

FEBRUARY 2018

THE GENEROSITY OF RELATIONAL HOSPITALITY

BY JOHN LIN

One of my most distinct memories as a child of immigrant parents was that while we had our own network of family and friends from the same cultural background, there were many social networks we weren't able to gain access to. It seemed there were always networks of people who were more established, connected and resourced than ours.

Generosity in relationships, at its heart, is an expression of relational hospitality and welcome. It's a way to bridge the disparity between those who are more and less socially connected. Hospitality is a way to be a friend and neighbor to anyone, regardless of social standing, and while it often means opening up homes and sharing a meal, it also means sharing relational resources and a sense of social connectedness. It's welcoming strangers as friends and acquaintances as family.

This is why, when we read biblical instruction on the practice of hospitality, particularly towards the disenfranchised and marginalized, the issue is never simply a lack of financial resources or a place to sleep. The issue is often a lack of so-

cial resources. For aliens and immigrants, there was no sense of citizenship or belonging. For orphans and widows, there was a loss of inheritance in the form of land and family. It's for this reason that redemption in the gospel is often described as an invitation to be connected and belong.

1 Peter 2 reminds us that though Christians are being built into a spiritual house, we are also "foreigners and exiles" (1 Peter 2:11). Likewise, Paul writes, "you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens ..." (Ephesians 2:19). It was the experience of being an outsider, who is brought in to the people of God, that is the basis for the Bible's call to relational generosity and hospitality. "And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt." Deuteronomy 10:19.

So how can we practice this kind of relational generosity? Because New York City is a place of great diversity and mobility, there are many ways! Here are three:

- *Practice conversation.* New York is a place of ethnic, eco-

nomical and cultural diversity, which means we are always encountering people who are different than us and may have very different beliefs than we do. Conversation opens up ways for us to connect to people, even if we have very different experiences of life or views about the world.

Particularly in a city where relationships are often based on economic transactions or where we might not talk to people we live near and see everyday, conversation turns those relationship into ones of mutual concern and friendship.

Simply saying to a familiar neighbor, "I've seen you all these years, but have never introduced myself" or to a new neighbor, "I've never seen you in the building before, welcome to the building!" can create a relationship based on conversation and relational welcome.

- *Practice connection.* When I moved to New York, I remember thinking that New York was a big place, that I
(Continued on page 6)

GOTHAM: A NEW VISION FOR WORK

BY HILARY MERO

As I reflect on my life, I recognize that I am sum of people and experiences that have poured into me, and my work and Gotham are two very strong parts of that. I am privileged in that as I entered the workforce from college, I happened to be surrounded by people who talked about the importance of the integration of faith and work. I was molded with the idea that work was and is important to the flourishing of a community. So, in 2015 when I moved to New York and heard about Redeemer and the Center for Faith & Work for the first time, I was absolutely floored that there was something like the Gotham Fellowship and knew I had to apply.

As excited as I was about something like this, I was nervous when I began the program because I had never studied some of the things in the curriculum before and I felt like I would be totally intimidated by the people I'd be in class with. However, it took about 10 minutes into the first retreat to see how amazing this community was that I would to

get to live life with for the next nine months. The best way to describe it is that the Gotham community is as safe space. It's safe to learn, process, pray, seek, and to throw theoretical grenades of questions about doubt or application of the gospel. It's a group of people committed to your knowing God's love for you. A group of people praying with and for you. A group of people loving you.

The other apprehension I had in applying was that "this wouldn't be a good year to do this" because of how busy I am with work — classic New Yorker, right? I am a general manager for an education fundraising startup and it is very quickly growing. I feared this would negatively effect my work because I wouldn't have time for both. Applying to Gotham was an act of faith for me. "God, if you want me to do this fellowship this year, I pray you would have them accept me and I'll trust you and do it" is what I prayed.

Since then, I've seen the Lord do things in my understanding of how I effect the people I work with. I've seen

him teach me how to let go of this death-grip of control I have on the things I care about, and in my understanding of how I am an agent of reconciliation for God's Kingdom through my work. It has helped me not just think in the morning or evening about my faith, but to really have a functional belief about God that I am living in and out of. It's helped me understand how richly loved and secure I am. And that the work I am doing is a part of bringing God's kingdom to earth as it is in Heaven.

