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vol. 1

URBANISM

for the Local Church

Walkable Cities, Gospel-
Centered Urbanism, and
Pedestrian-Oriented
Church Planting

Sean Benesh

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Volume 1

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Urbanism for the Local Church: Walkable Cities, Gospel-Centered Urbanism, and Pedestrian-Oriented Church Planting

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Chapter 1

Walkable Cities

There are two facets of the city that influence my thinking and impact my personal life more than anything else: the built environment and transportation infrastructure. These two pieces of the city influence the day-to-day lives of billions of city dwellers more than we realize. Why is that? How is that?

Stop for a moment and think with me. What is your favorite city? What makes it your favorite city? Most often we think of cities we have visited and vacationed in whether at home or abroad. If you were to show me the pictures from your trip more than likely it would show you walking around some historic district with cobblestone streets and old buildings in the background as you sip on espresso, savor a bowl of gelato, or eat some of the local delicacies. Maybe your mind has a flashback to walking around The Bund in Shanghai, Old Montréal, Old Town in Portland, Gastown in

Vancouver BC, and many other similar places. Most often such places are defined by their built environment which in turn influences how people get around.

A city's built environment and transportation infrastructure are intrinsically linked. They also shaped how the church gathered in the first century as well as how the gospel spread. Our lives today, and that of the church, are still directly impacted, and in some ways determined, by a city's built environment and transportation infrastructure.

Why We're Drawn to Old Cities

Before we proceed any further, we need to ask ourselves why we are all drawn towards certain cities and especially places in those cities that are historic and walkable. Last fall I spent a half-day by myself walking around Old Montréal. The stone buildings dating back to the 1600s, cobblestoned roadways, and narrow streets make it a desirable place to visit for residents and tourists alike. For hours I wandered the streets, stopping on occasion to sit on a bench. The beauty of the place and the power of its historicity were truly moving. At times I was almost in tears as I prayed for the people.

I am not the only one who's drawn to these kinds of places. For millions of tourists there is a sort of magnetic pull to Old Montréal. A touch of history indeed. The narrow walkable streets are a reminder of what our cities

were once like. Maybe people have a deep longing to return to this kind of living as it stands in such stark contrast to our sprawling automobile-centric cities filled with bland architecture.

During the latter half of the twentieth century, North American cities saw their populations being propelled outwards to the suburbs in an ever-widening radius, as if they had been caught up in a giant centrifuge. Awaiting them there were low-density single family detached homes. Cities went from being traditionally walkable and pedestrian-friendly in their central neighborhoods to being automobile-dependent and sprawling on the urban periphery and in the suburbs. There is today a growing movement that seeks to counter-balance this, whether through the initiatives and influence of the Congress for the New Urbanism, retrofitting and urbanizing the suburbs, or generalized plans for such things as walkable districts and neighborhoods, tactical urbanism, creative architecture, and other thoughtful ways to create healthier cities and streetscapes.

This ebook looks into the differing dynamics that cities are utilizing to foster a more walkable urbanism. As we'll see, the missiological implications as well as the practical applications for the church are enormous. A walkable urbanism determines much of the daily and

weekly rhythms of the church, and how and where people gather.

Cities across North America are involved in various type of urban regeneration projects, whether in the downtown core, other central city neighborhoods, or even the suburbs. One of the common elements in downtown revitalization plans, apart from reorienting their economic strategies to attract and retain the footloose creative class, is to create vibrant walkable urban neighborhoods and districts. Walkable urbanism is a key component to create specific urban amenities that appeal to these cultural creatives. These strategies are not limited to altering the built environment as a way to foster walkability, but they also involve other creative ways that cities, through projects both small and large, are attempting to chart a course for a new urban future.

For many, the reality of bland standardized suburban sprawl, which to be fair did provide home ownership opportunities for millions of Americans, is not the ideal future in terms of the built environment of the city. This is also buttressed by the changing attitudes and preferences of the American public, in particular the successive younger generations who are opting for an urban lifestyle rather than the suburban lifestyle they may grown up with.

