



URBAN CURRENT

Thriving in an Urbanized World

Whatever your address, you live in an urbanized world. Cities run the world. The powers, ideas, and influences of urban centers impact every person on the planet.

The benefits of living in an urbanized world are many. So much is so much closer. Information. Data. Culture. Opportunity. Options.

We readily recognize the negatives of an urbanized world. The frenetic pace. So many voices. So many powerbrokers. A tsunami of information. Innumerable ideas and influences competing for the same space. These all contribute to the intensity of our day.

Yes, there is the rip and tear inflicted by an urbanized world. Many are not doing well in this environment. How about you?

Ironic. Humans have created this urbanized world which can be so hostile to humanity. Life complexity is exhausting. The problems can seem stifling. These elements take their toll on us physically. Never has it seemed that so many are suffering from non-accident related ailments and damage. There is a mental toll. Too much data, limited capacity to process. Emotionally we are taxed, strained, weary.

It goes without saying this urbanized world sucks the life out of our souls. There is no rest, no life-space. People living in rural areas are experiencing as much rat race as anybody else. What, with all the physical, material, sensual temptations, and external stimuli, spiritual life suffers big time.

William Wilberforce nailed it 200 years ago when he said, "The multiplication of great cities also, and above all, the habit, ever increasing with the increasing wealth of the country, of frequenting a splendid and a luxurious Metropolis, would powerfully tend to accelerate the discontinuance of the religious habits of a purer age, and to accomplish the substitution of a more relaxed morality. And it must even be confessed, that the commercial spirit, much as we are indebted to it, is not naturally favorable

to the maintenance of the religious principle in a vigorous and lively state."

And don't get me started about our impaired relational health. An urbanized world isn't friendly to relationships. Families are scattered, separated, rootless, tired, frayed. Many are technically tethered but practically estranged. With all the emphasis on the external, true intimacy becomes rarer.

Can we survive in an urbanized world? Can we thrive in this 21st-century environment?

Scripture centers on the city of Jerusalem. The New Testament drama is populated by characters thriving in 1st-century cities.

Jesus grew up in Nazareth, which, truth be told, was a hick town. But it was on a ridge with a view of Sepphoris a few miles away. This was a large, brand spanking new Roman city throbbing with life and activity foreign to the God-fearing Jew. Jesus undoubtedly was a frequent visitor.

Jesus said to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and these other things will be added to you. Spiritual things are first. Spiritual values and investments, spiritual relationships, and activities are a priority.

Paul was an erudite urbanite, comfortable in every situation, with any kind of people or culture. He speaks of supernatural strength. In an unstable world, in a taxing environment, we can do all things through Christ who gives us strength.

Think of Daniel, Nehemiah, Esther each thriving in challenging urban environments.

Daniel and his captive friends remind us that life commitments are absolutely necessary in a hostile culture. Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself.

What does Nehemiah's life say to people living in places like Detroit, New Orleans, Mogadishu, or our own disintegrating culture? Nehemiah didn't run from the destruction. He ran to it. Let's not hide behind church walls. Hear his call. "Rise up and build." Let's envision renewal. Let's get out in our world and build

something that honors God and serves people.

Esther reminds us to understand our moment. She received Mordecai's exhortation. Maybe you have "come to the kingdom for such a time as this." Understanding God placed us in this generation and armed us with everything we need to survive and thrive is key.

How to thrive? There must be a deliberate acknowledging of reality. You do live in an urbanized world! If you receive an inheritance but don't acknowledge it is actually yours, it will sit unused, unspent, uninvested. If you have a disease, you probably will not deal with it proactively until you acknowledge you have it.

Next, love the world God loves. The earth is the Lord's, all of it. The world and everybody who lives in it is His. For God so loved the world He gave His only Son. We are called to love the world God loves.

Think of living as serving, and living the life of a servant as thriving. We are called to serve. Fulfilling that purpose is to thrive, whatever the environment.

God provides us with practical anchors in our stormy world. The Lord's church is our spiritual family, our local spiritual army unit, our shelter, our feeding station, our encouragement depot.

The Lord's day anchors our schedule. The first day of every seven is devoted to worship, spiritual nurture, and service.

The Lord's tithe helps us remember to trust God day to day, lay up treasure in heaven, and live for eternity.

Scripture is jammed with people who thrived in hostile cultures. It's our turn now.

by Charles Lyons, Pastor
Armitage Baptist Church,
Chicago, Illinois
charles.lyons@armitagechurch.org

