



Five gent

31 DAYS
IN THE CITY

SHAUNA PILGREEN

Copyright © 2015 by the Send Network Team. All rights reserved.

Published by The Send Network

4200 North Point Parkway, Alpharetta, GA 30022

www.sendnetwork.com

What others are saying about *Live Sent*

The Pilgreens did more than simply land in San Francisco-- Shauna helped her family learn to embrace the chaos and live well in this iconically complex place. How I hope this book will help others maximize their own experience in our great city!

Such a fun read! I remember arriving in San Francisco in 1996 with a three year old, not at all certain how to navigate my uncertainties, bewilderment, and awe of this city. I hope this book is helpful to many newcomer families, as well as some who have lived here for years but stopped discovering its wonders.

It matters that the Pilgreen family moved to San Francisco, loves this city so completely and learned to live together missionally here. I have hope for a book like this to help other newcomers do the same. Enjoy the book-- enjoy your city!

*- Linda Bergquist: church planting catalyst, teacher, author, and
proud San Franciscan*

Shauna Pilgreen is my friend, but she is also a church planting wife that I admire and seek to emulate in the way she enthusiastically loves her city in the name of Christ.

The ideas she lays out in this ebook and the stories of how she's implemented them in San Francisco are encouraging, practical, and helpful for women wanting to start well in church planting or any woman desiring fresh eyes for her community. Her joy in loving God and loving others will give you courage!

-Christine Hoover, author of The Church Planting Wife: Help and Hope for Her Heart and From Good to Grace: Letting Go of the Goodness Gospel

When I (a small town/suburban girl) moved with my family to San Francisco five years ago, I was overwhelmed with the challenges and pace of city. I longed for a wise friend to come alongside me and show me how to be a mom in the city, how to be a follower of Jesus in the city. This is the book I needed then. Shauna Pilgreen is a friend to guide you through those lonely days of feeling new and overwhelmed. Her words are an encouraging whisper that you are here in this place because you have been sent, because God is on the move and you part of God's renewal in your city.

- Micha Boyett, Author of Found: A Story of Questions, Grace, & Everyday Prayer

As an urban church planter in our nation's capital, Washington, D.C., *31 Days in the City* is an excellent resource for anyone who feels called or led to move to a new, unfamiliar, place. It would have been awesome to have Shauna Pilgreen's book as a means of instruction and encouragement on what it means to "live sent" as a follower of Jesus when we moved to D.C. almost eight years ago. Even now, having lived in the city for a while, I plan to implement 31 days of "living sent" here in D.C. It will allow my children and I to discover our city in a new and fresh way, and hopefully be a blessing to those around us.

A great read, an excellent resource and a challenge to live the way that God has called us to live!

- Amy Graham, Discipleship Pastor, The District Church

This book will be your first friend in your new location! I leaned into every page of this book, wishing I had read it years ago! Keep this book nearby as you're unpacking boxes in a new move. No matter what location you're in, it creatively guides you to discover purpose and adventure in the place God has sent you. Every time I turned a page I found myself smiling. Not just because of the winsome way in which it's written, but because I could identify with the thoughts and emotions unpacked in this book. Get a pen and your shoes on, you're going to be motivated, and the adventure is just beginning!

- Lori McDaniel, Global Mission Catalyst, International Mission Board

Living Sent is a not your average book about engaging a new location, but rather a beautifully written journey about living sent where God has led you to call home. While Shauna did an outstanding job sharing her story about exploring San Francisco with her young boys and church planting husband Ben, this book is not just for families heading to the city by the bay. North or south, east or west, urban or rural, you will be inspired to start a journey with your own family and immerse yourself in a new place or rediscover how to live a life on mission where you call home.

- Jessica Holmes, Vancouver Church Planting Network

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Before the Boxes

Living Sent

Day 1: Buy Local

Day 2: Cultural Experience

Day 3: Library

Day 4: Meet the Animals

Day 5: Day at the Museum

Day 6: Go Team Go!

Day 7: Wake Up with the Locals

Day 8: Experiment with Public Transit

Day 9: Meet the Neighbors

Day 10: Make Time for the Elderly

Day 11: Get Outdoors

Day 12: Movie Night

Day 13: Tourist for the Day

Day 14: Discover a Park or Playground

Day 15: Explore the Surrounding Suburbs or Nearby Town

Day 16: Build Authentic Community

Day 17: Say Hello to Basic Business People

Day 18: Love (uh-huh) Them

Day 19: Encourage Another

Day 20: Make a Discovery

Day 21: Honor Dad

Day 22: Write a Family Plan

Day 23: Open the Door

Day 24: Date Night

Day 25: Take Care of Business

Day 26: Write Family and Friends

Day 27: Commit to a City Value

Day 28: Stroll Around the Block

Day 29: Escape the City

Day 30: Get Lost

Day 31: Celebrate

It's Not Lovey-dovey

Dedication...

To San Francisco.

You let me give and take.

Listen and learn.

Love and live sent.

Introduction

Before the Boxes

"The world is a dangerous place to live; not because of the people who are evil, but because of the people who don't do anything about it." - Albert Einstein

It's not our granny's generation anymore! Today's culture doesn't keep the same job from college through retirement. Families will make an average of 11 moves in their lifetime. From experience, I've lived in six states and our kids have lived in nine different homes or apartments. If you've made a move before or this is the first one ever, I'm going to take an experiential guess. You're in one of two camps: 1. You're excited about the changes that are coming. Your adventurous spirit is intact and you've got a smile on your face as to what lies ahead. or 2. If a glue exists that would bind you forever to the ground, you'd buy it and apply it. You're going kicking and screaming and leaving marks on the doorposts of your current home.

But if we were to get pretty honest, we have a little bit of both in us. And rightfully so.

Moves from one town to the next can bring stress, anxiety, and depression. Top it with children, new cultures, or an international move and it gets even more dramatic. Maybe it's a career move you've been planning for, having your sights set on accomplishing more in the future than what's been accomplished in the past.

With a move in this day and time and with Google closer than the person beside us, we can search and find everything to make the move smooth and successful. Apartment rentals, moving companies, power, water, and gas companies, maps of the area are easy clicks and apps are easily accessible. If only feeling connected and at home in the new place were just a click away.

A move across town or across the country or across the waters is happening every day. Now, you might be that one moving truck coming into town that has local curiosity spiked because the townspeople don't see these happenings all that often. For you, I will say, "Hang in there, town celebrity. Throw out any fears you have about being known and getting to know those around you." For those of us who have moved quite a few times, you can envision packing lists in your sleep and can pack the truck like a game of Tetris. Tylenol can relieve the back pain and the stress-aches, but the move is just the first part. After moving day comes living sent - embracing the new home and community with purpose and intention.

Think about a wedding. The bride eagerly plans all the

details of the wedding. So much to be done. Appointments with florists, travel agents, venues, caterers, and such. She lines up schedules and dates and gets the word out. She's excited one minute and stressed the next and the groom finds her at times an excited stress ball of energy! So much thought and planning goes into the wedding day. On the special day, within hours the wedding is over and marriage begins. The wedding day resembles moving day, and marriage parallels living sent. Marriage is living out the commitment made on the wedding day. Living sent is responding to the city and people God has given you.

A move typically happens in a set number of hours, days, or months. It's tangible. You can hold the contract, paperwork, packaging tape, and keys. Living sent takes time and it varies from one individual to another. The extroverts out there are hosting a party by the following weekend and us introverts are willing ourselves out the door, hopefully by day 13!

The difference between moving and living sent

I can move a chair from this room to that room. I can move a box over there. But I can send a box in the mail. I can send my kids to school. I can send a note via email. To move is direction. To send is purpose. A move is seen as a relocation. A chess piece. A 'have-to.' Sent is loaded with intention. It's a move with purpose. A 'get-to.'

Living sent is perspective beyond the boxes. This heart-intensive philosophy embraces what can take place despite the emotions of a move and the potential of what lies outside

the walls of your home. Living sent is a mindset. A willingness to love the place you now call home and receive all that it has to offer.

I believe this to be true: the most alert you will ever be to your town or city is right when you arrive. And call it a 'move' if you must, but by the end of this 31 days, I hope you see it as being 'sent.' It takes us humans time to figure out why God does what He does. For us stubborn ones, we might not figure it out this side of heaven. That's where perspective comes in. Sent is a move with purpose. This is the perspective I want you to see. The job, the family circumstances, the opportunity, the fill-in-the-blank that has uprooted you and plopped you down again, has purpose. Your new zip code. New address. New neighbors. New surroundings. They matter in perspective.

I once sat across the table from a mom who when asked the question, "How are you and the kids surviving your new life here in the city?" She wasn't looking for a textbook parenting answer--she was looking for a story pulled from my life. A story that would lead her to believe she can survive too. A principle that would urge her to get out and explore and thrive.

So I began to tell her...

For me it was a drastic move. Surroundings of green rolling hills were replaced with the San Francisco Bay and Pacific Ocean touching. A fairly Christianized culture in most of our ministry was given up for a culture of many religions, diversity, and tolerance of just about anything. We would spend less time in our minivan and more time on the sidewalks. We would

be starting relationships from the very beginning and we would do all of this with three little boys.

I had two choices. Kiss my husband on his way out the door, close the blinds, lock the doors, and then nestle down into our apartment and take refuge FOREVER or unpack a few boxes, get myself and the boys dressed for the day, and then get out of the apartment and learn to love our city. Most days this required a determination the night before that I would not recluse, but would respond to this God-calling with adventure. Don't let this sound simple. My emotions were easily persuaded that my husband's job was the premise for the move and that the rest of us were tag-alongs. Yet on the emotionally strong days, I knew the truth was that we were on this new adventure together, thus making it a God-calling from the oldest to the youngest. The adventures were certainly accompanied with tears and frustrations. However, with any relationship, emotions run rampant, including a relationship to a place to which you are living.

So how did I choose to see this new place with purpose?

I wrote up a plan. That's how I'm wired. 31 days in the city is what I called it. Each day me and the boys would do something to learn to love our city.

Day 1: Free day at the zoo

Day 2: Get a library card

Day 3: Make cards for the elderly at the assisted living home across the street

Day 4: Discover Chinatown

Day 5: Stick our feet in the pacific ocean (too cold for full body immersion)

Day 6: Family time at the ballpark

Day 7: Find a park with a great playground

Day 8: Write our friends and family back home and tell them about our adventures

Day 9: Explore the farmer's market

Day 10: Make cookies for our neighbors, concierge, postman, maintenance men, and apartment managers

And so on. These adventures didn't always happen as planned. On one adventure, I fed the meter and rushed the boys through Chinatown to get back to the car in plenty of time. But for some mysterious reason the van was not where I parked it. In a tear-stricken panic I called Ben and freaked out. I read about four of the parking signs posted near the van, but didn't notice the commercial loading zone sign. Via public transit, me and the boys made it back home and \$400 later we got our van back.

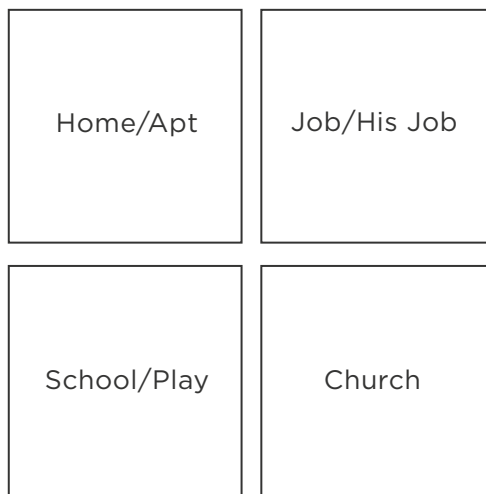
Since you're not right across the table from me, I'll be happy to share more of this frenzy later.

Any new place is worth exploring. And worth exploring again and again. From experience, the more you know your city, the more capacity you have to love your city. We certainly missed our friends and family and had days of longing for the

familiar to which we were accustomed. Yet, the getting-our-feet-out-on-the-streets moment taught us about our city and our people. It allowed us to learn the city as a family, rather than letting daddy do this church-plant thing.

The adventures made me vulnerable. It was risky, especially with the boys by my side. But it has made all the difference for us.

Think about your new surroundings. Big city or small town. Easy to get around or you're still clinging to the map. Complex layout or an understandable grid. Think of them in four quadrants. No more than four. Only one area of town can be listed in each square. Bare with me. There's good reason for it.



These four quadrants represent four areas of your life on a map; so think location. Think physical settings here. One is your home/apartment. What area of town do you live? Another is your job/his job. What part of the city do you

work in? A third one is school or where you play. This would represent where your kids go to school or where you socialize or spend time for hobbies. The last quadrant is church. Where is your church located in relation to home and work and school?

These quadrants show where you have the most impact, the areas of town where you spend the most time, and the people you will encounter on a consistent basis.

Life actually gets easier if you have less than four quadrants. You're not commuting as much and your impact is not as far-stretching, yet more contained. Say that your home is within walking distance of your kid's school. This means that there's potential your neighbors have kids that go to the same school. That's two quadrants in one. You can know them on your street and at school functions. Impact is contained, yet powerful as you interact with them more often.

Some places we live are urban centers and this concept of four quadrants can be a bit tricky. In the planning of a move, consider how you can scale down and live in only four. Live near work. Work near school. Find a church near home. Do life in as few as possible.

Here's how our quadrants worked initially:

Quadrant 1: we lived in the SoMa neighborhood (the east side of the city where construction was all around and the expansion was happening just east of us; right off of Hwy 280; just down from the Giants ballpark)

Quadrant 2: work and church in the SoMa neighborhood (it's what you get when you're a church planting family) Church offices and church space were 6-8 blocks from our apartment.

Quadrant 3: school was and still is in the Noe Valley neighborhood. (though it was just 4 miles from the apartment, it was a 20 minute drive; middle of the city)

In our first 31 days, we were operating in three quadrants. If I were to get really specific, we were only operating in two quadrants because we had yet to be placed into a school, so that was still unknown. Settling into our new home in the summer with school-aged kids, we explored our city, but we really focused on the area of town we were in on a daily basis.

Here's how our quadrants work now:

Quadrant 1: we live in the Noe Valley neighborhood.

Quadrant 2: we work in the SoMa neighborhood.

Quadrant 3: we go to school in the Noe Valley neighborhood.

Quadrant 4: we go to church in the SoMa neighborhood.

Living in two quadrants tightens our influence, but deepens it at the same time. I have more opportunities to see Jane and Carol at the gym, post office, and La Boulange because I live and play in this one area of town.

Here are some benefits of living in 4 or less quadrants:

- You start seeing people you know.
- People start recognizing you as you frequent stores, businesses, and restaurants.
- Conversations are extended.
- You are comfortable borrowing a cup of sugar and jumper cables.
- Relationships can go deeper quicker.
- You know when festivals, block parties, and games are happening.
- Our complex world becomes simpler through knowing people and becoming familiar with your surroundings.

People who live sent see their city and the people as a living and breathing part of the journey. I want my city and your city to be a better place. I want you to be more alive and present in the day to day than ever before. I want me and you to live sent. I want our cities to be sad if we ever had to pack up and move on. This can only happen if we choose to live sent.

I'm opening up the pages of our adventures, so that you might courageously begin yours. Each chapter is a way to learn your city. A way to give back or a way to receive from it. 31 days is not nearly enough time to know your city inside and

out, but it's a willful start. I imagine a few surprises along the way. I bet you'll have some stories to post and some tweet-worthy pictures. My favorite thing to imagine is how you're going to feel in 31 days. Exhaustion will be close by, no doubt. Yet a spirit of confidence and loyalty and generosity will be just as present.

To you, the new ones to your town or city...may God grant you the courage to explore. To embrace a new culture, a new understanding of how things operate, a new community.

To you, the ones who are comfortable where you live...may God give you a fresh new look at your surroundings. What's that part of town that still needs your footprints?

Write it down for memory's sake

I have a love relationship with post-it notes and require ginkgo biloba to survive. I call each of my kids every name but their own and walk downstairs forgetting why I went down in the first place. You might have absolutely no clue what the two previous sentences were all about, but I still encourage you to write your 31 days down. Trust me on this one. The longer you call this place home, the less new it will feel and it will begin to lose it's new-car-scent smell. Use descriptions as you write (that means lots of adjectives, even made up words). By doing so, you'll remember specifics and you'll feel the first days all over again. Or at least the ones you want to revisit!

Write it down for others' sake

No surprise here, but you're not the last moving truck to

pull into town. Someone is coming behind you. Tomorrow or next week or the next month. By then, you'll have more days in this place than they will. They will need a friend. They will need to know the free days at the museum and what makes for a great date night restaurant. In your first 31 days in the city, write down your findings and discoveries for them. Your future neighbors. Your future friends.

Write it down for your kids' sake

Kids see far more than we typically give them credit. They will see and experience 31 days differently from you. Depending on their age, they might be taking it all in from a stroller or peering at kneecaps on sidewalks and through museums.

My school-aged son kept a journal and would write and draw pictures each morning about the adventure from the day before. My preschool son used every colored pencil to illustrate his views. The toddler's form of art was through the eyes of Thomas the Train and superheroes. You wouldn't believe where Thomas and Spiderman had been the day before!

Let the kids dictate to you what they see and experience. Share with others at meal time their favorite and least favorite part of the adventure. Re-create the day in a bedtime story at night.

What better way to get to know our new city than exploring and discovering in our first 31 days? Do some research into what is free, discounted, and kid-friendly and

make a list of what you want to see and discover. Of course, weather can determine much in any city, as well as public transit or how long your feet and theirs can walk!

Though I am extremely type A and love a good plan, I love the spontaneity this brings and how our eyes see each adventure differently. Join us on our adventure. I will make mistakes and not everything will go according to plan, but that's what makes it an adventure, right?

Whether you are new to your town or city or have called it home for quite some time, it's worthy of exploring and receiving a different perspective from you and your family.

What's that part of town that still needs your footprints? The best way is to get out there and explore! Mistakes will happen, but discoveries definitely will! As Christ followers, we of all people should know our hometowns and cities the best! Follow me and my family as we seek to explore our city in 31 days. Pull from my learnings and fallings. Derive some ideas that work where you live. You've got this. Your city will be a different place in 31 days and you a thriving local!

Let the mood overtake you as you envision yourself as Jennifer Garner, hitting the streets, feeling electric in your bright pink lipstick and an "I can do this" attitude. Blare up Whitney Houston's "I Wanna Dance With Somebody" in your head and treat these days like you're 13 Going on 30!

This adventure will be far from perfect, but it will be yours. And that's the purpose for this guide—to empower you to explore your city with grit and determination, with wide-eyed

wonder and kids trailing along. Go ahead and make a rough draft of your days. Reference this page as you read through the chapters that await you. As you solidify your adventures, use the numbered lines to plan your 31 days. Raise a coffee cup, sippy cup, or drive-thru cup into the air. Here's to living sent.

Living Sent Draft

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6. _____

7. _____

8. _____

9. _____

10. _____

11. _____

12. _____

13. _____

14. _____

15. _____

16. _____

17. _____

18. _____

19. _____

20. _____

21. _____

22. _____

23. _____

24. _____

25. _____

26. _____

27. _____

28. _____

29.

30.

31.

Living Sent

We knew we could keep living a nice, comfortable life where we were. Work was going well and kids were thriving and growing in a safe, learning environment. We loved our life, our friends, our surroundings. It was just this question of “Is there more?” that kept surfacing. Is there a place that is untouched with the gospel? Is there a shift in lifestyle that would require us to live daily dependent upon God? Would we up and move to such a place? For us, these thoughts were becoming clear in the terms of us leaving a ministry position to start a church. However, when we analyzed this for our family, we did so through the lens any other family would. How would this affect our kids? How strong would a culture be influencing and steering our daily life choices?

As crazy as it sounds, we wanted to live in an urban setting. And for this rural-raised southern girl, the idea was sexy and adventurous, but I had absolutely no idea what this would mean. Urban was a skyline. A setting for romantic movies and thriller movies. Urban was taxis and buses and people of red, yellow, black, and white. Urban was a place to visit. A far-out picture in my head, not a close-up reality.

We wanted to live among influencers. My definition for influencer is one who is making daily strides to pursue a dream of making life better and bringing others along to do the same. Urban settings tend to have more influencers. People flock to cities to accomplish more together. Justin Buzzard, a Bay Area church planter, said this well, “the Bible invites some of us to be city people, to engage our cities just as Jesus did,

to make meaningful contribution to the commerce and culture of our cities.”

We wanted to live among the movers and shakers of an influential city with a family mission to live intentionally

We didn’t want it to be just another move. Just another ministry opportunity. We wanted to live sent. We wanted our move to have meaning, not just a change of address.

The concept of living sent

You know now why I am in San Francisco. If I were to ask you this question, “Why do you live where you live?” what would you say?

I’m here because of work.

I’m here because of school.

I’m here because of family.

I’m here to start a new life.

Answers are as varied as the readers engaged in this book. Some of us have figured this out. Others haven’t. Hence a book on living sent! Sure, it’s obvious why we are here on the surface. That’s the answer we give as to why we live in said city. But there’s reason beyond making a living or a job promotion or lifestyle change. And the kids have purpose in every move too. Their purpose is just as important as yours.

But what if these aren’t actually the reasons you are here, at least not entirely? What if there is a grander purpose

beyond you living where you live? Psalm 139 tells us that God knows where we sit and when we rise up. That certainly includes a move.

The first time we see this show up in the Scriptures is in Genesis 12:1-3 when God speaks to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you.” God heard the cry of His people Israel and wanted to free them from slavery. How would He accomplish this?

