



## Update from Barry and Terryll Bruce with The Way Out Ministries

December 2024

### **The Best Gift Ever!**

As we celebrate our 40th year of ministry, we realize that in our partnership together, we have given many tangible gifts to people in need; but none of those gifts can ever shine the smallest light on the sacrificial gift of Love that Jesus has given to all who will call on his name. His love and salvation is the best gift ever, and he is the reason that we can give at all. What a privilege it is to give in Jesus' name!

**The Way Out Philippines (TWOP):** Our holiday season really began October 8 when our first official mission team of 12 visited our base in San Jose, Occidental Mindoro, Philippines. The U.S. team joined forces with our staff and volunteers there to do multiple outreaches, featuring music, drama, evangelism, and food and hygiene distribution. The team also brought a nativity set and Christmas tree to our church and put on an all-day Christmas Kick Off program for many happy children—they celebrate Christmas for four months in the Philippines! Recently our church, The Gathering, also sent 45 Christmas packages to kids there, which included a family food box, a pair of shoes, a blanket and a toy. Read more on TWOP and see videos at [thewayout.org](http://thewayout.org).

**The Way Out USA:** Back on the home front, a series of special outreaches cascaded into our community beginning with a Trunk-R-Treat activity just before Halloween that brought many new kids into our weekly programs. This past Thanksgiving, we partnered once again with the L.A. Mission to provide 50 food boxes to families in need. On Thanksgiving day, our partnership with Supervisor Janice Han's office and The Gathering Church provided about 200 meals to individuals and families in the city of Hawaiian Gardens! At our Christmas Store, mothers, fathers and grandparents selected gifts for their kids and wrapped them. This year, we were able to give over 100 donated gifts to children through this program!

### **Spreading the Joy**

Our weekly programs all had Christmas fiestas, too—beginning with our annual Grace Stop Christmas Party for our homeless friends. We celebrated Jesus with brunch, a sing-along, and Christmas Bingo with prize gift cards to various fast food outlets. Each guest also took home a gift bag with a warm blanket, body spray, lotion, hygiene supplies, and a treat. Joy followed with Christmas parties for our recovery group The Lion's Den, Kid's Club, Zion Youth, Unite Bible study and Beyond Grief.

Our Annual Christmas Concert filled The Way Out Ministries with families, friends, visitors, and joyous Christmas cheer. Ryan and The Gathering Band put on a great show with all the classic songs and brought the true meaning of the season home by giving thanks to the Lord!

Thank you for helping The Way Out Ministries bring Jesus to so many people for 40 years! We wish you and yours a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year—“God bless us...everyone!” (Tiny Tim, A Christmas Carol)



*Celebrating the joy of Christmas in San Jose, Occidental Mindoro, Philippines, with our 2024 mission team.*



*Giving thanks to God by giving to others! Food boxes (left) and Thanksgiving Dinner (right).*



*Above left: Kid's Club celebrates Jesus' birthday; above right: Jesus... the reason for the season.*



*Above left: Our tireless Coordinator of Ministry Affairs, Rachel Perez, enjoys a picture with our friend Karen at the Grace Stop party; above right: The Gathering Band*



### Our Vision

Reach and inspire every community through the transforming hope in Jesus.

### Our Mission

Building experiences to encourage and equip every person for everyday life through Jesus.

[www.riseministries.com](http://www.riseministries.com)

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Dear FIRST REFORMED CHURCH BOYDEN

This year has been filled with extraordinary opportunities and challenges. Yet, our passion to reach and inspire every community through the transforming hope in Jesus has only deepened. Personally, I was reminded again of how joy and grief coexist in faith when I faced a setback with my mobility, breaking my femur in January. Even through this, I know it's time to take back ground in our hearts and minds.

In 2024, our goal was to gather 25,001 people at RiseFest to take back ground the enemy had stolen. As the festival drew near, this vision expanded beyond gathering on the grounds to reclaiming hearts and minds through Jesus' transforming hope. God did incredible things! We set a new record with nearly 24,000 attendees, ending with thousands in worship alongside Phil Wickham—a powerful moment that not only blessed festival-goers but touched the hearts of the artists themselves.

Shortly after, historic floods devastated our region. We partnered with Eight Days of Hope and local churches to bring practical help and hope, as volunteers from across the country served and prayed with affected homeowners. It was a humbling experience of faith in action.

