

LIVING AS A CHRISTIAN IN NAPERVILLE



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INTRODUCTION

I am a Christian. I live in Naperville, Illinois.¹ What does it mean to live as a Christian in Naperville? How does the culture of Naperville impact my faith? This is what we'll consider together in the following pages.²

I pose the question “What does it mean to live as a Christian in Naperville?” assuming my readers know what a Christian is. But, for those who do not, here’s what I am referring to: a Christian is someone who has committed to live for, and follow, Jesus Christ as the Lord of his or her life (Colossians 2:6-7). (If you happen to be reading this and are not a Christian, please check out this [video](#) and consider the wonderful message of the gospel).

Christians give their ultimate allegiance to Jesus and seek to be his disciples (to be like him, to obey him, to love him, etc.). This allegiance trumps personal preference, one’s family values, and even one’s culture. Christians view life through the lens of Scripture, believing the Bible to be God’s Word; it is here that we learn who God is, who we are, and how to understand reality.

The Bible teaches that Christians have a new identity as part of God’s new creation (2 Cor 5:17). It also teaches that we have a new citizenship (Phil 3:20) as members of God’s kingdom (Col 1:13-14). Our ultimate home is not found in this present life, but we live here as exiles or pilgrims (1 Peter 2:11), waiting for King Jesus to return (Titus 2:11-14) and bring in the new heavens and the new earth (Rev 20-22). In this life, we hope to live lives of love and good works (Eph 2:10), to make disciples of Jesus Christ (Matt 28:18-20), and to pursue holiness (Matt 5:13-16).

The Bible teaches us these things about being a Christian. Now we as Christians seek to live this out wherever we live. And, for those of us who live in Naperville, we have to ask ourselves what this looks like here. This is precisely what we’ll do together in the following pages. How can I live as a Christian *in Naperville*?³ What are the things about living here that help me in my faith? What are the things hinder it? What are some ways forward?⁴

¹ If you’re unfamiliar with Naperville, let me give you a brief snapshot. Naperville is a western suburb of Chicago and in 2018 had a population of around 148,000 people. It is a highly educated (much higher than the national average), and affluent (median home price is \$390k and median home income is nearly double the national average) suburb, filled with extremely driven individuals and families. It has a very low crime rate and is incredibly safe. Over the years, it has consistently been voted one of the best places to live in all of America. It has beautiful parks and libraries, amazing restaurants, and very good public schools and great private college (North Central College). Overall, it is a really wonderful place to live and raise a family. I’ve had the privilege of living here since 2014 and am a pastor of Cross of Christ Fellowship in downtown Naperville (crossofchristfellowship.org).

² This paper started out as a series on my blog (ttschmidt.com) in September 2018.

³ I think much of the application made in this paper can also be applied to those who live in the area surrounding Naperville and probably most of the other affluent suburbs of Chicago (and in other affluent suburbs in much of America!).

⁴ I certainly do NOT claim to be an expert on this topic, but a fellow student learning along with other Christians. I find—with Augustine and many others!—that I learn as I write and write as I learn. Writing this paper as certainly helped me think more clearly on the topic, and I hope it helps you too.

*May this study help you as you seek to live as a Christian in Naperville. If you have any questions, comments, or feedback, please feel free to reach out to me:
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1. Living as a Christian in Naperville: Considering the Reality of CONTEXT

Perhaps the idea of thinking about ‘how to live as a Christian in Naperville’ is a strange concept to you. Isn’t it *easy* to live as a Christian in Naperville? Why does it matter at all?

I hope in this first section to make the case that EVERY location brings with it particular challenges, and benefits, to living out our faith in Christ. Some locations and settings make it easier to follow Christ and other settings make it more difficult.

