

MAY 2013

CHANGE AND GRACE: PART 2

BY TIM KELLERS

In last month's newsletter I wrote about the 18th century pastor John Newton, who showed us that most Christians live out their lives with obvious character flaws that ruin both their joy and their Christian witness. But why is it that so many Christians live like this?

Our natural virtues, which come from inborn temperament and family nurture—such as our talents, aptitudes, and strengths—are good things. But they each have a 'dark side.' People with prophetic gifts—great directness, often good at public speaking or writing—can have problems listening to others and taking advice. People with priestly gifts—sensitivity, often good at listening, giving counsel, showing mercy—often can be too concerned to

make people happy. They may be cowardly, or overly sensitive themselves to criticism. A person who is very generous may also be undisciplined and irresponsible in financial matters. Thus his generosity is really a facet of his too-impulsive character.

One of the reasons that the virtues of gifts and temperament have a corresponding 'dark side' is that our gifts and natural temperament are bound up with the idols that dominate any not heart filled with the gospel of grace. Without a thorough knowledge of the gospel, we look to good things—human approval and relationships, the exercise of power and accomplishment, the control of our environment and self-discipline, the enjoyment of com-

fort, privacy, and pleasure—and make them into pseudo-salvations. So the person who makes an idol out of human approval may be a sensitive artist and the one who makes an idol out of power might be a courageous leader. But gifts and temperament in the service of idols—and *this is our normal state*—always are a mixed blessing. They have a good side—they produce virtuous behavior—but they lead the person into a corresponding sin or vice as well.

The final result of all this is that people cannot see their sins because they looking only at their virtues. For example, someone may say: "I'm not abrasive, I just speak very directly." It is true that a direct-speaking person may do good

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HFNY YOUNG SUPPORTERS SPRING BENEFIT

There is still time to sign up for HFNY's Young Supporters Spring Benefit on Thursday, May 9, at the Broad Street Ballroom.

Join our Young Supporters for food and drinks and learn how you can support Hope for New York's work serving the poor in our City!

Find out more and register for the event at <http://www.hfny.org/spring-benefit>

THE ON-GOING NEED FOR HURRICANE SANDY RELIEF

It has been over five months since Hurricane Sandy hit New York City and thousands of people are still displaced from their homes. While most of us went back to life as usual within a few weeks after the storm, things have never been the same for many in coastal neighborhoods like Coney Island, Sheepshead Bay and the Rockaways, where thousands of homes and businesses were flooded and destroyed.

For many there, the path to rebuilding is not just long and difficult, but has become indefinite due to a lack of financial and social capital. As a church community that exists not simply for itself, but for the city, we recognize that one of the costliest natural disasters in U.S. history is still causing suffering for thousands just an hour from where many of us worship on Sundays.

As followers of Christ, the suffering of our neighbors is an opportunity for us to express the love and generosity of God, who enters into and redeems the suffering of His people.

Members of Redeemer have been participating in the relief effort since November and during Lent this March, Redeemer Downtown partnered with Hope for New York and Brooklyn Presbyterian Church to create two “Sandy Relief Saturday” volunteer opportunities to serve those still in need. These days of service were born in the Spirit of Isaiah 61, out of gratitude since God has come into our lives and invited us to “restore the places long devastated” and “renew the ruined cities.”

Both Saturday opportunities filled up completely. Volunteers went to Sheepshead Bay in Brooklyn and suited up in full body Tyvek suits, mold respirators, goggles and work gloves to do demolition and mold remediation for homeowners that could not afford these services on their own. We had great days serving local residents such as a woman who had used her entire savings to purchase a home less than six months before the storm hit and a man whose home had been in his family for

generations. We were blessed by the opportunity to serve a few, but see that the needs are still great.

In the first weeks after the hurricane, there was an outpouring of support and volunteers while news outlets from around the country constantly covered Sandy related stories. There was a sprint to meet all of the immediate needs. However, the race to rebuild these neighborhoods will be more like a marathon and as the news and rest of the country has moved on, many need the compassion and generosity of others now more than ever.

Just as Christ did not serve us once and leave us on our own, let us consider how we might walk alongside those in need and be a part of rebuilding the broken places in our city for the long haul. For more opportunities to participate in the relief effort visit www.hfnj.org.

For photos from our Sandy Relief Saturdays visit www.Facebook.com/RedeemerDowntown.

