



STORIES OF REDEMPTION

BY JEREMY BURKHOLDER

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

~Kelsey Jurkovich, Publication & Literature Committee

Glory to God on High

"...everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judg. 21:25 LSB).

Have you ever come across someone and wondered if perhaps they were too far gone for God to save? When you look at certain individuals, perhaps you sometimes can't help but wonder if there really is any hope for them. Well, I used to be one of those people who seemed beyond hope.

Like so many lost people in our country and across the world, I was doing what was right in my own eyes. Actions, thoughts, and intentions that disgust me today were common back then; not only were they common, but I thought they were right, or at least okay. I believed that God was dead, as Nietzsche declared in his 1882 book titled *The Gay Science*.

Looking back today, I sometimes find it unfathomable that I'm actually a professing Christian; I was an advocate of everything that is wrong with our world today—held captive in substance abuse, and angry at a God, who, at the very least, was an evil God, if He existed at all.

"...unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3).

So, what changed? God changed me. And the only way it makes sense is to understand it in light of Jesus' claim that unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. You probably hear the claim all the time that God changes those who choose to be changed, but in my case, I was changed solely by the grace of God, the blood of Christ, and the work of the Holy Spirit.

It happened on May 2, 2015, sometime in the afternoon. My sister-in-law had died in childbirth just days before, and the baby with her. When I saw them in the casket together, something broke in me that caused me to stumble to my car, blinded by tears.

I was in such a devastated state of mind that I cannot even remember the drive back to my hotel. But I can so clearly

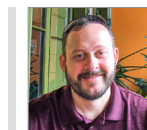
remember the hotel, where I knelt before God for the first time, needing Him to be real and wanting Him to be near. And He was.

"Know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes by one's own interpretation" (2 Pet. 1:20).

How does a person go from such an enslaved state of mind to suddenly believe in the God of the Bible, and immediately begin to live a different kind of life? I couldn't make sense of it at first. Moreover, even though my life changed dramatically, I really didn't know what it was like to live as a Christian. I had been taught Christian values in my childhood, but that was a long time ago and under many different circumstances.

I'll never forget the day I was walking out of the sanctuary at church and was accosted by one of the pastors, who invited me to sign up for Pastor Shawn's two-year discipleship training program. The growth I experienced in those two years under Pastor Shawn was nothing short of remarkable. Within a few years, I went from a shy boy who almost couldn't make eye contact with church people to a young man who stood before a congregation of hundreds and preached the Word of God.

Today, I am a Christian who is still growing to maturity under the godly leadership of my church. I have not yet reached perfection, but by God's grace, I will one day be completed by the very hand that has molded me this far. As a current elder at Bethel Mennonite Church, I look forward to the coming years with excitement because God is doing wonderful things, and He is still in the business of saving people and transforming them into the image of His Son. *Gloria in excelsis Deo.* 🙏



Jeremy is a current elder at Bethel Mennonite Church in Sarasota, Florida, where he has been a member since 2017. He is married, has one son, and is pursuing a master's degree in Christian Apologetics.



Making Time

BY PRESTON YODER

I have noticed a trend lately. More events happen than are humanly possible to attend. I know I'm not alone. You've had to make tough choices with your schedule. Will you attend this event or that one? How do you decide? People you love have to make tough choices about what things they "take time" to do. Our busyness has become a problem, affecting every part of our lives.

The United States experienced a decline in church attendance during the pandemic that has still not rebounded. One respondent to a Pew Research poll in 2023, explained why some folks prefer staying with virtual church services, rather than attending in person: "It gives me more freedom and extra time to multitask and do some other things." *

Church attendance is also challenged by sports taking up more and more time for the families who often try their best to stay committed to both. When the demands of being on a team conflict with church services, some parents start to question if they can still "take the time" for church. Some opt to attend a different church with a different service time, while others just skip church for a while. Still, others opt to skip the sporting event for church. Either choice says something about what each parent and family values most. For those who turn to God's Word for guidance about making this decision, Hebrews 10:25 certainly applies.

Hebrews urges us not to think of "taking time" for church as optional: "And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near" (Hebrews 10:25 NLT). We are not called to "take time" when it's available to gather with believers. We are called to "make time" to gather with believers no matter what! While the early Christians risked persecution to gather, we risk missing a soccer game or spending a little more time in our cars.

