



ChristCommunity
an Evangelical Free Church



THE CITY

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The City by Gabe Coyle
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INTRODUCTION

We believe we are designed to give ourselves away in our neighborhoods, city, and world.

I remember wrestling through how my personal faith intersected with my public life and how our gatherings as a body of believers impacted the rest of the week. It was that “Now what?” moment in my Christian journey. Is the Christian life really only telling my friends about Jesus so they can sing songs with us on Sunday until God takes us away from this messed up and hostile world?

This question may haunt some of you as well, but there is good news. It’s true that God’s plan is more all-encompassing than this. The Christian life, life as it was designed to be, cannot only be about getting “saved” and Sunday morning gatherings, but it must also answer how we are to faithfully interact with our fragmented society.

Really, I’m asking a question we all ask in a myriad of ways: Why does God still have us here in this city? And related to this: how do I interact with my neighbors, the institutions of my city, or the global realities of our world?

God addresses His people in the Old Testament through the prophet Jeremiah saying,

Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare (Jeremiah 29:4-7).

It is in Jeremiah’s letter that God directs His people on how to live in a fragmented society. What is His word of guidance?

First, God says to invest in the relationships and institutions of their city. He doesn’t tell them to get ready for a mass exodus that could happen at any moment. A day is coming when He will once again bring them to the Promised Land, but it should not be their focus nor is it soon in coming. Rather, He calls them to put down some roots and dig in. Start and grow families. Get to know neighbors. Build homes and begin investment in the economic engines for sustaining prosperity. It’s a paradigm shift for most of them. They shouldn’t withdraw from those around them, but they should thoughtfully engage their new community.



Secondly, God says to seek the overall welfare of their city. The Hebrew word translated welfare here can also be translated peace or wholeness, describing life as it was designed to be. This involvement with their new metro (with its diverse makeup) should be focused towards its flourishing. If they would seek the good of the city for the sake of the city, both in active pursuit and in persistent prayer, then they would also experience the overflow of God's blessing in their flourishing city. They would see transformation and experience God's goodness even in a foreign place.

Well, our city is just as fragmented today with various worldviews, broken homes, and corrupt institutions. The church finds herself in a time of waiting between her heavenly citizenship she already claims in God's Kingdom and not yet experiencing the fullness of creation's restoration.

As the people of God in the 21st century metro of Kansas City, we see God calling us to be investing in both *individual transformation and cultural influence* for the flourishing of our city where God has us.

INDIVIDUAL TRANSFORMATION

As we seek the good of our city, we are to be a people about evangelism that touches every part of life for all of life. We proclaim the gospel so that it does not have its end in an initial decision but rather a lifelong journey of apprenticeship that flows into eternity (Matthew 28:28-30). We are called to walk alongside our neighbors willingly and lovingly that they might accept, submit, and learn from our Lord Jesus.

Also, Jesus Christ is clear how the Church is to be a compassionate people caring for those within their sphere of influence. Whether we are seeking another's common good affirmed in the second Greatest Commandment (Matthew 22:39) to love our neighbor as ourselves or the charge to go and be like the good Samaritan who went the extra mile for a complete stranger (Luke 10:25-37), we are to be cultivating authentic relationships where we sacrificially give of ourselves to those with whom we interact (Galatians 6:10). It is in this patient and persistent love that we are then enabled to share the truth of the gospel both in word and deed.

CULTURAL INFLUENCE

Not only are we called to seek the good of those in close proximity to us in our daily lives, but also the church is to be an influential guide within culture for justice and mercy in the institutions of our city, nation, and world (Matthew 23:23). For "*if the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?*" (Psalm 11:3). We are well aware that transformation is more complex than just individual relationships, but systems of oppression and institutions must also be missionally engaged for lasting change.

For example, when we see the injustice of human trafficking destroying the lives of young children across the globe, we give of ourselves as a church to fight this horror. When we hear of education failure or abuse of the poor by loan sharks, we give of ourselves as a church to seek the welfare of our city by improving our educational and financial institutions. It has to be more than interacting with individuals, but it must also be working for better institutions.



WE DON'T GIVE OF OURSELVES BY OURSELVES

Because our world is so broken and the need so great, seeking the welfare of our city can be overwhelming. As a church we seek to be about individual transformation and cultural influence through intentional partnerships within our city and world.

As a church, we know that we are only a church in God's massive plan of redemption; so we have joined strategically placed institutions who are better equipped for dynamic impact. This does not mean that we have shirked our responsibility and are not involved. Rather, it means that we are joyfully not alone. We learn from and give alongside our brothers and sisters who are uniquely gifted to bring lasting change.

Whether you are new to Christianity or not, this may be a paradigm shift in how you see your placement in this city. We would love to have you participate in giving of yourself for our neighborhood, city, and world. Are you willing to join us?

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- » *Have you ever had that "Now what?" moment where your private faith disconnected with your public life? How have you learned to make that connection? Where do you still need to bring them together?*
- » *What needs (spiritual, economic, social) have you seen around your neighborhood? In what ways has God uniquely gifted and placed you to contribute to the flourishing of your city?*
- » *What would it look like for a church to fully give of herself to her neighborhood, city, and world? How have you seen that lived out at Christ Community? How have you experienced the joy and benefit that comes with seeking the welfare of our neighborhood, city, and world?*

NEXT STEPS

- » If you don't know the people in your community, take the initiative to get to know them. Start with the people who live next door.
- » Vocation is a vital aspect of reaching out to those in our sphere of influence. Read about God's purposes for work in a way that helps you to make the most of your vocation and join God in His work in the world in Tom Nelson's *Work Matters: Connecting Sunday Worship to Monday Work*.
- » How often do you pray for the welfare and flourishing of your neighborhood, city, and world? Work this into your regular times of prayer.
- » Are you familiar with the ministry partners of Christ Community? Get to know how they are each strategically placed for dynamic impact.
- » Find a time either individually or in a group to serve with one of our ministry partners for the welfare of our city.