



URBAN CURRENT

You live in an urbanized world

You can run but you can't hide. These are the words I used in my first "Urban Current" in February 2005. I told of sitting in an outdoor café in Kyrgyzstan with pounding beat accompanying the rhythm and rhyme of 50 Cent, American rap star. The decibels took the whole intersection by storm.

Urbanization has taken the world by storm.

To the people who have fled cities as well as those who haven't lived in a city, declaring they never will, I have an announcement: You Live In An Urbanized World!

"Cities represent the worst humanity has to offer," is the protest of the anti-urban crowd. They speak of the crime. They bemoan the corruption. They shake their heads at the jammed expressways and the gridlocked intersections. They frown with disapproval at the poorly performing schools. They "tsk tsk" over the gay political muscle centered in cities. "Dangerous, dirty, and completely undesirable," grimacing city-shunners say. Okay. Maybe that's all true. And, maybe there is even more bad stuff you don't know about.

In America, billions have been spent trying to escape the city. Ironically, all over the world, several billion people have risked everything to move to cities. Why? To these hopeful masses the city represents opportunity, a better life, maybe a new life.

Cities also showcase people at their best and most noble. Cities are centers of technological wonder, medical miracles, architectural splendor, majestic and moving visual and performing arts, heart-stopping, crowd-pleasing sports, and some of the best educational institutions known to man. There is much to ooh and ah over.

In the city, everything is magnified, multiplied, and intensified — the good, the bad, and the ugly. Urban towers stretch into the sky. Streets run for miles. Our hospitals are bigger. Our school system's larger. Budgets are ridicu-

lous. Our jails are vast. Our attractions are more numerous. Our problems and challenges are innumerable. Our stuff is bigger. We have more of everything. We tend to have more of everything in less space. Cities have more sinners per square inch, so cities have more sin per square inch.

Urban centers are seas of humanity; centers of human activity, pursuits, experiences, and yes, sin. They are whirlpools of business, entertainment, media, and politics. They are swimming pools for the rich, famous, powerful, and colorful. They are wading pools for the young, the hopeful, the explorer, and the experimenter. They are reflecting pools of academia, literature, art, and religion. They are cesspools of hubris, envy, greed, lust, hate, and hurt ... and did I mention, more opportunity for sin.

Cities are incubators. Cities are amplifiers. Cities are distribution engines. What the city thinks today, the rest of the world ponders tomorrow. What the city does has the rest of the world reacting and interacting. What the city produces, the rest of the world consumes. Think President Obama, Lady GaGa, Prince Harry, 50 Cent.

Come to find out, it's not about geography. The city can be made to live within its limits. However, its life, ideas, dynamic, and influence cannot be contained. Here are a few random headlines I pulled out of my file:

"The Myth of Rural Safety," *Associated Press*, January 26, 2000

"Chicago Gangs Find New Turf in Rural South." *Chicago Tribune*, June 1, 2004

"UNDER THE SUN — A NEW WAVE OF IMMIGRANTS IS TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES NOWHERE NEAR THE BORDER." *U.S. News & World Report*, June 20, 2005

"Hip Hop Nation After 20 years - How It's Changed America." *Time*, Feb. 8, 1999

A little over half the world lives in cities. The other half lives under their influence.

Just because you don't live in Manhattan doesn't mean you don't deal with urbanization on a daily basis.

Urbanization shows up in a variety of ways outside city limits. Everything is magnified, multiplied, and intensified with a few more trees and a little more grass, ... maybe with a little less political corruption. Witness the density of many suburban regions with accompanying traffic jams. See the toxic clouds of porn and gambling seeping from the cities, contaminating the land. The welfare state and the entitlement mentality, handcrafted and finely tuned in center cities, now burdens the whole country. Homosexual political clout began in cities. Now everybody everywhere contends with it. The media, centered in cities, pumps out its agenda-driven flow, coloring and influencing thought and action coast to coast. AIDS clinics in rural Mississippi. I have relatives living in small towns among cornfields whose lives are as harried as any urbanite.

Jesus' command to His disciples was never to run. It was always, "Go." To the people still trying to escape the city and urbanization, I simply beckon with Jesus' words: "Follow me." Just as surely as God prepared the 1st century world for evangelism, He has prepared the 21st century world. How does God expect us to marshal and maximize the opportunities urbanization affords?

You may not live in a city — you do live in an urbanized world.

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