

# Developing a heart for the city

John E. Blake

## What do you see in the city?

### **Look at the statistics:**

Ray Bakke reminds us in *A Theology as Big as the City*, "The frontier of missions has shifted to the cities. The greatest number of unreached people is no longer geographically distant but rather culturally distant. You must realize that the nations of the world are coming to the city." Today in a new millennium, missions has dramatically shifted in many ways, including from safe to dangerous, from receptive to hostile people groups, from villages and jungles to urban/city jungles. The 2000 U.S. Census revealed: 55-80% of the country's population lives and will be living by 2050 in metro/urban areas.

### **Look at the trends:**

Everything from music to fashion, language and politics is dominated by urban trends, says Bob Bufford of *Leadership Networks*. Sociologists, market analysis and government officials pay close attention to what happens in urban America. What happens there will influence what happens everywhere.

### **Look at the task:**

There is no easy, painless or inexpensive way to minister in the city today. Urban ministry is nearly always cross-cultural and calls us beyond ourselves into uncharted territory. But city ministry is critical! D.L. Moody said, "Water runs downhill, and the highest hills are the great cities. If we can stir them, we shall stir the whole country."

### **Look at the Word:**

To practice obedience to the Word of God and participate in contemporary missions, we must go inside the city. We must cross, not only an ocean and a continent, but the street with the changeless Gospel. The entire Scriptures, including *Jesus*, demonstrate this theological practice.

### **Look at the Church:**

Where is the Church in regard to this mission field? Do our methods, ideas, and attitudes really impact today's urban kids? Do they produce devoted disciples for Christ? In *Dare to Love the Ghetto*, Keith Phillips tells about one particular church, "They took five or ten black boys from the inner-city for a week of camping experience, stuffed them full of the gospel, meticulously recorded each decision and then pitched them back into the ghetto with these words of comfort: God bless you! We'll send follow-up materials by mail. Hope everything works out."

## How would you response?

### **Reflections**

How should the Christian and/or CEF worker respond to the need/call to minister in the city?

Follow a Q/A format --- Questions that must be answered.

- **Can you see the Heart of God?**
- **What does the Bible say?**

*Matthew 9:35-38*

The word 'weary' *NKJV* is also 'harassed, dispirited, or distressed' means to be flayed open, in hopeless despair, thrown down, to be at the end of oneself – the recurring

effects of those who are 'weary' can be pictured as a rock is thrown onto a pond, which results in a seemingly never-ending cycle of ripples and rings, thus illustrating the downward spiral of discouragement and hopelessness felt by the poor and disenfranchised. Jesus was moved with compassion. He saw beyond external appearances into the hearts of the people. He saw that they were unprotected, unsaved, and unguided. When you walk down the streets of our cities, when you drive through neglected, despairing, destitute neighborhoods, when you see crowds of people... How deeply do you see? Are you moved with compassion or revulsion?

- **How deeply do you see? How are you moved?**

- **Condemnation?**

- Attitudes like: 'They deserve what they get. Why don't they get a job? Well, Jesus even said that the poor will always be with us. How can they live like that? Don't they care? Look how dirty those kids are?'

- **Cultural Chasm?**

- This is a humanly cultivated apprehension because of being culturally distant from those in the inner city.

- **Curiosity?**

- Attracted to a fabricated danger, trendiness, or self-centered glorification by going into the 'hood' and doing good deeds.

- **Compassion?**

- Attitude that is God-centered, which causes your heart to love, reach out, and be enriched by those in the city.

- **What is in your heart?**

- 1. Have you seen any difficulty loving the unlovely of the city? Why? Increasingly, the poor have become nameless, faceless statistics. The poor are no longer our next-door neighbors, nor do they sit in the pew beside us.

- 2. Have you seen deeply into the eyes of children? How?

- 3. Have you seen children of the inner city being neglected? How? Ask for student response: having to care for self and siblings, defend self, safety, inadequate/on-going programs

- 4. Have you seen those neglected? Who? Ask for student response: churches, ministries, organizations, etc.

- 5. Have you seen the results? What? "When evangelicals left the city both physically and spiritually, this turf was conceded to the government and liberal churches; salt and light was removed from the city... the enemy devoured it."

- 6. Have you seen God's response? "In this modern age, given the context of need in our inner cities, given the separation by class culture that exists, given our history -- what would Jesus have us do?" says *Glen Kehrein, Circle Urban Ministries* – Chicago – Also, Have you read: *In His Steps* by Charles Sheldon?

## What is the problem in the city?

### Rejection & Realization

- Rejection of God
- Deteriorating social conditions result when people reject God.
- Poverty in every area of life is the result when God is rejected (*examples in Nigeria or Europe*). This is a spiritual battle and needs a supernatural solution.

## What is the solution for the city?

### Redemption & Resolution

- Redemption from sin gives hope, salvation, and empowers us with God's Spirit.
- In developing a heart for the city you and your ministry must have a firm resolve. A plan must be followed for resolution of its problems.
- It's found in three words:  
Values - describe who we are and what we really believe  
Vision - describes where we are going  
Resources - describe what we will use and how we will use it

## Having Godly VALUES

Core values are consistent, passionate, biblical, and distinctive convictions that determine our priorities, influence our decisions, drive our ministry and are demonstrated by our behavior. Our real core values are exposed in the way we minister, to whom and also where we minister.

