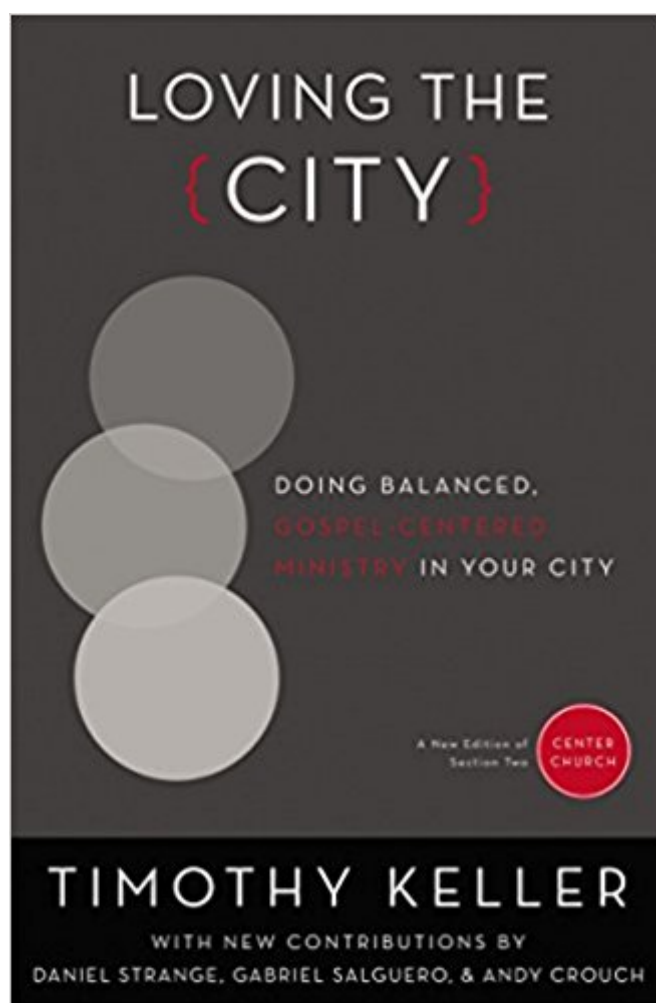


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# Loving The City: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry In Your City (Center Church)



## Synopsis

Even if you don't go to the city to minister, make no mistake—the city is coming to you. Regardless of your particular cultural or geographical context, you will need to consider the city when forming a theological vision that engages the people you are trying to reach. In *Loving the City*, bestselling author and pastor Timothy Keller looks at the biblical foundations for contextualizing the gospel as we communicate to the culture in a way that is both respectful and challenging. He articulates the key characteristics of a city vision, showing how the city develops as a theme throughout Scripture, from its anti-God origins, to its strategic importance for mission, to its culmination and redemption in glory. Finally, he examines the need for thoughtful cultural engagement, unpacking four models for engaging culture, showing the strengths and weaknesses of each approach and emphasizing a blended approach that balances the key insights of each. *Loving the City* will help you to minister to your cultural context in a way that is biblically faithful and fruitful. This new edition contains the second section of *Center Church* in an easy-to-read format with new reflections and additional essays from Timothy Keller and several other contributors.

## Book Information

Series: Center Church

Paperback: 336 pages

Publisher: Zondervan (March 15, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0310514088

ISBN-13: 978-0310514084

Product Dimensions: 5.4 x 0.9 x 8.4 inches

Shipping Weight: 10.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars 2 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #66,700 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #68 in Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Ministry & Evangelism > Missions & Missionary Work #12778 in Books > Religion & Spirituality

## Customer Reviews

Timothy Keller is the founder and senior pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City, and the New York Times bestselling author of *The Reason for God* and *The Prodigal God*. He has also mentored young urban church planters and pastors in New York and other cities through Redeemer City to City, which has helped launch over 200 churches in 35 global cities to date. Andy

