





# WEEK ONE: VISION

*These are the words of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem to the surviving elders of the exiles, and to the priests, the prophets, and all the people, whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. This was after King Jeconiah and the queen mother, the eunuchs, the officials of Judah and Jerusalem, the craftsmen, and the metal workers had departed from Jerusalem. The letter was sent by the hand of Elasah the son of Shaphan and Gemariah the son of Hilkiyah, whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent to Babylon to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. It said: "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 29:1-7 ESV)*

## STUDY THE TEXT

In Jeremiah 29, we read a letter that the prophet Prophet Jeremiah wrote to the Israelites who were taken captive by King Nebuchadnezzar in 597 B.C. Because of their disobedience to God, the Israelites were forcibly removed from their home in Israel, the land that God had promised to them, and brought to live in Babylon. It was a terrible time for their nation and families. They were trying to figure out how to make life work in their new circumstances. This letter gives God's instructions to the Israelites for their life in this new city.

Read Jeremiah 29:1-7 and ask the Holy Spirit to work in you as you encounter this text.

1. The beginning of the passage gives details about who is in Babylon and how they got there (vv. 1-3). Who is mentioned and how they are connected to each other? What events are mentioned?

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2. The recipients of this letter were facing some difficult and confusing circumstances. Psalm 137 was written to remember what happened on the journey from Jerusalem to Babylon. Read through this Psalm. What does this Psalm reveal about their emotions and their experience of being taken into exile?

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[Note: This Psalm is not meant to give us instructions about how to deal with enemies. It shows that we can cry out to God, being completely honest with him about our emotions, even in our desperation. God is not afraid of raw emotions and desperate cries for justice.

3. What commands does God give to the Israelites in verses 4-7:

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4. What's significant about the commands to "build houses" and "plant

gardens”? How about the radical command to “pray to the LORD on its behalf”?

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5. Many commentators see connections between this passage and Genesis 12:1-3, a passage that’s often referred to as the Abrahamic Covenant. Read Genesis 12:1-3 and identify all of these similarities between these two passages.

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6. How is Jeremiah 29:1-7 similar to Jesus’ teaching about enemies in Luke 6:27-36?

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# FOR DEEPER REFLECTION

## **Sin: Not the Way It's Supposed to Be**

When Jeremiah mentions the word “welfare” in Jeremiah 29:7, he’s using the Hebrew word *shalom*. This is a word that’s filled with rich meaning and is central to God’s mission in the world. *Shalom* has a connotation of a world that experiences flourishing because of a right relationship with God, people, and all of creation. Cornelius Plantinga helps us understand the meaning of *shalom* and how it’s affected by sin in his book “Not the Way It’s Supposed to Be: A Breviary on Sin”. Here is an excerpt:

The great writing prophets of the Bible were unafraid to diagnose sin as the oldest and deepest human problem. They talked about it all the time, often in contexts in which they protested injustice in the land. The prophets knew that sin has a thousand faces. They knew how many ways human life can go wrong because they knew how many ways human life can go right. (You need the concept of a straight line to tell when one is crooked.) These prophets kept dreaming of a time when God would put things right again.

They dreamed of a new age in which human crookedness would straighten out. The foolish would be made wise, and the wise made humble. They dreamed of a time when the deserts would bloom, the mountains would run with wine, people would stop weeping and be able to sleep without a weapon under their pillow. People would work in peace and work to fruitful effect. A lamb could lie down with a wolf because the wolf had lost its appetite. All nature would be fruitful, benign, and filled with wonder upon wonder. All humans would be knit together in brotherhood and sisterhood; and all nature and all humans would look to God, lean toward God, and delight in God. Shouts of joy and recognition would well up from women in streets and from men at sea.

The webbing together of God, humans, and all creation in justice, fulfillment, and delight is what the Hebrew prophets call *shalom*. In English we call it peace, but it means far more than just peace of mind or ceasefire between enemies. In the Bible *shalom* means universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight—a rich state of affairs in which natural needs are satisfied and natural gifts fruitfully employed, a state of affairs that inspires joyful wonder as the creator and savior opens doors and speaks welcome to the creatures in whom he delights. *Shalom*, in other words, is the way things are supposed to be.

## **From Shalom to Brokenness**

In the beginning, God made the world with perfect shalom. The entrance of sin into the world disrupted shalom, and vandalized the perfect order of God's creation. Now we live in a world that's been infected by the curse of sin. Sin alienates us, and causes brokenness, in the four main relationships we need for human flourishing.

1. **Spiritual Brokenness** - Sin alienates us from God. Therefore, people turn from God and worship idols. We often even take good aspects of God's creation and make them "ultimate things" that we tragically and foolishly love more than God.
2. **Personal Brokenness** - Sin alienates us from ourselves. Therefore, we tend to have a wrong view of ourselves, tending toward self-worship or self-hate.
3. **Social Brokenness** - Sin alienates us from others. Therefore, we live in a world of broken relationships, divided communities, lost friendships, slander, etc.
4. **Physical Brokenness** - Sin alienates us from the physical world. Therefore, we live in a world of physical pain, death, disease, deterioration, decay, and hunger.

Where do you see brokenness (lack of shalom) in the communities that you are connected to (self, family, neighborhood, workplace, city, world, etc.)?

