

DECEMBER 2019

## THE GOSPEL AND GIVING

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BY TIM KELLER

**A community of giving**  
The early Christians were a community known for radical giving. Diognetus, quoted below, was not a Christian, but an opponent of Christianity, who was listing the things that made it so frustrating to refute the Christian “heresy.”

*They share their table with all, but not their bed with all. They are poor and make many rich; they are short of everything and yet have plenty of things.* (Letter to Diognetus, c.100-150 A.D.)

Unlike their neighbors, Christians were promiscuous with their money, not their bodies. They shared their possessions in a proportion and with a joy that the surrounding

materialistic culture had never seen. This radical generosity began immediately after the resurrection when “*selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need* (Acts 2:45) ... *they did not consider that any of their possessions were their own* (Acts 4:32.)

The motivation for this unusual willingness to give is, of course, the infinite generosity of God, who: *did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, [so] how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?* Romans 8:32 (cf. also Galatians 2:20, Ephesians 5:2, and Ephesians 5:25)

In this season where we celebrate the Incarnation — when

the Second Person of the Triune God set aside his glory and came to earth as a baby, to live as we should have lived, and died as we were condemned to die — it is only fitting to meditate on the joy of giving in response to the Ultimate Gift of grace in salvation by faith.

It is a gift purchased not at a Black Friday sale, but on the TRUE Black Friday, which we now call “Good Friday” because through his death we are rescued from death.

If we are deeply moved by the limitless cost Jesus paid to redeem us, then we will have only joy when we have the opportunity to give back to him

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## THE REDEEMER REPORT NEWSLETTER BECOMES *LIFE IN THE GOSPEL QUARTERLY*

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BY CREGAN COOKE AND KATHY KELLER

**A**fter nearly three decades, the *Redeemer Report* newsletter is changing from a monthly church newsletter to a **Gospel in Life quarterly digital journal**, highlighting a variety of stories from across Redeemer’s network and Gos-

pel in *Life*’s partners. In our new journal we’ll feature stories of gospel renewal and how God is growing a gospel movement. This change will take place after the December 2019 issue. In March 2020 this newsletter will be relaunched as *Life*

*in the Gospel Quarterly*.

*Life in the Gospel* will be based on the premise that “the gospel changes everything.” There will be sections dedicated to Gospel Changed Minds (teaching from scripture, about

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# How HFNY IS STRENGTHENING OUR CITY

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BY ELISE CHONG, CEO OF HFNY

Hope for New York’s vision is the same today as it was over 20 years ago: to see our city and all the people in it experience spiritual, social, and economic flourishing through the demonstration of Christ’s love. To accomplish this vision, HFNY has remained dedicated to its mission of mobilizing volunteer and financial resources to support non-profit organizations serving the poor and marginalized in New York City.

During this past fiscal year, we awarded \$2.3 million in grants to our affiliates (a 7% increase over FY18). These grants helped support innovative programs within our network, provided training and leadership development to our partners, and empowered volunteers to invest in current programming with our affiliates. (Read more at [hfny.org/annualreport](http://hfny.org/annualreport))

We also heard stories of changed lives from neighbors in need who have been helped by New York City Relief, Dream Center NYC, and Recovery House of Worship. One neighbor, David Lopez, sang the praises of New York City Relief: “They instill the

hope that God is there to help you out. They work with you on tangible things too, like job training and housing — you can get your dignity back and be a part of society again.” Each affiliate we partner with provides holistic help and healing to our neighbors, restoring dignity and hope.

We also saw over 4,000 volunteers dedicate more than 34,000 hours to volunteer efforts across our city. One dedicated volunteer, Helen Lu, shared why she loves serving with Father’s Heart. “In the last three years at Father’s Heart, the relationships I have built at the GED program have taught me the importance of patience, humility, and above all, that none of us are defined by our circumstances or by our performance. The work that God has done in this program encourages me and reminds me to continuously pray for the renewal of our city.”

