



STORIES OF REDEMPTION

BY DEAN YODER

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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

The Transformation of a Human

"And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another..." (2 Cor. 3:18 ESV).

I love redemption stories, especially stories like those of John Newton and George Muller, where it is easy to identify God's redeeming hand. However, I find that my faith grows most when I take the time to recognize and celebrate even the smallest bits of growth that God is bringing to my life. In his book *Divine Conspiracy*, Dallas Willard has helped me see that God is at work in many subtle ways that can easily be missed.

Growing up as an Amish boy, I loved the stories of Joseph, Daniel, and Noah. However, I seldom saw myself in these stories of God's redemption. I was very conscientious, yet without a personal relationship with God. I grew up to be a self-righteous teenager enslaved to covert sins. What is God's recipe to redeem a person who is filled with darkness to become an agent of light and life?

For me, this redemption came in small and often inconspicuous ways. I love the passage in Exodus where God assures Moses that, though they are unaware, He is intimately aware of His people and plans to deliver them: "Then the Lord said, 'I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them..." (Exod. 3:7-8).

Looking back, I see God at work in my life, especially through His people and their influence on my life. Longing for answers to life's questions, I was first drawn to Townline Mennonite Church, largely due to the graciousness of my childhood neighbors. At Townline, I received lots of relational warmth. The small groups, filled with laughter, love, and Bible study, were the greenhouse environment that started melting away my protective and selfish reserve. God's love and grace were revealed to me in human faces.

How little it would have taken for me to fearfully flee from Townline in those early days! However, the little gestures of grace kept me in an environment where I began relying on Christ instead of myself. Here I discovered that God is not someone I have to hide my brokenness from. I discovered Christ as my biggest advocate and helper when dealing with my sinfulness. This was a major key in the development of my intimacy with Jesus.

One of the many people God used in my story was Andrew Eversole. Andy had a unique ability to poke and pry into my life in a way that got past my defenses. Andy pushed me out of lethargy into life. He pushed me to study the Bible as a legitimate life source; he pushed me to preach; he pushed me to attend college. Along with his insistent meddling and pushing, we fished and hunted together and he became one of my best friends. I often beat him in the outdoor endeavors and he easily laughed at himself. Yet, seldom did our fishing and hunting jaunts not turn to conversations about God. Andy believed in me more than I believed in myself. He was a big influence on me during a time when I was prime for a new identity. I cannot define the exact parameters of how he influenced me, but I know that God's glory shone on me through Andy's life.

God's redeeming hand reaches out to me repeatedly, often through others. In my life, there have been myriads of little redemptive tweaks. Bit by bit, the Lord continues His work. That our almighty, all-knowing Father desires to be with me and to transform me is an incredible reality and the grandest adventure I have ever been on! 🙏



Dean is the pastor of Townline Mennonite Church. He has a passion for helping people see and experience the beauty and goodness of God. He and his wife, Abby, have two girls and two boys.



Mediocre Churches

BY MATT ZOOK

Advice to Church Members

A majority of churchgoers attend churches that could be described as mediocre. The church leaders believe and teach the authority of scripture and present a clear gospel message, but there are also many frustrating things. We read the Bible and see who we ought to be as a body and how we should relate to one another, and then we look at our local church and find that we fall woefully short. Perhaps we hear of another church that appears united and growing, while we are divided and stagnant. What should we do if we are members of a mediocre church?

1. Church members need to be **grounded and confident in eternal truths**. This means we must never forget that regardless of the good or bad decisions that church leaders make, our greatest blessings come not from being a member of a local church, but from being a member of the universal Church. We have been forgiven of our sins. We have been born again. We have been given a new hope. We have been given the Holy Spirit. We have the confidence that one day, we will be with our savior. In that place, we know there will be no pain, crying, sin, or frustration—for the old will have passed away. Keeping these truths in focus will keep us from becoming overly frustrated at the mediocrity in our church.
2. Church members need to be **repentant**. This means that when we go through times in our church life that are frustrating, or when we see imperfections in our church and our leaders, we also should seek to examine ourselves for attitudes and actions that do not contribute to the glory of God. We need to be repentant of our complacency, our cynicism, and our complaining. While not all of our frustrations come from our own sins, some do, and we need to ask God to open our eyes to them (Ps. 139:23).
3. Church members need to **remember that mediocrity is normal**. As we read through the New Testament, we find that nearly all the early local churches were mediocre. If we were in one of those churches, we would sometimes feel frustrated. Paul himself spoke of being often perplexed but not in despair (2 Cor. 4:8). He spoke of

his work of proclaiming and warning and teaching to present everyone mature in Christ, which implies there was plenty of immaturities (Col. 1:28). The same is true today. While living with a lot of immature people can be frustrating, we must realize that imperfection and immaturity are normal. The Church will only be made fully mature at the second coming of Christ.

