



STORIES OF REDEMPTION

BY ROBERT WENGER

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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

Mysterious Ways

"God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform." These are the words of William Cowper from a hymn that our church occasionally sings. On a Sunday morning in October 2023, as we mingled together after our morning service and prepared to leave for our homes, one of our members informed me that someone was waiting in the parking lot, wanting to speak to the pastor about getting married.

When I went outside, I was introduced to a young man who wanted to marry his girlfriend of seven years. After explaining that I like to meet with a couple numerous times for counseling before officiating a wedding, the young man assured me that they would be willing to meet yet that afternoon. We set a time to meet and parted for our homes.

We truly believe that God has changed the lives of these two dear persons.

Later that afternoon, my wife, Lois, and I met the couple at the church and went to one of the Sunday school rooms to talk. After spending some time with them, we learned that their wedding plans had fallen apart, they already had their marriage license, and there were several children involved. Given the circumstances, it felt appropriate to move forward with the marriage vows.

We moved to the sanctuary, where I officiated their marriage vows during a brief ceremony. Afterward, Lois and the bride exchanged phone numbers. We then went home and proceeded to take our regular Sunday afternoon naps. When we woke up, Lois discovered that she had received a text from the bride asking what our church was like. There were many texts back and forth between the two until later that evening, with one of the final messages from the bride stating that our church

sounded like one that they could feel good about attending. She also expressed that they wanted to get their lives on track with God and provide a good home for their children.

Attending a church was a difficult step for them, as the bride had some very disappointing church experiences as a child and young adult. We patiently waited and continued to stay in touch, mostly through texts between Lois and the bride. Unfortunately, several months later, the groom was incarcerated because of some things that had happened previously. The children went to live with grandparents while the bride came to live with us for about six months.

During her stay with us, the bride gave her heart to the Lord and became a member of our congregation. I have regularly visited with the groom over the months and he also has dedicated his life to Christ. We truly believe that God has changed the lives of these two dear persons. We anxiously await the time of the groom's release and the freedom for them to be united again as a family with a new identity.

We are keenly aware that God is writing this story. Although we don't know what the final chapter will be, we see His hand in the script all along the way. Perhaps the greatest work of God in this so far was testing my willingness to step out of the boat, to walk on the waters of uncertainty, and to trust Him in a situation that was outside my normal comfort zone. God has been faithful, and I have realized that God truly works in amazing and mysterious ways to bring about His plan. 🙏

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Robert has served as pastor of four congregations and is currently the pastor of Zion Hill Mennonite Church in Singers Glen, Virginia. He and his wife, Lois, have four adult daughters and 19 grandchildren.



Lacking Nothing?

BY DWYLIN GINGERICH

An elderly woman in my local congregation once asked me if I was paying attention to what God had for me. Now this could have meant any number of things, but it was clear to me that she was implying that I should pursue a particular young single woman in our church. At the time, I was still single but was interested in my now-wife, who lived in a different state. This exchange was frustrating—not because of the woman’s intentions, but because of the assumptions that made such exchanges far too common when I was single.

I always understood that marriage is not guaranteed, but I did not know that nearly every married person in the church would treat you as if you were lacking an essential blessing from God. When you’re single at church in your twenties, nearly every conversation seems to inevitably involve a brief discussion about your relationship status. I’ve discovered that the overemphasis on marriage within church communities marginalizes singles, perpetuating isolation and neglect. Reflecting on my own experience, church members too often fixate on marriage and encourage everyone else to find a spouse.

If we do not involve singles in our lives regularly, we are not practicing church properly.

Single church members often seek to be brought into a community of believers that includes them like an extended family, especially when they live far from their own families. However, without being intentional about who we interact with, we can subtly drift away from our single friends, leaving them to face the lonely realization that they are being left behind. Over time, they may begin to believe that they are not desired by God or friends and that they are only useful for a few tasks in the church.

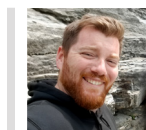
After getting married, couples often slowly begin to spend more time with others who are in the same “life stage.” At first, they are tempted to spend time only with their spouse, and as time goes on, they slowly surround themselves with other married people who can more easily relate to their place in life.

Once couples have children, they suddenly find themselves bonding almost exclusively with other parents. Our unmarried members end up spending most of their spare time alone or with other singles, often of the same gender. Over time, they become alienated from the rest of the body and can lose their desire to interact with others. If we do not involve singles in our lives regularly, we are not practicing church properly. Most singles in our churches have been conditioned to believe that married members possess an elevated status and that they, as singles, are not qualified for most church positions unless they are married.