EVERY LOCATION BRINGS *UNIQUE* CHALLENGES TO FOLLOWING CHRIST

Every regional setting brings *unique* challenges to living for Christ. A simple read through the New Testament makes this abundantly clear: whether it is the 7 churches in 7 cities that John addresses in Revelation 2-3; situations that the persecuted Christians who received Peter’s letters faced; or the various challenges that the recipients of Paul’s letters had to endure (temptation to legalism in Galatia, idleness in Thessalonica, contentious false teachers in Ephesus or Crete). Every place brings challenges to those who desire to live wholeheartedly for Christ. In addition to battles with sin and temptation, having to deal with the reality of an old fallen nature, and persistent opposition of the devil and demons, ***a Christian will be tempted to compromise in his/her faith through the unique pressures and unbiblical ideologies rooted in his/her particular cultural setting.***



Sometimes the challenges to our faith are more explicit. Believers may live in an atheistic country, which prohibits them from meeting for public worship or sharing their faith. There may be laws in their land which prohibit biblical ethics or biblical values. Or, there could be intense pressures from other religious views, perhaps the views dominant in their culture, which strongly tempt them to compromise or abandon their faith in Christ or be silent about it.

Other times the pressures and challenges to faith in Christ are subtler. A Christian can live in a place where secular culture is “tolerant” of Christianity or Christian values, and yet the pressure to comprise can be *very* strong. A location can celebrate unbiblical views or ideologies which are radically different from a Christian worldview, or promote ideas that exalt self or government over God. Sometimes the pressure to adopt ungodly rhythms of life or ways of thinking can be incredibly intense. (It is my opinion that a Christian in Naperville needs to be more concerned with these types of challenges when seeking to live for Christ here).

But we shouldn’t forget the fact that some places and situations can actually be really helpful to us, as we seek to live for Christ. This is something that many people overlook when thinking about faith and culture and context. In the next section we’ll think about how living in Naperville can *help* a Christian live out his or her faith.

2. Living as a Christian in Naperville: Enjoying the BLESSINGS of Naperville

I love Naperville. It is a beautiful city. It is comfortable. It has a lovely downtown area with almost every conceivable type of restaurant and at least 3 great coffee shops ([Sparrow](#), [Starbucks Reserve](#), [Two Brothers](#)). The city has some really good annual festivals, well-attended parades, amazing schools, excellent doctors, and it is incredibly safe.

I love meeting the people who make Naperville their home. I enjoy the many opportunities, comforts, conveniences, and things I get to do here with my family and friends. But is this *ok* to do as a Christian? Can I really enjoy the things of this world? Can I celebrate Naperville and the things of Naperville? I would argue that the biblical answer is **YES**.

NOTHING WRONG WITH ENJOYING THE GIFTS OF GOD



As a Christian, there is nothing wrong with enjoying the good things of Naperville. There is also nothing wrong with being successful in the world, having more money or education than others, or having a nice house (things which many who live in Naperville possess). *The Christian life is not the ascetic life of someone who denies themselves every possible pleasure, but is a life shaped by a recognition of God's generous grace and love shown in the gospel—the love of a Father who not only gives us eternal life in Christ (John 3:16), but also every good gift of this life and the next (James 1:17).*

Depending on one's conscience and situation, a believer gets to enjoy a variety of things from the culture, including music, literature, movies, friendships, food and experiences.⁵

God has richly given us all we have not only to bless others, but also for the enjoyment of our own hearts (this is a fact that the Apostle Paul wants Timothy to remind “those who are rich in the present age” to remember [1 Tim 6:17-19]). As believers we are free to enjoy the good things of this world—“to the pure, all things are pure” (Titus 1:15)—but at the same time we must keep ourselves from the love of the world (putting the world before God in one's heart and life). We are called to turn from ungodly dispositions, attitudes, and practices (James 4:4; 1 John 2:16). As Christians, we must pursue wisdom in this and we need God's grace and His Spirit to lead us away from worldliness and compromise. Yet, *it is worth remembering that one thing we get to do as Christians in Naperville is to enjoy the many good cultural blessings of living here for the glory of God, blessings which are an expression of God's common grace.*⁶

A Christian in Naperville is also blessed by some regional factors which can help them live out their faith in Christ. There are some solid, biblical, gospel-centered churches who are seeking to make much of Christ and proclaim him faithfully in this city of 148,000 people (beside the church I pastor [[Cross of Christ Fellowship](#)], there are other churches I would recommend including [New Covenant Church](#), [Restoration Community Church](#), and [Naperville Presbyterian Church](#)). In addition to these sound, biblically faithful churches (and there are others besides these), we also live close to Wheaton College, which has a great library of theological books and many free public lectures. There are really good public and private schools here (including an excellent [classical Christian school in Naperville](#) and a community of Christian homeschoolers), a community of believers who are committed to praying regularly together (mayor's prayer group and [Pray Naperville!](#)), Community Bible Study, a non-denominational organization which hosts Bible studies for Christian women, and several other Christian organizations (Young Life, etc.) which all are in Naperville.

