

FROM FAN TO FOLLOWER

BY GREG WIDRICK

A ROSEDALE NETWORK PUBLICATION
VOL. 56 | NO. 08

Something that has been made very clear to me as I look across the landscape of the 21st-century American Church is this: Jesus has a lot of fans but not a lot of followers. What I mean by that is there are a lot of people who consider themselves Christians who come to church, Sunday school, VBS, and youth who like what being a Christian gives to them, but do not want to follow what Jesus said in Luke 9:57–62. If our desire is to be a follower or disciple of Jesus, then we must take Jesus' call seriously in the Great Commission to make disciples. But you can't put the cart in front of the horse. To make disciples, you must be a disciple, and to be a disciple means you are abiding in Christ.

The first aspect of abiding in Christ is that a disciple abides in His love (John 15:9–10 LSB). Prior to these verses in chapter 15:1–7, Jesus gives us a visual picture of what it looks like to abide in Him, and He uses the imagery of a vine and branches. Jesus is showing us that abiding is being connected to the source of life. In fact, the Greek word used here for abide is *meno*, which literally means “to reside in” or “to stay in,” as in lodging with someone. Jesus is saying, when you are abiding in me, you are lodging in me! Where you abide matters, and Jesus says here that you must first abide in His love.

A true disciple bears fruit; no fruit means no disciple.

Secondly, a disciple abides in His joy (John 15:11). This is a direct result of abiding in His love, and it's a joy that is not self-produced. Jesus says that it is His joy that is in us. This comes in relationship and submission to Jesus. His joy becomes our joy, and as a result, our joy is filled up to the brim and is a key component that will define a true disciple. In fact, it's impossible for a follower of Jesus not to have joy. Billy Sunday said, “If you have no joy in your religion, there's a leak in your Christianity somewhere.”

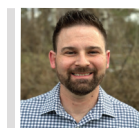
Thirdly, a disciple abides in love for each other (John 15:12–13,17). Love is the defining mark of someone who is a follower of Jesus (John 13:34–35), and this is reinforced in 1 John 4:19–21. Do you

love the person that sits next to you on Sunday? How about across from you? How about the one that irritates you or disagrees with you? How about your enemy? A true disciple or follower of Jesus abides in love for each other.

Lastly, a disciple abides to bear fruit (John 15:8,16). Jesus begins and ends this teaching with the same concept: a true disciple bears fruit. Bearing fruit does two things for the disciple. It glorifies God and connects you to Jesus. Yet this all hinges and is connected to being attached and abiding in the True Vine. This means that you cannot bear fruit on your own. Many of us know this, but do we live this way? Do you live in a way that shows your dependency on Jesus for the fruit you produce, or do you try to manufacture your own? One method leads to rest and life; the other leads to exhaustion and death. A true disciple bears fruit; no fruit means no disciple.

If you are abiding in Jesus, you will be different, you will act differently, you will love differently, and you will live differently. The difference, however, is not due to your strength, your effort, or your hard work. The difference is due to the persistent work of Jesus in you. Jesus is alive, powerful, and actively at work in his disciples to bear fruit! A disciple abides in Christ. Are you abiding in Him? 

Photo credit: [Nicky Pe on Pexels](#)



Greg lives in Beaver Falls, New York, with his wife, Deanna, and their five children. He pastors at Naumburg Mennonite Church and serves on the Rosedale Bible College board.



The Gospel of the Upside-Down Kingdom

BY MERLIN MILLER

In the Gospel of Mark, we read that as Jesus turned his face toward Jerusalem and led the disciples toward what would ultimately be His death on the cross, those who followed Him were both amazed and afraid (Mark 10:32 ESV). Jesus went about doing good, healing people from all kinds of afflictions and announcing the arrival of the kingdom of God. But in these pivotal central chapters of the gospel, He more clearly reveals that He is indeed the Messiah, *and* He more clearly reveals some things about God's kingdom that seem upside down to us—if you try to save your life, you will lose it, but if you lose it for His sake, you will save it.

