing business,²⁷ read about the event and revise their opinion. Church A thus gains new entrée in the city (returning blue arrow). However, the city doesn't just revise its opinion of Church A, it gains

²⁶ As cross-denominational pastors did in Treasure Valley Idaho, at Christmas time, 2004. See Appendix 3.

²⁷ "They're always preaching at their people to give, but it's all for self-perpetuation, they never give back to the community — every dollar they milk from people is a dollar those people aren't spending in my store!"

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a fresh respect for churches in general. Thus, Church B also gains new favor from the city (blue arrow to church B).

In the meantime, Church A decides to directly contribute resources to Church B's struggling ministry to single moms (yellow arrow from Church A to Church B). With Church B's new success in helping the city by aiding single moms become gainfully employed and maintain stable households (yellow arrow from Church B to the city), the city inclines even more favorably toward Church B (returning yellow arrow to Church B). Once again, however, the church directly responsible for blessing the city (this time Church B), is not the only one to gain favor from the city (yellow arrow from the city to Church A). Thus, Church A reaps a benefit indirectly from its investment in Church B. Odds are, though, that Church B will now catch the City-Church vision and find opportunity to directly bless Church A (red arrow).

Thus, Church A has quadrupled its blessing. Where at one time it only blessed itself by its own internal programs, now it continues to do that (1st blessing), but also receives blessing from the city both directly (2nd) and indirectly (3rd), as well as from Church B (4th blessing). This dynamic, when maintained for the Kingdom's sake, reaps an abundant harvest of converts from the city's pool of unbelievers who become open to the gospel as they see the churches serving the city and loving one another. Is it any wonder that Satan desires to keep our local churches isolated?

The Historical Testimony

Christian heroes in history understood the church-city dynamic and ministered accordingly. Have you ever noticed the way in which history remembers the names of early Christian leaders? You may not know Augustine's family name, but you know that he was "Augustine of Hippo." Hippo, was Hippo Regius, the ancient name of the modern, north African city of Annaba (or Bône), Algeria, and the place where Augustine poured out his life as shepherd and theologian. Similarly, you may have heard of Clement of Rome, Clement of Alexandria, Polycarp of Smyrna, Ignatius of Antioch, Aristides of Athens, Francis of Assisi, and so forth. These saints' names became inextricably linked to the cities, not necessarily where they were born, but where they invested their lives. Catherine of Siena (AD 1347-80), for example, ministered "to the poor, the sick, and the imprisoned of Siena. When a wave of the plague struck her hometown in 1374, most people fled, but she and her followers stayed to nurse the ill and bury the dead. She was said to be tireless by day and night, healing all of whom the physicians despaired."²⁸ No wonder her city would remember her!

What if the names of Christian leaders once again became linked to the names of the cities where they minister? Such a linking would imply that we were once again affecting

When the plague struck her hometown, most people fled, but she stayed to nurse the ill.

²⁸ Source: <http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/special/131christians/catherinesiena.html>

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whole cities with the redemptive power of Jesus. I pray that the names of Christian leaders *do* become linked to the names of their cities more than to the names of their local churches or denominations. However, such a thing can only happen if both the leaders *and their congregations* serve their city in a profound way, renouncing their isolationism once and for all.

Congregational Responsibility

The onus for our isolation does not fall only upon pastors. Congregations must also align their thinking with a city theology. The people in the pews must release, even *mandate*, their pastors to build relationships with other pastors in the city. The pastor's weekly schedule should include time to pray with and socialize with other ministry peers. Congregations must not see this as "the pastor using salaried time for non-church business"! If church members will take the risk of encouraging their pastor to build friendships with other pastors, the whole church will reap the benefits. As authentic friendships grow between pastors, individual ministries will be enriched and corporate prayer will increase for all the city's congregations. Growing cooperation between pastors and their flocks will result in more effective outreach at home and abroad, and ultimately in the transformation of the city.

Revival of a
nation begins
with the
restoration of
a single city.

Why Now?

As churches, we love tradition and hate change. Why should we attempt a potentially painful paradigm shift now? The answer, in a word, is *failure*. Our fractured, isolationist, self-absorbed approach to the Great Commission isn't working. Yes, there are glorious exceptions. Yes, the Holy Spirit can still use our old wine-skins. Nevertheless, the general state of the Christian church in America is appalling and our culture is going to you-know-where in a hand basket. We've been praying for the revival of our nation for decades; now we know what must happen for that revival to occur.

Our Nation Needs the Fruit of City Transformation

The lost message of Ezra and Nehemiah is this: *the revival of a nation begins with the restoration of a single city*. For years we have sung, "if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I



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hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and ***will heal their land***” (2Ch 7.14). We want our land healed, so we have repented of everything we could think of, and have prayed for the revival of America. But the whole exercise has left us disillusioned. Asking God to revive America has been too ethereal a request. We haven’t known what a revived America would look like, and have had no idea what we could do to help bring it about, beyond the generalities of singing, praying and repenting. After decades of intangible results, we don’t want to hear about reviving America anymore — it means nothing to us but another fundraiser by another TV evangelist.

