

ENCOUNTERING A HOLY GOD

BY CHRIS YODER

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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 focus on preaching within Rosedale Network of Churches. Each article features a recent sermon by a Rosedale Network pastor. May we all be encouraged by the faithful teaching of God's Word.

At the beginning of the Old Testament, we read about a series of historical events. These events have some drama, excitement, and a bunch of interesting facts. We then land at the Exodus, and what unfolds as God delivers a chosen people out of the hand of the Egyptians. Here, a dilemma emerges. How does this Holy God of deliverance now interact with an unholy people?

Obviously, there are interactions between God and individuals before the Exodus, but now God is going to interact with a nation of people. Beginning at creation, we see that God has a desire to interact with His creation. When God gives the Law to Moses, we start to see how God desires that this new nation interact with Him and with each other.

Leviticus, specifically, isn't an easy read for me, but it reveals God's character, heart, and love for His people. For instance, in Leviticus 16, we read about the Day of Atonement, and we are given very specific details of operation for this day. It may seem a bit much to you and me as we find ourselves far removed from such events. But it does uncover the principles to be applied in order that one might be prepared to encounter this Holy God.

What can be discovered is the chasm that lies between a Holy God and His people. Interestingly, this gap is then bridged by God and not by man (Col. 1:19-20, Rom. 8:3). God is the one who reveals the possibility of encountering His holiness. God is the one who gives directives for engagement in the Old Testament, and God is the one who sends His Son to die on a cross for our sins. And by doing so, allows us to encounter Him in a new way that doesn't require a special day, or dress, or sacrifice, or cleansing process.

The actions required in the Old Testament seem to be directives that require rigid obedience. While this is true at some level, God is providing a way for obedience to lead to worship. That's what biblical obedience really is—worship. When we obey God's directives, it is an active form of worship.

It's fascinating to me that God reveals His holiness to man, the resulting distance between a Holy God and man, then provides all that is necessary for man to encounter His holiness. And not just encounter it, but to live in it! He gives clear and specific ways by which we are to worship Him. When I view this from a perspective of God providing the ability to worship Him in order that I might encounter Him, it reveals my futility and the cost of what He is providing.

A conundrum of humanity is that our sin is intrinsically tied to God's holiness. Sin isn't sin without God being holy. It is human nature to downplay the detriment of sin. That can only be accomplished by decreasing the holiness of God. It's the only way to neutralize the effects of sin on our lives. In Romans 5:8, Paul reminds us of the generous gift of God. But, as I study the Old Testament—and especially the Law—I begin to feel as if I'm missing the holiness of God. Or, at minimum, reducing it to a comfortable level. Have I overlooked the principles to worship God according to His desires?

The Law, in part at least, seems to be God revealing what is required to worship Him. Obedience to these principles may seem daunting. However, if we can begin to view it as an active form of worship according to God's desires, it sheds a unique perspective on these directives. Seeing obedience as a way to encounter God places things in perspective, and Jesus has provided a unique way to do just that (Heb. 4:15-16). So, is my obedience a duty to win His favor, or an active form of worship as a way to encounter a Holy God? 🙏

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Chris and his wife, Jolene, live on a small farm near Hutchinson, Kansas. They have three sons, Benaiah, Jabin, and Zebulon. Chris serves as co-pastor at Plainview Mennonite Church.



LIVING ROMANS 12

A Snapshot of Multiply 2025

Multiply Conference 2025, held July 25–27 in Montgomery, Indiana, brought people together around the powerful message of Romans 12. As you read through the chapter below, enjoy photos capturing moments from the weekend focused on living transformed lives.

Romans 12 (Scripture arrangement and recitation by Craig Beachy)

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is* your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God (NKJV).



Because of the privilege and authority God has given me, I give each of you this warning: Don't think you are better than you really are. Be honest in your evaluation of yourselves, measuring yourselves by the faith God has given us. Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, so it is with Christ's body. We are many parts of one body, and we all belong to each other (NLT).



In his grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well (NLT). If prophecy, *let us prophesy* in proportion to our faith; or ministry, *let us use it* in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. *Let love be* without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good.

Be kindly affectionate one to another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.



Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep (NKJV). Live in harmony with each other. Don't be too proud to enjoy the company of ordinary people. And don't think you know it all!



Never pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable. Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone.



Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say,

‘I will take revenge; I will pay them back,’ says the Lord.

Instead,

‘If your enemies are hungry, feed them.

If they are thirsty, give them something to drink.

In doing this, you will heap burning coals of fire on their heads’ (NLT).



Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (NKJV).

Header Image: *Rashae Byler*

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Rosedale Network is an evangelical Anabaptist denomination with headquarters in Irwin, Ohio, and is made up of over 100 churches located in 24 states. Rosedale Network's mission is to mature and multiply churches both locally and globally.



Anabaptism and Roman Catholicism

BY ROGER HAZEN

Anabaptism and Other Denominations

On this 500th anniversary of the beginnings of the Anabaptist movement, Rosedale Bible College's Beacon articles look at a wide variety of denominations within the household of faith. 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.

In my more prideful moments, I sometimes think of myself as more Anabaptist than most Mennonites. You see, I was born and raised as a Roman Catholic—baptized as an infant, then re-baptized when I joined the Mennonite church at age 18. Of course, this doesn't mean I'm an expert on either Anabaptism or Catholicism, but I've been asked to share something about my Catholic experience and how that relates to Anabaptism.

First, as a Catholic, I was taught about the triune God. There wasn't much teaching about the Holy Spirit, but certainly about the Father and Son. My focus as a young Catholic was always on Jesus on the cross. I didn't think in terms of "being saved." We didn't use that language, but I knew that Jesus had died for my sins, and I needed to believe in Him.

Later, I came to learn more of the nuances of salvation, as well as how people other than Catholics think about salvation. But for me, sitting in the pew Sunday after Sunday, Jesus was the most important person in my understanding of eternal life. The Catholic Mass is centered around His sacrifice for sin. That idea is central to Catholicism, and I've always been glad for some of the foundational ideas about God that I learned growing up Catholic.

But in addition, there were many other unique and more controversial Catholic doctrines which non-Catholics enjoy pointing out to their Catholic friends—things like the role of Mary, prayers to saints, and the doctrine of transubstantiation.

I appreciate that Anabaptism emphasizes that God is present in every moment of every day

These spiritual practices were indeed part of the Catholic milieu in which I grew up. I dutifully prayed my "Hail Marys," wore my St. Christopher medallion as a form of protection from harm, and bowed my head when the bells rang during mass, signifying the transformation of the bread into the actual body of Christ.

When I joined the Mennonite church and delved deeper into Scripture, I began to reassess many of the finer points of Catholic theology. The Anabaptist emphasis on Scripture as the final source of authority for understanding who God is and how we should live as His followers is one of the greatest strengths of Anabaptism. Indeed, the rallying cry of the Anabaptists—when they were hauled before the Catholic magistrates—was, "Show us from the Scriptures."

From its long history, Roman Catholicism has many accretions that I came to realize are not found in Scripture. While this doesn't automatically disqualify any particular aspect of a "religious" life, it should serve as our highest standard of measurement. Roman Catholics hold their church traditions just as high as they do the Scriptures. Indeed, Catholics speak of Scripture, Tradition, and the Magisterium (the teaching authority of the church to interpret and apply Scripture and Tradition) as a "three-legged stool" that undergirds the church.

This "three-legged stool" idea is something Anabaptists and other reformers rejected as they emphasized *sola scriptura* (Scripture alone) as the infallible source of authority for the church.

Of course, the longer I've been a Mennonite, the more I see that Anabaptists have their own highly valued traditions. They don't stretch back as far as Catholic traditions, but that's another article!

On another level, as I've gotten older, I've come to appreciate the sense of awe and worship I experienced in the Catholic church. As a boy, I was taught to be quiet and respectful when

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Roger served as pastor in Nebraska for eight years, and at Pineview Mennonite Church in Vassar, Michigan, for 25 years. Roger and his wife, Sharon, have three children and two grandchildren.



