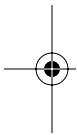


# THE SUBURBAN MOMENT

## Glimpses of a Suburban Future

*By 1970, more Americans lived in suburbs than in either central cities or rural areas. By 2000, more Americans lived in suburbs than in central cities and rural areas combined. The United States had become a predominantly suburban nation.*

DOLORES HAYDEN, *BUILDING SUBURBIA*

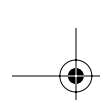


Suburbia is significant. Why? Because more people live in suburbia than ever before, and if trends continue, society will increasingly become more and more suburban. In 1950 less than a quarter of America's population lived in suburbia. By 2000, over half did. Urban cores have plateaued or are declining, while the suburbs continue to expand and grow at amazing rates.<sup>1</sup>

While demographers and missiologists often speak of the world's urban future, it may be equally accurate in many postindustrial societies to talk about the suburban future. With the majority of the population living in suburbs, much of the focus of future mission work and ministry outreach will necessarily be in suburban areas. Indeed, in a relatively short period of a half century or so, suburbia has emerged as the dominant cultural context of North America.<sup>2</sup>

Suburbs are no longer "sub." Today, "not only are Americans more





likely to live in a suburb than in a city, town, or farm; they are also more likely to work in a suburb, shop in a suburb, and attend entertainment and sports events in a suburb.”<sup>3</sup> This has displaced the former centrality of the cities. David Brooks writes, “We have a huge mass of people who not only don’t live in the cities, they don’t commute to the cities, go to movies in the cities, eat in the cities, or have any significant contact with urban life. They are neither rural, nor urban, nor residents of a bedroom community. They are charting a new way of living.”<sup>4</sup>

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*“Today more Americans live, work,  
go to schools and colleges, and do their shopping  
and recreation in suburbs than in cities.”*

J. JOHN PALEN, *THE SUBURBS*

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Given suburbia’s new centrality, Christians, especially suburban Christians, must take the suburbs seriously. If Christians are to herald the presence of the kingdom of God in our suburban contexts, we need to think about what suburbia is and how it works. Only when we understand how it affects us can we think about how we can affect suburbia.

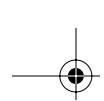


### **A SUBURBAN JOURNEY**

I grew up in the suburbia of the 1970s and 80s. My hometown, Bloomington, was Minneapolis’s largest suburb, with a population of about 82,000. Public parks were abundant there, with plenty of woods, lakes, bike trails and beaches. In the frigid Minnesota winters, my friends and I went sledding, skiing and ice skating, built snow forts and had snowball fights. In the summers we played cops and robbers around our cul-de-sac and built tree forts in the nearby woods. Some of my fondest memories are of warm afternoons playing sandpit volleyball with high school friends.

My suburban hometown was a place of in-betweenness. If I drove





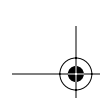
twenty minutes one way into the city, I'd be in downtown Minneapolis, able to visit skyscrapers or museums, see live theater or catch a Twins baseball game at the Metrodome. If I drove twenty minutes in the opposite direction, I'd be in the country, with dairy farms and barns dotting the landscape. In between these two worlds was my world—suburbia.

Bloomington can be roughly divided between east and west. The two high schools drew their students from their respective sides of the city. East Bloomington was an older community, representing earlier suburbs that were developed in gridlike formation akin to traditional city centers and small towns. West Bloomington, on the other hand, was newer development, with winding roads and larger lots. At the far edge of the city limits was “prestigious west Bloomington,” with million-dollar homes on hills overlooking the lakes. My high school classmates came from a variety of income brackets, ranging from blue-collar to executive status. My own suburb, while mostly middle- to middle-upper class, was a microcosm of several different socioeconomic classes and housing models in close geographic proximity.

