

How Invested Are You in the Place God Planted You?

Plesionology - the theology of place, that is, the godly importance of investing in one place - has been on my mind lately.

I tend to be a bit of an adventurer and something in me struggles to stay in, or invest in, any one place for a particularly long time.

There is rarely a week where I don't have a road trip to somewhere. Multiple times a week, I'm Zooming (video conferencing) with people from various places across our region, nation or globe.

In addition, I grew up as a military kid, moving to various places and starting in new schools. Even when I left my childhood home, I bounced around the country and globe for a number of years.

It hit me as very strange when I recognized that I have lived in Saint John, New Brunswick, Canada, for more than 10 years. That's longer than I have lived anywhere in my life.

The other challenge I see in me is this: Neighboring is hard for me. It's easier to do my own thing and invest elsewhere.

When it hit me that I have lived in Saint John for more than a decade, it challenged me to reflect on questions, such as "How well do I know my neighbors?" and "How have I invested in the people here?" and "How have I been a blessing to this city?"

Turns out, not very much at all. Recently, I happened to see neighbors coming out of their house carefully carrying a newborn in a car seat across the ice to their truck.

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And I thought, “They had a baby! I had no idea. How did I not notice she was pregnant the last nine months?”

As I’ve been running the roads all over the globe, my neighbors’ lives have gone on and we’ve scarcely had a wave. How sad.

Love your neighbor. I am recognizing how counter to my normal rhythms (and perhaps yours too) that has become, as we live so much of our lives elsewhere, including virtually elsewhere.

What would it mean to invest in my life right here? To have a theology of place right here?

Preston Pouteaux, who was our guest speaker at the Canadian Baptist of Atlantic Canada Youth and Family Summit in mid-January, also got me thinking about this when he talked about “Plesionology” - although I’d prefer it to be called “placeology” - a theology of place.

Pouteaux shared that “plesionology” has scarcely been studied or written about by theologians compared to other topics, yet it is one of the most important spiritual disciplines as we learn to love our neighbors.

He also used the words “neighborology” and “neighborist,” and these concepts have been bouncing around in my head ever since - as I run the streets of my neighborhood, as I glance out the windows at neighbors dealing with the ice and snow, and as I engage in the chatter at my local gym.

So, let’s ponder this together: What is our theology of place? How important is it to engage in a particular place and time? And what does that even mean and look like? What does it mean to be a part of seeing God’s Kingdom of heaven breaking in on earth right here in this place?

Here are a few starting things that come to my mind as I ponder this:

1. Jesus had a plesionology.

He is the savior of the world, but he entered the world in a specific time and place, and he invested himself fully there with those around him during his earthly life.

Jesus never traveled really far, getting around mostly by foot and spending a large portion of his time investing in just 12 young, rough leaders. Jesus traveled most through the region of Galilee and frequently traveled by foot to Jerusalem.

If Jesus thought it valuable to begin changing the world by investing in a specific place and people, perhaps we're called to do the same.

2. Plesionology changes me; it shapes me to invest steadily in one place.

When I'm flying through a place, it's easy to avoid the difficult, the long haul, the depth of sharing and the shaping experiences that truly change me and us. It's through steady investment in a place and people that God develops our hearts for others.

Sure, God can certainly bring about "God moments" as we're passing through others' lives and a place.

However, more often "God moments" and conversation happen after a slow and steady investment in peoples' lives and in a place.

People only get to know each other and see into each other's hearts over time. We only build a reputation and trust in a place over time.

In this instant world, longer-term investment is needed and valued in opening up deeper, richer experiences that would not happen if we're just "passing through" or don't take the time to invest where we are.

It molds and shapes me, as I invite Jesus to help me know how to love my neighbors through the ups and downs, the city politics, the differences of opinions and the storms.

3. It takes slowing down.

Jesus' main mode of travel was walking. It is estimated he walked more than 3,000 miles during the three years of his earthly ministry.

I realize how much I've been missing in my specific place, my neighborhood, my people, as I've been rushing and gallivanting all over the place.

I know there has been great value and richness in my travel, and I will continue to value that.

But I'm recognizing I need to use my time when I'm not on the road - being a regular, at least as much as possible, around my place and join the activities going on in my neighborhood, so that I can get to know my neighbors and they me.

I need to slow down enough to invest right here, in this place and these people. Where can I - where can we - be a regular investor in our local church, school, community center, street parties, gym, coffee shop and neighborhood?

Here is to us investing in our place and joining God in our neighborhoods.

Editor's note: A [version](#) of this article first appeared on One Neighborhood, the [blog](#) of Canadian Baptist of Atlantic Canada's Youth and Family Department. It is used with permission.