I got married in my early thirties, and both my wife and I experienced many frustrations as single church members. We hope to learn from those experiences and help other church-going singles not feel excluded or marginalized. Here are some examples of intentional actions we choose to take to involve singles: First, we are very willing to talk with our unmarried friends about romantic relationships, but we will not be the ones to start that part of the conversation. In fact, we force ourselves to talk about new and interesting things that these friends are doing with their lives. Secondly, we typically avoid church activities that exclude our single friends, such as couples-only Valentine’s banquets.

Playing matchmaker insistently with our singles can actually push them away and suggest that we believe they are not living to the fullness of what God has for them. This implies that we believe Jesus, our Savior—a single man—as having lived a lesser life because He never married. Of course, most would never say such a thing out loud, but the implications are there for us to examine. Did Jesus lack something by being single, and do we believe that our singles lack something essential? 🙏

Header photo credit: AI-generated



Dwylin and his wife, Jessica, live in the village of Rosedale. Dwylin is a recent graduate of Rosedale Bible College and currently works at a woodworking shop in the Plain City area.



Are You Part of the Anxious Generation?

BY JOSH & JEWEL SHOWALTER

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 Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood Is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness by Jonathan Haidt

Jonathan Haidt’s book *The Anxious Generation* became an instant bestseller following its release in March 2024. The book explores the impact of a shift in Western culture from a play-based childhood to a phone-based childhood.

Haidt starts the book with a parable about sending children to Mars at the age of 10 to be part of the first human settlement. In the story, when parents ask about this project, they find out that there is little research and background knowledge to support any positive outcome. Haidt compared this story to what adolescents have gone through since the release of smartphones and social media. Much like sending children to Mars, many parents have sent their children into an endless uncharted virtual world that has many harmful effects on their mental health. The introduction of smartphones in the 2010s led children to become more consumed with virtual friendships and their online status than with the embodied community around them.

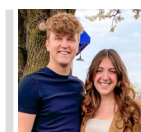
With many hours of time and research, Haidt shows that “The Great Rewiring,” as he calls it, has fundamentally changed the way children interact with each other, both in the real world and online. He defines “The Great Rewiring” as the shift between the years 2010 and 2015, when research shows a sharp incline in mental health issues among adolescents, including anxiety, depression, and suicide. Although there has been some pushback related to the cause of the shift, Haidt makes a strong case for social media and the rise of smartphones as being the main cause. He recognizes that this is the only factor that has been present globally.

Haidt’s central claim is that “Overprotection in the real world and underprotection in the virtual world are the major reasons why children born after 1995 became the anxious generation.” He uses the phrase “discover vs. defend” to discuss the societal shifts that have taken place over the years. Having a childhood filled with in-person interactions, free play, and independence allows children to “discover” the world around them. This non-anxious parenting style has declined significantly and instead, parents are starting to shield their children from the outside embodied world, while allowing their children unrestricted and unsupervised freedom in the virtual world.

Now, many parents hesitate to give their children any independence, which creates fear and anxiety in kids when they enter the real world. They enter “defend mode.” Because of their interdependence growing up, they find it hard to interact with others outside of their homes. If we want our children to grow up in “discover mode,” Haidt argues that communities need to take collective action to allow kids to have unsupervised free play to become independent people who can survive in the real world on their own. His four main points of focus in accomplishing a reverse in “The Great Rewiring” include no smartphones before high school, no social media before age sixteen, phone-free schools, and far more unsupervised play and childhood independence.

Interviews and writings of Haidt suggest that these negative effects seem to be less apparent in religious communities. While participation in religious communities does not exempt its members from the negative effects of a screen-based existence, it does offer notable protection. In his book, he dedicates a portion to examining the various rituals and practices within these communities that have provided a sense of protection. The church prioritizes practices such as sharing meals, attending events, engaging in community, and appreciating God’s nature. These routines counteract the isolation and screen dependency affecting many people today. They embody the values of presence, peace, and togetherness, which resonate with Haidt’s advocacy for a natural, experience-driven childhood. Church communities have the potential to foster a culture of shared experiences and intentional living. By reevaluating priorities and embracing change in pursuit of a healthier lifestyle, they

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Josh & Jewel live in Columbus, Ohio. Jewel works at Freedom a la Cart, a non-profit that empowers survivors of sex trafficking, and Josh is a full-time student at Ohio State studying psychology and social work.