I went to college in Rochester, Minnesota, home of the Mayo Clinic. Rochester is a city of about 85,000 people, located about an hour and a half south of the Twin Cities. It stands on its own as a city big enough to have many of the amenities of city life, yet it's close enough to the Twin Cities should you have a hankering for anything you couldn't find in Rochester. Minnesotans are famously proud of being nice and providing nice communities to live in. For several years Rochester ranked number one in *Money* magazine's top places to live in the United States, and Minneapolis-St. Paul ranked in the top five. Rochester has been described as “a suburb looking for a city.” Perhaps that's why I felt so comfortable there during my college years. It reminded me of the suburb I'd grown up in.

Many of my college classmates and friends, on the other hand, found Rochester too big and even threatening. Most had come from small towns across Minnesota and neighboring Midwestern states. I was one





of the few students from a metropolitan area, and my high school of two thousand was bigger than some of their hometowns. So I was called a “city kid” by my rural counterparts. I would correct them and say, “I’m not from the city. I’m from the suburbs.” This was an important distinction in my mind, even though it all seemed the same to them.

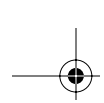
My suburban identity was such that I didn’t want to be thought of as being from the city. I had a few classmates from inner-city Minneapolis, and their experience growing up seemed far removed from my own. I also wanted to distance myself from the small-town mindset of my rural friends. Back then I had a rather condescending attitude toward both urban and rural environments. I saw myself as a cultured, cosmopolitan-minded suburbanite. I was proud of the fact that my high school had ranked second in the state in terms of overall academic, artistic and athletic programming. I was sure that my educational experience was superior to what my classmates had received in their smaller rural schools or underresourced urban schools. I assumed that my suburban identity made me more accomplished and ambitious than my peers.

I didn’t realize then how wealth and privilege factored into different school districts’ ability to provide resources for their students. I probably perpetuated my classmates’ conceptions of suburbanites being snobby and superficial. It wasn’t until meeting friends from different geographic and socioeconomic backgrounds that I realized that I had a certain sense of entitlement and superiority that tainted how I viewed others. And yet I was grateful for the benefits and advantages I had received from growing up in the suburbs. Had suburbia been good or bad for me? Did it make me a better person or a worse one? Or both?

Even then I began to wonder: *If I’m neither a “country bumpkin” nor a “city slicker,” then what am I? What are suburbanites? Is there such a thing as a suburban worldview? What does it mean to be suburban?*

I also remember several classes at my Christian college that focused on the need for urban ministry on both a domestic and global level. Clas-





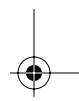
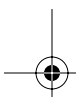
sic urban ministry textbooks like Ray Bakke's *The Urban Christian* emphasized the strategic significance of cities for Christian mission and ministry. Our college encouraged students to have ministry internships in inner-city settings, both here and overseas. But in practice, most of the school's involvement was among its supporting churches in rural Minnesota. Though the majority of the population lived in urban and suburban centers, I wasn't seeing a proportionate emphasis on ministry and church planting in metropolitan areas.

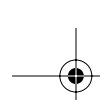
After college, I moved to Illinois for graduate school and have lived in the western suburbs of Chicago ever since. In Minnesota, suburbia seemed neatly defined, distinctly located between city and country. In northern Illinois, however, suburbia seems to be the dominant form of landscape. In some parts of Chicagoland, you can drive for an hour in any direction and still be in the suburbs. Because of distance and traffic, it takes me an hour to get downtown, so I rarely visit the city. It is now quite infrequent for me to experience either urban life in the big city or rural life in the small town. For me and my family and millions of others, suburbia is inescapable. We live in a suburban world.

### DEFINING SUBURBIA

Defining suburbia is both a simple as well as a tremendously complicated task, and sociologists have employed different kinds of definitions, typologies and classifications. At a most basic and functional level, suburbia is that seemingly self-evident area that is neither urban nor rural and usually is situated between central cities and unincorporated open land. If you're not living in the city limits proper of an urban metropolis like New York, Toronto or Seattle but are living in a community either adjacent to a city or several contiguous municipalities away, then you probably live in suburbia.

