

Rhythms of Renewal: **GENEROSITY**

A Four-Week Guide
Fall, 2023



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Dear Renewal Church,

Welcome to the Generosity Rhythm. We are so glad you are joining us on this 4-week journey.

You may have heard by now that Renewal Church exists to make disciples for the glory of God and the good of the neighborhood, and our desire is to experience a multi-ethnic reproducing movement of God in our lifetimes. One of the main ways we grow in our mission and vision is through what we call *The Rhythms of Renewal*.

The *Rhythms of Renewal* are simple and straightforward—four times a year, we have an all-church emphasis on one of the 4G's (the four values) of Renewal Church: Gospel, Growth, Good Neighboring, and Generosity.

This guide will help us, together as a church family, explore our current rhythm *Generosity*. At Renewal, we consider generosity a lifestyle, meaning it's more than just giving financially; it's being generous in forgiveness, in love, in worship of Jesus, and as we interact with our neighbors. Because Jesus was so generous with us in his life, on the cross, and through his resurrection— and because God has been so generous to pour out the Spirit and lavish love on us— we want to pursue lives of generosity.

As we walk together through this Generosity rhythm over the next four weeks, we encourage you to say yes to a generous life. Pay attention to the opportunities God puts in your way to practice generosity, and even if it feels difficult at times, and trust the Spirit of Jesus to transform you along the way. We're praying for you and cheering you on!

For the Glory of God and the good of the neighborhood,

The Renewal Church Team

RENEWAL® CHURCH

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guidebook is your invitation into generosity. We believe God's Spirit will use this guidebook as a catalyst for you. Dive into what you can and have fun! We encourage you to use this guide in your Renewal Community or another group, and as part of your personal time with Jesus.

For each of the four weeks, we have included:

- Scripture reading from Jesus's Sermon on the Mount.
- Reflection and consideration questions
- A spiritual exercise
- Journaling space

Our hope is that you'll go slowly, absorbing the scripture reading, internalizing the spiritual practices, and paying attention to how God is transforming you over these four weeks.

We chose to focus on the Sermon on the Mount for this Rhythm because of its focus on a generous life, wholistically. In his sermon, Jesus focuses on themes of living, giving, forgiving, and generously loving others in the Kingdom of God. It's very applicable to generosity in Christ at Renewal Church.

Tips:

1. Choose a Bible translation you enjoy and can read easily. We often use the NIV, the NLT, or even the First Nations Translation at Renewal Church. (The reflections and considerations in this guidebook are based on the NIV.)
2. We invite you to read the provided Bible passages using a method known as *Lectio Divina* or Slow Reading: 1) Place yourself in a quiet environment, if possible; 2) Inhale and exhale slowly, getting present with God; 3) Acknowledge God's loving presence with you; 4) Invite the Holy Spirit to guide and inspire you as you read God's word. You might pray something like, "Come, Holy Spirit, enlighten my heart and mind to receive your Word." 5) Read the Bible passages several times, slowly and aloud if possible; 6) Pay attention to and note anything that stands out, any questions you have, anything that "strikes you." Assume *that* is God's Spirit speaking to you, showing you something. Underline or circle what stands out, or write about it in the journal space we've provided.
3. Spend the week meditating on the verses, going through some of the reflections and considerations, and walking through the weekly spiritual practice. Go slow and be patient with yourself. Walk through this personally, and wrestle through it in community. Assume God wants to transform your heart with love.
4. Join with us in praying over these four weeks, that God will grow our entire church in greater lifestyles of generosity.

WEEK ONE

Living Generously

In Jesus's famous (and arguably longest) sermon, spanning several Bible chapters, "The Sermon on the Mount," he is not only teaching incredible truths; Jesus was setting himself up as the "new Moses," and this teaching is a new version of the ten commandments. It's not that Jesus was eradicating the former commandments. Rather, he was revealing that there is a way of Jesus for his followers and his Kingdom. That way is to live holy, generous lives as God's people. This week, we'll look closely at the introduction to that sermon, The Beatitudes (or the blessings) and instructions for how we ought to live.

As we say at Renewal Church, generosity is not just about money; **it is a lifestyle.** Generosity in Christ is living, giving, forgiving, and worshiping lavishly (generously) because of how generous God, in Christ, has been to us. As we begin reading the Sermon on the Mount this week, we get an idea of how generous the Kingdom of God really is. Allow Jesus's generosity to help make you more generous in your relationships this week.

