



## DEMYTHOLOGIZING URBAN MINISTRY

PART 1

### SO-O-O MANY MYTHS, SO LITTLE TIME

**M**yth should not be barriers to a Christian's understanding of God's world or God's work in the world. Myths need to be identified for what they are.

#### The "Black, Brown, and Poor" Myth

Many believe most city people are minority and probably poor. While the numbers vary from city to city, and, while urban ministry should include the black, the brown, the poor, it is by no means restricted to these groups. At the time when the minority population of Chicago was at its highest, there were still one

overseeing basketball leagues for disadvantaged youth, planting urban gardens, cleaning up after the pigeons, etc.

Jesus was clear. He came to seek and save that which was lost. The message of John 3:16 is what defines and powers the work of the early church. This has never changed. Urban ministry is not social work in the name of Jesus. Urban ministry is carrying out the Great Commission in an urban center: preaching the gospel, discipling those who seek to follow Christ, baptizing converts, helping people grow in the understanding of what it means

to match. The city is not just one more place worthy of ministry. God's strategy to reach the world is an urban strategy.

#### The "Created equal" Myth

The idea that all urban ministries are created equal is popular with many. The thinking is that the city is a needy place and it doesn't matter what form or shape ministry takes because one is as good as the other. Many Bible-believing Christians think their monthly foray into the city to serve sandwiches at the rescue mission, preach at people they don't

## THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST IS UNIQUE. IT STANDS ALONE. IT IS THE PLAN TO PENETRATE AND EVANGELIZE THE CITIES.

million largely unevangelized white people here. Gentrification is taking place in large cities, midsize cities, and small cities. Places as diverse as Fort Worth, Louisville, Sarasota, and Kansas City are seeing old buildings converted to new residences, new condo construction, and new neighborhoods springing up in areas that were neglected or abandoned. Empty nesters are moving to center city areas. Homosexual singles and couples are acting as urban pioneers. Childless yuppies and couples with young children are drawn to the city by everything from cheaper housing, cultural opportunities, or minimizing the commute. Historically, urban ministry has leaned toward the black, brown, and poor. Today and tomorrow it includes the spectrum of humanity.

#### The "Doin' good in the hood" Myth

This is the belief that urban ministry consists of social work — serving soup to hungry people, handing out clothes to the needy, running tutoring programs for inner-city kids,

to belong to a local body of Christ. While this body may be engaged in various services to the community, these efforts are always short bridges designed to win people to Jesus.

#### The "One more worthy ministry" Myth

The world is huge. The whole world is needy. It doesn't matter where we serve God, just that we serve Him somewhere. Sure the cities need Jesus, but that's just one more place of need.

The Holy Spirit does not agree with that approach. The Spirit led the apostle Paul to the cities of the Roman Empire. The Holy Spirit knows what we need to learn: cities function as distribution centers. They function as amplifiers. What happens in a city impacts society. What impacts the city, impacts the culture. The gospel shook the Roman Empire without padded pews, megachurches, TV ministries, printing presses, cell phones, PA systems, church buses, etc. One church in the center of a great city leverages the gospel in ways that all of those modern tools have yet

know, and pray over people who they might not allow to sit in their own church auditoriums is engaging in biblical urban ministry. There are many para-church organizations doing works in the city. There are children's Bible clubs, Christian youth organizations, and those who jump in a church van and go to the city to pass out tracts on a corner.

How are we to view these efforts in the light of scripture? The apostle Paul did not open rescue missions. He did not found children's Bible clubs. He did not open youth gyms and run basketball leagues. The New Testament plan was to win people to Jesus and form what we now call New Testament churches. That's the standard. That's the model. Nothing else measures up. Nothing else fulfills the Great Commission. Nothing else fills the bill. Other well-meaning endeavors are not on equal standing with the local church. The church of Jesus Christ is unique. It stands alone. It is the plan to penetrate and evangelize the cities.

Myths will make you miss the mark... every time.