

RESTORING SHALOM

A FRAMEWORK FOR URBAN MINISTRY

A Public Faith Curriculum
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Purpose:

Bringing a message of personal revival and social reform, the early church grew from a handful of people to become the predominant religion of the Roman Empire. The purpose of this article is to help the reader consider how that was done and to derive an approach for ministry in 21st-century global cities.

Article Overview:

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Introduction

Cities, urban centers, major metropolitan areas—just the thought brings a sense of movement, power, intent and possibility. A press of humanity jostles for position, each looking to make a big break, to make a name, or sometimes just to fade into the background. Immigrants pour into the city from around the world: the rich, the powerful, as well as the poor and the displaced. The city is a place of business and trade, discrimination and injustice, crime and corruption, and also of art and beauty. It is a hotbed of creative energy and a citadel of intellectual capital. Home to the preeminent cultural and academic institutions of society, cities represent the best and the worst of what the world has to offer.

As a result of globalization, national governments no longer control the flow of money or information in and out of their major cities. Tim Keller, New York City pastor, academic and global city-watcher says, “not only are cities more powerful than ever, they are also more connected and therefore more alike. The cultures of center-cities in different hemispheres are surprisingly similar. There are many daily connections and their residents travel and move back and forth between them.”²

At its essence the city is a culture-forming center where the arts, academia and finance intersect and overlap creating a synergistic effect. It is in major cities that the corporate, academic and cultural institutions of society are forged and controlled. In addition cities are major job centers made up of people who come looking for new opportunities—immigrants either from other countries or less influential areas of the same country.

The question is: What does our urban context have to do with God and his Kingdom? To best understand the urban story, let’s look at the city through the framework of Creation, Fall, Redemption and Restoration.

Creation: *What was the city meant to be?* The world was created for *shalom*, a universal flourishing that was to be the context in which humankind was to live and work. *Shalom*, a Hebrew word, often translated as peace, is really much more. It is an **inter**dependence of the created order where God, humanity and creation are woven together, each in a right relationship to the other. As a result of this interdependence, or right relationship, everything flourishes and there is universal justice, prosperity and rejoicing.

Cities were meant to be *shalom* providers. We can look at some of the best that the city has to offer and see these things for what they “ought” to be. Cities at their best are places of refuge and protection. They are creative centers for business, the arts, science and the academy. They are places where culture is forged (fulfilling the cultural mandate) for the common good.

Keller says that, “Globalized city-centers are the strategic ‘leading edge’ of world culture.” It is in global city-centers that culture is being forged and created. Keller goes on to say, “As a result, the culture and values of

world-class cities are now being transmitted around the globe to every tongue, tribe, people, and nation. Large cities are now far more influential in forming the culture of, say, teenagers in rural Indiana or rural Mexico than are the national or local governments or civic institutions ... Cities continue to be the main place that the culture develops."

The Fall: What cities have become. When sin destroys *shalom*, the fabric of society or the interdependence of the created order unravels. Injustice abounds and people don't care. The rich dominate the poor. The fit survive and the weak are marginalized. The human race shuns interdependence because of the high risks involved in trusting one another. Instead independence is pursued and people often find themselves living in isolation, deeply longing for *shalom*.

The city is a *creational structure* that has been corrupted. With all their potential, the cities of the world have become broken and fragmented. In Geneses 11:1-9, we see a city taking on a *fallen direction* as it used its resources to forge culture in a sinful way.

Now the whole earth used the same language and the same words. And it came about as they journeyed east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks and burn them thoroughly." And they used brick for stone, and they used tar for mortar. And they said, "Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top will reach into heaven, and let us make for ourselves a name; lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth." And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. And the LORD said, "Behold, they are one people, and they all have the same language. And this is what they began to do, and now nothing which they purpose to do will be impossible for them. Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of the whole earth; and they stopped building the city. Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of the whole earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of the whole earth.

Let's consider this passage in light of *structure* and *direction*.

The structure. The city or urban structure is designed for administrative purposes, for creative purposes, for community, for worship and safety and protection. In the passage above, we see that the city of Babel spawned innovation. The "burning of bricks" and the use of tar or asphalt was new technology that came out of this urban setting. It isn't certain if the tower itself was to be a place of worship but it was to be a new architectural feat. The production of religious expression and architecture are culture-forging activities—neither of which is inherently bad. Their fault lies with why they were building the tower: They were seeking safety and power *independent* from God.

The direction. In the passage we see that the creational *structure* for the city was being moved in a *fallen direction* rather than in a *redemptive direction*. *Shalom* was being destroyed. First and foremost the people were disobedient to the cultural mandate to spread throughout earth and develop the world. Their desire was to, “make for ourselves a name; lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.” They didn’t want to be scattered abroad. There was a sense of pride and self-sufficiency that governed the decision to stay rather than go.

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary explains the passage this way:

The purpose of the undertaking was twofold. First, they wanted to assure themselves of the strength that comes from unity. The city and the tower would tie them into a solid group, so that they might be powerful—even without God's help. They said: Lest we be scattered. On the other hand, they were determined to make themselves renowned—make for ourselves a name. The sins of self-sufficiency and pride predominated in their thinking. They wanted to make sure that they would not be forgotten. The tower would hold them together and secure their names from oblivion. They defied God and set out to prove their self-sufficiency. Their towering structure would be a monument to their energy, daring, genius, and resources. Many towering cities, such as Babylon, Sodom, Gomorrah, Sidon, Tyre, and Rome, have proved anything but godly structures. When men spurn God's law and grace, and exalt themselves, catastrophe inevitably falls upon them.³

The Lord's redemptive act. In this passage, the Lord does two things that serve his redemptive purposes: He scatters the people and then confuses their languages. Why is this redeeming? By scattering he puts the people back onto the path of obedience and of fulfilling the cultural mandate; he is also preventing the people of Babel from accruing improper, self-sufficient power cut off from God. This alienation from God is *shalom* destroying. By confusing the languages he insures that the people will not be able to return to their sin.