Crouch is editorial director for The Christian Vision Project at Christianity Today International and executive producer of Where Faith and Culture Meet, a series of short documentary films on Christians creating "a counterculture for the common good." He is a member of the editorial board of Books & Culture, and a senior fellow of the International Justice Mission's IJM Institute. His writing has appeared in several editions of Best Christian Writing and Best Spiritual Writing. He lives with his family in Swarthmore, Pennsylvania.

good service, good book

A few years ago, Tim Keller released one of the most significant works on church planting and development to hit the shelves this century. Center Church is a massive examination of what it looks like to do gospel-centered ministry in your community. It received overwhelming praise from a majority of readers. However, if I had to guess, those who chose not to read it in spite of the reviews probably didn't do so because of its size. The first edition of Center Church was a 400-page piece of work, emulating more of a textbook than anything. That's why Keller's and Zondervan's decision to update, revise and release Center Church's content in three smaller, more compact volumes was a great decision. These three volumes take the overarching three concepts that make up Center Church and spend time examining each concept with more of a microscope, adding in accompanying contributions from respected authors that engage with Keller's work and offering discussion questions for leaders and teams to work through. The second volume, Loving the City, is Keller's bread and butter in my opinion. Many pastors and preachers seek to emulate and reproduce what Keller does at many levels, but it is his philosophy and teaching on city engagement that is most sought after. So many church leaders run to Keller to learn what it means to be present in the city, engaging the culture, and planting churches. They've watched what he has done in Manhattan, and consider him an expert in this particular area. Because of this, no one would be surprised to find that the major three sections of this book are divided as follows: Gospel Contextualization City Vision Cultural Engagement All three of these topics have the tendency to be polarizing, even within the gospel-centered camp. We are all fairly on the same page when it comes to our gospel-centeredness, but when it comes to these subjects, there is a bit more nuance and more disagreement. But Keller does a wonderful job of, more than anything, displaying the importance for all three of these areas. First, Keller discusses contextualization. He wonderfully defines it as "giving people the

Bible answers to questions about life that people in their particular time and place are asking, in language and forms they can comprehend, and through appeals and arguments with force they can feel, even if they reject them (26). Contextualization is key for fighting our tendency to flattening the teachings of Scripture, avoiding "ignoring some parts and exaggerating others" (44). Keller says that in order for contextualization to work, it must be active. "We must both enter the culture sympathetically and respectfully and confront the culture where it contradicts biblical truth" (66). Daniel Strange offers a very helpful reflection chapter on Keller's contextualization arguments. Perhaps my favorite section was Part Two on City Vision. Keller carefully traces a case for city-centric ministry throughout Scripture, from both Old and New Testament perspectives, with a focus on Paul's targeting cities. Keller pushes prospective church planters and disciple-makers to consider the city, though it may be uncomfortable: "I believe many Christians in the West avoid the city because it is filled with the other. Because cities are filled with people who are completely unlike us, many Christians find that disorienting. But see how easily we forget the gospel!" (155). In Part Three, Keller lays out his work on cultural engagement. He reminds us early that "culture is complex, subtle, and inescapable" (201). He moves quickly to the different cultural engagement models, taking a page out of H. Richard Niebuhr's Christ and Culture. He helpfully shows why all of these models work, why they all don't work, and how to keep models for cultural engagement in perspective. Keller argues that instead of picking one of the five presented models, we need a blend of each, keeping each in its proper place. He narrows our questions about culture to two: Should we be pessimistic or optimistic about the possibility of cultural change? Is the current culture redeemable and good, or fundamentally fallen? Andy Crouch's essay on cultural engagement at the end is one of the best things I have ever read on cultural engagement. He almost superseded Keller on his own turf! In all seriousness, do not skip this section. Much wisdom from Crouch can be offered here, as Keller even agrees. Overall, I think Loving the City is Keller's strongest leg of the Center Church material. It is a bold and unashamed call to loving people, preaching the gospel to them, caring for them, and engaging them. Great work from Keller and the other contributors here.

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