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Book Review: Urban Impact: Reaching the World Through Effective Urban Ministry by John L. Thompson

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John L. Thompson, *Urban Impact: Reaching the World Through Effective Urban Ministry*. Eugene, OR: Wjpf & Stock, 2011, 192 pp., \$24.00.

Reviewed by Timothy R. Sisk. Sisk is Chair and Professor of World Missions and Evangelism in the Department of World Missions and Evangelism at the Moody Bible Institute.

John Thompson has lived in the city of Chicago for almost thirty years. During that time, he has served as a program director with a Chicago inner city ministry as well as a youth pastor, minister of Christian education, and education pastor in three churches. He currently serves as the pastor of discipleship at Armitage Baptist Church, an inner city, multicultural church in Chicago which has thirty-seven ethnic groups represented among its congregants.

One cannot read *Urban Impact* and not sense the passion that Thompson has for urban ministry. The voice of the book is that of a veteran practitioner who has seen urban missionaries come and go and urban ministries blossom and wither, while not giving up hope. In this book, the author's long-term experience is coupled with practical steps that urban ministers can incorporate as they seek to bring the transforming message of the Gospel to the city.

The book covers an expanse of territory in its 192 pages, as the author introduces a number of vital topics and helpful guidelines for urban ministry. Chapter lengths vary from ten to eighteen pages with review questions at the end of each chapter that highlight the main themes covered.

The opening chapters of the book seek to paint a realistic view of both the challenges and opportunities of urban ministry. More than half the people living today live in urban areas, and that percentage increases daily as more and more migrate to the cities of the world. This demographic reality offers the church of Jesus Christ tremendous opportunities. However, the challenges are unparalleled as well; homelessness, gang activity, corruption, drugs, and educational deficiencies are just a few of the challenges that the author explores as he describes what impedes the ability of the urban church to flourish.

In chapters three and four, the author unfolds seven core values that he feels are foundational for successful urban ministry. He believes that urban ministry must be: 1) incarnational; 2) intentional; 3) personal; 4) cross-cultural; 5) characterized by credibility and integrity; 6) characterized by longevity; and 7) supernatural. These principles, illustrated with stories from his years of experience, reveal the author's philosophy of urban ministry.

on disciple making. While these chapters serve as a helpful reminder of the church's mandate and summarize helpful insights from both the author's experience and other well-known works on discipleship, the chapters offer little that is uniquely applicable to urban ministry and feel a bit out of place.

In chapter seven, the author returns his focus to urban ministry and particularly zeros in on reaching and ministering to the disenfranchised. In this category he includes such people as: addicts, former prisoners, gang members, and those who have suffered physical, sexual, and psychological abuse. Recognizing the growing number of people who suffer from depression, the author offers some practical tools one can employ to serve the depressed and disenfranchised person.

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Chapters nine and ten are the strongest in the book. In chapter nine, Thompson deals with the fallout caused by "the absent father." He writes, "Other than the absence of a relationship with Jesus Christ as Savior, I know of no factor that more clearly and completely impairs so many people's lives than the absence of a father in the home" (116). Chapter ten is an urban living survival guide for ministers and filled with "street smarts" advice on how to live and raise a family in the city.

The final chapters of the book offer some basic principles and recommendations concerning urban church planting. His stress on the centrality of the local church in God's plan is appreciated. A list of seven different church models for reaching "urban ethnics" covers familiar ground. However, I found the graphics used to illustrate the models unhelpful and even a bit confusing at times.

While the book lacks a comprehensiveness to serve as a stand-alone text for an academic urban ministry course, it would be very useful as supplemental reading, since a number of the chapters offer valuable insights and a realistic view of urban ministry from a seasoned veteran. This book would also serve well as a training guide for churches that are seeking to introduce ministry volunteers and supporters to the realities of urban ministry. It should also be noted that while the principles covered in the book are often universal in applicability, because of the author's experience, the primary focus of the book is urban ministry in the United States.

This is a good book both for those beginning their exploration of urban ministry and for those already in the thick of day-to-day ministry. The personal stories of the author, the practical ministry ideas, and his example as a faithful "long-termer" serve as a source of encouragement and guidance for those seeking to serve our Lord in the city.