



SEPTEMBER 2018

## BEING PUBLIC WITH OUR FAITH

BY TIM KELLER

**I**t is no surprise that every poll and study shows that over the past two decades there has been a steady increase in the number of Americans who say they are atheists, agnostics, religiously unaffiliated, or believe “nothing in particular.” Each generation — from Gen X to Millennials to ‘Gen Z’ — are significantly less religious and less church going than the generation before.

This should mean Christians talk more to their neighbors, colleagues, and friends about the reasons they believe, but that is not what is happening. A recent study commissioned by Lutheran Hour Ministries found that since 1993 the number of Christians who said “I believe every Christian has a responsibility to share their faith” and the number who said they would speak to others about the benefits of becoming a Christian has dropped precipitously. (See *Spiritual Conversations in the Digital Age*, A Barna Report, 2018.) So at a moment when there is more need for evangelism — sharing the good news about Jesus — there is less willingness to do it.

Why? There are many fac-

tors. First, talking about Christian faith is more complicated. A generation ago you could assume that the vast majority of people believed in a personal God, an afterlife, moral absolutes, the reality of their sin, and had a basic respect for the Bible. Christians routinely assumed the existence of these concepts (or “dots,”) and evangelism was mainly connecting the dots to show them their personal need for Jesus. But we can no longer assume that any of these basic ideas are common knowledge or, if they are, even acceptable. To talk about faith now entails working to establish very basic concepts before Jesus’ gift of salvation can have any meaning.

Second, talking about the Christian faith is more difficult. In the past those who didn’t believe always granted that religion was a good thing for society though ‘not for me.’ But Christianity and religion in general is no longer accepted as a good influence in society or in individual lives. From the history of the church supporting slavery and religious wars to the current involvement of religious persons in politics, the flaws and sins of the Christian

church are foregrounded in our culture. There is particular anger over traditional Christian views of sexuality. To talk about faith now means being peppered with hostile questions.

Third, younger adults especially have been told repeatedly that “no one has the right to tell others what to believe — so you should not be trying to convert anyone.” This very statement, of course, is self-contradictory, since it is doing the very thing it forbids. Nevertheless, it is a slogan with enormous cultural power and it is hard for younger Christians not to be swayed by it. In addition, Sherry Turkle, in her book *Reclaiming Conversation*, points to studies that show that the more people use social media, the less able they are to empathize or put themselves in another’s shoes, and the more unable they are to talk face to face with anyone who disagrees with them.

In short, doing evangelism today will take more patience, courage, and thoughtfulness than was needed a generation ago. And yet there is no substitute. Jesus told his disciples: “You will be my witnesses, in

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# FORMED FOR JUSTICE CONFERENCE NOV 16-17: WHAT DOES THE LORD REQUIRE OF YOU?

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**R**edeemer Churches and Ministries, in partnership with Hope for New York, is pleased to announce that its next Formation Conference, Formed for Justice,\* will take place on November 16 and 17 at the New York Society for Ethical Culture.

Throughout the Bible we learn that God is a God of justice, and that through the power of the gospel Christians are called to live in ways that reflect this justice. In fact, scripture tells us that one of the most powerful ways that the church embodies the gospel is through the love and unity we demonstrate across economic, cultural and racial divides (Colossians 3:12-15). What does this look like in our fractured society? How can we stay hopeful when it seems we are more divided than ever?

In this special two-day event, we will delve into questions such as:

- Who *is* my neighbor?
- What does the Bible have to say about race and why is it important?
- How do we build relationships with, and learn from, people who are different from us?
- What role does the church have to play in addressing areas of injustice?
- How can we begin taking action now to advance mercy and justice?

The Redeemer family of churches believes that as Christ's love transforms us, we participate in our spiritual growth through the practices we keep each day, the community we commit to, and through fulfilling our callings. In living out our callings, we can bring re-

newal where God has placed us: in our work, relationships, and neighborhoods. As we seek to challenge injustice in our neighborhoods, we take an active role in the gospel movement God is growing in NYC.

Join us this November as we encourage one another to see our neighborhoods as places to root ourselves, and invest in the flourishing of our neighbors. Speakers include Christina Edmondson, Daniel Hill, Dr. Tim Keller, Soong-Chan Rah, Gabriel Salguero and Jemar Tisby. The weekend will also include worship, times of reflection, and workshops to equip us in advancing justice wherever we are.