Doing hard things is scary. Applying to Gotham might take some faith. But I encourage you to do it. In the process, you might just learn a little more about yourself and about God.

The Gotham Fellowship is CFW's nine-month discipleship intensive which provides theological, spiritual and relational foundations required for meaningful and sustainable integration of faith and work. Applications for the 2018-19 class are due March 31. More information and application at faithandwork.com/gotham

REDEEMER REPORT

Cregan Cooke, Kathy Keller
Heather Klein

Hunter College Auditorium
E. 69th St.
(btw Park & Lexington)
Services: 10:30 a.m.
and 5 p.m.

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West Side Church Plant:
NY Society for Ethical Culture
2 W. 64th St.
(at Central Park West)
Service: 10:30 a.m.

Salvation Army Auditorium
120 W. 14th St.
(btw 6th & 7th Aves.)
Services: 9:30 a.m.
and 5 p.m.

FIVE WAYS TO PRAY FOR DON'T WALK BY

Homelessness in New York City has reached its highest levels since the Great Depression. Currently, more than 60,000 New Yorkers sleep in city shelters each night. Thousands more sleep on New York City streets, in the subway system, and in other public spaces. The large majority of our neighbors sleeping on the streets are living with mental illness and other severe health problems. The winter months are particularly difficult for those who are without shelter.

That's why Hope for New York works alongside The Rescue Alliance, a collaboration of faith-based organizations, to host four Don't Walk By outreaches in February. Each Saturday this month volunteers walk the streets of Manhattan, offering the men and women they encounter care kits and an invitation to return to an anchor church for a hot meal, medical care, and connection to holistic recovery programs.

Last year, Don't Walk By volunteers were able to engage more than 800 people on the streets. Join us in praying for the outreaches happening this month — and, most importantly, for our neighbors who are experiencing homelessness.

Here are five ways you can pray:

- Pray for every man, woman, and child in our city who has no place to call home. Pray that they would be connected to the resources they need to meet the most basic and essential needs and find access to shelter, adequate food, and health care.
For the needy shall not always be forgotten, and the hope of the poor shall not perish forever. (Psalm 9:18)
- Pray for the healing hand of the Lord on the men and women living on the streets. Pray that He would remove any physical, emotional, or mental barriers and illnesses they face to finding stable housing and/or employment.
The blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. (Matthew 11:5)
- Pray that the Holy Spirit would be moving during these outreaches. Pray that Jesus would meet our neighbors on the streets in undeniable ways, that they might know Him as Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. (Psalm 34:18)
- Pray for the volunteers who will be participating in the four outreaches. Pray that they would be bold in proclaiming God's love for every single person made in His image, and that the Lord would give them hearts that are properly motivated and aligned with His.
The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, and that the oppressed will be set free. (Luke 4:18)
- Pray for the organizations, including many of our affiliates, who day in and day out serve our neighbors experiencing homelessness. Pray that they would be encouraged in their work and that God would ignite a fire in their hearts that allows them to endure all difficulties.
If you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday. (Isaiah 58:10)

FORMED TO STAND WITH THE HOPE OF THE GOSPEL

BY CREGAN COOKE

This year at Redeemer we are emphasizing Formation: the practices necessary for being formed spiritually. But for us to properly leverage our spiritual formation for God's purpose, we need to *live out* of an identity founded in Christ with our friends, neighbors and coworkers who are not Christian. If we want them to encounter the life-giving hope of the gospel, we must be willing to identify ourselves as followers of Christ. We have to be ready and willing to share the joy, freedom and hope that comes from the gospel with the people God puts in our life.

There are many inspirational images that come to mind when we think about taking a stand. We might think of those who marched from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, in the face of terrible threats and grave danger to stand against the injustice of racial segregation and institutional racism in the United States. Or we might think of a person like the Apostle Paul who was willing to preach the gospel in places where his life was nearly lost for doing so. Events and stories where someone stands against injustice, or works to bring hope to those who have lost it, inspire us to consider how we should live.

In Daniel chapter 3 we read about such an occasion in the lives of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. They were willing to take a stand against govern-

ment instituted idolatry, knowing that it could cost them everything — their jobs, their reputations, and their lives. These three young men decided to stand and be identified with the God of Israel when thousands of others would not. They were willing to identify themselves with their God even if it meant being thrown into a fire. As we think this year about being formed to be sent out to love and serve the city, there are three things we can learn from their experience.

