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LOVE IN THE BROKEN PLACES

BY MATT PENNELL

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Jim and Dee were my neighbors when I was about eleven or twelve years old. Their homes were filled with brokenness—Dee's house marked by addiction and instability; Jim's by the lingering wounds of war and the chaos of alcoholism. Dee's children were often dirty, hungry, and hurting. Even as a kid, I could sense the heaviness that hung over both families.

One night, my dad and I were under our house working on some plumbing. I was near the entrance when Jim suddenly crawled in after us, drunk and emotional. He grabbed me, and I'll never forget the look on my dad's face—steady, calm, watching but not panicking. My dad simply said, "Hi, Jim. What's going on?"

Jim didn't answer him. Instead, he stared at me with a mixture of desperation and pain and asked a question that has stayed with me my entire life: "Do you love my family?"

I was just a boy, unsure what to do, so I said, "Yes, Jim. I love your family."

He pressed again, even more intensely: "Will you promise to always love my family?"

I told him yes. At that, he let go and began to weep. My dad gently told me to go get ready for bed, but instead I sat quietly in the laundry room above them, listening as my dad shared Jesus with Jim for what felt like hours.

Will you love others?

In John 21, after the resurrection, Jesus turns to Peter and asks him a deeply personal question: "Do you love me?"

Peter answers, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus replies, "Feed my sheep."

Jesus asks Peter this question three times. By the third time, Peter is hurt, not because Jesus doubted him, but because Jesus was pressing into something deeper. There are many layers to this passage—the different Greek words for love, the disciples listening nearby—but at the core, Jesus is asking Peter the same question Jim asked me: Will you love others?

In John 13, Jesus makes the answer unmistakably clear: "If you love one another, everyone will know you are my disciples."

When I think back to Dee and Jim's lives —both broken, both desperate for someone to care—I realize now that Jim's question wasn't really about me. It was the cry of a wounded soul longing for love, longing for someone to see his family, to care, to not give up on them.

And that is exactly the kind of love Jesus calls us to.

We don't always know the pain people carry. We don't always see the battles they're fighting. But sometimes a simple act of love—such as a promise, a conversation, a moment of compassion—can change someone's world.

My friends, may we never forget to love others enough to share with them the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ!

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Matthew is a husband, father, and grandfather, and serves as lead pastor at Maranatha Fellowship in Dover, Delaware. He loves serving others and finding ways to share the gospel.

Introducing Kingdom Service

BY LOWELL & RACHELLE EASTMAN

A Response to "What Happened to Voluntary Service?" As we read Aaron Miller's article "What Happened to Voluntary Service?" in the May issue of the *Beacon*, my wife and I found ourselves wanting to shout out that something *is* happening—we are working on it! What Aaron did not know was that after Multiply 2025, someone planted a seed with Rachelle and me to explore restarting Voluntary Service (VS) or something similar. As former Voluntary Service workers in Mississippi, we were eager to investigate this; VS is a program and concept we are passionate about.

Our time with VS was one of spiritual growth, learning to live in community within our household, and serving the community around us. While we wrestled with challenges with individuals, there were also wonderful times of seeing God's love and grace lived out. VS enabled us to experience beautiful people in a culture that was vastly different from the cultures we had grown up in. To say VS has held a special place in our lives would be an understatement.

> We believe serving is an integral part of obeying Jesus's teachings to love our neighbors.

During the fall of 2025, we met with various groups to discuss what VS in the States could look like today. We met with individuals from Rosedale Network of Churches, Rosedale International, Rosedale Bible College, and Rosedale Trades. We agreed collectively that a new program needed to include and focus on discipleship, community, and service. We also spoke with leaders at Mennonite Mission Network, Eastern Mennonite Missions, and Virginia Mennonite Missions, learning about their current programs. By January of 2026, we received a "blessing" from Rosedale Network and RI leadership to move forward.

We are excited to introduce you to Kingdom Service—a new service and discipleship opportunity within the USA, focused on service, sharing the gospel, discipleship, and spiritual growth while living in community. Our board of directors consists of: William Joe Byler (president), Andrew Beitzel (vice president), Darnell Brenneman (secretary), Mary Edgington (treasurer), Jared Chase, and Carl Dube. In this new program, we intend to offer flexible term lengths from one month to a year or more, and program participants will include young adults, retirees, families, and those on sabbatical.