For more info or to register, please visit **[redeemer.com/formationconference](http://redeemer.com/formationconference)**.

*\*The event is funded by the Rise campaign, and intended primarily for Redeemer congregants.*

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## REDEEMER REPORT

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Cregan Cooke  
Kathy Keller  
Heather Klein

The Redeemer Report is a publication of the Redeemer Presbyterian Church.  
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Hunter College Auditorium  
E. 69th St.  
(btw Park & Lexington)  
Services: 10:30 a.m.  
and 5 p.m.

W83rd Ministry Center  
150 W. 83rd St.  
(btw Columbus & Amsterdam)  
Services: 9:30 & 11:30 a.m.  
and 5 p.m.

*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.

# WHAT I LEARNED AT THE CITY TO CITY ASIA PACIFIC INTERNATIONAL INTENSIVE

BY RAWEE BUNUPURADAH

I was born and raised in New York City to a Thai immigrant family. I, with my wife and three sons, currently call Bangkok, Thailand home. I moved to Bangkok to serve God and to serve the people of this great city. I have a passion for culture, community, discipleship and the church. We just started a new church called Grace Community Church, serving a community of young professionals and young families.

This past May I was very fortunate to attend the City to City Asia Pacific International Intensive, a two-week training including folks who have started or are in the process of starting new churches. We came from all over the region to the city of Taipei, representing two continents, seven countries and twelve cities for one reason: to learn how to start gospel-centered churches in urban contexts. The Intensive was a deep dive into discovering the intricacies and beauty of how the gospel should affect our doing, thinking and being. Everything.

Several key concepts from the training really struck me. First, the gospel is more than just head knowledge. It is truth

meant to be experienced continually in deeper and richer ways both personally and in our ministry. The trainers shared their stories, experiences and struggles to move us to see why



*City to City Asia Pacific International Intensive*

the gospel is so critical, helping us see how the gospel should renew us and transform us. I also was struck by the continual need to meditate and grow in the promises of the gospel and



*Bangkok*

in my identity in Christ. Only in Christ am I righteous, am I strong, am I valued, am I accepted above and beyond my own actions, successes or circumstances.

One of the most import-

ant and difficult sessions of the two weeks covered how we are called to works of mercy and justice. Is our church motivated at its core to be a voice for and helper of the marginalized, homeless, oppressed and powerless? Discussing this topic with our trainer made me realize how little I have considered the complexities my church will face in the city. Yet the gospel compels the church, compels me, to find ways to love, serve and befriend those with fewer opportunities.

Participating in the Intensive was an immensely helpful and insightful experience. It was an opportunity to recheck my vision and values in serving the city of Bangkok. It provided best practices to consider as we begin leading our new church. It was also an honor to be part of a growing community of church planters, sharing life, joys, fears, struggles and dreams with one another. I am thankful for seeing God

at work in the Asia Pacific region and hopeful to see many more church planters trained and many more churches started through the City to City network.

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# MINISTERING IN THE LIKENESS OF GOD

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BY PETER ONG

At the end of third grade, my youngest son, Noah, had to do a presentation on a “famous person.” To my surprise, he chose me as his subject. He did his online research and found several posts about me. He interviewed me and asked some very important questions like, “What is your favorite food?” and “Who is your hero?” and “What do you do at work?” I answered them like I was on a late night talk show with interjections of gravitas and humor.

Then he showed me his presentation, aptly titled, “The Biography of Peter Ong.” What struck me was how intently he had listened to my answers and how he had been able to truly represent who I am. He wrote about my work with the poor and advocating for them to local churches. He wrote that my work at Hope for New York is non-profit work “because money is not the most important thing, but Jesus’ love for those who are forgotten is.”

But what was most telling was how he remembered the stories I had shared with him about being a poor, immigrant child. He remembered that my mom was a garment worker and my father was a steel worker. As I read his pre-

sentation, I realized how much attention he paid to the stories I had shared with him in the very ordinary moments of our days.

I took a moment and considered what it would be like if we were to write a biography of God. How would we present God?

In scripture, God is often described as a defender of the most vulnerable. As Tim Keller points out in *Generous Justice*, “Realize then, how significant it is that the biblical writers introduce God as a ‘father to fatherless, a defender of the widows’ (Psalm 68:4-5). This is one of the main things he does in the world. He identifies with the powerless, he takes up their cause.”