Does this passage mean that God is against cities or for rural areas? By no means; we can see that God is very city-affirming by the fact that we will eventually end up in the renewed city of God, and by his plan to use urban centers for redemption. However, when the culture-forging centers of society produce godless culture the sinful effect is spread with great speed and efficiency.

Redemption: *How can cities be utilized in the redemption process?* Ray Bakke, urban pastor and author says that, “Most Christians still read the Bible through rural lenses.”⁴ In reality, urban centers have played an important role in redemption history from the earliest pages of Genesis to the last chapters of Revelation. God intends for cities to be redeemed *and* redeeming.

Tim Keller explains that in the Old Testament the city was meant to play a redemptive role in society, “The city wall represents the fact that cities are places of refuge and justice. The density of population and the wall made it possible for citizens to protect themselves from robbers and armies. God put his judges in cities and directed that cities of refuge be built in Israel where cases could be tried. Cities are still places where the weak—minorities (those unrepresentative by the majority of society), the poor, etc.—go to find a place to live.”

The City as a Place of Refuge. In Numbers 35:9-15, God appointed six cities of refuge:

Then the LORD said to Moses: “Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘When you cross the Jordan into Canaan, select some towns to be your cities of refuge, to which a person who has killed someone accidentally may flee. They will be places of refuge from the avenger, so that a person accused of murder may not die before he stands trial before the assembly. These six towns you give will be your cities of refuge ... for Israelites, aliens and any other people living among them, so that anyone who has killed another accidentally can flee there.’”

The fabric of society seems to unravel fastest in the very places that were intended to be safe havens: urban centers. However *shalom* can be restored to our cities through righteousness.

Proverbs 11:10-11 says, *When the righteous prosper, the city rejoices; when the wicked perish, there are shouts of joy. Through the blessing of the upright a city is exalted, but by the mouth of the wicked it is destroyed.*

The word for righteous used in this verse means someone who makes things right or just. In order to be righteous we must restore justice when we can. Righteousness requires a willingness to disadvantage oneself for the advantage of the community in order to restore justice. By definition we can only be righteous as we take interest in others and in the whole community at the expense of ourselves.

Doing justice involves re-weaving the torn fabric of society so that we are again in an *interdependent* relationship, so that all people flourish and *shalom* is restored. It is impossible to live a righteous life and ignore the needs of others, particularly those in our reach who are disadvantaged or disenfranchised. Restoring *shalom* to the city and its people is a Kingdom activity that the righteous will do.

In most urban centers there is a tear in the fabric of society and *shalom* no longer exists. When anyone is prohibited from flourishing for any reason, there is a tear in the social fabric. This grieves our Lord. As believers we are called to restore *shalom* by re-weaving people back into the fabric so that they can again be part of the flourishing society. This involves bringing the outcasts back in, the downtrodden back up and becoming the means for those without means. We re-weave these people back into society with God, with the rest of humanity and with the physical, cultural and social structures of the created order.

Urban Centered Missions. In the book of Jeremiah we get a glimpse of the attitude we should have toward the cities we live in. The nation of Israel had been taken into captivity; they were to spend 70 years in Babylon. In Jeremiah 29:4-8, God gives instructions for how Israel should live during those 70 years in the city to which they have been taken:

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."

"Seek the welfare of the city to which I carried you." This is incredibly redemptive. God was seeking to bless the hand of the aggressor, Babylon, through the captive Israelites.

Paul too had an urban centered mission. Wayne Meeks, a church historian, says that, "within a decade of the crucifixion of Jesus, the village culture of Palestine had been left far behind, and the Greco-Roman city had become the dominant environment of the Christian movement."⁵ Within 300 years, 50 percent of the urban populations of the Roman Empire were Christian; on the other hand, less than 10 percent of the rural empire had left paganism.

In the New Testament we see that Paul planted churches in the largest urban centers of each region he entered. Tim Keller explains the reason for this approach, "cities are the 'culture forming wombs' of the society. Whatever captures the cultural centers captures society."

Restoration: A City – The hope of the world

God's plan for the created order began in a garden where he commissioned humankind to develop his creation according to his will. But to what end were we to develop creation? Were we to stay in the cool of the garden forever? In Revelation 21:2-5, God gives us a picture of what we were, and one day, what we will become. He is renewing the world and will one day present the New Jerusalem, the heavenly city to Jesus as his bride. A city! Not just the people but also the place.

Revelation 21:2-5: I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

The job of restoring *shalom* can seem pretty daunting to those who live in global cities. Cities pose great challenges to Kingdom workers.

Restoring *shalom* involves three elements of ministry: proclamation, social service and cultural engagement. Evangelism, discipleship and Bible teaching, are the primary means of bringing others into a right relationship with God. Social service, which is restoring *shalom* for individuals and their communities, is love for love's sake. Helping restore *shalom* in societal structures, which is cultural engagement, has great import because as we bring cultural structures back under Kingdom reign they honor God and reveal his character.