Our first unit will be in Vassar, Michigan, approximately 30 miles northeast of Flint, where we are pastoring Pineview Mennonite Church. While Flint continues to receive media attention, shifts in the auto industry have affected and devastated the economies of surrounding counties as well. Rosedale Network leadership has a burden for Flint, but we have also seen firsthand the needs of Tuscola County. Many opportunities for service placements exist in both communities in home repair, childcare, healthcare, legal aid, youth services, food banks, B Light Restoration Center, the Restoration Warehouse, and more. Pineview Mennonite Church will be the local congregation for the unit and is eager to support this ministry.

We believe serving is an integral part of obeying Jesus's teachings to love our neighbors. God's kingdom depends on His people blessing others with the gifts He provides. In Genesis 12, God blessed Abraham and instructed him to be a blessing to others. We are moving forward by faith, depending on God's ability to move in the hearts of His children to provide the resources needed to build a new VS-type ministry that will open doors for service and sharing the gospel.

If you are interested in blessing Kingdom Service, there are several ways you can help. We need a few additional board members to guide Kingdom Service. Prayer support is also vital. Please pray for Kingdom Service leadership as planning and preparation continue. Specifically, in regard to paperwork to become a parachurch organization of Rosedale Network and our 501(c)(3) tax exemption application; also, for future participants in the program. If you would like to support us financially, tax-deductible donations can be designated to Kingdom Service through Rosedale International as a special project.

For more information on Kingdom Service or to become involved, contact Lowell Eastman, c/o Pineview Mennonite Church, 4415 Swaffer Rd, Vassar, MI 48768, or by email: lowelleastman@gmail.com.

Photo credits: *Kingdom Service*



Lowell and Rachelle have recently moved to Vassar, Michigan, where Lowell serves as pastor at Pineview Mennonite Church. They have three adult children, two daughters-in-law, and three grandchildren.

More than a Dairy Farmer

BY VAUGHN MOSER



When people ask me what I do for a living, I tell them I'm a dairy farmer—mostly.

Well, I also have a sawmill and a kiln. And in the spring, I make maple syrup and help my parents sell equipment for maple syrup production. And yes, I do keep a few beef cattle and pigs, but that all falls under the category of agriculture, right? Plus, it's a family legacy. I'm at least the fourth generation to farm and make maple syrup in this area.

My dad has a sawmill I learned to run, and that inspired me to buy my own. I can also deliver a calf, then hop on a tractor to do field work, and hop off to wait on a customer at my lumber store. One day I may be running my sawmill, the next I could be doctoring animals, the next, tearing apart a piece of broken equipment to fix.

I enjoy the variety of activities that come with my vocation. There is satisfaction and connection to the circle of life.

There is also heartbreak and contemplation—like when a newborn calf doesn't make it. You are staring at a perfectly formed animal but missing the breath of life. These kinds of experiences remind me of Genesis 2:7, where God formed Adam from the dust of the ground and breathed the breath of life into him.

One thing I've realized about myself as I've grown older is that I love to learn. I want to know how things work. We live in a fascinating world made more fascinating because it is ordered and reliable, yet complicated beyond what we fully understand. We understand what causes different weather patterns more than ever, but there are still days when my hay gets "washed" even though it wasn't supposed to rain.

We know when we put a seed in the ground, water it, and expose it to sunlight, it will grow. But we now know it's far more complicated than that. Agronomists at seed companies are studying how corn seedlings sense how close they are to other plants. If we plant corn kernels too close together, the seedlings will orient themselves to shade out their neighbors. But planted the right distance apart, the seedlings orient themselves parallel to their neighbors instead. Corn kernels also sense what the weed pressure is above ground. Just having weeds in the field as the corn seedlings emerge lowers yield potential as the seedlings adjust to the competition.

And then there's the variety and uniqueness of the different logs that I run through my sawmill. What causes one maple tree to have a curly grain, or Birdseye, and not the tree beside it?

I intentionally used the word vocation earlier instead of occupation. An occupation is the regular job, trade, or work that a person does to earn a living. The term vocation taps into the deeper meaning of work, sometimes even used to refer to a divine calling to serve in a specific church vocation.

One of my struggles as I became a young adult and started working off the farm was finding work that mattered. I was doing carpentry while I went to college for a degree in engineering and trying to find the eternal significance in what I was doing and studying. A year at Rosedale Bible College (RBC) helped deepen my faith but didn't answer the question of what I was supposed to do with my life.

> We don't have to be "in ministry" to minister to others.

After RBC, I transferred to Messiah College, where I had an engineering professor named Dr. Vader. Dr. Vader started each class with a short devotional and frequently talked about how to make our occupations into our vocations, our ministries. He taught us about how we can use our relationships, skills, and abilities to help others we connect with. We don't have to be "in ministry" to minister to others. Those insights changed my whole perspective on my career.