We all yearn for this kind of sovereign hero. We look around and see so much brokenness that it causes us to question if God cares. As C.S. Lewis points out, “My argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. But how had I got this idea of just and unjust? A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line. What was I comparing this universe with when I called it unjust?”

Last month, Hope for New

York volunteers shared testimonies across Redeemer churches as part of HFNY Sunday. I have been struck by each of these testimonies and the profound sense of transformation and insight that has come about through serving.

One of the testimonies included these words: “We would have burned out long ago if we had served in our own strength, rather than relying on the church body to love these children well. United in our efforts to be His hands and feet, we seek advice from each other on how to address behavioral changes, how to make the Bible more ‘approachable’ for five year olds, and we encourage one another to deepen our personal relationships with God. God is truly showing us that the fundamental element to unconditionally loving others is to understand how He first loved us and to rely on His body to serve together.”

It is my prayer that we would all, as the Body of Christ, grow together to express this unique and important aspect of the “Biography of God.”

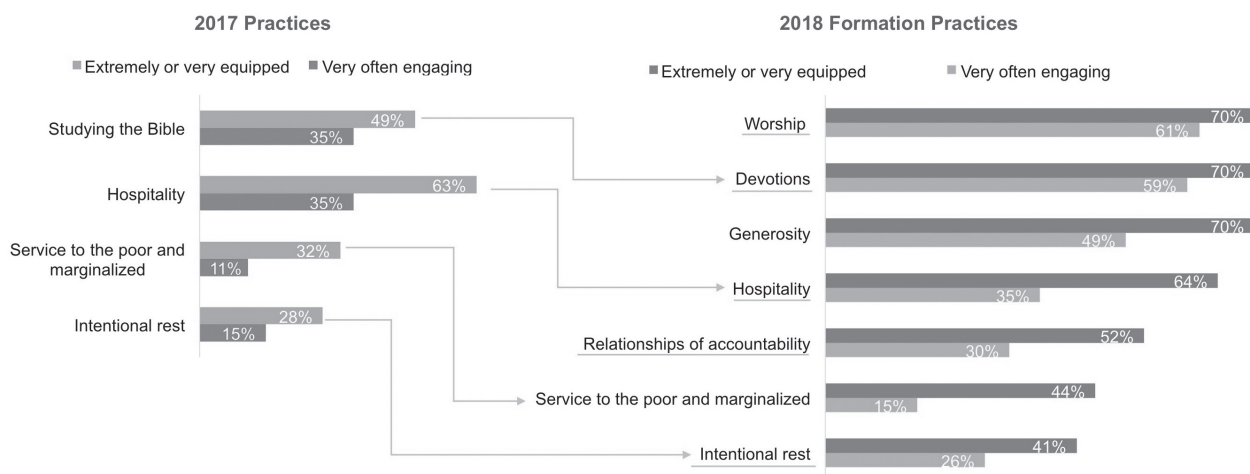
*Peter Ong is the Director of Church and Community Engagement at Hope for New York.*

# TRACKING SPIRITUAL GROWTH AT REDEEMER

Spurred by the Rise Campaign vision to raise up new leaders, Redeemer began working with the Barna Group in 2016 to help us better understand the “state of discipleship” at our church. We conducted extensive interviews with congregants and staff, and fielded a church-wide “spiritual health” survey in spring of 2017. The findings from 2017 helped to shape the initiative now known as Formation, and provided a baseline to track growth in the coming years. This past April we conducted a follow-up survey at our Downtown, East Side and West Side churches. The highlights below are based on the 2018 online survey of 1,425 adults (18 years and older) from the three Redeemer churches, including 1,211 members and regular attenders.

## Areas of Growth

One of the central elements of the Formation initiative is equipping congregants in spiritual practices. In 2017–18 we focused on five “starter” practices of worship, devotions, hospitality, accountability and rest. Comparing the 2018 and baseline 2017 survey, we saw that the proportion of Redeemer congregants who report “very often” practicing devotions or studying the Bible rose from 35% to 61%; intentional rest rose from 15% to 26%; and service to the poor and marginalized of rose from 11% to 15%. The practice of hospitality remained static.



In addition, half of regular attendees and members think that Redeemer places “a top priority” on equipping congregants for spiritual growth, **an increase of 10%** (from 41% to 51%) from 2017.