First, they were willing to be identified — to stand out even when no one else would. They had courage because they were sure of their identity in their God. They knew it would be difficult to take a counter-cultural position. They would be criticized and even threatened. They decided it was more important to be public with their faith and stand on their identity in the God of Israel rather than to retain their advantages of education, position, and wealth.

To the degree we are formed more fully to live out of an identity founded in Christ, the more natural and comfortable we will be when we “stand” to love, serve and share our hope in the gospel with the people we know.

Second, they were willing to stand even though they didn't know how or even if God would respond in that moment. When the king

gave them a second chance to bow down to the statue and demonstrate their allegiance to him, they gave a memorable response. “We believe that our God is able to deliver us from the fire, *but even if he does not*, we will not bow down or serve your idol.” They were confident in the power and plan God had for them even though they didn't know what God would do or if he would do anything at all in that situation. They chose to trust and put their faith in God.

As we live out the gospel with our friends, neighbors and coworkers, we need to be, first and foremost, true friends, where our joy and hope in the gospel is evident, winsome and intriguing. Whether we can see God working in a situation or not, we are called to live with the hope of the gospel and trust God to do the rest.

When the three men declined the king's second offer and said they would not join the rest of the culture in bowing to an idol, it made the king furious. He ordered the furnace made seven times hotter, and Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were bound and thrown into the fire.

Which brings us to a third thing we discover in the story — **Jesus stands with us** in the fire. When the king looked into the fire he saw the three men walking around and a fourth person who looked like the

(Continued on page 6)

THE MR. BRIGHT I WAS MEANT TO BE

Wilfred Bright, a.k.a. Wolfie, is a full-time volunteer with Gifted Hands — a Hope for New York affiliate that offers art, design, and craft classes for the elderly, the homeless, and people living with HIV/ AIDS.

Below, Wolfie shares his story of how God worked through Dustee, the founder of Gifted Hands, to bring him back to life.

I grew up in a good family. We moved from North Carolina when I was five years old, and I have lived in Brooklyn ever since. My parents raised us to be respectful. We were at church every Sunday and went to Bible school. I was the oldest of six. It was my job to take care of my four brothers and one sister, so I've always been responsible. And I started working when I was 14. I worked in the laundromat, in department stores, and I worked in the mailroom at a law firm on Wall Street for 25 years.

My problem was that I was following people. A person might sit here and do something and I'd want to try it. So instead of going the right way, I went the wrong way. I was too busy hanging out with the wrong people and not listening to anyone who told me differently.

I got involved doing drugs. At the time I lived with my parents, but they had rules, and I didn't want to go by any rules. So they told me to leave. I stayed with friends for a while,

but then I ended up homeless, living in Tompkins Square Park for four years in a place called Tent City.

I didn't have faith in God then. People would talk about how Jesus was going to do this and Jesus was going to do that, but I was still homeless. I was still going through so much. And I got tired of waiting for Him. So I gave up. I didn't trust Him.

While I was homeless, I got sick and was placed in a nursing home called Rivington House. That's when I met Dustee, who started Gifted Hands, a non-profit arts outreach for HIV/AIDS patients. She would come to my hospital room weekly to talk or pray for me, but I didn't want to be bothered. I would turn up the TV, pull the curtain, slam the door. I had given up.

But Dustee kept coming to see me anyway. At that time, God had started talking to me, saying to give her a chance, that she was trying to help me, there was a reason she kept coming in here praying for me. God had also kept coming to me in a dream. I ignored it for a while, until one night I had this dream where God came to me. It was scary. When I woke up, right then and there I felt like God came and got me. He rescued me in that moment. When I saw Dustee I told her about my dreams, and we prayed together, and I gave myself to my God. And He has blessed me so much since then.

Since Jesus came into my life, He's really changed me. All that negativity is gone. He's taken it away. I can look at myself in the mirror and say, "Wow. This is what I've been missing all these years. This is the Mr. Bright I was meant to be." Now I listen to God and learn what He wants for me. And I love myself now. I see myself the way Jesus sees me. I feel like God has brought me back to life, and He used Dustee — I call her my spiritual mother — to do it.

