



## MESSY AND DANGEROUS

KEEGAN WRIGHT



A ROSEDALE NETWORK PUBLICATION  
VOL. 55 | NO. 01

### ***Sermons in Rosedale Network of Churches***

*Continuing a multi-year theme of hearing how God is at work in our churches, the 2025 Feature Beacon articles will focus on preaching within Rosedale Network. Each article will feature a recent sermon by a Rosedale Network pastor. May we all be encouraged by the faithful teaching of God's Word.*

When I began working as a nurse's aide, I was warned that there would be a lot of cleaning up unpleasant messes, and to make sure my vaccinations were up to date. The message was clear; caring for people will be messy and dangerous. This is also the case in taking the good news of Jesus to people who don't know Him, especially to those in dark and uncomfortable places.

In the church, we typically don't like these words—messy and dangerous—and like to live cleaner and safer lives, like respectable hobbits who “never had any adventures or did anything unexpected” (Tolkien, *The Hobbit*).

Church, it's time to wake up and think about what could happen if we get messy and dangerous for the gospel.

However, reaching our communities with the good news of Jesus will be messy and possibly dangerous. If we avoid this truth, we can be lulled into a sleep that will keep us from fulfilling our God-given commission to make disciples.

Church, it's time to wake up and think about what could happen if we get messy and dangerous for the gospel.

2 Peter 3:9 is likely a familiar verse; God does not desire anyone to perish, but for everyone to come to repentance. He loves each and every person on the face of this planet and designed each of us intimately because He wanted the world—at this time in history—to have each one of us. He has work for us to do in His redemption plan for the whole world!

Verse 10 may be a little less familiar, and certainly less comforting: “But the day of the Lord will come like a

thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare” (2 Peter 3:10 NIV). Jesus will come back without warning—things will be in tumult, there will be destruction, and the earth will be laid bare and all that was done in it revealed.

And the time for repentance will be over.

Church, there is an urgency! People are going to spend eternity in Hell away from Jesus unless someone like you and me will wake up, get uncomfortable, and go out of our way to tell this news to all the world, starting right where we're at.

We need to shift our thinking to that of C.T. Studd: “Some want to live within the sound of church and chapel bell; I want to run a rescue shop, within a yard of hell!” When the church lives like this, transformation happens: “Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed what they had done. A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas” (Acts 19:18-19).

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Header photo credit: Greg Rosenke: “Yellow and Black Caution Sign”



*Keegan is married to Charity, has three children, and serves as co-pastor at North Street Community Church in Canton, Pennsylvania. Keegan has a passion for outreach and sharing the love of Jesus through the local church.*



# Redeeming the Time

BY BRIAN HERSHBERGER

In 1930, economist John Maynard Keynes predicted that with technological advances, his grandchildren would work only 15 hours per week and have almost limitless free time. Not only was his prediction wrong, but it seems we are busier than ever, always struggling to get caught up. We walk fast, we drive fast, we work fast, we talk fast, and we eat fast. Then, we get done eating and we stand up and say, “Gotta run.”

I’ve never been a big fan of making New Year’s resolutions, or at least not of calling them that. I must admit though, that I’ve benefitted from setting goals and establishing priorities. As I think about goals and priorities for the year ahead, Paul’s encouragement to “redeem the time” (KJV) comes to mind: “So be careful how you live. Don’t live like fools, but like those who are wise. Make the most of every opportunity in these evil days. Don’t act thoughtlessly, but understand what the Lord wants you to do” (Eph. 5:15-17 NLT).

**Don’t wake up one morning realizing that you’ve spent your whole life doing good things, but have missed out on the best.**

How much thought do you put into how you live your life? We are encouraged by Scripture to do a healthy, careful, thoughtful examination of how we are living. Don’t live like fools. Don’t wake up one morning and realize that you’ve taught your children more about pursuing the American dream than pursuing God. Don’t wake up one morning to discover that your marriage is in shambles because you were too busy pursuing your own interests, or too busy trying to keep everybody else happy that you neglected your relationship with your spouse. Don’t wake up one morning realizing that you’ve spent your whole life doing good things, but have missed out on the best. Martha says to Jesus of her sister, Mary, “Lord, doesn’t it seem unfair to you that my sister just sits here while I do all the work? Tell her to come and help me” (Luke 10:40b). Jesus replies, “My dear Martha, you are worried and upset over all these details! There is only one thing worth being concerned

about. Mary has discovered it, and it will not be taken away from her” (Luke 10:41-42).

Paul also instructs us to “make the most of every opportunity...” I believe that making the most of every opportunity starts with measuring the use of our time with our priorities. If you’re like me, you’ve often said deepening your relationship with Christ is your highest priority. How does the use of your time measure up to that? Maybe sharing Christ with your non-Christian friends is a priority for you this year. Does your time measure up? Perhaps strengthening your marriage is a high priority this year. Prove it! Plan your date nights in advance and then let your other activities and interests fall into place around them rather than just waiting to see if you happen to have a free night to spend with your wife. Read that book about marriage that has been sitting on your shelf. Register for that marriage retreat you’ve always talked about going to.