Short-term sacrifice is worth long-term gain. *Painful* and *public* removal of things that cause us to sin is good because it's better to enter life lame than with two feet go into hell. If we want to be great, we must make ourselves the least of all. Our reception of the God of the universe is based on our reception of the lowliest and most vulnerable among us. In fact, we must become utterly dependent, entirely trusting, and completely able to accept a gift with no thought of being able to pay for it if we want to enter into this kingdom.

Short-term sacrifice is worth long-term gain.

Though these are the ways of the Most High God, to our limited vision here, they appear upside-down. And from the time that Jesus began to declare these things, He also began to invite His followers to walk down the same path of living out and proclaiming this good news of the upside-down Kingdom.

This is why the disciples were afraid as they followed Jesus to Jerusalem. But after the resurrection, we find that every one of the remaining 11 disciples did exactly that—they lived out and proclaimed the gospel of the upside-down Kingdom.

We are no different today. Jesus' invitation to us is the same: join me in this Great Commission. But herein lies the rub—it seems to make a lot more sense to us to proclaim a different good news, one that is a lot more self-serving, self-promoting, and allows us to continue living in self-autonomy. Who is going to receive "good news" like die to yourself and your own desires? Who is going to receive "good news" like if you want to be great, make yourself a servant to all? How is this even "good news"?

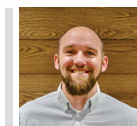
This article does not permit space to adequately dig into all of this, so hopefully you are willing to spend your own time contemplating and responding. But let me offer at least two compelling reasons to never stop proclaiming the gospel of the upside-down Kingdom.

First, there is the blatant truth that if you try to save your life, you *will* lose it. So, there are millions of people, including people around every one of us, who are busy trying to save, preserve, enhance, promote, protect, enrich, or otherwise bring ease to their lives, and in doing so, they *will* end up losing their life ultimately. Who will tell them? Who will let them know that the very thing they are naturally doing in their flesh is actually upside down in God's kingdom, and is the very thing that will be their ultimate downfall?

Second, there is already so much suffering and affliction and hurt in the world. Apart from the gospel of the upside-down Kingdom, that suffering is a senseless tragedy. But the good news of God's kingdom is that even things that are painful can have meaning and produce eternal fruit in us when we are surrendered to Him.

For all of those who are already suffering in this world, the good news we have to offer is that through Christ, something beautiful and everlasting can emerge. May we continue to live out *and* proclaim the gospel of the upside-down Kingdom. 🙏

Photo credit: AI-generated



Merlin is married to Heidi and the father of seven children. He gives leadership to Riverview Christian Fellowship in White Pigeon, Michigan, and serves as moderator-elect of Rosedale Network.



Five Lessons Learned after 15 Years at RBC

BY MATT SHOWALTER

This past year has been a time of transition for me. I'm leaving Rosedale Bible College (RBC), where I served for 15 years—one as a faculty member, 10 as Dean of Students, and four as Academic Dean.

This summer I'm moving into the president's office at Rosedale International. I'm excited about this transition, but the move has also forced me to look back at the last 15 years. It's been a rewarding and sacred season as I've had the privilege of walking with hundreds of young adults moving from childhood into adulthood.

As I leave, the Communications Team asked me to share five lessons learned during my time at RBC. So here goes:

1. The power of the poker face

Young adults love to talk to people who listen. I fight the impulse to jump in and tell them what they need to do. Sometimes it's painfully obvious to me, but if I want them to keep talking, I need to be quiet and listen. I've learned to keep a straight face, whether I am laughing or crying inside, so I can hear their hearts. This is likely true for people of all ages, but the older I get, the quicker I feel like I need to switch into "lecture" mode. There is a time to lecture, but often a poker face will keep the conversation going longer and deeper.

2. The power of tea

I brewed Turkish tea in my office twice every week. This became a scheduled time when all sorts of things could be discussed, and questions pondered. Would students have shown up if there hadn't been tea? I'm not sure, but tea was the excuse that brought people together. And as they gathered, good things happened. Tea may not always be the catalyst for coming together, but we need to be on the lookout for things that trigger connection.