REDEEMER REPORT

Kathy Keller
Heather Klein

Hunter College Auditorium
East 69th St.
(between Park & Lexington)
Services at
10:30AM & 6PM

W83rd Ministry Center
150 W. 83rd St.
(between Columbus & Amsterdam)
Services at
9:15AM, 11:15AM, 5PM, 7PM

Salvation Army Auditorium
120 W. 14th St.
(between 6th & 7th Aves.)
Services at
9:30AM & 5PM

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NYC RE-IMAGINED

BY SARAH DAVIS

There are many ways Christians can engage the city. Serving those in great need, fulfilling our civic responsibilities, protesting perceived injustices, and advocating for things that promote the flourishing of the city are all good. But what about participating in what the city has to offer? God is at work all across this city, and invites us to see His work through events that showcase His common grace in a variety of ways—public readings, artistic events, museum tours, city walks, and even foosball tournaments can show us glimpses of His glory. To this end, we invite you participate this summer in **NYC Re-Imagined**.

What is **NYC Re-Imagined**? Well, for those of you who attended the Center for Faith & Work's Gospel and Culture Conference last No-

vember, this summer series is similar to what was entitled "Glimpses." They were small events (typically 8-15 people) that took place the night before the Conference, scattered throughout the city, including plays, food tours, architecture viewing, star gazing, etc. Whatever the event, the hosting leaders helped participants see our great city with a new set of eyes, seeking to glimpse God at work through every aspect of life here.

Now, picture these types of cultural events held not just on one night, but extended across the ENTIRE MONTH OF JUNE, targeting each of our congregational communities (Downtown, East, & West) to see these areas of the city (vocationally and geographically) with new eyes and begin to envision what God

might be doing in and throughout the city. **This is NYC Re-Imagined.**

Our hope is that these events will be as varied and unique as this city and the members of Redeemer. So grab your friends, your community group, your colleagues, and engage the city through a gospel-centered lens. June is a time when New York seems to come alive. The weather is warm, the days are long, and on nearly every corner there is something happening that is so uniquely New York that it feels sometimes as if the city is just begging you to be involved. And in a way, it is.

Would you like to help us re-imagine New York City? Please feel free to contact me at davisarah@gmail.com for more information.

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because direct, blunt comments are sometimes needed. But overall the abrasiveness is ineffective and the person's boldness and confidence comes to some degree from pride and a lack of love. And for this reason, many (or perhaps most) Christians do not work on the supernatural graces of the spirit that are *not* natural to us, and that mitigate or eliminate the dark side—the besetting sins—of our nature.

So how can we be shaken out of our lethargy and awak-

ened to our need to grow? Here are some principles that I have gleaned from Newton's letters over the years.

1. Know that your worst character flaws are the ones you can see the least.

By definition the sins to which you are most blind, that you make the most excuses for, and that you usually minimize—are the ones that most have you in their grip. As we said before, one way we hide our blemishes is that we look at places that our natural tem-

perament resembles spiritual fruit. For example, a natural aptitude for control and self-discipline can be read as 'faithfulness', and a natural desire for personal approval could look like 'gentleness' or 'love.' Or we mistake a bubbly, sanguine temperament for joy, and a laid-back, phlegmatic temperament for peace. We give ourselves spiritual credit for these things, when actually we aren't growing spiritually at all. The lack of other fruit shows that real

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supernatural character change is not happening.

2. Remember that you can't learn about your biggest flaws just by being told—you must be shown.

There are two ways we come to see our sins and flaws more clearly. One way is that we are shown them by troubles and trials in life. Suffering is 'God's gymnasium'—it reveals our spiritual weaknesses just as a workout reveals physical weaknesses.

Secondly, we learn by Christian role models. Sometimes the best conviction comes when you are brought near a person who is living as you should be living. You may not think of yourself as impatient, or abrasive, or over-sensitive until you are brought into close proxim-

ity to someone much more patient, irenic, and content than you. What this means is that we should make use of these opportunities to grow. They are painful—even being near very holy people can be uncomfortable! But it is at such times, when we most feel the need for grace, that we find God's grace most desirable.

3. Be willing to listen to correction and critique from others.

We just said that no one ever learned about his or her sins by being told. We have too many layers of self-justification to grow without hard knocks. But in addition, as a complement, we need critique and accountability from brothers and sisters.

There are at least two kinds. First, you can create your own

Hebrews 3:13 community. Hebrews 3:13 says we are to "exhort one another daily" so we are not "hardened by the deceptiveness of our sin." Take some other believers that you trust and give them "a hunting license" to talk to you about where you need to grow.

Secondly, don't forget the "Balaam's ass" principle. You must learn how to profit from criticism even given by people who are badly motivated, or who you don't respect. Even if only 20% of what they say is true, it may be God speaking to you.

But, you may ask, how do we actually make changes once we see where we need to change? We will look at that in the next article.