

# Loving our Community Tim Sheerman from STREETWORK

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Preacher: Steve Jeffrey

[ 0 : 00 ] Let's pray. God, as you led me in my preparation, would you take the reins now and speak through me? Would your Holy Spirit have its way in this service?

And would your will be done? And at the end of it, would you be glorified? Amen. Longer than I can remember, people have said to me, don't judge a book by its cover.

Yet when you walk through a bookstore like Borders or if there's a bookstore left in your neighbourhood, how frequently you don't get past the cover when you're trying to decide which book you're going to buy.

Every book is literally covered in things designed to entice us to purchase. There's reviews, there's decoration and art, a short blurb, even a sticker indicating that it's one of Oprah's favourite things. All of these parts of the cover very much drew us to judge the book, yet still we preach the proverb, don't judge a book by its cover. Similarly, when we choose a piece of fruit or vegetables at the supermarket or at the farmer's market if you're cool, we are naturally drawn to better looking pieces of fruit, yeah?

[ 1 : 12 ] The ones that have symmetry, the ones that don't have any blemishes and there's lots and lots of colour. Even though the funny looking one that you probably grew yourself has just as much nutritional content and just as much flavour.

Still we say, don't judge a book by its cover. Let me posture this idea. What we see compels us to choose. I'm going to say that again because I'm trying to make a point.

What we see compels us to choose. I was recently standing, enjoying the last of the summer fruit, picking myself out a couple of peaches.

I had this grand scheme of taking the wife to the beach for a peach. It's a cheap, simple date. Boys, I don't have a patent on it. You can use that. Go for it. A peach at the beach.

It's good value. As I was trying to choose the best peach from the selection, a lady who was a little older than myself decided she wanted to stand between me and the peaches.

[ 2 : 16 ] She wanted to sidle in sideways. Problem was, there's about six inches between me and the peach display, yeah? I had to get out of her way and I was quite excited to go and tell Tanya the story of this lady just having to squeeze in to get to the peaches first.

I couldn't stop her. The peaches were very compelling. They were very good looking. And as I said earlier, what we see compels us to choose. Sadly, I was not compelled to befriend this lady.

Yeah? Instead, I just quickly went and told Tanya, you won't believe what just happened at the peaches and pointed the lady out. Good or bad, what we see compels us to choose.

I grew up on a small farm about 30 minutes south of Dubbo. Everybody say Dubbo. Good. Just checking. I had an amazing childhood. I have two older brothers who are very musical and a little sister who was different for all sorts of non-tonka truck girly playing reasons.

Right? I sold my cows and I moved to Sydney the day after my final HSC exam, taking on the apprenticeship as a cabin maker in Bankstown. I wanted to live in this mystical land my brothers had told me about called Castle Hill.

[ 3 : 34 ] Even though I understand now, geographically, they're very far apart, from a country boy, I thought I'd just live in Castle Hill and commute to Bankstown every day. And I did for four years.

This magical place, Castle Hill, was a mystical land my brothers had told me about, filled with big adventures and pretty girls and big houses and all those sorts of things a 17-year-old boy leaving home wants to experience.

I was there, I wish I was there for a more spiritual explanation, although in hindsight, I see God's hand weaving a path through my life, which included leading me to my wife in the hills. Just saying that now, though, actually is quite funny. It makes me laugh out loud. Being a country boy, you don't have the faintest idea beyond school or beyond my barbed-wired imagination that I was very quickly out of my league once I arrived in Sydney and I quickly started to miss home. I even drove home for weekends with boots full of fireworks, things you can buy in Bankstown, whenever I could afford. As much as I enjoyed the adventure of living in Sydney, I felt as if it was living in somewhere very unfamiliar and for the first time ever in my life, I felt like I was in exile. And maybe you felt something similar. Maybe you've worked abroad. Maybe you've studied abroad. Maybe you've taken a contract away from loved ones. The whole time, you just can't wait to come home, yeah?

[ 5 : 02 ] In the first of today's scriptures, the author speaks to a people in foreign lands longing for home, longing for their promised land. Except instead of mentoring through the steps to urgently return home, they do something else.

Gordon Fee puts it, the book of Jeremiah is a collection of oracles, mostly poetry, mostly against Judah and Jerusalem. This is a crazy time for Judah and Jerusalem. And there isn't a time for a full history lesson or a mansplaining.

But Jeremiah and, but Jerusalem and Judah found themselves a soccer ball between Egypt and Babylon. As the both of them were jockeying for the possession of all the lands along the Mediterranean there.

Jeremiah 29 is written shortly after as the scripture gave us the context in the first section.

Nebuchadnezzar just brought an end to the three-month reign of Jehoiakim and carried off the people to exile.

Jehoiakim was one we didn't spend much time on in Sunday school, right? I think he was in the flannel board collection of characters. Jehoiakim was only there for three months as the ruler.

What's really interesting is that the exiles long for home.