There are also multiple kinds of suburbs and tremendous diversity between suburbs. Some are older communities with a historic small-





town feel, while others are new developments with little sense of history. Some are primarily blue-collar and industrial, while others are mostly white-collar and professional. Some are historically African American or other ethnicities, while many are still mainly white. Different regions of the country also have their own personalities and characteristics. So we must beware of making sweeping overgeneralizations about suburbia.

On the other hand, surprisingly, suburbs share similarities even across all these differences. Historian Kenneth T. Jackson, in his landmark study *Crabgrass Frontier*, found that suburbs across the country have common traits of population density, homeownership, residential status and journey-to-work that give them strong commonalities in ethos and lifestyle, regardless of geographic region.<sup>5</sup> In many ways a suburb of Houston has more in common with a suburb of Atlanta or Denver than it does with an urban or rural community in the same state.

The prefix *sub* in *suburb* has often been understood to indicate a community's dependence on the larger urban center near it. It was not urban, but *suburban*. *Urban* was understood as having the central institutions of commerce, industry, government and arts. Suburban areas lacked some or all of these elements, and suburban residents would routinely travel to




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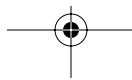
***“The sprawling suburbs now account for more office space than the inner cities in every metro area in the country except Chicago and New York.”***

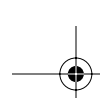
DAVID BROOKS, ON PARADISE DRIVE

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the urban center to work, shop or participate in cultural events.

This no longer holds as a rule of thumb. While a good percentage of corporations and jobs are still found in downtown central business districts, suburban job growth has meant that workers from cities and inner-ring suburbs now commute outward rather than inward. And we





may bypass our own cities entirely. Some years I make more trips to Los Angeles, Orlando or Nashville than I do to downtown Chicago, and often the closest I get to the city is O'Hare or Midway airports.

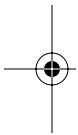
In some metropolitan areas, the newest suburbs are called exurbs. The prefix *ex* in *exurban* indicates both “out of” the city as well as “formerly of” the city. They are no longer “sub,” in that these new exurban edge cities are often economically autonomous and no longer dependent on the older cities. Those in exurbia are looking for all the resources of the city without having to be in the city. People don't quite know what to call these new suburban-urban hybrids; they have been called technoburbs, superburbia, exurbs or perimeter cities. Just a few decades ago they were cornfields or empty desert; now they are bustling centers of commerce and power.<sup>6</sup>

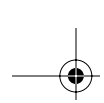
California's Silicon Valley is an example of the new exurbia. It is “suburban in form—sprawling, patternless—but it is a city in function. It is a center of wealth, business, industry, finance, education, and research.”<sup>7</sup> The Valley is a cluster of technoburbs that are more important to the regional economy than either of the adjacent older cities of San Francisco or San Jose. A one-thousand-square-foot bungalow in Palo Alto can run \$600,000. Ironically, San Francisco is becoming a bedroom community to Silicon Valley, as Valley residents find themselves priced out of affordable housing.<sup>8</sup>

People continue to search for certain ideals: a good place to live with maximum positive opportunities and minimum negative liabilities. As a result, suburbs and exurbs are becoming the dominant new form of city.<sup>9</sup> But the new suburbanism is far more complex than that.

### **THE SUBURBANIZATION OF CITIES**

Cities have had suburbs growing around them from the start. But increasingly, cities themselves are taking on suburban traits, especially in layout and organization. One historian writes, “After almost two centu-





ries of steady growth, suburbs have overwhelmed the centers of cities, creating metropolitan regions largely formed of suburban parts. . . . In the spaces of the suburban city lie metropolitan complexities.”<sup>10</sup> The familiar concept of an urban core with suburban rings around it is becoming less and less the norm. While this previous model is familiar in older East Coast cities such as Boston or Washington, D.C., it is less common in newer cities in the south and west.