Finally, Paul encourages us to understand what the Lord wants us to do. While I’m all about people finding and embracing God’s specific will for their lives, I’ve come to believe that the will of God often has more to do with the journey than it does about arriving at some particular destination where we can say, “Ah, I’ve arrived at God’s perfect will for my life!” I believe what the Lord wants us to do is listen to His voice today and do what He says so He can lead us to where He wants us to be tomorrow. My goal for this year is to stack enough of those kinds of days on top of each other so I can get to the end of the year and say that to the best of my ability, I have understood and have done what the Lord wanted me to do.

I could say more, but the day is slipping by and I gotta run! 🏃‍♂️

Header photo credit: [unsplash.com](https://unsplash.com), [Icons8 Team](https://icons8.com)



*Brian serves as executive director of Rosedale Network of Churches. He and his wife, Sharla, live in Marysville, Ohio, and are involved in community outreach and worship ministry at Lighthouse Fellowship.*



# Fireplaces and a Warm Meal

BY JEREMY MILLER



## **Anabaptism and Other Denominations**

*On this 500th anniversary of the beginnings of the Anabaptist movement, Rosedale Bible College's Beacon articles will look at a wide variety of denominations within the household of faith, highlighting a different denomination each month. We hope to foster a humble, rooted, appreciation for how the gospel has come to us and to consider how Jesus might be calling us forward.*

One of my closest pastoral friends was Jack McClelland, pastor of Fredericksburg Presbyterian Church in Ohio. We served in the same small town and met together several times a month to pray, chat about ministry life, and enjoy the friendship of two brothers ministering in the same community. Jack's church baptized babies, celebrated believers joining the military, and ordained women—all ways of practicing the faith that would have made it difficult, if not impossible, for us to pastor the same church together. And yet, we were brothers in Christ and close friends.

My history with the Presbyterian church didn't begin with Jack. After attending Rosedale Bible College (RBC), I transferred to a small liberal arts Presbyterian college where all my theology professors were conservative Presbyterians. Furthermore, my first preaching role was in a small-town Presbyterian church in Kansas while I was still in college. The head elder, a crusty Kansas farmer, knew I was Mennonite and informed me that the church was happy to have me and that I could preach what I wanted, but I needed to know there wasn't anything they hadn't heard before. "One other thing," he added, "don't go talking about the environment." Noted.

After years of interaction with theologically conservative, reformed Presbyterians, I developed a deep appreciation for their church. I appreciated their model of church governance, the way they valued doctrine, and the ability of their pastors to teach the Bible. It seemed to me that every Presbyterian was a capable teacher! Yet, for all my Presbyterian engagement and admiration, I'm not Presbyterian or reformed and would not be ordained in their denomination. Why?

Several years into my pastorate at Mennonite Christian Assembly in Fredericksburg, Ohio, a group of young people asked me to do a series of teachings on what it meant to be Mennonite. "Who are we?" they asked. Ironically, our church was located in the heart of Ohio's Amish country, an Anabaptist Mecca. And still, many of our young people had no idea what a Mennonite was. They were skeptical of denominational labels,

unsure of how we were fundamentally different from most other churches in the area. They questioned the value of denominations in general. Didn't denominational labels just create barriers between Christians who were essentially the same?

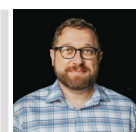
This denominational skepticism isn't limited to that group of young people. Rather, they were reflective of a broader movement over the last 40 years toward a non-denominational church identity. According to Professor Ryan Burge's data from 2020, 22% of U.S. Protestants identify as non-denominational, making it the largest "denomination." For comparison, in 1984, only 5% of Protestants were non-denominational.

What is this shift about? There are a variety of reasons for the growth of non-denominational churches, not least of which is an American culture that is increasingly anti-institutional. In a post-modern culture where individuals create their own truths, institutions are met with significant suspicion. Much more could be said about this important reality.

Beyond this, many churches want greater autonomy and flexibility with their missional goals. They don't want to be saddled with baggage from a particular denomination's past or present unpopular theology or practices. Also, many Christians don't want labels or boxes and believe that if we all were serious enough about our faith and the Bible, we would all come to the same conclusions without external entities insisting on particular beliefs and practices.

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Header photo credit: [Oleksandr P: "A Woman Warming in Front of a Fireplace"](#)



*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.*



# As He Said He Would

BY ROSEDALE INTERNATIONAL

*This summer, after completing her first term in the Mediterranean, Esperanza returned to Columbus for a time of debrief. The Communication team sat down with her to catch up about her experiences over the last two years; the article below is pulled from that transcript.*

“I spent the last two years focused on language and culture acquisition. I was part of a team of other language learners in the city, and I appreciated the community and support of others who were also focused on learning.

“The language learning method we used was unique; I went to my language teacher’s home five days a week and learned to speak by listening and repeating. At the very beginning I spoke like a toddler, but slowly progressed to speaking and understanding more advanced stories and deeper life topics.