Another aspect to consider is the potential for using our financial resources to bless others. Naperville residents tend to have greater amounts of financial resources (the median income of those in Naperville is nearly double the national average). If approached rightly, I believe there are great possibilities for us bless others: we can use our finances to fund missionaries, help church plants, and give to worthy causes locally and globally. This is certainly happening already and we

⁵ This is not to forget the reality that the Christian life is also one of “denying oneself” and “taking up one's cross” (Matt 16:24) and forsaking an ungodly “friendship with the world” (Jas 4:4). Every Christian will have to deny themselves the fleeting pleasures of living for self or sin, and will have to take up their cross to follow Jesus. Doing this will often mean turning from some pleasures or conveniences or comforts that those outside of Christ freely enjoy (pleasures of sexual sin, gossip, envy, greed, etc). The point I'm seeking to make is that while a Christian is called to take up his cross and follow Jesus, this does not NECESSARILY preclude a Christian from enjoying many of the good gifts and pleasures of this world. Every good gift is from God to be enjoyed (James 1:17) as long as a person's conscience permits it and it is not contrary to the Word of God.

⁶ “Common grace” is a theological term referring to the blessings that God gives to all people, both Christians and non-Christians. It something everyone gets to enjoy. This helps those of us who are Christians to enjoy the good things of this world, for the glory of God. Spurgeon once spoke about enjoying a cigar for the glory of God, and Christians in Naperville get to enjoy the good things of Naperville (schools, stores, safety, food, festivals) for the glory of God.

pray it would happen even more as Naperville residents use their God-given financial resources to bless others around the world.⁷

Another thing that can help a Christian in Naperville is the overall depth of community-spirit embraced by the city. Naperville is a city that values community events and connecting with each other. We have parades, festivals, home-owner associations, block parties, organizations, YMCA's and local park district facilities, sports clubs, meetups, and many opportunities to meet others who live here. This can aid a believer who wants to build relationships with those in the community; it can help us be on mission (Matt 28:18-20).

All of these realities *can* work together to help a person live out their faith in Christ in Naperville, and we ought to praise God for these things.

Yet, living as a Christian in Naperville can also be seriously challenging. In some ways, I think it is INCREDIBLY difficult to live for Christ here. In the next two sections we'll think about why this is so.

⁷ This is one of the wonderful things that the gospel does to a person's heart: it changes someone from being greedy to being generous, from thinking they own everything to seeing that all that they have is a gift from God.

3. Living as a Christian in Naperville: Handling the Challenge of IDOLS

In many ways it is very **EASY** to live as a Christian in Naperville: no one is physically persecuting us; we have the freedom to go out and talk to others about the gospel (even if we get politely dismissive comments); and we have the freedom to meet publicly for worship on Sunday mornings. On the surface, it seems like being a Christian in Naperville is really rather easy.

Yet, in many ways, I would argue that it is actually **very difficult** to live as Christian in Naperville. This is due to the biblical concept of idols and idolatry. ***An idol is anything we worship in the place of the one true and living God.*** It is anything we set our hope or ultimate identity in, instead of God. In the words of the [New City Catechism](#), it is “trusting in created things rather than the Creator for our hope and happiness, significance and security.” Idolatry is described in the Bible as a form of spiritual adultery, where we leave God for “other lovers” (Hosea 2:5, 7).

Because of sin, we all have to deal with idolatry. Our hearts are so perverse that we can’t help but make idols of things around us.⁸ *The idols which allure us in Naperville often show themselves to be good things we mistakenly elevate to the place of ultimate allegiance or priority in our hearts or lives. These idols have a POWERFUL and strong influence in our lives and in our culture.* In my estimation, after living here for several years, four idols seem to be prominent in Naperville: ***comfort, convenience, children, and career.***

NAPERVILLE IDOL #1: COMFORT

One of the idols tempting us in Naperville is COMFORT. Many people move to the suburbs for the comfort offered here, and Naperville certainly has A LOT of comfort. *Comfort in itself certainly isn’t bad—God Himself is the “God of all Comfort” (2 Cor 1:3)—and there isn’t anything wrong with placing some value in the comfort of a nice home, a good vehicle, a fun vacation, or keeping our family safe. The problem comes when we elevate “comfort” above God or doing what is pleasing to God.* The idol of comfort can subtly take over our hearts and lives: we see its effect when we are more shaped by the love of earthly comfort than the love and comfort that God gives to us in Christ, or when we place earthly comfort above honoring Christ. We see it when our own comfort is more important than holiness or treasuring God.