That was five years ago. Today, I volunteer with Gifted Hands full-time. I lead two jewelry design programs where we also do a devotional. Dustee is mentoring me to be a leader in Gifted Hands, and my pastor is mentoring me to become a deacon in our church. I also started going out across the city a couple times a week to give hats and scarves or socks and protein bars to the homeless and pray with them.

When I'm out there doing this, God is saying, "I got you Mr. Bright. I love what you're doing. I have your back." I get emotional, because I was there. But God is blessing me so much. I can't believe I'm out there serving the homeless. That used to be me. But I know I'm not serving by myself. It's God.

Sometimes I sit back and I think, "Wow. I came a long way." But I didn't do it on my own. Jesus, He's helping me with this. And He's not finished with me yet.

(Continued on page 8)

RELATIONAL HOSPITALITY ... (CONT'D FROM PAGE 1)

didn't know anyone and I had no idea how to find a good restaurant. My roommate showed hospitality to me simply by introducing me to his friends, inviting me to his community group and telling me where to get the best bagels in the neighborhood! He was in a position of greater social connectedness and familiarity with the City and helped me take first steps towards calling New York home. Inviting people into relational networks can be the first step for many to

find family and home in the City. Sharing our friends and awareness of the City can make New York a more inviting home.

- *Come to the Table.* The Lord's Table is the greatest emblem of biblical hospitality and relational welcome, because it reminds us of Jesus' supreme act of relational generosity to make us welcome. In His willingness to be separated from the Father, He gave us access to the Father. What the Lord's Table reminds us is that ac-

cess to the God of the universe is not based on social standing or moral achievement. It is based solely on our acknowledgement that we are hungry and thirsty for connection to God and that Jesus Christ welcomes us to Him. The more we are immersed in the story of a God who welcomed the stranger, foreigner, and alien, the more we will extend that welcome to anyone around us, for their flourishing and for the good of the city.

FORMED TO STAND ... (CONT'D FROM PAGE 4)

Son of God. Jesus met them in the fire and brought them through unharmed.

When we are concerned about how difficult it might be to share our faith or take a stand and be identified as a Christian, when it seems like the fire of the situation might be too much, we have the confidence that Jesus is there with us and is faithfully forming us into the people he wants us to become. We can trust that he is using the situation to bring about renewal and restoration beyond what we can see or know.

We can stand with the hope and joy of the gospel knowing that Christ stood for us. In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus prayed that if there was a way to not go into the fire of God's wrath, he asked: "Let this cup

pass from me, nevertheless not my will but thine be done." Because Jesus submitted to God's will, he had to stand before Pilate, he had to stand before the mobs, he had to stand before the cross and allow himself to be executed. Christ mirrored the words "even if he does not" when he prayed to let the cup of wrath pass. Only when *he* took a stand for us, he was cast into the ultimate fire that our sin deserved, so that we wouldn't have to be.

We can see how the gospel is beautifully threaded into the stand Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego took. It should inspire us, that as the Holy Spirit forms us, we can stand and be public with our faith with joy and hope because Jesus was willing to say "even if not" for us. When we live out of

that identity we can have the strength and faith to stand and extend the hope, joy and truth of the gospel to the people in our lives who haven't yet experienced it.

Would you like to learn how to become better at sharing your faith? In February, the second of three Formation conferences will be held on the topic of **Public Faith: Sharing the hope we have in the gospel**. Redeemer congregants are encouraged to attend in order to be equipped to share your faith with winsomeness and courage. Registration for non-Redeemer congregants, as well as joining by Livestream is also available. For more information visit redeemer.com/formationconference

ON BEING A NEIGHBOR

BY BIJAN MIRTOLOOI

In March of 1959 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and his wife, Coretta Scott King, were visiting Israel. They rented a car and decided to take a trip from Jerusalem to Jericho. While they were en route, Dr. King began to reflect out loud on the significance of the well-known parable of the Good Samaritan.

