

# WE BELONG FOR THE CITY: *STUDY*

Quoting author Gabe Lyons, “Cultural anthropologist Margaret Mead once warned against doubting that a ‘small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world.’ She went on to remark that ‘...indeed, this is the only thing that ever has.’” Christians are people who belong to God and to one another. But they belong for the neighbors and neighborhoods, the cities and citizens around them. Followers of Jesus don’t simply get “saved” and then retreat from the communities in which they live, work, and play. Instead, Christians experience the redemptive work of Christ in their lives and then stay in the communities where God had previously placed them. While some are called to new work in new places, most Christians are called to walk out the implications of their faith within the space of the old.

What does it mean that Christians belong *for the city*? From one angle, this principle is a barricade against making community within the church an-end-in-itself. The care, support, friendship, and accountability you receive inside the church are critical aspects of belonging to one another. Yet another way to ask the question could be, “What is all the care, support, friendship, and accountability for?” And the bible’s answer to that is we belong to God and one another for the sake of the city. We strengthen one another for the sake of our neighbors. We equip and pray for one another so that when we leave the walls of the church and enter into the places, families, schools, and industries where we’ve been placed, we’re able to live for the glory of the God to whom we belong. To some this might sound like the nature of “mission.” And it is. But it’s also the fundamental nature of the Christian life. Christians are small groups of committed citizens (of heaven and earth) who believe that God just might change the world through them.

The prophet Jeremiah wrote to a group of exiled Israelites living in the cruel and brutal nation of Babylon. There he gives the surprising instruction to neither assimilate nor separate but to live as a community “seeking the peace of the city.” Christians are people who weave themselves into the well-being of a city, giving witness to God by our individual lives, but also by the beauty of our communal life.

**Read through the following as a group:**

o Jeremiah 29:4-7

1. Tim Keller writes that God gave the Israelites the instruction to “identify” with the people of Babylon. “He says, “Settle down. Build houses. Have children. Identify with the city.” Explore this idea together.

2. Often we move into neighborhoods and cities in order to benefit from what they can offer. We go into those places in order to “use the city” and move on. Discuss verse 7. What would it look like to truly seek the welfare of the city (town, neighborhood, work place) where you’ve been sent?

3. Everyone can help rebuild the city in some way. Identifying with the people of the city without responding to its needs is limiting God’s call to seek the welfare of the city. What are the “people needs” that God might be calling you to meet?

4. Jeremiah tells the Israelites to pray for the city of Babylon in verse 7. As a group, pray for the “cities” where you’ve been sent.

# WE BELONG FOR THE CITY: *REFLECT*

“And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?” These are the closing words of the book of Jonah. The word “concern” can also be translated “weep.” Here God is giving us a glimpse into his heart. God loves people and he wants Jonah to love them too. Because cities are filled with people, God has great concern, even to the point of tears, for the well-being of his city. The narrative of the gospel takes things one giant-step further, though. Because cities are filled with people, God has great concern, even to the point of death, for the well-being of those people. As followers of Christ, we’re supposed to have his heart for his cities, towns, and villages because these places are filled with his people.

How might we live out a deep “concern” for the cities and places where God has sent us? First, we have to lean in close enough to notice its blemishes and needs. Next we have to make ourselves available to be a part of the solution. Use the next page to note areas of concern as well as possible solutions within your neighborhoods and cities.

NEIGHBORHOOD

CITY

CONCERNS

SOLUTIONS

# WE BELONG FOR THE CITY: *PRACTICE*

“A recently released song by the band LANY has a telling line that says, “*Am I starting to hate California, why am I in LA? 40 million in California, no one cares if I stay.*” The song describes how loneliness and a sense of isolation is crippling someone’s affection for a city they love. They’re surrounded by millions of people and yet they don’t experience the joy of belonging.

The church is designed to be a place where people experience belonging. It’s a place where people ought to know, “even in the middle of the night, that they are among friends.” Christians are people who live to gather and include others because of the simple fact that Christ died to gather and include them.

*Below is a list of “best practices” for adopting a missional lifestyle within the normal rhythms of your day. Consider practicing some individually and others as a group:*

1. **EAT WITH OTHER PEOPLE:** We all eat 3 meals a day. That’s 21 opportunities for church and mission each week without adding anything new to your schedule. And meals are a powerful expression of welcome and community.

2. **WALK DON’T DRIVE:** If you live in a walkable area, make a practice of getting out and walking around your neighborhood, apartment complex, or campus. Instead of driving to the mailbox, convenience store, or apartment office, walk to get mail, groceries, and stuff. Be deliberate in your walk. Say hello to people you don’t know. Strike up conversations. Attract attention by walking the dog, taking a 6-pack (and share), bringing the kids. Make friends. Get out of your house!

3. **BE A REGULAR:** Instead of hopping all over the city for gas, groceries, haircuts, eating out, and coffee, go to the same places. Get to know the staff. Go to the same places at the same times. Smile. Ask questions. Be a regular.

4. **HOBBY WITH NON-CHRISTIANS:** Pick a hobby that you can share. Get out and do something you enjoy with others. Try City League sports. Local rowing and cycling teams. Share your hobby by teaching lessons. Teach sewing lessons, piano lessons, violin, guitar, knitting, tennis lessons. Be prayerful. Be intentional. Be winsome. Have fun. Be yourself.

5. TALK TO YOUR CO-WORKERS: How hard is that? Take your breaks with intentionality. Go out with your team or task force after work. Show interest in your co-workers. Pick four and pray for them. Form mom groups in your neighborhood and don't make them exclusively Christian. Schedule play dates with the neighbors' kids. Work on mission.

6. VOLUNTEER WITH HOPE FOR SAN DIEGO: Find a non-profit in your part of the city and take one Saturday a month to serve. Bring your neighbors, your friends, or your small group. Spend time with your church serving your city once a month.

7. PARTICIPATE IN CITY EVENTS: Instead of playing X-Box, watching TV, or surfing the net, participate in city events. Go to fundraisers, festivals, clean-ups, summer shows, and concerts. Participate missionally. Strike up conversation. Study the culture. Reflect on what you see and hear. Pray for the city.

8. SERVE YOUR NEIGHBORS: Help a neighbor by weeding, mowing, building a cabinet, fixing a car. Stop by the neighborhood association or apartment office and ask if there is anything you can do to help improve things. Ask your local Police and Fire Stations if there is anything you can do to help them. Get creative. Just serve!

\* Adapted from Tim Chester's *"10 Simple Ways to be Missional,"* and Jonathan Dodson's *"8 Ways to Easily Be Missional."*