



## STORIES OF REDEMPTION

BY KRIS RECKERS

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Throughout 2024, the feature articles will be devoted to hearing stories of God's redemption within our Rosedale Network churches. We pray these stories will fuel your love for the Lord and lead you to greater service in His Church.

~Kelsey Jurkovich, Publication & Literature Committee

### ***Kris Reckers' Story of Redemption***

I am writing this article after finishing our elder retreat at Riverview Christian Fellowship. Do you ever have one of those moments where you stop and think, how did I get here? It's wild to think that I, Kris Reckers, am an elder at an actual church—I preach, teach, and lead discipleship groups. I have a wonderful wife and eight children. To top it off, I work in full-time ministry in the US with a church planting organization in India. To answer the question, I need to back up a few years. Allow me to walk you through our journey.

We grew up in a small town in North Carolina. My parents split up when I was 16 years old. My wife, Stephanie, comes from a similar background. Her parents split up when she was three, and she was raised by a single grandmother for most of her childhood. Stephane and I were good friends before we started dating at 17. We were married at 20 and had our first son at the age of 22. When our son was born, I had a job offer from a local beer distributor, paying more than my current driving job. I said yes and became a beer guy. About a year and a half later, we were expecting another son. During this time, I had started drinking beer daily, and with all the free samples, it was tough to turn down.

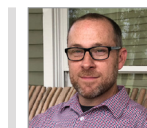
My wife was exposed to church growing up with a bus ministry for a few years, and as a young mom, God was drawing her to church. I reluctantly said yes, and we started attending church. I'll be honest—I did not want to go and could argue away, at least in my mind, everything the pastor said. I did this for my wife and sought reasons not to attend church. This went on for several months.

One evening, my wife needed to run to the store. I was at home with my son and was drinking a beer as usual. I looked over at my son as I was holding a beer in my hand. I started to think about being a father, and this is where the Lord began to get my attention. I started thinking about my father, grandfather,

and family tree. I saw broken marriages, alcoholism, and strained relationships with children. It was not a pretty thought and it broke my heart. This is where the Lord spoke to me. In my heart, I felt Him say, "There is another way!" I was standing, looking at my son, thinking of the wedding vows I made to my wife. *What was I doing? Who was I becoming?* I did not like what I saw, and to top it off, I was asking, "Is God real?"

I spent the rest of the week driving the beer truck and listening to the Christian radio station. *Was there something to this Jesus and the Church?* I still had my doubts, but I knew inside that I needed help. I prayed all week, "If you are real, I need to see it."

We went to church that Sunday and I was a mess. I kept looking around asking, "Where is the difference? Is this real?" I spotted a couple in the back of the church who had two teenage daughters. I knew something was different by the peace they had and how the wife looked at her husband. The daughters were respectful and honoring towards their parents. Immediately after church, I went to talk to them. I stood before them and said, "Whatever you have, that's what I am looking for." He answered that he and his wife had been praying for a young couple to disciple, and he believed we were it. They had begun praying for us when we first started attending the church. This was the beginning of the path we have been walking for 25 years. We are grateful to God that He pursued and saved us! He broke the chains of iniquity and set us free: "Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed" (John 8:36 NKJV). 🙏



*Kris is the development director for Serve India Ministries. He serves as an elder at Riverview Christian Fellowship, Michigan, and is an ordained Rosedale Network minister. He has a passion for strong families, discipleship, and missions.*



# It Only Takes a Spark to Launch a Movement

BY CALEB REED

Several years ago, our family was driving north out of Phoenix, where we were living at the time. It was early on a Saturday morning toward the end of June, and most of northern Arizona was experiencing massive wildfires. As we came over one of the many hills in the mountain range, we drove into a complete whiteout—something you typically see in the winter months. This was the first time we had experienced a wildfire like this. We had seen them from a distance, but up until now, we had never driven through this much smoke. The truck immediately smelled like smoke; we couldn't wait to escape the smoke-covered mountains. We were about 80-90 miles away from the massive wildfire, yet still felt the effects of it. I can only imagine what the people closer to the fire felt—I hope I never have to experience something like it.

## Imagine the impact that would have on just three people.

According to the Department of Forestry and Wildfire Management, 2,519 wildfires destroyed 978,519 acres in Arizona in 2020. \* The destruction caused by these fires was incredible. Families and communities experienced immense loss. Living in Arizona, we would often hear about the cause of these fires, anything from a lightning strike, a trailer chain sparking by hitting the road, or a tire blowout. One spark is all it takes to start a wildfire; a tiny spark has enough power to leave a path of destruction that takes years for the forest and desert to recover from. On another occasion, while driving through the mountains, we saw the aftermath of a wildfire. There were charred trees and bushes as far as we could see, once again, all caused by a tiny spark.