How can we as believers work toward restoring *shalom* in our cities? How can we make a difference in our communities and in our world on behalf of God's Kingdom? The early church understood and worked for the Kingdom of God like no other generation has since. As a result Christianity grew from about 150 people just after Jesus' death to become the predominant religion of the Roman Empire less than 300 years later. How did they do it? For the first-century believers, the backdrop for this huge conversion rate was the restoring of *shalom*. Let's look more closely at **who** they were, **how** they ministered and **why** they did what they did.

Introduction Summary Points:

- Global culture is being forged in the leading cities of the world.
- Urban centers have played an important role in redemption history from the earliest pages of Genesis to the last chapters of Revelation.
- The world was created for *shalom*, a universal flourishing that was to be the context in which humankind was to live and work.
- The backdrop for Kingdom expansion for the first century believers was the restoring of *shalom*.

Chapter 1 - Who, Influentials

The believers of the early church had a compelling faith that addressed public issues. They were active in every part of society restoring *shalom* and providing gospel solutions for all sorts of personal, cultural and social ills. They confronted sinful people, explaining the new-life that is available in Jesus and they confronted social and cultural practices with solutions that honored God and gave dignity to the human race. This seamless approach to proclamation (preaching the gospel) and incarnation (living out the gospel) caused the first Christians to be involved in the affairs of their communities. They reached into the areas of health care, the abuse of women, care of abandoned infants and a host of other issues, actively weaving the poor and the downtrodden back into the fabric of society.

As Rodney Stark, sociologist and author of *The Rise of Christianity*, says, "the power of the early church came from its ability to revitalize society like other religions of the day could not. As such, the Christian faith was not only attractive but also relevant to the daily needs of society. **As a result people responded to the gospel in remarkable numbers.**"⁶

The first-century believers understood the world in light of the gospel and influenced people, society and culture to move in redemptive directions. They were woven into the very fabric of the cities in which they lived and were thus able to bring Kingdom values to bear on the social institutions of the day. The first-century believers were for the most part *influentials*.

What is an *influential*? And how did the early Christians possess and utilize the traits of *influentials*? Jon Barry and Ed Keller, in their book *The Influentials*, say that approximately 10 percent of the people in every stratum of society influence the thinking and behavior of the other 90 percent—and those people, many times, are not in positions of formal leadership or decision-making. They are, what the authors call *influentials*.⁷ Barry and Keller go onto explain, “Influentials are people who make society, culture and the marketplace run. They are involved in local affairs, active in their communities, highly engaged in the workplace and in their personal lives, they are interested in many subjects and involved in many groups. They know how to express themselves and do so.”⁸

This is a pretty fair description of the early Christian. Far from Friedrich Engels’ claim that Christianity was originally a movement of the poor and oppressed, first century believers were primarily urban social elites. In 1967, Heinz Kreissig, a Marxist historian recanted of his proletarian view and said that the early church was drawn from, “urban circles of well-situated artisans, merchants, and members of the liberal professions.”⁹ E.A. Judge, a New Testament historian, agrees, describing the early church: “The Christians were dominated by a socially pretentious section of the population of big cities.”¹⁰

The early church was primarily comprised of urban elite who, governed by creeds of love and charity, acted to revitalize society and saw great numbers of people respond to the gospel. Early Christians, like Barry and Keller’s *Influentials* held several traits in common. These traits are instructive to us if we desire to affect and influence people and society.

Traits that *influentials* generally hold in common: (This list was derived from *The Influentials*¹¹)

1. They have strong **Convictions**—they know what they believe, what matters to them and why. They have priorities in light of these convictions.
2. They are **Activists**—influentials act on their convictions. This “activist” trait is what makes their beliefs “convictions” rather than simply beliefs. They follow through on what they hold to be true and right. In addition they view change positively and thus work toward it.
3. They **Articulate** their thoughts—they are able to articulate their convictions and draw people into conversation. They are users of technology largely because it connects them with other people in verbal and written ways. They desire to communicate with others on issues that are important to them.

4. They have *Active Minds* – they are widely read and keep current in books, articles, and issues being discussed in society. They are generally not TV watchers but seek to be informed through reading and conversations. *Influentials* are motivated by a desire to be life-long learners. They are interesting conversationalists as a result.
5. They are *Widely Networked* – *influentials* have a wide network of people they know and interact with – more than the average person. They are part of several different groups/networks (formal and informal).

The five traits mentioned above describe people who are woven into the fabric of the cities in which they live. They are the people who make society, culture and the marketplace run. Though *influentials* don't necessarily forge thought and culture, they do spread and normalize it. The early church is a good case study for how the gospel can spread through *influentials* in action.

In *The Rise of Christianity*, Stark looks at early Christianity's rapid growth. He says, "movements grow much faster when they spread through preexisting social networks."¹² *Influentials are widely networked*. Stark goes on to build a case for the fact that those who are well informed will adopt new ideas more quickly than others. *Influentials have active minds and are well informed*. In *The Rise of Christianity*, we see that Christian values were, "translated into norms of social service and community solidarity."¹³ *Influentials have convictions and act on them*.

Chapter 1 Summary Points:

- The first Christians were active in every part of society restoring *shalom* and providing gospel solutions for all sorts of personal, cultural and social ills.
- The power of the early church came from its ability to revitalize society.
- 10 percent of the people in every stratum of society influence the thinking and behavior of the other 90 percent.
- The early church, as a model, shows how the gospel can spread through *Influentials* in action.

