



STORIES OF REDEMPTION

BY MATT MULLEN

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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

By His Blood: The Love that Binds God's People Together

Years ago, I went on a youth group mission trip. Near the end of the week, we shared our testimonies, going around the circle and revealing how God had worked in our lives. Every testimony started with, "I was raised in a Christian home..." *True*, I thought, *but I haven't always felt like a Christian*. So, in exercising my inner rebel, I decided to go against the status quo and say something to the effect of, "Well, I was raised in a Christian home but have not always *been* a Christian."

The others probably received the random insert of theology as arbitrary rather than the teaching moment I intended it to be. Nevertheless, eternal security was something that always haunted me. I believed subconsciously that baptism concluded, rather than commenced, my Christian walk; however, my distress was boundless at my ongoing sin. In my search for answers, the truth of the cross overwhelmed me: "But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed" (Isa. 53:5 ESV). It occurred to me that the cyclical legalism of my works to retain my salvation were all but filthy rags. I finally understood my ongoing need for Jesus' death: God is holy and just, and I am rebellious and sinful. I need a substitute—a sacrifice on my behalf to be the propitiation for my sins.

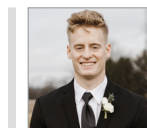
I discovered very early on in following Christ that if I was going to be redeemed—justified *and* sanctified—it was not going to happen in a vacuum. I was already attending church, but suddenly, I wanted to be *a part* of the church. God's faithfulness brought older men into my life who disciplined me; this wasn't part of any ministry or initiated by anyone in particular. Instead, regular people in a congregation believed in the merit of walking alongside someone younger in our collective journey of following Christ.

Recently, I brought a friend to our small group for the first time. I used to be uncomfortable watching everyone bombard

the new guy with all sorts of questions: "Where do you work? How many siblings do you have? Are you Wayne's John?" Yet, as I have sat through this seemingly interrogative process, I have developed a newfound love for it. Evangelicalism has lost the beauty of tight-knit relationships in the wake of consumer-driven production. The blood of Christ is far too expensive for our investment into one another's lives to be anything less than brother or sister. As we were putting on our coats and shoes to leave our small group, I witnessed, out of the corner of my eye, an older man from our church give my friend, whom he had just met, a goodbye hug.

As a freshly married couple, my wife and I could not imagine our lives without the local church. Whether we're playing volleyball with the youth, being brought meals postpartum, or traveling across the country for a conference, we need the fellowship of believers who are set apart by His blood. At one time, I could merely give lip service to the necessity of the body of Christ. In God's faithfulness, He has embedded it into the fabric of my life.

As I look at my newborn daughter, I think about how unqualified I am to be her dad, how undeserving I am to steward the gift of this little baby. What am I going to offer this girl? That may sound discouraging or bleak, but here's the thing: It's true. God has given me a unique role in this little girl's life, to be sure. But what's that old saying? "It takes a community to raise a child." The best gift I can offer her is Jesus Christ, His life, death, resurrection, and His blood-bought bride: the Church. 🙏



Matt is the youth pastor at Light in the Valley Chapel and a theology student. He and his wife, Malia, have one daughter.



Distracted

BY IVAN YODER

Have you ever thought about what the biggest challenge facing the church is today? If you have, I am sure there are a few possibilities that immediately come to mind. We can consider this question in the context of either the big “C” Church (the Church around the world) or the little “c” church, demonstrated by a local body of believers that gathers. I would like us to consider a challenge that comes from within the church before we begin to look at outside challenges. My simple suggestion is that *distraction* is a primary challenge for both the “c” and “C” church.

We know what Jesus calls His followers to do, but things come up that require immediate attention. I recognize this in my own life all too often, and occasionally, I am reminded of it by others. Consider the powerful tool that most of us carry with us each day—our smartphone. Information and communication at our fingertips can become a great distraction from the task at hand. When I read the accounts of the apostle Paul, I marvel at what appears to be a laser-like focus on accomplishing his God-given mission. He had an incredible encounter with the risen Jesus, but haven’t we all? How did Paul balance relationships, traveling into places that had not even heard of Jesus, and consistently give guidance to various churches?