1. **Physical Brokenness**

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2. **Social Brokenness**

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3. **Personal Brokenness**

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4. **Spiritual Brokenness**

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# Shalom Restored

How does God deal with the problem of sin? How does he restore shalom to this broken world? The answer is found in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The life of Jesus perfectly embodied shalom. Sin, satan, and death were defeated through the death and resurrection of Christ. Just as Jesus was resurrected with a restored body, God has already begun to restore and renew this broken world. This work is not yet complete. But when Jesus returns, he will complete the restoration and the world will once again experience perfect, God-centered shalom (Rev. 21-22).

Jesus is the one who ultimately redeems this broken world. He is the savior and redeemer. We are not. However, the church has the unique role of bearing witness to Jesus and working for shalom in the places where God sends us. We won't fix all of the problems in the world, but we can be God's instruments of shalom that create a foretaste and a preview of the healing and restoration God will one day bring fully when Jesus returns.

Take a few minutes and dream of the various ways that you can be an instrument of shalom in each of these areas:

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Neighborhood:

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Workplace:

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City:

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Church:

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Other:

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# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Look at a newspaper or the headlines of a news website. How would these headlines be different if there was perfect shalom in the world?

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2. How does a strong church contribute to the flourishing of the city?

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3. What's one thing that you are good at? How can you employ that ability to bless others and contribute to welfare of the city? How can you leverage this to help build a stronger church at Redemption Tempe?

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4. What prevents you from using your time, talents, and treasure to serve others? How does the Gospel speak to this issue?

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5. What does it look like to pray for the welfare (shalom) of the city? What are some of the main things that we should pray for?

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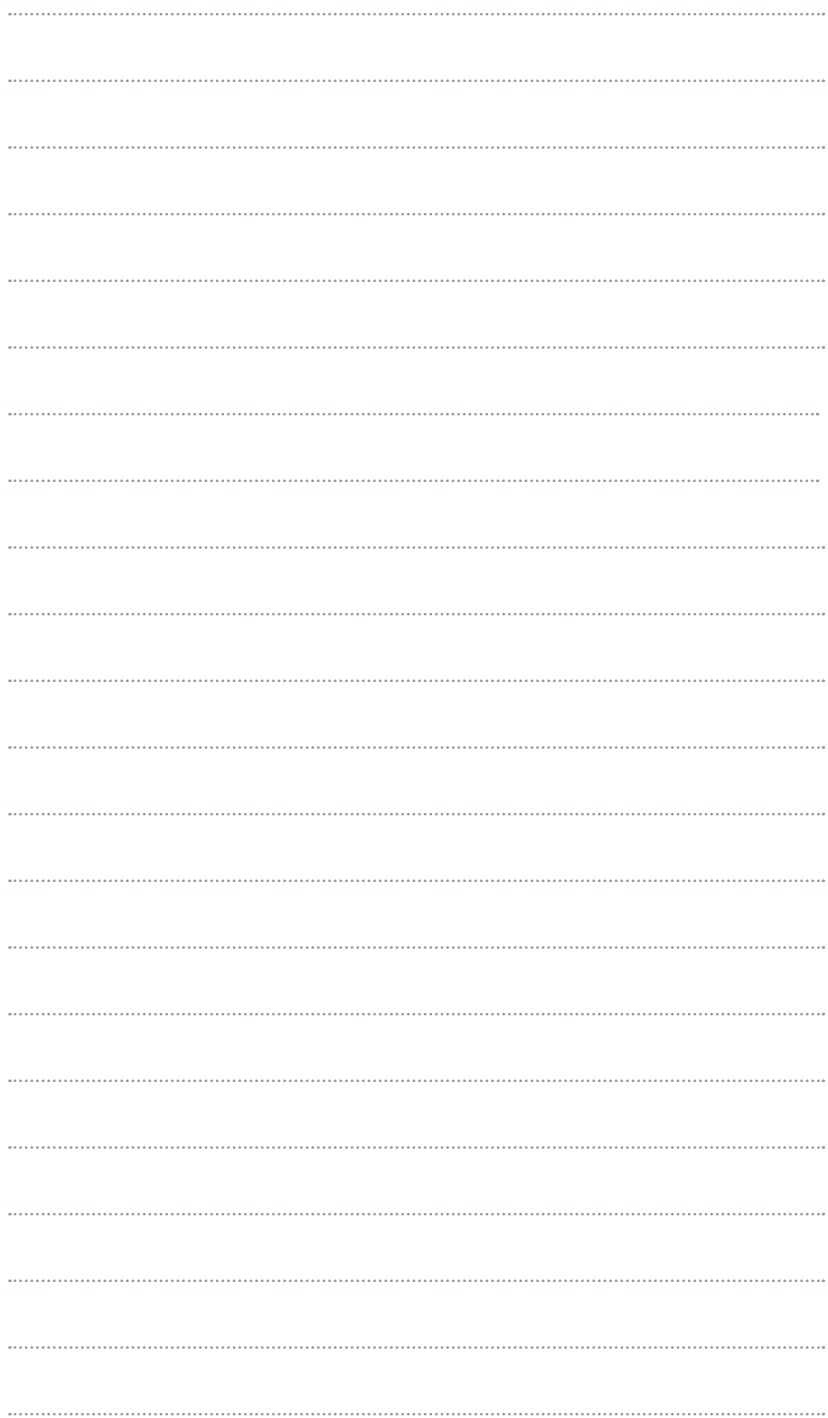
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# SERMON NOTES

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# WEEK TWO: APPRENTICESHIP

*You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him. An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops. Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything. (2 Timothy 2:1-7 ESV)*

## STUDY THE TEXT

The book of 2 Timothy is a letter written by the Apostle Paul to a young church leader whom Paul had trained named Timothy. This was likely the last letter Paul wrote before he was executed in Rome, and perhaps, his last communication with Timothy. The below questions are intended to help us think through what God is saying through Paul about God's design for growth and mission.

