

REDEEMER

R E P O R T

MAY 1998

FELLOWSHIP GROUPS: AN ANTIDOTE FOR INDIVIDUALISM

BY ANDREW FIELD

humbled by our need for Christ's mercy, and at peace with God. The former way of thinking: 'what's in it for me?' gets replaced by: 'where is God taking us as his people?'

This is a painfully hard process, especially for people like most of us who have been raised in a culture that is driven by competition, individual fulfillment, instant gratification, consumerism and self-centered accomplishment. We have to admit that we are poisoned by these cultural sins—and yet enthralled by them at the same time. We have suckled them in for so long that they taste good. We don't notice the burning sensation any more.

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Christian to view himself or herself with "sober judgment," so that you "do not think of yourself more highly than you ought."

A Grace Perspective

Paul is saying, think! We are saved by God's grace alone, because of what Jesus Christ did for us. Therefore, whether we are highly educated or not, whether we are successful or poor, whether we are self-controlled or a wreck, whether we are moral or sleazy, God needed to rescue us from our treason. No one is good enough to not need his mercy.

So, our proud individualism must be cast off. We join with other Christians as a body united in grace,

Jesus Christ turns scattered individuals into a new people. When the Gospel penetrates the heart, it breaks down the barriers between God and people (Luke 2:14, Romans 5:10-11.) That foundational peace allows the Christian to love other people in a new way. Love becomes condition-free, it reaches out to serve rather than be served (Romans 12:9-18.) We can even love enemies, just the way God loved us (Romans 12:21.)

A Christian is not simply able to serve lovingly, but must serve lovingly. It is an obvious working out of the gospel in our lives. In Romans 12:3-8, Paul shows that a proper gospel humility forces a

...foundational peace allows the Christian to love other people in a new way

CAPITAL CAMPAIGN UPDATE

The first phase of the Redeemer's Capital Campaign has ended with our collective gratitude and praise to God for the generous financial commitments of His people. As of the second week of April over 500 commitment cards have been collected, totaling approximately \$4 million in pledges to be received over the next three years. We continue to receive cards daily and expect the total to grow, allowing us to further expand the vision God has given us towards a Renewed Church and Renewed City.

As we enter the next phase of our campaign, the answers to the fol-

lowing questions may be helpful:

1. When should I begin to contribute?

As soon as possible. We have already incurred expenses associated with the multi-site model. As explained in the Campaign newsletters, opening a west side site in the fall necessitates the hiring of new staff members this summer. Also, we have signed a lease for additional office space to accommodate the growing staff and storage requirements of the multi-site model.

Therefore, if you haven't already started, please begin to contribute your weekly or monthly commitments.

2. How should I contribute?

You can place your "over and above" Capital Campaign contributions in the offerings on Sundays along with your regular offerings. Checks should be made out to Redeemer Presbyterian Church, and identified specifically in the memo section as either "Capital Campaign" or "Renewed

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- GROUP LEADER TRAINING SEMINAR
- INTERNAT'L MISSIONS CONFERENCE
- CHURCH FAMILY UPDATE MORE...



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FELLOWSHIP GROUPS:

Anti-Toxins

What is the antidote for this poison? Fellowship Groups. A church full of healthy groups will begin to spread life-giving anti-toxins into our community. The culture of individualism will be replaced by a culture of God's kingdom. We will look more and more like a distinct people of God.

Fellowship Groups force us, maybe even kicking and screaming at first, into the lives of others. We learn to be a part of a community not simply for what we get out of it, but for what we can give. We learn that we can share other's burdens and begin to even love it. We learn that our personal experience of Jesus Christ and his presence is but one small part of a much more grand purpose of God in history.

As a church, we have a long way to go. Maybe it will take five years, or ten years, or maybe a generation, to embody the kind of loving community that God calls his church to become.

For those of us who are not connected to a group, we can start now by committing ourselves to living out the gospel in a small community. For those of us already in groups, we can start now by seeing the group as a place to share rather than consume. For those of us leading groups, we can impart God's vision for his people and raise up new leaders to carry it forward.

The Need for Leadership

We have a problem, however. Nearly 120 groups of various types currently involve approxi-

mately half of our congregation. Most of those groups are full. Therefore, if we are to incorporate more of our church into groups, Redeemer needs to begin a hundred new groups in the next two years. Yes, 100!