3. Formation is a process

I had a student sit in my office one day and say that he could never love anyone else again. He had just had his heart broken. He was in pain. Deep pain. At that point in time, he felt that the life he had planned had been shattered. Of course, he did learn to love again, but it took time. It was a process. I had another student tell me that she had never felt closer to God than during that morning's chapel. A week later she was in my office asking why God seemed so distant. Ups and downs are inevitable as we follow Jesus, as we form relationships. We need to be reminded that spiritual formation is a process, a journey.

4. Embodied community is powerful

Over the years we have tried various forms of online education at RBC, but each time we've been reminded of the greater impact and power of physical presence. Online education serves a purpose in some settings, but the change and transformation that I've seen in young adults as they seek Jesus together has convinced me of the supreme importance of physical community. We need each other. We need people to walk with, to pray with, to laugh and cry with. There is transforming power in seeking Jesus together.

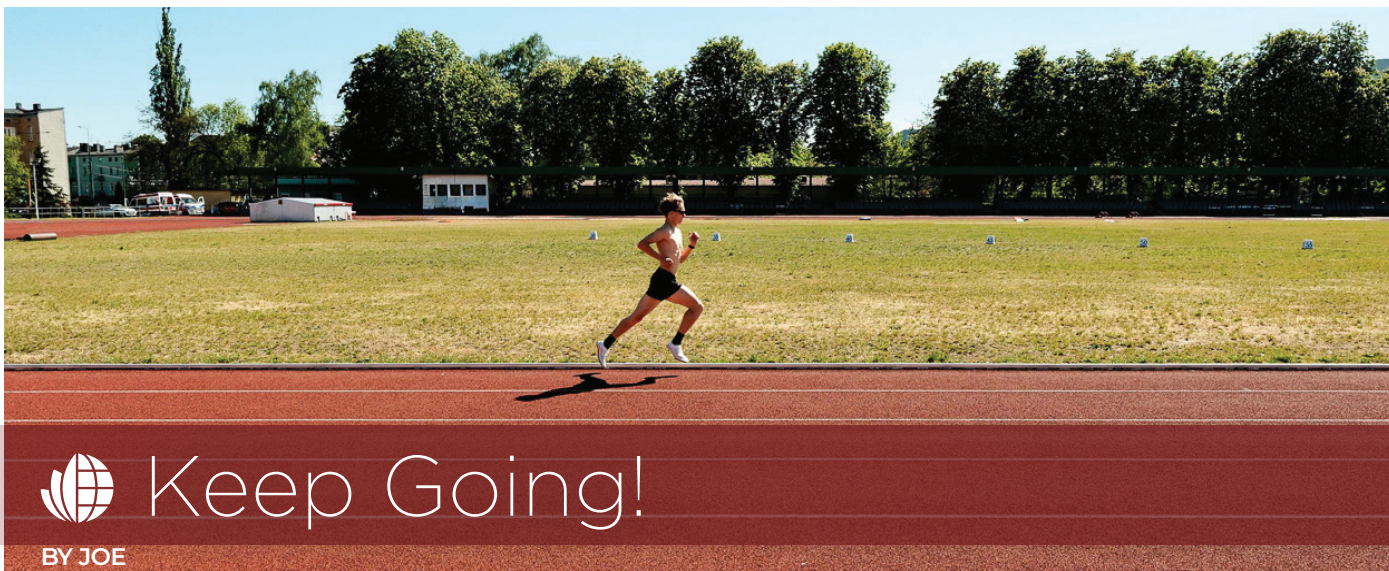
5. Kids these days... vs. Kids these days!

As I reflect on the past 15 years at RBC, I'm very encouraged about the future of the church. I walked with young Millennials as they tried to sort through life decisions. Then came Gen Z. This brought different challenges, but now we find ourselves prepping for Gen Alpha. There may be differences in some of the defining markers of each generation, but the common denominator that I have seen in each generation of young adults is a sincere desire to follow Jesus in their generation. What will that look like? I don't know, but I love the passion and desire that I see as young adults meet Jesus and endeavor to follow Him. I guess that's a big reason why I'm moving to Rosedale International. I hope to see not just young adults, but the whole church, catch fresh vision for what it means to follow Jesus—and to follow Him well. 