A Patient Labor

BY HUNTER

Growing up in the church, I thought I knew missionaries. They were distant relatives, Sunday morning guest speakers, and youth returning from short-term programs. Their experiences were backdropped by beautiful mountains, deserts, and jungles. They ate exciting food. They led daily healings that led multitudes of people to Jesus. Even their struggles were exciting. Cartels would attack them, and secret police would chase them through city streets. The life of a missionary was colorful and explosive.

I'm not entirely sure where these conceptions came from. It's likely that my young mind fused aspects of what these workers had shared with whatever Indiana Jones film was playing on TV. As I got older, I began to understand that the actual life of a missionary had some differences from the one that I envisioned as a child.

As I've worked at RI, I've been able to observe in closer proximity that the rewards and challenges of overseas mission work take a more nuanced shape than what I'd previously perceived. As with any lifestyle or field of work, there are intricate details that can be difficult to see or experience from the outside. RI's vision statement is, "Jesus to the World, and the World to Jesus." Implicit in this vision is an aspect of "bringing." This requires a patient labor that is rewarding, but not always glamorous.

Planting crops involves multiple steps and processes, and takes time to cultivate.

Logistically, there exist many of the same complications that are present in any other organization or functional system. Just to name a few, there are Visa complications, job openings that need to be closed, and fundraising plateaus. These aspects can be frustrating and laborious, but are essential to the process of planting spiritual seeds.

Similarly, there are complications that exist relationally and personally. Overseas workers sacrifice proximity to friends, family, and an established church community. They face cultural hurdles as they learn new languages, environments, and customs. My childhood self didn't consider these types of nuanced struggles. Of course, missionaries around the world face various

types of persecution and security concerns, but those seemingly "larger" struggles don't negate the "smaller" ones.

Planting crops involves multiple steps and processes, and takes time to cultivate. Overseas mission workers also involve themselves in work that may not bear visible rewards for long periods of time. There are often smaller victories that come before a spiritual harvest is realized. Workers experience this as they see a breakthrough in their language learning, finally have a spiritual conversation with a local after years of connection, or learn of the ways that their simple actions have served as a spiritual witness to a community that doesn't share their language. Of course, we rejoice when people and groups come to Jesus, but we also rejoice in the victories that serve as steps in the planting process.

I've been challenged by RI's overseas workers. Their commitment to this patient labor has caused me to look inward and examine if I act with the same commitment. Do I ignore the "small" ways that I can share the gospel, because they don't feel drastic enough? Are there parts of me that effectively ignore the great commissioning because I'm not what would be perceived as a "missionary?" These questions, amongst others, have been largely influenced by the stories of bold perseverance in the workers that RI sends.

We know that the work of sharing Jesus is not absolved of labor. If anything, we know that this command increases our responsibilities. Paul compared the Christian life to that of a race (1 Cor. 9:24-27). He acknowledges the discipline and self-control that are required of the believer to obtain the imperishable reward of eternal life. This discipline and self-control extend to the spreading of the gospel, even if it defies our (my) desire for immediate and incredible change. May we all commit ourselves to a patient labor in sharing the good news. The work is well worth the reward! 🙏

Photo credit: Pieter Bruegel, the Elder. *The Harvesters*. 1565. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



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Anabaptism and... *cont'd from page 3*

we entered the sanctuary. We knelt to pray, and when we were done praying, we sat quietly until the service started. Any failure to comply brought a quick ear-twisting from my mother!

The entire worship service, even though I knew it by heart, inspired in me a sense of God's presence. Today, I sometimes long for this sense of the sacred when I'm in an Anabaptist service that seems little more than just another way to chit-chat about the weather or gripe about work while waiting on the pastor or worship leader to start the service.

The problem with this more Catholic sense of sacred space is that God can tend to get left behind in that space. The church sanctuary becomes the only place where God is truly present, and it's all too easy for God to fade into the background in everyday life.

I appreciate that Anabaptism emphasizes that God is present in every moment of every day, not just as a Savior but as a leader and master who teaches us how to live as disciples, no matter where we are or what we're doing.

I love the Anabaptist understanding of faith. While I could never return to Catholicism, we can glean important things from that historic faith tradition that help us walk more faithfully as disciples of Christ. 🙏