We need new leaders and hosts throughout the city. A New Group Leader Training Seminar will be held on Saturday, May 16, from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at the church office (271 Madison Avenue). Pre-register at 808-4460 x10. If you are interested in considering becoming a group leader, you can find out everything you need to know at this seminar. Following the seminar, you will have an opportunity to meet with a pastor to see if group leadership is an appropriate way for you to minister.

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CAPITAL CAMPAIGN UPDATE

City." If you prefer to write only one check please remember to identify on the check the portion you would like to go to the Campaign.

3. Is it too late to make a commitment to the Campaign?

No. Given that many new people are constantly attending Redeemer, are sure that there will be others who want to sign on to support the vision for all or part of the three year length of the campaign. So if you suddenly come into an inheritance or win the lottery, you may make a pledge (or alter one already made) at any time. Commitment Cards are available after every service at the Information Table

in the East Lounge. You can either mail them to the Church Office or place them in the offering baskets on Sunday. If you require additional information, such as how to give stocks, bonds or property, please call David Bisgrove at the church office (212-808-4460 ext. 11) and he will assist you.

Again, we want to thank everyone who has committed to invest in God's kingdom through Redeemer's Capital Campaign. Special thanks to the dozens of individuals who volunteered their time on the Steering Committee. Without their help we would have been unable to accomplish the hundreds of tasks that went into

MUSIC NOTES

New Song Choir...

The New Song Children's Choir, a nationally-known ensemble from New Song Presbyterian Church in the Sandtown neighborhood of Baltimore, will be at Redeemer on Sunday, May 31, participating in our morning service and giving an afternoon concert in the Hunter College Auditorium. (Many of you know New Song from Redeemer's Habitat for Humanity trips to Baltimore.) The choir's debut recording has raised the standard for children's music — it is not merely joyous, but soulful, thoughtful and sophisticated. You will not want to miss this service and concert! An offering will be collected at the afternoon concert to support the choir.

REDEEMER REPORT

Kathy Keller

Yvonne Dodd

Dave Jacobs

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Redeemer meets Sunday at

HUNTER COLLEGE AUDITORIUM • EAST 69TH BETWEEN PARK AND LEXINGTON
services at 10:30 • 6:00

Group Leader Training Seminar May 16

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Congregational Meeting Sunday, May 17, at 2:00 p.m.

The annual congregational meeting of Redeemer's members will be on Sunday, May 17 at 2:00 p.m. At that meeting members will elect officers (elders, deacons, deaconesses, and a trustee) and hear a report on the capital fund campaign. Arrangements for the west side site will also be discussed.

Don't Miss the May 10th Deadline (to sign up for the International Missions Conference May 22-24)

May 10 is the last day to sign up for Redeemer's International Missions Team Spring Retreat. Held at the Fellowship Deaconry in New Jersey on May 22-24, the theme this year is "Spiritual Danger Zones: The Obsession with Spiritual Alternatives." The retreat features guest speak Tal Brooke, President and Chairman of the Berkeley-based Spiritual Counterfeits Project.

Throughout the weekend, we'll discuss different religions and the spiritual condition of the world, virtual gods, new age gods and nature as god, as well as how to approach people entrenched in false religions with the gospel. Tal is especially qualified to speak on these topics. His most recent book, *Virtual Gods*, explores and critiques cybernetic spirituality. He has appeared on ABC, NBC, MSNBC, Fox, USA Network, CBN, Moody Broadcasting, and BBC 1 & 2.

A special concert and entertainment are planned for Saturday evening. There will be free time for walks on the beautiful scenic paths and sports facilities are available for the energetic. It will be a good opportunity to meet new friends while learning about international missions.

To sign up, come to the Spring Retreat table by May 10 in the East Lounge after the morning or evening services. A \$50 deposit will be required at that time. The balance is due upon arrival. For more information, contact Cathy Dryden at 808-4460 x 32.

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OLDER BROTHERS

istries today are corporately acting like the elder brother—not taking steps to welcome prodigals into their fellowships (or at least, not welcoming them until they have left every vestige of their former prodigality behind.) There are theological elder brothers, who can't rejoice over the salvation of anyone who doesn't sign off on their theological distinctives. There are financial elder brothers, who aren't willing to absorb the cost of sprucing up the nursery, going to two services, or expanding the physical

plant to accommodate the growth that God is sending them. There are cultural elder brothers, who wouldn't lift a finger to minister to rich people, or poor people, or (really) messed up people, or anyone who wasn't exactly suited to their target demographics.