Exodus 3:10 records God’s conversation with Moses, “Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.”

God is about sending us to do something. Sending us with purpose.

Esther was queen when her people were threatened of being murdered. Her relative, Mordecai, wanted her to realize that she wasn’t in the kingdom by accident or just to be queen. Look at what he says to her, “For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father’s house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?”

Who knows whether you have been sent for such a time as this. And we find out as her story ends, that no doubt God had sent her to the kingdom for such a crucial time.

God also sent Jonah to a city called Nineveh. Sometimes we aren’t thrilled about the places God sends us. In fact,

that's exactly how Jonah ended up in the belly of a whale. This story still stumps me. This guy refused to go where God was sending him. God was so interested in sending Jonah to Nineveh that even after the crazy whale incident, God sent him again.

"Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, 'Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you.'"

Go to that city for a specific purpose. That's what God was telling him.

Throughout the first century, we see Paul and others consistently being sent to specific places by God to accomplish specific things. These aren't the only people the Bible mentions as being sent by God. Here's the big one:

"But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons."

Jesus was also sent by God at a specific time to a specific place for a specific purpose. But the sending doesn't end there. Jesus offers up to God a prayer for his disciples in John 17. "As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world."

My favorite living sent story in the Scriptures is when God sent the exiles to Babylon. They didn't haphazardly end up there as gluttons for punishment. We don't have to feel sorry for them either. Most people don't feel sorry for us when they

learn we live in San Francisco. However, there have been a few people who have come for a visit and have pity on us and feel like we're doing one of the hardest things ever by living here. When you are sent and live sent, it's a joy! A crazy joy!

Related to the exiles in Babylon is a very popular verse, Jeremiah 29:11. "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord..." I grew up memorizing this in regards to happiness and health, but when you study it in its context, God was saying to the Israelites, "Hey, I know you're in exile in Babylon, but while you are living in a city that is not your home, in a city that is very different from your foundational beliefs, stay there, live at peace with those around you, keeping at the center that I am Your God."

I'm often telling our kids on the way to school that they are ambassadors that day. They get to give kindness, laughter, generosity, knowledge, and help to their teachers and classmates. They have the privilege of being a mighty example of Jesus.

For me personally in answering this question, I take you back to 2009 when we were deciding if we were going to start a church in the city or the suburbs of San Francisco. I remember six of our staff pulling into an industrial park down near San Jose and all of us chiming in with what we believed we were hearing God to be telling us. Mine wasn't very deep, which I've learned to appreciate that God keeps it very simple with me.

For me, living in the city, I would not be able to escape the reality of what we would be here to do. Living very close

to people in a tight space with numerous cultures would be a daily reminder that we are here for reasons beyond making a living. And that our kids are here for more than the obvious that they had to come with us!

Tim Keller states that, “cities have more of the image of God per square inch than any other place on earth.” His reason is that if human beings are who Christ came for and there are more of them living in the city from sheer number, cities are very important. That makes San Francisco important. That makes your town important.

God is a sending God. God has purpose for you and I being where we live beyond the obvious. Then how do we do so practically and creatively?

While the Israelites lived in Babylon, Jeremiah wrote a letter and told them what God had said.

“Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease.”

Maybe God has you building your house. For me, it's renting a house. Planting gardens looks more like buying local produce. Maybe you've got a green thumb and can grow a garden. And God is certainly advocating for growing families! For us, we have three biological sons and are adopting a girl from India. I know other families whose parents relocate to live near them. If you are living sent and teaching your family to

do the same, your impact grows. These verses are packed with practical and creative ways to live sent!

My heart connects well with the heart of Jeremiah. So I'm going to reference him again without getting his permission. He goes on to write the family of Israel, "and this city shall be to me a name of joy, a praise and a glory before all the nations of the earth who shall hear of all the good that I do for them. They shall fear and tremble because of all the good and the prosperity I provide for it."

Christ followers, of all people, should love the places God has us in. We learn to love our cities and towns by knowing them. We know our cities more by engaging. We engage our cities when we attend sporting events, get a library card, dine at restaurants, play in the parks, ride transit, run marathons, shop locally, meet the neighbors.

A prayer for living sent

Start off by praying Jeremiah 33:9.

God, You love this city and the people that fill it. I pray that this city shall be to You a name of joy, a praise and a glory before all the nations of the earth who shall hear of all the good that You do for us. Cause us to fear and tremble because of all the good and the prosperity You provide for it.

My home, San Francisco, should be prayed for daily by me. The best place I do this is while sandwiched on the train in the mornings. I can look at their faces and pray for the hurting, the depressed, the stressed, the angry.

Christ followers are the light of the world. The salt of the earth. We have a message to proclaim through our words and actions in our time here on earth. We will bless our city when we seek the good of the city and do so in Jesus' Name. People around us are taking care of the earth and helping the homeless. But our city will be blessed when we do so for Christ and because of Christ.

The best part of living sent is that we get to simply live like Christ asks of us. For me, it's in a really amazing place full of brokenness and beauty wrapped up together. How about you? What's the best part of living where you live?

While you're living sent, people will be attracted to your lifestyle and life choices. These are the ones that are easier to talk to about your faith because they are curious. So by all means, share your story. Why you live there. What you enjoy doing in your city. How you are contributing and settling in.

Also while you are living sent, people will be uncomfortable and unimpressed with your lifestyle and life choices. While you may not be able to have conversations about your faith, you can certainly have conversations about the weather. A conversation breaks the loneliness barrier no matter the subject. And know that at the very least, they are watching how you live, work, parent, and give.

A disclaimer: Challenges with living sent

I know that I'm married to a pastor and I kinda do this thing because of our ministry. That's why we moved to San Francisco in the first place - to start a church. To live sent.

That doesn't get me off the hook or make it any easier. I'm introverted. Spending time with people zaps my energy. I have to pull away from crowds to recharge. Being with people requires more of me than it does for others. I'm not a natural people person like my husband and middle child. And then when you throw in the spiritual factor, my palms produce excessive sweat.

I've been on the soccer field sharing my story when the mom interrupted me to ask who Jesus is. I've been on the playground meeting a family who just moved from Japan. As we were sharing our very different stories, she asked me if my pastor husband wore a priest robe. That excessive sweat comes when conversations get challenging or when I feel inadequate (which is 9.5 times out of 10). I put our family out on the line when we host something for our neighborhood, wondering if anyone will show up. No one showed up for our egg hunt. Six people showed up for our ice cream social and the whole street came by for cookies and cocoa last Christmas.

We want to be a family, to the best of our ability, that models living sent. We mess up and I often lead the way in how "not to do it." I look around in the parks and on the school yard and see countless families that are making it work. Who are accepting the challenges. Challenges come with city living. Challenges come with living sent. Instead of looking to the city on how to face these challenges, people of the city should be looking to us. We, as Christians, should display how to love our city. I know our city needs to see radical, Jesus-inspired generosity and love.

Sink roots where you call home for now. Your zip code, your street, your neighborhood will be a better place if you do. Because I believe this:

We, of all people, should laugh the loudest, give the most, and love better than anyone else in the places we call home.

While I can't say how long each of us has been sent to the places we presently call home, I can tell you this: God is a sending God. If you are here and shouldn't be anywhere else, you must conclude that God has sent you here. And if He has you here, it can't just be for a job or pleasure or just because. So why has He sent you here? And how do we live as people who have been sent?

Day 1

Buy Local

"Think globally, act locally." - Paul McCartney

From my 31 days journal:

One by scooter, two by stroller, me and my three stair-step boys set out on foot to the farmer's market. We passed by a shack letting off beefy smells that would lead us to believe they were flipping burgers inside. My kindergarten-accomplished-meat-eater started to salivate. I joined him in the act, but peanut butter and jelly sandwiches packed inside an insulated tote would have to suffice today. Our attention steered to the homeless encampment across the street. The boys most definitely thought the men had the coolest place ever as a row of camping tents lined the chain-linked fence. The shopping carts filled to the brim threw the boy's imaginations to the moon. I could see their mental wheels turning. A campout with your friends. No one to tell you when

to go to bed. Strolling through the city with everything you own. Their thoughts stayed tucked away for another day. I let them think solo on this one. It's good for them to process life within the close proximity of a truthful and loving adult. In this scenario, it was me.

Scoot and stroll we did until we could see the clock tower ahead and the Bay Bridge spanning just above our heads. Artists displayed their work on canvases, wine bottles, t-shirts and the sidewalk. Observing their display gave insight into how well they were doing. Struggling and starving artists abound indeed, but they are profoundly rich in the trying. Just as sumptuous local food abounded in the display of tent-shaded mountains of fruit ahead.

San Francisco has several farmers markets in the city, the largest being at the Ferry Building on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. We had heard that it was very crowded on Saturdays with tourists, residents, and local chefs, so we opted to go on a weekday. New friends from our apartment complex came along and our stroll along the bay was complete.

A feeling came over me. One that demanded I not approach what stood ahead without a degree in the culinary arts or pomology. Strolling through with wide-eyes, all of us, we knew we were not in the grocery store produce section anymore. An experience was about to be had.

Large plastic signs clearly introduced the nearby farm name and bay area location in every tent. The farmer's faces were proud of the work they were bringing to us. Carrots were displayed in mounds with their funny roots screaming, "I'm

going to tickle you, kiddos!” Not sure about my previous life, but my new life was going to require me to learn that more than three types of cheese exist. Holy cow! {sorry} The rounds of cheese. Cheese that bobs in a container of water. Cheese that smells like I’d never dare put that in my mouth. The boys preferred to tell the dairy farmers an honest “no thanks” as they pinched their noses ever so tightly. “Sample me” signs were our favorite signs. Oh the strawberries! And the almond chocolate brittle!

With our family budget, the market prices were a little much, but for the experience we purchased two peaches! Most vendors delighted in telling us about their organic and fresh produce and products. Me and the kids sampled strawberries, peaches, nectarines, and Scream Sorbet flavors such as snap pea, chocolate peanut butter, and apricot. We smelled, tasted, and passed over fresh sauerkraut, local honey, and blueberries. Our day one was clearly a summer one accentuating what was presently harvested from the farms.

More of the Ferry Building was explored and then our scooters and strollers took us to the water fountains across the Embarcadero. Forgetting all about those beefy smells of burgers, we enjoyed our picnic lunch and the boys indulged in a mad chase with the pigeons. Pigeons always win at the game. Shucks.

{End of journal entry}

To buy local is typified in a farmers market or artisan fair, yet local can be bought anywhere. Local can be supported by anyone. The more “anyones” the more local can thrive.

Louisiana local

In a town in rural Louisiana where citizenship seems to be offered to you upon your seven-year mark and where college students come in by the droves and create a ghost town in the summer months, peach orchards abound. With just a single little one to buckle up in the car, we'd take the afternoon drive out to the county line to buy direct. That's local. Buying straight from the farmer himself.

Alabama local

In another college town just a day's drive on the same major U.S. interstate from the Louisiana one, sits a City Cafe. Its delicacies range from fried okra to cream corn to chicken fried steak. And the list continues depending on what day of the week it is. It's 15 or so booths that can't contain all the college students and hospital employees and business folk and mommas with their kiddos on their lunch break. That kitchen staff arrives before the sun rises and though the cafe closes in mid-afternoon, I imagine they work until dark to prepare for the repeated mass tomorrow.

Missouri local

Take a dozen and a score back roads up and west

and up and west again to a bubble-like community in the Ozarks of southern Missouri. A coffee shop brews it's offerings nestled among shops in a connected-shopping-center-sort-of-way. But it's local. It's where my hardest and easiest conversations happened with friends with the largest mug ever sitting between us. Conversations about book ideas. Conversations with a woman who demonstrates her blind faith to the world. A place to gather with friends before I say good bye and move west. A place to revisit and enjoy a latte with a dear friend.

California local

It took a plane to get me here, but my adventurous husband took one for the team and drove the 1,989 miles with our stuff. The neighborhood we moved into had the new car scent all over it. It's what "they" were calling up-and-coming (whoever "they" were). Residential high rises abounded and were anchored with new shops and restaurants like Walgreens, Safeway, Borders, Panera, and Philz Coffee. Not until my fearful hands got a hold of the steering wheel of the van and ventured into other neighborhoods did I discover that local establishments were far superior to familiar signs in my neighborhood. San Francisco is so local that legislation was passed in 2004 to limit the number of chain stores. Ironically, San Francisco is home to big name brands like Gap and Gymboree and Levi's. Some of which began as local clothing

stores are now global brands. In four years of living sent, I have deemed local hubs that I support. A local hub is a cluster of small businesses, restaurants, and retail shops. If I'm in Pac Heights, I'm going to eat at Dino's, indulge at Sift, and meander through the Nest and Athleta {which has gone national}. If I'm in the Richmond district, I'm going to buy my bing cherries from the sweet Asian ladies at their market and stock up on books for gifts at Green Apple. My day in the Richmond would be not be complete without the comfort food at Mandalay Burmese restaurant, my top five favorite restaurant in the city.

To buy local is not contained to a building or farm stand. Do you hear that knock on the door or that pull on your heart when you are running in to buy groceries? Buying local is supporting that school-aged kid with his chocolate bars and that homemade-shrink-wrapped cookie to get her to Europe this summer.

I could have easily bought the book on Amazon and our family thrives on such an Amazon budget, but we cherish and own less books when we say yes to buying from the bookstore in our neighborhood.

Ever-growing markets of local artisans can now tap into the world-wide web, taking them beyond the neighborhood. Book and clothing distributors aren't restricted to local stores or even the superstores as the internet frees them to advertise with Google ads that pop up when you'd rather them not. Local has truly gone global. My friends in Kenya

and Ghana are selling their products here in Oklahoma and California. And their lives are better for it. What local chef or artist doesn't want to be world-famous? Who's not looking to make it big? You and me play a part in helping them succeed. We play a part in their self-esteem. Our buying local speaks into the farms, the small town businesses, the coffee shops, the hair stylists, the chefs, the gardeners. No one can get the backstory and know the artist or chef like you can in your town.

To buy local is to invest. To invest is to make impact. To make impact is to strengthen community. To strengthen community is to realize you are making a difference in the place you call home.

Looking back at my first farmers market experience, I thought their produce ridiculously overpriced. Now that I call the same place home as the vendors and farmers, I get it. They need the money for rent and \$6 milk and \$4.50 gas, too. Produce is cheaper at the store, but more fun at the market. Me and the kids also discovered that walks are more fun when you have scooters and new friends.

What can you buy locally? Does your city have a farmers market? I'm sure it has local boutiques and mom and pop restaurants. Deck out your kitchen table with flowers from the local florist. Make this one of your family mottos—"Support the Locals."

Day 2

Cultural Experience

No culture can live if it attempts to be exclusive. -

Mahatma Gandhi

See

See the people and what makes them tick.

See the times of day that have people moving at rapid speeds.

See how school children respond to life in the afternoon after the bell has rung.

See construction going up and down and out.

See the decorations that explain what people celebrate.

See how people get around. what direction they are going.

See the flow of traffic.

See the bags in their hands. where are they shopping?

*See the plaids. the denims. the grays. the monogrammed
lettering.*

See how they stay warm and what they do to cool off.

*See what they rally around. what makes them well up with
pride.*

*See the signs. governmental. spray painted. city ordained.
management written. modern. vintage. peeled off. barely
there.*

*See what moves them. what would hurt them or grieve them
or aggravate or frustrate them.*

See what they tote and carry.

See what they are reading.

See what they are drinking.

See how they dress on weekdays and weekends.

See the homeless.

See what's in the windows of the stores.

See the places barred and gated. it's okay to wonder.

See what's for sale. homes. businesses. retail.

See what they're eating.

See what they're seeing.

Make your own “see” list. Highlight the positives. Circle the negatives. Challenge the kids to write their own “see” list. Seeing is half of living sent.

In these 31 days, a large portion of the adventure is in what you observe and what captures your attention. You will find

that what looks familiar to you will remind you of something from a place you've lived or visited before. What looks, smells, and feels different will awaken a hodgepodge of emotions. Fear will grip you. Heart palpitations come when the kids touch everything in sight and then insert those same hands in mouth. That funny taste in your mouth just might become a delight in a short while.

We Americans tend to pay for cultural experiences. A trip to Africa. A medical mission trip to South America. Humanitarian aid brought to Haiti. Some of our neighbors think it a cultural experience to give proceeds or tax write-offs to benefit a group of people different from them. We'll dine with chopsticks and take our shoes off at the door of our eastern friends' home. All to say we've experienced another culture.

Home for you might be all of one color. The homes in your town are a similar shape and size. Everyone shops at the same grocery store and attends one of the fifteen churches. Your kids go to the same birthday parties, and everyone will be at Friday night's sporting event. Open both eyes. Your eyes might have to roam the neighborhood or the corners of your town a few more back-and-forths than I do, but there is another culture to experience in your one-color-city.

Home might be so new that you've yet to cross the street to the home that looks completely different from yours. You might already describe your new place as rather colorful. Welcome to my world. And I knew that before we made the move. Engaging with other cultures and people different from

you causes the paint cans to spill and run together.

From my 31 days journal:

China...as the boys called it! For the first time in the city, without Ben, I looked up the bus schedule and planned our route to Chinatown. San Francisco was still startling new to us. The bus system, even newer. Me and the boys were the clan at the bus stop wearing tags hung from swift attachers. We looked fresh out of the clear packaging and still had the “New” sticker adhered to us. Asher, my then-two-year-old, absolutely loved public transit. No buckles. No straps. Free ride. As for me, I loved public transit when we got to our destination.

Grant Avenue is the street home to Chinatown. It is the largest outside of Asia and the oldest Chinatown in North America. Elijah, racing toward age seven too fast, quickly noticed all streets that crossed Grant Avenue throughout Chinatown were written in Chinese characters with the English words above. He felt pretty impressed that he could read them.

Sam, who then was four years old, loved all the stores for every one of them sold the exact same trinkets and souvenirs. He continually picked up the \$4.99 samurai sword, expensive stress relief balls, and toy cable cars. It was an endless street of dollar store items to him.

We all dined for \$4.65 at Floating Boat Sushi with two entrees and a huge side of rice. Now don't start thinking this was anything unusual. It's what you would get at the mall food court. Nonetheless, it was in China as the boys called

it! We ventured into the Wok Shop and discovered that they sold a bag of freshly made fortune cookies: 12 for \$1.25. Our snack-loving Sam loved them. I think he ate eight of them throughout the course of the day. As we strolled along Grant Avenue, I noticed lots of pretty Chinese blouses and scarves. I took a minute while the boys were looking at the infamous samurai swords to feel the beautiful scarves hanging on a rack. A persistent older Chinese woman begged us to come into her shop and see more scarves. As if three boys weren't convincing evidence to not dare enter the tiny store, I tried with words to convince her, but she insisted. Scarves carried my eyes all the way from floor to ceiling. There had to be 400 scarves in this ten foot by ten foot space. Organized by fabric, plaids fed into floral fed into solid fed into striped fed into cashmere fed into silk. This lady had a system. Tucked away in a space that would just hold her, was a small black and white tv, a tea kettle and a hot pot. I gathered she spent most of her days in this very room.

The boys made friends easily with the woman as she treated them like her grandchildren. She bribed them to be still with dum-dum suckers. It worked for the 2 minutes it takes to devour such a tiny treat.

Me and the boys all took turns introducing ourselves to Kit as she also asked us to spell our names so she made sure she was saying them correctly. Of course, I had to buy some scarves. It was ministry. Kit told me she was giving me a great deal since I was her new friend and since I was lucky to have three boys. Lucky is a word that I have since heard often from the Chinese culture. Three means "san" and is associated with

the three stages of man's life (birth, marriage, and death). The sound of the number is also important as it sounds like "sheng" meaning growth. I made a promise that me and the boys would be back. She welcomed our company and I looked forward to visiting with Kit every so often.

Eyes wide open, we exited Kit's scarf shop and I owed the boys for their patience in her 10 foot by 10 foot space. A fabulous discovery was made as we ventured back to catch the bus home. I tilted my head just right to see a playground nestled in St. Mary's Square while standing at a crosswalk. At least that's what the sign said it was. Remember, I'm fresh out of my package with a "new" sticker on me. It had a great playground nicely fenced in to keep roaming toddlers contained. The equipment fit the boy's age group perfectly. Elijah made a friend named Eli from Sacramento and Sam mastered his coordination skills across the ropes. Asher loved the train he could board all on his own. I was happy to plant myself on the bench and give my eyes and body a rest. To just keep an eye on the boys was such a break. My mind was swirling with new sights and new bus routes and a new friend and her thoughts of us.

{End of journal entry}

The more you interact with a culture the more you learn. The more you learn, the more you begin to understand their way of life. The more you understand their way of life, the

more friendships are established.

China, as the boys called it, was just the beginning to exploring such cultures in our city. Our exploring of Grant Avenue had to first be planned before I could think beyond the realm of possibilities and the fears that gripped learning something so new. That's the beauty of living sent. What begins with one day at a time, sampling the places you call home, opens up freshness and insight and breaks down assumed walls that otherwise remain barriers to friendship and growth.

Now that I've learned our city a little more, if I find myself over in the Richmond District, I'm running into the Asian market to bag the most delicious bing cherries. I haven't gotten much further than the cherries, as for me, there are still many unrecognizable produce. Yet, the people are just as varied as the market items. The men hastily empty boxes from the truck beds. The ladies know their store inside and out and are eager to help you find what you are looking for and more! And the customers are regulars. Even me.

