

## Reaching Our Communities

As leaders, it's important to remember that our ministry should not be limited to work "within" the church. We are called to share the Good News of Jesus to those who don't know Him, and for the most part, those people are "outside" the church walls. God has strategically placed us in our own communities, with its own strengths, weaknesses, needs, and problems. And God has uniquely gifted each pastor and congregation with specific gifts to reach those communities. The best way to reach your community is to find out what the needs in your community are, begin praying about them, and then find ways to meet those needs. We have the privilege of being the visible hands and feet of Jesus by loving people. We can't do that unless we are visible in our communities. Jeremiah 29:7 says, "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." Krista Petty wrote, "Just as bridges and cities go together, churches and communities are linked. God's people are to be connected to the city, the community, and the world." While the Church is called to be separate in lifestyle, it has never been called to be isolated from the people it seeks to influence. We are called to shine as lights in the world (Matthew 5:16), not just within the Church. We are called to love God and love our neighbors. Paul says we are to be "the fragrance of Christ" (2 Corinthians 2:14). A fragrance does nothing when it's in the bottle, but when it's opened, it begins to have an impact. That fragrance can infiltrate and seep into the world. That's how the Kingdom of God advances ... it moves forward by penetrating our society with the same tools that Jesus used in His ministry, truth and grace. As a Church, we can find ways to build relationships and bridges with the community so we can begin spiritual conversations. We can learn how Jesus loved people and follow His example. He loved all people because all people are made in God's image. Jesus was also intentional; He always had a purpose and a plan. We can follow His lead in that as well. Staying in our "holy huddle" may be comfortable, but it's never been how we're called to live. I believe we are called to weave ourselves into the fabric of our community, and by doing that, we will be weaving Christ in as well, creating opportunities to love others to Christ.

As leaders, we are called to lead the charge. We must lead, teach, and be an example of how to reach our communities. We must first invest our own time and involve ourselves in our neighborhoods and communities, and then help equip the Church to use their own gifts, talents, and resources to do the same. As we work within the community, we can pray for ways and opportunities to introduce those we work with to a wonderful Savior. I'd like to end with a quote by Timothy Keller, "When a city perceives a church as existing strictly and only for itself and its own members, the preaching of that church will not resonate with outsiders. But if neighbors see church members loving their city through astonishing, sacrificial deeds of compassion, they will be much more open to the church's message." Let's do our part and infiltrate!