4. Church members need to be **aware of what the leadership team can do and what only Jesus can do**. We must remember that church leaders are imperfect and have limited wisdom with which they oversee the church. On the other hand, Jesus is perfect and has unlimited wisdom and power to change people's lives. We await His return when He will set up His perfect and eternal kingdom. This is something church leaders can never do.
5. Church members need to **look towards their heavenly reward**. The fact that we are members of a mediocre church does not in any way inhibit our ability to live for the glory of God, to seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and to store up treasures in heaven. We need to keep in mind that our greatest treasure is not building a kingdom or church on Earth that appears impressive in the eyes of men. Rather, we are waiting for a city that cannot be shaken, whose author and builder is God (Heb. 11:10; 12:28).

So, let us throw aside cynicism and complacency as we live in mediocre churches. As frustrations come because of leadership decisions, when petty squabbles arise in the church, or when attendance is low and apathy is high, let us move forward with a choice to be thankful and content. Let us be obedient to the commands Christ has given us, let us pray for our leaders, and let us be hopeful and confident of all that is ours in Christ. 🙏

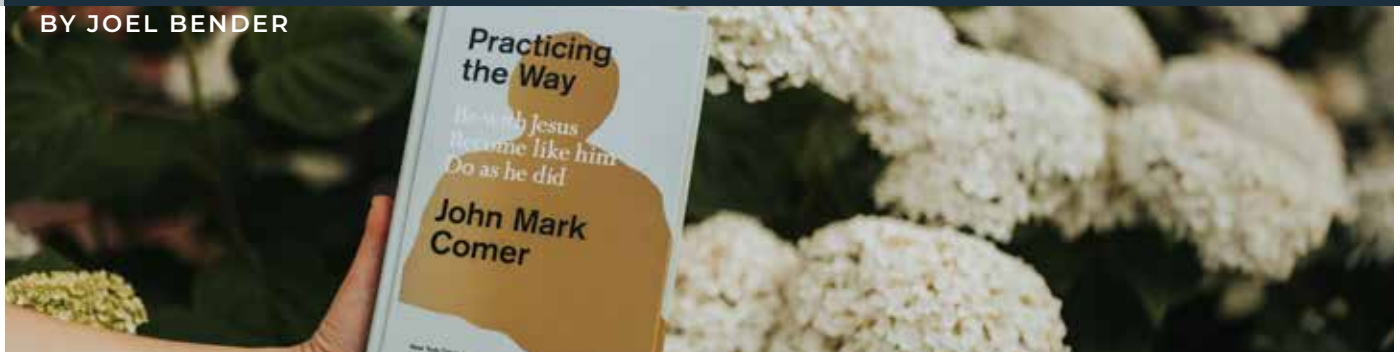


Matt has been a licensed Rosedale Network minister since 2004. He, his wife, and their three children live in Mozambique serving as missionaries with Ethnos360.



What or Whom Are You a Disciple Of?

BY JOEL BENDER



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.

Practicing the Way: Be with Jesus. Become Like Him. Do as He Did. by John Mark Comer

The question is not, “Are you a disciple?” It is, “What or whom are you a disciple of?” The question is not, “Are you abiding?” It is, “What or whom are you abiding in?” The question is not, “Are you practicing spiritual formation?” It is, “Into what is your spirit being formed already?”

These types of paradox-shifting statements are the backbone of John Mark Comer’s new book, *Practicing the Way*. Comer begins the book with sobering statistics: 63% of Americans identify as Christian, yet only around 4% follow the way of Jesus (he admits this is a difficult variable to measure). If we want to reap the benefits of our souls being healed, unity with God, and being pervaded with love from the inside out, we must practice *the way*.

The word “practice” necessitates action on our part. It’s not that we aren’t already practicing spiritual formation, Comer writes. It’s that we don’t always participate in practices that help us to be with Jesus, become like Him, or do as He did. We need a “rule of life”—habits, rhythms, and lifestyles that will naturally lead us on the road toward Jesus.

Comer has a beautiful way of writing about the urgency of practicing the spiritual disciplines while reassuring readers that the yoke of the gospel is light. Comer encourages us that often, especially in our consumeristic culture where time and effort are a commodity, spiritual disciplines should lead us to do less, not more. That is relieving. As a father, husband, employee, student, homeowner, and friend, the suggestion that following Jesus means cutting out some of the less important things in my life that clutter my calendar, house, and mind is truly good news.

