

Q & A



Agents of Flourishing *Pursuing Shalom in Every Corner of Society*

May 10, 2022 | \$26, 368 pages, paperback | 978-1-5140-0078-6

God calls Christians of every vocation to participate in his redemptive mission so that every corner and square inch of society can flourish as God intends. Amy Sherman offers a multifaceted, biblically grounded roadmap for enacting God's call to seek the shalom of our communities, showcasing historical and contemporary models of faithful and transformational cultural engagement.

We Are Called to Be Agents of Flourishing

Why is this book needed for this time in the life of the church?

Amy L. Sherman: My purpose in this book is to encourage and equip congregations to seek the flourishing of their communities—based on a conviction that this is a central mission of the church in our time. God is for: for life, for thriving, for flourishing. He is for beauty and justice, for reconciliation and community, for wholeness and peace. I'm grieved that today his followers are often known more for what we're against than what we're for. We've certainly made terrible mistakes, wedding our churches to partisan political agendas and allowing our public witness to be marred by fear and prejudice. We've been in the world and of it, sometimes inhabiting its patterns of incivility, materialism, and indifference.

But this is not the only story of the church. God has used his Spirit-empowered disciples to demonstrate extravagant love and generosity for centuries. Today churches nationwide are participating in Christ's mission to "make all things new" by acting as agents of cultural, civic, and economic renewal. These congregations are still too few, and their example is admittedly imperfect. But their inspiring model of enacted, incarnated witness to Christ's compassion and justice is arguably the most effective means of advancing his kingdom in today's missiological context.

What does *Agents of Flourishing* bring to the church?

Amy: Increasingly, congregational leaders today recognize the church's exilic position in contemporary culture and are embracing God's call to seek the shalom of their communities. They are eager for their churches to have a more sustainable, lasting, and comprehensive influence for good in their locales. But we need deeper reflection on what a thriving society looks like and on what the church's theology and practice in seeking to nurture that thriving should be. This book brings together a vision of the church's missional identity—including her rich, two-thousand-year legacy of advancing the common good—with a holistic, biblical, and sociological understanding of the dimensions of societal flourishing, and it offers practical strategies for pursuing that flourishing.

How is the book organized?

Amy: The book is organized by the Thriving Communities Group's "Human Ecology Framework." This approach argues that six social realms—The Good, The True, The Beautiful, The Just, The Prosperous, and The Sustainable—must be healthy and strong if a community is to flourish. I couple this sociological framework with theological reflection on God's normative intentions for each realm and what Scripture teaches about how these arenas have been malformed by the fall. I then discuss specific historical and contemporary strategies that the church has implemented to re-form these spheres and strengthen them. My hope is that these stories will both inspire and instruct today's Christian leaders.

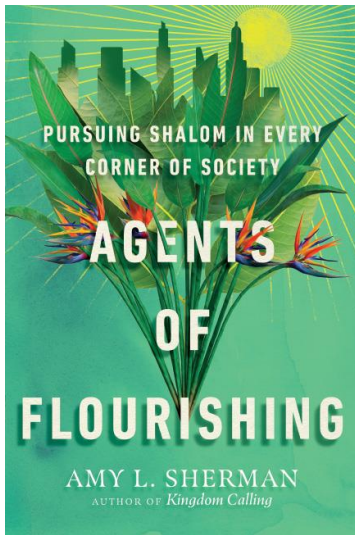


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Amy L. Sherman directs the Sagamore Institute's Center on Faith in Communities, which trains and consults with faith-based social service providers and religious congregations desiring to invest more effectively in their neighborhoods. She is also the founder and former executive director of Charlottesville Abundant Life Ministries and a senior fellow with International Justice Mission. She earned her BA in political science at Messiah College and her MA and PhD in international economic development from the University of Virginia. She is the author of *Kingdom Calling: Vocational Stewardship for the Common Good*.

What do you hope your readers learn and take away from *Agents of Flourishing*?

Amy:

- That being agents of flourishing is central to the church's identity and mission
- That we need better, deeper thinking about how to enact God's call to seek the peace and prosperity of our cities. Currently there is a disconnect between rhetorical agreement with the call and vigorous, effective, transformative enactment of that call.
- That church history offers rich examples of how believers have enacted flourishing in society's six realms—through both thought leadership and social reforms
- That the contemporary "case study" congregations profiled in the book offer practical lessons learned for other churches in their own pursuit of effective local outreach
- That congregations that engage sacrificially, over the long term, in advancing community renewal offer a powerful, winsome witness to a watching world. Living into our calling as agents of flourishing is the faithful pathway between accommodation to the culture on the one hand and an ugly, aggressive "take-back-the-culture" stance on the other.



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