However, when we learn that the revival of a nation begins with the restored integrity of *one city*, and when we see that *our city* could be the one, suddenly a whole new menu of Kingdom strategies opens up before us. We may not have influence at the national level, nor the gifting to schmooze with beltway powerbrokers, but we can all make a difference in our own city. We can each ask this question: *what can I personally do to help restore the structural, cultural and moral integrity of my own city?* When we ask how we can transform our city, neither reaching for a whole nation prematurely nor confining revival shortsightedly to our own congregation, God speaks and tells us the answer! God will give us vision for our cities because, as we have seen, they are strategic cultural units in His Kingdom agenda.

Our Churches Desperately Need the Vision

Generally speaking, only 20% of the people in a given congregation are doing 80% of the giving, both financially and in man hours supporting the church’s programs. The sacrificial 20% deserve high praise; the problem is that the other 80% in our churches are barely twitching when it comes to advancing the Kingdom. (Yes, I know your congregation is an exception, but my peers acknowledge the ubiquity of the 80/20 problem.) Imagine what our world would look like if we could mobilize the more passive 80% in the congregation. *Talk about transformation!* If the other 80% of all our congregations were truly mobilized for the Kingdom, we’d think the Millennium had come. Consequently, the burning question has been, *why aren’t the 80% mobilized?* Now, though, we face an even more pressing question: why are members of our congregations *leaving* to explore other approaches to Christian spirituality?

The 80/20 question and the disillusionment of those seeking other ways to “do church” are related. The obvious implication of the 80/20 problem is that *it only takes 20% of the people* to maintain the church’s current programs! The 80% can see this. They would like to serve in the church, but they’ve not found a niche in the church’s current menu of programs that corresponds to their own gifts and aptitudes. Since the current programs fail to capture their imagination, the 80% are content to let the 20% carry the load of perpetuating those programs. *The 80% are bored.*

As for those dropping out of church, but not out of Christianity, George Barna calls them “revolutionaries” and describes them this way:

They have no use for churches that play religious games, whether those games are worship services that drone on without the presence of God or ministry programs that bear no spiritual fruit. . . . They refuse to follow people in ministry leadership positions who cast a personal vision rather than God’s, who seek popularity rather than the proclamation of truth in their public statements, or who are more concerned about their own legacy than that of Jesus Christ. They refuse to donate one more dollar to man-made monuments that mark their own achievements and guarantee their place in history.

²⁹ Barna, George; *Revolution: Finding Vibrant Faith Beyond The Walls Of The Sanctuary* (Tyndale House, Carol Stream, 2005), pp. 13,14.

These “revolutionaries” are bored with the status quo and want to pour their lives into something more than perpetuating an in-house vision.

Is The Present Routine All There Is?

Let's face reality. As the Holy Spirit blows through our congregations, stirred believers find themselves asking, “*Is the present routine all there is to church?*” If we were to ask a random evangelical what her church's focus is, she might say, “Evangelism, getting people saved.” If we asked why her church focuses on getting people saved, she would respond, “So we can help the newly saved get their lives straightened out, and help them become disciples of Jesus.” So far, so good, but here's the telling question: *Why does your church want to help the newly saved grow into disciples of Jesus?* The answer? “So they can become effective evangelists and help us save others.” In other words, our hypothetical congregation is *getting people saved to get people saved*. Sooner or later, its members wake up and say to themselves, “This is crazy; there has to be more to Christianity than perpetuating an institutional fire escape!”

Am I drawing a caricature of the contemporary Church's vision? Sure, somewhat, but you get the point: our vision is too small to capture and hold the imagination of the Spirit-filled Christian. There is

a biblical vision, however, that is big enough. It is gigantic, filling the world and stretching into the next age. *That vision is City Transformation*. It is the spiritual work of transforming cities that will require every Christian's gifts, aptitudes, skills and personality. *We are already seeing the power of this vision to capture the imagination of once bored believers.*

Preparing For Our Destiny

The reason that City Transformation is beginning to grip believers' hearts, is because it is a vision that merges with our destiny. God has destined us to reign, to rule over nations and shepherd cities. Does a king train his son for the throne by sending that son to sit passively and listen to history lectures? Yes, for a very *short* time, but the prince will never learn to rule without getting his hands dirty in the work of serving the communities he will one day oversee. If we believe the Bible's millennial promises, then we must prepare for the work of the next age by working for city transformation now. As we do, we will see a greater percentage of the Church mobilized than in any century since the first!

Our vision is
too small
to capture
and hold
the imagination of
the Spirit-filled
Christian.

Objections!

“Are You Advocating Reconstructionism?”