Read Matthew 5:1-16, using the slow reading method (*from the How To Use This Guide page*).

Spend the week meditating on the verses, going through some of the reflections and considerations, and walking through the weekly spiritual practice. Go slow and be patient with yourself. Walk through this personally, and wrestle through it in community. Assume God wants to transform your heart with Divine love.

Reflections and Considerations

1. Take some time to discuss, note, or write down all of the "blessed" statements. Who is blessed and what is the particular blessing that is promised?

2. Do you see yourself in any of these categories? What blessings listed here from Jesus do you long to experience for the season you are in? What blessings do you long for your loved ones to experience, and why?

3. Jesus uses an interesting rhetorical tool, something we find in ancient Hebrew poetry, parallelism, to make a point. For instance, Jesus speaks with coupled yet opposite pairs, when he mentions: poor/inheritors, mourners/comforted, hungry/filled...what does this teach us about Jesus's style of teaching? And why would that matter to his audience?

4. What does this—who and how God blesses—reveal about the Kingdom of God? What is the Kingdom of God like?

5. Jesus uses two peculiar metaphors, salt and light, to describe what it means to live generously with others. Make a list of the ways salt and light are useful in our culture. Then, consider how salt and light would have been found and used in the Ancient Near East, in the days of Jesus (feel free to Google that). How would the use of salt and light be different then, than they are now? With the past and present in mind, how is Jesus calling us to live?

6. In other places in scripture (in fact, later in this sermon), Jesus tells us not to let our left hand know what our right is doing, but here Jesus seems to say something else. Why are we to let our light shine before others?

7. There weren't subtitles when Jesus first preached this sermon, so it was all connected when Jesus delivered this. Ask the Spirit to help you/your Renewal Community make a connection between verses 13-16 and verses 3-12. How is letting your light shine (and your saltiness staying salty) connected to the blessings Jesus mentioned?

8. What stood out to you? Anything the Spirit is bringing to mind? Any questions you have?

Spiritual Exercise

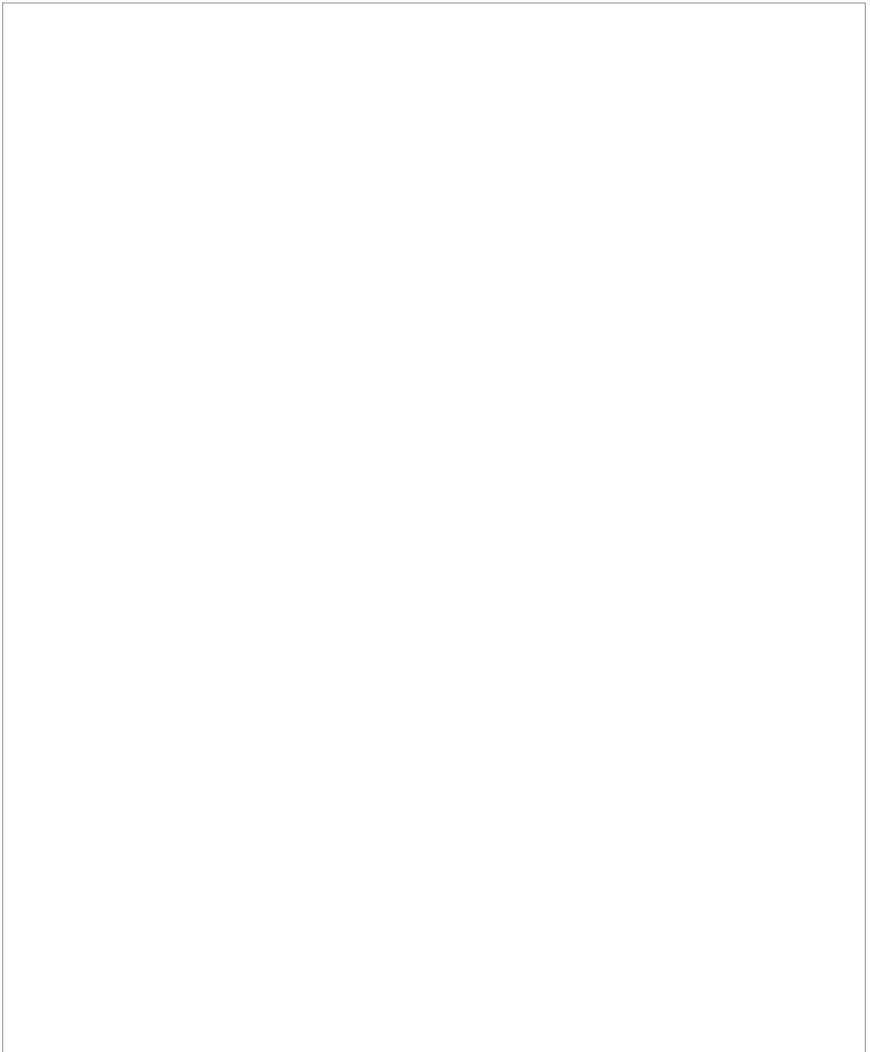
One way we can draw each other back into God's original design for community is through relational generosity. At its most basic level, relational generosity is about being present to others. This means that from a posture of generosity, we initiate connections with other people. Whether it's with a stranger on the street or a family member we know well, when we initiate a connection we are giving them our attention, acknowledging their presence, listening to their voice, validating their thoughts and feelings or simply being present in their company. Relational generosity is simple and requires no special talent. We can all practice it every single day.