The earliest description of the church in the Book of Acts describes a commitment to hearing the apostles' teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, prayer, and a radical generosity that eliminated poverty in the body of Christ and would soon send missionaries across the nations. They met "in the temple courts" and in "their homes" (Acts 2:46 NIV). They did not "take time" that was left over. They "made time" for

corporate gatherings for worship and teaching, and in-home gatherings for fellowship and eating together. I imagine prayer, service, and outreach took place in both. The Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Jesus promised that He will build his Church (Matthew 16:18). He also wondered aloud if He would find faith when He returns (Luke 18:8). We know that faith comes by hearing (Romans 10:17). Faith also grows by hearing the Word of God taught, by praying together, by worshiping together. When you make the time to gather with believers, you are inviting God's Spirit to grow your faith. You are becoming the kind of person that Jesus will search for when He soon returns to this world. You are becoming the kind of person who will be ready to rule in his new Kingdom.

If you read this article, you are likely committed to gathering with believers. I hope this article reinforces this conviction in your mind. I encourage you to pass on this encouragement to others who you see need it. We are closer than we have ever been to the return of our Lord Jesus. Soon we will see his reign made complete.

When we gather together as the body of Christ, we welcome the reign of Jesus, even now, to break into our neighborhoods. The people in our communities are under the yoke of loneliness, sin, addiction, and broken relationships. We bring them the beautiful name of Jesus, who heals broken hearts, sets captives free, loves the lonely, and invites them into the family of God. Only as we make time to gather in the presence of God can we thrive as disciple-makers in our community. Let's keep making time for what matters most. Let's encourage each other all the more as we see the day of Jesus drawing near! 🕊️

* Faverio, Michelle, and Justin Nortey. "Why Some Americans Prefer to Go to Religious Services in Person and Others Prefer to Watch Virtually." *Pew Research Center*, Pew Research Center, 6 Sept. 2023.



Preston is pastor of Shiloh Mennonite Church and moderator of Rosedale Network of Churches. He and Liz serve as pastoral marriage counselors. They have three young daughters and live in Plain City, Ohio.



Who Is the Heavenly Man?

BY MARK SNYDER



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 Heavenly Man by Brother Yun with Paul Hattaway

As a relatively new believer in 2015, I sought sources of encouragement for my growing faith. At that time, I was in high school, and while the fire of first love was burning in my heart, I felt that my surroundings were constantly trying to stamp it out. I felt like Lot, whose righteous soul was tormented by the dark deeds performed in Sodom (2 Peter 2:8 ESV), which I'm sure most believers have felt at one point or another. Struggling to find any real Christian friends who could strengthen me in my faith, I sought the solace and camaraderie I yearned for through the mediums of music, video, and books.

During this time, I stumbled upon a book called *The Heavenly Man* by Brother Yun with Paul Hattaway. Although I can't remember where I heard of the book or even where I got it, I can remember how the stories in it flooded my searching heart with vitality. As time passes, I am sometimes surprised at just how formational this book was to me and my Christian walk. I believe this book and the stories inside contain considerable value for those who call themselves disciples of Jesus Christ.

The story follows a man named Liu Zhenying, more commonly known as Brother Yun. Brother Yun was born in southern Henan Province in China in 1958 to a poor farming family. When Yun was only 16 years old, his father was diagnosed with lung cancer and given a death sentence. Yun's mother contemplated suicide, as she didn't know how to care for their five children in their already poor condition. As she lay in bed one night, she heard a voice say to her, "Jesus loves you." With this miracle and the little knowledge she had learned from a Western missionary decades earlier, she urged her family to pray for their dying father in Jesus' name. He was miraculously healed, and as a result, the whole family confessed faith in Christ, including young Brother Yun.

China at this time was like Israel in the days of Samuel: "...the word of the Lord was rare" (1 Samuel 3:1). Because of the oppressive rule of the Chinese Communist Party, Bibles were expelled from China. Brother Yun learned from his mother about a book that contained the teachings of Jesus, but no longer existed. However, upon seeing her son's desperation for the Word of God, she recalled a man in the neighboring village who had

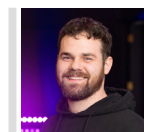
been a pastor before the Cultural Revolution. After finding the man, Yun was instructed by the former pastor to pray and fast. After 100 days, Yun miraculously received a Bible.