This summer also marked the release of my first book, *Broken Still Chosen: Finding Hope in Jesus When You Feel Unloved, Unseen, or Forgotten*. It's been moving to hear how God is using it to encourage and uplift people across all walks of life.



Here are a few comments from readers:

*"Highly recommend. A story of courage in the face of a debilitating disease. A story of personal growth and increase in faith by a man blessed with a Godly wife who helps her husband journey through a life of adversity. A must read for anyone who has ever asked the question, "Why me, Lord?"*

- Jay

*"Personal, real life wounds salvaged by our great God and turned into an ongoing masterpiece. Rob Roozeboom shares his heart with humor and HOPE, his pain with truth and grit, and lays it all out for us to see that, truly, "God's heroes are those who say yes to Him".*

- Deb

Together, we've witnessed God's impact this year:

- **RiseFest 2024** – A new record of 23,970 attendees
- **Over 1,000 Bibles distributed** and **nearly 500 gospel conversations** at RiseFest
- **Messages of hope** shared through our podcast Enjoying the Journey, as well as our Christmas and Good Friday programs reaching audiences on TV and on-line
- **RISE with Rob & Friends:** A Night of Hope through music and storytelling in partnership with Touch of Hope – Haiti and Rosie's Boutique
  - **6 cities:** Sioux Falls, Sioux City, Sheldon, Pella, Edgerton, & Brainerd
  - **5 artists:** Matt Maher, Patrick Mayberry, Natalie Layne, Micah Tyler, & Emerson Day
- **Speaking engagements** at festivals across the U.S., from New Hampshire to South Dakota

We are committed to pointing even more people to Jesus, and we are deeply grateful for your support. Your investment and prayers have been pivotal in changing lives!

Looking to 2025, we are setting our sights even higher. In the next 3–5 years, we envision inspiring 2.5 million people to take back the ground in their lives, moving from the lies of the enemy to the freedom of God's truths. Together we believe this is possible and have seen the growth in impact over the last three years. We do not carry this alone, we carry it together!

Romans 12:2 reminds us, "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." We're answering that call, and we invite you to join us in impacting even more lives.

Because it matters,



Rob Roozeboom  
Founder & President of RISE Ministries



CHRISTMAS PROGRAM WITH BEN FULLER



RISE WITH ROB & FRIENDS



PHIL WHICKHAM AT RISEFEST 2024



ROB SPEAKING AT ROCK THE PARK







## From the Director

It's a new season. Fall has begun. The horizon looks different, yet beautiful. It's diverse in landscape and design. The days are shortening, and the nights lengthen. It feels different. There is expectation and wonder in the air as we watch the crops become ready to be gathered. The Lord paints the tree line, and we marvel at His creativity and care. As I reflect on the new season of Fall, I also recognize that Whispers of Love, Hope & Joy enters a new season. This past summer we opened our doors to people who lost their home to the ravages of the flood which swept our area. Many lives changed.



Whispers of LHJ was blessed by having ten men and staff from Hope Haven live in our apartments while damage was assessed and next steps determined. As I write this the men will move to their new longer term temporary housing until they can move back to Rock Valley. We are so thankful and wish them God speed as they transition to their new home.

We look forward to welcoming families into the apartments and begin walking with them as we connect them to God, themselves, others and God's good creation while beginning to create new life going forward. We covet your prayers as families who are impacted by domestic violence commit to a new time in their lives which promotes healing, growth and transformation. Are you a God sighting watcher? That takes intentionality and expectation. Sometimes God reveals Himself through unusual ways. Do you remember Balaam? The Angel of God revealed Himself through the talking donkey (Numbers 22). And we cannot forget Moses and the burning bush that was not consumed by fire (Exodus 3). The Bible is full of God sightings, and God still makes Himself visible. I want to share a couple with you! The beauty of the sky at sunset. The confidence of a young gal who sits astride her horse at the end of summer after engaging in equine therapy. Be sure to read her story found in the newsletter. The delay in the arrival of the security system allowed Whispers to be available for providing safe housing to people impacted by the trauma of the flood. God knew what He was doing when multiple delays happened preventing installation of the security system. Good news! The security system is now installed, just in time for new guests coming in October.