Chapter 2

Retrofitting the City

The Congress for the New Urbanism (CNU)¹ advocates for a decisive shift away from low-density automobile-dependent suburban sprawl to reclaim a bit of America's past. One of their aims is to rekindle some of the vibrancy that characterized the central cities and small towns of yesterday, namely the neighborliness of a walkable community. "The Congress for the New Urbanism views disinvestment in central cities, the spread of placeless sprawl, increasing separation by race and income, environmental deterioration, loss of agricultural lands and wilderness, and the erosion of society's heritage as one interrelated community-building challenge."² This is a healthy and timely corrective measure as they seek to espouse and highlight

¹ www.cnu.org.

² Congress for the New Urbanism, "Charter of the New Urbanism," 357.

certain elements of urban life that are appealing to a growing number of North Americans. This explains some of the popularity of places such as Old Montréal, Old Town in Portland, or even the Amana Colonies in Iowa.

What the CNU seeks to do is rectify the problems that rampant sprawl and thoughtless suburbanization have brought upon the American public. In addition, they view many aspects of low-density automobile-based suburban life as hazardous to one's health. As Jeff Speck writes, "While a battle was never declared, many American cities seem to have been made and remade with a mandate to defeat pedestrians. Fattened roads, emaciated sidewalks, deleted trees, fry-pit drive-thrus, and ten-acre parking lots have reduced many of our streetscapes to auto zones in which pedestrian life is but a theoretical possibility."³ Speck and the CNU share much of the same angst in terms of not only the blandness and sterility of the suburbs, but also the need to create and recreate walkable neighborhoods and districts in cities whether urban or suburban.

For many, including Speck and the CNU, there is a yearning to what it was like to live in walkable cities and small towns. Eric Jacobsen writes, "The advantages that cities and traditional neighborhoods have over sprawling suburbs with respect to interdependence is that they

³ Speck, *Walkable Cities*, 15.

allow people of a greater variety of ages to participate meaningfully in the culture.”⁴ Walkability then becomes more than a mobility issue, but in fact broadens the scope of the conversation to include livable cities, cultural amenities, and what makes for good life in the city ... and neighbors.

Where this becomes important is that not only are the younger generations opting for an urban lifestyle, but by and large so is the creative class. Various studies have revealed this trend and researchers such as Richard Florida have been keen to highlight the importance of place. Not just *any* place, but cities, and not simply *any* city, but the ones that have a certain “Quality of Place.” This points specifically to concepts of vibrant streetscapes and walkable urbanism.

It [Quality of Place] refers to the unique set of characteristics that define a place and make it attractive. Generally, one can think of quality of place as having three dimensions: *What’s there*: the combination of the built environment and the natural environment; a proper setting for pursuit of creative lives. *Who’s there*: the diverse kinds of people, interacting and providing cues that anyone can plug into and make a life in that community. *What’s going on*: the vibrancy of street life, café culture, arts, music and people engaging in outdoor activities—

⁴ Jacobsen, *Sidewalks in the Kingdom*, 26.

altogether a lot of active, exciting, creative endeavors.⁵

Ehrenhalt asks, “Where do the Millennials want to live? In many ways, this is the demographic question that will determine the face of metropolitan America in the next twenty years.”⁶ In his chapter on “Urbanizing the Suburbs,” Ehrenhalt advocates that these urban amenities (including a walkable urbanism) be introduced in the suburbs as well as in the central city. As house prices and the cost of living in central cities escalate, places like Manhattan or the Loop in Chicago become inaccessible to Millennials who are just starting out. Instead, Ehrenhalt asserts that we need to create these same dynamics in the more affordable suburbs, and that the suburbs need to embrace a significantly higher-density built environment.

The lesson is that if retrofitted suburbia is to meet the demands for classic urbanism that today’s millennial generation tells so many polltakers it wants, suburban retrofits will have to become much, much denser. They will need to move beyond sidewalks cafés and nighttime street life and build buildings with enough tenants and homeowners to support the retail on the ground floor, without a six-lane highway whizzing by just a couple of blocks

⁵ Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, 232.