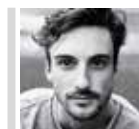
Unfortunately, human hearts are easily swayed by the currents of cultures. We are readily persuaded that filling our homes and calendars with more things will benefit us somehow. That is why we must have these rules of life: sabbath, solitude, prayer, fasting, scripture, community, generosity, service, and witness. These practices are freeing and keep us aligned with the upside-down kingdom of God that the world sees as foolishness.

Comer’s book is theologically rich without requiring a seminary degree to digest. He uses plain language while challenging readers to consider profound truths. *Practicing The Way* is a gift to the church in that it simply invites us back to the way of Jesus with practical examples, offering wisdom that will help us as readers avoid common pitfalls that would prevent us from being successful in our walk with Jesus.

Comer’s message is not a garnish to your Christian life, something that you can add for appeal. It is the crux (pun intended) of our discipleship to Rabbi Jesus. I often think about how Jesus rebuked the religious people around Him. Think about this for a moment: the folks who were committed to their faith and were trying to do everything right were chastised by the Messiah because they had traded out God’s heart for religious fervor that was chaff in the wind. What parts of my religious life are chaff, taking up room in my life to prevent me from truly walking toward Jesus? To be with Him? To become like Him? To do as He did?

Comer is talented in communicating the heart of God and what that means for modern followers of Jesus. He doesn’t leave us with a call to action without also giving us practical advice on how to do it. Some may feel that *Practicing the Way* is too simple—a condensed and diluted introduction to the spiritual disciplines.

Comer frequently quotes many people who have previously written on spiritual formation. It seems that much of the book is an amalgamation of various ideas he’s picked up along the way in his spiritual journey. I still see this book as a gift. While simple in theory, it is a challenge to followers of Jesus to take their commitment to the way of Jesus seriously. If we call ourselves Christians, do we *really* look like Christ? 🙏



Joel lives in Columbus, Ohio, with his wife, Amy, and young son, Sparrow. He is pursuing a master’s degree in clinical mental health counseling and drama therapy from Lesley University while also working as a substance abuse counselor.



“Listen to My Voice”

BY GLORIA

Five months ago, I moved with my family from Ohio to East Africa. We left in the dark on an icy morning and arrived more than 24 hours later into the blazing sun of noon in the desert.

The first months in our new home felt fast-paced and full of urgent tasks: buy furniture, find silverware, figure out what to do when the water tank is empty. We wear different clothes, eat different food, and feel like toddlers as we figure out how to navigate the world around us. We are less fluent in our new language than our toddler is in English. But five months in, we have settled into a routine. Now, my heart is catching up to my body.

This is the eighth time I have moved to a new city. This is the sixth language I have stumbled through while buying vegetables. I miss sitting around a table with family; I want to see daffodils peeking out of last year’s mulch; I long to sing to my Creator in a room full of people I know and love deeply. Sometimes I wonder why I signed up for this—if my husband and I made the right choice for our kids. These things are worth grieving. So why, then, are they also worth leaving?

How can we stay in the fold when we know there are still places that need to hear the voice of the Shepherd?

Humans are created for deep connection; life is good when we are deeply known by others. God gives us earthly and spiritual families so we can understand his trinitarian nature—so we can understand that He chooses to give Himself away in love. This love finds its ultimate expression in Jesus, who gave Himself in love for us. He asks his followers to do the same. “...I have other sheep that are not of this fold,” says Jesus (John 10:16 ESV). “I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.”

How can we stay in the fold when we know there are still places that need to hear the voice of the Shepherd?

Leaving the places I know and the people I love is not easy. But somehow, three to six months later, I wake up and realize that I’m doing okay. This morning, my daughter and I walked

to the neighborhood shop and bought salt without using English. On the way back, two kids called my daughter’s name, and she happily waved back and exclaimed that her friends wanted to play. My baby bounces up and down with delight as she crams handfuls of rice into her mouth. We are slowly building relationships with our team through joyful moments and moments of shared pain. These things are worth celebrating.

In each new, lonely place I have found myself, the Shepherd has gotten there first. Every time I follow Him out of my familiar fold, I get a little better at hearing His voice. He is calling for His lost sheep; I want to follow close to Him so that those around me can hear His voice, too.

As you consider the lost sheep the Shepherd is calling you to live among, please remember to pray for this family and the other RI workers around the globe as they build community and share the love of Jesus. 🙏



Gloria and her husband, Luke, serve as RI workers in East Africa. They work with a team to plant churches and cultivate regenerative agriculture in their country’s capital city.