

This week I want to share with you two things that have come across my desk recently. The first is an excerpt from Tim Keller's book, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Zondervan, 2012). It appears in the current issue of *ON MISSION*:

## Why We Must Reach the Cities

"The growth in size and influence of cities today presents the greatest possible challenge for the Church. Never before has it been so important to learn how to do effective ministry in cities, and yet, by and large, evangelical Christianity in the United States is still nonurban.

"Along with these challenges comes a range of unique opportunities. I see four important groups of people who must be reached to fulfill the mission of the Church, and each of them can best be reached in the cities.

- 1. The Younger Generation.** The prospects for advancement, the climate of constant innovation and change, the coming together of diverse influence and people—all of these appeal to young adults. In the United States and Europe the young disproportionately want to live in cities, and for the highly ambitious, the numbers are even higher. If the Church in the West remains, for the most part, in the suburbs of Middle America and neglects the great cities, it risks losing an entire generation of American society's leaders.
- 2. The "Cultural Elites."** The cultural elites are those who have a disproportionate influence on how human life is lived in a society because they exert power in business, publishing, the media, the academy and the arts. These people live or spend much of their time in city centers. Since cities now influence the culture and values of the world more than ever, the single most effective way for Christians to influence the culture of a nation is to have large numbers of them stay in cities and simply "be the Church" there.
- 3. Accessible "Unreached" People Groups.** Many people speak about the importance of engaging in mission to the hard-to-reach religious and cultural groups, people who live in remote places or in nations that forbid Christian mission work. But the currents of history are now sweeping many of these formerly unreachable people into cities as rural economies fail to sustain old ways of life. Millions of these newcomers in the burgeoning cities of North America specifically, and in the world more generally, are more open to the Christian faith than they were in their original context.
- 4. The Poor.** The great majority of the world's poor live in cities, and there is an important connection between reaching the urban elites and serving the poor of your city. First, an urban church's work among the poor will be a significant mark of its validity. It is one of the "good deeds" that Scripture says will lead pagans to glorify God (Matthew 5:16; 1 Peter 2:12). Similarly, once cultural elites are won to Christ, discipling them includes reorienting them to spend their wealth and power on the needs of the poor and the city instead of on themselves. In other words, an urban church does not choose between ministry to the poor and ministry to the professional class. We need the economic and cultural resources of the elites to help the poor, and our commitment to the poor is a testimony to the cultural elites, supporting the validity of our message.

"We can be confident that the cities of the world will continue to grow in significance and power. Because of this, they remain just as strategic—if not more so—than they were in the days of Paul and the early Church when Christian mission was predominantly urban. I would argue that there is nothing more critical for the evangelical church today than to emphasize and support