I hope this treatise has not made me sound like a Reconstructionist. I sympathize with the Reconstructionist’s belief that we can bring the Kingdom more fully to our cities now. I also see restoration of man’s dominion over the earth as part of our Kinsman-Redeemer’s eschatological agenda. Furthermore, I share the Reconstructionist’s’ desire to see morality, sexual and otherwise, returned to the public life of our nation. *I repudiate*, however, the amillennialist fantasy that we will bring about the full expression of God’s rule before Christ’s visible return. I see a typological lesson in the capture of Rabbah (the Ammonite city covered by present Amman, Jordan). David’s army, under Joab, besieged the city and took control of its water supply (2Sa 12.26-31), but King David remained in Jerusalem until that stage of the battle. Then Joab sent this message to the King: “Muster the rest of the troops and besiege the city and capture it, otherwise I will take the city, and it will be named after me.” Joab understood that the Ammonites needed to see clearly who their conqueror really was, and

who would be their new king. The final conquest of a city must await the visible appearing of the new ruler so that there may be no confusion as to his identity. *The people of the King do the initial work of besieging a city to the point of becoming those who administer the water of life, but the final conquest is the Lord’s.*

In addition, as a convinced premillennialist, I see in Revelation 20.7-10 that even Christ’s direct reign over a utopian earth will not rehabilitate human nature; far less will we bring righteousness to the earth by education and legislation. I abhor any agenda proposing a legally forced morality in the spirit of Islam’s *sharia*. I don’t propose that the church capture the reins of our government, but that it labor sacrificially to capture the imagination of our culture “in a demonstration of the Spirit and of power” (1Co 2.4). I wholeheartedly agree with Lee Irons who writes in his essay, *The Reformed Theocrats*:

I propose that the church labor sacrificially to capture the imagination of our culture.

Thinking that the disestablishment of the church is the cause of its cultural ineffectiveness, Reformed fundamentalists long for a revival of Christian theocracy. But if the humble proclamation of the King’s gracious amnesty is the present function of the church (and thus the present form of the kingdom of Christ prior to the second coming), then coercive, public, legislatively favored and triumphalist means of advancing Christ’s kingdom must be renounced. Otherwise the church’s witness to the gospel of grace and to a coming eschatological kingdom ... will be transmogrified into a grotesque perversion of that gospel and of that kingdom. Ironically, then, it is the wholesale rejection (not revival) of theocratic principles that is desperately needed today if the church is to be faithful to the task of gospel witness entrusted to her in the present age. *It is only as the church is conformed to her Head, the Suffering Servant, who came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many - it is only as the church learns to be satisfied with God’s eschatological timetable, and thus puts aside the lust for worldly influence and power – that she will be a positive presence in society.* (Emphasis added.)³⁰

³⁰ http://www.upper-register.com/theonomy/reformed_theocrats.html

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“The World Is Passing Away, Why Try To Fix It?”

Dominionism, along with less radical “realized millennium” theologies, rests on flawed hermeneutics and would have us repeat the blunders that the Church has committed in history. However, Dispensationalism has done us a disservice as well whenever it has implied that there is no hope for the present world — *and no hope for the present Church!* Speaking of false hermeneutics, I’m appalled to discover the longevity of the idea that the seven churches of Revelation represent seven consecutive ages of the Church.³¹ Unfortunately, some Christian groups, who see themselves as sort of a remnant, teach that we are already in the “Laodicean” period of apostasy and that there is no hope for the compromised Church at large.

Another tendency has intertwined itself with this idea that apostasy already constricts us. Dispensationalists have tended to see the earth as a “late great planet” and to adopt a lifeboat approach to the Great Commission. Dwight L. Moody, who himself survived a shipwreck, is often quoted as saying, “I look upon this world as a wrecked vessel. God has given me a lifeboat and said to me, ‘Moody, save all you can.’” I honor Moody as a great evangelist and share his desire to save all the people we can; the problem has to do with Moody’s heirs looking “upon this world as a wrecked vessel.” Seeing the world as already smashed beyond repair, and about to be washed away, will certainly discourage efforts at city transformation — but is this the picture given us by Scripture?

Paul does say, “this world in its present form is passing away” (1Co 7.31), and John echoes, “the world and its desires pass away” (1Jo 2.17). Peter says explicitly, “the heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare” (2Pe 3.10-12), and John confirms it when he says, “earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them” (Rev 20.11, NASB). Add to this the many specific



God’s many eschatological promises to Israel explicitly include flourishing in the land.

³¹ See for example <http://www.mazzaroth.com/ChapterSix/SevenHistoricalChurchAges.htm>

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descriptions of cosmic upheavals in the Revelation and other apocalyptic passages, and the future of the earth does begin to look grim.

However, we err if we consider only a part of the scriptural testimony. As we have already seen implied in the prophecies of a transformed Jerusalem (Isa 26.1), God's many eschatological promises to Israel explicitly include flourishing *in the land* (Isa 14.1; 26.15; 49.8; 57.13; 60.21; Jer 31.23; 33.11-14; Eze 11.17; 20.39-42; 36.24-35; 37.21-28; Hos 2.21-23; Oba 1.17-21; Mic 4.1-4; Zec 3.10; 13.2). Furthermore, the coming kingdom of the Rock will fill "the whole earth" (Dan 2.35,44), while the Messiah reigns from Jerusalem and the Holy Land (Jer 25.5; Oba 1.21; Zec 9.9,10; Luk 1.32,33). We who reign with Christ will rule over the nations of the world (Rev 2.26), *on the earth* (Rev 5.10). Since we will steward this world in the coming age, should we not care for it tenderly now?

We must not fall into the Gnostic error of thinking that the material creation is evil, and only spiritual entities are worth saving. "The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it,

the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters" (Psa. 24.1,2). God knows "every bird in the mountains, " and every sparrow that falls (Psa 50.11; Mat 10.29). "He determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name" (Psa 147.4; Isa 40.26). It is the material creation that clearly proclaims God's invisible attributes (Rom 1.20). True, this earth does groan under a curse, but it eagerly awaits redemption:

The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. (Rom 8.19-22)

When the Lord returns to judge the earth, it is terrestrial trees that will sing for joy (Psa 96.11-13). It is not only men, but *the whole of creation* that is destined to praise the name of the Lord (Psa 148).

When we consider the big picture in Scripture, we see that Paul's message to the Corinthians was not about the earth being discarded but about the present worldly system (Greek, *schema*), the world's external milieu, passing away (1Co 7.31). Likewise, John was not emphasizing the disappearance of the planet, but the inevitable end of the objects of our fleshly lust (1Jo 2.17). Yes, "the heavens and the earth will disappear," but the Revelation tells us that this will happen *after* we reign with the Lord, on the earth, for 1,000 years (Rev 20.1-11). Only after the millennium will the Lord make a new heaven and new earth (Isa 65.17; 66.22; 2Pe 3.13; Rev 21.1). God is not done with this planet yet, and we must get serious about caring for it, beginning with its cities.

But what about the apostasy of the Church? Well, let's look again at the letter to the Laodicean church. The call in the letter is for Laodicea to *repent* (Rev 3.18,19). The message

We must not fall into the Gnostic error of thinking that only spiritual entities are worth saving.

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is one of hope, not of inevitable rejection. The Lord invites Laodicea to become truly rich, truly clothed, truly able to see — in other words, *to be transformed*. If we were to buy into the “seven churches = seven Church ages” typology, and if we were to accept that we were presently in the “Laodicean age,” then our response *should be* to call for and expect repentance, revival and transformation.

Yes, Scripture does teach a final apostasy under Antichrist before the Lord’s return (2Th 2.3). However, contrary to the pop eschatology of our day, the rebellion under Antichrist will involve a limited geographic area of the Mediterranean world. Just as the “entire world” of Caesar Augustus did not include Japan (Luk 2.1), neither will the “whole world” of the beast extend beyond the biblical geography of the first century (Rev 13.3). Even in the region of his greatest strength, whole districts will elude the authority of Antichrist (Dan 11.40-41). Therefore, let’s throw off the defeatist idea that the Church will be swallowed up in the apostasy of the Beast! Whose spirit do we really think has promoted such an idea? The Church is not going down; Christ is building it up (Mat 16.18). She is not becoming polluted, but prepared (Rev 21.2)!

Conclusion: Invest In The City Where You Live

Christ is preparing the Church as His bride, but not as a passive one. The Church who will “see his face ... will reign for ever and ever” (Rev 22.4,5). God prepares her now for her future reign by strategically placing her members in cities of His choosing. As Paul told the Athenians in Acts 17.26,27:

From one man [God] made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and *he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live*. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us.

It’s no accident that we live in the cities that we do! God sovereignly determines where people live, and He does so to give everyone the best possible opportunity for redemption. Jesus Christ brings that redemption through the Church as we live out our mandate of love (John 13.34, 35) and commission of discipleship (Mat. 28.19,20), *in our city first* (Acts 1.8).