## Providing a Clearer Path for Spiritual Growth

Previous studies with Barna led us to conclude that providing a simpler, clearer path for spiritual formation could be helpful to congregants. One analogy was that programming at Redeemer felt like a 30-page diner menu, leaving congregants overwhelmed. Could we begin to move toward a “tasting menu” of carefully selected courses? While we didn’t communicate a “tasting menu” publicly, behind the scenes we began aligning programming around five elements of spiritual growth and guiding people toward a “next step” wherever they were.

This is an area in which we’d like to continue improving, as 14% of respondents strongly agree that their next step for spiritual growth at Redeemer is clear to them. However, those who have experienced a lot of spiritual growth in the past year are more likely to agree with this statement.

Those who were clear about their next step named CG engagement (#1 for West Side and Downtown), accountability relationships (#1 for East Side), serving the community/others, and being more consistent in prayer.

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# CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA MISSION TRIP

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BY CHRISTINA STANTON

Our Cape Town team served this year July 18 to 29. This was our second time going to the Nomzamo township, where the team focused on the ministries of Pastor Peter Makapela and Christ Church Strand. Pastor Peter ministers to those who are poverty-stricken in his area through various outreach programs. He also offers Bible studies and Sunday services each week. The team joined Pastor Peter and helped with their regular programs and offered special events.

Since the team was serving during Mandela Day — a national holiday of service work — we helped host a lunch for children and senior citizens in Siyayanzela, an impoverished settlement. The team heard speeches from local Elders, was treated to dances by a local troupe, and enjoyed the company of about 300 people!

Our other projects included hosting a special dinner for senior citizens and two children's programs. We also offered multiple events for teenagers such

as Bible studies and a movie night, complete with ice cream sundaes. We volunteered at the church's day care center, where we gifted the 70 children with back-to-school supplies we had brought with us in our luggage. The kids were so excited by the supplies, which were donated by Redeemerite Joy Booker. We hosted several appreciation dinners to thank local hard-working volunteers, such as the staff of Christ Church Strand and a pastor and his wife who are starting up a church. We also hosted a braai (a BBQ) for other pastors and their spouses.

Finally, we hosted a three-church Faith and Work event, where we gave testimonies of how faith affected our work life in New York City. About 60 people attended, and the evening was considered a great success. We were also privileged to share our testimonies of how God changed our lives at almost every event we attended throughout the week.

The team took part in cultural activities in order to learn about the area's past. We went to a museum dedicated to apartheid-era laws governing workers and their living quarters, and took a tour of the city of Cape Town. We also attended the Sunday services of two of Redeemer City to City's network churches, Hope City and Pro Deo, to learn more about other ministries in the Cape Town area. We learned from locals by praying for them in their homes, and we went to two Bible studies held in a shack in Siyayanzela. We were able to tour a local township high school (where we donated a computer), and had tea with the principal and some staff. We also toured another non-profit, Beautiful Gate, and learned how they are serving the poor in their community. These events gave us a much deeper understanding of the local people and culture.

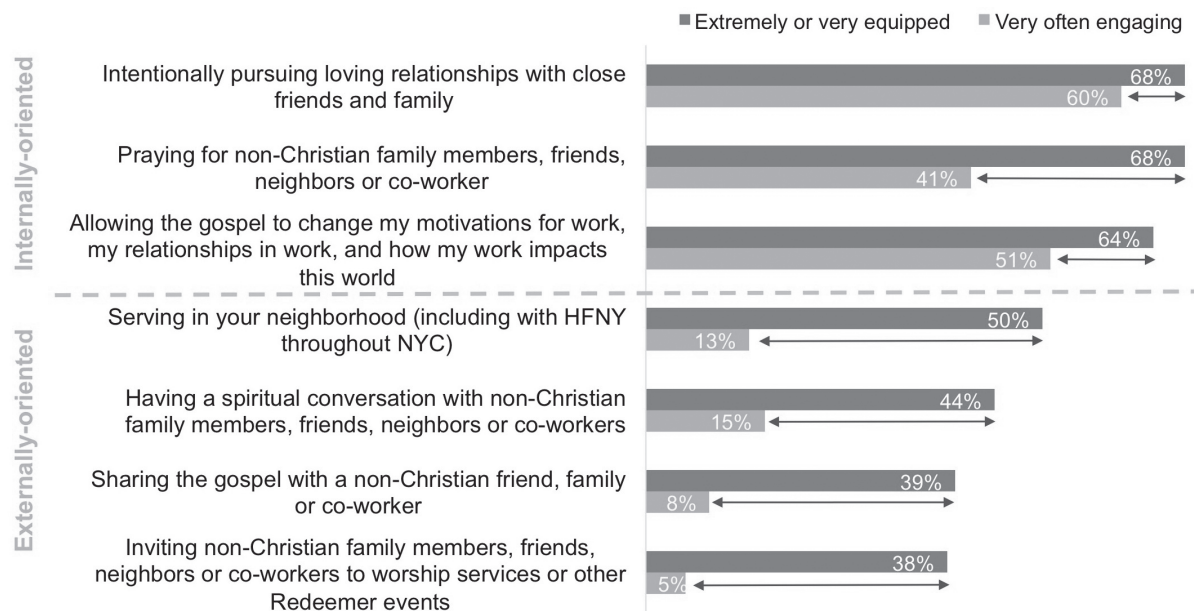
The team is very excited about continuing this wonderful trip in the future!

