

Shalom in the City

A Contextualized Gospel Vision for Urban Flourishing



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Jeremiah 29:4–6

4 “Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: ⁵ Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. ⁶ Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease.



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Jeremiah 29:7

But seek the *Shalom* of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its *Shalom* you will find your *Shalom*.

Tohu Wa-Bohu

*And the earth was without form
and void... Gen 1:2*

Tohu Wa-Bohu vs. Shalom

Shalom

The wholeness, peace, and flourishing that comes when life is aligned with the heart of God.

Tohu Wa-Bohu in the city:

**Loneliness,
broken relationships,
economic problems,
housing problems,
racial problems,
underfunded schools,
limited healthcare,
limited food options,
policies that target vulnerable groups—
*whatever makes life harder to flourish.***



Shalom in the city:

**Belonging,
healthy relationships,
economic sufficiency,
affordable housing,
racial justice,
well-sourced education,
accessible healthcare,
healthy food options,
policies that protect the vulnerable—
*whatever makes life easier to flourish.***



Jesus didn't begin
with evangelism; **he**
began with shalom,
and evangelism
followed.





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Jeremiah 29:7

But *seek* the Shalom of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its Shalom you will find your Shalom.

What do we **do**?

Not a method or a program,
but a **framework.**

Eldin Villafaña's Hermeneutical Circle

The ongoing movement between God's Word and the realities of people's lives, especially among the poor, marginalized, and oppressed.

Eldin Villafaña's Hermeneutical Circle

- Clarification (Seeing)
- Conceptualization (Understanding)
- Confrontation (Responding)

Context Theology Praxis



Praxis
Theology
Context



Theology
Praxis
Context



Context
Theology
Praxis





Context (Seeing)

Before preaching, teaching, or “fixing,” the church must learn to observe and listen.

- What is actually happening in the community?
- What wounds, systems, fears, sins, and hopes are present?
- What cultural realities shape people’s lives?
- Where is God already at work?



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Context (Seeing)

We must simultaneously study:

- **Scripture**
- **The city (Community, neighborhood)**
- **Human condition**



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Context (Seeing)

Recognizing realities like:

- Poverty
- Racism
- Immigration issues
- Gang violence
- Family fragmentation
- Spiritual oppression
- Economic exploitation
- Cultural resilience
- Loneliness



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Matthew 9:36

When he **saw** the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.



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Context (Seeing)

We begin with holy discernment.

Not assumptions.

Actual listening.

Actual seeing.



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Theology (Understanding)

What does the gospel say about what we are seeing?



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Theology (Understanding)

Conceptualizing our theology involves:

- **Interpreting social realities biblically**
- **Identifying the sin beneath the symptoms**
- **Imagining God's redemptive alternative**



Theology (Understanding)

Context: We see addiction destroying families

Theology:

- What does scripture say about bondage and freedom?
- About healing?
- About dignity?
- About community restoration?
- About principalities and powers?



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John 1:14

And the word **(theology)** became flesh and dwelt among us **(context)**.

Theology becomes embodied among real people experiencing real suffering.



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Theology (Understanding)

Protects church from...

- Simplistic answers
- Imported theology disconnected from context



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Not just, “How do people get to heaven?”
But also... *“What does the reign of God
look like here, now, in my city?”*



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Praxis (Responding)

We begin by **seeing**,
we follow by **understanding**,
and end with a ***faithful response***.



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Praxis (Responding)

The church now confronts:

- Personal sin
- Oppressive systems
- Spiritual strongholds
- Injustices
- Broken social realities



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Praxis (Responding)

This can include:

- Preaching
- Discipleship
- Advocacy
- Community organizing
- Prayer
- Prophetic witness
- Compassion ministries
- Urban Centers of Influence



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Urban Centers of Influence

Small to mid-scale institutions, wellness centers, clinics, academic hubs, mental-health resources, sports spaces among others, that woven into the fabric of the city.

“Embodiments of Shalom” - Gary Krause



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Urban Centers of Influence

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Stories of Success

Get ideas here!



Urbancenters.org



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Praxis (Responding)

The idea is to have the gospel respond with action through people empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Hermeneutical Circle

**We see (context),
We understand (theology),
We respond (praxis)...**

...and a new reality is created.



The goal is *never* a trendy project,
but participation in the mission of God.



A Church *in* the city

(Fortress)

A Church *to* the city

(Savior)

A Church *with* the city

(Partner)

If the city is hurting, and we are
unmoved by it, **something is wrong**
with our theology.



How do we begin to see?

- Prayer walks
- Listening to stories
- Exegete the city (Art, music, murals, advertisements, events, newsletters, social media accounts, etc.)
- Ask questions
 - Who is flourishing?
 - Who is celebrated and who is invisible?
 - What wounds do people carry?
 - What are our idols?
- Frequent public spaces (Coffee shops, parks, etc.)
- Observe emotional climate (Anxieties, fears, loneliness, exhaustion, etc.)
- Community needs assessments



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