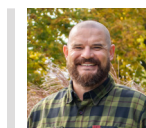
At Rosedale Network of Churches, we have a desire to see disciple-making churches thriving in every neighborhood in our world. It's easy to look at this vision and become overwhelmed with this idea. I will be honest, it is a lofty vision, but by God's grace, we can do it. Sure, if we focus on the end goal, we are going to get discouraged and feel like we are not doing what we set out to do. Remember, it just takes a tiny spark to start a wildfire, just like those sparks, tiny acts of love and service can shift the culture of a neighborhood. Imagine if you chose three

people in your circle of influence who do not have a relationship with Jesus and committed to praying for them. What if you committed to reaching out once a week, encouraging them, and recognizing the "gold" in their life? Imagine the impact that would have on just three people. If you are consistent and committed to reaching out, there is a good chance they will give their lives to Christ. They will then take the love they have experienced and share that with people they are connected to. Before too long, those tiny acts of love and service have a huge Kingdom impact.

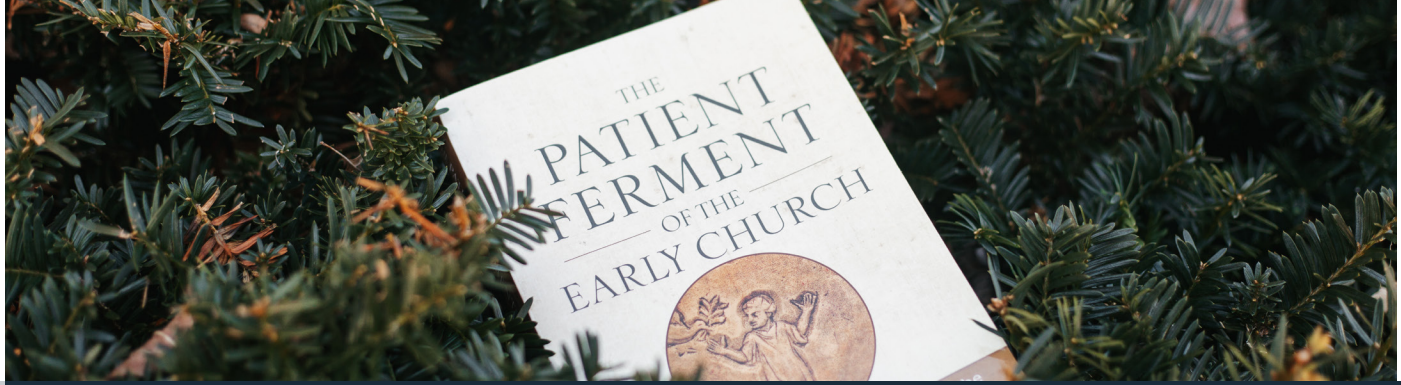
While living in Phoenix, Arizona, my wife and I, along with our team, began to connect with a local elementary school by supplying breakfast to teachers and staff once a month. This simple act of love and service led to us partnering with six Title I elementary schools in the downtown Phoenix area. We served these schools in many ways, like running homework clubs, painting murals, and hosting events for staff and families. What encouraged us most was that people began to ask for prayer. They began to ask for advice on things they were facing in life and it even led to conversations about God's love for them. We are still connecting with some of the school staff and discussing their need for Jesus, and we have been gone for two years. Never underestimate the power of a "tiny" act of love or service—God can take it and transform an entire neighborhood.

What are you going to do to spark a movement? 

\* <https://dffm.az.gov/intelligence>



*Caleb serves as church planting catalyst for Rosedale Network of Churches. He loves a quality cup of coffee and spending time with his family. Caleb and his wife, Stephanie, and their two children live in Resaca, Ohio.*



# A Church of Pat-ter-ins

BY JEREMY MILLER

This year, RBC is running a series of articles in the Beacon examining books that might be especially helpful to the life of the Church. We hope you will benefit from these book descriptions and suggestions.

## ***The Patient Ferment of the Early Church: The Improbable Rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire*** by Alan Kreider

One of my children took great delight in the discovery of patterns in the world, or as she would proclaim, “pat-ter-ins”! From numbers to colors to textures, pat-ter-ins were everywhere and waiting to be discovered.

Christ’s Church has existed for roughly 2000 years; if you are paying attention, you see patterns. Some of these church patterns reveal repeated failures and, more excitingly, many point us to a vibrant and healthy expression of faith and church life. These pat-ter-ins have much to offer 21<sup>st</sup>-century Christians.

Several years ago, at an RBC board meeting, one of the members began talking about a book he was reading and how it impacted his perceptions of healthy life in the community of faith. The title of the book he was referencing sounded rather unappealing to my more aggressive and entrepreneurial orientation. The book was *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church* by Alan Kreider. Patience and fermenting did not sound particularly inspiring, but the subtitle resonated: *The Improbable Rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire*.

The book explores the habits and teachings of the early church and what caused its profound spread throughout the Roman Empire. During the first three centuries of the church, it is estimated that the church grew by about 40% per decade. Here are a couple of tidbits from the book:

1. The primary virtue that pastors and church leaders taught and wrote about was the development of patience. The church did not make important decisions quickly. They were persecuted and persecution required a patient waiting on God or one would grow frustrated and quit the faith. Patience was key.
2. They were slow to baptize new converts until they had completed a rather lengthy catechism or discipleship process. This catechesis sometimes went on for three years. Church leaders wanted people to know precisely what they were getting into and what was required to be a follower of Christ. It is interesting to observe that they had several clear behavioral expectations.

