



Charles Lyons, Pastor  
Armitage Baptist Church  
Chicago, Illinois

## An unlikely urban bibliography

**B**ooks that have been most useful to me in 34 years of center-city ministry have not necessarily had urban ministry in the title. Here are a few:

### *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*

I read this book as a college student. I was forever seared by its heat and hate. It allowed me to see into the mind and soul of an intelligent, young, angry black man. It helped me understand some of that which seethes beneath the surface in many African-American males. This read is required of all our urban ministry interns. After completing the book, I wrote on the last page, "Lord, let me never forget and, oh God, please send someone."

### *To the Golden Shore* by Courtney Anderson

This biography of Adoniram Judson is a story of sacrifice, cross-cultural evangelism, and persistence. In an impossible environment, this warrior never gave up. He was so desperate to put God's Word into the hands and hearts of the Burmese, he gave himself to the toil of producing the first alphabet for their language. Then he produced a dictionary, grammar, and translated the Scripture into the Burmese directly from the Greek and Hebrew. "The motto of every missionary," said Judson, "whether preacher, printer, or school master ought to be 'Devoted for Life.'"

### *The Cross and the Switchblade* by David Wilkerson

A bestseller, this is one of the early stories of a white evangelical venturing into the American inner-city jungle.

Obedience, boldness, and God's power are in grand display. Reading this as a kid, God began to stir in me a call that would lead to my life adventure.

### *The Acts of the Apostles*

Virtually the whole book takes place in cities. Not only do we find theology that can stand the heat of first-century heathen urban centers, we also see God's strategy to impact those metropolises and the world. The gospel, the divinely ingenious, transcultural concept of the local church, and manifestations of God's power are the very warp and woof of Luke's record. I continue to learn from Acts.

### *William Carey* by Timothy George

Any adequate biography on this Christian soldier will describe a savant ministering cross culturally. Through his biblical conviction and the preaching of biblical truth, he cut a swath of social impact that should make modern fundamentalists hide their faces in shame. Carey brings sweeping societal change and good, impacting customs, traditions, and institutions with salt and light, establishing work that is still bringing souls into the kingdom.

### *The Life of General William Booth: the Founder of the Salvation Army* by Harold Begbie

My probably-out-of-print, two-volume copy is a veritable urban ministry handbook. He took on the toughest issues of the day in the toughest places, in the name of Jesus. This tradition-bashing, out-of-bounds, take-it-to-the-streets radical evangelist faced impossible odds and was used colorfully,

mightily, and gloriously by God. Modern Baptists would do well to re-familiarize their tame selves with this wild saint.

### *Adventure in Africa: The Story of Don McClure* by Charles Partee

This modern story of a missionary family serving in a remote area of the Sudan unfolds a drama that is anything but urban. Yet all the familiar dynamics are present: a hostile atmosphere, impossible odds, a domineering out-of-touch denominational mission board steeped in traditionalism and ineffectiveness, bold believing, "out-of-the-norm, beyond-the-bounds, create a new-paradigm" kind of ministry. Great lessons.

### *Charles Spurgeon's Autobiography*

Talk about taking a city by storm! His Metropolitan Tabernacle pulpit, in the largest city of the world, preached to the world. Numerous ministries (many of which would have been dismissed as "social gospel" by the ill-informed) cutting-edge evangelism, effective training, speaking truth to the London masses and beyond were all part of this servant's idea of what "church" meant. He was a pioneer of modern urban ministry saying, "Reach the city, touch the world."

### *Esther*

This incredible drama of a teenage girl serving God within a heathen power structure, no less godless than any political system dominating today's urban centers. Wrong gender, wrong age, wrong race; she gave her body, and was ready to lay down her life. She lived with such grace and courage, God was able to use her significantly.