Chapter 2 - How, Civic Involvement and Open Networks

The Greco-Roman world of the 1st century A.D. was undeniably brutal, exhibiting an obscene fascination with death, holding a very low view of marriage and family and especially of women and promoting all sorts of sexual debauchery.

The urban centers were death traps for the poor and disenfranchised as well as the upper middle classes. Fire, disease and civil uprisings left no one untouched. The cities were culturally diverse and socially volatile as immigrants and conquered peoples crowded into city centers.

Pagan religions were incapable of providing solutions in times of need for the general populace. But Christians with creeds of love and charity were

able to effectively address the problems of society. It was in these urban centers, in the midst of social and cultural turmoil that the church took root and grew.

The new Christian faith was considered a “revitalization movement” because of its ability to respond to social crisis. Stark writes, “the name indicates the positive contributions such movements often make by ‘revitalizing’ the capacity of a culture to deal with its problems.”¹⁴

For Christians in the first century, conversion and cultural reform went hand in hand. They were able to effectively meet social needs while at the same time meeting individual needs for salvation. Their efforts were enhanced by two normative practices: First, through *civic involvement*, the urban elite, which made up most of the Christian body, engaged the inner workings of the cities in which they lived. Second, these believers were able to mobilize others to meet the needs of the general populace through their *open social networks*.

It was in this context of civic involvement and open networks that people came to understand the gospel of Jesus Christ. And it was in this context that cultural norms were challenged and transformed.

Civic Involvement. The Judeo-Christian tradition has always linked faith in God with a highly social ethical code. Jesus calls his followers to challenge the norms of society that destroy *shalom* and to promote new norms, forming policies and laws that help re-weave the fabric of society. Of the early church Stark writes, “Christian values of love and charity had, from the beginning, been translated into norms of social service and community solidarity.”¹⁵

The civic involvement of the early church reformed and challenged social norms in a number of areas including the treatment of women, abortion, infanticide, the treatment of the poor, widows and orphans, family values, and caring for the sick.

Stark states, “Christian doctrine prohibited infanticide and abortion even though exposure of unwanted female infants and deformed male infants was legal, morally acceptable and widely practiced by all social classes in the Greco-Roman world. By the end of the second century, Christians not only were proclaiming their rejection of abortion and infanticide, but had begun direct attacks on pagans, especially pagan religions, for sustaining such “crimes.”¹⁶

Open, Social Networks. “Typically people do not seek a faith; they encounter one through their ties to other people who already accept this faith.”¹⁷ For the early Christians personal relationships provided the major impetus for accepting the Christian faith, as a result personal conversions tended to proceed along the lines of preexisting social networks.

A social network is a group of people with a common connection such as club membership or professional associations. Most people are part of

several networks. A person will gain the most benefit from his social networks when those networks are open and overlapping. An open network is one that doesn't close off to new members. Some of our networks are naturally closed, such as the people with whom we graduate from university. This network can remain open if it overlaps with other networks, say the friends of fellow alumni.

Civic involvement naturally leads to expanded networks. As Christians get involved with their communities, their networks are broadened to include those with whom they work. As the early Christians mobilized people for collective action, not only did the doctrines of our faith generate new social arrangements to meet social needs, but also it opened the door for more people to hear about and embrace Jesus as the vital solution to all of life's ills. Following Jesus' commands to minister to the poor, weak and disadvantaged requires civic action and forces the church to maintain open networks. Open networks of interpersonal relationships are both a means and a by-product of this kind of redeeming love. As Christians ministered to immigrants moving into the cities, as they addressed the needs of the sick who had been abandoned by family and friends, as they cared for both rich and poor in need, their networks were expanded and so too was their ability to reach out.

Stark says, "The basis for successful conversionist movements is growth through social networks, through a structure of direct and intimate interpersonal attachments. Most new religious movements fail because they quickly become closed, or semi-closed networks. That is they fail to keep forming and sustaining attachments to outsiders and thereby lose the capacity to grow. Successful movements discover techniques for remaining open networks, able to reach out and into new adjacent social networks. And herein lies the capacity of movements to sustain exponential rates of growth over long periods of time."¹⁸

Chapter 2 Summary Points:

- The early church took root and grew in urban centers, in the midst of social and cultural turmoil.
- The new Christian faith was considered a "revitalization movement" because of its ability to respond to social crisis.
- *Open social networks* and *civic involvement* were essential to early church growth.

Chapter 3 - Why, To restore shalom

The appeal and power of the early church came from believers who were committed to emulating the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. Jesus' followers lived out his teaching of love and service in a way that continually connected Jesus to the world he came to save.

Rodney Stark concludes *The Rise of Christianity* with these amazing words: "Surely doctrine was central to nursing the sick during times of plague, to

the rejection of abortion and infanticide, to [issues of] fertility, and to organizational vigor. Therefore, as I conclude this study, I find it necessary to confront what appears to me to be *the ultimate factor* in the rise of Christianity ... it was the religion's particular doctrines that permitted Christianity to be among the most sweeping and successful revitalization movements in history. And it was the way these doctrines took on actual flesh, the way they directed organizational actions and individual behavior, that led to the rise of Christianity."¹⁹

Let's look again at the concept of *shalom* and see how it fits with the Kingdom of God and Jesus' ministry on earth. *Shalom* is the context in which humankind was intended to live and work. It is an **inter**dependence of the created order where God, humanity and creation are woven together, each in a right relationship to the other. As a result of this interdependence, or right relationship, sin and evil is abated and there is universal justice, prosperity and rejoicing.