“It was a very humbling journey to embrace being a learner—to make mistakes, to ask a lot of questions, and to really learn from my local teachers. I still have more growing to do, but I see the fruit of two years of persevering through this intense study. I see the ways God grew my resilience.

“Another challenge of living in this region was experiencing the spiritual heaviness of Islam, the majority religion. I experienced this heaviness in my relationships with local people—dear friends who shared with me their beliefs, and with whom I shared mine. We respected one another, but we did not agree with one another.

“I remember walking away from a number of meaningful conversations with a heaviness in my spirit. These dear friends, who I love so much, do not know Jesus as Lord. Their eyes are blind, and there is nothing I can say to compel or convince them; that is a work that really requires the Spirit of God to move.”

And move, His Spirit did. In a rare experience for a first-term worker, Esperanza rejoiced with her team as God began to bring years of work to completion. “The city where I lived is home to very few believers, but seeds had been planted and watered for many years. I happened to arrive in a time when God was finally bringing the fruit of the harvest.

“A male teammate of mine had developed a close friendship with a young man who was disillusioned with Islam and asking

a lot of questions. He was hungry, and my friend pointed him toward the words of Jesus.

“Changing religions is not really a concept in this culture, but this young man chose to follow Christ. He has experienced immense opposition and persecution as a result—but he has the joy of the Lord, and is so open and bold about sharing it. Through his local networks, through his childhood friends, through his willingness to share with anyone who will listen, we’ve seen the beginning of a church in my city.

“Over the past year-and-a-half, we’ve watched the numbers of believers grow. We’ve seen great witnessing and great response—and great persecution, yet the movement continues to grow. Thirteen new believers were baptized in just the last few months! We see Jesus building His Church as He said He would. We see God pouring rivers of water in the desert.

**“We see Jesus building His Church as He said He would.”**

“Looking ahead to mid-January, I plan to join an already existing team that uses community development to serve a vulnerable, displaced people—same country, different city. I am excited to use my training in social work to bless those who need assistance, and I feel honored to serve these people who are close to God’s heart.

“I really appreciate and value your prayers on my behalf, for me and my teammates as we continue learning, persevering, and pressing into this people group. It’s a privilege to be sent and it’s a joy to know that there are countless individuals lifting me and other workers up for the expansion of God’s kingdom.” 🌱

Header photo credit: [Stanislave Kondratiev](#): “[Selective Focus Photography of Wind Swaying Brown Plants](#)”



*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.*

### **Messy and Dangerous** *cont'd from page 3*

Because of the good news being shared in dark places—places where sorcery was being practiced—those who needed the light the most found it! They were so convinced of the good news of Jesus that they burned their livelihood and wealth, which had been invested in their books of sorcery.

We may read this passage and think “Okay, but none of that stuff goes on in my quiet community.” However, I wouldn’t be so sure. In the rural area of Canton, Pennsylvania, there are mediums, many of whom use Ouija boards and the like. While these are extreme cases, there are many people affected by the darkness and lies of the enemy all around us. Because of Jesus, we don’t have to be afraid of these dark powers, but can shine a light into those places, pointing people to Jesus for light, freedom, forgiveness, and salvation!

Will you join me in asking Jesus what first step He would call us to take to interact with our neighbors caught in darkness, shining a light for Him?

Church, it’s time to get messy and dangerous for the gospel! 🏠

### **Fireplaces and a Warm Meal** *cont'd from page 3*

In his powerful work, *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis explained the value of denominations. He likened coming to faith to entering a large home. First, you enter the hallway where people mingle and have much in common with one another. The conversations are light and pleasant. The hallway symbolized the unifying foundational truths that all Christians believe.

However, Lewis notes, “The hall is a place to wait in, not live in.” All believers eventually must enter one of the rooms where “there are fires, and chairs, and meals.” The rooms represent different layers of belief, culture, and shared commitments, a working out of salvation God has given His people. These rooms with food, fire, and chairs are where we learn the deep truths of God and develop convictions that facilitate intimate fellowship for the journey with God and His people.

I can appreciate the frustrations that sometimes come with deep ties to a particular room in the household of God. Despite these tensions, the truth is that Christianity is a received faith. We are all products of faithful streams of church life that have flowed out of the empty tomb through the church and down through the centuries by the power of the Spirit. It’s in the rooms that we learn how the gospel message has been transmitted down through the centuries, carried by traditions, stewarded by church authority, and cultivated into the lives of God’s people through centuries of discipleship practices. The stream of faithfulness that has brought us the gospel of Christ included a serious reformation 500 years ago by a group called Anabaptists. They were not without fault, but they showed us Jesus, and we are products of their faithfulness.

This year, on the 500th anniversary of the founding of the Anabaptist movement, RBC’s articles will crack open the doors of other rooms and examine various denominations in God’s household. Our aim is to help us understand our own room, learn from other denominations, and embrace the gospel our Anabaptist forebearers entrusted to us. We hope to foster a humble, rooted, appreciation for how the gospel has come to us and to consider how Jesus might be calling us forward. 🏠