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- What does “in the world but not of it” mean to you personally?
- Share a real-life moment when this tension became very real for you.
- Loving God is best demonstrated by loving people – and many times those people are different from us. Read Philippians 2:3-4 together. How does this Bible verse provide context to what it means to really listen to each other?

- Which temptation do you think Christians are more prone to today: retreating into a bubble or blending in like a chameleon?
- Where have you noticed yourself leaning toward one of those extremes?

- How does the idea of being both a citizen of heaven and an earthly city reshape your understanding of faith?
- Describe the benefits and challenges that come with holding both citizenships.

- Jesus said, "A city set on a hill cannot be hidden." What does visibility look like in your daily life?
- In what ways can "good works" make faith compelling and not just private?

QUESTIONS CONTINUED

5. THE CHURCH'S JOURNEY (1970s TO TODAY)

- How could the story of the New Apostolic Church in the USA mirror your own spiritual growth—from insular protection to outward engagement?
- What lessons stand out from the District Apostles' different approaches?

6. BUILDING IDENTITY FIRST

- Why was it important that the early church (and later, the NAC) first established a strong identity before engaging outwardly?
- Share various practices that help you stay rooted in your core identity.

7. CRISIS RESPONSE & GROWTH OF THE EARLY CHURCH

- Why do you think the Christian response during the plagues was so powerful to the Roman world?
- Have you seen modern examples where selfless service made faith visible in a fresh way? Explain.

8. SERVICE VS. STRATEGY

- Sociologist, Rodney Stark showed that Christian growth wasn't about strategy but about simple service. How does this challenge how churches sometimes think about outreach?
- Describe what it would look like for us to serve without any hidden agendas.

9. DRAWING THE LINE

- Daniel kept his windows open toward Jerusalem while living in Babylon. What are “lines” you will not cross in today’s culture?
- Discuss ways to encourage each other to stand firm without becoming hostile or judgmental.

QUESTIONS CONTINUED

10. MOTIVES MATTER

- The lesson: “Are you using the city, or are you serving the city?” How can we check our motives in work, friendships, or service?
- Where is this most challenging for you personally?

11. SHALOM – SEEKING THE CITY’S PEACE

- The Hebrew idea of *shalom* is full flourishing. Share how this could expand your vision for serving your community.
- What would shalom look like in your workplace, neighborhood, or family?

12. CONSUMER OR CONTRIBUTOR?

- When you think about your role in your congregation and community, do you see yourself more as a consumer or a contributor?
- Share one practical way this week you can shift from "using" to "serving" your city.
- What is one tangible step you can take this week?

ARTICLE

A CITY ON A HILL

Today we're diving into this really powerful, really old idea for how to live a life of faith, especially when the world around you, it just doesn't seem to get it. It's a concept that totally reframes one of the biggest challenges out there. How do you engage with culture without just disappearing into it? You've all heard this phrase, right? "Be in the world but not of it."

It sounds so deep and wise, but how? I mean, what does that actually look like on a Tuesday afternoon. How are you supposed to navigate your job, your friendships, your neighborhood while your ultimate identity is rooted somewhere else? That is a tough tight rope to walk. And usually we see two responses to that tension.

And honestly, neither one is great. First, you've got the bubble. You just retreat from the world completely, build up walls, hide away from anything that feels threatening. The big problem there, you end up hiding your light. Then there's the other extreme, the chameleon. You just blend in. You become so much like the world around you that there's nothing distinct left. You've lost the very thing you were supposed to hold on to.

But what if there's a third way, a better way, an idea that reframes this whole thing? It's not about choosing between two bad options. It's about learning to live in two places at once. You could call it "a tale of two cities." And that idea is what we're calling "dual citizenship."

A TALE OF TWO CITIES

The core principle is that you can be a fully engaged citizen of two different cities, or spheres of life, at the exact same time. So on one hand, you're a citizen of a heavenly city on a hill. That's your ultimate home. But at the same time, you're a resident of an earthly city, your town, your neighborhood, and you're called to serve it and make it a better place. It's not about escape. It's about engagement.

And this idea goes way back. All the way back to the source. Jesus describes his followers as a city that is set on a hill. And He says it cannot be hidden. The whole point is to be visible, right? To be a source of light. And how do people see that light? Through good works. It's an identity that's meant to be active, tangible, and positive for everyone around you. Okay, that's the big idea. But how does this actually play out in the real world?

FROM INSULAR TO ENGAGED

Let's get practical and look at a fascinating case study, the journey of the New Apostolic Church in the USA over the last 50 years as we've very intentionally moved from being closed off to being open and engaged. So, if you go back to the 1970s, the church was pretty insular, almost like a tribe. The identity was super strong, built on these tight-knit family and social connections. But then District Apostle by District Apostle, they started a gradual deliberate shift. District Apostle Kraus began opening the windows a bit, starting work overseas. Then, District Apostle Wagner came in and focused on deepening that core identity from the inside. After him, District Apostle Freund helped members figure out how to live their faith in society in a normal, practical way. And finally, District Apostle Kolb laid the groundwork, the actual infrastructure to get the church ready to really engage with the world. It was this careful step-by-step process. And here's the crucial take-away, This wasn't about saying the old way was wrong. That early insular phase was essential for building a rock-solid identity. But then the goal itself evolved. It shifted from just protecting that identity to using that identity as a launchpad for serving others.

