

# “AS I WALKED AROUND AND LOOKED CAREFULLY . . .”

**Editor’s Note:** “How to Be a Good Farmer—Even in a City: Creating a Community-Based Ministry” appeared in the January–March 2011 edition of Elder’s Digest. The article proposed 10 “farming commandments” which systematized Jesus’ ministry method into 10 intentional action steps for our time<sup>1</sup> and served as an introduction to a series of Elder’s Digest articles that, in the coming months, will unpack these commandments in more detail.<sup>2</sup> This article is the fourth in the series and will focus on the sixth “farming commandment.”

Paul couldn’t sit still. He had recently arrived in Athens and was waiting for his colleagues, Silas and Timothy, to join him in this great metropolis of the ancient world. He decided to walk around and check out the city. What he saw distressed him—the city was full of idols! This motivated him to have lively discussions with the local intelligentsia and anyone else who happened to be at the marketplace. As he listened to the local chatter and dialogued with the city folk, he got a better grasp of their issues and needs. Curious to hear more about Paul’s strange out-of-the-box-ideas, some probing philosophers brought him to a town meeting on Mars Hill (also called “the Areopagus”). There Paul told them what he saw on his walk: “Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. *For as I walked around and looked carefully* at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: ‘To an Unknown God.’ Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you” (Acts 17:23, NIV, emphasis added).

When he looked around their community, Paul discovered that they had a nagging need—to find the answer to an unanswered question in their lives. As they strove to know all there was to know, they came to a dead-end. There was an unknown-God-shaped hole in their lives.

“As I walked around and looked carefully.” Paul’s urban evangelism included walking around and looking carefully at the communities where he would be sharing the gospel. He

sought to know their needs, local situations, and issues. Paul modeled Farming Commandment #6: “Thou shalt drive or walk around the chosen territory and note the types of homes, stores, churches, people, etc.”

Paul did a walking survey in preparation for his outreach in the city of Athens. A basic step in studying a community is simply to get a visual survey of the targeted area. In our day and age, depending on how our territory is laid out, we can walk or drive. If the territory is rural and sparsely populated, driving would likely work best. Drive through designated random samples of your entire rural territory. If your territory is urban or densely populated, you will likely prefer to walk. It’s ideal to cover every street of your territory, but if that is not possible, you can walk or drive a grid pattern, doing a random sample of every third or fifth street. Don’t pick streets informally. Have an intentional pattern so that you will get a more balanced view of the community.

The Walking/Windshield Survey Form (included here) is convenient for taking notes. It’s better to do the survey in teams of two, especially when driving, so you won’t be distracted while taking notes and cause an accident! Even if the streets you are walking or driving are very familiar, look at them through the eyes of ministry. As you see people, homes, businesses, churches, schools, and agencies, dream of possible ways to serve the community. The survey may help raise questions and spark ministry ideas that could be asked about and verified in interviews<sup>3</sup>



with community leaders. Also, you can turn this activity into a prayer walk for the people, homes, and buildings that you see.

After your teams have been out for a couple of hours, reconvene and share what you saw and what your findings mean for your ministry goals. Place a big street map of your territory on the wall and attach notes to it from the observers. Indicate on the map the industrial areas, residential areas (expensive homes, poor homes), businesses, churches, etc. You might also want to attach to the map some notes that tell what needs you noticed and what ministry ideas came to mind as you walked or drove around. For example: “Start a tutoring and mentoring project at the school on King Street,” “Provide volunteers at the home for disabled adults on Main Street,” or “Start after-school supervision, activities, and homework help at the community center on River Street.”

If we only consider numbers (demographics) without being able to visualize the people and their environment, we get an incomplete image of the community we desire to serve. If we

go with what we think we already know, we will likely pre-judge or have a prejudiced image of the community.<sup>4</sup>

In one part of the world, I sent out teams two by two to do a walking survey. Before they left, they weren’t convinced they really needed to do this; it was familiar territory and they already knew the community. Before I sent them out, I had a brief prayer with them that God would open their eyes to see what Jesus would want them to see. When they returned and we had our debriefing session, they couldn’t stop talking about their exciting experience. They were bubbling over with ministry ideas and dreams for various locations in the community. This was a transforming experience for the group.

Organizing a Walking/Windshield Survey is yet another opportunity for you as an elder to help lead your church into a deeper experience with incarnational ministry. In so doing, you are going among the people in your community and experiencing the environment where they live and work, looking at them through the caring eyes of Jesus!



### WALKING SURVEY/WINDSHIELD SURVEY

<b>Area covered</b>	
<b>Geography</b>	
Characteristics	
Street layout	
Physical boundaries	
Identity markers	
Traffic flow	
<b>Homes</b>	
Kinds of housing	
Clusters of homes	
Appearance	
<b>Residents</b>	
Age group	
Impressions	
Relationships	

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<sup>1</sup> The Ten Farming Commandments are: (1) Thou shalt study Jesus’ ministry method and pray for . . . ; (2) Thou shalt assess the resources in thy church; (3) Thou shalt establish a Social Action Leadership Team (SALT); (4) Thou shalt choose and narrow down thy territory; (5) Thou shalt do a demographic analysis on the chosen territory; (6) Thou shalt drive or walk around the chosen territory and note the homes, businesses, churches, people, etc.; (7) Thou shalt talk to community leaders and business people to discover community needs as they see them; (8) Thou shalt earn “Social Capital”; (9) Thou shalt develop a church strategic plan for church community involvement based on the felt community needs thou has discovered and the re-

sources and dreams of thy church; (10) Thou shalt look for ways that God is already working in thy community. Celebrate, acknowledge, cooperate. . . . AND an 11<sup>th</sup> Commandment: Thou shalt not ignore Commandments 1-10, and thou shalt remember to *reap* where thou hast farmed and *keep* what thou dost reap (disciple—preserve the harvest)!

<sup>2</sup> So far in this series, the following articles have appeared in *Elder’s Digest*: “Once a Month Jesus Comes and Holds My Hand . . .” (October–December 2011); “Our Community Does Not Know Us . . .” (January–March 2012); “Help, Lord! I’ve Been Asked to Plant a Church!” (July–September 2012). To access these articles online, go to [www.sabbathschoolpersonalministries.org/acsi](http://www.sabbathschoolpersonalministries.org/acsi) and click

on “Articles and Media.” To access a comprehensive curriculum about community outreach, click on “Resources” and “ICM Community Services Certification Program Curriculum.”

<sup>3</sup> Interviewing community leaders is an important step in properly creating a community-based ministry through your church. This will be the subject of the next article in this series.

<sup>4</sup> Main concepts are adapted from Monte Sahlin, *Understanding Your Community*.

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