Jesus' work of Salvation is *shalom* restoring; it reweaves the fabric of the individual soul as well as the social fabric in which that soul dwells. It restores the broken relationships between humankind and God but it also restores the broken relationships among people and between people and the created order. Jesus' atonement on the cross makes *shalom* possible because it does away with death and sin and restores life and righteousness. Remember that righteousness requires making things right for the sake of the whole – *Shalom*.

The first believers were overcome by the love and grace of God in such a way that they were transformed by grace and became transforming agents of grace. Let's look at some of the scripture passages that have informed the lives and ministries Christians over the centuries.

Love as the essence of Christian character. The Great Commandment recorded in Matthew 22:35-40, Mark 12:28-34 and Luke 10:25-27 establishes love as the foundation for being in right relationship to God and everyone else with whom the believer may come in contact.

Love is a testimony that we belong to Jesus. Jesus said, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." John 13:34-35

Love your neighbor is expanded to include all people. The parable of the Good Samaritan, often referred to as the parable that changed the world, goes on to tell us who our neighbor is. Luke 10:28-37

Luke 10:25-37

And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and put Him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" And He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?" And he answered and said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." And He said to

him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live." But wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied and said, "A certain man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho; and he fell among robbers, and they stripped him and beat him, and went off leaving him half dead. And by chance a certain priest was going down on that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite also, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion, and came to him, and bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them; and he put him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper and said, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I return, I will repay you'. Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers' hands?" And he said, "The one who showed mercy toward him." And Jesus said to him, "Go and do the same."

Love extends beyond our neighbor to our enemy. Matthew 5:43-44: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy'. But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you."

Through good works love is extended to all men. When you look beyond the Gospels to the remainder of the New Testament you can see how Jesus' teachings were lived out.

See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all men. 1 Thessalonians 5:15

Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Romans 12:17-18

So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith. Galatians 6:10

And the Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all ... 2 Timothy 2:24

Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, to malign no one, to be uncontentious, gentle, showing every consideration for all men. Titus 3:1-2

Honor all men; love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king. 1 Peter 2:17

Good words and good works go together. Healing and casting out demons accompanied the proclamation of the Kingdom of God. When Jesus preached, when he sent his disciples to preach and when he told them to ask for more laborers, the preaching of the gospel was accompanied by acts of service and mercy.

Matthew 4:23-25: And Jesus was going about in all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of

disease and every kind of sickness among the people. And the news about Him went out into all Syria; and they brought to Him all who were ill, taken with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, paralytics; and He healed them. And great multitudes followed Him from Galilee and Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and from beyond the Jordan.

Matthew 9:35-38: And Jesus was going about all the cities and the villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. And seeing the multitudes, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and downcast like sheep without a shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest."

Matthew 10:7-9: "And as you go, preach, saying, 'The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand'. Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons; freely you received, freely give."

Mark 6:7-13: He summoned the twelve and began to send them out in pairs; and He was giving them authority over the unclean spirits; and He instructed them that they should take nothing for their journey, except a mere staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belt; but to wear sandals; and He added, "Do not put on two tunics." And He said to them, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave town." And any place that does not receive you or listen to you, as you go out from there, shake off the dust from the soles of your feet for a testimony against them." And they went out and preached that men should repent. And they were casting out many demons and were anointing with oil many sick people and healing them.

Love gives confidence on the Day of Judgment. We are to live our lives in God, hidden in Christ, new creatures. This is salvation. Consider 1 John 4:16-5:1, when we live in love we live in God: *God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him.*

There is an interesting progression in the book of Matthew. In Chapter 22, after being tested by the Sadducees and Pharisees, Jesus issues the Great Commandment saying that the most important requirement is to love God and our neighbors. Love is the impetus for all shalom building.

Matthew follows this in Chapter 23 with a record of Jesus giving a series of warnings or woes to the Sadducees and Pharisees. Jesus calls the Pharisees hypocrites because they "preach but do not practice" and says that they actually "shut the Kingdom of Heaven in people's faces." Jesus issues seven warnings, and the first thing for which he criticizes the Pharisees is their lack of social conscience, saying that they have "neglected justice, mercy and faithfulness." In neglecting justice, mercy and faithfulness the Pharisees have neglected to build and restore shalom.

Then in Chapter 25, Matthew records Jesus' teaching about the Kingdom of God.

In verses 35-40, we see that the Kingdom is reserved for those who meet the physical and judicial needs of those around them; judgment is somehow linked to good works or how we live our lives. It is important not to confuse this with a works based salvation; we are saved by grace alone, but we can't ignore these strong words of Jesus.

Matthew 25:34-45: "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me'. Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you'? The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me'. Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me'. They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you'? He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me'."

Remember that the idea of righteousness is an "others" orientation that requires doing justice and mercy or making things right for others. In Matthew 5:20 Jesus says, "unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the Kingdom of Heaven."

For the first Christians, love and charity were seen as the central duties of the faith sustained in everyday life! This is incarnate love – Jesus loving the world through those who love him. We are given a radical new life of love and sacrifice, one that embraces all that Jesus taught. This is the life style that is to carry the message of saving grace.

For most Christians the idea that love and charity are the central duties of the faith is not new. The question we need to grapple with is: Do those outside the faith view us as loving?