As I close out this note, I humbly ask you to continue to remember Whispers of Love, Hope Joy prayerfully and financially. Without you we are unable to serve families as we continue to do the mission God has called us to. Thank you for being on mission with God & Whispers. Donations may be made through our website: [whispersoflhj.com](http://whispersoflhj.com) or by personal check. We are a faith-based non-profit (501 c 3) that stands independent from any other agency. All gifts are tax deductible and a receipt for your 2024 donations will be sent out in January 2025.

With unending joy and gratitude,  
Pastor Deb



This QR code will take you to Whispers of Love, Hope & Joy's Everyday Giving Page.



## Thanksgiving Donations

Several families we serve do not have the resources needed to have a nice Thanksgiving meal.

We are seeking donations of turkeys and hams with all the trimmings to give to our families.

You can drop off your donations at Talitha Koum by calling Pastor Deb to set up a time. 712-441-0049

## Christmas Wish List Project



Please consider adopting a family or individual for Christmas.

We ask each family member to share their needs and wants. Then private individuals, churches, groups, etc shop and wrap the gifts and share a message of care at Christmas time.

Whispers of Love, Hope, & Joy delivers the gifts to the families.

If you are interested in adopting a family call Pastor Deb at 712-441-0049

## Current Wish List

- Non-perishable foods
- Canned Food
- Peanut butter and Jelly
- Rice
- Instant Mash Potatoes
- Cereal
- Baby food and baby snacks



## WE ACCEPT GRAIN DONATIONS

The security system is in! Whisper's healing campus is now ready for women & children affected by domestic abuse to live on campus. May your hearts be moved to donate a % of your crops for this life giving ministry.

## Prayer Requests:

- KR continues working hard to have full custody of her 4-month-old daughter as she strives for sobriety.
- SR has an unexpected major car repair bill.
- AD as she navigates a new job.
- AL as she and her children adjust in becoming familiar with the new area and school.
- J & C and family as they mourn the death of C's father.
- Whispers of LHJ to continue to connect with families.
- Hope Haven men & staff as they transition to their new homes, while waiting to move back to Rock Valley.
- Wisdom for Whispers of LHJ board as they determine which families fit the faith-based program.

## Prayer Praise:

- KR delivered a healthy baby girl who is growing & thriving.
- New connections being made within the community and area.
- A Support group specific to domestic abuse meets weekly.
- New families continue to get connected to Whispers of LHJ.
- Volunteers who give selflessly.



CENTER of HOPE

December 2024

# Center of Hope Newsletter

Sowing Seeds of God's Love...Physically and Spiritually

## Inhaling Patience, Exhaling Kindness by Adam Hofer



### What does love look like in action?

This is a loaded question in today's age because we all have different opinions of what "love" is. Is love an action or a feeling? Is love acceptance and tolerance? Does love mean we turn a blind eye to the sin of others, or is there space for accountability in love? Is living a life of love a life of self-denial? Is love selfish? We all have opinions when pondering these questions. However, our opinions lack foundation if they are not rooted in the Word of God.

One of the most well-known passages about love is 1 Corinthians 13:1-13. The Apostle Paul addressed love because like us, the Corinthian church lacked consistency on what love looked like in practice. Paul's concern for the Corinthian church began several years prior when he visited Corinth for his first time seventeen years after the death and resurrection of Christ. The city started humbly as a Roman settlement of freed slaves. Yet, over time, the city grew quickly and became one of the largest political and trading centers of the Roman empire. Wealth and prosperity grew quickly, which attracted many people of different faiths, cultures, and worldviews. The city formed the reputation of being one of the most corrupt and immoral cities

of the Roman Empire. Due to this reputation, a new word was made "*korinthiazomai*" which meant "to live immorally like a Corinthian." Paul had reason to believe the church in Corinth would mature. Yet, that was not the case. Instead of maturing in the faith, divisions broke out between Christians who believed compromising their Christian beliefs was essential to maintain peace with the overall culture and Christians who believed isolation from the overall culture was essential to preserve the holiness of the church. The tension between these groups of people grew out of control, which endangered the future of the Corinthian church.