1. Paul addresses Timothy as “my child” in v. 1. What does this say about how Paul feels toward Timothy? How does this help us understand what it means to be an apprentice to a teacher, or vice versa?

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2. 2 Tim. 2:1 begins with a command to “be strengthened”? In this context, how would a follower of Christ “be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus”, or in other words, how does grace give strength?

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3. What does v. 2 show us about how God’s truth reaches more people?

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4. There are numerous pieces of wisdom Paul could have given Timothy on leadership (resolving conflicts, dealing with money, building relationships, etc.). Why then does Paul say “share in suffering”? What is it about being a faithful Christian and suffering that Paul is teaching?

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5. Paul uses three metaphors in vv. 4–6. Name these metaphors. What do you think these metaphors mean? How do they relate to v. 3?

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# FOR DEEPER REFLECTION

## **An Excerpt from “Multiply”**

By Francis Chan and David Platt

Two thousand years ago, Jesus walked up to a handful of men and said, “Follow me.”

Imagine being one of those original disciples. They were ordinary people like you and me. They had jobs, families, hobbies, and social lives. As they went about their business on the day Jesus called them, none of them would have expected his life to change so quickly and completely.

The disciples could not have fully understood what they were getting into when they responded to Jesus’s call. Whatever expectations or doubts, whatever curiosity, excitement, or uncertainty they felt, nothing could have prepared them for what lay ahead. Everything about Jesus—His teaching, compassion, and wisdom; His life, death, and resurrection; His power, authority, and calling— would shape every aspect of the rest of their lives.

What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus Christ? As you will discover, the answer is fairly simple, but it changes your life completely. The word disciple refers to a student or apprentice. Disciples in Jesus’s day would follow their rabbi (which means teacher) wherever he went, learning from the rabbi’s teaching and being trained to do as the rabbi did. Basically, a disciple is a follower, but only if we take the term follower literally. Becoming a disciple of Jesus is as simple as obeying His call to follow.

It’s impossible to be a disciple or a follower of someone and not end up like that person. Jesus said, “A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher” (Luke 6:40). That’s the whole point of being a disciple of Jesus: we imitate Him, carry on His ministry, and become like Him in the process.

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In a world where we are inundated with information and access to any teaching or teacher literally at our fingertips, how do we determine if we are Jesus' disciples or someone else's disciple?

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2. Who does Jesus call us to make disciples of? Is there anyone excluded?

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3. What does it mean to "make a disciple"?

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4. Is there a difference between “making a convert” and “making a disciple”? How are evangelism and discipleship related? How are they different?

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5. Do you consider making disciples as something that you can do in your day to day life, or something that is done on the “mission field”? If yes, name a few ways you can take active steps toward making disciples in your life this year.

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# SERMON NOTES

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# WEEK THREE: GENEROSITY

*I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich. And in this matter I give my judgment: this benefits you, who a year ago started not only to do this work but also to desire to do it. So now finish doing it as well, so that your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completing it out of what you have. For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have. For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness. As it is written, "Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack." (2 Corinthians 8:8-15 ESV)*

## STUDY THE TEXT

1 and 2 Corinthians are two letters that are written by the Apostle Paul to the church at Corinth, a lively sea-port city in Greece. Corinth was known for its wealthy merchants and trade, and for its culture of success and worldliness. Paul's letters to the Corinthian churches show a deep affection for them, and yet we see at times a turbulent relationship, as Paul speaks lovingly of the believers and harshly against false teachers and those causing division.

Corinth, with its prosperity, had with it dangerous temptations to the idols of money and sex and prestige. But by faith in Christ, believers are new creations (2 Cor. 5:18) and our desires are transformed. Thus, in 2 Corinthians, Paul describes at length how Christians are to be ready to flee from the temptations of sin and grow into grace-shaped disciples who are marked by love and generosity.

1. Read all of 2 Cor. 8-9. In 10 words or less, what is the main thing Paul is asking the Corinthians to do?

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2. In v.8, Paul says the people of God are to give “to prove...that your love is genuine.” How does being generous with your possessions and money prove that your love is genuine?

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3. What does this passage teach about the relationship between God’s grace and our generosity?

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4. In vv.10–12, Paul talks about “completing” a task and “desiring” to do it. What do you think these terms mean here? Why is “desire” an important aspect of giving? (See also 2 Cor. 9:6–15)

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5. In v.15, Paul quotes a part of Exodus 16:18. Read Exodus 16:1-18. What does this story teach us about God's providence? How does v.18 fit into a passage about generosity and our attitude toward giving?

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## FOR DEEPER REFLECTION

### Exerpts from Generous Giving

By Randy Alcorn

**The Sacred/Secular Distinction.** All of life is spiritual, including the use of money, because God is involved in it. There are philosophies that separate reality into “spiritual” and “material” spheres, but Christianity is not one of them. The Bible covers the waterfront of human life because the gospel of God’s redemption covers the waterfront of human life. In the words of Scripture, God is reconciling all things to himself through Christ (Colossians 1:20).