A Year of Plenty

BY ROSEDALE INTERNATIONAL

As the end of the year approaches, we at Rosedale International (RI) have been reflecting on the multitude of blessings brought to us in 2024. While the list is far too long to fully recount, we wanted to take a moment to acknowledge and celebrate the highlight reel—and to thank you, our Rosedale Network family, for your generous, unwavering support.

We welcomed four new office staff.

In April, Judah brought his expertise to the role of Food Services Coordinator. In June, Lizziann jumped full-speed-ahead into her role as Administrative Assistant to the Short-Term Programs. In August, Connor joined RI in the newly-created position of Rosedale International Associate, and Darryl came on board shortly after as our much-needed RIC Director and Maintenance Technician.

We sent seven new workers overseas.

In January, Luke and Gloria joined a partner team in East Africa; Chloe followed them in July. Roger and Susie entered a partner team in South Asia, and RI's workers in the Mediterranean welcomed Jamie and Hazel.

"We continue to grow deeper in our friendships here, specifically with each of our language teachers," Susie wrote in a recent update. "We are finding deep joy in this country partly because of those friendships. A couple of days ago, we found ourselves saying to each other, 'We love it here—we love learning how to live here well.' And that really is the truth. South Asia can be an intense and frustrating place to live, but the people and the culture are beautiful, and we feel the Father continue to grow our love for this place more and more."

We celebrated 30 baptisms in Asia and the Mediterranean.

"This year, RI's partner teams in Asia were blessed to see results from their long-term work of patiently sharing the gospel as small groups of people made the brave decision to break from their traditional beliefs and follow Jesus," shared Tom, Asia Regional Director.

"In the south, 11 young men studied the Bible together and decided to publicly declare their faith through baptism. Several students from the hostel in the southeast made the same decision. Their paths to faith came through long-term contact

with believers, intentional discipleship from our teams, and the casual but consistent witness of believing friends.

"In every part of the world, the decision to be baptized is a cause for celebration. But in these communities—where so few believe and where identification with Jesus can carry a heavy social cost—baptisms are especially exciting. These new believers are budding disciple-makers in areas where the harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. God is drawing His people to Himself, and our teams are privileged to bear witness."

We visited seven Christian schools and 25 churches, 21 percent of our network. We hosted 10 youth groups—a total of 212 students—during City Challenge. We reached a total of \$77k raised through Missions 101, helping us meet the deficit in our general budget. We purchased a much-needed minivan for Short-Term Programs. We biked 350+ miles with Ride for Missions.

Thank you, Rosedale Network, for the ways that you contributed toward these accomplishments. Whether you sent your youth to City Challenge or REACH, participated in Missions 101, or supported a new worker financially, it is your partnership that made 2024 such a good year for Rosedale International. 🙏

Header photo credit: Brad Switzer on Unsplash



RI is the mission arm of Rosedale Network of Churches, working to take Jesus to the ends of the earth by fully engaging Rosedale Network churches in maturing and multiplying disciples, especially among the least reached.

can embody Haidt's vision of a play-based, community-focused lifestyle. Emphasizing experiential learning and community is vital for current and future kingdom workers.

As part of the church and the "anxious generation," we have experienced the benefits of these practices. Participating in church events and maintaining in-person interactions provide critical opportunities for connection and growth. While reading this book, both of us related to almost everything Jonathan Haidt explained about our generation. Throughout the past decade, we have seen a shift both in ourselves and in the young people around us. People have a virtual escape in their pockets at all times. Bored at home? Look at our phones. Taking a break? Look at our phones. Lying in bed? Gotta have phone time before going to sleep. Many young people even have a hard time dealing with conflict because their phones give them an escape from feeling uncomfortable.

Haidt's last arguments are about coming together as communities, schools, and churches to essentially "recall" social media and smartphones for adolescents. Going back to a play-based childhood and teaching independence combined with protecting children in the virtual world can empower children and help them to influence social norms. *The Anxious Generation* is a straightforward and riveting read that we recommend to everyone, especially parents. The church serves as a vital community in nurturing and guiding youth. To fulfill this role, we should be considering and implementing Haidt's insight and recommendations for creating a community-driven environment for ourselves and for children. 🙏

Header photo credit: *Esther Snyder*