North Beach is home to Joe DiMaggio and is the Italian neighborhood in the city. It's quite obvious with smells of garlic and tomatoes simmering in dozens of restaurant kitchens all in a row. North Beach shares a border with Chinatown and it's in Washington Square where countless older Asians practice Tai Chi daily. I want to be that focused and nimble when I'm their age. Such grace and patience abounds through such a culture.

Cultural experiences come in all shapes, sizes and

colors. Ben and I were invited to attend a special dinner and presentation for some of our best friends in the city. The husband was receiving an award for being one of the most admired CEOs in the Bay Area. Yes, we have such a friend! Held in the Four Seasons Hotel, we began the evening mingling and exchanging greetings with some of San Francisco's finest business people and entrepreneurs. In a few short minutes, I felt like I needed to quickly whip up a career path with titles and experience.

Verbalizing my accolades as a stay-at-home mom with three public school-aged kids didn't seem to me that it would lead to a conversation longer than forty-five seconds. Not that my life isn't interesting, but I think it would overwhelm the career woman and her life would overwhelm me. I was enamored as the banquet room opened and we took our seats around the table that honored our friends. Throughout the night, distinguished men and women gave speeches on their work ethics and the leadership and vision they give to their companies. As our friend took the platform, Ben and I could not have been more proud. He gave credit to his upbringing, his wife and daughter, and his faith in God. Applause erupted. My mind's wheels turned more. On any given day on the streets of the city, the career woman and I would look cultures apart. Yet tonight we gathered in the same banquet room, she in her daily attire, I in my once-in-a-blue-moon attire, and we cheered on the leaders of our city. A cultural experience quite different from Chinatown.

We are not at a loss for good places to eat in our city. Several years into living sent, we now enjoy dinner with

friends whose roots are from Hawaii, Korea, Ghana, China, Texas and Russia. Ben is eating Pho' and both of us are more adventurous than ever before. Our moms would be proud. On one particular night at the end of a long Sunday, we met up with friends, who, in our San Francisco life, would be considered longtime friends, having met them shortly after we moved. They run in different circles than we do for many reasons. Their kids go to French school and speak Mandarin at home. They cheer on their lawyer dad and make frequent trips to visit grandparents just down the coast to L.A.

Any time with them is an equal cultural exchange for the four of us. She is drawn to my southern dialect that resurrects itself in the evening hours or when I'm talking with my mom. Plus, they are always so interested in how Ben got this church thing going. Within ten to fifteen minutes of initial conversation at the dinner table, the server asked us how we liked our meat cooked. We gave our answers and she let us know it would be our ninth course. Ben's eyes grew larger than life. I could see his eyes right before me and at the same time see my friend's eyes in my peripheral looking at Ben's. What? We had never gone past a five-course meal. And if the ninth was meat, chances were there was more! This was going to be a fabulous cultural experience.

Cultural experiences happen more than we cognitively realize. It's in the realization of such that we learn about the small world we call home. Take the time to debrief with each other after encountering moments different from the normal. Otherwise, you live parallel to those different from you, doing your own thing beside each other, rather than with each other.

What's an area of town that is quite different from yours? The sights are obviously different. Even the smells and vibe are not familiar. What do you see? How do the people in this part of town do life? What have you experienced that is new and refreshing, yet quite opposite your lifestyle? Who is someone you can learn from as they view life from a different vantage point?

Day 3

Library

"The only thing that you absolutely have to know is the location of the library." - Albert Einstein

From my 31 days journal:

Francisco was our first impression of our neighborhood library. His name is fitting for the place we now call home, right? His childhood was packaged and preserved in Mexico and now he is studying photography in the city. The month we arrived in the city his pictures were on display in the gallery space of the library lobby. We told him our favorites and made an instant friend. Francisco gave us a tour of the library and a brief history. Brief is always key with kids, and we are all better for it. While libraries are 99.9% books, the puzzles, coloring sheets and mounted wooden games on the wall lend themselves to the outward imaginations of the kids. They read for a little bit then put their thoughts to work on paper or

daydreaming on a beanbag cushion on the floor.

{End journal entry}

Katherine is our newest library friend. She works in the children's library in our Noe Valley neighborhood. Amazon gives you direct access to books these days, but it's Katherine who tells us her favorite childhood books and the heroes inside them. And we tell her our stories. Katherine wants adoption updates and little league scores. She wants to know what the kids are learning in school and what was their favorite book they just returned. I can think of fewer delights than revisiting our library and what it does to the librarians to have us back again. I think they're smiling for the book's sake.

Today is the day to begin this friendship at your library. Since there's typically not a food truck line at the library front desk, you have easy access to the library staff. Learn their names and how long they have lived in your town or have worked at the library. Ask them what they love about where you both live. It's the librarians that speak on behalf of the books and are the gatekeepers to a world of imagination and exploration.

Don't let the smell of a large collection of older books frighten you. We run in the opposite direction of silence and that's what we think a library embodies - smelly silence. After countless visits to our library with preschoolers and

grade-schoolers, we bring the myths to a halt. A library is a building, yes, stacked high with information, but with a wind of community breathing through the rows and pages. An open library says there is still life in your community.

I think it ironic that the large chain bookstores resemble libraries. Chairs provided for a restful read from the outside world with no pressure to leave with a book. Rather just cherish it while inside and then place it back upon the shelf with your fingerprints still attached. It's the library that lets you walk away with scores of books of your choosing. It's the library that invites you back again and again. A library is a friendship in the city. It always welcomes regardless of age, size or status.

After you've made introductions with the librarian, take a look around. The man trying to get back on his feet can check out a laptop computer while at the library and work on his resume. The mom, or in San Francisco, the nanny, plans her day around story time. The kids with backpacks are getting ahead on their studies or trying to keep up.

Libraries show you what your city cares about. Is it new? Is it updated? Is the staff eager to order a book or request a book that is not available? Notice the fliers posted on the community board. What's happening and who's hosting? You can gather a wealth of information by looking around and you haven't even gotten a library card or checked out a book yet!

We shy away from something that is free and open to the public thinking there are others who need it more. If that's how we treat a community, we grow all the more segmented.

While you might have stacks of books at home and on your device, people in your community depend on information that they can only get at a library. Your support of the library is supporting their need.

Libraries do everything they can to help you thrive and learn. Not a standard across-the-board list of services, but many offer:

- Homework help with tutors and volunteers
- To request a book not on the shelf
- Language learning
- Accessibility (libraries come to you on wheels or in the mail)
- Meeting rooms
- E-books
- Reference materials
- Printing services
- Classes of all sorts (DIY, computer skills, filing your taxes, caring for the earth)
- Summer reading programs

I'll be honest and say four out of five of us have library cards. Not saying names, Ben. Trips to the library were a part of my childhood as my mom would drop me and my middle-school friends off to work on a report. Back in the day, we would reference Encyclopedia Britannica, not Google. We'd

walk a few blocks past the library and get a snack at the convenient store and then eat under the shade of the library awning. The library was an experience. It was a resource. It was a staple part of my town.

It's time to get a library card for whoever in the family wants one. Usually the kid's cards don't collect late fees. That's nice. My cookbooks are always checked out on the kid's cards. Check out books that speak into the age levels of your family. Today is the day to make friends with the library.

Where is the most accessible library near you? {Insert lines} It's helpful to look around online to know the hours and programs available. You can peruse the catalog and see what books are on the shelf.

I'm a hoarder of great books. Yet, I recklessly give away titles of great books that anyone in my family has consumed. I've invited my kiddos in to share their favorites, their classics. But I'll go first, since it's you I'm writing.

Living sent requires some encouragement from the outside world. Even from the imaginative world. These books I share with you speak to living in a new place, missing home and making friends. Not necessarily all together, but necessarily helpful indeed.

So Close by Natalia Colombo {children's book}

Here I Am by Patti Kim {children's book}

Toot and Puddle books by Holly Hobbie {children's books}

The Art of Neighboring by Jay Pathak and Dave Runyon
{religious}

Organized Simplicity by Tsh Oxenreider

Conspiracy of Kindness by Steve Sjogren {religious}

Spiritual Rhythm by Mark Buchanan {religious}

Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable
Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent and Lead by
Brene' Brown

The boys want a turn.

- Press Here by Herve' Tullet
- Tickle Monster by Josie Bissett
- Knuffle Bunny books by Mo Willems
- Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge by Mem Fox
- Roxaboxen by Alice McLerran
- Sylvester and the Magic Pebble by William Steig
- The Story of Ferdinand by Munro Leaf
- The Giving Tree by Shel Silverstein
- Roald Dahl books (especially James and the Giant Peach and Charlie and the Chocolate Factory and Charlie and the Glass Elevator)
- Robert Munsch books (especially Thomas' Snowsuit and Love You Forever)

- The Hundred Dresses by Eleanor Estes
- The Adventures of TinTin by Herge
- Lost City Chronicles by Daniel Blackaby

That library card certifies you as a local as much as the driver's license certifies you as a capable person behind the wheel. Here's to more plastic in our wallets, more books in our tote bags and the smelly silence in our home as we indulge into our imaginations.

Day 4

Meet the Animals

"Well, it's true. We do not live in a zoo. But Man is an animal too. So why can't you, like me, Like animals?" -

Dr. Doolittle

I seek not to offend you pet lovers, but we prefer to visit the animals, not raise them in our home. This day will look different for each of us as we have different feelings for the feline and bird and reptile kinds.

Go to the zoo. Make a visit to the local animal shelter. Take your dog to the dog park. This is from observation only, but it appears that animals have a way of bringing people together. Conversations arise as you ask the age, the breed, the name of someone's pet. Smiles abound and pride wells up.

Without hesitation, I made the easy choice for our family to meet the animals. We would visit them at the zoo. We could "ooh" and "aahh" with some distance between us and consider

ourselves animal lovers when we left.

From my 31 days journal:

A perk to living in our city is the family pass that's available at our public library. It will become more of a national thing, but for this year, the family pass program is being piloted here in our city. And we are grateful for it. You see, there are eighteen attractions in the city that you can "check out" for up to two adults and four kids for free admission. I scored the zoo family pass this week and since my pastor husband is doing this church planting thing full time, I invited two very new friends of ours to join us. You can certainly live sent as a family, but the benefits are far-reaching when you invite others to do life and learn to love our city with you. So we packed a sack lunch and parked on a side street making for a free adventure.

It seemed like all the animals came out to welcome us to their city. But seriously, I knew many, if not all of them, were transplants, too. 90% of them were out and visible. Elijah led us with the zoo map in hand. He's that first born leader. Sam talked to each of them in their native language—a skill mastered by middle-child syndrome. Asher, like myself, was thankful for the glass walls and fences that separated him from the animals.

We ended our time at the children's petting zoo. The boys brushed the goats and felt the thick coats of sheep. They agreed the zoo would be a place we would return as often as we could.

We had no idea during our first 31 days that the zoo would be an annual field trip once school began. We would have never guessed that we would visit these animals again and again with classmates and teachers.

The zookeepers, with all of their education, knowledge and skill set, do everything to create a flourishing and natural habitat for each animal. These animals were born in other countries. Their move probably wasn't easy. Imagine the giraffe as he steps out into his new home for a leisurely stroll to stumble upon a rather large metal barrier of some sort. Confusion. Bewilderment. I don't pretend to think like a giraffe, but given similar circumstances, that's what took place for me with a move to quite a different habitat. Thinking and willing life to be as normal and smooth as possible until stumbling upon a barrier, a change, something new or different.

Your new place might resemble your old place quite well. But in time, a day or a week or a month, you will stumble upon bewilderment. That very emotion can cause a spiral down or a launchpad to discovery. What do you do when you stumble upon something different? How do you process it as a family?

You've gotten the point that we're not animal people. Love them for they are God's creation, but thankful to the rest of humanity that sees fit to raise them and give them a home. In our former life {that's life before San Francisco} we didn't encounter too many animals for they lived in backyards and inside homes. It didn't take but a step outside our city apartment to discover dogs are just as numerous as people in our city. To be exact, there are more dogs than children in the

place we now call home.

Folks begin and end their days on the sidewalk with their furry roommates. It baffles me how they naturally scoop down and bag their pet's poop and keep strolling along. It will always seem far easier to change a diaper than that sidewalk duty. Nonetheless, we knew that meeting animals was a conversation starter and we were all about starting conversations in our new place. However, the boys and I learned that you don't just pet whatever animal you come upon.

You must first ask the owner. Upon approval, you stick your hand out for the dog to smell you and agree. Then the petting can begin and conversation can roll from dog's age to breed to name to human interests like, "How long have you lived here? Where do you live? What do you do here in the city?"

While animals aren't our thing, the people that own them are. We long for friendships. For relationships. To know what people love and do. Those taking their dogs out for a stroll are relaxed and traveling at a dog's pace. They have time for conversation and are happy to share their canine stories. Interestingly enough, they want to hear your stories, too.

So be creative on this one. If you have a pet, this day will be easy breezy for you. You're already knowledgeable and can use that pet of yours to strike up conversation. For others, it will be finding a place to meet the animals and your kids will love you for it. Regardless, use this day to notice your new habitat. What's similar to your previous one? What's different. Use the differences to launch you into new discovery. Pray

against the enemy using them to cause a spiral down to complaints and regrets.

Day 5

Day at the Museum

“Living is like tearing through a museum. Not until later do you really start absorbing what you saw, thinking about it, looking it up in a book, and remembering—because you can’t take it in all at once.” - Audrey Hepburn

Big or small. Art or aerospace. Museums can pique your interests or bring out a yawn. Whatever the case may be, museums display your culture’s values. You won’t know until you step inside.

Museums capture your city’s treasures. Mobile, Alabama, and San Diego, California’s, museums are battleships. Dayton, Ohio, and McMinnville, Oregon’s, museums are aircraft. Lighthouses are museums on St. Simon’s Island, Georgia, and in Rockland, Maine. Pearl Harbor and Lower Manhattan’s blocks of the World Trade Center are memorial locations that

have become places where we remember—museums that seem to speak the voices of the heroes and those we honor.

I would not classify our family as museum folk. I just wouldn't. I'm the history buff and if someone is suggesting a museum around our household, it's me. So during our first 31 days, we found quite a few and we all have a more well-rounded view of museums, especially the ones that are interactive. Though we all appreciate art affixed to a wall, right?

From my 31 days journal

Just across the never-gets-old-of-seeing-it Golden Gate Bridge, sits in the old Fort Baker bunkers the Bay Area Discovery Museum. We have only been to a few children's museums in the country and one thing is true of them all: kids get to let their imagination run free without the expense of tearing down your house. The boys are hoisting up fish and crabs from the "bay" below where they can take them to "Fisherman's Wharf" and sell them or put them on "train tracks" or load them on "boats."

The room was set up like the Port of San Francisco with tunnels that seemed like you were under sea and toll booths where you could collect pretend money. There was an enormous train track that filled up half the room. Elijah discovered how to make a boat out of foam and see if it could stand the waves. It took a few sinkings before it stayed afloat. Sam and Asher turned the wheel to see how the waves affect the ocean floor.

Outside at Lookout Cove, the kids pretended a hurricane was at sea. It was amazing to watch how other kid's imaginations sparked another kid's and how the story seemed to continue as kids had to leave or lost interest while others picked up where they had left off.

Meanwhile, Asher put on a construction vest and hard hat and began work on the unfinished "bridge."

The art studio allowed the kids to paint, play with sand art, build with blocks, or paint the windows. Another part of the studio provided the kids with recycled products and tape and scissors to encourage them to create a space thing.

We discovered much today and who knows where the kids will go in the future, but it's looking bright for sure!

Another entry from my journal:

Like I wrote, not everything goes according to plan and sometimes it works out better than planned! We made the drive over to Golden Gate Bridge in an effort to walk across, but as we approached the west side of town, the fog was thick. Too thick to enjoy the bridge and the view. So, we detoured a little and drove through the Presidio.

A beautiful location on the bay and the ocean, the Presidio has amazing architecture and a national cemetery. The Presidio was once a military outpost and when the base was decommissioned and the land made available, it was the movers and shakers that moved in. But the exciting part for our boys is that Lucasfilm Ltd. operates a 1,500 employee

digital art complex on site!

The facility doesn't conduct tours anymore, but we got to see a few statues, original lightsabers, blasters, and other paraphernalia from the movies in the lobby. Ben and I wondered what takes place behind all the closed doors.

Sam asked, "Can I give Darth Vader a hug?" Maybe he thinks his soft side will turn Vader over to the good side!

Though our boys are young, they greatly love the classic Star Wars and still dream of George Lucas having them over to talk about more movies or Jedi training!

What does your city have to offer in the form of museums? Museums are a beautiful collection of the values and history of the place you now call home. The fastest way to an "I'm a local" badge is right through the doors of a museum.

And for you Pinterest-addicts or "I need something else to hang on my barren wall" people, turn your home into a museum. Wipe away the vision you have right now of an armored soldier in the hallway. Although that would be pretty awesome. Bring back treasures from your outings such as leaves or posters or brochures. Save ticket stubs from your experiences in the city. Then pull them out upon every year on the anniversary from when you moved.

Hanging on our living room wall are four square frames, each with a large-as-your-face leaf from a hike our family took one Thanksgiving. On the fireplace mantel are three mason jars belonging to each of our children. Those lovely rocks they collect as treasure and give you as a gift? Yes there's a place

for them! Our jars are filled with rocks, sea glass from the shore, and acorns from who knows how many parks!

At the end of our 31 days in the city, I distributed large white paper to the boys and asked them to illustrate their favorite thing about our new home. These artistic renderings are, of course, framed, in the hallway, where no money in the world could obtain them. Use that getting-home-set-up money for living sent! Our home now tells the story of our city and what we love about it. And I thought we weren't museum folks!

Day 6

Go Team Go!

[sung to original tune of Take Me Out to the Ballgame]

Take me out to the ballgame

Take me out to the park. (Balboa)

Bring me a sweater, scarf and a coat.

I don't care how much we have to tote.

Cause it's root, root, root for the Bears.

If they don't win, it's okay. (they don't keep score)

For it's one, two, three cheers you get

At The Junior Giants ballgames.

{Written and never sung by me}

This is a no-brainer for the Pilgreen family. No matter how many museums or restaurants we go to, none will equate to the ball fields and sporting events that draw us in.

I see absolutely nothing wrong with using the kids' activities to start conversations. I actually see so many positives. Our oldest had played t-ball in our former life and we knew that youth sports could be a magnet for friendship building. Ben and I looked strangely at each other in the parking lot the night of our first baseball meeting in the city.

"Are we ready to meet total strangers and do life with them for the summer?" I'm not sure who asked the question or how the other answered, but we weren't ready. Newcomers never are. At the same time, those living sent don't let new things keep them indoors or to themselves. Living sent requires embracing the new. Living sent sets fear aside. So out of the van and into the parent meeting we went.

In our few shorts years of calling San Francisco home, we've asked the question again and again every time we start a new sports season.

Our first summer it was the Junior Giants baseball program. Ben signed up to coach. How about that for intentionality? Church planters are desperate from the get-go. Our oldest would show up for games decked out with Mardi Gras beads and sunglasses on the most overcast, cold and foggy afternoons that summer. The rest of our clan never boxed up our winter accessories. We were learning you wear them year-round in the city. We sat in the stands with heavy coats, gloves, scarves and beanies.

We enlisted another couple who had moved out to plant the church with us. In early church-planting days, you will stop at nothing to build relationships. Simultaneously, there was simply a short list of things to do that summer: learn the city and meet people. We all had time for baseball. It allowed for more of us to engage in conversations. Sitting in the stands and being new, we each did a good amount of listening to others. Listening to why they moved to the city. Hearing stories of cold summers and summer camps and Mandarin classes. Learning how they get around and what they do for a living.

By the end of the season, we gathered one night and ordered lots of pizza and played a fun game of baseball at a field close to our house. It was the windiest day ever with absolutely no conversation for we were all eating fast and furious and picking up paper plates blown here and there. However, lots of smiles and thumbs up were offered from one another as we scarfed down our food and were all grateful for new friends and lots of city information.

We are a little biased when it comes to our favorite athletes for we are raising three of them. And like I said, there is no shame in being their agents as we interact with their teammates and coordinate playdates after practice. Baseball is our family thing and has strong interest in our city. What is it for your family and your city?

On rainy days, I'll take the boys to a city gym to play basketball. Towering African American and Korean teenagers do not seem to intimidate my elementary-aged boys. Their

three pointers have nothing on our air balls and attempted layups.

Orange and black are no longer just Halloween colors, but are the colors worn almost daily in the spring in our city. We are passionate about the San Francisco Giants. Our youngest alternates wearing gold and green as he is equally passionate about the Oakland Athletics. Color scheme changes in the fall to gold and scarlet as we cheer for the 49ers.

Team sports are a strong way to connect to your city. Attend a sporting event. Little League or major league. Lacrosse at the park or pick-me-up game of hoops on the court. And this is all suggested from the most non-athletic gal you will ever meet. If speaking sports or being athletic don't seem to be your expertise, host a party for your kids and their teammates. Invite neighbors over for the big game. Use sports as a starting point for engaging your new community.

Remember Francisco, the librarian? We saw him at a Giants game in a crowd of 42,000! He's a big fan and we now have something extra to talk to him about when we visit the library again.

