

KNOWING AND LOVING THE CITY



INTRODUCTION

Cities are full of people. God loves people. God loves cities. Even when his chosen people reject the cities of their enemy (Jonah 4:9-11) or oppressor (Jeremiah 29:4-11), God remains committed. Cities have been a part of God's plan for humanity from the very beginning. We are made to use the innate potential of the creation to make culture and industry and economy. But something has gone terribly wrong. Instead of being centers of hope that reveal the love and glory of our God, cities have become places of mixture that reveal the best and worst of broken humanity.

YOU HAVE TO KNOW IT TO LOVE IT

Jesus' letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3 reveal a lot about his heart - what he values and what he hates. But they also reveal his deep knowledge of the cities in which his churches are living. A particularly powerful one is the letter to Laodicea. In the letter, he mentions riches, lukewarm water, clothing, and eyesight. He has contextualized his message to this church based on the features and values of the city. Laodicea was located just far enough away from natural sources that by the time water reached the city, it had become lukewarm. The city was a natural hub for commerce and was unusually wealthy in the region. They were known for their exceptionally fine black wool clothing. And they were associated with a special eye ointment. Jesus models a profound reality: in order to love something, you need to begin to understand it. In order to deeply connect with someone you love, you have to speak their language, know what they value, what they don't, and how they see the world. Loving a city is no different.

KNOWING AND LOVING PORTLAND

What is our city known for? Food. Music. Strip Clubs. Natural Beauty. Beer. Coffee. Gentrification. Homelessness. The statistics can only tell us so much, but they show a city in the midst of rapid growth and change. We are a relatively young, medium sized city. We are not very diverse, ethnically. We are politically progressive and have the second highest per capita population of LGBTQ residents in the nation. We are in the midst of a homeless crisis; a foster care crisis; and a housing crisis. We are educated, employed, professional-ish, and mostly single. Despite appearances, 15% of Portlanders live below the poverty line and more than 11% of all residents do not have health insurance. How can the church read the signs and love this city?

AN EXERCISE FOR READING YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD

Your neighborhood is not a neutral space. Everything in it communicates and creates a value system. Learning to observe and evaluate the values communicated by your neighborhoods will help you contextualize and communicate the Gospel through action and word. As you go about your week, take a few moments to ask the following questions:

- What value systems does the structural environment communicate? Who is this environment built for?
- How does the structural environment impact the way people live?
- How old are the buildings? Is this an old and maintained neighborhood? Are buildings in decline? Is it in the process of being torn down? Is everything new? Who are the spaces marketed to?
- Who are the businesses marketing to? Who do they want to attract? Who are they excluding?
- Who do you see? What is the observable demographic? Is it the same during the day as at night? What about on weekends?
- How do people get around? Foot, bike, car, public transit, skateboard? Is this a commuter neighborhood, or a live/work/play kind of place?
- Where do people congregate? What draws them?
- What brought people here in the first place? This requires conversation with homeowners, businesses, and renters. Cultural affinity, shared values, political affinity?
- Where do you observe hope vs. brokenness?
- Where does the church need to get involved?

SOME THOUGHTS ON APPLICATION

Door of Hope finds itself in Portland in the first quarter of the twenty first century. You and your immediate community find yourselves in a particular neighborhood, in particular workplaces, in particular places of business, etc. The people of this time and these places need to know the good news that Jesus loves them, that He died for their sin, that He promises them grace, life, purpose, and hope if they'll receive Him. In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul describes a key feature of his approach to ministry: "For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in

order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings" (1 Cor. 9:19-23). Paul contextualized his ministry to the people he found himself with—but to do it he had to first *know* the same people. At Door of Hope, may we be a people who will do the hard work to know thoroughly, that we might love faithfully, that we might proclaim effectively.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

211 App for smartphones – The 211 App is a great tool for finding information on available resources across the city at a moment's notice. Especially helpful for connecting people you meet with what they need in the moment. [<http://211info.org/contact211infoorg/>]

Portland on City-Data – A smattering of statistics on various features of the city of Portland [<http://www.city-data.com/city/Portland-Oregon.html>]

2017 Portland Homeless PIT Report – This report was prepared in collaboration between the Population Research Center and the Survey Research Lab at Portland State University for the City of Portland, the City of Gresham, Multnomah County and the Coordinating Board of A Home for Everyone. [https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1040&context=prc_pub]

Exegeting a Neighborhood Within the City article by JR Woodward - A super practical article on how to "exegete" or read a particular neighborhood you find yourself in. Woodward urges us to consider our neighborhoods from four perspectives: narrative, rituals, institutions, and ethics. This thorough reading will hopefully allow us to more effectively present the gospel and tangible love of Christ in these places. [<http://thev3movement.org/2013/11/exegeting-a-neighborhood-within-the-city/>]

Exegeting the City book by Sean Benesh – Sean's book was written for urban church planters to help them understand the cities they live in. It aims to "aid you in the process of contextualization as you discern how to embody, teach, and proclaim the Gospel in the city." Whether you're a church planter or not, it's full of helpful tools and ideas. About 168 pages.

Loving the City book by Tim Keller - Keller looks at the biblical foundations for contextualizing the gospel as we communicate to the culture in a way that is both respectful and challenging. He articulates the key characteristics of a city vision, showing how the city develops as a theme throughout Scripture, from its anti-God origins, to its strategic importance for mission, to its culmination and redemption in glory. About 336 pages.

The Meaning of the City book by Jacques Ellul - An incredible scholarly book discussing a theology of the city in conversation with philosophy and sociology. Ellul is one of the master dialectic thinkers from the past century and exposes the false promises of the city while fully embracing God's election of the city as an instrument of grace in our world. About 230 pages.