

Seek the Peace and Prosperity of the City by Ken Behnken

This article first appeared in the September 2005 New Harvest newsletter from the Center for U.S. Missions. Permission is given to copy this article for distribution within your own congregation. Please credit the author and the Center for U.S. Missions in Irvine, California, www.centerforusmissions.org. For more information, contact the Center at 949-854-8002 x1780.

A majority (52%) of people today live in metropolitan areas. Yet sadly, rather than planting new churches in the city, the church is deserting our cities and running to the suburbs. How can we bring peace to our cities if Christians are not living there?

God dictated a letter to Jeremiah, a letter to the Jewish leaders taken in chains to Babylon when the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem. This letter gives us tremendous insights into how God wants us to be in ministry in the cities where he has placed us.

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."... For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. (Jer. 29:4-7,11)

These words are still excellent guidelines for reaching the city. We need leaders in the city who are willing to do the following:

Settle down

We need leaders whose families are willing to enter into life with the city, willing to call the city their home, to raise their families, make friends, shop, plant gardens, live the Gospel, share the Gospel, and use their gifts and talents to help others improve their lives. When others rush to the suburbs, they become more determined to call the city their home. They settle down and let the Lord use them to touch other people in the city.

Increase in number

These are leaders who love the city and pass on that love to their children. They teach their children the culture of the city so that the city becomes a part of their lives. They teach their children that the love of Christ is learned and caught through their lives. The only way the city will be conquered for Christ is if we increase the numbers of Christians in the city. Families pass on the love of the city to their children and their children to their children. Missionaries are born and raised in the culture of the city.

Seek the peace

True peace comes in knowing the One who says, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives." (John. 14:27) The presence of Jesus

Christ is in the city “in us.” Luther reminds us that we are to be “little Christs.” Peace comes to the city as the leaders, their families and friends let people see Jesus Christ, the True Peace, in and through their lives. As Christians work for the “shalom,” the peace of the city, by practicing their faith and living their peace in Christ, True Peace comes to the city.

Pray

These commands of the Lord are no easy task. This is not something that just flows naturally from our human nature. Pastors and leaders working in cities around the world will tell you there are hardships, sufferings, difficulties, disappointments, and struggles to raise a family in the city, but they will also tell you of the rewards and blessings. All city missionaries are quick to let you know how important prayer is. Without God it is impossible. “With God all things are possible.” (Matt. 19:26) Constant communication with the Lord of the City makes city ministry possible. His desire is to prosper the work of his missionaries in the cities. The Lord’s promise is that when the work of the Lord prospers, the missionaries and their families prosper. The Hebrew word for prosper is “shalom,” not meaning financial wealth but happiness and peace.

Pray the Lord of the Harvest for workers in the city. Pray the Lord of the Harvest to use you to seek the peace and prosperity of your city. ■

Ken Behnken is the Director of Training at the Center for U.S. Missions.