

Success in the City

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How do Cities Fail?

1. Through the reign of vice, suffering, and injustice ...

- eg. Licentiousness, abuse, greed, poverty, under-employment, inequality, division, loneliness, fear ...
- Fundamentally bad things – not what God wants for anyone made in his image
- Generally recognised as being bad

... met by false hope wrapped up in inadequate narratives

- Claims that either liberalism or conservatism is the answer
- The packaging and polarisation is getting stronger, with roughly even numbers on both sides
- Sadly true worldwide
- Has always been true and will be true until Jesus returns – Mt 26:11
 - Neither liberalism, nor conservatism will fix the city

2. Through not knowing Christ

- Important in its own right, and because of the fruit it bears
 - The NT does not know a fruitless Christianity – Mt 7:15–20; 13:1–23; Jn 15:5–8
- Doesn't necessarily change circumstances, but changes people in all circumstances – eg. Phil 4:11–13
 - The glory to come relativises any present struggles – eg. Rom 8:18
 - Frees believers to serve, irrespective of the temporal costs – eg. Phil 1:20–24
- Not generally recognised as being a problem in its own right, nor a part of the wider problems

The relationship between the two problems

- Fewer Christian believers mean fewer people who sacrificially serve those around them
- And, an unholy city turns people away from Christ ... or does it?
 - Christianity has flourished in pagan places when it has become known as the better alternative

3. So why doesn't everyone follow Christ?

- Partly because of their stubborn sinfulness – eg. Rom 1:18–23
- Partly because they have not been engaged with the gospel – eg. Rom 10:9–17
- Partly because Christians have not shone like lights (eg. Mt 5:16), but have instead come across as –
 - Boring – Christian 'fun' is dull and Christians don't approve of truly fun things
 - Irrelevant – out of touch with, and not needed by, modern society
 - Stupid – they reject mainstream science in favour of the Bible (which is full of bad things)

- Intolerant – no concessions for those who think or act differently
 - Hypocritical – fall short of the high standards they set for others
 - Privileged – get tax breaks, a social voice that's disproportionate to their numbers
 - Dangerous – paedophilia, misogyny, homophobia, islamophobia
- And Christians are not widely known for –
- Love and compassion – doing good for others impartially and without seeking gain as a result
 - Humility – laying down their rights, rather than fighting for them
 - The gospel – the message about Jesus
- The very ouchy question is, To what extent are these perceptions grounded in reality?

Steps to Success

1. Removing the logs from our own eyes – Mt 7:1–5

- Why does Jesus contrast specks and logs?
- For the sake of others, we must first take our own reform very seriously
 - Moral reform and cultural reform

2. Evangelism

- Learn the gospel – in all of its facets
 - eg. The significance of Jesus' Messiahship and the significance of his resurrection
 - A lifetime of learning from the Bible
- Learn the culture
 - From the perspective of a participant, as well as a critic – 1 Cor 5:9–11
 - Get out of the echo-chambers and end the confirmation bias
 - Learn the felt needs as well as the real needs
 - Understand which sacrifices the idols demand
 - All so that we can talk with people, not at people or past people
- Love your enemies – Mt 5:43–48
 - When was the last time you showed sacrificial love for an SSM advocate?
- Proclaim Christ Crucified – 1 Cor 2:2; 2 Tim 4:1–2
 - At all times, and with unambiguous humility, integrity, clarity, understanding, and love
- Logos, ethos, and pathos
 - Rational arguments are important but, no matter how right they are, on their own they will never win anybody

3. Getting the ground game going

- The air war is important, but it does not secure territory
 - We need 'public Christianity' and healthy structures, but they must be backed up on the ground
 - No amount of evangelical bishops will change anything if the churches and people are not engaged
 - Training and modelling one-to-one ministry
- Investing in one person at a time
- Investing in one church at a time
 - Your church is critical
 - NB. We must not just keep the strong churches strong, we must strengthen others

4. Prayer

- Without ceasing – 1 Thess 5:17
 - Or at least more than perfunctory prayers
- For shepherds and labourers – Mt 9:35–38
- For opportunities, and the boldness to make the most of them – Eph 6:19; Col 4:2–4

The Marks of Success

1. Legal and political victory?
 - Laws that favour Christians?
 - Justice in this life? – Acts 17:30–31
2. Freedom, prosperity, safety, and security?
 - We are free from sin – Rom 6:1–23; Gal 5:1
 - Our treasure is in heaven – Mt 6:19–21
 - NB. 'Where your treasure is, there is your heart', *not* 'Where your heart is, there is your treasure'
 - We have eternal security
 - Persecution comes with the territory; it's mainstream Christianity – 1 Thess 3:1–9
 - NB. Do not confuse loss of privilege with persecution
3. Big events / public presence?
 - Maybe as a means to an end, but not necessarily an end in themselves
4. People converted to Christ
5. Christians and churches sacrificially serving and blessing those around them...
 - In every good work
 - Including blessing others by sharing the real hope of the gospel