It's here that the story was especially impactful for me. The 16-year-old Yun devoured the Bible. It was his companion night and day. Having only had three years of education, he had to painstakingly learn new Chinese characters as he read. After reading the entire Bible, he began memorizing one chapter a day, starting with Matthew. It was after he memorized Acts 1 that he asked for and received a baptism in the Holy Spirit, and after memorizing Acts 12, an audible voice of God told him to go to the West and South to preach the gospel.

The story of his life compares to that of the early apostles—beatings, imprisonments, miraculous escapes, supernatural boldness, surprising unity, and unceasing prayer. We believe such stories really did happen, but they seem, perhaps, just beyond our reach.

This book is an incredible resource for anyone who is looking for encouragement and inspiration for their Christian walk, just as I was in 2015. Upon reading it, you will find yourself provoked to seek more, as a disciple of Jesus Christ. As I did, you might leave with a deeper appreciation and love for the Word of God and a conviction to "meditate on it day and night" (Joshua 1:8). You will receive greater encouragement to share your faith with all boldness and without hindrance (Acts 28:31) as you read stories of what God can do with simple acts of faith.

But maybe, beyond all this, you will leave with a deeper humility as you hear about what our brothers and sisters around the world are willing to endure for the sake of Christ. It is truly inspiring. This is a book that I can confidently say will not leave you the same. You should check it out! 📖



Mark lives in Mechanicsburg, Ohio, where he serves as youth director and administrative assistant at Mechanicsburg Christian Fellowship. Mark has a passion to see people become all that God has destined them to be. He is engaged to Esther Martin, RBC Admissions Counselor.



Better Together

BY MIKE

MISSIONS

When my family served in West Africa, we served as a family unit, each member actively participating in the work. When I became Rosedale International (RI)'s Director of Partner Development, one of my goals was to connect and mobilize our Rosedale Network family in a similar way.

At RI, we focus on training and equipping the church to go overseas, specifically to the 10/40 Window. God asks many of His followers to go to these unreached places, but the reality is that most of us will not receive that call. Yet each of us is asked to join in building the Kingdom. This reality got me thinking—*what can we, as a Rosedale Network family, do here, today?* The answer was Missions 101.

RI's heart for Missions 101 is to cultivate mission vision within our churches, raise money to support RI's workers on the field, and provide tools that allow each person to participate at whatever level they can. After all, we are a Body with different parts, but we function so much better when we work together. No person is insignificant; Paul tells us that we are each created for good works prepared by God, that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:10).

This month, each Rosedale Network church will receive a Missions 101 toolkit. This kit includes four videos with stories from RI's workers on the field, a Mediterranean recipe for families, small groups, or entire congregations to share, and 101 envelopes. These envelopes are numbered 1 through 100, with each number indicating a donation amount. This system invites everyone in the Body, from young children to families to successful businesspeople, to join in.

As you think about this, I invite you to look at your church family and take ownership of Missions 101. RI has provided the toolkit, but our hope is that each Rosedale Network church will take our tools and make them your own. In essence, do what you are good at! Be your body part! Walk in your good work.

This might look like using the videos to find new ways to pray for RI's workers, or creating a prayer wall that reminds you to lift up workers, regions, and specific people groups. It might look like being willing to tap the shoulder of someone who may be called overseas, and encourage them to go.

It might look like bringing your church together to fill the 101st envelope (meant for a donation of any size over 100 dollars). I encourage you to consider what your church does well—a hog roast, a 5k race, corn hole tournaments or pie eating contests, an auction—and use that to build community and raise money for those called to the

unreached of the world.

If all 113 Rosedale Network churches participate as a whole family, over 11,000 people will actively engage in missions through prayer, games, sharing food, and raising support for overseas work. I encourage you to take this opportunity to actively participate in building the Kingdom!

If you have not yet heard about Missions 101, please ask your pastor or missions director what it's all about. You can also email me at mike@rosedaleinternational.org, and I will send you the Missions 101 toolkit, whether or not you are involved in a Rosedale Network church. I invite you to participate in missions, and can send you all the information you need to get started. **We are in this together, and better together.** 🙌

What is missions? What does it look like? How do we define it?



Mike serves as Rosedale International's Director of Partner Development. He attends London Christian Fellowship and is active in youth ministry. He, his wife Karen, and their five children previously served in West Africa.