Day 7

Wake Up with the Locals

*We don't accomplish anything in this world alone
... and whatever happens is the result of the whole
tapestry of one's life and all the weavings of individual
threads from one to another that creates something. -*

Sandra Day O'Connor

I just offered half of my little round table at Starbucks to a decorated woman in grays and pearls. Though she's removed her shoes and her toes are within mere inches of me, I will not undo my decision. I've been here for an hour or so and go a solid minute before becoming greatly distracted by the locals walking in and out. The hip-hop girl and guy dance out of my left peripheral on the sidewalk as they are eager for signatures for their cause. This sweet couple that I recognize from the gym are truly enjoying retirement and one another. I offer a friendly wave to the nanny I know from school. The beautifully tall white-haired woman has the most petite dog

on the planet inside Starbucks. I'm learning dogs inside public establishments is quite normal in my new life. It's a moment with the locals. My neighbors. (Time out. The gym man just offered his wife a bouquet of flowers and the toe lady is eating something in a brown box that is going to keep me from writing in a minute.) Time in. To know the locals is to know their routine places and stops throughout the day. Which of these will be a part of your routine?

The donut shop or coffee shop or diner buzzes with long-lived locals in the morning. See what's brewing at a nearby bakery or coffee shop on this day.

Growing up it was the Hardees where the locals gathered. If you wanted the latest gossip, aged opinions, town happenings, you sat close enough to the older men clustered in the booth.

Times have changed and my surroundings certainly have changed. The locals at our nearby coffee shop seem as freshly planted as we are. They appear to be transplants for their accent gives them away. German. English. Chinese. Spanish. Korean. Russian. Southern. Northern. I lean into their coffee talk and hear words such as coding, stem cell research and nothing at all. For their ears are budded with white plugs or they're scrolling through the latest updates on Twitter. That's not always the case and the locals are not just the customers.

Lucia, a long-time San Franciscan from Central America, works behind the counter at a bagel place. What began just as an order and a playback of that order is now catching up on the kid's activities and then the order and playback of that

order. I know at least five things about her and vice versa.

Cory is a barista at one of over 50 Starbucks in our city. The one closest to our first church location was frequented every Sunday by our staff and set up team. It became routine for the team to arrive at the hotel to unload the truck at 6 am and set up children's space and worship center. Ben and the team got to know Cory between set up and the 11 am service, and in time, she started coming to Epic. Going on three years now, Cory and now, her brother, Moses, are often at church. All from waking up with the locals. Even on a Sunday.

It's become part of our family ritual to wake up with the locals. We've called San Francisco home for over four years and we look for any celebratory reason to swing by Happy Donuts on the corner of Church and 24th any morning. The boys pick this place on their birthdays and after several mornings a week of fixing breakfast, I think Friday is always a good day to swing by the donut shop. Typically a few police officers are sipping their coffee and seem wide awake for 7 am. Other families in the neighborhood are hopping in and out on the way to school. We sit down to watch commuters board the J train after they, too, have grabbed their chocolate twist and cup of regular joe.

A freshness seems to surround Saturday mornings when you know you're doing something local. Have daddy or mommy dates at a consistent place where the locals gather. Choose a certain day of the week to stop by the same breakfast or coffee place. Routine is good for you and it's good for business.

Day 8

Experiment with Public Transit

Lots of people want to ride with you in the limo, but what you want is someone who will take the bus with you when the limo breaks down. -Oprah Winfrey

Kristin stood at the intersection waiting for the train to come. She knew where she was headed and what line she needed to take. Her job in Louisiana was profitable and she was trying to make it work in the city. It was the 30 she needed. She knew that for sure. Kristin waited and waited. She grew nervous knowing her appointment was approaching and the train was not. Desperation set in and she made a call to her husband, our executive pastor on staff at church. She explained the situation and hoped he had a better vantage point.

“I’ve been waiting for over half an hour and the train has yet to come,” she explained.

Tim had the better vantage point. He told Kristin to look down at the street where she's expecting the train to arrive. "Kristin, do you see any tracks?" he asked.

"No."

A long exhausting and frustrating pause.

The 30 is a bus line, not a train line. The buses had been stopping all along in front of Kristin, but she was expecting a train.

That's what public transit can do to the brain. For us, rural and suburban transplants, our minds weren't used to thinking buses and trains. Formerly, we would exit our homes into our garages and step inside our cars. Open the garage door and drive ourselves to our destination where ample parking existed.

Now we found ourselves mapping our routes from point A to point B. We had to figure out the best route, quickest route, or route that was arriving soon. Numbered public transit indicates bus lines. Lettered public transit indicates the light rail/train. Once we got that fact down, we weren't waiting for trains where there were no train tracks!

Kristin might have been the pioneer on our team to put public transit to the test, but she wasn't the last to turn transportation into an adventure.

We learned the hard way that just because you can fill up a shopping cart full of groceries, doesn't mean you can load it up on a bus and commute home. Forget the looks you get on

the bus that shame you and seem to say, “Here goes another one. Pitiful girl. She just moved here.”

It’s more of the sheer labor of piling on 6 bags of groceries on each arm that leave rings on your arms for days and the new reality that the milk and eggs need to last two weeks before you make that trip again.

Yet all adventures on public transit weren’t failures.

Shortly after we arrived, we began to have mission teams come and help with advertising about the new church in the city. While they might have thought the efforts mundane at first, the teams would hand out granola bars and invite cards to countless strangers on the streets. Like any other mission team, they enjoyed their evenings and a free day to enjoy and explore our city. While commuting on the train to a Giants game, someone on the mission team noticed a girl with a houndstooth scarf. He hesitantly asked, “Roll Tide?” {People will say just about anything on a mission trip if it means advancing the Gospel.} She looked up in shock. “Roll Tide.” Conversation expanded and they learned about the mission trip and her residency at a local hospital. She had recently graduated from the University of Alabama and was looking for a church, but came up empty.

He was happy to tell her about Epic. Days later, the girl with the houndstooth scarf sat among Alabama folks at a church service in the city all because of a conversation on a train between two strangers. What became of that girl with the houndstooth scarf? She became a mom in San Francisco and joined our mom’s small group at church where she

was surrounded by other moms desiring to live out faith in parenthood and employment in an urban setting. The baby was dedicated to Jesus just before they moved across the United States where they were eager to find another solid church home. Again, all because a conversation was had on public transit in the city.

What I've learned about public transit:

- Riding public transit is like reading the daily newspaper.
- Now is not the time to practice balance. Hold on.
- If you leave something on the bus, parting is such sweet sorrow.
- If you leave something on the bus, miracles still happen there.
- Front rows are reserved for the elderly and disabled. You with the New sign on your forehead and your little ones and stroller do not count.
- Sweat happens in close proximity to others.
- Know your route. Repeat your route. Study your route. All before you board.
- Stepping on public transit is the adventure. If and when you get to where you're going, another adventure awaits.
- It's simply a mode of transportation. Those on board

are not all coming home with you.

- Smile. I guarantee someone on that bus or trains needs one.
- Now's the time to get risky. Determine the best route and best mode of transportation. Bike. Train. Bus. Boat. Taxi. The accomplishment for the day is not the destination, but rather the way in which you arrive.

Day 9

Meet the Neighbors

I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the whole community and as long as I live, it is my privilege to do for it whatever I can. I want to be thoroughly used up when I die, for the harder I work the more I live. ~

George Bernard Shaw

From my 31 days journal:

“If you’re gonna make cookies, might as well make an army of them!” This was our family philosophy today as we mixed ingredients for some delicious cookies. Good thing we started with a large mixing bowl! It’s the famous Neiman Marcus cookie recipe that is so delish.

I reminded the boys that most of our adventures have been for ourselves as we are wanting to learn the city, the culture, and the history. This week, we are doing some things closer

to home and for others. We made cookies for our neighbors to the left and to the right. We made cookies to take as dessert to our friends for dinner tonight. We made cookies for the concierge who smiles when she sees the kids. We made cookies for the maintenance men who have taken care of our fridge. We also made cookies for the people that run our apartment complex. And we still have plenty of cookies to take with us to our first ball practice.

And as we delivered them today...we discovered that cookies and a smile advance a relationship that can go a long, long way.

It's bad thinking that to move into a new place the neighbors around you are to extend the first welcome. In our western culture, you'd be waiting a long time! While we ought to be most excited about the new folks moving in, that's not always the case. Living sent means meeting the neighbors before they have the chance to meet you!

Our family called the SoMa neighborhood home for the first 18 months. Our front door opened to sidewalk where many commuters trekked to the train or downtown every workday. Meeting the neighbors in this area was a challenge. Some kept east coast hours hanging with Wall Street and the stock exchange as they worked in finance. Others called tech their job and seemed to wake when they wanted to and finish work when they wanted to. In our apartment complex, a large number of units were corporate housing. The concept sounds glamorous. You work for a company and they provide housing for a few months while you get settled in and look

for more permanent housing. Or the company brings you in for a short period of time for a project or contract. The point is temporary. In our first weeks in San Francisco, I let this transitional lifestyle bother me.

“How on earth are we going to meet the neighbors if our schedules don’t line up and if they are here today and gone tomorrow?” I wondered.

I can self-doubt with the best of them. These doubts only paralyze you from doing what God intends for living sent. Rather than thinking of your relationship with the neighbors as long-term, think of these relationships as a biblical mandate.

James tells us, “If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself,’ you are doing well.”

It sounds too good and easy to be true, but simply show love to those who reside beside you and you are doing well. It becomes a complicated mindset when we think we have to have home proper and put away and be all settled in before we make time for our neighbors. Living sent makes time for the neighbors in the midst of settling in. It’s far more easier to meet them while new than later do the “head nod” towards one another because you didn’t make the introduction earlier.

After 18 months of our downtown SoMa apartment, we moved 4.6 miles to the middle of the city to a rental home. On our dead end hilly street, it seemed like a doable feat to meet our 9 neighbors. Within a few days of moving in, we gathered lemons from our lemon tree in the tiny backyard. We pulled

out the Neiman Marcus cookie recipe again and made an army of them. We bagged the goodies together and attached a note. The note was a small introduction to our family, a sentence about our joy of sharing the street with them, and our phone numbers and email addresses.

On a Sunday afternoon, we went door to door with our bags of goodies for our new neighbors. New conversations where you are the initiator aren't the easiest to be had. Especially for the introverts. I know. But when you think of the purpose behind the new conversation, it's all worth it.

Delivering treats in an effort to make a connection and establish a relationship—even if it is just the commonality of sharing a street—makes the value of your neighborhood go up. We got to have front door introductions as if Facebook and text messaging never existed. We learned about one neighbor's garden and another's families travels to Ireland.

We discovered one family's love for cycling and another couple who loves to dance late into Saturday night. Some goody bags we left on the neighbor's doorsteps and hoped to have conversations later. Regardless, our efforts were a success. We sought our neighbors out before they had a chance to seek us out! We established a value before them that we want to be THAT family who cares deeply for their needs and are honored to be their neighbors.

Meeting new people can't be any more intentional or awkward as an adult than as an incoming kindergartener or a college freshman. Everyone and everything is new to them. Make a plan today as a family for how you will meet the

people in your building or the people on your street.

Day 10

Make Time for the Elderly

“Our society must make it right and possible for old people not to fear the young or be deserted by them, for the test of a civilization is the way that it cares for its helpless members.” - Pearl S. Buck

From my 31 days journal:

The building looks no different from our apartment complex. Monotonous cream tones several stories high. Yet the people coming in and out of that building move at a different pace than those exiting our apartment building. The boys slurp their cereal at the table and point out the obvious as they look out the window at those folks across the street.

“Momma, that van that picks the people up has machines in it.”

“Does everyone there stay in wheelchairs?”

“Can Mimi and Pops and GJ live there some day?”

Mission Creek Community is an independent living complex for the seniors in our city. We often notice non-profit shuttles coming to pick the residents up for errands and activities and the Meals on Wheels van comes to deliver food. We knew this was a place for us to serve them as well. Besides, they are our neighbors now.

Any age can do this well: color, glue, cut, tear, write, draw and create! We made 20 cards and filled them with stickers. Me and the boys walked over to deliver them and discovered there were 179 residents! We put the 20 we had in individual mailboxes and know where we left off. We made it our mission to work on more in the meantime. I left the stack of rectangle pieces of colored paper and supplies on the kitchen table and when there would be a lull in the day, we thought about our older neighbors across the street. Our artistic stack grew and the plain paper shrunk. It was time to visit again.

As we walked out of the building on our second visit, one of the managers caught up with us. “Thank you so much.” I shared with the manager that the boys loved to sing and move around with musical instruments and that we’d love to come and make the residents smile sometime. We swapped numbers and planned one day to meet the residents collectively in person.

Make cards. Show off the kid’s talents. Shower them with flowers. They will smile toothless grins. Today, make time for the elderly. It’s natural to enter into relationships with people in the same season of life with us or our kids. Friendships at

work and church will happen. Yet a generation or two above us is watching. They know we are the generation of social media and multi-tasking, of organic foods and on-line shopping.

The elderly have been in our shoes before of raising kids and cooking dinner and paying bills and voting for government officials. They've gotten to their current place in life pouring into our generation and leaving footprints that we follow. It's not just enough to come behind them and see their picture on the wall as the former president or CEO or pastor. While there is time, engage in face-to-face conversations with them.

- Seek out the elderly in your church and offer to meet them for coffee to hear their story.
- Invite older women to a younger women's or mom's small group with the focus being to learn from one another.
- Host a banquet to celebrate their contributions and legacies.
- Swap recipes. You'll be astonished at their beautiful penmanship on the cards and how "made from scratch" the outcome will be.
- Step inside their home to see their walls of pictures or albums of times past.

What is the next holiday on the calendar? Invite them to be a part of your family or church's celebration or make an effort to call or write them.

Our neighbor, Connie, is as stubborn as a mule, and she'd say it to you right square in the eyes if she could. I'm not telling you anything she wouldn't say. Trust me. Connie is in her 70's going on 20. Her back might give way and her hip need replacing, but she's going to keep dancing on Saturday nights and running her errands on Monday mornings. We could let her remain stubborn or we could pay attention to her goings and comings. We've decided on the latter. In our hurriedness to this game or that event, we make time for Connie, and it's typically when she's unloading her bags from her car. We talk about the weather and school. We talk about our travels and her weekly happenings. We ask how we can serve her. Connie's answer has not altered to this day.

"Oh, you're sweet. I'm doing just fine."

We turn that answer into action. I will bake a little extra for dinner and run it over. We'll move her trash cans back to the side of her house after pick-up. We've marked our calendar for her next surgery, and as a family, we're deciding just how we're going to show her amazing love in action.

The elderly aren't flagging us down begging for help. They often go unnoticed and unappreciated. Surprise that generation by being a generation that listens and responds and shows love in action.

Day 11

Get Outdoors

Growing up in northern California has had a big influence on my love and respect for the outdoors. When I lived in Oakland, we would think nothing of driving to Half Moon Bay and Santa Cruz one day and then driving to the foothills of the Sierras the next day.

- Tom Hanks

I've just come down the hill after picnicking with our youngest. It was his idea. We packed string cheese, dry cereal, a melted Twix candy bar, Gatorade and strawberries and raspberries to balance it out. The phone was tucked away in case I was needed on this outing. (We often think we're needed more than we are. Our need is to be most present in the moment. That's just something extra that I wanted you to know.)

The wind was whipping, but the sun bright and warm.

That's a rare day in the summer in San Francisco. We threw down the picnic blanket and faced down the hill. We stared at the skyline of our city. He and I played "I spy with my little eyes" as we squinted to find each other's pick. After lunch, we laid down and admired the wispy clouds that all looked identical today. His 6 year old head rested on my belly.

Life was normal for him. His day kept rolling on from one adventure to the next. I, however, had to set the phone down, put my work aside, jot down a few notes before they got lost in my head, before I could roll on. In order to get outside, I had to put some things down.

Being new to a city or neighborhood, you have more time and less guilt now than ever before to explore. The great outdoors will grow larger and more daunting the longer you go without stepping into it. If you're outdoorsy by nature, this day will be a great excuse to set aside work and go play. If you're a homebody by choice, you must will yourself to trade the picnic basket for the crock-pot.

Getting outdoors can be a fairly inexpensive way to meet people and learn more about the place you call home.

Take air photos. These are pictures you take with your fingers in the air and store on your mind and heart's database. Go ahead and caption it in 140 characters or less: Too good to post on Twitter or Instagram or Facebook. My picnic on the hill outside our home with our youngest is not documented on social media. He and I both know it. But years from now, one of us will say, "Remember that time we got outdoors and picnicked on that hill?"

Our outdoors look different from each other. In my surroundings, backyards are teeny-tiny or non-existent. Parks are in abundance in order to give us citizens green space. The ocean is two miles to my west and the bay three miles to my north. The vineyards are a 45 minute drive from home and the redwoods bookend my city to the north and south. What do your outdoors look like?

“Rain, snow, sleet or shine. I have come to extend the time.” My college roommate was a time-extender and I borrow her powers to extend to you! Get outdoors today regardless the weather. Pack accordingly.

- Go on a hike.
- Follow the river.
- Splash in the ocean.
- Walk to lunch.
- Throw the ball or frisbee in the evening as a family.
- Move dinner outside.

From my 31 days journal:

“The mountains are calling and I must go.” That’s what John Muir said. In our first thirty-one days in the city, we discovered that if you arrive before 9 a.m. at the Muir Woods National Forest, you enter for free. And we like that...even if it means leaving the apartment at 7:45 am.

The advantage is that we were the only ones there. With

wintry clothes on and strollers in gear, we lazily walked through the woods. Our new friends Kaci and Luke joined us on the adventure. And though all the trees could be described as gigantic and majestic, we never tired of looking up and around them.

We listened for the bird sounds, babbling brook, and the wind. It was hard to imagine that we were just minutes from a bustling city. I know I found great pleasure in being able to escape city life, even for just a few hours.

John Muir said, “A few minutes ago every tree was excited, bowing to the roaring storm, waving, swirling, tossing their branches in glorious enthusiasm like worship. But though to the outer ear these trees are now silent, their songs never cease.”

The boys used their imaginations to point out the fallen trees that resembled alligators and crocodiles. They thought they found ‘the tree’ that was burned by the jungle speeders when Star Wars filmed the Battle of Endor in these woods. They chased the little chipmunks and spotted a deer or two.

We were so far outdoors this day that cell phone service was as ancient as the trees themselves.

“I never saw a discontented tree. They grip the ground as though they liked it, and though fast rooted they travel about as far as we do.”

We stood small among God’s massive redwoods that day, but it was what we didn’t see that was equally as spectacular. Redwoods don’t grow alone. They link roots to create a

strong bond of a community below. Ah, a perspective of living sent. Mr. Muir was right again, “In every walk with nature one receives far more than he seeks.”

Day 12

Movie Night

A good film is when the price of the dinner, the theatre admission and the babysitter were worth it. -Alfred Hitchcock

From my 31 days journal:

Before we moved to the city, we commented to the boys, “When Toy Story 3 comes out, we will be seeing it in San Francisco!” The day we made the promise seemed so far away, yet within the blink of our eyes we were living in the city for a few weeks and were on the sidewalk outside our downtown apartment about to walk to the theater to see TS3!

Pixar Studios is located in Emeryville, just a few miles across the Bay Bridge that flows into our city. It was very justifiable to watch a movie created so close to home. I had even convinced myself that Pixar employees were in the same

theater with us watching it for the zillionth time and being just as amused as us for the first time.

Living in the midwest, we might have thought it odd for one of our sons to go in costume to a movie, but not in our new habitat. It's very common to see people in costume in the city. In our first week in the city we had seen Minnie Mouse and a devil. Why not Buzz Lightyear?

I know I was just as excited to see the third Toy Story movie. I have told the boys that it was in my high school and college years that the first two movies came out. I find it so fun to know that the classics continue into our children's generation.

We have learned a thing or two about the movie environment in our city. The fact that there are more adults than kids in the city proved equally true in a kid's movie showing. The setting for the Catholic Church in Sister Act is in our city's neighborhood. Urban legend has it that George Lucas was inspired by Bay Area locations.

Fascinating movie facts aren't limited to cities. I've lived in Brad Pitt's hometown of Springfield, Missouri and know a few folks that who have been in a movie filmed in rural Georgia.

Today is what any good ole American family would do in a given week—movie night. If moving boxes have been the norm for you, you might have already had a movie night or two with a pizza on the side! Forbid the idea of having watched a dozen movies to unwind after unpacking or plant the kids in front of the tube in order to get to the bottom of the boxes.

It's not just any movie night. Living sent is covered and dowsed with intentionality. Friend, tonight is local movie night! Download or check out a movie on your area, a film on local culture. Google will be happy to provide you with information on what was filmed or shot on location near you. Duck Dynasty counts in Louisiana, Gone With the Wind in Georgia, and Spider Man 2 in Chicago. Play a game of trivia that you dig up about the movie, the stars, and the setting. Roll out the red carpet. Pop the popcorn. Buy the tickets or download the movie. This is an easy day to live sent!

Day 13

Tourist for the Day

*The traveler sees what he sees, the tourist sees what
he has come to see. - Gilbert K. Chesterton*

Do you remember staying at hotels when on vacation and a display of brochures stood off to the side of the lobby promoting everything touristy? You either rolled your eyes over the pitiful advertisements or you stood overwhelmed at all there was to do in such a short amount of time. I was that kid that collected half a dozen and spread them out on the hotel bed, clueless to reality that mom and dad had already made plans for our vacation and it didn't include the \$50 here and there for this activity and that activity. Those travel days seem like yesterday, but technology makes it look so ancient.

Today, give yourself a break. You're working so hard to get settled in, now go and enjoy being a tourist for the day. Wear the fanny pack and big lens camera. Set out and love your city.