[ 6 : 08 ] And Jeremiah speaks in this instance of God's pro-exile stance. Spoiler alert, the pro-exile bit is contrary to a couple of prophets from the earlier chapter who died.

Double spoiler alert. Jeremiah comes out very strong in verse 4. Let me read for you. This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. Build houses and settle down. Plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters. Find wives for your sons. Give your daughters in marriage so that they too may have sons and daughters.

Increase in number there. Do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it because if it prospers, you too will prosper.

God carries them into exile. I love that. God carries them. On the eve of a federal election here in Australia, Facebook news feeds are being filled with many Christian friends of mine crying at the death of our Christian governance and laws.

[ 7 : 22 ] Does it scare you that God could carry us as a nation into exile? Into a country that could be different to what you grew up in? I actually get excited and draw hope from the practical application of verse 7.

Seek peace and prosperity for where God has carried you. Pray to the Lord for it because if your city prospers, you too will prosper. As Streetwork, we work to help young people turn their life around.

We do whatever it takes. Whatever it takes, we'll do it. A recent review of the work we do at Streetwork by PwC, if you're cool, but Price Waterhouse and Coopers, if you don't know who PwC is, show that the work we did in that one year here in the North Shore of Sydney, mostly Chatswood, saved the local community just over \$8 million.

And we did that on a shoestring budget. Youth Week is cheap. I'm regularly reminded when I open my bank balance. We see young people starting on the trajectory of life of crime transform into contributing members of the community.

It's a really rewarding job, but it's also a living testimony of how seeking for peace and prosperity in your local area brings prosperity for all the community. I've moved by the ongoing support of so many in the community, many of whom aren't even church people.

[ 8 : 47 ] They're just motivated to see this community prosper. Also, I think the idea of exile can be strangely foreign to us as many of you will have grown up here in the North Shore, lived your entire

life here in the local area.

Maybe you were even here at St. Paul's in 1980 when Peter Hobbs, a member of this church, birthed Street Work with the help of many members of this church, I believe. See, when I moved to Castle Hill back in 1999, the Young Adults Ministry was called Embassy.

I loved this so much. I shared earlier how much I liked, I felt like I was in exile moving to Sydney from my homeland of Dubbo, which sounds funny to say. Here was a community that acknowledged as citizens of heaven, we were all exiles in a strange land.

And the Hills District definitely qualifies as strange lands. But here on earth, here in Chatswood, was where God had carried us. And while our citizenship was secured by what Christ had done on the cross, our job was not yet done.

We were in exile and it was a good thing. Being a part of Embassy was what got me involved in volunteering with young people 17 years ago now.

[10:06] and it's led me to being involved with youth ministry and youth work ever since. My experience as a young adult in that ministry was one of two defining experiences God carried me into in that season.

The other was as an apprentice. As an apprentice cabinet maker, I also became friends with a guy named James. And James was from Lakemba. And James, which is a much more sensible place to commute from, yeah, to Bankstown.

James was from Lakemba and James had daily normal habits the likes of which most of us in this room would rarely encounter. From substance abuse, he collected weapons, he had an inappropriate expertise in hydroponics and what I can only describe as a genuine sex addiction. James was the polar opposite of my upbringing and my church world and we strangely ended up the best of friends. James used to steal my phone on lunch breaks and he would call the girls from my church that I liked.

He would ask them why we hadn't had sex and if I was gay. Stuff that probably shocked them and if I'd been able to stop him, I would have. But they were genuine questions he couldn't make sense of because of how different our lives were.

[11:21] I think my world was as confusing to James as James was to me. I even brought him to church once and he genuinely was too afraid to come in. He sat in the car, both of us sat in the car while he smoked some cigarettes and we listened to the singing inside.

Later that night, James rang me and said, Tim, can you go back to church and light a candle for me? I said, James, you should have come in, mate. It's really not that kind of church. I still haven't had the privilege of introducing James to Jesus.

We talk regularly over Facebook when we don't see each other. I know he's going to meet Jesus. He's been looking for him but he's still not ready to let go of some of those things that hold him back even though he knows they heard him.

It was great being carried into exile into a place like that and meeting someone like James. For a good little church boy like me, James was unique but the reality is, our city is full of Jameses. I pastored with Tanya here in Chatswood for many years. I was a youth pastor. Tanya was the worship pastor at a church the other side closer to Willoughby and we worked on the same streets I now work on as a youth worker except now the cafes that I always used to have my pastoral meetings in, I know the kids that deal drugs in them.

[12:38] Sometimes they're armed. Apparently they'd always been there. They'd been there for years and years and years but I just didn't recognize them before when I was busy with my flock and my songs and my sermons.

They were invisible to me. Please don't think that's a cheap shot at clergy either. Each has our crucial role in this God-ordained exile, yeah?

Clergy and you. My point is that on the North Shore we don't think we have a problem. We don't talk about it. Our leading politicians are from here and we don't know why our issues are invisible.

