



The Holy Spirit's plan for urban ministry WORKS!

Her name was Mrs. King. She was employed by her city's newspaper publisher. Her work was not with the newspaper but teaching ragged street children to read and memorize a catechism. Her boss paid her 30 cents an hour for this Sunday-by-Sunday effort. Robert Raikes began publicizing his school through the columns of his Gloucester Journal in 1783. A movement was born. Soon Sunday schools were established throughout England. Who knew that this urban ministry would play such a vital role in Christian work worldwide for 200 years and counting?

The inimitable Charles Spurgeon rose from obscurity to notoriety in the largest city in the world of his day. His was a great urban church drawing first masses of commoners, then the higher classes from across the river. There had never been such a church in all of Christendom. A host of churches and Sunday schools were birthed. His sermons circled the globe in newspapers. With limited technology, this urban preacher impacted his world and is yet cutting a swath of light through the darkness of this age. He once said, "A church which does not exist to do good in the slums and dens and kennels of the city is a church that has no reason to justify its longer existing."

In 1865, William Booth began preaching and doing missionary among the poor lower classes in the White Chapel neighborhood in East London. This work would become the Salvation Army. This inner city ministry spread to 55 countries before his death in 1912.

Across the sea, Henry Ward Beecher became the pastor of Plymouth Congregational Church in Brooklyn in

1847. He became the most popular and widely known preacher in America during the next 20 years. From his city pulpit, he fanned the flames of abolitionism and helped stir America to rise up against slavery.

At a different Plymouth Congregational Church in a different city, Chicago, a youngster from Boston asked for a Sunday school class. He was charged with the responsibility of gathering his own students. Scouring the streets of the slums, he soon had children for several classes. Then D.L. Moody organized his own Sunday school that grew to 1,500 in attendance. A Christian pied piper, he wandered the streets looking for children, no matter how dirty or belligerent, luring them with candy prizes, carrying them in horse drawn wagons, bringing them from squalid flats to learn the love of Jesus.

"If we reach the cities, we will reach the nation. If we fail in the cities, they will become a cesspool that will infect the entire country," Moody said. His urban work impacted Chicago, the nation, and crept across the oceans. The residual benefits of this work continue to this day in far flung corners of the earth.

Not quite a century later, J. Frank Norris, pastor of First Baptist Church, Fort Worth, Texas, battled liberalism in the Southern Baptist Convention and functioned as a general for the burgeoning ranks of independent Baptists across the nation. From this city church came a church planting and missions movement, the ripples of which are still being felt today.

A few years later, and a few miles to the east, W.A. Criswell, pastor of First Baptist Church, Dallas, with

pulpit and pen, unleashed a salvo on the deteriorating theology in the SBC with his book, *Why I Preach That The Bible Is Literally True*. One could easily argue this began a movement that culminated in the conservative resurgence and domination of the Convention. With its multiple inner-city chapels and ministries, First Baptist, Dallas was, according to Criswell, exactly where it needed to be. He said, "The tragedy to me is that most of the whole spectrum of Protestantism has abandoned the city. To me, the cities determine the destiny of the nation. To abandon the city to Satan and despair is inexcusable before God."

Urban ministry had been around for a while of course. Led by the Holy Spirit, Paul moved from city to city establishing local churches. It wasn't merely an urban strategy — it was a world strategy. Reach the cities, impact the world. It worked. Without technology, denominations, budgets, boards, rallies, mission conferences, the Holy Spirit's plan worked.

Now, a new chapter of impact for Christ in the world is being written — perhaps out of the mainstream and away from the limelight, but there are those laboring in cities across America and around the world. Like the soldiers planting the stars and stripes at Iwo Jima, they are raising the blood stained banner in needy metropolitan areas. If you are such a soldier, I want to hear from you. Tell me who you are, where you are, what you've been doing, and for how long. I would love to read your stories. I would love to share your stories with others. Contact me at: Charles Lyons, Armitage Baptist Church 2451 N. Kedzie Blvd., Chicago, IL 60647, charles.lyons@armitagechurch.org.