Ask God to bring someone to mind that you can practice relational generosity with this week. Whether it's inviting someone out to coffee, to come over for a meal, or just a text to ask if they need prayer, live in this posture of generosity this week.

Who will you practice generosity with this week?
Write their name(s) here:

*Share about this experience with your family, friends, and/or your
Renewal Community.*

Journal

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WEEK TWO

Giving Generously

In this week's reading, Jesus is focused on a lot—giving, integrity, money, financial anxiety, the future, and so much more. Here, Jesus cuts through our excuses and gets to our hearts, as he dives into our difficulty living generous lives. According to Jesus, we struggle to live generously because we don't trust God to supply our daily bread, and because we are not thinking about eternity but only our earthly lives. And, when we give, we give for some wrong reasons. Though Jesus has strong words for us here, he roots this entire section in the care and lavish love of our Heavenly Father, who knows our needs and will provide for them. Let that love wash over you this week, as you seek to give generously.

Read Matthew 6 (yes, the whole chapter), using the slow reading method.

Spend the week meditating on the verses, going through some of the reflections and considerations, and walking through the weekly spiritual practice. Go slow and be patient with yourself. Walk through this personally, and wrestle through it in community. Assume God wants to transform your heart with Divine love.

Reflections and Considerations

1. Write down or circle or underline everything Jesus says about money and/or giving from this chapter. Make some connections and applications; why is Jesus saying this? What does Jesus's teaching mean for us today? How do we live and give generously in the way of Jesus?

2. Why is it so important to Jesus that we live lives of generosity, rather than storing up treasures for ourselves?

3. What should we do, according to Jesus, when we are worried about our finances and material needs being met?

4. How do we “store up treasures in heaven?” And why does this matter for the follower of Jesus?

5. Early in this section, Jesus talks a lot about hypocrites and praying... how might this apply to us today?

6. Jesus taught us to pray in verses 9-13. Why? What points does this prayer bring up, related to how we should live? What stands out to you about the Our Father prayer?

7. Is there anything else that stood out to you from this chapter? Anything the Spirit is bringing to mind? What questions do you have?

8. What do you think Jesus means when he says we can't worship God and money? Can you give an example of what that division or duality might look like from your own life? What would it look like, instead, to surrender your budget to the Lordship of Jesus?

9. What's one step you can take this week, in your daily budget or in your posture towards giving, to live more generously?

Spiritual Exercise

Theologian Walter Brueggemann writes about the myth of scarcity. Brueggemann prophetically reminds us, "We have a love affair with 'more'—and we will never have enough." At the root of it, we don't trust the story of generous abundance laid out for us in scripture. Rather, we buy the shadow-story of scarcity, the line that there's not enough. It doesn't matter what "it" is—money, time, prestige, people who care about what we think, kids who show up at youth group—our tendency is to say, "Not enough!"