Out of his concern for the Corinthian church, Paul wrote 1 Corinthians 13. Verse 4 begins by addressing what love is: patient and kind. Some would argue that patience and kindness are the pillars of love, which I agree with. Yet, the way I think of love is this: **Love is inhaling patience and exhaling kindness.** When we think of patience, we often think of waiting for something. However, in this passage, the Greek word for "patient" is *makrothumeo*, which can be quite literally translated as "long-tempered." In other words, one who is patient is slow to anger. Patience is when you are supposed to get mad, but choose to be understanding instead. Love inhales offenses without exhaling offenses. Instead, love exhales kindness. As patience inhales offenses, kindness exhales gentleness, generosity, and acts of service. Kindness not only desires for people to thrive but actively works for the betterment of others, even one's enemies. People who are kind are good *to* people and *for* people. Their kindness is not based on what others

have done for them, what their spouse have done for them, what their children have done for them, what their employer has done for them, but rather is based on who they are in Christ. Love does not simply feel patient or kind, it intentionally practices patience and kindness. even when it is hard and inconvenient.

After addressing what love is, Paul then goes through the eight do-nots of love. Love does not envy but instead exhales kindness by being content. Love does not boast but instead exhales kindness by using words to lift others up. Love is not proud (Gk. *phusioo* meaning "to be puffed up") but instead exhales kindness by being humble. Love does not dishonor others but instead exhales kindness by being thoughtful and courteous. Love is not self-seeking but instead exhales kindness by being others-focused. Love is not irritable but instead exhales kindness by being self-controlled. Love keeps no records of wrongs but instead exhales kindness by forgiving others of their wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but instead exhales kindness by rejoicing in the truth, a truth that is not found on social media or on TV but is found in the innate Word of God.

So what does love look like in action? Love is inhaling patience and exhaling kindness. Love is an intentional action that we are all called to do, even when it is hard, even when it is inconvenient, even when we don't feel particularly loving towards someone. We are called to love regardless. And no one embodied this love better than our Lord, Jesus Christ, who came as a baby to this unloving, sinful world.

**Have a Merry Christmas!**



## End of the year stats (Jan.—Nov. 15)! We had a great year of service thus far!

Praise God for HIS faithfulness this past year! This past year has been a wonderful, record-breaking year of service at the Center of Hope. In total not including the thousands of people who come into our Care Center each year, we had 5,402 completed services as of November 15, and we have the rest of the year to go! We had 2,055 pastoral counseling sessions (393 increase since last year!), 986 bicycle repairs (186 increase since last year!), 135 Prison Transition Aid backpacks full of resources distributed (new program!), 557 Earn-Your-Way participants (126 increase since last year!), 880 bicycles distributed (111 increase since last year!), over 210 patients in our free clinic for the uninsured, and more! Your contribution to our ministry IS changing lives. All for HIS glory and honor.



### Sharing Christmas 2024

Time to celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, this Christmas season through acts of service! Sign up to volunteer, provide new toys, and/or support the Sharing Christmas program

financially. Join the Center of Hope and The Community Outreach as we care for families this Christmas season in the Sharing Christmas program. If interested, please reach out to Adam Hofer via email at adam@centerofhopesf.org.

### Christmas Celebration Week! Desserts needed!

We will be celebrating Christmas with our guests the week of December 9-12. During the week, we will be offering desserts to our guests as they come in! Partner with us by making or donating desserts for our guests. Please drop off dessert donations at Center of Hope on Monday, December 9. For many of our guests, this is their one and only Christmas celebration. Thank you in advance!



### Let's Connect—Mission Moments, Pulpit Supplies, and MORE!

Out of our gratitude, we want you to know that we value our partnership in ministry. If you are a pastor, elder, or deacon of a church, do not hesitate to reach out to us if you need pulpit supply help or if you want us to update your congregation on what God has been doing at the Center of Hope. We would love to join you for worship! **All for HIS glory and honor.**

### Join Our Team as our Bike Ministry Coordinator!

Our Geared-To-Empower Bike Ministry is in need of a Bike Ministry Coordinator. The ideal candidate would have a passion for both bicycles AND ministry. Their main job duties would include: 1) sharing the Good News of Jesus, 2) recruiting, training, and assisting volunteers, 3) assisting children and adults with bicycle repair, and 4) preparing bicycles for guests. If interested in joining our team, please send Adam Hofer your resume and cover letter via email at adam@centerofhopesf.org.