Let it be a growing, exploring love. Let it be birthed out of this desire in Jeremiah 33.9: “and this city shall be to Me a name of joy, a praise and a glory before all the nations of the earth who shall hear of all the good I do for them. They shall fear and tremble because of all the good and all the prosperity I provide for it.”

You’ve got plenty of time to eat local and live out a daily routine that keeps you far removed from anything touristy. This is what most days will look like. What attracts people to your city? Where do people flock from out of town? This is the day not to think local, but rather like a vacationer.

Research what your place is known for. What put it on the map? How would outsiders describe your town?

From my 31 days journal:

We headed straight towards our city’s tourist traps. Fisherman’s Wharf. Cable Cars. Ghirardelli Square. Golden Gate Bridge. It’s what everyone thinks of visiting when they come to San Francisco. I didn’t want us to be that family who got settled in and never took advantage of what boosts tourism in the place we call home.

The seagulls and out-of-towners flock to Fisherman’s Wharf where sourdough bread is made fresh and fills the air. Blocks west of the famous wharf, the vintage Ghirardelli sign tops the hill in its flashing white lights. It’s as if the chocolate knows you need the extra steps in order to obtain its delicious calories. With Fisherman’s Wharf behind us and chocolate looming to our left, the Golden Gate bridge stands iconic in

the bay to our right. What's that? Cable car bells ring and down the hill comes the rectangular box with humans popping out of the sides. Our new home seems perfect. A beautiful place to live and chocolate to be reckoned with was exactly what I had in mind when I heard God's call. Any voice we heard today seemed anything but English. People from all over the world were here.

As I peered back towards the hills of home, I was hit with the reality that we were not returning to a hotel like everyone else around us for the night. We had a mailing address in this city. These homes were filled with our new neighbors. I looked around me and began to observe how the tourists saw our city.

You know you're a tourist:

- When you've got a map out in your hands.
- When you eat at chained restaurants because they're familiar.
- When you had to buy a San Francisco fleece because you thought all of California was warm and sunny.
- When you look no further than the heavily populated areas and assume that this is what this place is known for.
- When everything you need for the day is in your backpack or fanny pack, just in case.

With a church planting mentality, it's not like we were

going to invite all those on vacation to help with the launch team. Our day was surrounded by tourists, not locals. But looking back these are the places our mission teams wanted to see when they came to help with our church. We now had the insight and could point them the way. Honestly, after a fanny-pack wearing, big lens camera-carrying kind of a day, we had seen the top tourist spots and the day was complete. We made it out of the tourist trap with plenty of pictures and a knowledge of what makes San Francisco iconic to the rest of the world.

{End of entry}

I always ask friends and family that come to visit to tell me their favorite and least favorite part of our city. I ask them to share with me what took them by surprise. Our answers were similar in our first few months in the city. Now the answers remain pretty standard as newcomers come to visit. It's our answers that have changed. God has been gracious to give us that growing, exploring love that His prophet Jeremiah wrote about in regards to Babylon. The longer the exiles were in captivity in Babylon, the more they made the land their own. And the more the land becomes our own, the more a deep appreciation takes root.

After you've put the fanny pack and big lens camera away, make your own brochures like days gone by. Tri-fold good ole construction paper and let the kids choose one attraction to

promote or make a brochure including their top picks for their new hometown. Fill it with tips and drawings, cut-outs and personal photos from the day. When guests come to town, put these on display.

Day 14

Discover a Park or Playground

"The more successfully a city mingles everyday diversity of uses and users in its everyday streets, the more successfully, casually (and economically) its people thereby enliven and support well-located parks that can thus give back grace and delight to their neighborhoods instead of vacuity." - Jane Jacobs

From my 31 days journal:

I remembered a park close by. During our first trip to the city to consider where God wanted us to plant a church, we drove by this small oval green space. The reason being, I was growing claustrophobic and started begging Ben to drive to the nearest spot of green that Google Maps showed. That particular day in January 2009 brought a steady rain and gray clouds. The weather described my soul. I could not get my bearings straight and the tall buildings were closing in and life

looked so drastically different from anything I had ever known. And to think we were believing God was calling us here?

Doubts of living sent will crowd in. The psalmist writes that it's in the green space, the green meadows, the quiet streams, where He gives rest.

I remembered this park being nestled between loft apartments, cozy restaurants, and small businesses. I remembered this nearby park and needed to return for two reasons. One, it was now our neighborhood park, and we must say hello. Two, I needed to return for my sake. With feet now on the ground and a San Francisco address attached to my identity, I wanted to see this park with a fresh pair of eyes.

The boys hopped onto the scooters and into the stroller and together we ventured over a few blocks to South Park. The day was overcome with blue skies and patches of clouds. The return visit was already looking up. However, I did not remember the vast number of adults enjoying their lunch break on the playground. And for obvious reasons since my first visit included steady rain. I slowly pushed the stroller up and around the sidewalk feeling like me and the boys were intruding. Three swings were accompanied by three guys with lunch sacks. Never had I recalled my kids being outnumbered by adults at a playground.

A sign adorns most playground gates: Adults must be accompanied by a child at all times. One of our favorite parks on a sunny day is heavily populated by adults. If the day is warm and sunny, some adults treat the park as a sun-bathing mecca.

I took a deep breath and relaxed. As odd as it was, we were about to be a rare sight at noon on a weekday on a playground of all places.

The boys didn't mind and raced to began a game of tag. We did get to enjoy the swings and I made a new friend - a stay-at-home mom with a 4 month old!

As we ventured back home, our oldest, Elijah, has become quite the good listener with street commands as he maneuvered his scooter. He was understanding road signs and doing his best to ride in a straight line so as not to take someone down on the sidewalk.

We made a discovery on the way home. Ubisoft headquarters, a major educational software and video gaming publisher, sits among brick buildings in a line. But that's just it. Our neighborhood, SOMA (South of Market) is an area where the dotcom business came to life, and is still booming. The folks we shared the play space with today work for such start-ups and tech businesses.

{End of entry}

Living sent today could be a book in and of itself. The list of parks and playgrounds might outnumber the grains of sand. Think strategically. Think close to home and work outward from there. Parks and playgrounds in your quadrant will reflect your neighborhood the best and introduce you to people

nearby. Start there. Green space varies from city to suburb to town. Activities and the people congregating are just as diverse. The commonality of the people and the place is to unwind and play. Cities preserve what green space is left in such density. Suburbs and rural communities tend to have the space to form complexes or multi-functional parks equipped with sports fields, trails and playgrounds.

I've lived in towns where schools and churches opened up their playgrounds for public use. My children have called green space at a university commons area their football field. The place you call home gives to you in preserving green space. Give back by visiting often and inviting friends to join you. Treat these discovered parks and playgrounds as sacred spaces to build friendships and restore sanity as a family. I'm overly type-A and an old soul keeping a pen and pad with me at all times. Your smartphone suffices as well. Make notes as you engage your community at the park. Challenge the kids to draw a picture of someone from the park that day or draw a map of the space. See how much they remember. Gather the family together before leaving the playground and with eyes open and looking around offer a prayer of thanksgiving to God for such space and the conversations and friendships that will come from here.

Another entry from my 31 days journal:

If I've said it once, I've said it twice, not everything goes according to plan! Ben had to take our Honda in for a 'quick' service and we thought he'd come back in the van so we could drive over to Golden Gate Park. Not the case. He dropped it

off and the Honda store said they'd call when it was finished.

Plan B entailed catching a bus and train over to the other side of the city to meet up with our church-planting team for a picnic and exploration of the very big Golden Gate Park. I was packed for a minivan ride, not a public transit ride. And when we boarded the bus, we looked like a minivan. This included three kids, two scooters, picnic cooler, two backpacks, and one not-made-for-the-city stroller! Our family boldly displayed "the new sticker" and new scent well. Doors on buses are equipped to close after a couple of people board. We pressed that issue a time or two. Plus one has to be quick loading and unloading or else! Yep. We were really new at this.

Nevertheless, we made it. Stroller, scooter and all. We enjoyed time on the playground with lots of kids and parents, throwing the frisbee, and walking around Stow Lake. It was fun to spread out our picnic blankets and enjoy a good peanut butter and jelly sandwich and fruit. In the shade or in the sun, it was such an enjoyable day together.

We explored the Japanese Gardens briefly before sleepy-kid syndrome set in. The rest of our team continued to explore, while we raced back to catch the bus and the train. I took notes on this park day. Golden Gate Park is bigger than Central Park in New York City and allows free parking. Gardens, hiking trails, lakes, paddle boat rentals, historical ruins, and more fill the expansive green space. Much was left to be explored, but we had to go get that minivan of ours.

The backyard might be sufficient, but that doesn't count today. Discover a new park or playground. Play spaces in your

town display children, laughter, and the release of worries and stress from life. Interact with your town's children. This might be one of those days for the whole family. And just when you think you don't have time to play, that's a sure sign for park/playground discovery!

Day 15

Explore the Surrounding Suburbs or a Nearby Town

"Adventure is worthwhile." - Amelia Earhart

You are either the big city bordered by smaller ones or the smaller city on the border of a larger one. Whatever the case may be, today leave the one and explore the other. Find an attraction in a neighboring town. Do an afternoon drive through a place that borders your city.

From my 31 days journal:

Every day can't be full of more than one adventure, but this day sure was. I surprised the boys this morning with Star Wars pancakes. I know, can it get any better than this? Crazy to think that Williams-Sonoma is a local purchase, but Mr. Chuck Williams did start the store just down the street from our apartment. The boys had to understand that it would take

a few tries before I successfully removed a complete one from the mold, but they were okay with Yoda only having one ear. Then it was off to Emeryville to meet up with a college friend of mine that I had not seen in a decade. Emeryville is that suburb that borders San Francisco. We reconnected through a friend's blog and discovered that we now both live in the Bay Area. She has three boys as well. We met up at IKEA which has a playplace for the kids and a kid-friendly cafe. We had 10 years to quickly catch up on and talked about meeting up again this summer. You can imagine the looks we got throughout the store as we mobbed around with 6 boys! The boys hit it off well and were excited to make new friends.

After we left IKEA, we googled directions to PIXAR Studios. We could peep through the walls and tell they are expanding and tried to get in, but because of security reasons, tours are not conducted. It was worth the try and has become a theme for our 31 days in the city. At the very least, it was fun to see where all the creative ideas originate and headquarters to some of our very favorite movies!

Another entry from my 31 days journal:

In a really short time we have made new friends with a family in our apartment complex that are Christ followers and have joined our church plant launch team. Her husband moved to the city for work and she was choosing to work from home with a toddler in tote. We put our heads together for excursions out of the city to find warmth in the summer. The city is just that cool. I still couldn't reason with wearing coats and boots in June and July. An escape to a typical climate was

needed.

All Aboard! My new friend had family in the Bay Area that blessed us with train tickets from Roaring Camp in Felton to the Santa Cruz Boardwalk. We invited a few other kids along. The open-air train led us through tunnels, over a bridge, past large redwoods, alongside a river and into Santa Cruz. All the kids moved around the different seats, stepped outside for the rear view, and had to present their tickets to the conductor. Once we arrived to the Santa Cruz boardwalk, we had about an hour to enjoy the Pacific Ocean.

Now, I thought we would simply admire the ocean and enjoy the sand, but my kids had other ideas. Because of my pre-conceived thoughts, I didn't pack towels, swimsuits, nor a change of clothes. That didn't stop them. Sand and all, we barely made it back to the train before it departed. You can imagine what it was like to tell the 9 kids it was time to leave the beach, wash 18 feet, take everyone to the bathroom, and run to the train. Everyone on the train looked impressed that we made it. We were quite impressed also.

I've called San Francisco home for several years now and it's still a bit odd that we have so much in our city that we rarely need to leave in search for this or that. Most of my life, I've grown up in the reverse. I'd put something down on my list to pick up when we went to Birmingham or I would count down until we got to go to the amusement park outside of Atlanta. We might have had a zoo in Springfield, but the rage was going to the free one in St. Louis.

Whichever way you are looking at this day, explore outside

of your habitat.

It's not home, but it borders home.

Day 16

Build Authentic Community

"Christian community is more than just a supportive fellowship; it is an alternative society. And it is through this alternate human society that God shapes us into who and what we are." - Tim Keller

From my 31 days journal:

This day could easily have been titled: Acknowledge that homesickness is for real. Maybe two months into us being San Franciscans, we as a family were starting to get the hang of things. Or at least how to shop smarter at Safeway realizing that we had to carry groceries home by foot rather than load them into the car. We were certainly walking more...that being a good thing.

Old Navy had their jeans for \$10 this particular weekend, so we made it a family outing. Remember only two months in, it's

not like we had people lining up at our door for dinners and parties. Family outing to Old Navy was looking pret-ty good. After finagling the boys into the dressing room and securing a few pairs of jeans for all three of them, I was not expecting to see what I saw when I came out of the dressing room. With a pile of jeans and three rambunctious kids, I stopped and stared. Have you ever wondered the look that would take over your face if Ed McMahon knocked on your door or you were caught on candid camera? Well, neither of this scenarios have ever happened to me, but I know I had that look on my face.

There standing by Ben was our entire team. We moved out with 3 other families to start Epic Church and they all were here at Old Navy's flagship store. Here's what I knew:

They were not here to get \$10 jeans.

This city was big and them being here wasn't coincidence.

There was no, "Hey, what are you doing here?"

Or, "Well, what a small world!"

They weren't there for fashion tips from me either.

They needed us. They needed to be standing beside us, be it at Old Navy or the Waffle House. (by the way, we don't have those, but I could go for one about 11 pm tonight) They needed to not feel alone in a crowded, new place.

Ben and I said nothing to each other. We didn't have to. I made my way to the cashier and bought that pile of jeans. I motioned to Ben that our outing was complete, and he said, "We can't leave them."

He was right. We were all emotional basket cases (whatever that means). Ben and I certainly weren't the wisest and strongest in the bunch, but in the moment, we knew they were looking at us to tell them what was next.

"Let's get ice cream. Our treat." Ben said with confidence. It was as if he had solved the world's problems. And to be honest, to the six of us adults, he had.

We were learning streets and knew that going out the door to the right would take us back to our apartment, so we went left. We walked to where every tourist in the city flocks... Union Square. Remember, we had yet to discover the amazing bakeries, restaurants, and coffee shops. In a sense, we were still tourists, but trying not to look like one.

Ben took us to the basement of our seven story Macy's. We passed by the Kitchen-Aids for sale and Boudin's bread bowls and went straight to Ben & Jerry's. Everyone put in their order. I watched as my 33-year-old husband stepped up to the role of leader and forerunner. It's as if we were college students and dad was in town for a visit. He paid for 9 ice creams and got that many thank-yous.

We went back outside with our treats and corralled some chairs at Union Square. The skyscrapers loomed large around us. Thousands of different noises distracted our attention from time to time. We were speaking English, but no one that walked by us was. We devoured our ice cream and each other's presence. All seemed well now. To be together. To be reminded that we have to start somewhere and that's often the hardest part.

I looked at everyone. No one was saying it, but we were all saying it, “I want my mama, but Ben & Jerry’s will do!”

“Life in community is no less than a necessity for us—it is an inescapable ‘must’ that determines everything we do and think. Yet it is not our good intentions or efforts that have been decisive in our choosing this way of life. Rather, we have been overwhelmed by a certainty - a certainty that has its origin and power in the Source of everything that exists. We acknowledge God as this Source. We must live in community because all life created by God exists in a communal order and works toward community.”

God created man to live in community with one another and most of my life I have taken the gift for granted. In fact, I am arriving at the fact, that at times, I have tried to escape from this very gift. It’s not until we discover that God is all we need that you crave His very presence and desire to have other followers near you.

I challenge you to make a family out of friends. Our kids have more aunts and uncles here all because we live far from blood relatives. When friends become family, you’ll begin to see yourselves where you’re at long-term.

A recent autumn ago, we gathered together with our authentic community, those who came to plant the church with us. We spent a few days together away from the hustle and bustle and changed our pace to slow. I noticed this while among such genuine people...

When friends become family, it matters not who is your

child. They all are.

When friends become family, sometimes the only place to be is on the outside of the 14 conversations and children screaming and babies napping.

- When friends become family, you gain cousins, aunts and uncles.
- You share life as it is and pray together for what God has in store for life ahead.
- When friends become family, you swap the football for the toddler.
- You think about who you want your kids to become and who you want pouring into them.
- You sing 'Winnie the Pooh' because she asks you to and because you love her and believe God has a purpose for her life.
- You teach the next generation with hope that they will do the same.
- When friends become family, you share everything.
- Paint. Laughter. A wet paper towel. Tears. Frustrations and sheer joy.

When you experience life together, you create memories. And those memories become links—links to where you live and the people that live there. Then these memories take root and start settling in with family who began as friends. For it's the friends who become family that get you the most. They are

doing life with you in the same culture, the same town or city.

Community has taken on a much richer and deeper meaning for our team and our family since moving to the city. We are stronger together and find encouragement from each other's presence. It's been neat to 'happen' to run into one another on the coffee aisle at our grocery store or pass one another in the apartment complex. In the first few weeks of life in a new place, you must be intentional about turning any meal time into fellowship time and any family activity into a group activity. You might not be the one desperate for community on a given day, but they might be.

Another blessing of community has been visiting churches in the Bay Area. We have been encouraged by staff and their families and how God is at work here. Visiting with other faith communities in the area allow you to see how your new culture does fellowship, worship and service.

I'm known to state the obvious, but I will state it anyway, When we are together, we are not alone! And that's exactly how it feels in a city of 800,000. And though our community will grow and is growing, I am thankful for this amazing and powerful gift.

"Living together in one place is safer than living alone. The sacred words of Jesus our God bear witness to the necessity of living together; for He says, 'Where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am in the midst of them (Matthew 18:20). Likewise Solomon speaks about the danger of living alone when he says, 'Alas for him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up (Ecclesiastes 4:10).

And David calls those who praise God in love and concord blessed when he says, 'Blessed is the people that sing aloud together (Psalm 89:15), and he commends life in community, saying, 'Beyond, how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together (Psalm 133:1).

And among the disciples of our Lord there was but a single soul and a single heart (cf. Acts 4:32); and even God's incarnation did not take place in the wilderness, but in inhabited areas and among sinful men. Thus we have need of the concord of the communal life. Isolation is treacherous and full of danger." (Nikitas Stithatos, *Philokalia*, Vol. 4 (Faber)

Attach yourself to a small group who is doing life where you live. I can call friends and family back east, but they can't fully get life here because they're not here in the everyday. In San Francisco, we understand each other because we're smelling the same stuff on the streets and cheering for the same teams {well, most of us} and interacting with the same cultures. Who's becoming family the longer you live where you are?

Day 17

Say Hello to Basic Business People

"The pain of parting is nothing to the joy of meeting again." - Charles Dickens

I had always been a part of an established church community, meaning that enough people were coming to church to pay the staff's salary. New people would join the church when they moved into town. The amazing stories were of those neighbors and co-workers who decided to attach themselves to our faith community because of the fruit they witnessed in someone at our church. Revival crusades and Vacation Bible School would trickle in a few folks here and there.

I'm making a sad case for the fact that I never felt a big need to simply reach out to those I engaged with in our community because we needed more people to come to our church. And in the culture of such established church

communities, I often believed the lie that most people attended or were members of a church in town anyway. I'd often nod and give that friendly look and they'd nod back and that was the extent of "and they will know we are Christians by our love."

My perspective has changed drastically. Starting a church from scratch requires warm bodies. Being new to the community where the church is being planted throws me further out of my comfort zone as every person I encounter becomes someone that might just be interested in spiritual things, let alone, attending the new church in town. Unfortunately, I look back at the people I interacted with on a daily basis in our former places and regret not knowing them beyond the services they offered me and my family. I'm doing it differently this time. And as much as we did need warm bodies to come to church, I wanted to be a blessing to the daily people in my life and learn their names at the very least.

Olivia is the sweetly quiet Chinese lady who manages the cleaners on the corner. Her husband is there, but is more quiet than she. I like routine, but Olivia thrives on routine. I was so happy to learn that after four years of no time off, she and her husband enjoyed a two week trip to Florida.

Anna stops what she is doing when me and the boys approach the customer service counter where she works at our neighborhood grocery store. She has taken an interest in the boy's days at school and she's open to talking about her family as well. Anna's husband has traveled indefinitely to South America to care for his sick mom. She is managing

the home with 4 kids who are at 3 different schools while maintaining her busy work schedule.

Nancy gives me a courtesy smile each time I walk into the bank with the three boys. I'm beginning to think it's more of a pity smile. It seems to say, "I'm glad I have my day job and not yours." Nevertheless, she treats them to lollipops every time. I now choose to wait for Nancy as my teller. I want to learn her story as she clearly knows mine very well.

I change hair stylists like the second hand on a clock. It works best with our vocation. I get to chat for 45 minutes with someone that can't just quit on me and as the hair stylist goes up in price, I take on the new talent. Shannon, Lauren, and Majalyn know my story and I'm learning theirs. I think I'm more open to talking while I sit relaxed in the chair and they're more inclined to listen as they cut and beautify my hair.

A frequent stop in my errand running when the kids are tagging along is the chocolate store in the neighborhood. It's conveniently located by the post office and the bank. Jack, the owner, has chocolates predominately from around the Bay Area, but literally from all over the world. He doesn't sell a bar that he hasn't tried and loved. Jack generously gives us a piece of his chocolates when we walk in. Nowadays, we talk baseball with him. He's definitely from Brooklyn for his accent gives him away. And he doesn't even guess where I'm from. The distinction is as clear as his. We send friends to visit his store when they are in town and try to buy a few gifts a year from him.