The first thing I see is that Paul was kingdom-minded. The apostle Paul was able to be deeply connected and invested with the local church while at the same time always focusing on those who had not yet encountered Jesus. He understood that the temptation of almost every church is to become distracted by caring for those within the local church and, at times, to miss the people just outside the doors. A kingdom-minded church, in its simplest form, sees the world as God does and reacts in a way that reflects God’s heart. Being a kingdom-minded church or individual is an unshakeable commitment to the cause of Christ—a perspective that is soul-oriented, while aware of human needs.

When reading through the New Testament, it does not take long to recognize that the early church was familiar with opposition. The opposition they encountered went beyond what most of us have encountered as Christians in the United States. I believe that this consistent opposition provided the opportunity for the early church to remain on task. Should we consider that challenges and opposition are the very things that

Christ uses to keep His followers on mission? Encouragement played a critical role in keeping the early church focused amid opposition. Being intentional about simply encouraging one another is emphasized by the writer of Hebrews, who invites us to consider how to spur one another on. I have ridden a few horses and will say that spurs are not a subtle reminder. We need encouragement at all points of life, which is especially true in challenging times, or when something comes up that draws our attention away from the mission we have been given.

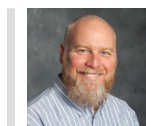
“And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.”

(Hebrews 10:24 NIV)

Finally, the early church displayed a level of urgency that has often become relaxed in churches as time has passed since Jesus’ resurrection. Nothing motivates us out of distraction better than a deadline. Two thousand years later, our urgency to do the work of Jesus has been replaced with a longing for Christ’s return based on the desire to be set free from this broken world. We, as followers of Christ, live in the paradox of anticipating Christ’s return with joy while weeping for the millions who have yet to hear the name of Jesus.

Rosedale Network of Churches, along with our local churches and individuals within those churches, have an incredible opportunity to be intentional about encouraging each other to stay on task. We can do this every Sunday morning as we

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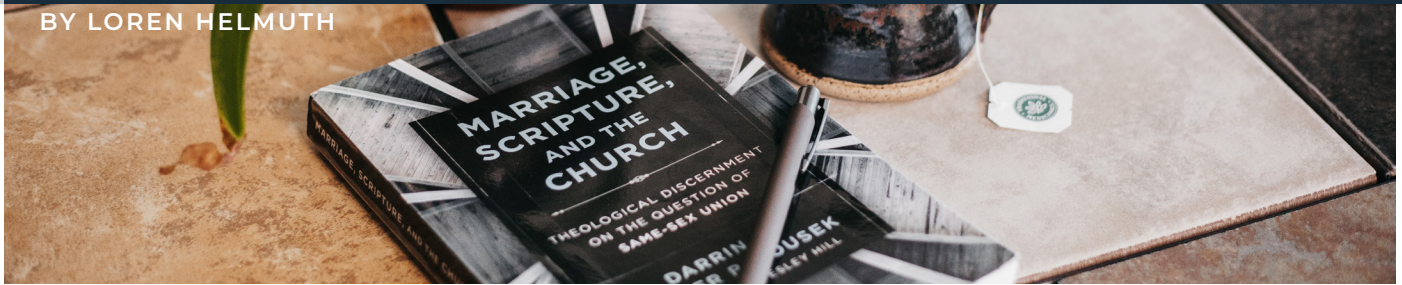


Ivan is moderator-elect of Rosedale Network of Churches and lead pastor at Locust Grove Mennonite Church. He and his wife, Pam (who serves part-time in women’s ministry), are the parents of two adult children.



What Is Biblical Sexuality?

BY LOREN HELMUTH



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.

Marriage, Scripture, and the Church: Theological Discernment on the Question of Same-Sex Union

by Darren W. Snyder Belousek

Having recently taken a deep dive into the current divide and controversy related to LGBTQ issues, and devouring the seemingly endless books, blogs, articles, and discussions ranging from the very conservative to the very liberal, I found this book quite refreshing. It is very well written, scholarly, and courteous to all, but at the same time, firm and uncompromising in its presentation of biblical truth.

I believe the LGBTQ controversy is likely the most important issue facing the Church since the Reformation. Earlier challenges of this magnitude included the Constantinian changes and the inclusion of non-Jews in the early church (Acts 15).

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These historic challenges to the Church have all traveled a similar pathway involving: 1) theories of subjective reality and morality; 2) concepts of Scripture, both in its inspiration and conception; 3) the hermeneutic used to read and interpret Scripture; 4) the substantial influence of the surrounding culture.

These four factors are all a very present part of this current conversation—a naked reality from which the Church has not escaped in any generation. Thus, it is important to educate ourselves concerning these matters.

In this book, the author primarily addresses L, G, and B, without going into T and Q. He frames his argument around the theology of marriage. Building from the Genesis creation account as a foundational theology of male-female complementarity in marriage, he follows this pattern throughout the entirety of Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation.

Belousek notes that, without exception, there has been the male-female pattern of marriage, from the beginning (*antiquity*), throughout the Judeo-Christian tradition (*universality*), and by *all* Christians (*consensus*). Building on this solid foundation of tradition and Scripture, he asserts that the justification for the

redefinition and reformation of marriage is up to the *innovationists* to adequately substantiate, and to do so scripturally.

The author uses the term *innovationist* to identify those who would affirm same-sex unions, and the term *traditionalist* to identify those who hold to the traditional ethic and theology of marriage.

The author then establishes a biblical theology of marriage, describing its *form*, meaning the male-female pattern, its *function*, including companionship and procreation, and its *symbolism* as noted repeatedly throughout the Scriptures: God and His people in the Old Testament; Christ and the Church in the New Testament; the wedding feast of the Lamb and His Bride. He notes that to justify same-sex unions, the powerful *form, function, and symbols* of the Bible must all be broken.

Throughout the book, it is notably asserted that there is no other form of marriage approved in the Christian Scriptures and that the condemnation of same-sex relationships/marriage is universal throughout the Bible.

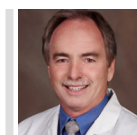
Along with his excellent discussion of the theology of marriage, the author notes and debunks what I call the “pillars of the *innovationists*.” His debunking is so good that at the end, there are no pillars left standing!

If there were anything I would add to the book, it would be a clearer explanation of how *innovationists* look at Scripture, both in its synthesis—a term *innovationists* use to label the concept of how they believe Scriptures came to be—and their resulting hermeneutic.

Synthesis means that the Scriptures came to be as a community of faith developed a narrative of God at work, and then, a writer, in his best attempt to explain God’s work among His people, writes it down. At some point then, that synthesis became the Bible.

Inspiration, in this scenario, occurred at various points along the way. God would put bits of inspiration in the narrative, and the writer would write. These narratives need to be read through the lens of

continued on page 5



Loren comes from Lagrange, Indiana, and is a semi-retired, farm-raised surgeon, who still has a farm in him! Loren, and his wife, Mairi, have four children and four grandchildren. After studying at RBC ('72, '76), he graduated from Eastern Mennonite University and the University of Florida.



Toward South Asia

BY MADALYN

Rosedale International (RI) is excited to introduce Roger and Susie, our newest workers on the field. In partnership with another mission organization, the couple has committed to serve in South Asia, and recently arrived in their new home. Roger and Susie made this commitment to long-term work as a couple; however, theirs is a story that begins long before they met.

From day one, Roger's life was influenced by missions. At the age of nine months, his family moved to England as workers with Operation Mobilization; at the age of eight, they returned to the States and became deeply involved in refugee ministry.

At the age of twenty, the death of a roommate shook Roger—and the idea of giving his life to serve God's kingdom took hold of him. "As a twenty-year-old, it's shocking to realize that you could die. I'd figured that you just do the program—you go to college, you get a nice job and a family and a big house—and life works out. But that was proven a lie." While contemplating this reality, Roger attended the conference of his parents' sending organization. "At the end of the week, they honored the workers who had died over the last four years. It was a lot of people," he remembers. "Some of them died from cancer, and some of them died because they got shot or were, you know, in prison. I thought, *these people clearly understand the limitation of their life. They're not in a dream land where things work out, yet they're still willing to die for this cause.*" In that moment, God truly laid the call on Roger's heart.