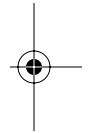
By the turn of the twenty-first century, most population centers had moved to the new reality of “multicentered metropolises.” Outer cities are not extensions of the old “core-periphery” model of cities and suburbs; today’s suburban centers are a new organizational model entirely.<sup>11</sup>

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*“Parts of the city are actually becoming suburbs to the suburbs.”*

ALEX MARSHALL, *HOW CITIES WORK*

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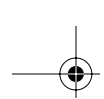
For example, Los Angeles can be thought of as a suburban metropolis. The geography of southern California has not lent itself to Los Angeles proper as being “central” in any meaningful way. In fact, the region’s commerce and industry is decentralized and spread out across multiple smaller cities and suburbs.<sup>12</sup>

Joel Garreau, author of *Edge City*, observes, “Every single American city that is growing, is growing in the fashion of Los Angeles, with multiple urban cores.”<sup>13</sup> As the decentralized cityscape continues to unfold, more cities will be developed with suburbanlike land-use patterns in mind—sprawling rather than concentrated in a dense central district, more dependent on the automobile rather than public transit or pedestrian walkways. Cities, especially the newest ones, are themselves changing to look more and more like suburbs.

### THE URBANIZATION OF SUBURBIA

At the same time, suburbia is urbanizing in two directions. On the one





hand, the newest suburbs, exurbs and edge cities are taking on the civic traits of cosmopolitan centers by providing the kinds of features once only found in urban centers. But on the other hand, many of the oldest suburbs are increasingly becoming like the cities they are adjacent to. While poverty is still disproportionately concentrated in central cities, in recent years urban renewal and gentrification has been dislocating the poor. As low-income urban neighborhoods are redeveloped for middle-income and upscale professionals, public and low-income housing is being eliminated, forcing the poor to move toward less affluent communities at the edges of cities. In other words, as community developer Robert Lupton puts it, “poverty is suburbanizing.”<sup>14</sup>

According to a 1999 U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development report, older inner-ring suburbs are experiencing many of the same problems as urban cities, such as job loss, population decline, crime and disinvestment. These older suburbs have a declining tax base, aging population, increasing poverty and deteriorating schools and infrastructure.<sup>15</sup>

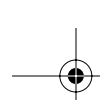
Even as new suburbs become new cities, old suburbs become old cities. Urban blight is becoming suburban blight. Increasingly, suburban issues are urban issues, and we will need all the experience and strategies of urban renewal and community development to attend to the changes in the urbanizing suburbs.

### **THE SUBURBANIZATION OF RURAL AREAS**

Another recent trend in suburbanization is that suburbs are not only growing out from the cities, but they are also growing in from the outside. Small towns now have suburbs too.

The U.S. Census Bureau formerly categorized small cities as “non-metropolitan” areas. Now a new term, “Micropolitan Statistical Areas,” designates areas with a central city between 10,000 and 50,000 people. Such cities and their suburbs may carry a combined population and commercial power of 150,000 to 200,000 people. These small towns are





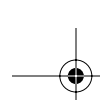
growing in clout. For example, Roanoke Rapids, North Carolina, is a small city of 17,000 and less than eight square miles. But the micropolitan area that it anchors has more than 76,000 people and 1,360 square miles. Such micropolises are increasingly targeted by national department store and restaurant chains as potential places for growth. “Branding these places recognizes what Wal-Mart has known for years: It doesn’t take a big city to create an urban economy.”<sup>16</sup>

As a result, rural areas now have suburbs. The suburban developments growing around small cities look much like the suburbs of big cities. They have similar development and land-use patterns as well as nationally branded retail and commercial outlets. A resident of a micropolitan suburb will likely feel quite at home in a metropolitan suburb and vice versa. While there are still stark cultural differences between the landscape of a small town and a big city, the rural suburb and the urban suburb are much the same. The primary difference is in real-estate values, but this is only a difference in degree, not in kind.