Of course we couldn’t have done all this without our supporters — supporters like you who have reached out, raised funds, volunteered, and listened to the stories of our commu-

nities. To date, we have partnered with 58 affiliates and 15 churches to help us continue serving our city and keep it thriving. Would you continue your ongoing support for Hope for New York?

Help us make this fiscal year our biggest grantmaking year yet by making a year-end contribution:

- Give online at [hfny.org/givehope](http://hfny.org/givehope)
- Send a check to Hope for New York, 1166 Avenue of the Americas, Suite 1610, New York, NY 10036
- Ask your company if they match charitable donations
- Become a monthly supporter by joining The Hope Exchange at [hfny.org/hopeexchange](http://hfny.org/hopeexchange)

Our goal is to continue sustaining and strengthening our affiliates to provide for our city, and help churches mobilize and motivate Christians to serve and love our neighbors.

Together, let’s make this season one that’s full of the deep and beautiful love of Christ.

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## REDEEMER REPORT

Cregan Cooke  
Kathy Keller  
Heather Klein

The Redeemer Report is a publication of the Redeemer Presbyterian Church.  
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**Redeemer East Side**  
Temple Israel Sanctuary  
112 E. 75th St.  
(btw Park & Lexington)  
Services: 9:30 a.m., 11:30 a.m.  
& 5 p.m.

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

**Redeemer Lincoln Square**  
New York Society for  
Ethical Culture  
2 W. 64th St.  
(at Central Park West)  
Service: 10:30 a.m.

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

# THE MOMENT HAS ARRIVED IN CUBA

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BY PACHY QUESADA

When I was three years old, my father was arrested because he was a pastor. He was released three years later, and that was the first time I remember seeing my father.

Economics and religion made growing up in Cuba hard. We were very poor, and because of my family's Christianity, my teachers and fellow students hit me and laughed at me. As a young teen, I made three decisions. First, I'm going to be a tough man. People will respect me. Second, I'm going to be a smart man. I want to study in the university and bring my family out of poverty. Third and most importantly, I'm not going to be a pastor. I'm not going to subject my family to the life I've had. The purpose of my life was to achieve these three things.

I was successful on the first two. I received a scholarship to study neuroscience, and I became a Judo national champion. People not only respected me — they feared me. I had only one last goal: not to be a pastor.

But that wasn't God's agenda. One of the hardest moments in my life was when I felt God calling me to ministry. But, despite the inner struggle, I finished university, attended seminary, met and married my wife and became a pastor. After pastoring two churches, I studied theology for four years in Colombia and returned to Cuba to lead the seminary for

thirteen years as academic dean.

But I was deeply concerned about something. The churches I had pastored were part of a denomination marked by legalism. There were a number of students in the seminary who were a part of this denomination. I was looking for something new. And many of the seminary students and other pastors I knew were as well.

I connected with a man named Allen Thompson, who has become a mentor to me, and he introduced me to Tim Keller's books. As I studied Tim and other authors, I began to understand a whole new concept of grace and the gospel. As a legalistic denomination, we focused heavily on morality, and holiness was something to be achieved. But when I experienced the impact of the gospel, it changed me. I saw I didn't need grace only for that moment of salvation, but I needed it to be able to live life daily.

As I shared this with others, they too began to understand grace differently. And as my own life was transformed by the gospel, my perspective on how the gospel could impact Cuba began to change. By the power of God, the gospel changes what it touches. It changes the individual, it transforms the community and it renews the church.

That's the difference between churches that ascribe to a cultural Christianity versus

churches that are based in the gospel. Cultural Christianity does not truly change people. So now my focus is church planting. So we're doing something new. We're engaging with different types of people because God loves them, and the Holy Spirit has the power to change everyone.

One of our churches has a ministry called Grain of Sand where they feed eighty elderly, homeless men and women daily. There are also fifty teens and young adults in the program, and workshops bring the elderly and youth together. A grandfather actually met his grandchild for the first time through one of these workshops. Many of these teens have been on the streets, and this exposure to grandparent figures is serving to reconnect these teens to the concept of the family unit.