- **Why are core values important?**
  1. Values provide the foundation for formulating goals and giving direction for ministry.
  2. Most strategic plans fail because values are not articulated when starting the process.
  3. Conflict arises often due to differing values.
- **What are 'Key Questions' in determining your core values?**
  1. What are your ministry and/or the Church really supposed to be doing?
  2. What do you get passionate about?
  3. How do you invest your time and money?
  4. For what do you (*your ministry*) want to be remembered?
  5. Are these values action oriented?
  6. Does your (*ministry's*) action or behavior demonstrate or address these core values?
- **What values are essential for developing a heart for the city?**
  1. **Relationships** - Do I value people in the city?  
Then you will make intentional decisions to build long-term relationships. Intentionally doing so across cultural barriers believing that building such relationships enriches ones life. The people and its diversity within the city enriches and broadens ones vision and ministry. It presents itself as an indigenous vault of resources.
  2. **Redistribute and reinvest** - Do I value leadership development?  
Will you pour yourself into those that God sends your way by taking what He poured into you and redistributing and reinvesting it into them? This is about making spiritual disciples for Christ... *Matthew 28:19-20* and making spiritual leaders for Christ in the city... *Philippians 3:10*.

### **3. Reconciliation** - Do you value reconciliation?

A result of redemption, the end being made right with God, now we are His ambassadors... *2 Corinthians 5:19-20* Satan has a plan to alienate and separate us from God and each other. You and I need to repent and forgive.

### 4. Do I value **Risk-taking**?

It is in the heat of urban 'risk-taking' ministry that some of the most innovative and energetic ministries are developed today and pioneer paths for the church tomorrow.

- After-school, mentoring, tutoring programs sponsored by indigenous churches
- Long-term commitments to disciple indigenous leaders
- Training, teaching, and ministry development standards
- Bridge teams and young teen programs

### 5. **Relocation** - Do I value relocation?

Are you willing to stay (*live*) and serve the Lord in a community of need? Living and serving in the city comes with a cost. You experience life as your neighbors. You struggle in the city with those that you intend to minister and help. You share the struggle. You have a bond – common ground to work from, which builds a trusting relationship. It's called 'incarnational' ministry, which is simply to live and be enriched (stimulated) by the people you minister to. Whether or not you presently work on "the inside" with city kids, effective ideas are born in the city and will inspire your creativity and enhance your ministry.

## **Having a Godly VISION**

Vision can only be as clear as the eyes in which it must focus through. A God-given vision requires looking through God's eyes. Is your vision in ministry focused through God's eyes? Are you focused in God's direction? Shoot arrows beyond yourself - *Psalms 127* - "having a higher expectation than where you are... project a vision for success and a heart for God..."

- **What is vision?**
  1. Desires fruitful outcomes in ministry/initiatives
  2. Describes what the ministry will look like in five years
  3. Develops a mental image that motivate people
- **Where do you get true vision?**
  1. Catch God's perspective on reality
  2. Recognize God's desire for people
  3. It flows from God's redemptive purposes
  4. Seek God's specific assignment
  5. By empowering God's indigenous people
- **How can you know it's God's vision?**
  1. Listen during prayer
  2. Seek godly wisdom and counsel
  3. Minister with others who share the same vision
  4. Promotes faith rather than fear
  5. Motivates people to action and multiplies
  6. Requires risk-taking
  7. Glorifies God, not people
- **Where should vision be focused in developing a heart for the city?**
  1. **Staying and Serving** - It may take fifteen years to develop indigenous urban leadership. What are the implications when this decision is made? Are you willing to

make such a commitment to the Lord for city kids? This type of commitment is rare and not for the weak. Will your vision be focused on making a long-term commitment?

2. **Networking** - It must be focused on networking with others in the community. A God-given vision will be inclusive of His Kingdom at-large. Indigenous partners and leadership with the same vision will empower people in the Kingdom if done long-term.

## **Having God's RESOURCES**

Look for indigenous people, programs, and churches within the target community that will supply the needs and gain ownership of the vision. Look in the city. There is a vault of resources that cannot be found anywhere else.

### ▪ **What resources are essential for developing a heart for the city?**

1. Ministries or initiatives that practice successful networking:
  - Indigenous families
  - Local church-based outreach ministries
  - National urban network of ministries
  - Evangelistic ministry teams
  - Auxiliary-Helps ministries
  - Creative ministry teams
2. Church Partnerships with diversity for indigenous development
3. Innovative Outreach Events

## **How can you begin developing ...a heart for the city?**

**Read: James 1:26-2:1**

The heart of God responds to the disadvantaged with an active compassion. This is the heart of pure/true religion. Compassion is all about connecting with the helpless condition of the hurting world. The spiritual and physical needs of this world are great. Look around, where are the greatest needs? Who is suffering the most? If you are called to Christ, you are called to compassion. As this calling becomes more real, as your values become more God-centered, and as you develop a more biblical vision (worldview), you will develop a heart for the city.

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