Kim, the concierge, always has greeted us with a smile

at our apartment complex. I know that it's part of her job to notice the residents, but I really believe she delights in seeing kids around the kid-sparsed neighborhood. She would sit for long hours answering the phone, receiving packages, and beeping people into the building. Cookies were in order from time to time to bless Kim and let her know that what she does matters to all of us. We used those cookie moments to ask how we could encourage her and pray for her. We would invite her to church. She would tell us that she wanted to come, but she worked every Sunday. She always knew she was welcomed anytime and that her not coming didn't stop us from blessing her.

Shannon and Kate take turns opening the gym each morning. I'm really bad with names and have called Shannon, Sharon one time too many. But I'm getting better now that she's corrected me. We both have lived in the midwest and talk about the seasons that change in the rest of the country, but not in the city. She teaches rowing out on the cold bay waters and from my end, knows she's welcomed at our church anytime she wants to come.

This gentleman is as consistent as the sun rising. He climbs up our hill and back down again six days a week. Most of those days are in the fog. He always delivers! His name is Mailman Jones we learned this past Christmas season. Our family baked him a festive plate of homemade treats for him. He returned the blessing with a card in our mailbox from Mailman Jones. The kids think it so fun to get something personal from the one who brings so much junk mail to our little box on the steps. And because he gave us a Christmas card, it goes in

with our plethora of cards during the season. When the New Year comes, we take a night and pray over each person that sends us a card. Mailman Jones included.

Recluse or extrovert, you're going to have to, sooner or later, interact with basic business people in your new community. And this is a really good thing, and for the most part, easy and low-key. Determine where you will do business. Map out the bank, post office, cleaners, and coffee shop. Introduce yourself to those you will be seeing on a frequent basis.

- Post office.
- Dentist.
- Bank.
- Cleaners.
- Grocery store.
- Coffee shop.
- Pharmacy.
- Gas station.
- Beauty salon.
- Local chocolate store.

As you interact each time, introduce yourself with the purest purpose of learning their name. That's all. Then move to sharing something about yourself and asking them a common question. The best time to do this is when you are new. People

are more likely to engage in conversation with newcomers, even if it for taking pity and compassion. Take it! Share that you are new to town. Depending on the culture, share why you moved here.

This is how those conversations typically go for me:

- “What brought you to San Francisco?”
- “My husband’s job.”
- “Is he in the tech industry?”
- “No. He’s starting a church.”

This is when the conversation can go multiple ways. One response is, “A what?” Another typical response is, “How do you do that?” And my favorite is, “Is that like a start-up?”

Then the conversation continues:

“What kind of church?” People tend to ask this in terms of what religion this establishment will be.

“A Christian church.” I’ve learned denominations don’t matter where we live.

Then if I’m bold in my faith that day, I might add, “It’s a community that believes in the Bible and tries to live out the teachings of Jesus.”

One of the most accessible people on your route each day might be right under your nose. Glynda works security at the front desk of the high-rise building where our church meets. In building a friendship with Glynda, she would allow her boys to

come down to church on the Sundays she worked. Her cousin started working for the same security company and would sneak down for services. She said she came “to get her church on” and shortly after gave her life to Jesus. Her boyfriend started coming. He found Jesus too. Both have been baptized.

Saying hello and building a friendship with the people you see everyday matters. It’s worth every smile, cookie, name, and going out of your way.

Day 18

Love (uh-huh) Them

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”

Maybe your days are just hunky-dory. Your community is just over the top excited that you have moved into town. People are flocking to the doors of the church and God is adding to the number those who are being saved and baptized. You can't bake cookies fast enough for everyone is bringing you some. Partner churches are showering you with encouraging emails and texts and letters in the mailbox. Your children greet you in the morning with joyful phrases of “you're the best mommy and daddy to follow Jesus to this place that must be heaven.” Menu planning comes easy and your address change caused no hiccups in the move with all your billing companies. You can close the book now and say a prayer for the rest of us!

We are called to reach humans with the beautiful message of Jesus Christ and that's not always hunky-dory. It's not always received with open arms filled with cookies. Today, make extra effort to love (uh-huh) them.

- Those who reject a church from meeting in their space.
- Those who throw invite cards on the ground.
- Those who raise rent.
- Those who take that parking spot.
- Those who schedule church volunteers to work their day jobs on Sunday.
- Those who don't want you here.
- Those family members who don't support what you're doing.
- Those who don't understand.
- Those who believe differently.
- Those who party at night next door and sleep during the day and think you're the loud ones.

We tend to think our neighbor lives in close proximity to us. Our neighbors must be like us or believe what we believe. Jesus calls our enemies our neighbors. That's why He told the story of the Good Samaritan. (Luke 10) He knows our hearts and how we gravitate towards people just like us. Jesus expands the definition of neighbor when He instructs us to

“love our enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” (Matthew 5.44) In the present world, this sounds ridiculous. Absurd. Yet Jesus’ teachings are counter-cultural. Love (uh-huh) them means we want something better for them than what they currently want from us.

If you’ve lived in your place long enough you’ve discovered that not everyone is like you or likes you. Do we do life around them? Do we hold a grudge?

From my 31 days journal:

It was the hundreds of people from our partner churches that stood in the cold, fog, mist, and wind to hand out invite cards with granola bars attached. After a morning of acceptance and rejection, the teams would move on to other ways of serving our city and new church. Me and the boys and the stroller would cross streets and see trampled invite cards. Granola bar devoured. Not so much the invite card. And that’s a big no-no in our culture to throw trash on the ground. My mind immediately assumed that to (uh-huh) them that a church invite card was not trash. It was nothing at all. I sensed enemies. I sensed persecution. My kids didn’t understand why someone wouldn’t want to come to our church. They wondered why these people weren’t ever told as kids not to litter. Oh to see life through the eyes of a child.

Another entry:

We live in a day when people can write up reviews about a church on yelp.com. Yep. While we welcome anyone and everyone to our church and turn no one away, a few have

come and found our love offensive. Those few have yelped about it. In searching for a place for our church to meet, landlords have been afraid to take a chance with a “religious group” that’s only a few years old. Ben would come home and tell me about the day on the streets looking for space, and I wanted to scream, “Don’t they know that the Church has been around a very long time and nothing will prevail against it?” Ugh.

And another entry:

One of our partner churches met us at a popular park in our city on Saturday afternoon. We were going to pass out bottles of bubbles with an information card about Epic Kids. Everyone was informed to approach the parents, not the children. The end goal being to inform parents and bless the kids. Our boys loved the idea of handing out bubbles and Epic Kid cards and then getting to play afterwards. I could see moms blowing the bubbles into their toddlers’ faces. I wondered what the group of adults was thinking as they read over the info card. I was happy. A park we loved and visited frequently were receiving a blessing from our church. A blonde-haired man with a little blonde-haired girl approached me. I broke my stare to give them my attention.

“Hi there. Are you one of the ones giving out bubbles?”

“Yes. It’s working,” I thought to myself instantaneously. I was awaiting a sweet compliment.

“We are!” I said aloud. My smile grew bigger.

“I think it’s absolutely absurd that you would attack the city’s children with this brainwashing filth. Who do you think you are that you would slither in here and drop these bombs among the innocence of children on a playground? This propaganda is nasty and you should be ashamed of yourselves for even standing here.”

My insides shook. He was using words towards me that I would describe of the enemy.

Wait. It was the enemy speaking. I stood there and took it. I let him know our intentions were not for harm and we really wanted to be a blessing. He would have none of it. My eyes met the little blonde eyes beside him as they walked away.

“Oh God, have mercy on our city. On the children. On the adults.” I uttered from my soul these pleas.

We have to experience the darkness to appreciate the light. We have to encounter the enemy to understand the Victor. We get to love our enemies to disturb the Enemy. Every time we love (uh-huh) them, we send a clear signal that mercy triumphs judgement. When we choose to love, we pierce the darkness.

Greet them anyways.

Pray for them and go a step further—ask God to bless them.

As far as it depends on you, love them.

Remember your identity and that people don’t have power over you.

We aren't entitled to His love, therefore, don't hold anything over others out of entitlement for their love.

“So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.”
(Matthew 7:12)

And may you and your family be blessed and strengthened today as you love (uh-huh) them.

Day 19

Encourage Another

"Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much." - Helen Keller

I never knew how lonely serving God could be until we moved away from our tribe of supporters. And when I looked at the map, the Mississippi River might as well have been an ocean. That is how far away it seemed like we were moving. Worlds apart.

At Epic Church, we have this motto: life is meant to be shared. You and I were created for "one another" life. This can be difficult in our role. I believe, even more so, as church planting wives. Some of us are the only staff. Others of us live thousands of miles away from a support group. That's why a network is crucial.

Here's what I call a personal network of people:

A close one, two or three. A circle of prayer warriors. Those nearby and those far away. People from your sending church. An online community with commonalities.

If we don't take this upon ourselves, we get burnt out and lonely and wonder why or we enter this journey thinking we've got skills, ministry experience, twitter followers and that that will be enough. It's not! Even if you don't need this network now, you will need it later. And honestly, it's best to set it up when you're healthy than when you're desperate. No one is going to build this for you.

How to build a personal network:

First you ask. Then you stick to it. You calendar times to meet. You set reminders to check in and give updates. You schedule prayer update emails. You plan times away with like-minded people. {Insert three circles these sizes: Small. Medium. Large.}

Small circle:

I define small as 1-3 people. It's intimate. Detailed questions are welcomed. Old-school word would be accountability! A place where you can be raw.

Medium circle:

I define medium as 4-8 people. A small group. Those you can send an email to who might live far away. A group of people who gather for coffee and talk common life like

parenting, crafting, exercise, cooking, etc. A place where you're heard.

Large circle:

I define a large group as 8 plus. A place you gather with like-minded people. Conferences, blogging communities, retreats. A place where you receive encouragement.

The small should take place weekly.

The medium network should take place monthly.

The large should take place a few times a year.

Your health depends on this personal network of people. You'll go crazy trying to maintain life without places to process out loud. When you start thinking, "I'm going crazy," that's the time to go small. When you're overwhelmed and need direction, go medium. When you're burnt out and need to be surrounded by people who understand, go large.

Note: Large never includes Facebook, Twitter and other social media. That's everyone else's outlets. We need soul support. It's an unhealthy sign when we are posting our private issues there. Sure, get and give recipes, leadership principles, updates on social media.

Also small might need to be a professional counselor. Don't put on a friend's shoulder what a counselor might need to hear. We will face circumstances and seasons when counseling is needed. This is not a bad thing. In fact, be a ministry couple that encourages it on the staff rather than fears it.

Advice: Make known to sending churches you need more than their money and prayer. You need care.

Who's cell phone number do you have that you could text or call when you're lonely and they'd get it? At the very least, they'd know how to pray?

Who are you pouring into? Who's pouring into you?

Is there another church planting family nearby that needs a dinner out? Who can you invest in on your church staff team?

Our kids are at the school age that allows others who keep them to have less hands on involvement, which is nice for all involved. Our worship pastor's family are in the same season of life. We swap 24 hours with them about every quarter. We keep their kids for exactly 24 hours. They get away or go back to an empty and quiet house for 24 hours. Then vice versa. It's the best 24 hours. You strategize how to get the most of those hours. When your house is doubled in the amount of children, you think of activities a week in advance to prepare for such an army. The blessing is receiving such refreshment and giving the same to a family with whom you are doing life.

You know you are being pastored by some swell people when they walk closely with you during a high stress season. Our dear friends, Andy and Stacie, pastor and bless us. They are church planters in a neighboring city and are a few years ahead of us on the church planting journey. In a recent storm we battled, they texted us one Sunday right after our last service and invited us down their way for pizza with the whole family. We were spiritually hungry for this time with them.

They listened in between our children asking for more water and more slices. We chased kids while trying to catch up. But as we left each other that night, we know we had received such a blessing in their friendship. And we knew they were holding us up. The storm we were facing grew worse. The mailman knocked on my door a few days later. A package from that neighboring city and that church planting family who were holding us up. I opened it up as if a raincoat and umbrella were there to wade through the storm. Better! A note that read: When life gets stressful, sometimes you need some serious silliness. Remember 'stressed' spelled backwards is 'desserts.' We love you! Inside the box was a batch of homemade cookies and 5 cans of silly string! The storms blew over with some miraculous works by God. But it was the encouragement that kept us afloat.

We serve, we love, and we live best when we are surrounded by others who are in this with us! Encourage a family who are on a similar journey with you today.

Day 20

Make a Discovery

"I like nonsense, it wakes up the brain cells. Fantasy is a necessary ingredient in living, it's a way of looking at life through the wrong end of a telescope. Which is what I do, and that enables you to laugh at life's realities." -Dr. Seuss

At this point, you're halfway through your first month! Take a deep breath. You deserve at least that. In choosing to live sent, you must take time to celebrate the small victories. If you've met someone new or made an appointment with a service person, props to you. You're getting settled. That's worth celebrating.

Boxes should be torn down and recycled, right? You'll get there. Pace yourself. Boxes always have several lives in our family. What originated as a dish box becomes a race car and later a puppet show stage.

Something has surprised you about your city by now. Your curiosity is peeked. Make a discovery today. Let's not limit discoveries to what our eyes can see or read. Anyone in the family should chime in on this day. Think back on what you've experienced thus far and set out to make a discovery today. Maybe you've passed by a restaurant on your way to church. Maybe you're hearing talk about a festival or event coming to your city.

From my 31 day journal:

We are never at a loss for something to do in the city. In fact, we're discovering that you get to choose. The refreshing part is that something is always free! Today at Borders Bookstore, which is just around the corner and across the street, was a children's event. We probably made it a bigger deal than it was, considering that it was just our three boys in attendance and the coordinator lacked kid-friendly skills. However, she read a few books and handed them some activity sheets and that seemed like just enough for our boys.

On the other side of the street from Borders is AT&T Park. Though a ballgame took place in the evening, the stadium was packed during the morning hours with World Cup fans. The stadium showed the game on the Jumbotron. Needless to say, the streets were packed with soccer fans and in our city the world is well represented!

One treat we weren't sure we'd be able to enjoy here in the city is swimming. The temperatures hover between 60 and 70 degrees. However, today was the exception with upper 80s!

The idea of being in a pool sounded splendid. We're thankful that two of our staff families live in a complex that has several pools! So we walked a few blocks and jumped in! We even made a few friends with some kids at the apartment complex. Something different I will say...Because swimming is rare here, most of the kids in the pool swam in their undies! I guess there's no need to invest in swimsuits if they are seldom if ever worn!

Another entry:

Today's adventure was done mostly in our mini-van and with an extra friend. We drove to the top of Telegraph Hill which proudly displays Coit Tower, a 210 foot tower that gives a beautiful 360 degree view of the city. They say the view at sunset is the best...I'm saving that view for a date night with my man. Roads are steep and tight leading up to the tower and parking is limited to 30 minutes. The view is free from the base, but cost to ride the elevator to the top of the tower leaving 36 or so steps to climb. Me and four littles enjoyed the free view today!

The boys saw the Golden Gate Bridge, Alcatraz, the Bay Bridge, the tall buildings in the Financial District, and the Ferry Building. There's even a shady grassy area where we took a few minutes to play 'fake baseball!' You know, no equipment needed, just air bats and air gloves and air balls. We loaded back into the van and drove over and down Lombard Street. It's neat to compare the pictures of Lombard Street taken from Coit Tower and then taken at the base of the crooked street. Though we've driven down the street a few times, it

never gets old. We wonder what it's like for those that call this street home and give them lots of credit for how they keep it so beautiful.

Discoveries come in big and small packages. Discoveries are not limited to the first 31 days. Living sent brings about many discoveries. Our eyes should always be open and ears perked as we invest in our cities. The God of wonders is good to show us Himself as we seek to discover the places where He has called us to live. I am never short of amazement as I can stand at the same park or in front of the same church seat and discover Him in new and fresh ways. It should be a habit for us to seek Him and find Him as we seek Him with all our hearts. (Jeremiah 29.13) He is all around the place you live. He's waiting to be discovered by those who trust in Him and by those who don't know He exists.

As you discover something new and tangible in your day today, find God in that discovery as well. It's the spiritual and physical colliding!

Day 21

Honor Dad

“And they compelled a passerby, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross.”

Father’s Day just happened to land in the midst of our 31 Days in the City. Depending on when you experiment with your 31 days, make a day just about him.

Why can dad use one special day out of the 31? Because this is what your man is doing:

Mark 15.21 describes the man to whom you are married.

“And they compelled a passerby, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross.”

Luke 23.26 describes the scene in a little different way:

“And as they led him away, they seized one Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and laid on him the cross, to carry it behind Jesus.”

So you're probably not married to a man named Simon, but so amazing if you are. You probably don't have two children named Alexander and Rufus, but I've got goosebumps if you do. Let this part of the crucifixion story come alive as we think of our husbands. This dad doesn't even call this place home. He's just there for the day. Maybe the wife needed a break from the kids and asked him to take the kids to town. Perhaps Simon, Alexander, and Rufus, were making a discovery that day as they heard what was going down with the crowds on the street. We know that the culture was preparing for Passover. As the moment unfolded, what did the children experience?

“Daddy, where are we going? What are you doing?” the boys might have asked.

“Boys, stay close. I don't know where we're headed, but we're going to follow this Man,” Simon must have told his sons.

“Daddy, watch where you step. That Man is dripping blood.” The boys could have observed.

Alexander and Rufus experienced their dad carry the cross that day quite literally.

Simon felt the weight of the cross. He encountered Christ's blood on his body. Simon heard the ugly comments. He carried a burden he wasn't expecting to carry that day.

I can only imagine that Jesus thanked His Father for this relief from Simon. I love envisioning Jesus' expression towards this Cyrenian. Simon, as his children watched, carried the cross that day.

This is such a heavy way to begin this day, but it's a reminder of what your ministry husband is attempting to accomplish for God's Kingdom. Living sent requires an honoring of him from you and from your children and from the church. It begins in marriage. It overflows to home and family life. This honoring will be seen by the church.

From my 31 days journal:

My husband, Ben, makes life all about us. We know so by how he prioritizes his time and makes the most of it when we are together. I commented to him just the other day that our boys (whether they realize it or not) have a dad that spends an enormous amount of time with them. I love that Ben is a dad who doesn't waste time. Most days always have the comments, "Where's daddy?" or "When is daddy gonna be home?" And though I get tired of giving the same answer, I love knowing that it's NOT that daddy is never around, it's just that daddy makes being around GREAT!

Make a day all about him and what he loves.

The lineup for dad:

- Breakfast
- Gave gifts of video game and Giants shirt and hat and a Yogurt gift card

- He went on a run
- Family ate pizza in a new neighborhood, Inner Richmond district
- Rest time
- At a church meeting that night, girls served guy's favorite appetizers
- Later that evening, toured possible church facility

One way he spends his time is a one-on-one date with each child. He calls them daddy dates. He and Elijah enjoy video games and baseball together. He and Sam enjoy doughnuts and tech-savvy things. Ben and Asher also enjoy sports and taking trips.

These dates go on the calendar first. I strive to protect them for him and clear days so that Ben can have these moments with the kids. A few hours of personal non-invaded time lasts all month. When Ben has to stay late at work for a counseling session or has to leave the house early for a breakfast meeting, the boys know that they have had or will have their own personal time together with him.

We are still pretty selfish with his time and always want more. However, Simon, portrayed this well for us. He modeled fatherhood before his children as he walked in sync with His Father before him.

Not every ministry-minded father sees the kids in the forefront of their ministry. Vision can get blurry and tasks overwhelming. Church people can be demanding and

schedules overcrowded. Regardless, honor him.

- Help him to protect a day a week for family time.
- Take the family to him during a work day and picnic on the office floor.
- Walk with him to work.
- Receive his phone when he comes home and promise to give it back in a few hours.
- Schedule a meeting with him. It can be an afternoon meeting of juice and crackers.

Simon's wife probably looked out the window and grew impatient wondering what was taking him and the boys so long in the city. Simon's day was filled with carrying a cross and letting his children see him do so. Honor him today.

Day 22

Write a Family Playbook

"You can actually make your life the thing you want, instead of watching from the sidelines those lives you admire and want to emulate." - Tsh Oxenrider

I share a concept for setting up structure with margin. A concept that carves in this intentional living sent beyond 31 days. As if I haven't already, I'd like to bare my soul with you. In this 31 days, I've held nothing back. I hope it's clear to you that I'm writing in the thick of it. We continue to do more 31 days in the city as we call San Francisco home for over four years now. You're either thinking we're such newbies or you are wondering why we are still here. As you thrive in the place you now call home, I'm calling this a very intentional day for you and a day that will probably go completely unnoticed by any littles in your home at first.

It's a day set aside to write a family playbook. Now before

we could even arrive at words to put down on paper, we had to start living intentionally and the way God intends to the best of our ability. Ben and I have put in place over the course of a few parenting seasons our family purpose statement. I used Tsh Oxenreider's book, *Organized Simplicity*, as a guide. We spent days mulling over the language we use collectively as a family to describe the values we have together. We have rhythms in the fall that are quite different from our spring rhythms. We revamp the playbook every semester to reflect the season we are in. The playbook is an ongoing work in progress. We know come December and August that we can change things. Yet it hangs on the refrigerator with the kid's artwork and weekly menu and pictures of our sponsored Compassion and World Vision kids.