In terms of land-use patterns, rural suburbs can be even more suburban than urban suburbs. The vast amount of open land around small micropolitan cities means that their suburbs can be situated miles away, creating a spread-out commuter culture. Robert Lang, director of the Metropolitan Institute at Virginia Tech, says, “Micros are more suburban because they’re born sprawling.” Lang’s research shows that more than half of the land area in the continental United States lies in either metropolitan or micropolitan areas. “Rural areas now for the first time make up the minority share.”<sup>17</sup>

DeKalb, Illinois, is a micropolitan city of about 40,000 and home to Northern Illinois University. It’s about a half-hour drive west of the far western edges of the Chicago suburbs. At the edge of DeKalb’s adjacent “suburb” of Sycamore (population 12,000), there are plenty of new developments, with subdivisions of recently built townhouses and new shopping areas complete with national chains. Borders, Barnes & Noble, Pier 1





Imports, Ruby Tuesday, PetSmart. While many local mom-and-pop establishments still exist, clearly the national corporations have targeted the DeKalb micropolitan area as an area of growth. They see this and other micropolitan cities like it as home to future shoppers and customers.

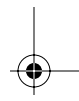
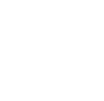
Small-town life, for better or for worse, is disappearing. As rural suburbs come to resemble metropolitan suburbs, micropolitan areas are repositioning themselves as smaller communities that offer the benefits and opportunities of suburban life without the problems of bigger cities. The growth of micropolitan suburbs is yet another indicator of the dominance of suburban culture. Whether urban or rural, suburbs are inescapable.

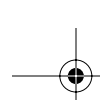
#### **THE SUBURBAN SHIFT**

Suburbs have existed in some sense throughout human history. Four thousand years ago, the Sumerian community of Ur in southern Mesopotamia had a population of 100,000 that spilled beyond the city's gates. John Wycliffe used the word *suburbis* in 1380, and Chaucer used it in *The Canterbury Tales* a few years later.<sup>18</sup> In North America, Boston, Philadelphia and New York had suburbs well before the Revolutionary War.

Yet suburbs are also a fairly modern development. In America, the mid- to late-nineteenth century saw a huge demographic shift from the country to the city, and suburbs as we now think of them began to emerge. A second major shift, from city to suburbs, occurred in the mid-twentieth century. Modern mass suburbia came to the fore after World War II. Ever since, the percentage of people living in the cities has declined and the percentage of suburbanites has increased.<sup>19</sup>

In previous eras, cities were the civilized centers of society, and suburbs tended to be dangerous slum areas. A diary entry from 1849 records, "Nine-tenths of those whose rascalities have made Philadelphia so unjustly notorious live in the dens and shanties of the suburbs."<sup>20</sup> Both in the United States and in Europe, suburbs housed the societal





outcasts. Shakespeare’s Globe Theater was located outside of London proper, across the Thames in the suburbs, reflecting the marginalization of theaters and actors. In Elizabethan England, brothels moved to outer areas, so prostitutes were known as “suburban sinners.” It was an insult to call someone “a suburbanite.” The *Oxford English Dictionary* in the nineteenth century defined a suburb as “a place of inferior, debased, and especially licentious habits of life.”<sup>21</sup>

A primary way that North American cities and suburbs differ from their counterparts around the world is in the distribution of socioeconomic classes. In most cities around the world, the wealthy live in the city centers, while the poor live in the “suburbs.” From Cape Town to Cairo, Barcelona to Rome, Bombay to Paris, the metropolis is where quality housing and public services are provided, usually at an economic premium. In many international cities suburban areas are usually lower-income, with slums and shantytowns found mostly around the rims.