The story of God speaks in opposition to this narrative. Brueggemann writes, "The Bible starts out with a liturgy of abundance. Genesis 1 is a song of praise for God's generosity ... [it] affirms generosity and denies scarcity." Choose to meditate on the reality that with God, "*There is enough.*"

This week, keep a record of the "abundances" God has given you. Next to each abundance write what it means to you to have a God who interacts and intervenes in your life. Notice what you have been given that you did not deserve. What do you want to say to God about these things? Share about this experience with your family, friends, and/or your Renewal Community.

Abundance

What this says about God

WEEK THREE

Forgiving Generously

Forgiveness has been defined as “a divine invitation to no longer define *you* by your harm against me, and no longer define *me* by your harm against me.”

Forgiveness is the foundation of our life with God. It is the most wonderful gift we can receive from God, and has the highest cost - Jesus’s own life. Thanks be to God.

But forgiveness in our own daily lives—well, that’s a challenge, isn’t it? How do we forgive injustice? Heartache? Friends who betray us? How do we forgive other church members? Estranged loved ones? Our family? Leaders of toxic systems?

The book of Matthew embraces something called a *realized eschatology*, which means, biblically, that passages about the Kingdom of God, are actually referring to the ministry of Jesus and his lasting legacy - and these passages should impact the way we live now.

What does this have to do with radical forgiveness? In Jesus’s Kingdom, we are not only called to forgive our loved ones, but also called to forgive and love our enemies. Why? So that we might live up to our namesake—*children of God*.

Read Matthew 5: 38-48, using the slow reading method.

Spend the week meditating on the verses, going through some of the reflections and considerations, and walking through the weekly spiritual practice. Go slow and be patient with yourself. Walk through this personally, and wrestle through it in community. Assume God wants to transform your heart with Divine love.

Reflections and Considerations

1. Let’s get personal this week. Spend some time throughout the week asking the Spirit who you need to forgive or ask for forgiveness from. What makes it difficult to offer forgiveness and ask for it?

2. Forgiveness is not the same as permission. How does scripture define forgiveness? How do you experience forgiveness and forgiving? How is forgiveness different from reconciliation? Does that distinction matter, and if so, how?

3. What happens when you choose not to forgive; how has that impacted your personal relationships and your interior life?

4. Jesus describes two phrases here that, “you have have heard...” What are they? How is Jesus’s way different from what his audience had previously heard? What does that tell us about Jesus’s generosity?

5. Why does it matter that we love our enemies, according to this passage? Can you share an example of powerful forgiveness in your own life?

6. Jesus is referencing Old Testament language from Leviticus 19, in which God gave Moses the Ten Commandments. The idea is not that we are to act perfect enough or holy enough to earn holiness or perfection; it's more like God is saying, "Look. I have called you holy, righteous, perfect. This, then, is how you should live." The point is the same here: we are invited to live into who Jesus has already declared us to be. We are not earning our way towards holiness and perfection. In Jesus, we are becoming who we already are. It's a small nuance, but it matters. Why?
7. Is there anything else that stood out to you from this chapter? Anything the Spirit is bringing to mind? What questions do you have?

Spiritual Exercise

This is a simple exercise, but it can also be fairly difficult. Take a deep breath, commit yourself, and give it your very best.

Invite the Holy Spirit to help you identify someone with whom you have held a grudge and toward whom you experience a lack of forgiveness. This might be a friend, spouse, family member, neighbor—or you might not even know them personally.

(A special note for anyone who has been abused or betrayed: this exercise is not to be confused with reconciliation. Forgiveness does not mean reentering any kind of harmful relationship. If you'd like to talk to a pastor about this, reach out to Kevin@bringrenewal.com or Aubrey@bringrenewal.com.)

Then write down as many reasons as you can possibly find for why you are grateful for this person. This is possible and it can greatly assist you as you enter the forgiveness process. Try starting with gratitude that they are alive and have the same chance to breathe and love and learn as anyone else as we are all made in the image of God. Start with what

seems easy, but do your best to find something that sees beauty—even in this person who hurt you. Share about this experience with your family, friends, and/or your Renewal Community.

OR

Write a forgiveness letter. Write about a time when you were hurt you may or may not ever send to the person who hurt you. Illustrate how you were affected by it at the time and the hurtful or negative feelings you are still experiencing.