That same church led an initiative to paint houses in the neighborhood. A leader of a local gang asked the project lead, "Why are you doing this?" The project coordinator responded, "We want to be able to show you that there is something better, and that we love you." The gang leader responded by gathering some friends and painting the church that same day. This young man has since given his life to Christ, and his whole life is changed.

Grain of Sand has been operating for five years, and it is now a government-sanctioned

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some of what he has entrusted to us. Below there are some guidelines to follow if you are new to generosity.

## **The guidelines for giving**

### *The tithe.*

The Old Testament called believers to tithe — give 10% of their income. The New Testament nowhere explicitly requires tithing, but in Matthew 23:23 Jesus criticizes the Pharisees for not being willing to go beyond the tithe when there were community needs. This means that while the church cannot *require* members to give any particular amount of money; Jesus *assumes* his followers will go beyond the tithe in giving.

This is only reasonable — since we have greater privileges, joy, knowledge, and power than our ancestors in the faith, how could we be expected to be *less* generous with our possessions? So the tithe is a minimum rule of thumb for Christians who want to give in a gospel way to the church, the poor, and others.

### *Surplus-and-sacrifice*

#### a) Surplus.

Jesus warns against ‘*storing up*’ beyond what you truly need (Luke 12:21). While it is sometimes difficult to find the line between ‘necessities’ and ‘luxuries,’ it is sufficient to know that most middle class people in the U.S. should continually be pushing the percentage of their giving further and further beyond a tithe. What we think

of as basic necessities (clean running water, Wi-Fi, food on the table) would be untold luxury in most of the world.

#### b) Sacrifice.

There may be seasons of life in which you cannot tithe and still meet your other obligations. But more basic than tithing is the guideline of sacrifice. Paul tells us of a church who gave “*even beyond their abilities*” (2 Corinthians 8:3.) Their giving entailed sacrifices in their daily life-style (how much they spent on clothes, travel, home, etc.) If we have tithed but it doesn’t curtail the way we actually live, we need to give more. But if we *cannot* tithe yet, but our giving *does* reduce our daily life-style, our consciences can be at rest.

## **The dynamic for giving**

Jesus said that your treasure goes where your heart is (Matthew 6:21) You always give most effortlessly to that which is your real salvation, your hope, your meaning in life. If Jesus is the one who saves you, your money flows out easily into his work and the lives of people. If your real hope is in your appearance, status, or comfort, your money will flow more easily into those items and symbols, and giving anything away anything substantial will seem difficult. Generosity is a test of the heart.

## **The plan for giving**

In 1 Corinthians 16:2 Paul wrote: “On the first day of

every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income.” Giving in the early church was planned, not spontaneous. Spontaneity is good at many times and in some settings, but when 9 out of 10 of us give impulsively and spontaneously, we usually give far less than we should or could with some planning and discipline. (The other 1 out of 10 gives too much and finds he or she can’t meet other obligations.) So ask two very simple questions:

1. What percentage of my income do I want to give to God’s work this coming year? (Cf. Leviticus 27:30-34; Malachi 3:6-12; II Corinthians 8:3)
2. What percentage of my giving do I want to give to Redeemer’s ministry? Then make a plan for regularly doing so (cf. 1 Corinthians 16:2) Without planning it is common for people to think that they have given more than what they actually have. It is rare for someone to say, “Whoops! We’ve been giving more to God’s work this year than we budgeted.” It’s always the other way around.

At year’s end it seems that every charitable organization has need of a financial gift to make their budget. Redeemer is no different in that respect, but try to remember that you are not just giving to an

*(Continued on page 6)*



## JOIN US THIS ADVENT SEASON!

View our worship service schedules for December —

[eastside.redeemer.com/advent](http://eastside.redeemer.com/advent)

[westside.redeemer.com/advent](http://westside.redeemer.com/advent)

[lincolnsquare.redeemer.com/advent](http://lincolnsquare.redeemer.com/advent)

[downtown.redeemer.com/advent](http://downtown.redeemer.com/advent)

## THE MOMENT HAS ARRIVED ... (CONT'D FROM PAGE )

project. As the government measured their programs' impact rates, they found that crime had decreased by 30 percent in this neighborhood. They asked, "What have we done to achieve this success?" They were told that it was because of the work of this church. This is the power of the church understanding and addressing some of the social issues happening in their community.

