



## SEE THE CITY, SEE THE FUTURE

**C**ities predict the future. The urban trends of today become the societal tide tomorrow. What's on my front porch in Chicago this morning will be on your front porch tomorrow morning.

In the July/August 2006 edition of the *Tribune*, BBC president Mike Randall had a tremendous piece titled "Paradigm Shifts: Doing Ministry in Times of Change." In the section titled "Paganizing of Our Culture," he cited nine change agents that have diminished Christian influence and challenged Christian values: Bible reading in schools banned, prayer in public

vey authority, end of argument. People were saying, "So what?" Sure the Word was a sword and would cut whether people believed it was sharp or not, I also believed in thoughtful religion. We worked at teaching and explaining why the Bible was trustworthy and how we had come to personally know it was true and effective. This kind of foundational work became not just important, but necessary.

*Evangelism is more difficult today than before because of the general ignorance of the Bible.* In the '70s, I discovered more time was needed to explain, convey, repeat, and teach the gospel.

tend with here in the city. It took longer for these new Christians to achieve a level of fruitful maturity. Because they were starting at minus 10, it was a while before they could function as contributing members in the body.

Let me make the following observation: the realities Randall listed ruled the major cities a generation ago. White fundamentalists and evangelicals fled the cities and have generally avoided them. Had white Christians not fled the cities, they would have been aware of the changing cultural tide. They would have faced these realities earlier. What's "city" today is

### **RATHER THAN SEEKING A CULTURE TO SUPPORT THE GOSPEL WE PREACH, WE MUST UNLEASH THE GOSPEL TO PENETRATE THE GODLESS CULTURE.**

assemblies diminished or eliminated, abortion, feminism attacking traditional marriage, pornography, homosexuality, gambling, drug and alcohol use, cults, new age religions, and the occult.

Many of these issues gained acceptance or momentum in our urban centers. It's an inescapable truth that these things have seeped out of our cities, polluting our entire culture. Instead of permeating the culture by bringing the gospel to the city, our method in the last couple of generations has been to get out of the city, and from some outpost, blast the depraved madness.

Randall went on to list four important current realities that believers must successfully deal with.

*The need today to do pre-evangelism before attempting to lead someone to Christ.* Thirty years ago, I found the line, "The Bible says..." not so much unusable as ineffective because that statement no longer carried the meaning it conveyed a couple of generations before. We used that line to con-

We were starting with a lower baseline of knowledge. It was not uncommon for us to see people come to Christ after several years of evangelism. Also, relationship became a huge factor in the process. We saw far more people come to Christ through family members and friends evangelizing in a relationship over time than we did in response to a sermon.

*A lack of general Bible knowledge in our population makes discipleship essential.* Early on, I learned that the ability of people to take biblical truth and apply it to life was very limited. They needed the teaching, encouragement, and connection with believers that would provide them with modeling and support as they learned to follow Jesus.

*Because many who make professions of faith today have deep and serious moral weakness or sinful lifestyles, some churches only accept members who complete membership classes and commit to their church covenants.* This was one of the first realities I had to con-

"society" tomorrow. You can run, but you can't hide.

Fundamentalists and evangelicals must now step up to the challenge we have helped create. Rather than seeking a culture to support the gospel we preach, we must unleash the gospel to penetrate the Godless culture. The general culture is becoming more like the culture of the cities of the New Testament. The gospel effectively penetrated these cities. The gospel acted as salt and light in these cultures but did not necessarily transform these cultures. The churches planted by the apostles thrived in these hostile cultures.

The genesis of new urban trends is taking place as I write these words. They are coming your way. Be ready by being a student of contemporary urban culture. "And of the children of Issachar, which were men that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do..." (1 Chronicles 12:32) Do you know what to do?