#### **Mission:**

The Center of Hope exists to walk alongside people, to bring spiritual and physical health, and ultimately to change the community one life at a time.

#### **Vision:**

The Center of Hope encourages and mentors people with the hope of redemption through Jesus Christ. Our focus is holistically addressing physical, emotional, social and spiritual needs of individual that can only come through creating relationship and accountability. We work in partnership with community organizations to engage in a consistent and positive interaction with guests.

#### **Principles:**

1. All people are created in God's image.
2. Self sufficiency
3. Holistic Ministry
4. Reconciliation
5. Partnering to Serve

## **MEMORIAL GIFTS**

*Center of Hope appreciates the gifts In Memory of — Marlene Timmer and Enulene Kroon*

### **Your Gifts SPREADS HOPE:**

**Stock or Commodity Gifts**—Talk to your financial advisor about gifting stocks and commodities to the Center of Hope.

**Make it Double**—Check with your employer to see if they will match your charitable contributions to the Center of Hope.

**Be a Sustainer of Hope**—A monthly gift will bring stability to individuals and families. Give online at: [www.centerofhopesf.org](http://www.centerofhopesf.org)

**In-Kind Gifts**—Clothing, Winter gear, Bicycles, Hygiene items, Backpacks for people transitioning out of prison, encouragement cards/letters, office supplies before donating)

### **Financial Update**

*Fiscal year runs from April to March, for the year 2024-25*

*April—To Date. Income*  
\$271,653.89

*2024-25 Budget Need*  
\$409,672.04

Help us save on postage by receiving your newsletter electronically! Send your email address to [info@centerofhopesf.org](mailto:info@centerofhopesf.org) Also, please let us know if we need to update your mailing address.





*Your generosity is putting smiles on the faces of people in Nicaragua and worldwide!*

## YOU ARE MAKING A WORLDWIDE DIFFERENCE



People are engaged in God's Word



Christians are trained to share God's Word



Churches are planted around the world

## Share the Gospel with a World in Need

Because of your generosity, people around the globe are finding hope in Jesus. Thank you. You're helping people in more than 50 countries to have the Bibles they so desperately crave. Whether it's war, poverty, or persecution, people everywhere are experiencing heartbreak. Yet, believers are persevering. They are spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ in their communities. And you're part of it. Amid such hardships, people are craving the hope of Jesus. The Lord is growing His Church.

Even in some of the most unexpected places, you are equipping Christians to reach their communities with God's Word. Thank you for transforming lives around the world!

## God's Word Transforms Lives and Communities

"When I was a Buddhist, I never had a happy mind. I would always feel an emptiness inside." Hemalatha is a 65-year-old grandmother in central Sri Lanka. About 30 years ago, she discovered the way to fill that void when she and her husband became Christians. She notes, "When we accepted Him, we found peace and happiness."

Ever since, Hemalatha and her husband have faithfully attended a church about four miles from their home. Over the years, her faith has grown deep roots through studying God's Word. Recently, she attended training to become a Bible League Bible study leader.

"My dream is to pass on to my neighbors what I have learned and received," she gently responds. Browsing through the booklet on her lap, Hemalatha adds, "We can take these books and the Bibles and use them to reach out to others. I joined this training because I want to be strong in and through the Word of God. It will help

*Continued on next page*



# God's Word Transforms Lives *(continued)*

me do personal evangelism and explain the Gospel to the people I meet.”

Though Hemalatha has already been sharing the Gospel with her neighbors, she knows Bible League's Bible studies will help her reach even more people in her village. She explains, “Your Bible study materials are so easy to understand! It's a blessing to have this kind of resource. Some people can't buy a Bible because it's expensive. But now, with your program, giving Bibles has become so easy.” Your desire to provide Bibles and training is making a difference in lives like Hemalatha's.

## PRAYER REQUESTS

- Bible League's team in Mozambique recently reintroduced Bible studies in the prison in Boane. Give thanks for the inmates and guards who are taking part in the studies.
- Bible League's ministry director in Venezuela asks for your prayers. A recent nationwide blackout left most of the country without electricity. Bible study training workshops were suspended as a result.
- Pray for the 100 Sunday school teachers in Hong Kong who received training to lead Bible League's Bible studies for children.