⁶ Ehrenhalt, *The Great Inversion and the Future of the American City*, loc. 2990.

away. They will need to have transit stations integrated into the very fabric of the developments. Whether this is possible, I don't know. The suburban retrofits are, despite the number of examples that multiply every year, in only the earliest stages.⁷

However, the call for a walkable urbanism, including some of the CNU's basic tenets, has received pushback on numerous fronts. Where it breaks down is over what to focus on first: the buildings or the people (i.e., the culture). In terms of placemaking, which is more important? Architect B.D. Wortham-Galvin reveals this tension in the competing voices of the CNU and Jane Jacobs. While both would claim that they are advocating for the same thing, it is the *how* or the starting point that is polemical. "The New Urbanists employ a tautological approach—that architecture should be based on architecture. In contrast, Jacobs's seminal tract, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, makes the argument that architecture should start with culture in order to make place in the city."⁸ For the CNU, the starting point is design or architecture. For Jacobs, according to Wortham-Galvin, the starting point is culture:

⁷ Ibid., loc. 3168.

⁸ Wortham-Galvin, "Making the Familiar Strange," 238.

It is hard for New Urbanism to foster Jacobs's beloved notions of diversity and vitality of uses, people, economies and ecologies when implementing the unifying vision of a comprehensive plan, instead of infilling tactically in an extant culture. When culture is, therefore, rendered homogenous and applied from the top down, organic transformation and the potential for democratic action are slighted and made invisible, if not impossible.⁹

⁹ Ibid., 239.

Chapter 3

Exploring Grassroots Design Interventions

In contrast to the CNU's almost technocratic approach to urban planning and retrofitting, there is a growing movement of people "taking back their streets" and creating ad hoc forms of vibrant walkable urbanism. Rebecca Sanborn Stone writes about a "guerrilla urbanism," Benjamin de la Peña explains the importance of the "autocatalytic city," and Charles Wolfe pushes for an "urbanism without effort." In each case, the common denominator is a form of urbanism and placemaking that is more "bottom-up" than the zoned and regulated approach used by developers and local governments. However, the desired outcomes of both are the same, to create vibrant walkable streetscapes that are enjoyable to live in and experience. They just go about it in different ways.

This is where the church can have a direct impact. Churches are not urban planners, but they can be about other activities that foster a walkable vibrant urbanism.

Guerrilla Urbanism

Rebecca Sanborn Stone in her chapter “Guerrilla Urbanism” in *City 2.0* writes about “tactical urbanism,” which “uses short-term actions to catalyze real, long-term change. It might be quirky, but it’s a serious strategy for creating more vibrant, livable places through lightweight, temporary, grassroots projects called interventions.”¹ More than a mere prank, these are ways that people across the planet are reclaiming spaces in cities and repurposing them. In some cases they are only temporary, but in others what starts off as temporary turns into permanent. These are cheap, creative, and flexible ways to improve urban life for city dwellers from pop-up or pocket parks to ad hoc movies in a vacant lot.

The goal is not simply to stage a show, but to organically create change in the urban fabric of the city. “Tactical urbanism offers a way to revitalize neighborhoods and build those more livable urban environments right now and with minimal red tape.”²

In the *Tactical Urbanism* guidebook, Jaime Lerner, the architect and former mayor of Curitiba, Brazil, is

¹ Stone, “Guerrilla Urbanism,” loc. 788.

² Ibid., loc. 799.

quoting as saying “The lack of resources is no longer an excuse not to act. The idea that action should be taken after all the answers and the resources have been found is a sure recipe for paralysis. The planning of a city is a process that allows for corrections; it is supremely arrogant to believe that planning can be done only after every possible variable has been controlled.”³ The city of Curitiba is an inspiration because it recreated its urbanism with little to no resources. Every time an issue arose, from traffic congestion to trash build-up in the slums, the mayor would say, “We need to fix this ... but we don’t have any money.” The lack of resources forced them to innovate in ways that created a model global city from reclaiming park space to its BRT⁴ system.

The concept of tactical urbanism posits that there are creative and cost-efficient ways to create a vibrant urbanism in cities. The guidebook sets out an alternative way to redevelop cities. Churches, take note:

Improving the livability of our towns and cities commonly starts at the street, block, or building scale. While larger scale efforts do have their place, incremental, small-scale improvements are increasingly seen as a way to stage more substantial investments. This approach allows a host of local actors to test new concepts before making substantial

³ Lydon et al, *Tactical Urbanism*, iv.