Photo credit: Annika Conte, RBC



Matt is president of Rosedale International. He and his wife, Colleen, have five children and are looking forward to becoming grandparents next year. They attend Shiloh Mennonite Church.



One hundred years ago, when Rosedale Network of Churches was very young, many of our leaders had accepted an interpretation of the Great Commission that held that the commission had been completed. In the first decades after Jesus spoke it, the disciples had done what he said and carried the gospel to the “ends of the earth” as they knew it.

But some challenged the status quo. Some said, “No, the commission still stands. We who follow Jesus must go.” I’m glad those voices eventually gained influence, because today, Rosedale Network has a vibrant heart to go to the ends of the earth. Rosedale Network exists, we agree, to *mature and multiply churches locally and globally*.

Over the years, I’ve heard other challenges to the Great Commission. Some have read the commission in Greek and argued that it doesn’t say, “Go and make disciples,” but instead, “As you go...” or “Going therefore...” Making disciples, it is maintained, must be intentional, but it just happens along the way as life happens. However, I remember well when my Greek professor pointed out that the participial phrase carries imperative force. Translating it “Go and make disciples” is the most accurate way to understand what Jesus meant.

Going is not optional. It’s what Jesus’ disciples do.

In more recent years, others have argued that it’s getting too expensive to send North Americans to faraway places. Instead of going ourselves, we should assist the churches that are already in the region so they can go. The problem is, the church doesn’t exist in some regions, so no one is going. I believe it’s a both/and situation. Yes, we should help near-culture people reach their “Samaria.” They can often do so more effectively than those from more distant languages and cultures. But this doesn’t relieve us of the responsibility to go. We are blessed with the financial resources and support structures that enable us to go to some of the hardest places. Might this not suggest that we should be the ones to go to those places that are the most expensive and difficult? Jesus said, “You will be my witnesses...to the ends of the earth.”

Matthew 28 was not the first time Jesus told his disciples to go. It was the third time. In Matthew 10, he sent out the twelve: “Go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt. 10:6 NIV). In Luke 10, he sent

them out again, but by then they had multiplied to seventy-two: “Go! I’m sending you out like lambs among wolves” (Luke 10:3). Going—to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth—is not optional. It’s what Jesus’ disciples do.

It’s interesting to note the context of the first two commissions. Luke 10 says it like this: “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Beg the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to thrust out workers into his harvest. Go! Do not take a purse or bag or sandals” (Luke 10:2-4a). The story in Matthew is similar. Pray for workers, and be one.

The primary questions we should be asking are not about cost or risk. High cost and great risk are pretty much guaranteed. Going drives us to our knees. On our knees, the primary questions become: “Where?” “When?” “To whom?” “How?” On our knees before our Good Shepherd, we find our answers. From that place, we go as His lambs, fully protected even while encountering wolves.

I count it a great privilege and joy to have been entrusted by God and by you, the church, with the role of leadership at Rosedale International (RI) these past two and a half decades. Thank you! Thank you for praying. Thank you for sending. Thank you for giving. Thank you for going.

As I transition into a new phase of mission, my role will change, but I intend to keep learning, growing, risking, sacrificing, and going. I want to continue to be an active participant in RI’s mission: Jesus to the world. The world to Jesus.

Today, there are more lost people in the world than there have ever been before. The least reached are still hard to reach. The darkness is deep. The call of Jesus is to everyone; His mission is for all of us. Let’s keep going! 🙏

Photo credit: [Bohdan Hyrovych on Pexels](#)



Joe lives in Columbus, Ohio, with his wife, Janice, and together, they lead the Columbus Network of Microchurches. After being the president of RI since 2002, He is assuming a new part-time role as director of the Council of International Anabaptist Ministries (CIM).



From the Archives

BY PHIL WEBER

When was the last time your church participated in a community tent revival or sponsored a week(s)-long series of “renewal meetings”? Many people today may not even remember such events, but it is within living memory that renewal meetings and tent revivals were faithfully attended, sometimes in astounding numbers. Enjoy photos and sermons of revival and renewal this month [From the Archives](#). 📷