

# ONE FROM THE HEART

## Loving our Community

The streets of the world's cities are busier than ever. The spectacular growth of large cities represents an awesome challenge to the church. One thing is certain – if we fail to reach cities with the Gospel we will fail to reach the world. The cities hold the key to reaching the world with the good news about Jesus and His kingdom.

Our great challenge is to grapple with the complexities of an ever-changing society and learn how to love our community, our city, into God's kingdom.

### God's People Bring God's Salvation

There is always a relationship between the presence of the godly and the preservation of communities. Sodom – Genesis 18; Jerusalem – Jeremiah 5:1.

Throughout the Old Testament, Israel's theology carefully balances the individual and community. The principle is clear: The presence of godly people is beneficial for the salvation of places. This is the Old Testament's witness to an idea mentioned by Jesus in Matthew 5, where the righteous are called to be both salt and light.

### Why Was Sodom Destroyed?

So, if the presence of godly people can save a city, why in the end was Sodom destroyed. Ezekiel gives us the divine commentary on the destruction of Sodom (Ezekiel 16:48-50). The rich were getting richer and were proud of their extravagant surpluses while the poor were getting poorer. And because amid their arrogance they did not aid the poor and needy, God said, "I did away with them."

In nearly every city in the world, the rich are getting richer, and the poor are getting poorer. If we can catch a glimpse of God's heart out of this story it is that God has some issues with an indifferent attitude towards helping those in need.

## God's Change Agents – The Church

God is looking for a few righteous people who will live in every city. Why was God angered and furious at both Sodom and Jerusalem? He saw the sins of Jerusalem, and no one would do anything about it. So, God acted righteously, delivered the city, restored the communities for families and sent the Spirit to live in the city with them (Isaiah 59:14-21).

God so eagerly desires to use His people for the good works of righteousness. But we must take sin seriously and come to repentance and confession rather than make excuses about our sins. Isaiah recognises that there is a collective as well as an individual aspect to sin. We must help each other in our battle with the world, the flesh and the devil.

As we work together, we are either helping or hurting our ability to make an impact in our community. We can't afford to come in on a Sunday and sing about how good God is if that's not the experience those in need have of Him through our actions. Jesus would call people like those hypocrites. We have the wonderful opportunity to have a positive, God-ordained, and Spirit-led impact in this city, in our community.

## A Call to Action

### *Christmas in Our Community*

This Christmas, we believe God is calling us to love our neighbours with generosity, compassion, and purpose. There are some people who are doing it really tough, and we want to join together to donate gifts for children and create Christmas hampers for our community.

### *Praying for our Community*

Praying for opportunities to share who Jesus Christ is with our friends, families, and neighbours. This is particularly important as we head into Christmas. But don't wait to pray at the last minute. There's something that happens in us as we pray for the poor, the lost, the marginalised that moves our hearts and brings it into alignment with God's heart for all people. It will stop you from becoming indifferent or self-focussed so we might avoid the sin of not acting to help meet the needs of those with need.

As we start to pray for our community we will encounter a spiritual battle. Paul says that we shouldn't be ignorant of the enemy's devices (2 Corinthians 2:11). This implies that if we are ignorant of Satan's devices to keep our communities in darkness, he will more than likely take advantage of us and fulfil his desire to steal, to kill and to destroy (John 10:10). But this should not be! Why? "For this purpose, the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8).

How can we engage in this battle and intercede to our Father on behalf of the people of Brisbane?

### **Idea #1: Prayer Room**

Every month the Prayer Room changes to give you new stimulus to pray for the needs of our community.

*Action Point:* Get along to the Prayer Room (open Sunday – Friday 7am–10pm) or join an Intercessory Gathering (2nd/4th Monday 7–9pm and every Wednesday 11:30am–12:30pm)

### **Idea #2: Fasting Prayer**

The revival He promises begins when we humble ourselves, repent, fast, pray and seek His face and turn from our evil ways (2 Chronicles 7:14). Fasting is a biblical means of humbling ourselves. As Christians humble themselves before the Lord, the Holy Spirit will convict people of their sins, cause them to repent, bring healing to His people and restore blessing to our land.

*Action Point:* Commit to fasting prayer once a month for the salvation of our communities.

### **Idea #3: Prayer-walking: Praying On-Site with Insight**

Prayer-walking is simply praying in the very places we expect God to bring forth His answers. The prayers are intercessory rather than devotional. Prayer-walkers learn to pray beyond their own concerns, focusing prayer on behalf of their neighbours.

**Action Point:** With a friend, pray with biblical hope for the families, educators, leaders and children of our community. Focus on Jesus, asking Him to fulfil all of His heart for every neighbourhood.

Loving Our Community (City) into the Kingdom is not a pipe dream, it can become a reality. God is looking for a faithful few who will stand and be counted for Him. He asks that we live a life of unity with one another so that as we live empowered by the Holy Spirit, we will be the transformational agents He desires us to be for the sake of the lost and dying in our city. It requires us to be a people whose hearts ache for the poor, the brokenhearted and the unsaved and are then motivated to action, to prayer for them and to bring them the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus.

## **Discussion Questions**

1. God longs to use His people to reach out and care for the lost, the broken and the poor. Have you ever thought about how our indifference to those in need is abhorrent to God?
2. How can urban environments serve as effective mission fields for the church, and what unique challenges do they present compared to rural areas?
3. In what ways do you believe the presence of godly individuals in a community can influence its overall well-being? Can you share examples from your own experiences?
4. There is a growing divide between the rich and the poor. What practical steps can individuals and churches take to address this issue in their communities?
5. How does prayer align our hearts with God's purpose for our communities, and what strategies do you find most effective for praying for those in need?
6. Considering the call to action during Christmas, what are some innovative ways to engage your community in acts of kindness and service this Christmas?
7. Spend some time as a group in prayer for God to move powerfully through us as a church family to be a people whose hearts ache for the poor, the brokenhearted and the unsaved and are then motivated to action, to prayer for them and to bring them the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus.