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Together

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REDEEMED LOVE

How God's grace carries couples through all seasons of life



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TEN YEARS TOGETHER

Looking Back at Our History & Looking Forward to What
the Future Holds

By Eric Huffman, Lead Pastor of The Story

Photo from 2016

The Story began on Sunday, February 22, 2015, in the gymnasium of St. Luke's Methodist Church. Geovanna and I were thirty-six years old, and our kids - who are now giant and (mostly) self-reliant teens - were just seven and five. The worship band - which we had "borrowed" from another church because we didn't have one of our own yet - played "How Great Thou Art," and the four hundred or so people there sang with all their hearts.

Shaking with adrenaline and nerves, I stood to deliver The Story's inaugural message about Cain and The Prodigal Son, which began with these words: "It breaks my heart when people walk away from God or the Church because they have questions that Christians aren't willing to deal with."

Mine wasn't the only heart that was broken for skeptics who have been led to believe that their questions are unwelcome among God and His people. From day one, The Story has drawn doubters (and the believers who love them) in droves because of our God-given mission to **inspire non-religious people to follow Jesus.**

"Non-religious" is the fastest-growing segment of religious identity in America. In 2024, around thirty percent of Americans identified as non-religious (up from only twenty-two percent a decade ago). For reference, 20% of Americans are Catholic. And 8% belong to other faiths like Islam and Judaism. This means there are more nonreligious people living among us than Catholics, Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, and Hindus combined.

In major urban centers like Houston, the number of non-religious people is even greater. More and more people - especially young people - do not trust organized religion as a source of Truth and virtue. They question religious teachers and doctrines. They doubt the legitimacy of the Bible. They believe political identity and social activism to be superior means to their desired ends.

This might seem like bad news for Christianity in America, and in some ways, it is. But there is also good news for those who question organized religion: they are in good company - the best company, actually - because Jesus was skeptical of religion and religious leaders, too. He was suspicious of priests and hypocrites,

too. He always welcomed people's questions. He asked a bunch of questions, too. And most importantly, he never told anyone to become more religious. He simply invited them to follow him.

And for the past decade, we've sought to do the same by inviting tens of thousands

of people to follow Jesus - not only through worship and our many discipleship ministries, but also through outreach efforts like the Maybe God Podcast and its fast-growing YouTube channel, as well as the work of our Strategic Partners such as Jubilee Prison Ministries, Loaves & Fishes, and GO Ministries in the Dominican Republic.

God has also used The Story to impact hundreds of lives through the very successful launch of our Timbergrove Campus. Under the leadership of Pastor Kale Kinchen, that new community has grown deep and wide, making disciples

**"It breaks my heart
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daily and meeting their neighborhood's needs with ministries like the new Mothers' Day Out program, among many others. I'm particularly proud of how their worship experience has evolved: instead of just watching a livestream of my sermons, Pastor Kale and others have been preaching live every Sunday for months, and the church is growing faster than it ever has!

By God's grace, we've witnessed more than five hundred baptisms and over a thousand professions of faith in our first ten years, and we have every reason to believe that the best is yet to come. After calling five different buildings "home" in our first nine years, God blessed us with an extraordinary, beautiful new headquarters in 2024. Along with the new facilities, we also acquired a very successful Christian preschool called Bethany Christian School that reaches and serves hundreds of local families every year.

Now is the time to dream. We're dreaming about a future where the preschool is expanded, and new, Christ-centered educational opportunities for older children and adults are offered on this campus as well. We're also dreaming about the possibilities of raising, equipping, and sending more leaders than ever, leading a movement of discipleship and prayer that spreads throughout the city, and planting more new churches that reach more people in more places with the grace and truth of Jesus.

When I look at all that God has done since February 22, 2015, I can only imagine what He will do over the next ten years. Looking back, it truly was our collective heartbreak for the prodigals - the lost, the skeptics, and those who ask questions - that was the spark that lit the flame. And it was the Holy Spirit who fanned that flame into a wildfire that reached thousands. May the holy fire of God continue to burn in our hearts, and may His fire continue to spread for many decades to come. ■





REDEEMED LOVE

How One Couple's Marriage was Saved by Confession & Grace

By Dilan Braddock, Discipleship Pastor and Kathryn Brough, Communications Director

Josh is a third generation Houstonian who dreamed of seeing the world. He graduated from Texas A&M in 2011, and following the path of many Houstonians, he went to work in Oil & Gas. Josh immediately found himself working in Chad, the heart of Africa.

Josh was working a rotating schedule, spending three weeks in Chad and working 14 to 16 hours every day, seven days a week. He would then come back home to Houston for three weeks off where his only goal was to “play, have fun, and party”. It was during one of these off-periods that he was out celebrating his 23rd birthday when he ran into a friend he'd known from college: Megan. Throughout college, they had been in the same friend group, but were always dating different people.

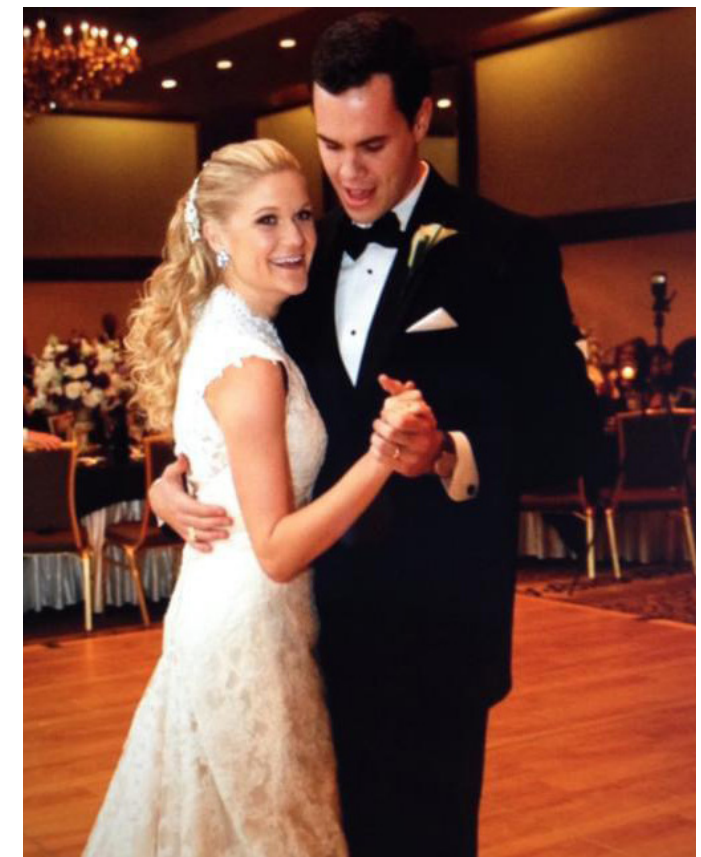
“I saw her at a bar, and I turned to her and I said, ‘Oh, hey, where's your boyfriend?’ She said they broke up, and I looked at her and I said, ‘Oh, I'm so sorry. What are you doing tomorrow night?’ And the rest is history.”

Shortly after they started dating, Josh's company moved him overseas, first to London and then to South Korea. On his 24th birthday, a year after he had re-connected with Megan, the company asked him to move to Nigeria.

“I told my boss that I'd go, but only if I could bring a partner. And he responded, ‘You better go buy a ring.’” On February 1, 2014, Josh and Megan got married. On March 3, just 32 days later, they were on a one-way flight to Lagos, Nigeria for the first three years of their marriage.

“I always make this joke - when you move overseas, you don't get to pick your friends. The company picks them for you. When you are in a big city like Houston, you can surround yourself with good influences and you can identify some people that may not necessarily be the best influences. However, when you're an expat and living in a compound, you find yourself surrounded by people that you work, live, play and hang out with all the time. Sort of like roommates. Some of those people are Christian influences, and others are not of the faith. I learned the hard way.”

Josh got caught up in the scene. He was partying all the time and pursuing ungodly things. He started to lose his faith and lose his way. Megan, on the other hand, remained his biggest cheerleader, willing to go anywhere and do anything. She was plugged in with a Bible study group every place they moved - from Nigeria for three years, to Russia for four,



Josh and Megan at their wedding reception

and India for another three. But Josh continued to feel apart from God.

“I got caught up by Satan, and I ended up having multiple affairs throughout those different countries, all the way from being engaged to Megan, through marrying her, and moving her overseas. I was watching porn, pursuing sex. I just always opened the door for Satan and pursued personal pleasure.”

On Thanksgiving 2022, Megan discovered one of these affairs, eight years into their marriage. Shocked from the news, and trying to process it all, she thought the best thing to do was to make plans to leave their home in India. Two days later, a very shame-filled Josh was sitting on the edge of the bed in their guest room while Megan was broken on the floor crying over their failed marriage.



Josh & Megan's ReEngage group, including their leaders, Scot and Gina Luther

Megan recounted, "For days, anger and rage filled my heart as I tried to process why this happened and how I was going to move past this. It felt like my entire world had shattered. I felt heartbroken and exposed. As I was crying on the floor, broken, devastated, and filled with anger, a wave of peace, greater than I've ever known, surrounded me. It was powerful, yet serene. A peace that filled every hole in my grieving heart, a peace that blanketed me in my devastation, that provided me with the stability that I desperately needed. It was the Holy Spirit."

Megan shared that in that moment all of the anger, anguish, and heartbreak she had been experiencing immediately left her body. "It was like I could see Josh's soul and in that moment. God used me to say to Josh, 'You are so lost aren't you? You need help. I love you.' I had the strength of a thousand at that moment. I

knew this was bigger than my heartbreak, my agony, my desperation. This was love. I felt pure, endless, overwhelming love. And I knew that was God. Both of us needed comfort, but in different ways. God provided everything we both needed at the same time."

When Megan asked Josh if he was lost, he replied, "yes." And Megan stayed. She immediately poured love into him and as Josh puts it, "saved him".

Megan wanted full disclosure. Josh, still feeling far from God, withheld the full story from her. He was ashamed, embarrassed and scared that things would fall apart if she knew the full scope of his infidelity. But he worked with her to change things. He stopped drinking. They started praying and doing Bible study together every single day. They remotely attended marriage counseling, something Josh calls

"a tool for maintenance, not just to be used in duress". Megan had charted out a path for recovering their relationship.

"Megan and I flipped the script and we made a conscious decision to remove all negative influences from our lives. I put in a formal request with my company that I wanted and needed to move back to Houston. In October 2023, we moved back to the United States and within one month of landing, we were at The Story."

Josh found himself suddenly struggling with depression. He didn't know how to live in the USA as an "American". He felt like he needed to grow up and find himself apart from the career he had. But mostly he knew that holding back the entire story from Megan was slowly killing him. They were butting heads all the time, and they knew they needed outside support. After Megan did some online research, they decided to attend the Affair Recovery Emergency Marriage Seminar, a Christian-based weekend retreat in the Hill Country of Austin, run by counselors who have been either the wayward or betrayed spouse.

"During that weekend they tell you straight up, 'Your marriage isn't going to last if you're withholding information.' And they don't say it just once. They say it multiple times, clearly, openly and honestly. I thought I could take my full story to the grave. Yet again, I was wrong."

Four months after that retreat, on Christmas Eve 2024, Josh finally came clean. He wrote down every infidelity on a piece of paper and walked Megan through every affair he had in their 11 years together, from their first months

dating, until she discovered the final affair in 2022. Megan didn't run away. "She sees me and she loves me. The only way she does that is through Christ."

Josh and Megan continue to put in the work.

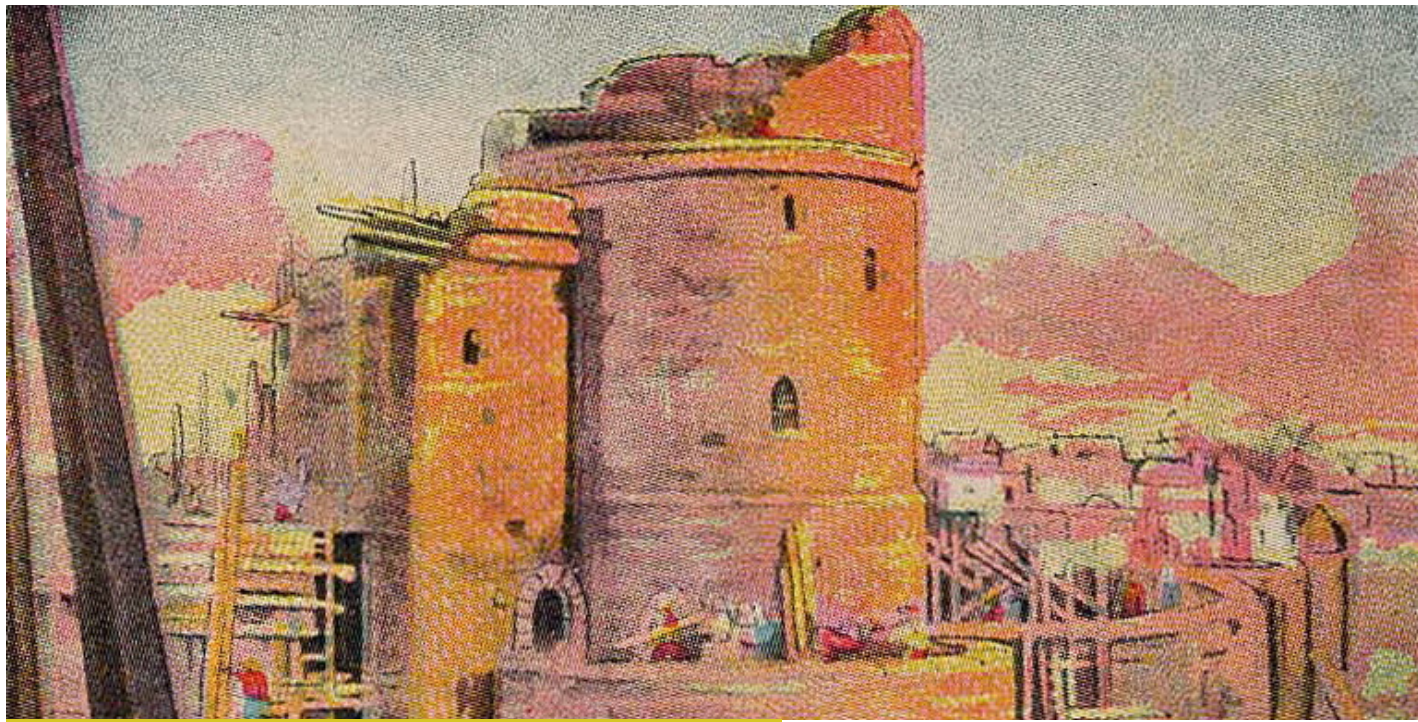
"She sees me and she loves me. The only way she does that is through Christ."