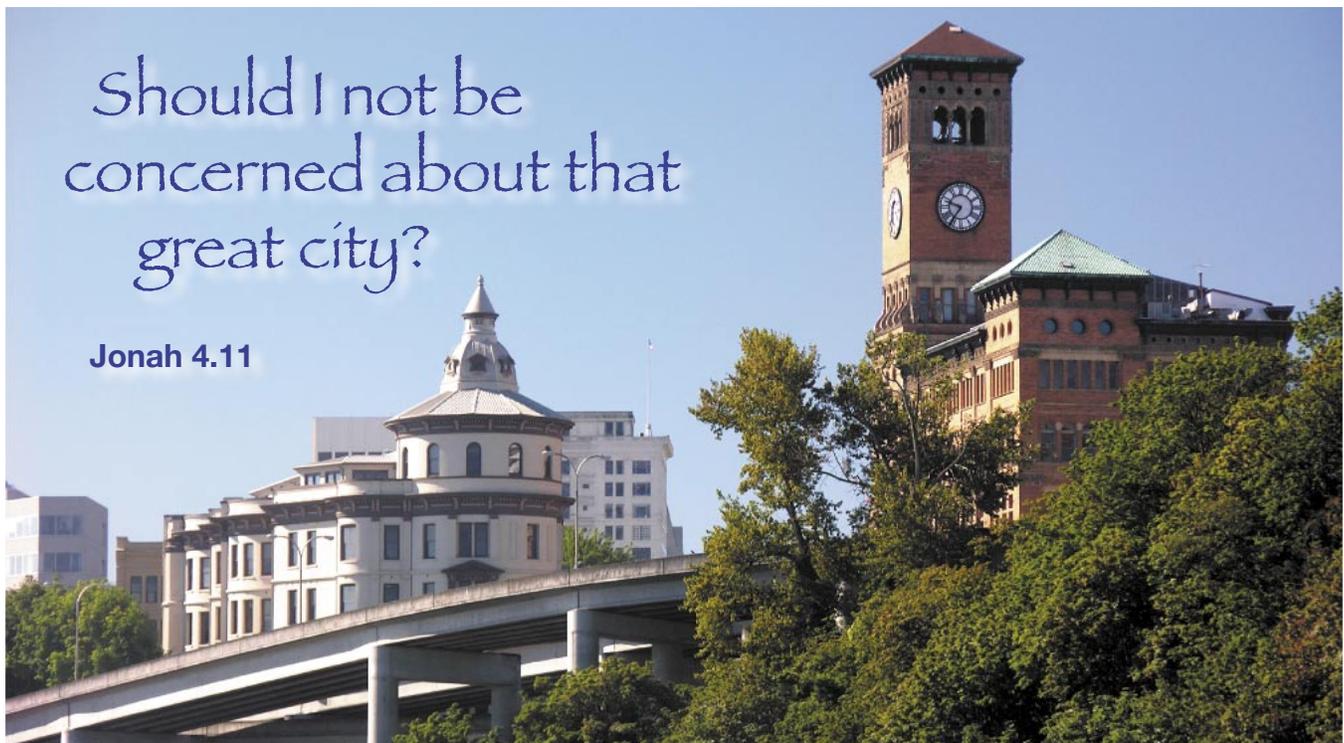
What Is A City, And Which One Is Mine?

What do we mean by *city*? To put it simply, a city is a permanent settlement large enough to become the central distribution point for goods *and services* to its surrounding rural homes and villages.

Technically, we define American cities today by a geographical perimeter (the city limits) within which a local government holds authority. Practically, however, a city is a *cultural* entity that may, by virtue of its social and economic influence, encompass a territory beyond its official limits. When we speak of “greater Tacoma” or “greater Seattle,” for example, we refer to an area that legally includes other smaller cities.

As individuals, we generally identify with the city in which we have the greatest relational and economic connections, whether or not our family home stands within that city’s limits. We may reside in the unincorporated county or in a smaller adjoining city, but we will think of the city as our own in which we spend the majority of our working hours and/or in which we have the greatest amount of social interaction with family and friends.

For the purposes of City Transformation, what any one of us thinks of as *my city* will be that civic community that most directly affects the quality of our social, economic and spiritual lives. Apart from a special divine calling, we will naturally feel the greatest spiritual burden for that city whose welfare will most directly influence our own. Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. The city where my heart is, whether it’s San Francisco or New York, is *my city* and the one in which I should invest first for its spiritual and cultural transformation.



Appendix 2

The Danger Zone

The transformation of the city awaits the transformation of the Church. The transformation needed by the Church, however, is only *the restoration of health* in its local congregations (see the calls for repentance in Rev. chs. 2 and 3). We often pray for the revival of our churches, and some do need a return to spiritual vitality and vision. Perhaps a greater problem, though, exists in churches where strong leaders and energetic congregations are slipping into cultishness.

Let us take note: Actual “Christian” cults, such as Mormonism and the Watchtower are not our priority problem today. By saying this I do not negate the validity and blessedness of ministering to these cults by those called to do so. Growth-wise, however, the fastest growing cult is a speck in the rearview mirror of Islam and biblical Christianity. Islam is our true competitor in worldwide growth. As such, the Church must prioritize Muslim peoples in our missionary endeavors.

The point of this appendix, though, is not to highlight the need for missions to Muslims, but to underscore an *internal problem* of the fundamentalist/evangelical Church. More serious than the threat of “Christian” cults is the slide of once healthy and theologically orthodox churches into *cultishness*. The slide is not doctrinal only, but also cultural and organizational. The devastating result is a spiritual neutralization — and sometimes a complete inoculation against Christianity — of wounded congregants. To put it simply, we have a serious problem in our midst of *spiritual abuse*.

Unfortunately, like the proverbial frog in the kettle, we tend not to recognize the slide into cultishness until a church has become an actual cult. It is not a single step from biblical balance to heretical abuse, however. A church usually passes through a *danger zone* on its downward path. It is with the hope of helping congregations recognize that danger zone — and pull back from it — that I have prepared the chart on the following page.