⁴ Bus Rapid Transit.

political and financial commitments. Sometimes sanctioned, sometimes not, these actions are commonly referred to as “guerrilla urbanism,” “pop-up urbanism,” “city repair,” or “D.I.Y. urbanism.”⁵

There are a wide variety of creative ways that city dwellers can be engaged in improving the livability of their cities such as: Park(ing) Day,⁶ food carts, informal bike parking,⁷ pavement to plazas or parks,⁸ reclaimed setbacks,⁹ open streets,¹⁰ micro-mixing,¹¹ and pop-up retail space¹² or cafes¹³ to name a few. These are many ways that people can enliven and reclaim their neighborhoods and districts.

⁵ *Tactical Urbanism*, 1.

⁶ “To reclaim space devoted to automobiles, and to increase the vitality of street life.” *Ibid.*, 15.

⁷ “To increase the supply of bicycle parking where needed.” *Ibid.*, 30.

⁸ “To reclaim underutilized asphalt as public space without large capital expenditure.” *Ibid.*, 19.

⁹ “To create a more engaging streetscape by activating the space between the structure and the sidewalk.” *Ibid.*, 34.

¹⁰ “To temporarily provide safe spaces for walking, bicycling, skating and social activities; promote local economic development; and raise awareness about the detrimental effects of the automobile on urban living.” *Ibid.*, 11.

¹¹ “To incubate new businesses and sustain existing ones through the co-location of mutually supportive uses.” *Ibid.*, 39.

¹² “To promote the temporary use of vacant retail space or lots.” *Ibid.*, 17.

¹³ “To promote outdoor public seating in the parking lane (during the warm months) and to promote local businesses.” *Ibid.*, 21.

This approach also stimulates new ways of thinking that churches can actually be part of in making their cities livable, vibrant, and walkable. While to many, especially in the church, these are probably foreign concepts we need to think of these as ways to promote God-ordained human flourishing, which also creates better conditions for interconnectivity and even ways for the gospel to spread rapidly, non-programmatically, relationally, and organically.

The Autocatalytic City

Benjamin de la Peña writes about “the autocatalytic city.” In this framework, he is advocating for more of a “messy urbanism” which stands in stark contrast to the CNU. Some of the CNU critics say it should really be called the Congress for the New *Suburbanism* because what it proposes can only lead to homogeneity and even a certain level of blandness. A number of model new urbanist communities have been derided both for their ethnic homogeneity, and for being havens of the middle class and the wealthy.

The messy urbanism that de la Peña writes about is at the other end of the spectrum. Part of his approach is in how he views the city: “Urban centers are evolving organisms, not engineering problems.”¹⁴ In this he

¹⁴ de la Peña, “The Autocatalytic City,” loc. 965.

pushes for a bottom-up urbanism that “actually works for the people in them.”¹⁵ de la Peña adds:

Our understanding of cities has been shaped by our Industrial Age expectations of institutional control. As urban centers boom around the globe, however, we are hitting the limits of the machine model of cities. Metropolises are growing too fast for our industrial models to work. Our task, as so ably argued by author and urban activist Jane Jacobs, is not to command the city but to understand the processes that make it work.¹⁶

Many examples of autocatalytic cities can be found in informal human settlements on the urban periphery of cities in most of the developing countries. While at first glance these seem chaotic and disorganized, and in fact some are, but what they reveal is a form of urbanism that we can learn from. Peeling back the layers, one finds innovation and entrepreneurialism as people, despite the odds stacked against them, figure out ways to not only survive but to thrive as best they can. One outcome is the creation of informal economies where people create, market, and sell their wares. Many of the urban districts that we enjoy today started off as more or less ad hoc developments without master plans. While these were

¹⁵ Ibid., loc. 976.

¹⁶ Ibid., loc. 1045.

different from informal human settlements, there was still an inherently autocatalytic nature to these places.

