



# URBAN CURRENT

## "...zealous of good works"

Why was I picketing an off-track betting parlor on a gritty westside street? A new law allowed these establishments which had popped up in the sketchier Chicago neighborhoods like mushrooms after rain. This one was next to a friend's church building. The pastor's opposition produced death threats.

Why was I sitting on frozen concrete with our group, huddled in front of an abortion clinic door? Our presence for even a couple hours would save babies' lives.

Why did I lead a hundred of our congregants to march with banners and signs around a fast food joint on a Saturday morning? A new law allowed fast food joints to serve alcohol, even through drive-thru windows. Nobody asked if we wanted this added hazard in our fragile neighborhood.

Why was I sitting on the floor outside the Mayor's office with several hundred believers singing "Jesus will Fix It"? Politicians allowed the Chicago Public School system to go bankrupt. By state law, they could not open the schools until this was remedied. Now, 400,000 children had been out of school two days.

Why were 200 people marching behind me three abreast, stretching two blocks with police stopping traffic as we crossed busy streets, news trucks rolling alongside capturing our strange parade? No floats. No signs. No songs or chants. Just prayer. Because Julio, mistaken as a rival gang member, was dragged from his car stuck in traffic during a Bulls championship celebration three blocks from our church. He was stabbed to death in front of hundreds of people. No suspects. No arrests.

Why was I sitting in the posh office of a new luxury residential/commercial development one block from our church building challenging the developer like an Old Testament prophet? My congregation of the marginalized, heavily populated by single mothers, all recently dragged from sin's ditch of damnation, was finding it increasingly difficult to find decent, affordable places to live.

I did not arrive in my urban jungle neighborhood fresh out of Bible college as a leftwing social gospeler. I am not a liberal do-gooder. I came under God's call, by God's direction, as a preacher of God's Good News with a vision to see a New Testament church grow, thrive, and multiply in an extremely hostile environment.

I was confronted with issues that raised questions I found answered in God's Word. I was overwhelmed with the heart of God for the poor, orphans, widows, and aliens, and the expectations He has of His people towards such.

Jesus and the apostles have a lot to say about good works. Numerous New Testament references make clear the nexus of good works prepared for us with believers prepared for every good work.

This is not about neglecting the Gospel or abandoning the Great Commission. Jesus sends us to rescue the perishing and teaches good works are a primary outflow of a Gospel-dominated life.

It seemed natural to get out of my car and help the fallen drunk to the curb and safety. Why would I not think it a natural progression to fight to close the three booze-based establishments within 75 feet of our front door? Why wouldn't I support my friend who launched a campaign to vote his precinct dry, resulting in 19 bars closed?

Is helping the drunk a good deed and voting the precinct dry social justice? Does it matter? Is not the latter simply an extension of the former?

There are good works that are personal, private, one-time acts of kindness. There are other good works that are organized, corporate, sustained, with larger goals.

Why would it be Christlike to meet the problems of a couple foster children, and not Christlike to address the system that is creating or enabling the problems? If I'm able to salt and light the system, I've served thousands of children.

The American version of Christianity for

the last 100 years is a far cry from New Testament Christianity and the faith of our fathers. American Christianity has become synonymous with a white, suburban pursuit of the American dream. Why do most Bible commentators ignore the scriptures that deal with social ills? Is it because most of them lived on streets where every blade of grass was manicured and the uglier sins of mankind hidden from view? In the hood, we don't have that luxury. Depravity, in all its ghastly ugliness, is in our face constantly.

From 1st century believers saving abandoned babies to the orphanages of Charles Spurgeon and George Mueller, the work of Salvation Army rescuing young girls from prostitution, believers fighting for abolition, William Carey working to change Indian law to do away with widow burning, the heritage of New Testament believers is one of living out the Gospel not just in the neat safety of a suburban cul-de-sac, but in the dangerous main streets and public squares of depraved humanity.

Health care, education, food, clothing, and shelter . . . these are good works that honor God and create evangelistic opportunity.

*"Christianity stands or falls with its revolutionary protest against violence, arbitrariness, and pride of power, and with its plea for the weak. Christians are doing too little to make these points clear rather than too much. Christendom adjusts itself far too easily to the worship of power. Christians should give more offense, shock the world far more, than they are doing now. Christians should take a stronger stand in favor of the weak rather than considering first the possible right of the strong."*

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer

(from a sermon on 2 Corinthians 12:9)

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