Chapter 3 Summary Points:

- It was the early Christians' understanding of Jesus, his life, his ministry and his teaching that informed their life and ministry.
- Christian Scriptures emphasize love and charity as the central duties of faith, and these are to be sustained in everyday behavior.

Conclusion

The 1st-century church can provide a viable approach to spiritual life and ministry for those living in global cities of the 21st century. Theirs was an urban world as is ours. Then as now, the only solution for sin and brokenness is the blood of Jesus.

First-century believers were drastically reoriented by the gospel of grace. They viewed the gospel as comprehensively relevant and sought to both bring the message of salvation and to mitigate misery wherever possible. Motivated by their love for Jesus, they were transformed by grace and so became agents of transformation.

In taking Jesus to the world his followers became *influentials*. They were involved in the communities that they lived in and they were well networked in order to restore *shalom* and to share the good news of new-life through his forgiveness. They confronted sinners and sinful institutions with love and charity.

Tim Keller says, "Redemption is much more than simply saving souls. It will ultimately entail the complete healing of creation, including social justice, the reunification of all humanity, and the end of physical decay and death (Isaiah 11:1-10.) But even now it means bringing the health and coherence of Christ's lordship back into every aspect of human life. The Christian Church is to be a new society in which the world can see exhibited what family, business practices, race relations, and all of life can be under the kingship of Jesus Christ."²⁰ This is a good picture of the coming kingdom, one in which, the *shalom* of Jesus is currently being repaired and will on one future day be completely and forever repaired.

How can we be a new society in which the world can see what life can be under the kingship of Jesus Christ? Have 21st-century believers largely withdrawn from the business, academic and culture-forging institutions of our day? If so how can we reengage so as to recover our ability to bring the health and coherence of Christ's lordship back into every aspect of human life?

Appendix 1

The Portrait of an Influential: *Xu Guangqi from Shanghai*

Although Shanghai had a relatively high standard of living in the Ming and Qing dynasties, the region's prospects for development were severely hindered. In the ancient Chinese tradition, the administrative system was composed of nationally proved scholars and Shanghai had no intellectual heritage. Without serious intellectual accomplishments, a region could not be represented by the system of governing mandarins.

Xu Guangqi was the first person from Shanghai to pass the national examination and become an official in the governing body. As a result, he is considered today to be the city's father. A flourishing district – Xujiahui – was named in his honor.

In 1602, Xu traveled to Beijing to serve in the Imperial court. While in Beijing he met Matteo Ricci, a Jesuit missionary and converted to Christianity, becoming the highest-ranking Chinese official at the time to do so. Xu had great influence both academically and politically but in 1603, when he was baptized, his influence took on a spiritual dimension as well.

While in Beijing, Xu set up instruments for astronomy and started Catholic schools and continued to study under Ricci's tutelage.

In 1625, Xu Guangqi returned to Shanghai bringing Lazaro Cattaneo with him to preach the gospel. At that time Cattaneo baptized many friends and family members of Xu's and they built the first church in Shanghai inside the city wall.

Xu continued his work as an official within the government as well as with his academic pursuits. He opened several libraries and churches, as well as two or three observatories. He also opened several schools and orphanages using his influence to provide vocational training for the children. The children were taught carpentry and embroidery along with French and Latin.

In 1847, two centuries after Paul Xu lived and worked in Shanghai China, the Jesuits set up their base of missionary work, building St. Ignatius' Catholic church on the original site of one of Xu's churches.

Xu Guangqi's influence spread through his family and his granddaughter was herself a missionary to the area, sponsoring more than 100 chapels throughout the lower Yangtze region.

Considered a superb scientist, translator and author as well as a just and fair official, Xu Guangqi was a man of great influence.

Appendix 2 - A Portrait of Civic Involvement: *Gladys Aylward*

“If I must die, let me not be afraid of death, but let there be a meaning, O God, in my dying”

This traditional Chinese prayer often comforted Gladys Aylward through the long years of the war with Japan. Her life in the mountains of southern Shanxi province was anything but easy after the demolition of the local villages. Taking responsibility for the safety of local war orphans, Aylward escorted nearly 94 children from YangCheng to Xian, climbing through the mountains and hiding from Japanese troops as they went. As remarkable as this story is, it is but one instance in a life long commitment to civic involvement. When you look at the life of Gladys Aylward you get the sense that she must also have prayed, “If I live, let me not be afraid of life, and let there be a meaning, O God, in my living.”

On the surface Aylward’s life was unimpressive. She was a poor, uneducated parlor maid in England who was considered unfit for Foreign Service. Yet through determination and self-education she embarked on one of the most incredible careers in the history of Christian missions. She was un-sponsored and self-supported which meant that she could not depend on help from a home mission agency. She saved her money and left England by train planning to cross Siberia and then into China. Caught in the frozen wasteland between Russian and Chinese troops, who were then at war, Aylward endured life-threatening hardships that prepared her for life in China.

Upon arriving in YangCheng the real work began. Aylward and her co-worker Mrs. Lawson opened an inn for mule train drivers and served these traveling men by providing the cleanest beds, best food and free Bible stories.

Before long, the local mandarin asked Aylward to take on the responsibility of foot inspector for his district. She was escorted from village to village where she would inspect the feet of young children making sure that their feet were kept unbound and allow to grow. As she went, Aylward taught the value of little girls and explained the story of a loving God who did not want his children harmed in this way. Soon there was a church in every village to which she traveled. And within a short period of time foot binding in that district was eradicated.

