



URBAN CURRENT

Center of the action

The creak of the ox cart in Thessalonica. The scream of the traffic cop's whistle in New Orleans. The call of the shopkeeper hawking merchandise in Corinth's bustling market. The conductor's baton taps the music stand calling the rehearsing St. Louis Symphony to attention. The roar of 30,000 throats in the Aphrodisias stadium. The collective moan rises from the masses at Wrigley field.

From the moment they said "Come let's build a city and a tower that will reach into heaven..." cities have been the center of the action. Okay, the tower of Babel didn't make it very far, but the concept seems to be memorialized in the ziggurats of Mesopotamia. The city-state idea persisted for centuries. The ancient world was run by cities from Babylon to Beijing, from Antioch to Alexandria. The power, the ideas, the influence flowed from cities.

Before the archeologists broke the news, Bible readers knew about Ur, Jericho, and Nineveh. Who could have known that 2,000 years before Christ, a gathering of people on a rocky crag called Jerusalem would be the center of the world's attention for generations to come. Ephesus, Athens, and Rome all figure prominently into the story of the early church.

More recently, we have witnessed global urbanization. The industrial revolution powered a gathering of population in urban centers growing villages to towns, towns to small cities, small cities to medium-sized cities, medium to large, large cities to megalopolises.

Cities run the world. The daily global chatter is "Beijing said today..." "Washington will proceed with its..." "Moscow is moving toward..."

There are many kinds of cities: political cities (Washington D.C., London, Beijing), cul-

tural cities (Paris, Milan, St. Petersburg, Cairo), cities of entertainment and leisure (Miami, Las Vegas, Rio), and commercial cities (Hong Kong, Dubai). These are world-class cities, meaning they are of such size and influence that they maintain significant position in the international network of urban centers.

The character of cities is unique. Everything urban is magnified, multiplied, and intensified. The good. The bad. The ugly. Cities are centers of culture, education, and technological sophistication.

There are also more sinners per square inch in cities so the political power tends not to be of the cleanest sort. The "culture" can show its dark side quickly. The media can be sleazy. All of that and more. The density of cities creates potential for anonymity, which can provide cover for depravity.

Cities do what cities do. Cities function as distribution engines. Whatever is in them will be distributed. Urban centers are huge amplifiers. They will amplify whatever is in them. Cities are sociological hilltops. Whatever is in them will roll or flow down the hill into the surrounding social structure and culture.

This is precisely why God chose to use cities to evangelize the world. The gospel was first preached in cities by divine direction. The Holy Spirit chose cities as the first places for local churches to be founded, so the power and influence of the gospel would not only impact the city itself but also be distributed and amplified from the city. This is what happened. We read the record and see evidence of the world being evangelized within 100 years of Christ's ministry. No web, no wireless communication, no air travel, no printing presses. How was this incredible feat accomplished? The power of cities.

In God's plan, in God's program, in God's work, the city is where the action is. If cities are central to God's plan, what ramifications are there for our lives? "But I'm not in a city," you say. "I'm not called to the city," you protest.

You can participate in the activity of God in and through cities worldwide.

1. **Educate yourself.** What is the largest city close to you? What is the population? Who is the mayor? Who are some of God's people in that city?
2. **Visit a large city.**
3. **Vacation in a large city.**
4. **Get to know some urban Christians.** These days technology makes almost anything possible and fast.
5. **Pray for cities and God's workers in them.** Make a list of the world's 10 largest cities and start there.
6. **Are there local churches, Christian ministries, urban Christians who need financial support who you could help?**
7. **As you become more knowledgeable, are there urban ministries you or your church can partner with in some way?**
8. **Pursue employment and/or a promotion that takes you toward the city instead of away from it.**

The city is where the action is. We can all be part of the action, in some way, on some level. It will matter in eternity.

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