



URBAN CURRENT

City and family — A good mix?

Debbie (D): Having lived in the inner city Chicago 29 years, I can say I never wanted to be anywhere else.

I'm speaking with John and Debbie Thompson who have two sons, two daughters, and 12 grandchildren. John has been on the staff at Armitage for 12 years, and served as one of our pastors since 2003.

John (J): We moved into Chicago's Humboldt Park, declared one of the worst gang-saturated neighborhoods in the nation by a University of Chicago sociologist. We wrestled with that reality. I reflected on my theology. God impressed upon me that the safest place in the world is right in the center of His will and that the most dangerous place is outside of His will.

D: I felt safe — what does that mean? For me, it means being in the will of God. In the city or in any place around the world we adjust and surrender to the place God sends us. I've never been apprehensive of doing God's will.

Have you seen some city horrors up close and personal?

J: Well there was the gang fight right in front of the house, the wife trying to stab her husband, the lady of the night being dragged up and down the alley with little to no clothes. We have had some close calls, but we have never been injured and our house has never been broken into. God has helped in a hostile environment.

What about the fear factor and the kids?

D: We were not afraid so we did not transmit fear to our children. There's a big difference between not being afraid and not being wise. We taught our children street smarts from the earliest ages. They were never afraid of where they were living.

The kids get to school age, now what?

D: I made a decision to disciple my kids and I knew that home schooling would provide the time and the vehicle to do that. I have never regretted that decision. We talked about everything.

Were your kids ever challenged?

D: One time a carload of gang bangers pulled up by Jamie and Curtis who were probably in junior high at the time. "Whatcha be about?" somebody yelled. *(I need to inject some interpretation here. That question is a major challenge in street parlance. The wrong answer and you die.)* Jamie and Curtis responded "We be about Jesus." After a moment of puzzlement the car drove off. We were known as the church people. We were always out in the community walking up and down the streets. We made sure kids came to our house and played in our little yard. Then everybody was safe and we could keep an eye out.

Any difficulties?

D: Well, our children became so acculturated that they struggled with prejudice against white people and especially suburbanites. They had to wrestle through identity crisis. At one point my 16-year-old daughter said, "I'm plaid." She knew she was Anglo but she thought and felt like a Puerto Rican.

What are some of the deliberate things you did as parents that were especially effective?

J: We kept the kids involved in ministry.
D: Our children accompanied us as we visited the poor, those on drugs or alcohol, troubled families, the sick. They observed us treating the homeless and prostitutes with respect, even inviting them on occasion for a meal. Primary relationships came from church and other fam-

ilies that shared our faith and values. Our kids were never alone as they moved around the city. They were either with parents or in a group of trusted peers.

Do you feel like you sacrificed your family?

J: No. They got their spouses here. I came from a very prejudiced background. They are now completely free of prejudice. They have watched us live our faith. We never sheltered them from our struggles. When we had no money for the mortgage, they knew we were trusting God. They watched God provide again and again. In other words, we involved them in the trials of life. God became real to them.

How about it Debbie? Any regrets?

D: God raised my kids. God took this little wimpy girl from a small town and let me mother these kids.

Each of our children loves Jesus and is active in ministry. Our three oldest are married and have wonderful families. Our oldest daughter serves in leadership with her husband in a city church. Our oldest son is pastoring in one of Chicago's worst neighborhoods. He, his wife, and three children live where they serve. Our second son and his wife are working as full-time missionaries at our first son's church. Our youngest daughter is very involved at church and is a senior educator with a Christian organization teaching abstinence in the public schools.

J: City life is a school for life. It's been rich living.

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