**Wealth.** Money itself is morally neutral, a medium for the exchange of goods and services. But because human beings are sinful in their attitudes toward money, large amounts of it are spiritually dangerous. Wealth makes it hard for a person to enter the kingdom of God (Luke 18:24) because people are so strongly tempted to love it (1 Timothy 6:10). But the mere fact of wealth is not itself sin. The sin lies in a person’s attitude toward and use of wealth, not in the possession of it. We are to be content with the wealth God gives us, not anxious to have more.

**Prosperity.** The Bible teaches that there is a general connection between faithfulness to God and prosperity in this life (Proverbs 12:21), but not a one-to-one correspondence (Psalm 73:1-14). In addition, there is a special connection between generosity and prosperity (2 Corinthians 9:6) which exists for the particular purpose of further

generosity (2 Corinthians 9:11). To those who give generously, God gives more. But what he gives is seed, which is meant to be re-sown.

**Poverty.** There are several reasons why God chooses to allow poverty (1 Samuel 2:7). Some kinds of poverty are directly related to our own behavior (Deuteronomy 28:48, Proverbs 14:23). Others simply happen to us, and many of these cases are manifestly unjust. Therefore, while no human life is worth more or less than any other (Exodus 30:15), the poor do have a special place in God's affections (Luke 6:20), because God is not blind to the unjust economic realities of the world (Psalm 140:12). Even the Lord Jesus himself was poor, and Christians should not consider it a dishonor to be poor in this life (Luke 9:58).

**Stewardship.** Stewardship is a lifestyle based on the biblical belief that God is the rightful owner of everything (Psalm 24:1) and that we are stewards or caretakers of his world, responsible to do with it what he wants done. Biblical stewardship includes many aspects, including ecology, physical fitness, personal finance, use of one's abilities and more—even the gospel itself. But of all the various aspects of stewardship, the Bible frequently singles out financial generosity as the one most representative of a person's heart (Matt. 6:19-21).

**The Christian Motivation for Giving.** The Bible gives a number of reasons why Christians should give their money, including apostolic command (2 Corinthians 8:7) and the promise of reward (Luke 12:33). But above all else, Christians give because it is a natural response to the gospel of God's grace. Because God has given us his Son, it is only fitting that we should offer ourselves as sacrifices to him (Romans 12:1), and specifically in part by giving our money (2 Corinthians 8:8-9). We do not give fearfully in order to receive God's grace, but joyfully because we have already received God's grace. For this reason, all Christians—not just the wealthy—are called to practice radical gospel generosity.

**The Role of Giving in Salvation.** Salvation is utterly and completely a gift of God, accomplished by Jesus on our behalf. In no way does giving (or any other good work) secure God's favor, because our very best acts fall far short of God's holiness. However, once we have been made new by the gospel, that same gospel changes us through and through, causing us to practice generosity (and other good works) out of thanksgiving to and love for God (Ephesians 2:10). Thus, while a person's giving does not in any way determine his salvation, it is an excellent indicator that salvation has come to him (Matthew 25:31-46).

**Public Giving.** Jesus commands us to do our giving in secret out of concern for our motivation, whether we give to be praised by men

or to please God (Matthew 6:1-4). But the Scriptures also illustrate that Christian giving can sometimes be a public event (Acts 4:34-37), provided we “give out loud” in order to praise God and encourage others, avoiding possible abuses. Insofar as the church shares a mutual responsibility for the spiritual growth of its people (Galatians 6:1-5), including their use of money (2 Corinthians 8:7), it is right to talk about giving in the church. This means that pastors should preach about giving (Acts 20:27), and that public testimonies of generosity can be a fitting way to edify the church (2 Corinthians 8:1-5, 9:2).

**The Tithe.** The tithe, a one-tenth offering of the first and best of one’s income from the promised land, is merely one aspect of giving in the Old Testament. The law taught three tithes totaling about 23.3 percent of one’s income, but in both testaments tithers are called beyond tithing to mercy, justice and freewill giving in response to God’s grace (2 Corinthians 9:7). Faithful tithing can even mask selfishness or legalism. Since most Christians can and should give far more than one-tenth, mere tithing becomes a tool to avoid the more difficult pursuit of justice and mercy with our wealth (Matthew 23:23). God’s standard for our generosity is not a percentage; it is obedience to the radical command to love others as we love ourselves, imitating the pattern of Jesus’ radical sacrifice on our behalf (2 Corinthians 8:9; John 13:34; 1 John 3:16-18).

**Christian Liberty.** The New Testament does not give us a mandatory percentage for Christian giving. The apostle Paul says, “Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion” (2 Corinthians 9:7). There is a liberty of conscience in Christian giving. But its purpose is not to indulge selfishness but, rather, to cultivate voluntary generosity by God’s people. This is a sort of freedom unfamiliar to the Old Testament Israelites. But it is a freedom to excel in good deeds, not a freedom to sin; a freedom to give more, not less.

