

Urban Ministries

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YOU CAN RUN... but not far enough. You can hide... but why?

I'm sitting in an outdoor cafe in Kyrgyzstan. Before I left on this mission trip my partner called Sprint here in Chicago to see if they could arrange for cell phone service there. The rep told him there was no such place as Kyrgyzstan. That's how far I am from home; so far that Sprint doesn't even think it exists.

Anyway, here I sit. Pounding out of the speakers in this distant, exotic locale is 50cent, (a HUGE American rap phenomenon). I'm amazed anew at the awesome influence of the city. 50cent is from the hood — the street. Rap and hip-hop have taken the world by storm. From the streets of Ameri-

place coupled with the anonymity of urban living all worked in their favor. First in larger cities — New York, Chicago, L.A. — and then smaller cities — San Francisco, Minneapolis, Dallas — homosexuals began congregating in particular neighborhoods, organizing, making themselves known as a voting block. They pressed their city councilmen on issues important to them. The politicians responded. Political power grew. Now our children are growing up in a society that allows those who used to be called perverts to adopt children and function openly as normal families. Openly homosexual men are seated in Congress and laughed at on

day for the other candidate.

The presence and influence of God's people in our urban areas is at low ebb.

The cities are centers not only of significant political power, but of business, education, entertainment, the arts, the media, and transportation. I don't think anyone would disagree that Christian influence has been diminishing in our society. But why? Is there a parallel to diminishing presence of believers in cities and the diminishing influence of believers in society? Is it possible that God the Holy Spirit was on to something when He sent the first missionaries to cities?

We were running. Running out of the cities. Running for many reasons, but running. **Running to a better place.** Running to better neighborhoods, better schools, more grass, a bigger garage.

can cities this explosion of urban youth culture has impacted the youth of the world.

FACT: Fifty percent of the world population lives in urban areas, and the other half is being urbanized. What happens in the city today impacts, or at least influences, everyone else tomorrow. You can run, but you can't hide.

Let's look at homosexual political clout for a moment. The gay marriage issue exploded on the national scene last year due to the activism of a few mayors and judges. Gay clout has been building for years — in the city. Homosexuals long ago found that going to a large city increased their chances of finding others like them. The distance from home, the lack of the scrutiny that comes from living in a smaller

sitcoms. Civil unions, if not gay marriage, are likely around the corner, the last election notwithstanding.

And where were the Christians while all this was building up? We were running. Running out of the cities. Running for many reasons, but running. Running to a better place. Running to better neighborhoods, better schools, more grass, a bigger garage. Behind us, all the powers that mold, shape, impact, and influence our culture had less salt and less light. Fewer and fewer churches believing the Bible and practicing truth were present to be "lights on the hill." The map from the election last fall told a spiritual tale. Though most of the country showed up red, the blue of the northeast, Chicago-dominated Illinois and a few other places almost won the

Gangs. School violence. Homelessness. Pornography. Drugs. AIDS. Single parent households. Yes, homosexual political clout and hip hop. I wonder if you can name a significant social phenomenon or trend that did not originate in the city. All of the above were urban staples before they became reality in smaller cities and then even in rural areas. We can run but we can't hide.

Cities serve as distribution engines. Cities serve as amplifiers. The Holy Spirit sent the first missionaries to the urban centers of the first century. A handful of people without technology spread the gospel throughout the empire by sowing it in places that would impact all the other places.

With so little time left and so much to do, we can run. But WHY?