Recognizing The Danger Zone Between Grace And Cultishness

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<p>SHEPHERDING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sacrifices in order to serve • Prioritizes people over agenda • Works for success of others, willing to see others elevated above self • Able to receive warnings and constructive criticism • Works hard to restore strays 	<p>Leadership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dominated by a strong personality who is insensitive to subordinates • Has diminishing tolerance toward dissenters and strays; becomes isolated from followers • Views people as assets, "human resources" • Begins to violate family authority structures • Focuses increasingly on material gain • Becomes increasingly secretive 	<p>MANIPULATION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Controlling, accountable to no one • Gets special, self-serving revelations • Completely intolerant of criticism • Assumes absolute authority • Imposes beliefs on followers, exploits them materially and emotionally • Justifies immorality
<p>GRACE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasizes serving one another • Patient with the immature • Includes all believers in fellowship • Practices the Priesthood of the Believer, values personal views • Spiritual gifts balanced by fruit of the Spirit and biblical disciplines. • Disciplines with brokenness • Emphasizes giving all to Christ 	<p>The Danger Zone</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritizes the organization over individuals • Legalistically emphasizes externals • Adds rites of initiation • Spiritual disciplines de-emphasized as gift of prophecy is prioritized • Replaces personal discernment and counsel with dependence upon leaders • Testing of "all things" deemed superfluous • Emphasizes giving to the organization 	<p>The Danger Zone</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loses "one another" love • Becomes completely elitist • Judges actions <i>and attitudes</i> severely • Silences dissent by marginalization • Claims all possessions for the group • Allows leaders to dictate all financial and relational decisions of individuals • Those with gift of prophecy dominate others
<p>ORTHODOX</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proclaims the deity and atonement of Christ, justification by faith, and the primacy of The Bible • Encourages personal discovery of biblical truth 	<p>Teaching</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proposes new rituals as means of grace • Increasingly emphasizes authority of leaders • Discourages independent thinking • Adds other authoritative books • Flirts with novel doctrines 	<p>HERETICAL</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Denies Christ's deity and atonement • Pushes a form of works-righteousness • Emphasizes submission to leaders, accuses the rebellious • Suppresses independent thinking • Proclaims revelations superior to Bible • Adopts other heretical doctrines

Appendix 3

What We Can Do

The Starting Point

Psalm 81.13 “If my people would but listen to me, if Israel would follow my ways, 14 how quickly would I subdue their enemies and turn my hand against their foes! 15 Those who hate the LORD would cringe before him, and their punishment would last forever. 16 But you would be fed with the finest of wheat; with honey from the rock I would satisfy you.”

The first step in obtaining God’s blessing, whether upon ourselves, our congregation or our city, is to discern the main hindrance to that blessing. Unfortunately, our temptation has been to grasp for blessing by attacking our enemies (real or perceived). Consequently, we have divorced our bothersome spouses, preached against backsliders who question pastoral or biblical authority, and organized campaigns against gay rights. However, Scripture teaches us that God Himself will deal with our foes if we will first address the matter of our own disobedience.¹

The first thing we can do, therefore, is pool our discernment and answer the question: “What disobedience currently stands as the greatest hindrance to God’s blessing upon our city?” I can speak for my own city, but citizens of others will identify with what I say: the greatest hindrance to God’s blessing upon my city is the rivalry that riddles *the Church*. Any given congregation will have its internal problems, but the scandal in our city is that too many of our local churches are still pursuing unilateral agendas rather than serving one another in unity. Jesus said, “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” As God gave Adam and Eve just *one* rule, so Jesus gives us just *one* new commandment; God will not bless us as we continue to make a travesty of it. The transformation of our city into a reflection of Eden awaits the Church’s repentance of its fractured unity. The next thing we can *and must* do, then, is work for the unity of the Church of the City.

Unbreaking The Church

As Pierce County pastor, Joe Miriello has observed, “it is a common good or common enemy that galvanizes



¹ Cf. Deu 28; Rom 15.4. The *principles* underlying God’s dealings with Israel throughout their history apply directly to us: obedience brings blessing; disobedience renders us vulnerable to every kind of enemy.

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individuals into a united people.” As part of our campaign to unite the Church of our city we must look one step beyond our own unity problem to the number-one, secular hindrance to God’s blessing. It is the top-priority secular problem that is the “enemy” that will give us a rallying point for the Church, and a practical context for building unity.

By way of example, our own great city, while full of beauty, prosperity and opportunity, currently bemoans a handful of problems. We’re plagued by methamphetamine use and the crime it generates. We’ve just suffered a resurgence of gang activity and slayings. Alternative religions like Wicca are aggressively pursuing our populace. The homosexual community enjoys growing success in promoting its agenda in our midst. Our number-one problem, however, is abortion. The most current statistics show *our county* as having the highest incidence per-capita of abortion in our state, and as the largest city in the county, ours bears the greatest responsibility.² If God withheld a degree of blessing upon our city until we repented of driving out our Chinese population a hundred years ago, He withholds an even greater degree of blessing until we renounce this ongoing holocaust of our unborn.

Abortion, then, is the “enemy” against which the Church of our city should mobilize, and *our job* is to call the Church to unite at that battlefield.³ We should *not* call the Church to fleshly strategies against abortion — God forbid that Christians in my city should take violent, abusive or even *insensitive* actions in the name of ending abortion! No, rather, we must call the Church to the use of its spiritual weapons against this plague (2Co 10.3-5), and to sacrificial strategies of loving service. Our local Care Net organizations (<http://www.care-net.org/index.html>) are ready to guide us in such strategies and to utilize our volunteers. The point here, though, is to identify a strategic issue that can and should serve as a uniting battle for the Church.