Urbanism Without Effort

Urbanism Without Effort by Charles Wolfe is a book whose ethos is in sync with both Stone and de la Peña. Wolfe even pulls together the polar extremes of organic urbanism versus the CNU framework: “As the discussions continue today, the question of authentic versus prescribed urbanism should remain at the center of urban stakeholder dialogue.”¹⁷ Where his position is unique among the extreme polarities is in calling for the need to look beneath the surface of current urban realities. “While we might champion the programmed success of certain iconic examples, we risk ignoring the backstory of urban forms and functions, and failing to truly understand the traditional relationships between people and place.”¹⁸ Wolfe points to numerous cities and places that many of us love, enjoy, and adore, and shows that one of the reasons behind their success and appeal was precisely because they grew organically ... without effort.

Cities as Living Systems

Rachel Armstrong in her book *Living Architecture* gets at what Wolfe and others are advocating. Writing

¹⁷ Wolfe, *Urbanism Without Effort*, loc. 97.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, loc. 117.

from the architectural or physical design perspective, she notes that our cities are more shaped by connectivity; there is a fluidity to them. “21st-century society draws from a world that is less determined by objects and increasingly shaped by connectivity.”¹⁹ Cities are less predetermined and mechanistic than we realize, but are in act more organic or autocatalytic. These are the processes that are changing and rearranging cities. She advocates moving away from the machine motif of cities and instead look at them as living, breathing organisms. “Unlike machines, living systems are native and positive contributors to the biosphere.”²⁰ This framework allows for a flexibility in our urban environments. One of the ways in which this flexibility is being tested is with our homes. Kent Larson writes:

Seventy percent of humanity will likely live in cities by 2050. A limited number of creative, vibrant cities, however, will dominate the cultural and economic life of the planet by actively nurturing entrepreneurship and attracting the young, technology-savvy professional who drive innovation and build new industries. But as demand relentlessly increases housing prices, the most desirable cities are becoming unaffordable for the very people whom they need to attract to remain globally competitive.²¹

¹⁹ Armstrong, *Living Architecture*, loc. 149.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, loc. 139.

²¹ Larson, “Flex homes,” loc. 881.

Flex Homes

This gives rise to what Larson calls “flex homes” which are smaller but yet more efficient and innovative living spaces. In his chapter “Flex homes: The future of urban dwellings is tiny and transformable” in *City 2.0*, Larson seeks to rectify the problem of expensive housing:

The answer to this problem lies not in building tiny conventional apartments but in creating hyper-efficient, technology-enabled spaces that transform dynamically to function as if much larger. It is entirely possible to build a 250-square-foot apartment with king-size bed, dining area for eight people, party space with 60-inch HDTV, fully equipped kitchen, and handicapped-accessible bathroom—but, of course, these functions are not all available simultaneously.²²

At first glance this seems as preposterous as a bad futuristic sci-fi movie. However, cities are congested spaces and as more that people move into cities, the greater the premium is going to be placed on space. If we want to be able to house more people more affordably, then creativity and innovation are key.

The purpose of this journey through guerrilla urbanism, autocatalytic cites, urbanism without effort, and flex homes is to show that there are many creative

²² Ibid., loc. 891.

ways to live and create vibrant cities. The gift of common grace is all around us as God works through people, most often those who would not identify themselves as a follower of Jesus, to create healthy, vibrant, and walkable cities. It is time for the church to ride the wave of this common grace and infuse it with saving grace.

Chapter 4

Gospel-Centered Urbanism

Here is a question truly worth considering: Can the church create gospel-centered urbanism? Or should that be the role of individual Christians in their neighborhoods? The follow-up questions are also worth exploring: What is gospel-centered urbanism? What do I mean by gospel-centered? Is there such a thing? Can that label (the gospel) be applied to urbanism? If we were to take up this challenge, do we run the risk of simply creating another subcultural experience like *Christian* music, *Christian* broadcasting, etc.? Lastly, what are the implications for pastors, church planters, ministry leaders, and churches in the city?

Maybe you're like me and have grown weary of labels. I have been a part of the church long enough to have watched labels ebb and flow. Admittedly, each new label is usually a course correction that tries to draw the church back to its roots as a missional community.