NAPERVILLE IDOL #2: CONVENIENCE

Another idol that allures us in Naperville is CONVENIENCE. We see it when we orient our lives *principally* on what is convenient for us, or we *automatically* overlook anything that threatens or challenges our convenience.

When we serve the god of CONVENIENCE, we find our hearts subtly begin to prioritize convenience above loving our neighbor or loving our God. ***The fact is, many things in the Christian life are NOT convenient, but they are good and righteous and beautiful.*** It may be more convenient to divert our giving away from the church to our next vacation, or give our early morning time to exercise instead of reading God’s Word, but vacations or healthy bodies alone will not feed or nourish our souls. Christ is far more glorious than earthly convenience.

⁸ John Calvin once wisely observed, that because of sin, our hearts are idol-factories.

NAPERVILLE IDOL #3: CAREER

A third idol we face in Naperville is that of CAREER. Because we live in a town that is so driven and so successful, we often find ourselves putting our career above God or above doing what is right. We see this idol in our lives when we overwork (working 70-80 or more hours a week) or when we neglect health and family or God to get ahead in our jobs. We see it when we make all of our decisions primarily in order to advance our career or finances, even if it means it will be destructive to living out our faith or will disengage us from the local church.

The idol of career makes us feel important, but it is a house built on sand, and only lasts until our company is bought out or we get passed up at work or let go. The idol of career enslaves and makes us work harder and harder until we are ultimately crushed. This idol promises significance, but it can never give us the lasting worth or value that only Christ can truly offer.

NAPERVILLE IDOL #4: CHILDREN

A fourth idol in Naperville is that of CHILDREN. I love children and am blessed to have three, but it is easy to place the success or the comfort of our children before loving God. We can cut out church or serving others for our children's sports, activities or things we believe they must have to succeed. We get tempted to set our value and reputation on how our children are doing.

If our children's success is our idol, we will end up feeling destroyed when our children do poorly, or we will get overly elated or arrogant when they do well. We may also put a crushing weight on them to succeed, the result of which has led to an enormous problem of anxiety disorders and stress for youth in Naperville.

These idols—and others—work against living for and treasuring Christ here in Naperville. They are powerful, alluring, and can steal our affections and hearts. They are deadly and lead us away from God. They are false gods that crush us, enslave us, and hinder us from loving God. They don't love us, they can't. They destroy us and all who live for them. And, they certainly don't make Naperville a better place, but hinder it from flourishing.

(Again, it should be repeated: comfort, convenience, career, and children are NOT the problem, the problem is making these our life or our god).

Yet these idols are not the only things which make living as a Christian in Naperville challenging, there are at least 3 other challenges worth considering.

4. Living as a Christian in Naperville: 3 Additional Challenges

Idols are not the only challenge a Christian in Naperville faces. Here are three additional challenges we should be aware of: *a ‘Paradise-Now’ attitude, a performance pressure mentality, and the practice of unrelenting schedules.*

A ‘PARADISE-NOW’ ATTITUDE

Naperville has consistently been voted one of the best cities to live in and raise a family in all of America. And it is an amazing place to live! (I certainly enjoy living here). But, as Christians, because we do live in such a nice city, it can be tempting to set our hearts on the pleasures and comforts of the present moment, rather than understanding that our ultimate joy is found in God.