**Eternal Reward.** As part of his gospel of grace, God promises to reward believers for their good works (Ephesians 6:8), including generous giving (Matthew 19:21). These eternal rewards are gifts of divine grace, having no human merit of their own, and their biblical purpose is not to provoke us to greed but to encourage us to persevere in obedience. God promises to reward us “according to what we have done” (Matthew 16:27), so there is a principle of correspondence. But the parable of the vineyard-workers (Matthew 20:1-16) makes it clear that the divine economy is no mere tit-for-tat calculation. And in the end, whatever other rewards he chooses to give, God himself is the one great reward of every Christian.

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What's the relationship between generosity and gratitude?

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2. When we think about generosity, we tend to think about money, but generosity extends far beyond this. What are some non-monetary ways we get demonstrate generosity to others?

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3. What are the common emotions that are connected to money? What do these emotions reveal about our heart?

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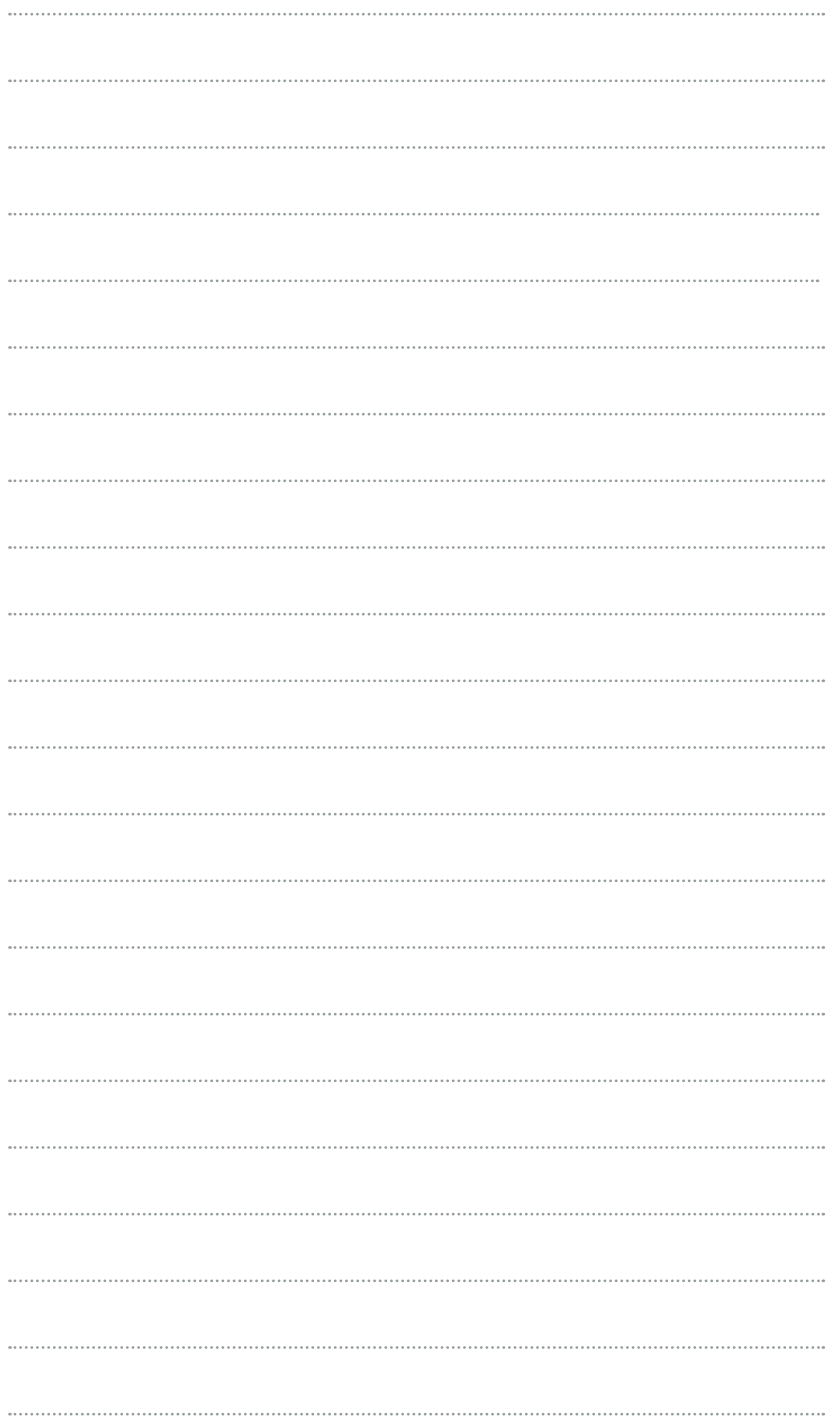
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# WEEK FOUR: ECLECTIC

*For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen. (Ephesians 3:14–21 ESV)*

## STUDY THE TEXT

1. Read Ephesians 2:11–3:21. [Note: In Ephesians, the term “Gentiles” is used to denote all people who are not of Jewish ethnicity.] Paul uses the word “mystery” several times. What does he mean by “mystery”?

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2. The phrase “every family in heaven and on earth” in v.14 could be also be translated, “the whole family in heaven and earth.” Also, the word “family” in Greek [patria] literally means, “fatherhood, of a father.” What is meant by this phrase in v.14? How is a “family in heaven” related to a “family on earth”? What do they have in common? How might this affect our view about how God sees all of humanity?

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3. In 3:14–21, Paul prays for the Ephesian churches, which are mostly composed of Gentiles. What is the main request of his prayer? Why do you think this request would be significant for a church that now accepts any person from any ethnic background, any class, any language, any education level, any financial standing, or any reputation? How is this prayer relevant for Redemption Church today?