## Join Others in Making an Eternal Impact for Christ



*Thank you for helping people in places like Zambia to spread the hope of Jesus.*

When you join hands with the Bible League Volunteer Ambassadors to pray and provide Bibles and training, you bring the hope of Christ to communities worldwide. By God's grace and the power of His Word, each \$5 Bible you provide today has the power to transform a life. A family. A community. And as lives are transformed, God's Church will grow—on a global scale! You will help make disciples around the world, just as Jesus commands. Thank you!

Faithfully serving more than 50 countries worldwide



Serving the under-resourced Church with Bibles and training to transform lives worldwide through God's Word.



**THE WORD  
IN ACTION**  
BIBLE LEAGUE PODCAST

Listen to *The Word in Action*—a podcast about how God's Word is transforming lives around the globe. You'll hear from people who are spreading the hope of Jesus each day. Explore new stories each month of how God is moving in the lives of kids, persecuted believers, church planters, and so many others.

***Subscribe, listen to, and comment on your favorite podcast app, or tune in at: [bibleleague.org/action-podcast](http://bibleleague.org/action-podcast)***



# New Roots Review

December 2024

**Merry Christmas! The Reality is, You are Important, and of Great Value!** by Fred Wilgenburg



**NEW ROOTS  
MINISTRY**

Happy pigs, as depicted by statues at the entrance of Smithfield Foods, where we provide workplace chaplaincy services, are not the reality as thousands of pigs are processed at the plant each day. Same thing with the Christmas lights at the plant's entrance, in keeping up with the neighboring Falls Park's beautiful lights. Those pretty lights cannot disguise the massive old meat factory just beyond. In much the same way, the reality of our society's, and the world's, hurts, and need for good news is not diminished by the lightheartedness of the season. I don't mean to be Mr. Scrooge grumbling, "bah, humbug," to Christmas festivities. Happy pig statues, beautiful lights, and Christmas music, are okay, even good, in entertaining us, and giving us some needed enthusiasm to help and encourage each other.



For churches, Advent and Christmas are for celebrating and proclaiming that God came to be with us in human form, as a humble baby, as Jesus Christ. For individuals, Christmas also includes gift exchanging. May we as churches and Jesus-followers **reclaim our place**, as a Christmas gift to society and the world. What is there to reclaim? Our influence, which is earned by consistent presence, obvious care, respectful reflections on truth, and thoughtful leadership. The reality is that the Church in North America has lost influence and impact. But the reality is also that we represent good news, for which our society and the world crave, and that we worship a peace-giving, redeeming God, who knows and cares about each person, and Who leads the way. Here's another reality: reclaiming our place of influence is done much more by a lot of ordinary people, collectively, than by extraordinary individuals like John the Baptist and the Apostle Paul, for example....

"But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel" (Matthew 2:6). In Bethlehem then, God shone through faithful ones like a young virgin, Mary, and a young carpenter, Joseph, as they bore, and raised, the Messiah, causing Mary to sing, "For he (God) has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed" (Luke 1:48). Some of the first to hear of Jesus' birth were shepherds, as an angel spoke to them: "I bring you good news of great joy" (Luke 2: 10). Eight days later, at the temple, some longsuffering, elderly God-seekers—Simeon and Anna—were blessed beyond their dreams. Seeing Jesus, Simeon praised God: "You now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation" (Luke 2:29-30), and Anna prophesied about Jesus to those looking forward to redemption (Luke 2:38).

The Magi were seekers of God, but they were not of God's people. Still, they became part of the fulfillment —>



Donations are always appreciated!  
Gifts can be given through the mail, or through our website—  
[www.sfnewroots.com/donate/](http://www.sfnewroots.com/donate/)

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(continued...)

of a messianic prophecy found in Daniel 9:24-27. Daniel and many Israelites were in exile, far to the east in Babylon. Daniel described what the angel Gabriel told him: that about 80 years later in 457BC, a decree would be issued for the restoration of Jerusalem, including the temple (Ezra 7). From the time of that decree to the coming of the Anointed One was 434 years, according to vs. 26. That would be near the birth of Jesus, the Messiah. Forty-nine years later, noted in vs. 25, as the time when the Anointed One would “be cut off,” is close to the time of Jesus’ crucifixion.

