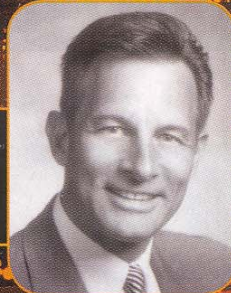


UrbanCurrent

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The Army for the Urban Battle

“Demonstrators were supposed to bring whistles and noise-makers to drown out church services,” stated the *U.S. News and World Report* article. “Fliers posted around town to draw a major crowd urged demonstrators to; ‘dress to shock and/or impress. Come in costume and show your rage.’ This was the pro-choice Night of Resistance in Chicago. Rallies were taking place around the country to mark the anniversary of the murder of abortionist doctor David Gunn. The Chicago demonstration was outside Armitage Baptist Church during its regular Wednesday service.”

It was no accident that Armitage was a handy target.

I was called to preach at 10 years old under the preaching of independent Baptist warrior Myron Cedarholm, who would later found Maranatha Baptist Bible College, Watertown, Wisconsin. God worked in my adolescent heart regarding the needs of the city. It seemed to me, even then, that white fundamentalists didn’t want much to do with the city. God planted in my heart the desire to pastor an influential church in the center of Chicago. That’s what I set out to do. This made us available to “the enemy.” Kinda like Jesus.

Laboring in this needy field, I have come to understand some basic scriptural truths. “The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14) is not just good theology — it’s God’s strategy. He came in person. He came to die. He spent a good part of his ministry training the nucleus of what would become the New Testament church at Jerusalem. He taught them; coached them; prepared them. He told them they would do greater works. He said he was sending them just like the Father sent him. He gave specific

teaching regarding the authority and discipline of the church. Then he left them.

What we see unfolding in Acts, then the epistles, was the teaching received from Jesus being followed by the apostles and those who followed them. The communities of believers conceived, shaped, and matured in the first century were the result of the very plan of Jesus Christ, who declared He was the head. It was Jesus’ intention

that, just as He came in a physical presence bringing spiritual power into the world, local churches would be His very presence in communities, being His actual authority, voice, hands, and feet. The strategy unfolded through the life and ministry of local bodies of believers planted in city after city. Yes, city after city. The New Testament plan to evangelize the world was an urban strategy.

The concept was not built around buildings, programs, or budgets. It was built around the idea that transformed men and women would bear witness to the power of the Messiah to forgive sin. This idea — bands of people under the headship of Christ and the leadership of those called and gifted to serve as spiritual shepherds — was as primitive as it was powerful. The local church is the army that General Jesus founded and raised to wage the battle for men’s souls. The strategy He chose and revealed through the Spirit’s leading in the first century was to plant local churches in major cities whereby those cities and surrounding regions

would be impacted with the truth of Christ and, consequently, through the planting of additional churches.

The whole idea of the local church was geared for battle, action, aggressive, proactive efforts to herald the gospel, standing for righteousness, and meeting the opposition head on. No social clubs these; no country club cliques these; no collection of fat bottoms on padded pews here! Jail, beatings, vicious pursuit, fleeing for one’s life or not, facing down religious hostility, engaging the heathen philosophies of the day, the heat of the Asian

We are at war. Cities are front lines. Every believer is a soldier. The local church is the army; authorized, adequate, able ... AWOL?

sun, shipwreck, fasting, proclamation in the public square, book burning, and meeting demons head-on were the order of the day. No soap opera-soaked saints were these. Bold bands of believers exalted Christ and shook the godless foundations in city after city.

Thank God for every rescue mission, children’s club, youth outreach, every mission team that ever passed out tracts on a city street, and every suburban believer that ever came to a city street corner to proclaim Christ. Thank God for every parachurch effort that preaches Christ as the way of salvation. However, the New Testament local church is God’s plan to evangelize the world. The plan was launched in the cities of the Roman Empire in the first century. God hasn’t told us He’s changed His mind. We will never improve on God’s plan.

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