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4. There are many titles for God in the Bible that are related to his power and strength (the Almighty [Gen. 49:25], the LORD [Deut. 4:34], King of Kings [Rev. 17:14], Sovereign Lord [Acts 4:24], Mighty God [Isa. 9:6], etc.). If Paul is praying for spiritual strength for the Ephesians, why do you think he chooses to call God “Father” instead of one of God’s other titles?

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5. If someone knew nothing of the God of the Bible and read this passage (Eph. 3:14–21), what words would they use to describe God? (feel free to use words both in the passage and not)

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## FOR DEEPER REFLECTION

### **Excerpt from “Many Colors: Cultural Intelligence for a Changing Church”**

By Soong-Chan Rah

Our goal in cultural intelligence [developing an understanding of other cultures], therefore, is not to erase cultural differences but rather to seek ways to honor the presence of God in different cultures. When we are dealing with cross-cultural and multicultural ministry, it is important to see God at work in all cultures, not just in one. The theological concept of *missio Dei* provides a crucial consideration to this discussion. The term *missio Dei* arises out of the biblical-theological understanding that mission is God’s initiative.

“Mission is, primarily and ultimately, the work of the Triune God, Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, for the sake of the world, a ministry in which the church is privileged to participate.” From the very beginning, it has been God at work reaching out to lost humanity. God’s voice ringing out, “Where are you?” in the garden of Eden is a reminder that God pursues and looks for us. “Mission is the result of God’s initiative, rooted in God’s purposes to restore and heal creation. ‘Mission’ means ‘sending,’ and it is the central biblical theme describing the purpose of God’s action in human history.”

When we consider the work of God throughout human history, we need to acknowledge that God's plan of redemption has been at work before the church even existed, that He is present in different places even before the Western missionaries show up. "Mission is God's turning to the world in respect of creation, care, redemption, and consummation. It takes place in ordinary human history, not exclusively in and through the church. The *missio Dei* is God's activity that embraces both the church and the world, and in which the church may be privileged to participate." The approach of *missio Dei*, therefore, means that there is sensitivity and awareness of the preexisting work of God in culture. If God has been at work, then His work in the world precedes any human effort and work. As Paul DeNeui puts it, "As a missionary ... it was always comforting to realize that I did not bring God along with my physical and cultural baggage to my new host country."

For example, in Acts 17, the apostle Paul appeals to the preexisting notion among the Athenians of an "unknown God" when bringing the good news of Jesus. Paul observes that the Athenians have an "altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. [Paul proceeds to assert that] now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you" (v. 23). Paul appeals to the preexisting elements of that culture in order to plead the case for Christ. While acknowledging that the Athenians were lacking the full knowledge of God, the apostle Paul believes that He had already begun to reveal Himself to them, through the expression of an unknown god. Paul even goes so far as to say that "we are God's offspring" (v. 29), implying that Paul shares the common parentage of God with the Athenians. In other words, Paul, the pious Jewish Christian, shares the image of God with the pagan Athenians; therefore, God's work (no matter how minuscule) had already begun among the Athenians. Paul shows respect for the culture of the Athenians, while pointing them to a fuller understanding of the gospel message.

A similar story occurs in Peter's interaction with Cornelius in Acts 10. In a vision (vv. 9–16) God instructs Peter to eat foods the law had deemed unclean. As a law-abiding Jew, he recoils at the thought of compromising his cultural identity. But the voice in the vision makes the declaration to Peter: "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean" (v. 15).

God had already been at work in Cornelius's life. Not only had Cornelius been seeking Him through his lifestyle of generosity, but God sent a vision of an angel to him (vv. 1–8), who told him

God knew of his good works, and directed him to seek out Peter. When Peter does come to minister to Cornelius, he recognizes that God has already been at work and recognizes that these Gentile believers will receive the same salvation as the Jewish believers. Peter said, “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts those from every nation who fear him and do what is right” (Acts 10:34–35). God’s mission was being fulfilled among the Gentiles, and Peter was allowed to participate in the mission of God.

Understanding the implication of *missio Dei* means that we acknowledge the power of God to work in all cultures. If mission is God’s work, then God’s plan is manifest not only in those being sent out into the world, but in those throughout the world with whom He has already been at work. The church is not the end all and be all of the gospel message—that position belongs to God alone. As Darrell Guder points out, “The church of Jesus Christ is not the purpose or goal of the gospel, but rather its instrument and witness.” Because of God’s sovereign, ongoing work, He is able to work through the culture to bring about His redemption. “Culture, with all its merits and limitations, has played a fundamental role in God’s self-disclosure in human history. Divine revelation does not come in a vacuum. It can only come with reference to culture—i.e., in relation to the religious environment, language, and understanding of man.” The mission of God means that God’s work is evident through the specific revelation of Jesus Christ, but also through the general revelation of creation and culture. God’s wisdom in planning redemptive history leads us to an appreciation of the myriad of cultures in the world.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you find yourself gravitating toward people who look, think, and act like you, or do you engage with others who are different than you? How? Give specific examples.

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2. What does it look like to cultivate a deeper love for those who are different than you?

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3. How should the diversity of the Church look distinctly different than other types of diversity?