It's a reminder that what matters most after God is our family. It puts our intentions before us. The playbook is written accountability. Ben states how he will maintain his values. I declare, as well, how I will maintain mine. Together, we boldly write what our family will be known for. What we will seek after. How we will live together daily. I have held tightly and dearly to this playbook for a few years now. It's 'that thing' you have and I have that tends to be tucked away inside.

Here is the purpose for the family playbook:

This playbook is to be a guide for our family during this season of life. This playbook will outline our purpose as a family, our priorities, our boundaries, our rhythms, and will be used to keep us focused on what really matters in our family. It will serve as a tool to protect us and to keep us accountable.

Elements:

- Family purpose statement
- Family verse
- Values
- Priorities
- Daily Rhythm
- Weekly Rhythm
- Monthly Rhythm
- Annual Rhythm
- Your Values
- Spouse's Values
- Family Values

The family purpose statement is very personal. The family verse is one we claim to memorize. The one we chose in August is one we claim to believe and live out at school. The one for the spring tends to speak into what we hope for the new year.

Ben and I sit down twice a year to revamp our family playbook. The first one to two are always the hardest. When life's seasons change, the playbook can be grueling to map out. However, the few hours spent on such a focused and intentional plan has months of reaping. Before you think I've just dropped the "bomb of impossibility" into your lap, you

need to know this about me. I fail at diet plans. I have good intentions to do my quiet time every day on vacation. I set out to drink my 8 glasses of water a day. I'm a quitter. Yet, when the plan has implications for my home, marriage, parenting, and personal time, I've got folks I'm accountable to. This is the part of a book where an infomercial would fit quite well. For one low payment of a few hours of your time one night, the product lasts for 4-6 months depending how you write it. Everyone pitches in as they hear their parts to play. The bulk of it lies on you and your spouse. Their involvement is critical. Someone needs to be the manager of the playbook, but the spouse needs to be a key support.

The playbook need not last more than six months. Church planting and ministry seasons change. School years change. Kids grow out of nap time and into extracurricular activities. Work schedules change. A shortened playbook timeframe allows for flexibility. It increases your success rate of fulfilling your values that you listed. And we all love success.

Let older kids chime in. Let this playbook be a guide and not a burden. Let it breathe freedom into being a family of intentionality in living sent. Let it infuse hope for what God has called your family to be in this season.

Day 23

Open the Door

...welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. - Romans 15:7

Open the door to your home. Someone did it for you.

We live in a day when garage doors stay shut leaving us clueless if someone is even home. Life happens at coffee shops and the sports field, therefore, homes are becoming increasingly private. We can practically change this by a simple invite.

From my 31 days journal:

It was a strategy to build friendship and get to know our neighbors. Our church team lived in 3 different apartment complexes in our neighborhood. We would host a BBQ at each complex. The family that lived there would host and the rest of the team would help cook. All of us invited everyone we

knew and our lists were short those days. Initially, us, adults, were timid to invite for fear of rejection. In our own ways, we overcame such fears and realized collectively that people are lonely and are looking for community in whatever form it was taking. We learned to offer vegan options and pry open their bottles we weren't accustomed to opening. Neighbors met each other for the first time because we held a BBQ. We witnessed people step outside their normal routine of work to pause long enough for a name exchange and a story shared.

Another entry:

Together, our family recently read about the first Thanksgiving. Hundreds of years ago makes no difference for the purpose is still the same- to celebrate what brings us together – the bond of Christ. That through stormy waters and unknown futures, through welcoming a new people with strange ways and practices, blessings can abound when you embrace the uniqueness of what God created in each other. The diversity present on that November in 1621 was present in our home this past Thanksgiving. Maybe not the English and Native Americans, but the Koreans, Filipinos, Latinos, and Americans. We had a tableful in a home upon a hill in the city by the bay. My husband says that we do mechanics a service by taking our broken cars to them. If we fix our own cars, they miss out on using their gifts! I feel the same way about preparing a turkey. The local chef transplanted from the bayou knows what he's doing. So I let him handle the turkey. Fried and all. Ben gave thanks. This day was no different from the other days of giving thanks for God is so very good. Yet, more

came to the table because their family tables were far away. Because friends living in the city become family sooner than later and with young ones, we don't stay at the table for long. They rushed off to spy on imaginary creatures on the quiet street. The guys checked scores on TV. The girls compared recipes and traditions. We had a house full and my heart was full when leftovers were heated up later that evening. I returned to the table. No longer a table full, but tableful. For in my words, it has been coined as having grateful moments spent around the table with others. Maybe the holidays are upon you and you need to host a tableful.

Regarding International students who are studying here in cities across the United States, 75% will return to their home countries never having stepped foot in a home here. 85% will return never stepping foot in a church. This statistic unnerves me. It should all of us. What nations are represented in the place you now call home?

Jeri practices law and had some work to do at a law school in our city. She left home in Kenya for a stint of time here in the States. Jeri is a believer and sought a church as a top priority. Every Sunday, she would greet me in the most humble way possible as she would refer to me as the first lady. Jeri might have had many aims while at church, but she always sought after my personal prayer requests. In her time in America, I would recall days when I knew that Jeri was praying for me. I never saw her housing accommodations in the city, but I can clearly recall a time she saw mine. It was an evening of flash flooding and I was beyond excited to host my first book signing at our home up on the hill. Friend after

friend entered our home, quick to disrobe their raincoats and rain boots. The evening was finishing up and I was overcome with support for a two year project that had a huge piece of my heart. I shared my gratitude to everyone present and then the door opened. Jeri stood out of breathe and soaking wet. I looked out of the window and knew she had just walked miles to get to our home. In the rain. Late at night. All to show me her support. I begged her to rest, to eat something. All she asked for was a warm cup of water. Jeri got down on the floor after the rest of our friends had left and looked at our children's DVD collection with the boys. We receive a blessing far greater than gold when we open the door to our home.

Raj showed up to Epic Church on Super Bowl Sunday. Having adopted from India, I'm drawn to anyone from there. I introduced myself and brought Ben into the conversation. We learned each other's stories and were honored that he would find community at our church. Raj was in the States working on a short-term project. It was his first time out of his city, let alone his country. I knew for certain that he was a statistic that could be changed very practically. He had done one himself - simply by finding a body of believers while he was far away from home. And I was determined not to let him return home without experiencing a meal with a family in an American home. Fortunately, Raj was invited into a small group through Epic of young professionals who invited him on hikes and adventures in the city. It was nearing his time to return to India, but we got a date on the calendar to host Raj in our home. He shared stories of living out his faith and praying with his church through the night. Our boys stared as

they heard Raj talk about friends who have been persecuted for their faith. We laughed with him as he had learned to cook in his American apartment with his sister on Skype back home. It was an honor, once again, to open our home.

Invite others in. Invite others out. While it's best to host a party at your house where others can see how you live and what you value, home is not always conducive for everything. Have people join you for a meal at a restaurant. Meet up for coffee. I'm sure each of us could come up with a substantial list of people we could invest in through friendship and sharing a meal together.

We have to clear our calendars and say no to things.

Send out invites. Call it potluck. Fire up the grill. Depending on the season, create a theme around the party. Cookies and cocoa. Ice cream social. Egg Hunt. Block Party.

Who will you invite IN today? {Coming into your home}
Who will you invite OUT? {Meeting up on neutral ground}

Day 24

Date Night

Within this Christian vision of marriage, here's what it means to fall in love. It is to look at another person and get a glimpse of what God is creating, and to say, "I see who God is making you, and it excites me! I want to be part of that. I want to partner with you and God in the journey you are taking to his throne. And when we get there, I will look at your magnificence and say, 'I always knew you could be like this. I got glimpses of it on earth, but now look at you!' Tim Keller

Today is about the two of you. And just the two of you. Get dressed up and venture out to a place with cloth napkins and dim lighting. Celebrate a night on the town. Celebrate the days in your new place so far. This is called a real date. It might have been months since you've gone on one of these, but in your first 31 days in your surroundings, you both need this.

From my 31 days journal:

Ben and I have been dating since 1999. We tell the boys that we can be better parents and a sweeter husband and wife by going on dates...and it's not just an excuse to get away from them, but by doing so, we return to them more refreshed. If I'm honest, date nights are done so that we don't have to do bedtime routine. But that's just bonus material there.

In a ministry world, if your church is going to be successful, if your kids are going to make the transition well, if you're going to keep your sanity, then hold hands with your husband.

Hand holding says, "I'm in this with you." And we need our husbands to hold our hands as we need to hold theirs. We need them to voice and act upon this so we're not left on the sidelines.

Begin with nurturing your marriage. I've seen firsthand that it works best when you surrender to God's leading and affirm your husband's calling by embracing his hand on the journey. Everything else can wait.

Here's why:

- You're married to a start-up man.

There's a drastic difference between the established church pastor and your church planting husband. Not only does your husband preach, care for the congregation, and lead a staff, but he also advertises, fundraises, strategizes, and stresses. He will face opposition, have sleepless nights, question his calling and be very concerned for you and your family.

Here's what you need to know:

- Your start-up husband needs a stable wife!
- A constant supporter.
- A steady comfort.
- An always pray-er.
- A verbal encourager.
- A supplier of his needs.
- A gal that wants to date him.

Here's how you date:

- Engage in uninterrupted conversations. Phones not allowed.
- Thank God for the past and present.
- Dream together about our future.
- Go on drives with no background noise.
- Send the kids to a sitter and have the house all to yourselves.
- Book a restaurant weeks in advance.
- Order sushi after the kids go to bed.

I am privileged to have a helpmate who seeks rest with me and for me.

We have learned that pulling away from the ordinary and

normalcy of life for rest restores the weary and worn pieces of our soul. Rest has to be scheduled in this fast-paced world. Very seldom does one simply stumble upon it. Have you scheduled rest together? Protect these dates on your calendars.

I realize many married couples have anniversaries and wonder why they are still holding on. Strongly desire to be that couple that works daily at your marriage to make it great. It's worth it for your children. It's worth it for your church. It's worth it for each other. As a couple in ministry, we strongly desire it for you.

This is a fun activity just for you or one you can do on a date night. Talk about your sweet spots: those moments in time when you are most happy, most alive, and most satisfied. Share yours and ask your spouse to share.

Here are a few of mine:

- When writing is flowing/ideas are coming
- Dipping strawberries in chocolate
- Curled up on the couch with a blanket watching Downton Abbey or Anne of Green Gables or any classic
- Conversations with other moms figuring out how to give the most to those around us while staying healthy ourselves

Here are a few of Ben's:

- Being on the back deck with the fire pit blazing, chatting. Dessert or coffee adds to it.
- Walking and talking on the streets of San Francisco
- Reading thought-provoking, change-provoking books on leadership
- Preaching/leading/starting/building

What are some sweet spots you share together?

Here are a few of ours:

Intimacy

Trying a new restaurant or venturing back to a favorite

Dreaming about our next vacation or next adventure

No agenda Saturday mornings

Date nights in or out of the house

3 things to consider when determining sweet spots:

Rediscover a sweet spot. Perhaps it's something you enjoyed together during your dating days. A pastime in college years or grad school.

Do not feel guilty for carving out time for each other. Everyone will be better for it.

Indulge in their sweet spot. This is a selfless act that reaps benefits. As marriage partners, we should seek this out weekly or more often. Indulging can be as simple as a question. It can be as simple as looking them in the face when they talk. One way you indulge is by giving them permission and a push to enjoy their sweet spot.

Caution:

Check the expiration date. Just like candy, no one wants a sweet at Valentines wrapped in a Halloween wrapper. In other words, it might be his favorite sweet inside, but they can see how it's presented. Make sure your motives are right. Offer freshness.

Don't overindulge. Too much of a good thing can be bad for your health. Selfishness can be addictive as we try to please ourselves and want others to please us as well. You and I have the world at our disposal and often can expect too much. Moderation is key! Personal sweet spots are to be enjoyed in moderation. Mani-pedis and childcare daily to run to the grocery store might be a sign of overindulgence!

If you rediscover a sweet spot, indulge in one of your spouse's, and plan one for the two of you to enjoy, watch out! You might become irresistible.

Day 25

Take Care of Business

“The great thing is, if one can, to stop regarding all the unpleasant things as interruptions in one’s ‘own’ or ‘real’ life. The truth is, of course, that what one regards as interruptions are precisely one’s life.” - C.S. Lewis

While this is a necessity and usually doesn’t spell F-U-N, pack some snacks and let this be a high-tech day for the kids. Tackle the DMV and pull out a treat for completing that mission. Pull the car through the smog test. Today is about taking care of business. This is the un-fun part of living sent - running errands and getting life in order. However, if done so with the mindset of intentionality, conversations will be instrumental and your way of living will be an example to everyone around you and in line with you today.

Potential errands in your first 31 days:

- Post Office
- Bank
- DMV
- Pharmacy/drug store
- Register to vote
- Cell phone company
- Cable/internet
- Power
- Water
- Trash/Recycling
- Neighborhood or building association

I would share from my 31 day journal of taking care of business, but you would be so unimpressed. I attempted potty training for our 2 1/2 year old and it went just as everyone says it does the first time. Awful and completely against the dream in my head the night before. Potty training might not be on your list of business, but I know one that might be. I will share my grueling experience at the DMV in our first 31 days. It involved a booklet, interesting characters, and a bad eye.

From my 31 days journal:

Moving from Missouri and growing up in the deep south,

we assumed the trip to the DMV would just be paperwork. Au contraire. California DMV required a written test. The plan was for Ben and a staff guy to go in the morning while I kept the kids at home and then we would trade off for the afternoon. I got more play-by-play text updates from Ben's DMV experience than anything Sports Center could ever produce. He waited four hours for his number to be called. He noticed others with their noses in the booklet and thought it would make for some good reading material while he waited. To his surprise, he was learning all kinds of new laws and signs. Beads of sweat gathered on his forehead as his number inched closer to being called. He was cramming all this new information in and quickly. Ben took the test when his number was called. He guessed on some and was thankful for the time with the beloved booklet for others. Ben barely passed. Barely. After the play-by-plays, I knew I would need more time in the booklet than just a four hour wait in the DMV office. A few days passed and it was my turn. It's ridiculous to have a valid driver's license from another state and dread taking a written test in another. In the moment, I couldn't think of anything more humiliating than our partner churches to discover, 'Church planter's wife fails California driver's license test.' I could get by in the city with public transit and my two feet, but the humiliation from other states was enough to push me to study.

My friend and church staff member, Lindsey, had to take care of the same business, so we went together to keep each other company when we weren't cramming. We felt like fish out of water as we maneuvered through the city and joined

the crowd of people waiting for the DMV to open. We knew immediately how some people were planning on getting through the ordeal for the smell of weed overtook them. Others had returned to take the test once again or prove they were faithful law-abiding citizens and deserved their license back. These folks were dressed in things from tutus to leather vests. Taking care of business was about to be a life-changing day.

Do you know that motorcyclists can travel between lanes of still traffic and moving traffic? "Motorcycles may travel faster than traffic during congested road conditions and can legally travel in the unused space between two lines of moving or stationary vehicles; this is commonly called 'lane splitting.'"

Do you know that when parking on a hill going down, you must turn your wheels into the curb? If you are parked facing uphill, you turn your wheels out to the road. I figured I could skip over the paragraph about animal-driven vehicles for this test in this city. I learned that bicyclists rule the road and make any automobile driver nervous.

I finished my written test and stood in line to have it graded. Others were still taking their tests with their backs turned to the rest of us in line. An older lady must have gotten stumped on a question and asked me for answers. I was scared to even look her way for fear of being associated with cheating and forfeiting my good standing at the DMV.

Whew! I passed the test, but there was one more part. The vision test. For the average person this would be cake. I'm not your average person. I had recently had LASIK surgery and my

right eye did not heal properly, leaving some haze where the epithelium cells didn't fully join together. I did what you would have done. While I waited for my name to be called for the vision test, I told my friend Lindsey, who was with me, to read me the eye chart over and over. For precaution of my memory failing me, I asked the DMV employee if I could squint just a little bit considering my unique situation.

I only received a blank stare. My memory had to work perfectly here. And it did. That's why young people plant churches. Lindsey and I left with temporary licenses that day. Surely getting my prescriptions transferred to our new pharmacy and having the internet guy over to the house would be far less entertaining and intimidating than my day at the DMV.

As for me, I've learned that success doesn't come in a day and that a day is not made up of only success. No doubt taking care of business will be nothing short of an adventure today.

Day 26

Write Family and Friends

*Promise me you'll never forget me because if I thought
you would I'd never leave. ~A.A. Milne*

Grab some local postcards and let the kids write those they love. Share your new mailing address.

This day can make you either proud of your new home or very homesick. I am flipping through the postcards and handwritten letters from friends and family from across the country these days to remember.

"I hope that you guys are having fun in San Francisco."
Jonah, Louisiana

"I want to know if there are any tall buildings in San Francisco like New York." Jackson, Connecticut

"What is the funnest thing you have done?" Madison, Missouri

“What is your favorite thing about living in San Francisco?”
The Carrolls, Alabama

“I’m praying that you make new friends.” Natalie, Kentucky

Friends sent us postcards from Myrtle Beach, Las Vegas, Dogwood Canyon Nature Park. Packages arrived with markers and stickers from Kentucky.

From my 31 days journal:

One of our adventures is writing postcards and letters to friends and family. We found a box of 100 Pixar postcards for only \$15 and of course we haven’t come close to writing that many! But we’d love to try!

Here’s our sample card that even the newest writer can pen:

This summer, send us a postcard or letter asking us a question about our new city and we promise to write back! That’s a Pilgreen promise!

Make sure to include your address!

Send your card to:

(Insert address)

She handed me a piece of string that would tuck neatly in my Bible on the last Sunday evening at our church. She didn’t go all Scripture verse on me, but she made it clear to me that she was holding one end of the rope as we extended ourselves to the west coast. She was my pastor’s wife. She wasn’t letting

go. We walked behind the final 20 or so people that lingered around after our good-bye party towards the side doors of our church. All reluctantly. Everyone in a moment like this makes promises to stay in touch and come and visit. We've made enough moves to know that most promises fizzle out and are kind words to avoid having to say good-bye. Yet, it was the collective 20 friends that strolled out the church doors one last time that helped us move across the country and have made a trip or two to visit.

That inexpensive piece of rope remains a strong visual to this day. Some days I feel as if I'm in another country as a missionary with little connection to friends and family. Other than that being so far from the truth, I know that we're not alone. I see the rope. I know who's holding the other end.

Who's holding the other end of the rope for you and your family? Knowing their names, staying connected through email and phone calls, can keep your ministry going and your family thriving.

Day 27

Commit to a City Value

When you're surrounded by people who share a passionate commitment around a common purpose, anything is possible. - Howard Schultz, Starbucks CEO

This day will cause you to link arms with your community in a tangible way. Discuss together what your city values. These values might be blatantly obvious. These values might sneak up on you in conversation with a local or by observing how your new culture lives. Recycling and composting. Rallying together for justice. Sports fanaticism.

As our family lives sent, here are some values we notice in our culture:

- Tolerance. People tolerate your views and values, which makes most open to hearing your beliefs and how you do life.

- Less is more. Eliminating waste, caring for the environment, reusing and composting are actions that lead to “less is more” philosophy.
- Community. Urban farms, adult kickball teams, co-ops, nanny shares, car shares and neighborhood block parties are just a few ways people link up and form communities.
- Giving back. People care for the homeless. Corporations and start-ups take days off to clean the streets together. A pair of socks for the needy is admission to events.
- Diversity. The culture is a melting pot. You see it at Costco, in the school yard, and street corner. Languages fly around like species of birds. Collectively, the city thrives because of this value.
- Local sells. Few chain restaurants and bookstores thrive in the city. People rally and support their own who rise up and begin their own thing.

What matters to people where you live?

From my 31 days journal:

When I asked the boys about what they would like to do in our 31 days in the city, Sam would always say, “Plant a garden!” I know as the preschool year came to a close in Missouri, he had learned about spring, flowers, and plants. He gifted me a plant for Mother’s Day as well. It is evidently on his mind. I can think of no better way to end our 31 days in the city than with

starting life with a garden.

I will be the first to admit that I know nothing about planting, gardening, nor anything pertaining to the subject. Alison, an employee at our local Lowe's, helped us pick out the supplies and vegetables and told us what she thought would grow in our 'habitat.' We are planting squash and tomatoes. Alison said she loved squash and I made her a promise that if we were able to grow any, we would personally bring her one! (I never brought her squash. We never grew any.)

Being in the city and in an apartment, space is limited. We have a teeny-tiny balcony that is the perfect size for our pot and the veggies are able to get some sunlight. Sam is a nurturer and it shows in the way he likes to check on and water the vegetables.

We basically grew green leaves and that became quite boring to a preschooler. But from the streets below, we looked like the locals. We had greens on our balcony. It sent a statement that we value what our culture values.

To live sent, you must become vulnerable to the culture. Not so that you look ignorant, but so that you can learn. If you only view the culture from the church seat, office chair or home window, you will make assumptions that are false.

Living sent requires that you immerse yourself among the people of the city. From personal experience, your accent, style and skin color might stand out while you learn what matters to your new community. However, you will gain respect that far outweighs the obvious differences. Even if you

are not completely understood, people will appreciate your effort.

Take with you a spirit of teachability. Not all values are worth valuing. Some must be left to the city. Just because sports are considered family events on Sundays, does not mean that we forsake our priority of corporate worship for the sake of a city value. Just because kids spend weeks at various camps around the Bay Area in the summer does not mean we have to follow suit.