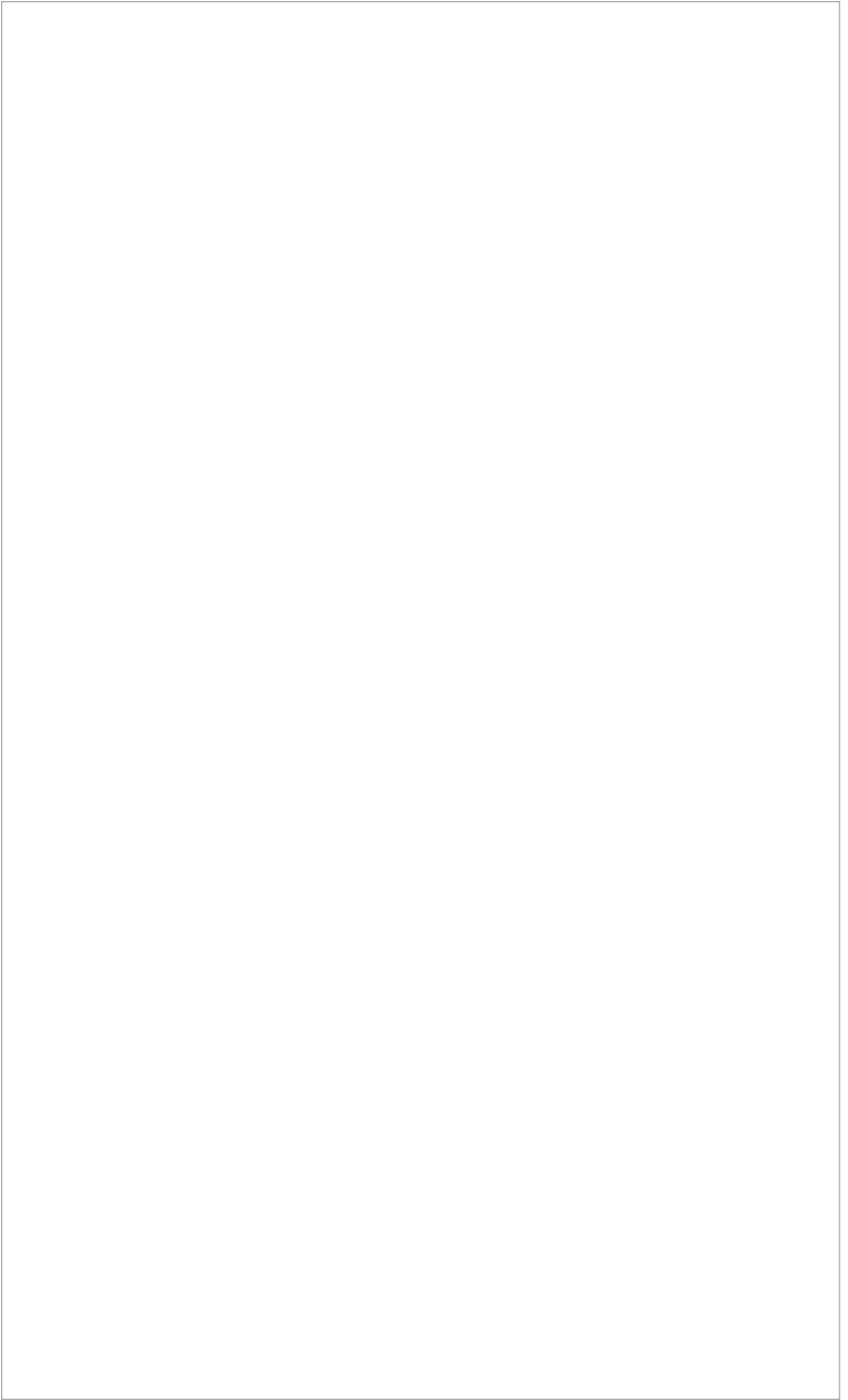
State what you wish the offender had done instead. End this forgiveness letter with an explicit statement of forgiveness, understanding, and even empathy if you can muster it.

Share about this experience with your family, friends, and/or your Renewal Community.

Journal

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WEEK FOUR

Worshiping Generously

When we think of worshiping Jesus generously, we might think of Mary of Bethany (Matthew 26) with her alabaster jar of perfume. In front of her critics, she anointed Jesus with luxurious, expensive oil—as an act of generous worship. It was so lavish, in fact, the disciples called it a “waste.” And yet, Jesus affirmed her actions as worthy and beautiful.