I keep dragging out crazy conspiracy theories about house prices and things and why we don't talk about our problems. Here in Chatswood we have some of the highest incidents of shoplifting, drug use and sexually transmitted diseases among young people per capita in the entire country.

We think those problems are out west or in Dubbo, right? Not only are we seemingly unaware but when preparing this sermon I spent ages praying about whether it was even appropriate to share this with you from the pulpit.

[ 13 : 46 ] Would it be a cool thing to tweet and go back to normal or is it something that might touch a nerve and call you to action? Some of you might be interested to know that within 500 metres of the train station in Chatswood there are 16 illegal brothels.

Does that terrify you? That's a stone's throw from here literally. Thankfully Jesus calls us not just share the BuzzFeed article about him but into action and doing something.

In today's second scripture from Matthew 5, you are the salt of the earth but if that salt loses its saltiness how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

How good is salt? Tanya and I lived nearly three years in exile in Southern California. The whole time we took Australian salt with us.

You can laugh at that because it's funny that we did. They have every kind of salt you can imagine there. In fact the supermarket had a whole aisle of salt and variations of salt but we liked this pink Australian salt which I can't even remember the name of.

[ 14 : 57 ] Yeah, the Murray River salt and it's complicated but it was our little bit of home and dinner every night while we were in exile. Good salt, there's nothing better than it.

Salt comes in different shapes, sizes, different colours, different origins, textures, you name it, it exists, you can find it. The important character of salt that defines it as good salt though is its saltiness, yeah?

Salt's ability to taste salty. Added to a soup, it goes from bland to I need more of that, you know. Tanya likes to sprinkle it on top of her cheese on toast which turns a lazy dinner into oh my gosh can I have more of that, it's delicious.

Good salt has that effect. Jesus continues in 514, you are the light of the world, a town built on a hill cannot be hidden, neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl, instead they put it on its stand and it gives light to everyone in the house.

In the same way let your light shine before others that they may see your good deeds and glorify your father in heaven. I'm going to be really honest with you here, when I read this I don't see a call for me Tim to go and enroll in apologetics class.

[ 16 : 15 ] You might and that's good if you hear that, go do that. I see a call to go do something salty, something seen, something that glorifies our father in heaven.

I think in 17 years of youth ministry I'm now full of stories of young people I've been blessed to introduce to Jesus. Ironically, I was recently going over my transcript from my Bachelor of Theology and I failed apologetics the first time around.

I'm terrible at it, the theory, but I'm sorting that out at the moment, second time around. Right back at the start of this sermon I talked about books and fruit and veggies and I postured this point, what we see compels us to choose, yeah?

But let me add, what they see out there will compel them to choose. I think if you're prepared to embrace that we're living in a post-Christian society, you can then also embrace that this is an exciting time for the church in this country.

We shouldn't be crying that it's harder to get a table at a cafe on a Sunday morning than a pew in a church. We should be excited to actually face that challenge and do something about it, yeah? See, I believe loving God and loving others is things we have to do.

[ 17 : 32 ] They're verbs, doing words. That's how I was brought up in Dubbo in primary school, right? A verb is a doing word. We need to be salty.

We need to go and do salty, yeah? Like salt is salty, we need to be loving, we need to be seen. that what we do may glorify he who is worthy of all glory.

And what they see will compel them to choose. You can have an impact on what they see. You don't need to wait for church to present you with an opportunity to do something.

You just have to do something. One thing you could do is to come and be a part of what we're doing at Street Work, particularly if you failed apologetics class like me. And we need people to sit in prison cells with young people that have just been arrested.

We need mentors for young people that are doing it tough. I really need people who are happy just to turn sausages on a barbecue. You don't have to do everything. In fact, if the recent movie is any indication, Superman really are unhelpful.

[ 18 : 39 ] We just have to do something. Something salty. If you want to talk more about it, let's come back this afternoon at 3.30 and Hugh and I are going to talk to you about that.

I also ask that you would pray for us at Street Work, as we did this morning. Hold us on your prayers. We regularly encounter dangerous situations.

Yeah? My staff, I'm the manager. My staff are really skilled, but we frequently have weapons and things involved in what we're doing. And please hold them up in your prayers.

As I come to a conclusion with this short message, I actually want to sing a song. And then I want to give the microphone back to Steve.

this is a song that we sung in my youth ministry in Southern California while I was in exile there, while Tanya was doing her PhD. And this song is about this very topic.

[ 19 : 45 ] And it's a song we used to sing in worship. And God used to do something in the youth ministry when we sang this together. Now, you don't know it, so I'm sorry.

If you do know it, please sing with us. My prayer for you today is that this song will have a similar impact in you. That on Pentecost Sunday, the Holy Spirit will touch you in a way that inspires you to do something salty.

Do something. And what they see will compel them to choose. after serious the time is that the who heard them ano myths the clip fall or nad Heute little monthcado■