LESSONS FROM THE PAST

Now, here's where it gets really interesting. This modern-day story perfectly mirrors what happened with the early church on a massive, world-changing scale. This is the story of how simple humble service literally changed an entire empire. Just look at these numbers from the sociologist Rodney Stark.

Right after the ascension, you've got about 120 followers. Fast forward less than 300 years to the time of Emperor Constantine, and that number is an estimated 30 million. Just sit with that for a second. That jump is absolutely staggering. You're talking about a compound growth rate of something like 40% a year. for centuries.

How on earth did this tiny marginalized group with zero political power and facing constant persecution pull that off? It seems completely impossible. Well, the answer showed up during moments of total crisis. The Roman Empire was hit by these horrific plagues.

And in the middle of it all, a Bishop named Dionysius wrote this account in 260 AD. He describes how the Christians, ignoring the extreme danger to themselves, ran towards the sickness to care for people. fully expecting to get sick

themselves. And that response was the absolute key. The default pagan reaction was to run for the hills, to abandon the sick. Their worldview just broke.

=But the Christian response was the polar opposite. They stayed, they served, they built community right in the middle of all that chaos. Their mindset wasn't, "What can I get from the city?" It was, "We are here for you." And the result, it was incredible. Stark's research shows that people who got even the most basic care from Christians; Just food, water, a little comfort had a survival rate up to five times higher. This wasn't some kind of magic. It was the life-saving power of simple, selfless love in action. So, let's be clear, this insane growth wasn't part of some political strategy to take over.

It was much simpler. They were just trying to imitate Christ by serving people in desperate need. And that combination, of soup spooned plus prayers offered, it was an unbeatable force. The culture around them couldn't help but notice. It was compelling because it was so real.

A PLAYBOOK FOR TODAY

Okay, so let's bring all of this together into a practical approach for right now, a playbook for today.

So, the big question is, how do we take all these amazing lessons from history and turn them into a practical playbook that you and I can actually use right now? Well, I think of Fantastic model for this is the story of Daniel from the Old Testament. I mean, think about his situation. He was in exile in Babylon, a totally foreign pagan culture, and yet he rose to the highest levels of government. He actively worked to help his city thrive. But, and this is the key, he never assimilated. Daniel's life gives us this really clear three-step playbook. Step one, fortify your identity. Just like Daniel prayed with his windows open toward Jerusalem, You have to be grounded in who you are first. Step two, seek your city's peace. Actively work for the good of your whole community. And step three, draw the line. Serve the city, absolutely, but refuse to assimilate. Know where your ultimate loyalty is. And don't compromise on your core beliefs.

And this all starts at home. In our families, it means we have to be so intentional about teaching our kids that their number one identity is as children of God. And In a world that's throwing a million messages at them, we have to be vigilant, and we have to model for them how to engage with the world respectfully while still holding firm boundaries. Our congregations are so crucial here, too. They need to be places that give us a strong sense of belonging and really

reinforce our identity in Christ. And through things like small groups, they build that community we need to learn how to live this stuff out together. A healthy congregation is also one that welcomes diversity and isn't afraid of the changes needed to better reflect Christ's light to everyone.

USING VS. SERVING

This gets us to the ultimate point behind all of this engagement. It's not about protecting ourselves or building a bigger brand. It's about a mission of selfless service. This command was given to the Israelites when they were exiles in Babylon, but it is just as real for us today. It basically says, "Hey, you are not in your city by accident. You're called to actively work and pray for its being because when your city flourishes, you flourish. You were sent there to be a blessing. And it's so important we understand what the Bible means by "peace." The Hebrew word is "shalom." And that's so much more than just the absence of fighting. It's this rich, beautiful vision of complete flourishing for everyone in every part of life, spiritually, physically, socially, economically. That is the mission. That's what we're called to work for.

CONSUMER OR CONTRIBUTOR?

This all kind of boils down to one, tough personal question. When you think about your community, your neighborhood, your workplace, are you mostly a consumer or are you a contributor? Are you mainly there for what you can get out of it or are you actively trying to create shalom for the people around you? Okay, last section, your mission, your city. Let's wrap this all up and talk about what you can do next. Just remember those early Christians during the plagues. Their world Changing impact didn't come from some big fancy declaration. It came from thousands of small, consistent, faithful, everyday acts of service. That's how real change happens. It's built on these repeated acts of love and contribution.

So, here's the final question I want to leave you with. Don't think about changing the whole world. Just think about your world. What is one tangible, practical step you can take this week to bring a little bit more of God's shalom right where he has placed you. And if you want to go deeper on this and maybe talk through that very question with other people, check out the "City on a Hill" discussion guide for small groups. It's available right below. Thanks so much for watching.