As Jesus begins to wrap up his sermon on the mount, he turns to what it means to worship generously in how we view others, in how we seek Jesus, and in what we build our lives upon.

Read Matthew 7 (*yes, the whole chapter*), **using the slow reading method.**

Spend the week meditating on the verses, going through some of the reflections and considerations, and walking through the weekly spiritual practice. Go slow and be patient with yourself. Walk through this personally, and wrestle through it in community. Assume God wants to transform your heart with Divine love.

Reflections and Considerations

1. Jesus begins with a big topic - judging others. Christians are often described as judgmental. What does Jesus say to us about our judgment of others? Why is not judging so difficult?

2. Jesus defines God’s provision for us; how? How does this speak to you, personally?

3. Jesus moves into some teaching about Narrow Gate and Wide Gate/True and False Prophets/True and False Disciples, once again using parallelism to teach...how are these connected to one another? What is Jesus saying to this original audience and to us?

4. What does it look like to be a wise builder? In your own words, how is that connected to lavish worship?

5. Is there anything else that stood out to you from this chapter? Anything the Spirit is bringing to mind? What questions do you have?

Spiritual Exercise

More than an exercise or practice, Sabbath is a commandment and a great provision from God. John Mark Comer describes Sabbath as rest *and* worship. Another theologian describes Sabbath as an invitation to entire delight, a “holy time where we feast, play, dance, sing, pray, laugh, tell stories, read, paint, walk, and watch creation in its fullness.”

More than just a day to catch up on all the things you did not get done during the week, consider Sabbath anything to direct your heart to gratitude, worship, and awe of God’s reality and goodness.

This week, make an intentional effort to plan for a Sabbath. Plan for a day of delight, disconnection from work and devices, and enjoy the gifts God has given you. Sabbath is more than just a day to catch up on your unfinished to-do list. Consider Sabbath-ing as a way to direct your heart to worship, gratitude, and awe of God’s reality and goodness.

Journal about your plan here:

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After you do it this week, share about this experience with your family, friends, and/or your Renewal Community.

For further reading, Dan Allender’s *Sabbath*, and John Mark Comer’s *Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, are great resources to help encourage you in this practice.

Journal

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Final Thoughts

Dear Renewal Family and Friends,

Thank you for walking with us through the Generosity Rhythm. Be sure to join us for our next Rhythm, Gospel.

As we engage together in our mission of making disciples for the glory of God and the good of the neighborhood, and as we pursue our vision of experiencing a multiethnic reproducing movement of God, we invite you to take your next step of growth at Renewal church.

What is your next step?

Get Baptized at Renewal. If you haven't taken this meaningful step of faith in your walk with Jesus, we invite you to get baptized during our next upcoming baptism service. Reach out to Kevin@bringrenewal.com for more information.

Join Renewal through Church Partnership. This is your invitation to attend and invite others to church, serve on a team, and give toward the mission of Renewal. Connect with Rachel@bringrenewal.com about church partnership.

Give to Renewal through an end-of-the-year tax-deductible donation by texting any amount to 84321 or by going to bringrenewal.com/give. Our mission is to be a church for the neighborhood, and your gifts of radical generosity, as an act of worship, go toward that end.

Experience Renewal through the Rhythms. Engage in the rhythms of Renewal four times a year, when we take a church-wide deep dive into one of the 4G's of Renewal Church: gospel, growth, good neighboring, and generosity. Reach out to Aubrey@bringrenewal.com with any questions.

Bring Renewal through Renewal Communities. Join or launch a Renewal Community, our small group gatherings of folks living on mission together, growing in Christ together, and building genuine relationships with one another. Reach out to Jake@bringrenewal.com to get connected to a community today.

God is inviting us all into greater intimacy with Jesus and deeper engagement with the church. We want to invite you to take your next step of radical generosity by joining, bringing, and experiencing Renewal. *What's your next step?*

Lastly, we'd love your feedback on this rhythm. What was helpful for your growth, and what would you like to see more of?

Let us know by emailing Aubrey Sampson, our teaching pastor Aubrey@bringrenewal.com.

For the glory of God and the good of the neighborhood.

Renewal Church Staff Team

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