In Jesus' parable, a man traveling on the road to Jericho was waylaid by robbers: he was mugged, beaten, and left for dead on the side of the road. Not long after, some priests happened to walk by. Seeing the man left for dead, they simply passed on by. Later a Samaritan, who had little social clout and standing in the first century, passed by on the same road. When the Samaritan saw the man left for dead, he got down from his donkey and bandaged his wounds, pouring oil and wine over him for medicinal purposes. He then brought the man to an inn where he could recover. Finally, the Samaritan gave the innkeeper some money and said, "Look after him, and when I return I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have."

As Dr. King discussed this story with his wife, he noted the fundamental difference between the priests and the Samaritan. When the priests walked by and saw the man lying for dead, they asked themselves, "If I stop to help this man, what will happen to *me*?" Maybe the robbers were still around.

Maybe the priests were afraid of becoming religiously unclean. Maybe they didn't want to be late for an appointment. Whatever their reasons, they applied a cost-benefit analysis to the situation, and immediately concluded that the cost of helping this man exceeded any potential benefit they would receive. They demonstrated an attitude of self-preservation in the midst of need, and so the priests passed on by.

But, as Dr. King noted, when the Samaritan came along and saw the man left for dead he asked a completely different question: "If I don't stop to help this man, what will happen to *him*?" There's no cost-benefit analysis there. He demonstrated an attitude of self-sacrifice for the good of someone else. It was very costly for the Samaritan to care for this man in need: it cost him time, money, and was a significant risk to his personal safety. Knowing what it would cost, he chose to put the needs of another in front of his own.

Why does this matter today?

One of the distinctive features of networking and relationship-building is the tendency to approach nearly all relationships through the lens of our own cost-benefit analysis. Whether it's a colleague, a friend, a church to attend, or even a romantic relationship, we are constantly trying to discern if the benefits of a potential relationship will exceed

the costs. If a relationship appears to be too challenging, if the needs are too great, if the person's problems are too demanding, we don't engage.

The gospel means that Jesus knew what it would cost to meet us in our need and he chose to come anyway. At the incarnation Jesus came down and made his dwelling among *us* (John 1:14). The "us" John has in mind is a world filled with needy and broken people.

Jesus came to meet our need — our sin — with overwhelming grace. Jesus Christ is the ultimate Good Samaritan who came down, not from his donkey, but from the cosmos, to meet us in our need. He did so not merely risking his life, but giving it up in self-sacrifice. It cost him everything to be with us, yet he became man and went to the cross with joy (Hebrews 12:1-2). How might this good news shape our lives today?

If this message takes root in our hearts one of the implications is that we become free to move towards others in their brokenness and suffering, because that's what Jesus did for us. When confronted with needs around us, the gospel frees us from asking, "What will this cost me?" so that we can begin to ask, "How will this serve someone else?" By the power of the Spirit, Christians can grow out of their need to constantly evaluate relationships in

(Continued on page 8)



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MR. BRIGHT I WAS MEANT TO BE ... (CONT'D FROM PAGE 5)

Interested in getting involved serving your neighbors through a program like Gifted Hands? Hope for New York partners with 50 non-profits across the city serving a variety of needs. Learn more at hfnj.org/volunteer.

ON BEING A NEIGHBOR ... (CONT'D FROM PAGE 7)

terms of costs and benefits and begin to move towards others with grace and compassion.

Can you imagine what it would look like if Christians and churches began to live like this? Imagine the beauty of a community that lived together and served the world not in terms of costs and benefits, but from a posture of eagerness to share radical grace and mercy with one another, all as a response for what God in Christ has done for us.

In a sermon on Philippians 2, B. B. Warfield called Christians to imitate the incarna-

tion. Towards the end of the sermon, after highlighting the wonders of the doctrine of the incarnation, Warfield makes this application: "Self-sacrifice brought Christ into the world. And self-sacrifice will lead us, his followers, not away from but into the midst of men. Wherever men suffer, there will we be to comfort. Wherever men strive, there will we be to help. Wherever men fail, there will we be to uplift. Wherever men succeed, there will we be to rejoice. Self-sacrifice means not indifference to our times and our fellows: it means ab-

sorption into them. It means forgetfulness of self in others. It means not that we should live one life, but a thousand lives — binding ourselves to a thousand souls by so loving them that their lives become ours."

What would our world look like if the message of Jesus, the ultimate Good Samaritan, became the pattern and power for how we relate to others in our homes, our churches, and our neighborhoods? It would be beautiful and hopeful, like light shining in the darkness.