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4. How can Jesus' example of incarnation shape the way that you interact with people who are different than you?

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5. People are different in thousands of ways beyond ethnicity and cultural origins. Some like spicy food, some like hip-hop, some like

the color blue more than red. Some people are driven and ambitious, others are relaxed and easy-going. How might this sort of eclecticism and diversity in the Church be good and honoring to God? Further, how does the full diversity of the Church (ethnic, economic, generational, personal) enhance the Church's participation in God's mission?

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# SERMON NOTES

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# WEEK FIVE: RELIANCE

*And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42-47 ESV)*

## STUDY THE TEXT

1. Read all of Acts 2. Make a list of observations about what happened to the church in Jerusalem in this chapter.

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2. Who is the “they” in v.42? Restate, in your own words, the four things to which “they devoted themselves.” How do you think that group in 1st century Jerusalem is related to us today in 21st century Tempe, AZ?

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3. How did the people of this early church rely on each other? How was the Holy Spirit of God, given at Pentecost in Acts 2:1-5, influential on the practices of this church? What effects did the Spirit bring about?

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4. What are some results of the Spirit-filled fellowship that we see in Acts 2?

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# FOR DEEPER REFLECTION

## **Excerpt from “The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story”**

By Michael Goheen and Craig Bartholomew

As Luke describes the young church [in Acts 2], it has three defining qualities. The first is devotion: this new community devotes itself to the apostles’ teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer so that they might more and more experience the life of the kingdom (2:42).

The church’s second defining quality is that the life of Christ is manifested both in the lives of individual members and in the life of the community considered as a whole. The church is thus known by convincing signs of God’s saving power within it (2:43), by justice and mercy in its communal relations (2:44-45), by joyful conviviality (2:46), and by worship (2:47).

Third, as the liberating life of the kingdom becomes more and more evident in the church, we hear that the exalted Lord “[adds] to their number daily those who are being saved” (2:47). This too fulfills Old Testament prophecies about God’s kingdom. The prophets picture the drawing power of a renewed Israel (Isaiah 60:2-3; Zechariah 8:20-23): “A decisive element of the prophetic conception of the pilgrimage of the nations to Zion is that the Gentiles, fascinated by the salvation visible in Israel, are driven of their own accord to the people of God. They do not become believers as a result of missionary activity; rather, the fascination emitted by the people of God draws them close.” This newly formed community of the early church is attractive to outsiders. The life of the believing community radiates the light of the kingdom and thus draws people from darkness (cf. Ephesians 5:8; 1 Peter 2:9).

Though the Spirit-filled community of Acts 2 is in one sense new to history, it also stands in historical continuity with the Old Testament nation that had its origins in Abraham. God formed Israel to be a light to the nations, but the Israelites failed to live up to their calling, so God sent them into exile.

Nevertheless, he promised to gather his people again one day, pouring out his Spirit on them so they might at last fulfill their calling. The prophets looked forward to the day when Israel would be regathered. Now, in Jesus, the regathering has begun. He has

appointed twelve apostles, representing the twelve tribes of Israel, to be the foundation of his kingdom, the new nation of God's people. At Pentecost, in response to Peter's preaching and the power of the Holy Spirit, three thousand people are added to that foundation. The remainder of the book of Acts tells the story of how this new community of believers continues Jesus' mission of gathering the lost from within Israel, then moves beyond old ethnic and cultural barriers to gather Samaritans and Gentiles into the kingdom.

## **Ways That the New Testament Tells Us to Care for Each Other**

By John Piper

Instead of one or two texts to demonstrate this [that God uses other believers as a means of caring for the church], I want you to get a feel for the biblical sweep of this truth. So listen to about twenty ways that the New Testament tells us to care for each other. As I read and comment on these passages, be praying that God would speak to you about the place of mutual care in your life.

1 John 4 :11 - "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." This is the great overarching, all inclusive command to care for each other with love.

Romans 15:7 - "Welcome one another (or accept one another) as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God." Our lives and our groups should be welcoming places.

1 Corinthians 12:25 - ". . . that the members may have the same care for one another."

1 Peter 4:10 - "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace." He who would be great becomes the servant of all.

Ephesians 5:21 - "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

1 Thessalonians 5:15 - "Always seek to do good to one another and to everyone."

Ephesians 4:32 - "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted."

Hebrews 10:25 - ". . . not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of

some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.” Being in each other’s lives with encouragement is going to be especially needed in the last days. Form the habit now lest you be taken off guard.

Hebrews 10:24 - “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works.” Who of us cannot trace much of our own passions for radical Christian living to other Christians who have stirred us up?

Hebrews 3:13 - “Exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.” God has ordained that his word not just come to us directly from the Bible but indirectly from the Bible through people. This is why the Bible says that the mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life (Proverbs 10:11).

Colossians 3:16 - “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom.” “Admonish” has a bit of an edge to it, and that is sometimes necessary among people who love each other.

Ephesians 5:19 - “Address one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart.” Many hymns and worship songs are sung directly to the Lord. But even when they are, we are doing it together and we hear each other and that is God’s will for us—that we minister to each other in song. This happens in large gatherings and in small groups and families.

Romans 15:5 - “May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in . . . harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus.”

2 Corinthians 13:11 - “Comfort one another.” Oh, the preciousness of a small group in times of loss and grief. How many personal and practical ways we have seen them comfort each other.