In 2011, we started a training center to train leaders to plant churches that preach the gospel. We've targeted ten cities and are currently working in six of those cities. We want to see these cities transformed by the gospel. We work with the poor, the artists, professionals and those who work in government. God is allowing us to work with key leaders.

As we approach evangelism, we focus on getting to know people — building a relationship with them. It's a relationship bathed in grace. And as we train leaders to engage with

people in this way, we are seeing many people come to Christ and want to attend church, so small house churches are being formed every few days. God is at work in incredible ways.

Through Robert Guerrero's relationship with leaders in the Caribbean, CTC is now officially working with us in Cuba and the Dominican Republic. We've formed a church-planting network called Caribe Church Planting Network, which is bringing together the existing work in the Dominican Republic, Cuba and CTC North America. In Cuba and the Dominican Republic there's a surge of church planting happening right now, and there's a great need to build a foundation around the gospel.

CTC Miami (in partnership with CTC North America) hosted their first Intensive training in Miami. We sent fourteen leaders from the Dominican Republic and five from Cuba. We have years of experience in managing the training content,

but we attended to get more of the technical details, so we can host our own Intensive in Havana, Camagüey and Holguín in 2020. We already have fifty leaders who want to attend. There is great momentum, and it's vital that we respond. If we don't train leaders, we're holding up the process. We've been praying for something like this for a long time. It's serious, and we're ready. The moment has arrived.

*Pachy is the president of the Los Pinos Nuevos Association of Churches in Cuba and the general coordinator of the Caribe Church Planting Network. He also pastors Los Pinos Nuevos Church in Old Havana. Pachy and his wife, Marilim, live in Havana, Cuba. They have three adult children.*

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[ctcsnapshot.com/](http://ctcsnapshot.com/)



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## *LIFE IN THE GOSPEL QUARTERLY ...* (CONT'D FROM PAGE 1)

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anything culturally or personally relevant); Gospel Changed Lives (individual stories of conversion); Gospel Changed Hearts (stories of repentance, reconciliation and justice highlighting individuals whose lives have been renewed by the gospel); and Gospel Changed Cities — this category will be the broadest and where we will feature stories of renewal from gospel centered ministries like Hope for New York, Center for Faith & Work, Redeemer Counseling Center and Redeemer City to City. We will share stories about communities, neighborhoods and whole cities that have been renewed and reshaped by the gospel.

Over time, the reporting of many of the stories and hap-

penings in the weekly life of Redeemer's churches has naturally migrated to the regular email updates that each of the Redeemer churches send out to their congregants. We wanted to feature stories and updates about what God is doing through Redeemer across the country and to the thousands of followers who are using the gospel teaching and resources provided by Gospel in Life.

We will produce issues in March, June, September and June. We heartily solicit testimonies and stories from all the Redeemer family (as well as out of town former members and well-wishers) of how the gospel has changed minds, lives, hearts, and communities. We cannot possibly do this without

your input, so we sincerely ask you to get in touch about any story in one of those categories. We will work with you to write it up, or write it entirely if you prefer, but please let us hear from you at **correspondence@gospelinlife.com**

This is a significant change for all of us. However, we're confident that it will bring you more stories and deeper coverage of how God is working to bring about hope and renewal to our friends and neighbors in NYC and other places around the world.

Thank you for reading the Redeemer Report. We look forward to reconnecting with you in March!

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## *THE GOSPEL AND GIVING ...* (CONT'D FROM PAGE 4)

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organization, but you are a steward of what God has given

to you, and you are only giving back to God what he has first

poured out into your life.