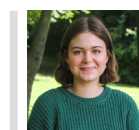
Growing up on a dairy farm states away, Susie also encountered God's call. "I first was drawn to missions at my church's summer camp," she remembers. "I was walking back from the chapel to my cabin and praying about what [the speaker] had said. I felt God say, 'I want you to spend your life overseas.' I was like, *what does that even mean?* I didn't know anybody who had gone overseas, so I didn't really have a framework for what that looked like." But God quickly provided. That same summer, her church invited a worker couple from Thailand to speak at her church. Soon after, Susie heard about RI's REACH program and decided she would sign up after high school. "I knew REACH would be a good testing ground." Two years in REACH confirmed to Susie what she already knew: "Yes—missions is what God wants me to do. I've been walking that path since then."

God calls some workers to a specific location; others, He directs to a certain religious group. When Roger and Susie began dating, they agreed strongly about the latter. "We both knew we wanted to work with Muslims. We both were interested in living overseas, in the Muslim world, for our lifetimes if God allowed." Their agreement on an overseas location was a different story. Before marriage, Susie had planned to join a team in the Mediterranean, while Roger was drawn to a country in Southeast Asia. "We were actually specifically uninterested in each other's locations," Susie recounts, laughing. "We had to work through that when we first talked about getting married." A year into their marriage, the couple began to engage with teams in both of these regions, while remaining open to other countries.

In 2022, they began talking with a director of missions in South Asia. Through these conversations, Roger and Susie learned of the one-to-millions ratio of Jesus followers living among Muslims in the region. Now, they share this fact with tears in their eyes. "We were blown away by the lack of work with Muslims in [our country] specifically. We felt very drawn to the region. God kept opening doors, and we kept feeling peace to move forward. It kept making sense that we would walk toward South Asia."

Last month, Roger and Susie finally arrived in South Asia. Under the guidance of a partner organization, they will spend the first two years learning language, receiving mentorship from established workers, and gaining the specialized set of skills needed to engage with Muslims in their region. Beyond this period of development, Roger and Susie are unsure what shape their work will take. "We have ideas of what we want to do long term, but we don't feel God telling us to engage in a certain way," Susie explains. "Our team leaders have asked us to come in open-handed and seek how the relationships in our city will lead us. It's very open ended, which is scary, but also the point—to discern how God wants to use us and our skills." 🙏

Names and locations have been changed or omitted for security.



Madalyn serves as media coordinator for Rosedale International. She lives in Columbus, Ohio, and attends Shiloh Mennonite Church.

Distracted *continued from page 2*

gather to worship in our local churches as well as through Multiply Conferences and Pastors Conferences. When we gather, we should immediately gain a perspective broader than ourselves. Let's challenge ourselves daily to live in the urgency of Christ's return and not fall into the distractions of our daily lives that can pull us away from our mission to the world. Let's be sure to hold the kingdom of God in the highest regard as we are diligent in seeing the world through God's eyes. 🕊️

What Is Biblical Sexuality? *continued from page 3*

the writer. The writer's culture determines the purpose or moral logic of the writing and its applicability to current circumstances.

This view of inspiration lends itself very well to the approach used by many *innovationists*. As knowledge increases, and there are new movements of the Holy Spirit, a new ethic emerges that makes old interpretations obsolete. The new ethic may supersede the ethic of the given Scriptures, reaching new heights of love and reality. This synthesis, in the *traditionalist's* mind, takes away from the authority of Scripture (I present this simply as an adjunct for understanding this whole controversy).

The book is quite readable, but you must plow deeply to reap its full harvest. Doing due diligence with this book will plant you firmly in a biblical theology of marriage and aid you in recognizing the many *innovationist* arguments that are filtering into the Church.

In addition to the challenges facing *innovationists*, the author challenges *traditionalists* to take responsibility for building communities of charity, fidelity, and solidarity that embrace sexual chastity for all believers, straight and same-sex attracted, to make transformational change seem possible as we seek to live out kingdom-centered lives. 🕊️