Romans 15:14 - “You yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another.” As you are filled with more and more knowledge about God and his ways, you begin to instruct one another. Who of us is ever beyond the need for others to instruct us? God does not mean for us to merely be alone without Bibles, but to share what we learn.

Romans 12:10 - "Outdo one another in showing honor."

Colossians 3:13 - "Bear with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other." Love involves being patient with each others flaws. It covers a multitude of sins.

Colossians 3:13 - "Forgive each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive." Not just bear with flaws, but actually let real offenses go, and don't store them up and brood over them.

James 5:16 - "Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed." Few things are more humbling and more healing than when you confess your sin to others. That is the level of trust we want in our small groups.

1 Peter 4:9 - "Show hospitality to one another without grumbling."

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How did you initially become a part of a local church? What drew you into that community?

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2. Why is community important? What are the biggest obstacles to living in community with other believers?

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**3. What does it look like to be led by the Holy Spirit as an individual?  
As a community?**

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# SERMON NOTES

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# WEEK SIX: SENT

*When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. (John 20:20-22 ESV)*

## STUDY THE TEXT

1. In John 20:21, Jesus says that he was sent by the Father, and that he sends his disciples in a similar way. Think about the ministry of Jesus, and make a list of everything that comes to mind about earthly ministry.

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2. Look at the list you made for question #1. What would it look like for us to imitate Jesus as we participate in God's mission?

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3. After Jesus commissions his disciples in v.21, it says he “breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’.” Describe the significance of the Holy Spirit as we participate in God’s mission. (See also: Acts 1:8, Luke 24:45–49, Acts 4:31)

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4. Christopher Wright defines mission as: “Our committed participation as God’s people, at God’s invitation and command, in God’s own mission within the history of God’s world for the redemption of God’s creation.” Reflect on these passages below and write down any implications you see about participating in God’s mission in the world.

For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. (Colossians 1:19–20)

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:18–20)

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:8–10)

List some implications about participating in God’s mission in the world:

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# FOR DEEPER REFLECTION

## Gospel Ecosystems

Note: God not only calls people from diverse backgrounds; he also calls people into different types of ministries. No individual can do all of these ministries, so we must rely on the God who empowers all of us for diverse types of ministry. Tim Keller, in his book “Center Church” Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City”, identifies five types of gospel ministry that contribute to gospel movements within cities:

**1. A prayer movement uniting churches across traditions in visionary intercession for the city.**

The history of revivals shows the vital importance of corporate, prevailing, visionary intercessory prayer for the city and the body of Christ. Praying for your city is a biblical directive (Jer. 29:4-7). Coming together in prayer is something a wide variety of believers can do. It doesn't require a lot of negotiation and theological parsing to pray. Prayer brings people together. And this very activity is catalytic for creating friendships and relationships across denominational and organizational boundaries. Partnerships with Christians who are similar to and yet different from you stimulates growth and innovation.

**2. Specialized evangelistic ministries, reaching particular groups (business people, mothers, ethnicities, & the like).**

Of particular importance are effective campus and youth

ministries. Many of the city church's future members and leaders are best found in the city's colleges and schools. While students who graduate from colleges in university towns must leave the area to get jobs, graduates from urban universities do not. Students won to Christ and given a vision for living in the city can remain in the churches they joined during their school years and become emerging leaders in the urban body of Christ. Winning the youth of a city wins city natives who understand the culture well.

### **3. An array of justice and mercy ministries, addressing every possible social problem and neighborhood.**

As the evangelicals provided leadership in the 1830s, we need today an urban "benevolent empire" of Christians banding together in various nonprofits and other voluntary organizations to address the needs of the city. Christians of the city must become renowned for their care for their neighbors, for this is one of the key ways that Jesus will become renowned.

### **4. Faith and work initiatives and fellowships in which Christians from across the city gather with others in the same profession.**

Networks of Christians in business, the media, the arts, government, and the academy should come together to help each other work with accountability, excellence, and Christian distinctiveness.

### **6. Systems for attracting, developing, and training urban church and ministry leaders.**

The act of training usually entails good theological education, but a dynamic city leadership system will include additional components such as well-developed internship programs and connections to campus ministries.

### **7. An unusual unity of Christian city leaders.**

Church and movements leaders, heads of institutions, business leaders, academics, and others must know one another and provide vision and direction for the whole city. They must be more concerned about reaching the whole city and growing the



whole body of Christ than about increasing their own tribe and kingdom.

When all of these ecosystems elements are strong and in place, they stimulate and increase one another and the movement becomes self-sustaining.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Ephesians 2:10 says that we were created for specific good works. What sort of good work do you believe you were created for?

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2. Where do you spend most of your time during the course of a week? What would it look like to work with excellence in that setting and point to God's glory? What are some ways you can love others intentionally in that setting?

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3. John Calvin said, "All the blessings we enjoy are Divine deposits, committed to our trust on this condition, that they should be dispensed

for the benefit of our neighbors.” Make a list of all of the resources that you use to take care of yourself (time, money, education, car, etc.). What would it look like to leverage these things for the benefit of others?

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4. In the Book of Acts, we see that the Apostles often used analogies to explain the Gospel. Can you think of any redemptive analogies from popular culture that could serve as a bridge to explain the Gospel?

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5. What are the biggest obstacles you face as you seek to participate in God’s mission?

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# SERMON NOTES

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