The Magi were from the area of Babylon, and they would have known of this prophecy of Daniel. Seeing an unusual star over the vicinity of Jerusalem and neighboring Bethlehem caused them to travel hundreds of miles west to see the King of kings (Matthew 2:2).

Obedience, seeking God’s will, patience, and hungry curiosity caused those “ordinary” people to be part of God’s magnificent story.

Again, may we as churches and Jesus-followers reclaim our place of influence, as a Christmas gift to society and the world, and to ourselves; how fulfilling when we are actively part of God’s unfolding story of redemption, not only reading the narrative, but being part of it!

The following are some non-extraordinary ways we have seen this, and have done this. We welcome you to join us, or better yet, may these give you ideas for where you live. My friend, Keo, came to the US from Laos as a refugee. He was a partying, nominal Buddhist in his 20s. He was also musically-inclined. At the time, a Lutheran pastor befriended Keo and asked him if he would help their church improve their music. As a non-believer, he did not lead the worship team, but he played keyboard. His curiosity was sparked by the peoples’ heartfelt prayers and kindness. Over time, the church invited Keo to a spiritual conference, at which time he gave his life to Jesus. He was discipled, he went to ministry training, and he began a church in Sioux City, Iowa, with numerous Laotian and Vietnamese people still attending, most of whom were formerly Buddhist.

We know of many Laotian and Vietnamese in Sioux Falls, yet there has never been a Gospel ministry specifically for them. We are presently seeking to disciple some young men to possibly become leaders. As well, as we were given many Laotian and Vietnamese Bibles, we are giving those out, which are of interest to some who have never read a Bible, and who have little understanding of Buddhism, with which they identify.

Beyond our driver training program, and being chaplains, both of which help us have Gospel-influence, occasional but consistent shopping at stores owned by people of other faiths, also opens doors for friendships, as well as opportunities for prayer and to speak Good News.

May we ordinary Jesus-followers be memorable Christmas gifts to others. The reality is that as we do this collectively, consistently, society senses its need for the Church. **God bless your Holidays and your 2025!**

**What is New Roots Ministry?**  
It’s “a springboard for new Americans & their churches.” This is done through workplace chaplaincy (we provide chaplaincy at Smithfield Foods & we train & place bilingual chaplains on commercial farms), through Timothy Leadership Training, through hosting special educational events, through empowering new American pastors, leaders, and their churches, through offering unique Service Opportunities—serve in, or visit, stores owned by new Americans, then hear their stories, through helping people navigate the American system and achieve their goals, like education, through driver training for new Americans, and through Everyday-Ambassadors Practicum.



## The Greatest Gift

I remember as a child being so excited about the arrival of Christmas. Our family had some unofficial traditions we would do that made the day special in my eyes. The kids would sleep in on Christmas Day and would awaken to the smell of some type of sweet rolls baking in the oven. After breakfast, my dad would build a fire in the fireplace in the living room which is also where the tree and gifts would be. The smell of incense would fill the air as a reminder of the gift of frankincense that was given to Christ by one of the wise men coming from the east. With Christmas music playing on the record player, we would take turns opening gifts one by one until they were opened. Looking back now I appreciate these traditions, but as a child I wanted nothing more than to tear into the gifts situated around the tree. There was only one thing that could detract from that joy—receiving clothes. Getting a new transformer, or a brand-new big wheel was as exciting as it gets. Receiving socks and underwear had the potential to throw some of that excitement right out the window. As a parent I understand why this would be, but at the time the thought of opening a package of underwear in front of others seemed like an inadvertent punishment. These days I can appreciate fully a gift of clothes that I know I'll need in the next coming year.

A few weeks ago, I attended the funeral of a godly woman who had recently gone on to be with the Lord. I knew her from her selfless work in the local nursing home from the previous church I had served. She and her husband would assist in the worship services at the home for the residents by helping them get to their seats, assist in passing out bulletins or hymn books, greeting people with a smile as they came in the door, and even help by playing piano for the congregational singing. She truly had a ministry to the people there and in many other ways in that community. It just so happens that her son was a former inmate at Mike Durfee State Prison. At the funeral service there were many former inmates who had come to support their friend in his time of grief. As I was looking around the room, I noticed something in that sanctuary that day—I was not able to tell the difference between former inmates and others who came to celebrate her life. The typical white t-shirt and khaki pants with inmate written on the side were not worn that day. From suits to street clothes, it was impossible to tell the difference without previous knowledge of their lives before entering the room. I believe this is an illustration to the spiritual realities many have experienced through an encounter with Christ.