However, calling one another to the top-priority battle is not the only thing we can do toward uniting the Church. Whatever individual roles and responsibilities we carry in our local church, we should each build relationships with our counterparts (peers) in the other churches of our city. If I serve as a senior pastor, I should pray with and socialize with other pastors. If I am a Sunday school teacher, I should make it a point to meet teachers from other local churches whom I can encourage and learn from. Of course, the Church does not have the non-fraternization policies of the military; “lay people” can minister to “pastors.” Aarons and Hurs in the pews can find non-political ways to “hold up the hands” of church leaders who need trustworthy confidants.

What is the
number-one
hindrance
to God’s
blessing
on our city?

² http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehsphl/chs/chs-data/abortion/2004/Intro_tb42004.htm

³ Many have wearied of the generation-long battle against abortion in our nation, but now is the time for our final, end-game push. Pro-choice forces have diminished because they are not reproducing and because they have offended my children’s generation (which is missing one third of its members). Now is the strategic time to shift the opinion of our culture on this key issue.

Assess Your City's Need

Judgment must begin at the house of God (1Pe 4.17), but having addressed the key issue of the Church's unity, we must go on to assess the additional needs of our city. We must survey our city to understand its needs, felt and not-felt. Yes, its citizens need Jesus and salvation from sin, but God has called us to minister to the whole person. Our culture is sick of Christians who criticize its morals without lending a hand with its tangible needs. As the old chestnut goes, "I don't care how much you know, until I know how much you care." Members of our society no longer care how much we know about God and what He thinks of their sins, unless we first demonstrate how much we care for them as whole persons. Therefore, we must get to know them and the city they constitute.

This is not to say that we should only find out what our city *thinks* it needs. Felt needs will tend to fall into the tangible category only, but we must also discern our city's spiritual needs, of which it may be completely unaware. We must look beyond the obvious need of salvation for individual citizens, to the spiritual strongholds that produce a corporate bondage in the city. For example, is there a "good ol' boy" network of Masons wielding influence in our city? If so, our city will probably not feel this as a need, but it is one that we must discern and address with our spiritual weapons.

The obvious way to survey our city regarding its needs is to do library research and interview a variety of community leaders. Another approach is to simply hit the streets and interact with the city directly.

The Walking Tacoma Project

In 2005 I read about Caleb Smith who walked every street in Manhattan.⁴ As far as I know, he did it just for fun. I decided to walk every street in my city mostly for the exercise, but also out of historical interest in the area. I did not expect the Lord to open my eyes and burden my heart for the city I'd lived in for forty years, but that's exactly what He did as I familiarized myself with its nooks and crannies. Far less did I expect the burgeoning vision for my city that would come as I walked her streets. The treatise to which I attach this appendix is one result of my city walk. Pointed prayer for specific neighborhoods is another result. I highly recommend this kind of "prayer walking." I dream of the day when I will happen upon other walking prayer teams as I pursue my street-by-street journey. (I'm currently about 150 miles into a roughly 700-mile, 5-year project. You can follow my progress at <http://www.walkingtacoma.blogspot.com/>.)



Address Human Needs, Material and Spiritual

Showers for the Homeless

Once we assess our city's needs, we must of course address them. One ministry in Tacoma, WA, is changing the lives of homeless people by offering them prayer, free clothing, free hair styling and a place to take a shower. Their "clients" have become a congregation as individual

⁴ <http://www.newyorkcitywalk.com/html/about.html>

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adults have reconnected with family and invited their relatives to Sunday afternoon potluck services. Pastor Jon says that if he could redesign his facility, he'd include more shower rooms.

Further south on our Pacific coast, the churches of Tillamook County, OR, joined with one another and with community agencies to lower the scandalous rate of teen pregnancies in their area. "Tillamook County dramatically reduced its teenage pregnancy rate between 1990 and 1994. Focusing on females under the age of 18, pregnancy rates were cut by 75 percent in four years. In 1990, Tillamook County's teenage pregnancy rate, 24 per 1,000 teen girls age 10 to 17, was one of the highest in Oregon. By 1994, the rate in Tillamook had dropped to the lowest in the state, seven per 1,000."⁵ The churches went on to organize an array of other social services, helping to revitalize their county, protect their children and gain the favor of government officials. Intercessory teams offered public prayer at strategic times and places.

Offer To Pray

People connected with the Healing Rooms movement have observed that "few people will turn down your offer to pray for them." I have found this to be true on the streets of my city. Sensitivity and discernment are required, of course, but prepare yourself to pray for anyone, anywhere and the door will open. Any conversation in which a person shares with you about their needs and problems, is a conversation in which you should volunteer to pray.

Few people
will turn down
your offer
to pray
for them.