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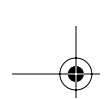
***“In 1990 the United States became the first nation to have more suburbanites than city and rural dwellers combined.”***

ROSALYN BAXANDALL AND ELIZABETH EWEN, *PICTURE WINDOWS*

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This is the opposite pattern of American urbanization and suburbanization. In the United States, while commerce still takes place in center cities, personal wealth is more concentrated in the suburbs than in the cities. “In the United States, status and income correlate with the suburbs, the area that provides the bedrooms for an overwhelming proportion of those with college educations, of those engaged in professional pursuits, and of those in the upper-income brackets.”<sup>22</sup> In other words, in America, even if people work in the cities, they tend to live in the suburbs, and they bring their wealth and income home with them. As Robert Lupton puts it, U.S. cities are like “donuts with a hole in the middle and the dough all around the outside.”<sup>23</sup>





American cities and suburbs differ from their global counterparts because of the compelling historical narrative of the American frontier. In medieval Europe, the impulse was to centralize inward in the cities, since city populations needed to stay within the boundaries of defensible walls for safety from external threats. In contrast, it is a distinctly American impulse to turn one's horizons outward. Go west, young man! Westward ho! The pioneer spirit and the concept of manifest destiny motivated thousands of Americans to move away from the original thirteen colonies to stake out their own land in this new world. Even those who did not journey to Oregon or California may well have gone to Chicago or St. Louis, and even there they were likely to expand out beyond the urban cores of the center cities into the new settlements that would become the suburbs.<sup>24</sup>

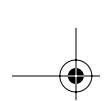
Urban historian Joel Garreau notes that America has experienced three major waves of suburbanization. The first wave was *residential*. After World War II the postwar baby boom of the 1940s and 50s required the building of millions of homes outside of center cities. This introduced the concept of the bedroom community, where people live and sleep a certain geographic distance from where they work.

The second wave was *commercial*. In the 1960s and 70s, people tired of shopping downtown because it was now a lengthy drive from the residential suburbs. So stores moved out of the city, building malls and marketplaces where people lived, in suburbia. Now commerce was done in local markets, not in urban centers.

The third wave, in effect since the 1980s and 90s, has been *industrial*—the move of jobs and companies out of the city and into the suburbs. Business and commerce moved from central cores to the emerging edges. Now we work where we already live and shop.

In sum, suburbia has become the context and center of millions of people's lives, and decisions and innovations made in suburbia influence the rest of society. If Christians want to change the world, they may well





do so by having a transformative Christian impact on suburbia and the people therein.

### **CALLED TO SUBURBIA?**

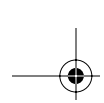
As demographic patterns have morphed and people have gravitated to suburban contexts, Christians have asked serious questions about Christians and suburban migration. Are urban ills due to Christians fleeing the cities for the suburbs?

It's true that Christians bear some complicity for urban blight. Despite a rich history of Christian presence and ministry in cities, American evangelicals have tended to have a theologically insufficient view of the city. Many have seen cities as dens of evil and corruption, as if the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah were inherent to their simply being cities. Christians are just as guilty as the general population of fear, apathy and disinterest in their civic communities. It has always been a temptation to avoid challenging environments and head for the hills.

So Christian urban ministry leaders have rightly argued against this anticity impulse and have called Christians to reestablish their presence in the city. As many have pointed out, the trajectory of Scripture moves from garden to city, from Eden to New Jerusalem. This is the course of both biblical history and human civilization. The Old and New Testaments are filled with examples of God's concern for the city and its strategic missional importance.<sup>25</sup> Rather than seeing the city as a place to be avoided, the city is a place to be embraced, where Christians can relocate and have a ministry of presence, acting as salt, light and leaven, finding solidarity with the poor and marginalized, bringing revitalization to local communities.

Unfortunately, a side effect of this renewed emphasis on the city has been the idea that living in the city is somehow preferable or morally superior to living in suburbia. Cities are pitted against suburbs. While it may not be stated so explicitly, the implication might be that truly com-





mitted Christians live in the city, and shallow, selfish Christians live in the suburbs.