*We were so blessed to have a mission team from Redeemer Presbyterian Church New York at the end of July. The team was such a blessing to our church and our community. We thank God for this team, every time they come here they leave such an impact. May the Lord continue to use them for the glory of His name.*

— Pastor Peter Makapela

## Equipping Versus Engagement in Callings

As we approach the 2018-19 ministry year, our church leaders will be focusing more on equipping people to live out their callings — making disciples and bringing renewal in the areas of of neighborhood, relationships and work. We found that congregants are more likely to feel extremely or very well equipped to engage in internally oriented aspects of calling. Fewer feel equipped or engage in the outward-facing aspects of calling, especially around service and evangelism. However, those who experienced a lot of spiritual growth this past year were more likely to engage in callings “very often.”



With the new ministry year upon us, we are looking forward to helping congregants engage in their callings, starting with a year-long sermon series called “Formed for the City.” For the neighborhood calling, we are offering a Formed for Justice Conference this fall, followed by a Neighborhood Advocate Cohort pilot. In the area of relationships, we will have classes and cohorts to equip people in singleness, marriage and parenting. For the calling of work, we are planning faith and work classes. In 2019, we’ll begin a Public Faith equipping season — which affects all spheres of life — culminating in a “Questioning Christianity” lecture series for our friends, neighbors and co-workers who don’t believe as we do.

## CITY TO CITY INTERNATIONAL INTENSIVE ... (CONT'D FROM PAGE 3)

*Rawee moved with his family to Bangkok in 2013, feeling called to preach the gospel in his parent’s homeland. He and Nui, his wife, planted Grace Community Church. They launched in August 2017.*

*This article was originally published in the City to City Snapshot.*



Rawee Bunupuradah



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## PUBLIC FAITH ... (CONT'D FROM PAGE 1)

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Jerusalem, in Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8) In Acts 8:4 we are told that after the persecution in Jerusalem all the Christians were scattered except the apostles and that they “evangelized wherever they went.” Obviously, all Christians are neither gifted nor called to do public speaking. It meant, and means, that every Christian talked to friends, neighbors, and colleagues about the gospel.

In the end, what we most need to be public about our faith is not more training (although that is highly recommended) but proper motivation arising from a grasp of the gospel, that we are sinners saved by grace. There are at least three major reasons for evangelistic unfruitfulness. There is a lack of sensitivity — countered by

the humility that comes from knowing we are undeserving sinners. There is a lack of courage — countered by the boldness that comes from knowing we are unconditionally loved.

Finally there is indifference. We look around us and we see people struggling to find meaning, satisfaction, hope, confidence. The biggest reason we keep our mouths shut is that we are failing in love for them. But the gospel produces love (Galatians 5:6). Now you may say: “Well, yes, I see I *ought* to be that humble, that confident, that loving — but I’m not.” But see, you’ve confirmed the point. The problem is ultimately in our hearts, not in our lack of training or knowing how to answer all the questions.

Remember the woman of Samaria that Jesus met at the

well. “Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony.” (John 4:39) Why? She had no training, but he had changed her with his mercy, and now she didn’t *need* to care what people thought. “Come,” she said, “See a man who knew all my failures and still loved me.” And they came. “They said to the woman, ‘We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world.’” (John 4:42)

Lord Jesus, change our hearts so that we have the love for our sorrowing, perishing friends that will fuel our bold yet humble witness to the grace of God that can only be found in Jesus.