Because Aylward performed her duties with such excellence she was called on for many tasks. At one point there was a riot in the local prison and the prisoners were killing each other. She trembled as she went into the prison, unescorted and unarmed. The mayhem that confronted her was appalling; the bodies of dead and dying men were strewn across the prison yard. One large man had a curved sword and was attacking anyone who moved. Other men were fighting to the death. As a result of her visit to the prison, Aylward began to teach the prisoners many life skills, including weaving, farming and personal hygiene. The prison governor and many of the prisoners, including the man with the long curved sword became Christians. This was Gladys Aylward’s first foray into prison reform, a concern she carried with her through out her life in China.

Gladys Aylward involved herself in the needs of her community whenever and wherever she could. She was known for her care for orphans and her fight against the institution of the child-sellers. She adopted four children into her own family and cared for hundreds of others in time of war and famine. At various times she worked in leper camps and continued to work for prison reform, she raised money for the poor and she worked in refugee camps aiding those who had lost everything in the war.

Gladys Aylward made faith real to thousands of Chinese through her civic involvement. The first missionary to become a Chinese citizen, she was loved as “the virtuous one.”

Appendix 3 - A Portrait of Open Networks: *The Clapham Group*

Injustice was basic to English society in the 18th and early 19th centuries; faith and morality were scorned and the lower classes were treated with coldhearted indifference. The trendsetters and policy makers of the day, the English upper class, were morally decadent and the parliamentary system was scandalously corrupt. Seats in parliament were bought and sold, elections were fixed and votes were secured by bribery.

The British slave trade was the economic backbone of the empire and considered essential for maintaining the upper class's style of living. However people from all economic classes invested in the trade, often making 100 percent profit in very little time.

According to Mike Metzger, President of The Clapham Institute, "Between 1680 and 1786, 2,130,000 Negroes were imported into English-American colonies. The sheer volume meant that the slave trade was often a ghastly enterprise. It was known for such abuses as mutilation, branding, chaining, the repeated rape of women and the dividing of families. Still, it was an economic juggernaut. In the ten years between 1783 and 1793, slave traders from Liverpool alone transported over 300,000 slaves to the West Indies, selling them for a profit of £15,186,850. The economy of the Empire literally depended on the trafficking of black people from Africa." ²¹ Social and moral changes might have seemed very unlikely.

It was in this environment, in 1787, that a group of activists slowly began to coalesce. The Clapham Group was a core of people at the center of several open and expanding networks who were committed to bringing cultural change to 18th-century England, and the world.

The Clapham Group was held together by faith, friendship and a willingness to commit their lives and resources in the fight for social change. Although the core members were strong Christians, their expanding networks were not a homogeneous group of Christian believers. The people with whom they associated did not necessarily hold to the common convictions of the core members.

Motivated by a vision to end the Slave Trade and to restore morality to English society, the Clapham Christians worked together in an informal network for more than 40 years. In 1807, 20 years after the Clapham group began working together, after much struggle and effort, the first abolition bill, prohibiting slavery in England, was passed. Twenty-six years later, in 1833, *The Abolition of Slavery Act* was passed—prohibiting the slave trade throughout the British Empire.

The Clapham Group was interested in far more than just abolishing the Slave Trade. They were involved in 68 other causes including starting Bible and missionary societies. They were concerned for the poor and for children, and worked hard to reform child labor laws. They worked to pass laws against the abuse of animals, establishing The Society for the Protection of Animals. Many historians believe that the unrelenting efforts of this small group of people ushered in the Age of Victoria—when Christian faith played an important role in public affairs and morality.

The Clapham Group, ranging in size from 20 to 40 activists was a group of people with diverse skills and social capital. Their overlapping networks drew participation from the political realm, arts and media, academia, business and trade and the religious domain. While some of these people were independently wealthy, others were self-supported; each brought unique gifts and skills to bear on the task at hand. The diversity of vocation and contribution of these men and women demonstrate the widespread influence that can be harnessed when a core community maintains open networks for the purpose of social and spiritual change.

According to Mike Metzger the principal leaders were:²²

William Wilberforce (1759-1833): A Parliamentarian and a close friend to Prime Minister William Pitt.

Henry Thornton (1760-1815): A successful merchant banker who gave practical business advice and financial support to the Clapham Sect. A Member of Parliament for many years, Thornton worked for banking reform.

Granville Sharp (1735-1813): A self-taught man with no inherited wealth, Sharp pioneered the early efforts against slavery and helped recruit Wilberforce to the cause.

John Venn (1759-1813): The rector at Holy Trinity Church in Clapham and spiritual guide to the group. Venn set up one of the first systems of parish visitation, conducted confirmation classes, and formed the *Society for Bettering the Conditions of the Poor*. He supported six local schools allowing every child in Clapham to receive a free education. Venn promoted parish wide smallpox vaccinations, vaccinating his family as an example. Venn was the founding chairman of the *Church Missionary Society*.

Hannah More (1745-1833): A playwright and poet, More moved in some of the most fashionable intellectual circles in London. After becoming a "serious" Christian in the 1780s, she sought to win her high society friends to her views. More's most significant work however was on behalf of the lower classes. Her venture in religious and popular education which provided education to some 500 children was greatly supported by the Clapham Sect. Believing that the laboring classes needed inexpensive and edifying material to read she wrote a series of *Cheap Repository Tracts*, which sold at a penny or halfpenny a piece and were subsidized by Henry Thornton. Within a year, over two million had been sold.