(Oops, I just used a label). Whether *emerging*, *missional*, or *gospel-centered*, these labels started off as powerful reminders of key biblical truths. This is healthy and necessary to get our attention.

What's in a Name?

Albert Gilbert wrote an article for the *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* entitled, "The Return of Slum: Does Language Matter?" Gilbert questions the UN for reintroducing the term (slum) in 1999 with its "Cities Without Slums" initiative. Is the term helpful, or did the UN reintroduce it simply because of its shock value? In a world with competing media interests, does "slum" generate a bigger buzz? Gilbert argues that while it certainly may stir up more public interest, there could be a downside in equating the negative attributes of a "slum" with those living there. Can slum-like qualities be separated from slum-dwellers? "What makes the word 'slum' dangerous is the series of negative associations that the term conjures up, the false hopes that a campaign against slums raises and the mischief that unscrupulous politicians, developers and planners may do with the term."¹

The two major outcomes that result from using the term are the devaluation of *places* and the devaluation of

¹ Gilbert, "The Return of the Slum," 701.

people.² When one or the other (or both) are devalued then it becomes easier for governments to become callous in their treatment of these places and people. If something is labeled a “slum” then one of the solutions becomes “slum removal.” When people are devalued as “slum-dwellers” then it becomes easier to displace them.

Gilbert’s article is helpful because it forces the reader to think through the meaning and usage of the term “slum.” Words and labels are powerful and need to be used wisely.

The last few years have seen an uptick in all-things *gospel-centered*. Again, this is a healthy corrective, but after a while it, like many other labels, can be applied so broadly and generically that *everything* becomes *emerging*, *everything* becomes *missional*, and *everything* becomes *gospel-centered*. We cannot simply have a small group, it has to be a *gospel-centered* small group. The problem is not with the words but in our overuse (and misuse) of them to the point where they lose their potency, and thus create the need for another label.

A Case for Gospel-Centered Urbanism

So can we create a *gospel-centered* urbanism? Am I running the risk of simply dressing up urbanism with the latest label? To a degree, yes, but I think if unpacked correctly, *gospel-centered* works here. As I have

² Ibid., 702-703.

articulated at length in other books such as *Blueprints for a Just City* and *The Urbanity of the Bible*, the scope and implications of the gospel are far-reaching. It moves beyond simply rescuing souls for heaven and in the process leaving the earth and its physical space as a wasteland. Instead, the full scope of the gospel as the good news that the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand, is to seek to redeem both *people* and *places*. As such, “gospel-centered” provides the right kind of descriptor when attached to *urbanism*.

If we believe that God created cities for human flourishing, then when we lean into that calling,³ we are doing precisely what God commanded humanity to do from the beginning. In other words, to advocate for and help create healthy, vibrant, walkable neighborhoods, districts, and cities is indeed gospel-centered because we are Christ’s conduits of both common and saving grace to our cities. The gospel is that Jesus died for the sins of Adam which had devastated the world and the hope of human flourishing, as well as for our sins which have devastated our own lives, our families, our neighborhoods, and our cities as well as the natural environment. The gospel of Jesus is the good news about redemption from our brokenness and the resultant impact upon creation. While the fulness or climax of redemption will not be fully realized until the end, when

³ See the urban mandate in Genesis 1:28.

we go about sharing the gospel with people as well as living out its implications in our cities we are promoting human flourishing. This I would contend reaches its fullest meaning when it is truly gospel-centered.

While we aim to see the flourishing of our cities, whether through a vibrant economy or in small ways like tactical urbanism, the greatest depth of this flourishing can only be found in the gospel. The church's direct involvement is most often not required for our cities to become healthy and vibrant, in terms of their economy, an activated urbanism, equity, or growth of the arts. However, that does not negate for a moment that God is truly the architect behind it all through his providence and common grace. As R.C. Sproul says "it is appropriate to use the word *providence* with reference to God's active governance of the universe."⁴

There have been many cases where the church really was instrumental in transforming society. But I believe the most potent form of urbanism is this notion of *gospel-centered urbanism*, where human flourishing in our cities, including the built environment, is promoted in conjunction with modeling and sharing the gospel. Without gospel proclamation we will see the effects of God's common grace as set out in Romans 1:19-21, but that is not enough to save or redeem. It needs to be coupled with saving grace.