The first week of school brought about a whole new list of city values for our family. It was obvious the first day that pick-up kids stayed and played on the play yard while moms and nannies visited together. On day two, I was thrilled at this opportunity to make new friends and that our boys could have extended “energy-release” time before returning to our no-yard living situation. I packed the boys their individual snack size bag of chips. They were quick to pull out their snack from my tote bag and my eyes were quick to notice what other moms and nannies were serving. Mysterious metal tins were handed out spontaneously around the play yard.

I was certain Frito-Lays chips weren't inside. The smells that filled the play yard proved my thoughts true: fresh fruit, roasted seaweed, and tofu. On day three, I left the bags of chips behind and packaged fresh chopped fruit for play yard snack time. I chose to embrace this value because it linked us more with our school community. This was an easy fix—one that silently said we cared and wanted to be a part. Plus, it forced a better healthy decision for the family. This momma is

still not on the tofu wagon. Maybe one day.

In our first few months of moving to the city, we began launch team meetings in our apartment for the church. We invited anyone interested in helping us start a church to come over every Sunday evening. By anyone, we meant anyone. Christians, our staff team, neighbors, warm bodies, were all welcomed.

Our staff team brought appetizers and desserts to share. We offered lemonade, water, and coffee. Two things were noticed. People asked for hot tea. We didn't have any. People didn't drink the coffee because we only offered non-biodegradable styrofoam cups. Hot tea and paper cups were provided the following week by our team.

This day requires you to live and learn. To give careful consideration to what your new community values. To live in such a way that ultimately honors God as you love the place He has called you.

Day 28

Stroll Around the Block

"I have an affection for a great city. I feel safe in the neighborhood of man, and enjoy the sweet security of the streets." - Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

This New York momma told me this in her apartment in the Upper East Side just months before we called San Francisco home. "You will talk so much more to your kids face to face as you walk the streets than someone else who talks to their kids in the rearview mirror."

She was so right. Then I remember her last words, "And it will wear you out." She was right again. Conversation between me and three kids on the sidewalks was non-stop action.

"Hold on."

"Wait up."

"Stop!"

“Watch out.”

“Don’t step in that.”

“What is that?”

“It’s from an animal...I hope.”

“Please don’t rub your hand along the wall.”

“Hold someone’s hand.”

“Be a good listener.”

“Pay attention.”

“No zig-zagging.” (The boys would naturally prefer to weave side to side on the sidewalks regardless of the other people walking in a straight line.)

“Listen and watch for the flashing light.” (All parking garage entrances have a blinking and beeping light that warn pedestrians of an oncoming car.)

“Hurry. Slow down. Stay by us. Watch out!”

And this was just from one corner of the block to the next.

From our 31 days journal:

We needed an incentive. I called it “Street Money.” The jingle went like this: Follow rules when on the street and earn coins for a tasty treat! This would be a reward for the boys for learning etiquette while sharing the sidewalk with other pedestrians.

You can imagine how tired we get of talking and how overwhelming these commands can be for the kids. Hence, street money. Our jar is already 1/4 full and the boys are doing GREAT. They are understanding crosswalks and street signs. They are learning our phone number and know our street address. They also know if they were to ever get lost to look for a police officer, walk into the nearest store, or look for a woman or mommy. (Though we pray daily for protection!) Even our friends in the city are impressed and have contributed to the street money jar. It won't be long before we're enjoying that tasty treat!

Another entry from 31 days journal:

We set out to notice how our neighbors lived. We told our kids to point out things they see. That quickly became a game of "I Spy." I spy a houseboat. I spy a kayak. I spy renderings of future expansion. I spy parking meter police in tiny cars.

Though our neighborhood is still being redeveloped, great things are happening and community is coming together. We already feel a part of it! Just across the channel is what is being coined as Mission Bay. Some of our staff team live there. Old Navy headquarters, UCSF Mission Bay campus, grounds for the new women's and children's hospital. There's also a mini baseball field. As me and the boys got onto the field for a few hits and runs, it wasn't no time that we had an audience.

Now, I will tell you that it was just an hour before the San Francisco Giants played an afternoon game and tailgaters were around, but regardless, we had us an audience! We were

considerate of the “tourists” and “fans” that wanted to play on the field, so we sat down along the bay and enjoyed some peanuts. We are thankful for our neighborhood and can’t wait to see what else develops commercially and relationally!

Today, don’t take the block for granted. By taking a leisurely stroll around it, you’ll discover paths, signs, and potential you’ll miss if you are zipping in and out by car.

Day 29

Escape the City

"The best way to prepare for what's ahead is to be present to what is now." - A. Voskamp

I know what you're thinking. 31 days in the city and we're escaping? I believe our appreciation for the city deepens when we leave what we love knowing we will return shortly. I read in a leadership book that a change of place plus a change of pace equals a change of perspective. Today, calendar an escape or intentionally sneak out of town!

From my 31 days journal:

Ben is the spontaneous one, not myself, yet I took on his mindset as we decided the night before to head south of the city to Monterey for a one night stay. We booked a hotel through Priceline (Ben's hobby) and got a great deal. We threw the essentials into a suitcase and headed south.

The boys enjoyed luxuries like TV with the Disney Channel, swimming (which of course was 53 degrees with a heated pool), and a fast food breakfast. All three were rare in our new normal. We drove further south along the California 1 Hwy to Carmel-by-the-Sea. The homes along the beach at Carmel were amazing and ranged from ultra modern to Snow White's cottage. Regardless of style, they all had an amazing view of the beach and that has to be figured into their multi-million dollar value! And what we think is on every California beach....a surfer. He stood on the shore just like the movies, whether contemplating the wildly cold waters or becoming one with the ocean. I think he had the same idea we did - a good escape indeed. Now it was back to our home in the city where every day is an adventure. It's just that the escapes were needed as emotional fuel.

We've taken a train to Santa Cruz and taken the CalTrain to Stanford University in Palo Alto. We've driven up and down the California Highway 1 to Half Moon Bay and Bodega Bay. All in a day's escape.

I remember very vividly, like the smell of the sap dripping off the tall pines, our trip to the mountains on Labor Day weekend. We had called San Francisco home since Memorial Day and this was our first overnight getaway as a family. Day trips had happened a few times, but our souls needed to wake up in a place far removed from urban life. We drove up the dirt and rocky road to a modest cabin tucked away from humanity and very near wildlife. As we got out of our van with some of our dearest friends, we, adults, experienced a let down. Our shoulders relaxed. We breathed in fresh mountain air.

Our heartbeat slowed down. Then the tears came. Tears that spilled out from drained and spent souls. Tears that come from living sent. Tears that taste like salt as they hit the lips on their way down. Yet these tears flowed out of grateful hearts for much needed time away.

Are you a mountains or ocean person? We are blessed to have both. While I love the vast expanse of an ocean, in this season of life, I love being lost in the wonder of the mountains.

So off to the mountains we went again. This time it was spring break for our kids and the city had been our home for 3 years. This escape was scheduled and I was looking forward to unplugging and all that mountain life had to offer us for a few days. In the past year, our oldest had experienced an asthma attack.

While we felt like it was under control, we knew to always be listening for wheezing as he is one active boy. After several days in the thin mountain air, we noticed that at night time, he was struggling with his breathing. I wasn't struggling at all. I was perfectly content with my camping chair perched by the creek with my journal and coffee in hand and kids playing wildly in the water. But we had no choice. We had to get home and see the pediatrician. We packed up two days early. We all had escaped. I thought. Tears came as we made it over the Bay Bridge and through the tunnel where San Francisco stands on display in its grandest best. I was overcome with the reality that I wasn't ready to return to ministry, to city life quite yet.

It's as if I was telling this city, "I'm not ready to come back. I needed a few more days away from you to love you better."

Yet the escape was over. I could not allow the escape to hold all healing power. The escape can serve a purpose. A purpose that God intends to use for our good. However, the same God that walks with me in the city is the same God that speaks to me by the creek running down the side of a mountain. When a moment to escape and be refreshed comes, seize the opportunity no matter how great or how small. Receive it as a gift from God and relish in it. But be careful to acknowledge God when you return.

In roles of serving others especially, we cannot forsake time away to refresh and recharge. I described our early days in church planting as much more draining and needing to escape much more often. Adjusting to a new life. Adjusting your family to a new life. Learning a new culture. Learning a new community. Being on with every new relationship. Starting a church and moving to a new place wasn't hurting us, but it was emotionally draining me.

And as a member of the female race, I compare church planting to that of childbirth. (Sorry men.) The early years of church planting is like that of infancy and toddlerhood. This means that church planting can bring post-partum. You can be excited about the process and the birth of the church, but there's a let down. You realize your identity was in the start of this and all the sudden, it's functioning and you're not!

It fleshes itself out in another way. You become depressed in a new surrounding and overwhelmed with a new way of life

and how all-consuming this is for your husband. You cocoon inwardly and outwardly. The days get darker. The blinds stay shut. Tell yourself to praise God. The shepherd and psalmist and king, David, had to do it. Get outside. David did that well too. It seems to me that Jesus had his best teaching days when he was walking along the sea or the field or the road. And then make plans, even if they're 6 months from now, to get away. Your ministry and your family depend on it.

“Lord, my every desire is known to You; my sighing is not hidden from You.” {Psalm 38:9}

God knows what you need. It's up to you to escape though. And do so before you explode. Escape when you are healthy and in need of a break, rather than on fumes leaving town. Make these escapes habitual and model this to your team and church. They will all know when you've escaped. It will be freshly spread all across your face.

Day 30

Get Lost

*The greatest mistake we make is living in constant fear
that we will make one. - John C. Maxwell*

Put the map away. Refuse to use Google. You're becoming a local. Explore uncharted parts of your city, but beware... surprises could be around the corner!

From my 31 days journal:

It pains me to write such an unexpected adventure. I'm still not laughing about it and if you knew how much we had to pay, you'd stop the chuckling pretty fast. Only the guy towing away our van has permission to laugh and shake his head. And I'm not in the mood to meet him anytime soon!

The short of it is that we wanted to take Aunt Lindsey to Chinatown and didn't have much time. And instead of paying the price for public transit, we opted for the cheaper route

of meter parking on the street. I did notice a public parking garage that charged \$7.50 per hour and knew we could do better than that. So we settled in between two cars on the street and filled the meter with \$3.50 in coins to give us a glorious one hour of parking.

Now, I've lived in the city LONG enough to know that you read the signs around you and remember the cross streets of where you parked. So I noticed Grant and Sutter Streets and that I only had one hour. I also noticed the signs up on the street posts that said the times and days for street cleaning and knew we were good there.

WHAT I didn't notice were the stickers down the post of the meter that said "commercial loading zone" and a phone number hotline in case your car was towed.

So we looked closely at our watches and enjoyed the next 54 minutes in Chinatown.

To my regurgitating stomach and shocked eyes, the van was NOT where we left it! I knew it was either towed or stolen and after I read the fine print down the metered pole, I knew the outcome.

I had no cell phone reception so Aunt Lindsey had to call and tell Ben and then call to find our van. The tall buildings around me grew taller in seconds. They seemed to look down on me for my ridiculous mistake. The streets felt more congested and I felt extremely lost without our van.

I did what any good mother would do and assured the kids that we would make our way home and daddy would

fix everything else! I had fooled them for I lacked even the power to put one foot in front of the other to guide us through the city back to our apartment. The walk home was a blur with tiny hands squeezed tight in mine. Those are treasures I would not lose in the city. In a matter of a few hours, Ben had retrieved our van from the Auto Return Yard and had paid the hefty fine.

“Not all who wander are lost,” once wrote J.R.R. Tolkien. If you make a discovery along the way, your being lost was not in vain. I gained vulnerability the day our minivan was towed. I gained a perspective I would not have reached had I pulled us back in the van to drive home.

Standing in the streets dressed in vulnerability and surrounded by fear, I had a choice to make. To allow being lost to destroy me or empower me. To say no to fear and yes to an opportunity. I won't lie. If it were just me on the streets with a disappeared van, I would have caved to fear. However, I had 6 little eyes watching me. They weren't concerned with the buildings or the missing van or the crowds. All they wanted to know was what momma was going to do. An opportunity.

“Boys, we know where this street takes us.” I was pointing back up into Chinatown. “But we haven't been down this street. And I think it leads home.”

I'm reading all street and parking signs better these days, but I still hold the record for the most parking tickets. I'm not proud of it, but it comes with the territory of exploration and adventure. That's at least what I tell my husband who has created a budget line for such.

You spontaneous ones, this will be natural for you. The planners will plan for this not to happen. You can simply avoid getting lost by staying close to home and keeping it safe though this defies living sent. Getting lost doesn't have to cost as much as it did for me, and it doesn't have to have a bad stigma on it unless we allow it. To live sent, we transport ourselves to a part of our community that hasn't been discovered yet, hasn't been touched yet by you and your family. The feeling will be like your lost. You've left your comfort zone and are exploring new turf. For all who have embarked on a life of mission, you must get lost and uncomfortable to identify with new surroundings. I can't say I know my city if I refuse to care for people of the Tenderloin, an impoverished neighborhood. I can't declare through worship that "greater things are still to be done in this city," if I won't go there.

Getting lost is a vital part of living sent. It's essentially vulnerability - allowing your new community to teach you a thing or two that might shake or rattle your worldview to the core. It might reveal the dark areas of your city or might shed light on the hope that is breaking through. It might unlock secrets that make you more of a local. I can almost guarantee that it will scare you and make you uncomfortable. But I can also assure you that it will grow your faith in the God who called you and has not left you lost.

Day 31

Celebrate

Out of them shall come songs of thanksgiving, and the voices of those who celebrate, I will multiply them, and they shall not be few; I will make them honored, and they shall not be small. Their children shall be as they were of old, and their congregation shall be established before me....” Jeremiah 30:19-20

Make a local recipe. Buy a dozen cupcakes from the bakery. You’ve made it 31 days in living sent and discovering the place you now call home. It’s time to celebrate! You’ve called this place home for a month now. You’ve hopefully grown more in love with the place God has called you. If you’ve done it right, you’ve made mistakes and encountered the unfamiliar. You’ve set aside fear to reach new heights in your faith in God. This calls for celebration! Go big or go small. Your goal today is to pause long enough to acknowledge that for some 30 days now, you’ve given of yourself, your time, your resources, your

family, your faith to love a people and culture with the grace of Christ.

From my 31 days journal:

Whoopie! To our 31 days!

Someone asked me the other day what my plan was now that the 31 days are over. I never expected it to be all that it has been! Our 31 days of adventure have forced us to get out and about, make mistakes, meet people, discover favorite spots and stay active.

“Whoopie! We’ve made it.” Day one seems so far away and from that day I had not the greatest hope that we’d make it this far. So with our ever-changing generation of social media and foodie trends, I took hold of the latest sweet trend in our city: whoopie pies. And that’s how we celebrated. The trend has changed from donuts to cupcakes to cake pops to cinnamon rolls.

However you celebrate, may it highlight your experiences thus far and honor your new community.

Celebrations are what my new culture does well. Our church team tapped into this when one of our guys got a job after searching for over 3 months. We walked along the bay for a mile to eat at a waterfront diner. Kids and all. As we walked in one direction, a group of cyclists were headed towards us. Our celebratory conversations continued, but then we became greatly distracted as the scene became a little too clear. The cyclists were naked men. Completely naked men. On

bikes. While we tried to return to the previous conversations and failed, we did manage to celebrate our friend's new job in our new celebrated community.

Days that followed, pink triangles adorned the twin peaks near the Sutro Tower that stands tall and visible in the city. A celebration of gay pride. The summer we moved to the city, the World Series celebrations would spill out into the streets. Cheers after every home game win would rush like a wave down our street and into our apartment complex. Halloween is a huge celebration amongst the Day of the Dead. Christmas is equally decorated on the outside of people's homes and apartments. It's as if the city seems to say, "You celebrate Carnival?" "Okay, me too!" And streets shut down and parties happen. A celebrated people and a celebrated culture are my new reality. It would be far from the truth to tell you that we celebrate just like our city does, but this truth I have learned from my new home: don't wait for a celebration to come on the calendar year. Look at today and find a reason to celebrate!

"How can I repay the Lord for all His acts of kindness to me? I will celebrate my deliverance, and call on the name of the Lord." {Psalm 116:12-13} Start a list. A list of gratitude and thanksgiving for what God has done, how He has provided, how He has revealed Himself to you. Naming what you are thankful for is a declaration of celebration. To celebrate is a public announcement of joy and happiness. Celebrations honor and lift up someone.

Since calling San Francisco home we have celebrated

one of our boy's giving his life to Jesus. We have celebrated new neighbors and consistently sunny days. We cheer during moments when we didn't get a ticket and moments when we scored an impeccable parking spot. Our church community causes an uproar when someone is baptized. Our family believes that the winner of every board game played in our home deserves to lead in a victory dance.

Know this, the most alert you will ever be to your town or city is right when you arrive. Call it shell-shocked, culture-shocked, sticker-shocked or just plain ole shocked, you experience new things every day countless times until they become the normal. The new normal will either dig us a fine rut that takes us to and fro carving out a routine that moves us along keeping life dandy and smooth, just the way we had planned. Or, we avoid the rut by keeping it fresh. Taking different routes to work and saying hello to a stranger on the street and hosting a playdate and buying coffee for the person next in line. So with each passing day, the more attentive you can be, the more the city begins to gain a piece of you. And as the city gains a piece of you, you leave a mark. A mark of fulfillment and purpose for that stranger will have a better day and that kid from the playdate will experience love inside your home or at the park. It's when that attentiveness becomes active that you begin to live out purpose in your community. And that's what we want - to have purpose in our time for every mark we leave on others because Jesus invites us to, we are all the blessed for it and our cities are all the better for it. And that's worth celebrating.

Conclusion:

It's not Lovey Dovey

It's true. I can write and live out 31 Days in the City and still not feel lovey-dovey about the very place God has invited me to embrace. I can honestly tell you I felt the same way in my first 31 days with a newborn in my arms—times three. Particularly during the 2 a.m. morning feedings or the cries of their five o'clock alarms. Nothing lovey-dovey about that.

To live sent takes initiative. To live sent takes intentionality. As the group DC Talk rapped in the early 90's, "Love is a verb." Living sent is choosing to love what doesn't come naturally. These 31 days are intended to have been a guide to learning your city for the first time or all over again. To lead you to consume and contribute with grace to the place God has called you.

As you live sent, give yourself grace to make mistakes.

Bank on needing the Kleenex box by your bedside. That smell of the unfamiliar will go away and become the new normal. In fact, I remember walking into a particular grocery store week after week and being overcome with the smell that showered me when the automatic door slid open. “Whew!” I blew a deep breath out and grabbed my cart and proceeded to attempt grocery shopping. Now I can’t even distinguish ‘that’ smell anymore. Hmmm. Living sent takes time, but living sent becomes your new normal.

In living with purpose and passion, don’t make the city supreme, but the God who put the city on your heart. Ask God for a heart that desires His presence to be more than enough. For if we model Jesus here on earth as a family, we will outwardly express His teachings in Matthew 20:28, “Here to serve, not be served.” Living sent is serving others, the people of our communities, our church family whether we are planting a church or teaching a class or seeing clients.

Living sent will take you beyond the walls of your home after you’ve made a commitment to do so as a family with your unique gifts and God-given purposes. Our family has ventured to the most outwardly tough and most inwardly hurting neighborhood in our city to deliver groceries door to door. Our first offering taken at our church, 100 percent of it, went to our neighborhood public school that lacked basic resources. Now, 3 years later, we are stepping foot into that very school to mentor and tutor the students. Our church will best model to the community what the pastor and staff families model. Your 31 days in the city matter. How you live sent on day 32 and day 672 matter. The choice to make a

difference, to love well, and to extend grace will be blessed by our Father in the doing.

I'm a sojourner with you on this earth to live sent for His purpose and Kingdom. Just as the rope was extended to me, I boldly and excitedly extend it to you. Whatever coast, mountain, farmland, valley, or dessert you are in. Whatever zip code that is now assigned you. Whatever color the sky. Whatever challenges and adventures await. I pray this prayer over you in this divine and holy moment:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, because I hear about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints. I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ. Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother {sister}, have refreshed the hearts of the saints.

If I could be the one jumping up and down as you pull into your new town holding a handmade sign that reads, "You are welcomed here!" I totally would. If I could knock on your door at an ungodly hour because I just knew you were in the mood for some chocolates and a good listener, I would be there in a heartbeat. You just have it better than that. The Prince of Peace surrounds you. The Rock remains steady in uncharted waters. His promises throughout the Old and New Testament don't expire. Speaking the sweet and powerful Name of Jesus ushers in His presence. Remember when He provided for you before? He will do it again! His ways are higher and you can

still be type A and be fine with that. He loves and protects those kids of yours more than you ever can. You might have moved far away, yet He's just as near.

Remember that cup we raised as we began this 31 day journey? Find it in the cupboards or the living room floor or still in the box and raise it again. Our Great and Gracious God is honored by the life you desire to live for Him. Don't be afraid. Don't you give into fear. Let faith win by taking that first step. Pull open the curtains, open the window and let the fresh air in. Take a deep breath each and every day, multiple times a day and know that the God that has called you to this new place will not leave you alone. Not for one minute. Even when you escape to the bathroom. Even when you sit outside under the dark sky feeling invisible. His power is made strong in you. God has you where you are for a reason and with great purpose. Here's to living sent, my friend.

For Ideas:

[illegible]