The pursuit of a ‘paradise now’ mentality can lead us to worship the pleasures of this life instead of the Living God. It can also lead us to shun anything which might threaten our comfort or convenience, or cause us emotional or social suffering. Yet putting the world before God or letting the cares of the world consume us is deadly. Jesus warned of this in the parable of the sower (Matt 13:1-9, 18-23). He said that some who hear the Word of God would not endure in the end, because “the cares and riches and pleasures of life” would choke out their love for God (Matt 13:22; Luke 8:14; see also Matt 24:12 warning about the ‘love of many growing cold’). Jesus warned those who were rich and spoke about the difficulty of entering the kingdom heaven: it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of needle than it is for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt 19:24).⁹

Setting our hope on the pleasures of this life can mislead us and cause us to wonder about the truth or reality of the gospel. Why would my neighbor, whose home cost 900k and who seems to have a ‘perfect’ family, job and health, need to hear about Jesus or come to church? Why would the gospel be relevant to a successful Naperville man, woman, or family? And, why should I seek to live for Christ when it makes my life more difficult or awkward and keeps me away from experiencing some of these worldly comforts? These are the kind of questions and thoughts that assault our hearts as Christians in Naperville. Of course, these thoughts overlook the fact that true eternal life is found in knowing Christ (John 17:3), that our greatest need is to be reconciled to God (2 Cor 5:17-21; Rom 3:21-26; Titus 2:11-14), and that the pleasure of knowing God is infinitely better than any suburban dream home or lifestyle or earthly joy (Psalm 16:11).

A PERFORMANCE PRESSURE MENTALITY

We are in a city of high performing individuals who place a large degree of importance on performing well. Performing well in Naperville often means success in our jobs, success in our hobbies and interests, success as a family, being well-known in our company or community, having large and visible results in our work or projects, being physical fit or attractive, or possessing objects or positions of status which make us look important in the eyes of others. We can feel an enormous pressure to do well and succeed here in Naperville, especially since so many around us do so

⁹ Yet, many rich people do go to heaven and it is NOT impossible for rich people to go to heaven. In that same passage, Jesus affirms this: “with man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible” (Matt 19:26). There are rich people who go to heaven and some who go to hell, just as there are poor people who go to heaven and some who go to hell.

tremendously well in their spheres of influence. This can lead us to think that whatever might look small or weak, or even average!, is a failure and should be a cause of embarrassment or shame.

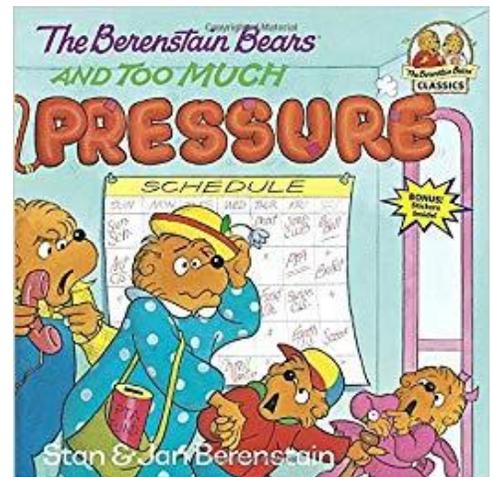
This pressure can be difficult for a Christian in Naperville. *Am I beautiful enough to connect with another mom at the park? Is my home nice enough to host my neighbor over for a meal? Is my job or career impressive enough that others will want to socialize with me? Is my small group or congregation large or flashy enough, or do we have enough programs to attract my friend to visit or join our church?* In reality, all of these questions and ideas flow out of a consumeristic culture that places a premium value on performance above other values like truth, mercy, integrity, love, and self-sacrifice.

Such a cultural pressure can lead us to forget that the gospel is the power of salvation (Rom 1:16-17), the gospel is beautiful enough¹⁰ to share with our physically beautiful neighbor (Titus 2:1-10), and that God often uses what is considered weak and inferior in the world to shame the proud and the wise (1 Cor 1:18-31). We must not succumb to a performance pressure mentality that tempts us to grumble about the smallness of our small group or church, or the size of our house, or our appearance, or our position in our job. God has called us to faithfully love our successful neighbors and share the good news of the gospel with them.

(Again, it is important to note that worldly beauty or success are NOT bad in themselves. We would make a foolish mistake if we think we're being godlier than our neighbors by not caring what we look like or thinking failure in the workplace shows we have put Christ first in our lives. What I'm addressing here is the unhealthy and ungodly pursuit of worldly success over a God-centered life, and the ungodly posture of 'performance-pressure' that can seep into our hearts and lives. In all these things we must seek God to lead and help us).