⁴ Sproul, *Does God Control Everything?*, loc. 125.

Chapter 5

Pedestrian-Oriented Church Planting

The more we see such things as guerrilla or tactical urbanism initiatives crop up, the more I believe traction develops for the furtherance of the gospel, both in word and deed. When we trek through the dusty streets and alleyways of First Century cities we watch and note how the gospel spread. To say that the church in the New Testament was walkable would be an understatement. What it reveals is that there can be explosive growth and movement without the aid of all the technology that we have today. That does not mean technology is wrong or ought not to be utilized, quite the opposite. The point is that the gospel spreads fastest through dense relational lines. When cities, whether large scale or at the bottom-up grassroots level, push for a more vibrant walkable urbanism, inevitably it densifies possible relational connections.

I have previously written in multiple places about the need to reorient church planting around a walkable¹ or bikeable² scale. For too long, despite changing transportation usage, most church planting and church growth techniques have focused on automobile-centric commuting patterns. Churches are encouraged to be regional churches where the congregation drives in from all over the metro area and then after the worship service are flung back out like a centrifuge. Churches are encouraged to have ample parking spaces if they want to grow. But as cities become more walkable and bikeable what is needed are alternatives to this approach in church planting. What is needed is pedestrian-oriented church planting.

In *View From the Urban Loft* I introduced this concept. “Pedestrian-Oriented Church Planting is starting walkable churches in dense neighborhoods that are accessible by foot, available for all local inhabitants (rich, poor, young, old, and different ethnicities), rooted in the community, and acts as lead catalysts in community transformation.”³ This meshes with the concepts of guerrilla or tactical urbanism, the

¹ *The Multi-Nucleated Church: Towards a Theoretical Framework for Church Planting in High-Density Cities*. Portland: Urban Loft, 2015.

² *The Bikeable Church: A Bicyclist's Guide to Church Planting*. Portland, Urban Loft, 2015.

³ Benesh. *View From the Urban Loft*, 165.

autocatalytic city, and urbanism without effort. In city neighborhoods and districts that are densifying and working to create a sense of vibrant walkable urbanism, this mode of church planting needs to at least be considered.

City after city across North America are moving in this direction. This is not merely a phenomenon in New York City, Portland, or San Francisco, but cities like Asheville, Wichita, Boise, or Waco are also moving into this direction. Cities have collectively bought into creative class strategies and are using them to rebuild their urban fabric in order to woo people back into their downtowns. The big selling points are loft living, walkable urbanism, bikeability, and cultural and entertainment amenities. Certainly, if churches move towards thinking and acting like missionaries as well as developing a missiological framework through which to operate, then that means in neighborhoods and districts where this shift has occurred we should adapt accordingly.

The potency behind pedestrian-oriented church planting is that it aligns with the trajectory in which cities are going. If certain cities are reducing parking to foster walkability and bikeability then the notion of automobile-oriented regional churches needs to be readdressed in those settings. Our purpose should not be to plant churches that are novel, but instead to think and

act like missionaries. As we watch cities, through God's providence and common grace, move towards being more sustainable and less dependent upon the auto, then the church should at least consider in that same direction as well.

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About the Author

Coffee and bicycles define Sean's urban existence who believes the best way for exploring cities is on the seat of a bicycle as well as hanging out in third wave coffee shops. Sean is an urbanist, professor, and author of more than 10 books related to living in, biking, walking, loving, and understanding the city.

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About the Epoch Center

We are a group of urbanists. Not only that, but we love and care about the cities we live in. As cities continue to go through metamorphic changes we are convinced that we need to bring to light how urban form truly does shape the experience and lives of city dwellers.

Because of that, why not be about influencing the built environment of our cities? That is what Epoch Center is all about.

More than that, we believe that the gospel has much to say about the role of the church in advocating for a just city and society. We have worked with churches in cities across the US and Canada through our Studios.

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