

Best Church FOR and WITH Community

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Below is a transcript of the video post:

Well, good morning faithful E-news readers. This is Lance Finley coming to you live from Findlay, Ohio. I am outside the Jacobs Elementary school. This is just a block or two south of the General Conference offices here in Findlay. I just wanted to talk to you about some of the ideas that have been brewing in my mind for a long time.

For years and years and years, as churches, we've talked a lot about how do we become the best church in the community; have the best programming, the best worship, the best preaching, best practices. All those things. And in some instances I think we've had churches that have done that. They've been the best church in their community, offering wide varieties of programming, great worship, great preaching, great discipleship, that kind of thing. And yet, in many of those instances we've watched as churches have done very well - they've prospered - they've done well - their community has continued to decline. Over the last several years, some of us have noticed that and begun to wrestle with that.

That even led me to one of my favorite passages, or what has become one of my favorite passages of Scripture, Jeremiah 29. A lot of you are familiar with the story in Jeremiah 29. The people of God, the people of Israel, are in exile. They have been dragged off to Babylon. They are not happy about that, and they just want to go home. And the false prophets are saying "hunker down" it's just going to be a couple of years, and God's going to rescue us. And then Jeremiah gets the word from the Lord that says it's going to be 70 years. It's going to be long enough some of you are going to die here. You are not going to make it home, so build houses, plant gardens, get on with living life. Give your kids in marriage. While you do all that, seek the peace and the prosperity of the city because if it prospers, you too will prosper.0

I've done a lot of reflecting on that passage over the years. For me personally, when you start asking what would it mean for our church not to be the best church in the community, but maybe to be the best church FOR the community, or the best church with the community.

For me personally one of the ways I've tried to live that out, practice that is right here at Jacobs Elementary. It's a school here on the North side of Findlay just a couple of blocks from our office with a 70-80 percent free and reduced lunch rate, which means 70-80 percent of the kids in this school come out of a poverty background. You can probably imagine some of the challenges of some of the kids that come out of that background and how that relates to learning. And so for the last several years, more than a decade, I have invested my time here as a mentor trying to focus on reading, and helping kids become able-bodied readers. I'm so proud of College First here in Findlay, how they have adopted this school and provided lots more mentors for program. Just done lots of things to serve the school. To love the school. I think seeking the peace and prosperity of Findlay in doing that.

And I know over the years we've talked about these things. Some. This isn't a new concept, but a lot of you have said, well practically, how do we do this? What does it look like for a church to seek the peace and prosperity of the city we live in? And I would say, often schools like this one are a good place to start. Maybe you know a teacher at a local school or the principal or a local superintendent. Just to go and ask the question, "How can our church serve the local school?" "How can our church be a blessing to the work that they are doing?"

I think it's one of those steps for us as God's people to seek the peace and the prosperity of the communities he's placed us in. Because I think there are times we are a lot like the people of Israel. Some of us want to hunker down and think that God's going to get us out of here pretty quickly, so we just need to stay safe and "hold on." I think God may have a word for us much like he did for Jeremiah. You may be in this longer than you think and so while you are here I've got work for you to do. I want you to seek the peace and prosperity of the places I've placed you. Because that reveals my glory and that allows me to demonstrate my vision—the original vision that we see in Genesis of human flourishing, of life being lived as God designed it to be lived.

So today I just want to encourage you that if your church is wrestling with, "We don't want to be the best church in the community, we want to be the best church for and with the community," maybe one of the places you start, maybe one of the places you begin to explore is one of the local schools. Just to go and ask them, "How can we serve you? How can we help make your work more successful?" And I think you'll be surprised at how willing they are to take that kind of help. And in the process of doing that kind of work you are going to build some wonderful bridges to folks that will probably never visit your church, walk into your church and develop a heart for those folks as well.

So I just wanted to throw that out there today. It's something for you to think about, something for you to explore and let's keep doing the work God's asked us to do. To seek the peace and prosperity of the places where we live. So have a great week and we will be back next week with a normal blog.

God Bless,

Lance