Zachary Macaulay (1768 -1838): At the conclusion of his governorship of Sierra Leone, a colony for former slaves, Macaulay took passage on a slave ship to collect eyewitness evidence of the horrific conditions of the Middle Passage from Africa to the West Indies. Macaulay provided research for all Clapham causes, especially the cause of abolition. With an almost photographic memory, Macaulay tirelessly gathered facts, sifted evidence, digested parliamentary papers, and submitted everything for analysis by the group.

Zachary Macaulay was the first major editor of the influential *Christian Observer*, which began in 1802 and quickly became the chief organ of Anglican evangelical piety. He was a member of 23 philanthropic and religious societies and on the governing committee of nine.

Thomas Clarkson (1760-1846): Having written an essay on the traffic in human life, he decided that if the contents of his essay were true "it was time that some person should see these calamities to their end." Clarkson was one of the 12 men who formed the *Committee for Abolition of the African Slave Trade*, having amongst its members such leaders as Wilberforce, John Wesley and Josiah Wedgwood.

Robert Raikes (1735-1811): Proprietor and editor of the *Gloucester Journal*, Raikes publicized the work of the Clapham Group. Credited with the development of Sunday schooling, he started his first school for the children of chimney sweeps in 1780. His schools spread "with astonishing rapidity" and in one year there were said to be 3,600 pupils in Manchester, Salford, and Leeds.

Sir William Smith (1756-1835): A Member of Parliament who served as the chief partner with Wilberforce in the investigation of slave trade. Smith was also the grandfather of Florence Nightingale, who came to faith during her time in England.

Charles Simeon (1759-1836): An evangelical Anglican vicar for fifty-four years. He nurtured an entire generation of preachers, was a colleague and friend of Wilberforce, the spiritual mentor of Henry Martyn, and preached vigorously against social evils. So much so, that his church boycotted his sermons for his first 12 years.

Appendix 4 - A Portrait of Love in Action: *the story of Father Damien* as told by Medefind and Lokkesmoe, in *The Revolutionary Communicator*²³

Molokai. The island's name was pronounced bitterly, with loathing and fear. Between 1866 and 1873, nearly eight hundred lepers were quarantined there on an isolated peninsula. Towering volcanic cliffs hemmed them in on three sides, and crashing surf on the fourth. It was a prison, a netherworld made all the more surreal by its pacific beauty.

Abandoned without law or hope, the lepers gave themselves alternately to despair and to what pleasures they could grasp. Robbery and drunkenness, sexual orgies and anarchy marked their lives. When finally, after a tortuous descent, the lepers finally succumbed to their disease, their already-decayed bodies often became food for pigs and wild dogs.

Father Damien first came to Hawaii in 1864. He had been born in Europe, the sturdily built son of a well-to-do Belgian farmer. When his brother fell ill and could not travel to his post in Hawaii's Sacred Heart Mission, Damien asked to take his place.

For a decade, Damien served at the mission. During that time, many of his parishioners were forced away to Molokai. Their memory remained wedged in his mind, slowly building into a fearsome emotion. He yearned to go to the lepers and to convey love to them where they lived. In April of 1873, Father Damien wrote to his superiors, asking for permission. A month later, he stood on the beaches of the dreaded isle.

Damien steeled himself for the worst, but the sights and smells of Molokai left him gasping. One of his first encounters was with a young girl, her body already half eaten by worms. One by one, Damien set out to meet them all. Carefully avoiding physical contact, he confronted their rotting bodies, putrid breath, and the ever-present rasped coughing.

Damien's first desire was to remind the lepers of their inherent dignity as children of God. To demonstrate the value of their lives, he honored their deaths—constructing coffins, digging graves, protecting the cemetery from scavenging animals, and ensuring a ceremony for every passing.

As days went by, however, Damien began to feel that he could not fully convey all that he wished to share without drawing ever nearer. He began timidly to touch the lepers. He ate with them, and hugged them. Over time, he even began to clean and wrap their oozing sores. Everything Damien did, he did with the lepers. Together, they built coffins and chapels, cottages and roads. He taught them how to farm, raise animals, and even sing despite their mangled vocal chords. One report described him teaching two lepers to play the organ with ten the fingers they still had between them.

Damien sought to draw near to the lepers in his words as well, even speaking of "we lepers." Writing to his brother in Europe, he explained, "I make myself a leper with the lepers to gain all to Jesus Christ. That is why, in preaching, I say 'we lepers'; not 'my brethren...'"

It was eleven years after Damien's arrival on Molokai that he spilled boiling water on his leg. He watched with horror as his feet blistered—yet he felt no pain. His efforts to draw ever nearer to the lepers was complete. Now he would meet them in the disease as well.

The final five years of his life, Damien served the lepers of Molokai as a leper priest. The days passed with both joy and suffering. Outpourings of international support arrived at the island, and also several helpers. Alongside the blessings, however, came physical pain, and times of loneliness and even depression. Finally on April 15, 1889, Damien breathed his last. He was laid to rest among the thousands of lepers he had helped to bury in what he called his "garden of the dead."

In 1936, at the request of the Belgian government, Father Damien's body was returned to his birthplace. Years later, the people of Molokai pleaded that at least part of their beloved Father be returned to them. What they finally received, with joy, was Damien's right hand—the hand that had touched and soothed and embraced them, even when everyone else had done all they could to keep the lepers far a way.

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