

I remember a conversation with a young woman many years ago. Several of her relatives were questioning why she stayed, lived and worshipped where she was. She had means and opportunity to move to what they considered a better place. They were concerned about her safety, etc. Her response was something to the effect, “But, if I leave this place it will lose my witness for Christ and his love for them.” What others viewed as a difficult situation she saw as an opportunity for the message of the Gospel.

Some of the people of Israel are in exile, Paul is in prison. Neither is an ideal situation and yet the words from Paul and Jeremiah are basically the same, “Live where you are.” Israel had failed to heed the warnings of the prophets and now some are in Babylon as exiles. They are exiles in a foreign land; we remember the words of the Psalm 134:7, “*How could we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land?*” Or, in Paul’s case, in jail. (Remember though, Paul’s most upbeat letter came from prison, Philippians).

Jeremiah sends a letter to the exiles instructing that they are to settle down, plant crops, marry and “seek the welfare of the city.” They are to do the best they can to make the best of the situation they find themselves in. Make the place where you are a better place with you than it would be without you.

For me, this answers the question, Why? Why Babylon? Why jail? Paul and Jeremiah saw this as an opportunity to demonstrate God’s faithfulness and God’s love. Let others see what God can do through you in less than ideal conditions. In thinking on this I thought of two other examples from the Bible. The first was Esther. She was chosen to participate in a beauty contest to be the next queen. With her uncle’s encouragement she kept her faith and would later save her people, the Jews, from extinction. She would demonstrate to the world what God can do when the people pray/fast and trust in God. When she seeks what is best for the city.

The second was Daniel, another exile. He was taken into captivity along with his friends and challenges those in power about the food they eat. He asks to be able to keep the dietary laws they have observed all their lives. His challenge was that if they are not better, healthier, etc. than the rest then okay. But, he wants them to give God a chance. He wants to demonstrate what God can do!

Jeremiah’s words were that the people were to live in the city, pray for the city and seek the best for the city. It will not only benefit the city but it will also benefit them. Paul says, “...endure everything for the sake of Christ.” Let God and Christ be lifted up through you. Show the world what faith can do.

In this month of the World Mission Offering I thought of three people, three women and colleagues in mission and ministry who have taken these words to heart.

The first was Dr. Bina Sawyer, from Saco, Maine. Bina is a doctor and pediatrician (she gave our Chris his first physical). She became an MD when this was not the popular route for women. Then she spent most of her life in a remote section of Thailand ministering to the people there. She established a hospital and worked with the local people and government to establish a treatment for opium addiction. Her work was so successful that she was recognized by the United Nations for her work among the Hill Tribes with opium addiction. She sought to “seek the welfare of the city” and in doing so brought the hope of Christ to many in Thailand and around the world.

Staying in Thailand, the second is Lauren Bethel. Lauren took a ministry that was in its infancy and helped it grow into a ministry known around the world, the House of Love. She

sought to make it an example of what can be done for young women sold, or in danger of being sold as sex slaves. Her work has brought world-wide recognition of the problem and for this she has been honored by both the Baptist World Alliance and the United Nations for her work in human trafficking around the world. She continues as an International Ministries Global consultant helping establish and support programs around the world. Her work began and continues because she sought “the welfare of the city.”

The third is another doctor, Marian Boehr, from Portland, Oregon. Like Bina she became a medical doctor when this was not the most popular route for women to take. She spent her life as an American Baptist medical missionary in India, establishing clinics and hospitals for the “least of these.” When India celebrated its 100 years of independence it recognized the 100 most influential people in India in their first 100 years. Dr. Boehr made the list. She was honored by the Indian government for her work for the “welfare of the city.” A woman, a doctor and a Christian lifting up the medical needs of women.

There are so many others. Those who never get regional, national or international recognition. They will never be honored or recognized for the work they are doing for the “welfare of the city.” However, that does not stop them from giving of themselves in establishing schools, clinics, orphanages or introducing crops to help the local economy (Mann’s in northern Thailand replacing coffee plants for opium. Knowing that the people need a cash crop to exist. They now produce coffee so good that it is used in Starbucks throughout many parts of Asia). These have followed God’s call/push and sought to make the world where they are a better place. They may have stayed in the same place, never venturing far from where they were born working with a local congregation to make a difference in the world. They may never get the recognition they deserve but they are held high in the eyes of those they serve and love.

They understood the need ***“to seek the welfare of the city, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.”***

The journey is not easy. Staying is sometimes harder than leaving. Yet, the task remains the same. As Paul writes to a young Timothy (the Message), *“Concentrate on doing your best for God, work you won’t be ashamed of.”*

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NIV, New International Bible Society, Zondervan, 1973, 1978, 1985  
NRSV, Division of Christian Education, NCC, 1988