This Christmas I am reminded that the greatest gift God has given us is new clothes. What the brothers at Living Stone Prison Church long for is to cast off the constraints of their former lives, and to recognize newness in the life they now have in Christ. Isaiah 61:10 says, "I will greatly rejoice in the LORD; my soul shall exult in my God, for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels." There are many challenges and blessings in any kind of ministry God has called us to, but one of the greatest blessings is to see brothers shed their former clothes of the sinful nature: addictions, selfishness, faithlessness, despair, immorality of all kinds, and to put on for the first time the clothes of Christ's righteousness which he freely gives. As a child I despised receiving new clothes. In this season of my life I am reminded that this is the very reason we exist—to give God glory through inviting people to transformation in Christ. This truly is the greatest gift ever given to humanity.

I want to thank you all for having a vital role in offering your prayers, your financial gifts, your presence inside with the brothers at Living Stone Prison Church, and your presence outside with the brothers and sister at Freedom's Gate Church. From our staff to you and your family we pray you have a blessed Christmas and a blessed New Year.

Pastor Dan Ebbens,  
Living Stone Prison Church, Springfield, SD



Greetings friends,

The Christmas season carries with it many things that traditionally pop up in December. One of ways in which we know that we are getting close are the movies that are frequently played as the 25<sup>th</sup> approaches. Of course, many of them feature a bearded guy in a red suit or a shiny, red-nosed reindeer, but there are some out there that get closer to the heart of Christmas and the Christ child who came one starry night.

I got to thinking this year about a Christmas show I'd watched as a kid that tugged at my emotions whenever I saw it. The 48-minute tale is based on a book by the same name and is called "The Best Christmas Pageant Ever". It's currently free on YouTube. (There is a new version in movie form in theatres that I haven't seen yet.) This story is about 6 kids from a broken family (The Herdmans) who hijacked the local church's Christmas play because no one dared to challenge them for the lead parts. When the Herdmans first came to church they took money out of the offering plate, scribbled in the Bibles and stuck gum all over the pews. They were known by their neighbors for their rowdy and rebellious behavior, including cigar smoking, cussing, drinking jug wine, and shoplifting. Their mother was overworked and overwhelmed and their father had jumped on a train many years before and had never been heard from again. Some of the townsfolk said the kids were headed straight to the Devil by way of the State Penitentiary!

As I watched it again, decades removed from my last viewing, I found myself stirred once more emotionally as the story proceeded and as the Herdman kids began to understand what the Christmas pageant was about. When they were first introduced to the story of Jesus birth, the rough siblings wanted to rewrite it. They wanted Joseph to gang up with the shepherds and go take out King Herod. They also wanted to rename the play "Revenge at Bethlehem".

I can't help but connect the narrative of the show with Freedom's Gate Church. You see, as it pertains to Biblical understanding; a person doesn't know what they don't know. We have many that come to us with little to no understanding of what the Bible teaches about who Jesus is and what that means to their life. Thankfully, they don't normally try to rewrite the biblical narrative. Most really want to know what God's Word says and we are happy to provide those answers through preaching, teaching, and answering oodles of questions. It can be a tiring task at times but well worth it! When we have someone come to us and say something like, "I get it now, I understand why Jesus came, I want to be baptized", we are encouraged to press on.

At the end of the Christmas Pageant, Imogene Herdman, who had played Mary, was weeping as she held the baby Jesus doll. Her tears were authentic and joyful as she understood for the first time the love God displayed in sending His Son to the world. This is the same love we want the people God sends our way to understand. Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given, and still today the message the Angel gave the shepherds is changing lives and giving new hope to many who grew up in chaos (like the Herdman kids) and replacing it with peace.

Merry Christmas - Pastor Jason and Ruth Wiersma, Freedom's Gate Church



Romans 10:14 -How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in?  
And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard?  
And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?



MERRY

*Christmas*

LIVING STONE  
PRISON CHURCH  
Pastor Dan & Natalie Ebbens

FREEDOM'S GATE  
CHURCH  
Pastor Jason & Ruth Wiersma