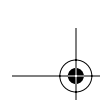
This too is an insufficient view of the city. It's just as incorrect to elevate the city to a preferred status as it is to denigrate it as evil or corrupt. Rather than contrasting cities against suburbs, it is more helpful to see cities and suburbs as part of a metropolitan whole. Our contemporary understanding of "the city" needs to include both city and suburb, and God needs Christians to have a presence throughout the entire metropolis. While an individual suburb might not be a microcosm of the total city, it is an essential slice of the larger metropolis that cannot be partitioned off or seen in isolation, just as a traditional local urban neighborhood is an essential component of the whole city. Concern for the city means concern for the suburbs and vice versa.

Ultimately both are legitimate places of Christian discipleship. Each will have different daily challenges and issues, but both are avenues and opportunities for Christian service and witness. All of us, whether rural, urban or suburban, must ask ourselves: Where do I sense God's call on my life? Where is God calling me to locate myself, and what community is he calling me to invest myself in?

I came to the Chicago suburbs for graduate school and found employment nearby. My wife and I didn't think much about the merits of living here; our jobs were in suburbia, so we lived in suburbia. But over the years we have become more rooted and invested in our local community, and we have a greater sense of God's call to this particular suburb. What was at first an arbitrary decision now presents itself as an opportunity to live out God's call in our suburban context.

Some of our colleagues who work in our suburban office have sensed a call to live in more urban environments, and part of the reality of living out that call is the tradeoff of a longer commute. Other coworkers telecommute from other areas of the country, having life situations and callings that propel them to live elsewhere. Wherever we live, we are called





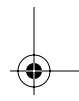
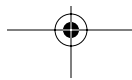
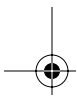
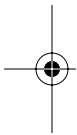
to live there Christianly, in ways that make sense for that setting.

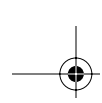
Some might argue that the very idea of settling down at all, whether in suburbia or elsewhere, is unbiblical. We might look to the Old Testament stories of Israelite nomads, wanderers and exiles who were always on the move, or the New Testament example of Jesus not having a place to lay his head, or Paul's constant missionary journeys. There is certainly something to be said about being free to go wherever God might lead. Settling in suburbia may run counter to that missionary impulse.

At the same time, we can also see biblical examples of faithful people who located themselves in particular communities in order to be salt and light there. A significant Old Testament theme is the land, and family clans were to be rooted so they could have history and permanence. Even the exiles in Babylon were exhorted to settle down and build houses, to invest themselves in their local communities and to seek the welfare of their city (Jeremiah 29:5-7). The missionary impulse for many of us might well be to settle in suburbia in order to have a significant Christian presence, lest we lose our witness there.

It's one thing to live in suburbia by default without ever wondering whether God would call us to live elsewhere. Informed suburban Christians will not be ignorant of the needs of the city and may well consider relocating to a more urban environment. This is similar to the larger question of global crosscultural missions. All Christians ought to consider how God might be calling them to participate in his worldwide mission. If we aren't called to go, we must be sure that we are called to stay—not in a passive sense, but to stay with an intentionality of active sending, sharing of resources and participating in global mission even at home.

So too it is with Christians in suburbia. All of us would do well to consider whether God might use us strategically in a different context. But if we conclude that we are called to stay in suburbia, then we ought to do so intentionally, seeking out ways of participating in God's work and mission in our immediate environment, loving our neighbors and caring





*The Suburban Moment*

for the poor, whether materially or spiritually impoverished. The old slogan “Think globally, act locally” is still true. Our mindset should embrace a global perspective of mission and justice, even while we seek out God’s call for us in suburbia.

Even as we consider how God might use us to serve in urban or rural areas or the uttermost ends of the earth, let’s not forget the suburbs. Jonah was rebuked by God’s concern for the 120,000-plus people living in Nineveh (Jonah 4:11). Shouldn’t we be concerned about suburbia and the thousands and millions there? Let it not be said of our generation that we didn’t seek the welfare of the suburbs!