There are many ways to be an elder brother, both corporately and individually, but only one way to please the father—by celebrating and being glad when one who is lost comes home, no matter what manner of messiness or cost

OPEN FORUM TO HIGHLIGHT AFRO-AMERICAN SPIRITUALS

Our last Open Forum of the spring will be held on Sunday, May 3, at 6:00 p.m., in the Hunter College Auditorium, replacing our regular Sunday evening service. The program is titled "*My God is a Rock: Listening to the Message of African-American Spirituals.*"

*Is the Gospel
the only hope
of racial
reconciliation?*

Using the repertoire of African-American spirituals as a starting point, we will examine the difficult and heated issue of racial reconciliation to see if the Christian gospel provides a coherent explanation and solution for such a complex problem.

The evening will begin with a musical program, featuring the Redeemer Gospel Choir, Lilius White (star of "*The Life*" on Broadway) and George Merritt (currently appearing in "*Jekyll and Hyde.*") Performing with the band will be Phil Hamilton (guitarist for artists such as Luther Vandross and Patti LaBelle) and bassist Gary Haase (producer and songwriter for George Benson, Chaka Khan, Grover Washington, and others.)

Following the music, Tim Keller will give a lecture, demonstrating how the texts of the spirituals provide us with clues to understanding the Christian gospel, and give hope for overcoming the ills of racism. Dr. Keller will then accept questions from the audience in an open-microphone question-and-answer session.

CHURCHES FULL OF OLDER BROTHERS

BY KATHY KELLER

The three sermons that Tim preached on Luke 15 at the end of January of this year continue to reverberate in the lives of people, as the tapes go out and letters and comments filter back to us.

You may remember that Luke 15 is where Jesus tells three parables about “lostness”—the parable of the lost sheep (who is lost because of his own foolishness), the parable of the lost coin (which gets lost because of someone else’s carelessness) and the parable of the two sons, usually known as the parable of the prodigal son. The famous prodigal son, of course, is lost through his own greed and sinfulness. But the other son, the responsible older brother, is also revealed to be lost, through his self-righteousness and moral rectitude, which separates him from his father’s heart of mercy.

Jesus told these parables not as isolated gems of wisdom, but as a pointed rebuke to the religious leaders of his day. Chapter 15 of Luke begins like this: “Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear him. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, ‘This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.’ Then Jesus told them this parable....” (vv.

1-3) These parables all reveal the searching, seeking, welcoming heart of God going after sinners. In contrast, the religious leaders, as personified by the elder brother, experience no joy at the reconciliation of God with sinners, but rather something suspiciously like outrage. In an ironic twist, the parable ends with the sinful younger brother sitting at the father’s table feasting, while the elder brother, who externally looked obedient to the father’s will, is revealed to have a heart which is completely alienated from the father, and, in the end, disobedient as well, since he refuses to go in to the party.

The power of this story in individual lives has been immense. Pastors, para-church leaders, an Episcopalian deacon, several missionaries, elders, mothers in Israel, and seasoned Christians of all kinds have been reporting breakthroughs of grace, as they recognize themselves as elder brothers. Very few have been guilty of such blatant Phariseism as the actual Pharisees. Instead, there have been confessions of irritation with the sacrifices that mature believers must make if they belong to a growing church. Irritation with people who don’t

know the rules, even the written rules (“Don’t eat your breakfast during worship,”) much less the unwritten ones (“Don’t talk loudly before the service begins.”) Annoyance with people whose children create difficulties in otherwise well-behaved Sunday school classrooms. Frustration when other church-goers act like consumers, leaving all the volunteering to someone else.

And even deeper, these elder brothers see that they have gradually come to rely on their pillar-of-the-church status, their outstanding performance as volunteers, teachers, officers, Bible study leaders, Sunday school teachers, etc., for their sense of assurance of God’s love. To recognize that I, as a three-decade Christian, stand in as much need of Christ’s mercy as the newest wretch pulled out of the swamps of sin is a wonderful thing. But as wonderful as these individual epiphanies are, perhaps there is a corporate lesson here as well.

Is it possible for an entire institution to be an “elder brother?” A church, a Christian school, a para-church ministry? I think it not only possible, but the unfortunate norm, that many Christian min-

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