Illustrate Grace In The Community

Once we are actively ministering to tangible needs in our city, we can begin addressing the way it thinks. Our city needs to renew its mind and re-embrace a biblical worldview. It needs restored faith in two great ideas: (1) God gave the world the gift of Himself by becoming a man, and (2) as Man, He has conquered death in resurrection.⁶ Therefore, let's not disdain twice-a-year holiday attendees to our church services. Rather, let's minimize the pagan trappings of Christmas and Easter and maximize our opportunity to give back to the community on those occasions. Let's proclaim the incarnation and resurrection, and combine our proclamation with practical demonstrations. We give away food baskets at Thanksgiving. We can also give presents to needy children at Christmas. But instead of an Easter Egg hunt on Resurrection Sunday, how about restoring a widow's dilapidated house, or "resurrecting" a neighborhood park that has fallen into disrepair?

Treasure Valley Grace Parables

There are creative ways that we can illustrate incarnation and resurrection to our

⁵ <http://www.llu.edu/news/scope/spr97/79.pdf?PHPSESSID=>

⁶ These two ideas are not the whole gospel, but they provide the basis for it. If our culture will receive these two ideas, we can follow up with "the rest of the story."

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community, even as there are ways to illustrate other biblical principles like *grace*. As reported in *Treasure Valley Christian News*⁷:

A cross denominational group of Treasure Valley pastors and dignitaries were at Jackson's Chevron, on Fairview, in Meridian, [ID], for two hours, pumping free gas as part of a modern day parable. On Saturday December 17th from 11:00 AM to 1:00 PM, \$11,000 of gas (approximately 350-375 tanks of gas) were given to single parents from throughout the Treasure Valley.

The event is called the "Grace Gift Parable II." The Christian Churches of the Treasure Valley is an association of approximately 80 churches from various denominations, and sponsored the parable for the second year in a row. The Association is comprised of Pastors from various Christian denominations that work together in the community. The member churches share a common heart for serving the community and a common belief in the core doctrines of Christianity.

"There are few cultural examples of what grace really means," said Mission Media Executive Director Michael Boerner. "The greatest message of Christianity is the message of grace. We receive God's forgiveness without having to earn it." Boerner says the effort will give struggling parents an extra 20 or 30 dollars to invest in their kids at Christmas time. He hopes the gas give-away will get people thinking about grace.

Money to pay for the fuel for this year's event was donated by local businesses and churches, and was raised specifically for this event....

Last December, at the original "Grace Gift Parable," anyone with unpaid parking tickets was given the opportunity to present them to an area pastor and have their parking fines paid in full – just by asking. The event was held at City Hall in Boise. The local event soon mushroomed into a national and international story for television, radio and print media.

The Christian Churches of the Treasure Valley association has provided us with some great examples of how we can not only give back to our city, but also allay our culture's image of the Church as an entity that is *only against stuff*.

Bless New Businesses

Our communities should realize *the Church is for things*, like honest business endeavors. During my city walk, I happened upon the grand opening of a coffee shop. I had a delightful conversation with the owners who took note of my "Pierce County Pastor" cap and ID badge. Two days later, I returned to the shop with a congratulatory gift and card. The owners overflowed with gratitude and wouldn't let me pay for my latte — though I insisted that I wanted to support their business. They know I belong to an association of city pastors who aren't just against crime, but also *for business owners*. As local churches, we should take note of new businesses opening in our neighborhoods and take the opportunity to bless them with a gift and let the owners know we are for their success.

Pick Up the Tab for Strangers

We can also bless and illustrate grace to individuals. I know two pastors who pick up the tab for strangers at restaurants. I saw one of my friends do it without fanfare, but as he signed the credit slip an onlooker began to ask him about his church. The Holy Spirit has the creativity to inspire such "random acts of kindness," if we have the willingness to invest material assets for spiritual dividends.

⁷ <http://www.tvcnews.org/gracegift2.shtml>

Address The Spiritual Realm Directly

Of course, we must address the spiritual realm directly. Let's join with Paul in urging that "requests, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone, for kings and all those in authority..." (1Ti 2.1). I have found that walking my city has "put feet" to this discipline in more



ways than one. I have prayed for the teachers and administrations of public schools that I didn't know existed until I walked around their buildings and play fields. I have likewise prayed for the people in businesses, firehouses, government buildings, church buildings and cult halls with which I had been previously unacquainted.

Along with intercession, the Holy Spirit will inspire symbolic acts. The intercessors of Tillamook County, mentioned above, were led to drive cedar stakes into the ground at significant locations in their area. There is nothing magical about the wooden stakes, but the intercession offered as they were pounded into the ground, and the symbolism of the act, impacted the spiritual realm.

As I've walked Tacoma's streets, I've hap-

pened upon many standing stones (generally smaller than 6 feet). Whether or not they are given cultish significance by their owners,⁸ I have begun anointing these stones if I can do so without trespassing. As I have anointed the stones, I have prayed for the surrounding homes or businesses, and rebuked any demonic presence. God is sending a message *now* "to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms," and He is doing it through us, the Church (Eph 3.10).

May this brief description of possibilities inspire you to pursue the unity of the City Church, and to join in creative acts of ministry to your city. This is the strategic hour.

⁸ Regarding standing stones and New Age or Wiccan ritual see for example: http://www.4qf.org/_StonesRising/index.htm