



3 Tools for Local Community Observation

I once heard someone say that the local McDonald's manager has a better handle on the trends and demographics of a town than the average pastor. That's just not acceptable. Whether you are planting a new church, starting a new ministry, or just want to build disciples more effectively who can live on mission locally, these three series' of questions can help you to get a handle on the unique problems and opportunities that your church can address. These three tools are designed to help you ask, "what do we see in the community we're trying to reach?"

Prayer Walk Tool

And they said to me, "The remnant there in the province who had survived the exile is in great trouble and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire." As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven. - Nehemiah 1:3-4

Intentionally walk through your community with your eyes and heart open to what God might be saying. Use these questions to ponder as you walk.

- What is breaking God's HEART?
- What does God FEEL?
- Where are the Open doorways?
- Where are the Roadblocks?
- What are the community needs?
- Where could the church find common ground?
- Where are their opportunities?
- Where can Bridges be built?

Local Survey Tool

The old rule of thumb said, you are not ready to start a new church until you've interviewed at least 150 local people in the area you're trying to reach. Maybe start with 15 or 20 people in a park or a local bookstore or coffee shop and ask the following questions.

- What do you think is the greatest need in this area?
- What are the biggest social challenges in our community?
- What are the most appealing elements of our community?
- In what ways has our community changed in the past 5 years?
- What are some trends that you see in our community that leave you hopeful? Leave you concerned?
- What makes you feel like you belong in the community? Disconnected from this community?
- Why do you think most people don't attend church?
- If you were to look for a church to attend, what kind of things would you look for?
- What advice would you give to a church that wants to be helpful to people in the community?

Listening Post Tool

This tool will not be as accurate as a survey, but can still be a source of important local information. Find a local spot where people are talking and just do a little non-creepy eavesdropping. It might be a watering hole, a greasy spoon, a coffee shop or a bookstore, but just go and sit and listen. Take some notes.

- What are people talking about?
- What are their concerns?
- What are their fears?
- What are their frustrations?
- What are their pressure points?
- What decisions are they facing?