



URBAN CURRENT

A force for God and good

Steps away from the floor where Michael Jordan led the Bulls to multiple championships, 300 leaders from across Chicago gathered at the United Center meeting room. Mayor's office reps, Chicago Police brass, elected officials, and secular social service agency leaders were meeting along with about 150 mostly evangelical "faith community leaders." This was the launch of a citywide effort to address escalating street violence. A pastor friend of mine had been tapped by the mayor to lead the effort dubbed Exodus 20:13, "Thou shalt not kill."

When I arrived at the first planning meeting for this event, it seemed mired in the same old gun control rhetoric. Finally someone asked "Well, Pastor Lyons, what do you think?" "I'm not sure you want to know what I think." I responded. The ensuing discussion changed the emphasis. Yes, there was still the gun control and legislation piece, but spiritual emphasis and prayer were primary.

Now, at this United Center citywide Exodus 20:13 roll-out, I was supposed to deliver a summarized version of the sermon I had been charged to write which would be preached at churches across the city on a designated Sunday as part of the campaign.

I didn't relish being the white guy preaching to a lot of men who could out preach me in their sleep, but they had insisted and here I was. To all appearances and by all accounts the Holy Spirit helped me connect. The three-point message was based on Abraham, Esther, and Jesus (keep the Muslims in the loop, touch base with the Jews, and point everybody to Jesus). Preached in scores of churches, I heard feedback for weeks...from the hood to the mayor's office. (Email me and I'll send you the outline.)

How did I end up in such a situation? In a spirited exchange with my prayer partner one day over who we should and shouldn't be involved with, he said to me simply, "If you're not at the table, you have nothing to say." That helped me. I've tried to make it my business to be at the table in my community and in my city. Just being at the table has opened many doors and provided numerous remarkable opportunities. I believe every city, every neighborhood needs righteous influence and a prophetic voice. We talk about being salt and light. If I am not where decisions are being made then I am just reacting after the fact. If I'm at the table with the leaders, I can influence the leaders.

"And seek the peace of the city wither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the LORD for it: For in the peace thereof shall you have peace" Jeremiah 29:7. This text communicates a very basic principle relevant to us.

The argument that we should depend on the government for nothing is fallacious. The case for the government doing everything is stupid. The idea that God's man plays no role in the community is misinformed.

The book of Nehemiah gives us a great model. Clearly, there is the piece that only God can handle. We need to remember that the king's heart is in the Lord's hand. Next, there is the role the king plays. The government has a proper role. We ought to see to it that it plays that role. No more, no less. Then there is the leader's role. This is the man of God, speaking the message of God to the king and to the people. Lastly, there is the role of God's people. It just so happens that Nehemiah's focus was building a wall necessary for protection. Safety and protection are screaming issues where I live.

Three principles will be helpful. **Service.** Service is humble. Anyone can serve. You can't do everything. Choose strategic opportunities for service in your community. Service opens doors.

Relationship. Service connects you with people under the best possible circumstances, enabling you to begin to foster and nurture relationships. Select key people and organizations. Through service you will meet and develop relationships with people you never would have connected with otherwise.

Engagement. "If you're not at the table..." Your ongoing involvement in significant issues, carefully chosen events and efforts in the community, put you in a place of influence. Essentially you are making yourself available. What God does with this is up to Him.

We know what our mission is. We are all about proclaiming the gospel. We are all about winning souls. We are all about taking as many people with us to heaven as possible. I see no conflict between that and being a voice of righteousness where I live. I will make some enemies, I will win some souls. That's all part of the battle. We can be a force for God and good in our communities.



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