What does all that have to do with the store where I sell slabs and lumber, mill wood, and kiln? I meet all kinds of people through our store. It's small, and I'm mainly open by appointment. I started the store for the purpose of making some extra money but also because I like interacting with people.

One day I had a couple walk in, and I sensed that their mood was heavy. They'd reached out ahead of time about some wood I'd advertised. I showed them the wood and asked what they were building. It turned out they were building an urn to hold the ashes of their young adult son who had unexpectedly passed away. They needed some lumber, but more than that, they needed love and compassion and someone to grieve with them. Moments like that humble me and remind me of my higher purpose—my real vocation.

A "salt and light" vocation truly takes many forms as we work in a wide variety of jobs.

Photo credit: *Vaughn Moser*



Vaughn lives in upstate New York with his wife, April, and their four children. He enjoys woodworking, fastpitch softball, and spending time with his family. They attend Naumburg Mennonite Church.



Meet Reach 2026-27!

BY ROSEDALE INTERNATIONAL

On August 29, six young adults descended on the Rosedale International Center (RIC) in Columbus, Ohio, with their families in tow. A small but mighty group, they had arrived at the beginning of their next great adventure: to pursue the call of Jesus on their lives. They were here to begin REACH 2026-27.

The opportunity to serve in another country is often the pull for first-time REACH participants—but the transformational work begins long before they leave the States. REACHers spend the first three months of the program immersed in Discipleship Training School (DTS). Each morning, they participate in educational sessions that cover a multitude of topics, ranging from the spiritual gifts to the authority of Scripture to prayer and fasting.

"The sessions in particular have really been a point of growth for me," reflects Vincent (Team Thailand). "On Tuesday morning, I felt challenged by the Spirit to change something in the way I am living. The session was on intimacy with God. The speaker had us create a chart of the pain we're avoiding and the people who love us. As I wrote down the pain in my life, I realized that I need to give this pain to God and invite Him not only into the broken parts of my life, but also into the places where I feel comfortable and loved."

> "What a beautiful thing to be able to meet them even for a few minutes and hopefully speak life through the Holy Spirit."

Another vital aspect of DTS is the work of building a strong, experienced team. REACHers participate weekly in outreach, not only with the goal of serving local ministries, but also of learning how to serve—and how to work together. By the time they reach Thailand and the Himalayas, each team will have built a strong foundation of teamwork, confidence, and experience in ministry.

Reflecting on a recent prayer challenge in downtown Columbus, Olivia (Thailand Team Leader) shared, "It was intimidating at first to walk up to random people on the street, but it was really encouraging to see how open many people were to being prayed for. As I learned in team leader training: they're all people. People, people, people. Each one has a story. What a beautiful thing to be able to meet them even for a few minutes and hopefully speak life through the Holy Spirit."

After completing discipleship training, the REACH teams will transition to six months of outreach on the field. **Team Thailand** will join the ministry of long-term workers Jacob and Danielle, who have been building relationships and discipling new believers in Bangkok since 2019. After time spent in language school, this group of four will teach English, lead worship, minister to children and refugee families, and seek relationships with locals.

Team Himalayas will work alongside a local believer and his family. The team of two will trek through the mountains with the goal of ministering to local churches and believers in remote villages. During their time in each village, they will teach English, complete service projects, and share the gospel. This year, they may spend a portion of their outreach assisting in flood relief efforts.

"I am confident of two things in this journey," shared Leo (Himalayas Team Leader). "It will be difficult, and it will be good. It is a season of sacrifice, service, and intentionality. It is a time of seeking the Father through the Word, teachings, and relationships with each other. Keep us in your prayers as we spend this season of our lives dedicated to following the Son."

We're excited to see what God has in store for each of this year's participants and invite you to support them through prayer over the next nine months! We encourage you to follow the team blogs to get first-hand insight into what they're learning and experiencing throughout DTS and their overseas assignments. You can find the team blogs at https://rosedaleinternational.org/reach/teams/.

Photo credit: *Diana on Pexels.com*

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.



What is the oldest continuously operating Mennonite congregation in Ohio? It is almost certainly a congregation within Rosedale Network of Churches! The recent wedding of Dorothy Plank and Jonathan Downey at Turkey Run Mennonite Church near Logan, Ohio, included a reminder of this congregation's longevity. While the wedding celebration was happening in the multi-purpose addition, I was drawn aside into the remodeled 1858 sanctuary and gifted with two great artifacts for the Rosedale Network archives—which you can glimpse in this month's *From the Archives.*