UNRELENTING SCHEDULES

A typical Naperville family has parents who both work long hours, and children who are incredibly overscheduled. Children have pressure put upon them to be in sports (school and league), do well in academics, play an instrument, learn coding and a foreign language, and be involved in other extracurricular organizations. The load on many family's schedules is unrelenting and entirely overbearing. (I'm reminded of the [Berenstain Bears classic 'TOO MUCH PRESSURE,'](#) where mama bear has an emotional breakdown because their family is tremendously overcommitted!).



As Christians we are tempted to imitate our culture and overschedule as well. We don't want our children to miss out, so we sign up for more things than we should. Or, we think that the only way we can connect with those around is by being part of certain activities or organizations which might demand more time than we actually have. Such overscheduling can make us too busy to be involved or become members of church; it can hinder us from sharing our lives with each other or being intentional in our discipleship and mission; it can also do damage to our marriage and family. And, it can lead to greater stress, anxiety, and health problems.

¹⁰ <http://www.ttschmidt.com/blog/beauty-gospel-gives-courage>

These three items along with the idols of Naperville can make living as a Christian difficult in Naperville.

In our final two sections we'll think of a way forward as we seek to live faithfully as Christians in Naperville.

5. Living as a Christian in Naperville: Pursuing Our Identity in Christ

So how do we live out our faith in Christ here in Naperville? In these last two sections we'll consider a way forward. We'll begin by thinking about having our identity rooted in Christ and then in our last section explore Scripture's imagery of the heavenly city.

PURSUING OUR IDENTITY IN CHRIST

The answer to the challenge of living out our faith in Christ in Naperville is *not* moving away or checking out of the culture, but digging deeper into our new identity in Christ. If we simply flee or remove ourselves from the culture, we'll end up in another culture that has its own unique challenges to our faith. Even if we flee to a "Christian" culture (like somewhere in rural Alabama?!), there are different challenges to living out our faith in Christ (like assuming inaccurate assumptions, such as believing that everyone who attends or sends their kids to a Christian school by nature must be a Christian, or if the majority of people attend a church in a town then everyone there must be a Christian: 'because a person attends a Christian school or lives in a town where everyone goes to church *everyone* is a Christian,'). ***Every culture on this side of heaven has elements that deviate from Scripture.*** As Christians, we must consider the ways our cultural and regional setting will impact our faith, and seek by God's strength and Spirit to be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves (Matt 10:16). We are to work for the good of our cities and be faithful missionaries wherever God places us (Matt 28:18-20). In order to do this, we need to pursue our identity in Christ.

We pursue our identity in Christ in a number of ways:

First, we fill our minds and hearts with God's Word daily and regularly. As we do this, we learn the truth about reality and ourselves; we replace the ideologies of our culture with the truth of God's Word, which makes us better equipped to discern error and falsehood in the culture around us. As we feed on God's Word and listen to God's voice (a voice that is recorded in the very words of Scripture), our hearts are bolstered and protected from idols, our minds are renewed and realigned, our perspectives are changed, we become grounded again in the gospel, we find our love for God rekindled, and our lives are reset to hope on Jesus and the grace of God.¹¹

A second way we grow in our identity in Christ is by becoming a member of a gospel-centered local church. Being an active and faithful member of a local church helps us in our identity in Christ in many ways: we hear the gospel preached, we sing worship songs with other believers, we hear the Scriptures read, we pray with others and receive prayer for ourselves, we are accountable to leaders who shepherd and love us, we are accountable to other members of our congregation who remind us of God's truth, we are regularly challenged to have our lives reflect the truth we profess to believe, we serve with our time and give of our finances, we are given

¹¹ I encourage believers to make God's Word the first thing they take in to their hearts and minds each day, even before looking at emails or social media or the news.

opportunities to have our hearts nourished as we take the Lord's Supper and see others baptized, etc.¹²

A third way we grow in our identity in Christ is to recognize how much of the ungodly elements found in our culture have seeped into our lives and to ask God to transform us to be more like Christ. Perhaps we have become very worldly in our approach to life, and have put comfort, convenience, career status, or our children's success before Christ. Maybe the pressures of performance, the paradise-now mentality, and overscheduling have drawn us away from believing and living out our faith. What we do now is confess our sin and trust in Christ (1 John 1:8-9). We repent of our worldliness (James 4:4-10; Hosea 6:1-6) and we trust in Christ as our savior (1 Tim 2:3-6; Rom 10:9-10). We plead with God that He might be our first love and that we might faithfully live as His ambassador (2 Cor 5:17-21).