There were many more notable aspects of the early church which you will need to read for yourself!

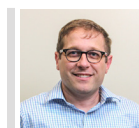
The pat-ter-in: Last fall, Sarah and I were privileged to host several leaders from the Meserete Kristos Church (MKC) in our home for a meal. MKC is the largest and fastest-growing Mennonite church in the world. It’s grown consistently every year, and last year grew 15%.

As we chatted about the pattern of life in the church, several themes emerged. First, they are shaped by persecution. Second, (you guessed it) they are an extremely *patient* church. They refuse to be hurried into decisions. They take their time processing matters of church policy and theological questions. Third, they are patient in their discipleship and catechism of new believers. They do not baptize new believers quickly. They take time to teach them doctrine, how the church functions, and how Christians behave. This catechism process lasts one year.

MKC wants to ensure that baptismal candidates understand their commitment to Christ and His Church and count the cost before being baptized into Christ’s body. They are a rapidly growing church filled with committed followers of Jesus. They are patient, trusting God to use their unhurried faith to share the gospel of Jesus with the people of Ethiopia.

I have thought frequently about these two pictures of the church and the pattern they represent. Their steady, patient growth stands as an indictment of a kind of hurried, growth-at-any-cost, rootless discipleship. The early church and Ethiopian Mennonites invite us to a radical trust in God and careful discipleship as we patiently await the work of God and the return of our King.

*The Patient Ferment of the Early Church* has many more jewels to reveal for those interested in spotting the patterns of healthy life in the Kingdom. 📖



Jeremy lives in Rosedale, Ohio, with his wife, Sarah, and their four children. He is president of Rosedale Bible College and is committed to its mission to prepare Kingdom workers.



# A Vision of Love

BY KARA

The end of the year brings bittersweet moments to Rosedale International (RI)'s Short-Term Programs (STP) team as our interns complete their term. We recently said farewell to Grace, Hospitality Assistant; Reid, Facilities Assistant; and Rochelle, Administrative Assistant and Prayer Coordinator. Their absence already looms noticeably. As I spent time debriefing with the team, we spoke about how the sadness of goodbyes is not something to repress or ignore, since it indicates that something of value took up space in our hearts. Instead of shutting off that experience of loss, we should acknowledge what was significant to us. So, I shall do my best to honor these individuals who faithfully served with RI in 2023.

*...the sadness of goodbyes is not something to repress or ignore, since it indicates that something of value took up space in our hearts.*

Through the seasons of the year, Grace, Reid, and Rochelle practiced hospitality, served the local community through personal outreaches, cared for, and engaged Rosedale Network youth groups through City Challenge, invested deeply in the lives of the REACHERs, and supported STP staff. They brought a contagious energy and joy wherever they went.

Although the intern team began the year with five members, two teammates moved off the team—one returning home and the other joining REACH. Despite these unforeseen transitions, Grace, Reid, and Rochelle remained engaged in their year of internship with a determined persistence. Staying committed to others and to each other through change takes a lot of resilience. These three could have easily closed themselves off from navigating these shifting dynamics, or become angry when their year didn't go the way they expected. Instead, they made themselves visible and available to any who needed them, frequently opening their activities and spaces to invite and include others.

Highly engaged and relational, Grace, Reid, and Rochelle put forth incredible effort to connect with those around them. Over and over, I watched as this team showed an attentiveness

to others. Neighbors near the Rosedale International Center (RIC), guests hosted in the building, citizens experiencing homelessness in Columbus, STP program participants, and RI staff all received their loving attention. Grace, Reid, and Rochelle demonstrated sincere affection for many through meaningful conversations, moments of prayer, spontaneous outings, and thoughtful acts of service. Each is a leader in their own right, and their influence permeated many spaces over the past year. Their initiative and ownership in their specific positions, their team life, and their spiritual lives is inspiring and encouraging.

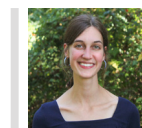
This intern team introduced me to a song \* whose main lyric is, "Give us a vision of your love, Lord. Let us fall in love with you again." It's quite obvious to me that this lyric—this prayer, if you will—became the rallying theme for these three. As they turned to the Lord, He gave them eyes to see others from His perspective. I'm humbled to have experienced more of Christ's love through interacting with Grace, Reid, and Rochelle, and pray I can follow their lead. Though we already miss them, RI releases them to continue sharing a vision of love as they re-enter their home contexts.

*Please remember Grace, Reid, and Rochelle in your prayers as they reconnect with their home communities, build relationships, and seek the Lord's direction in their lives. Pray that they would remain close to Jesus and be examples of His love, His light, and His joy.* 🙏

\* "Vision Of Your Love" words and music by Jessica Ray Langdon and Taylor Leonhardt  
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PHOTO: Marcus (leader, Team Zambia), Grace, Reid, Rochelle



*Kara serves at Rosedale International as the Short-Term Programs Personnel Facilitator. She lives in Columbus, Ohio.*