It seems that these three principles will help us to go deeper in our identity and Christ. And, as we as we pursue our identity in Christ, we are able to faithfully live out our faith in Christ more effectively in Naperville.

¹² Scripture calls us "to not forsake the assembling of ourselves" (Heb 10:24-25) and is filled with dozens of "one another" statements where believers are expected to love and care for 'one another.' It also speaks of submitting to the leaders God has put in place. All of these things assume that if a person is a Christian, he or she will be a member of a local church. The idea of a "lone-range" Christian or someone who just listens to sermons online for us but is not a member of a local church is completely alien to the Bible. Such a reality should sternly warn those who consider themselves Christians but refuse to become a member of a local church.

6. Living as a Christian in Naperville: Fixing Our Eyes on the Heavenly City

Augustine once said that every person is a member of one of two cities: either the city of God or the city of Man (see his book “[City of God](#)”). The city of God is filled with those who live for King Jesus and have lives and relationships that reflect his values, goodness, and beauty; this city lasts forever and is truly glorious. The city of man, on the other hand, is filled with those who reject the one true God, live for themselves, and pursue their own fleeting fame; this city looks glorious now but will not last, in the end it will be destroyed and forgotten.

As Christians, we set our hopes in God and the “city he prepares” for His people (Heb 11:16). We are waiting for Jesus to return (Titus 2:11-14) and our hearts are set on him. Our attitude is this: “here we have no lasting home,” but we seek one that lasts into eternity (Hebrews 11-12).

SETTING OUR GAZE ON THE HEAVENLY CITY

An essential part to living as a Christian in Naperville is setting our gaze on the heavenly city. *We must see in our hearts that the city of God is infinitely more glorious, beautiful, and enduring than Naperville or any earthly city.*

Naperville has only been around 160 years or so, and it has only had its reputation of being one of the best places to live in the last 30-40 years. Contrast this with the heavenly city, which is ETERNAL and filled with Christians who will inhabit it forever!



Naperville is beautiful and has some really amazing homes. But the beauty of Naperville has to constantly be kept up by landscapers; in addition to this, its beauty is fleeting: *one day every Naperville McMansion will decay and be bulldozed for something bigger and better.* The city of God on the other hand has a beauty that is not contrived, fake, or fleeting; its beauty is kept by God and reflects the beauty of God; its beauty endures and outshines the beauty of every earthly city combined.

Naperville is filled with beautiful looking people with successful jobs. But one day, all of us will grow old and eventually makeup, or surgeries, will not cover up our age. The city of God, on the other hand, will be filled with a people who have been glorified and have been made beautiful with a beauty that comes from being completely freed from sin and death. This is the beauty of resurrected bodies and renewed hearts that have been made completely whole. Here is a community free from entitlement, self-righteousness, bitterness, racism, sexism, selfishness, and greed. Here is a community filled with love and righteousness. Here is a beauty that grows into eternity rather than decays.

This is the city we are called into as Christians. Here is our ultimate home.

SEEING THE HEAVENLY CITY IN OUR HEARTS NOW

As we embrace these truths and live in light of the heavenly city, our attitude toward Naperville, and every other earthly city, changes. We are guarded from setting our hearts or ultimate hope in earthly comfort or convenience or career or our children's success. We are protected from the fear of man and worrying about what other people think of us: instead of being intimidated by another person's power, influence or beauty, we recognize that God has all power, authority and beauty and we are called to love those around us. We are tempered in our expectations of what we will experience in this world: we know that even the best earthly city can never grant our hearts' deepest desires; this helps guard us against coveting, discontentment, and bitterness. We are free to enjoy wonderful cities like Naperville and work for their best.

Finally, as the reality of the heavenly city grips our hearts, we begin to desire to see others enter into it. It is a real place and it will last forever. Our joyful task now is to proclaim the gospel to our friends in Naperville and invite to come under the kind care and rule of King Jesus. We boldly and gladly invite all to believe on Jesus and receive him as their lord and savior (John 3:16).

May the Lord grant us his grace to live in light of the truth and reality of the heavenly city, and may it lead us to love our neighbors in Naperville.