They still regularly meet with a Christian marriage counselor who they found through the Maybe God podcast. They also continue to meet weekly with their affair recovery support

group, who are all inspirational and working towards a strong Christian marriage. Josh and Megan also participated in The Story's ReEngage Marriage Class in 2024, mentored by Gina and Scot Luther. That mentorship has deepened as the Luthers welcome Josh, Megan, and other couples into their home every month for continued guidance and a course called "Love and Respect", a second step to ReEngage.

"Nobody's perfect. And until you actually get into the weeds and meet other couples that have been successful in their marriage, it's hard to realize that everybody goes through stuff. Scot and Gina - they were surrounded by strong Christian influences throughout their marriage, and they're now paying it forward and doing it for the next generation."

Josh says that the journey of affair recovery has been a time commitment that is well worth it. God is still helping them to work in their marriage, and Josh and Megan are eager to continue sharing their story with other couples through ReEngage and in other ways for the years to come. They know that God will use their story of forgiveness and redemption to save other couples in similar situations. ■



RESTORING THE RUINS:

Rebuilding Your Life When Things Fall Apart

By Eric Huffman, Lead Pastor of The Story

They say that life is what happens when you're busy making plans. One day you're working hard, getting ahead, falling in love, raising a family, going to church, doing your best, and then - BAM!

You lose your job. Or you can't get pregnant. Or your marriage is on the rocks. Or someone you love gets sick. Or you have cancer. Or your kid has an addiction. Or your home is destroyed by a hurricane. Or a close friend dies unexpectedly.

And all of a sudden, the life you spent years so carefully constructing comes crashing down around you. Standing amid the ruins of your once-proud walls of progress and success, nothing makes any sense.

You're not alone. Most everyone stands among the ruins at some point in their lives. It's not a matter of if, but when. And more importantly, it's a matter of what then? When life as you know it falls apart, what will be your rebuilding plan?

As a pastor, I've had the honor of walking with people through some of the most unforeseen, earth-shaking seasons of their lives, and the truth is that some people are better equipped than others to navigate turbulent times. Having observed those who've managed to survive and even thrive in adversity, I'd like to share some of their most effective habits and disciplines in hopes of helping you rebuild after the next unpleasant surprise leaves your well-planned life in ruins.

Step One: You Need a Vision

When things fall apart, people often think they don't have what it takes to rebuild. They don't feel strong enough, smart enough, rich enough, or young enough to piece their lives back together. But rebuilding the ruins doesn't require you to be fit, or a genius, or wealthy or young. All it takes is two things: a vision, and the will to see it through.

Proverbs 29:18 says "Where there is no vision, people perish." Having a vision is a matter of life and death, but don't let that idea intimidate you.

Visions are often uncomplicated things; in fact, when it comes to a vision for rebuilding your life, the less complicated it is, the better!

I define a vision as a *mental image of a preferred future*. For Christians, a better definition of a vision would be a *mental image of **God's** preferred future* for your life.

In the mid-400s BC, a Hebrew man named Nehemiah was living in Persia, working as the cupbearer for King Artaxerxes. Meanwhile, unbeknownst to Nehemiah, his family's motherland - Jerusalem - had lain in ruins for over a century after being leveled by Babylon's

army. When some of Nehemiah's friends returned to Persia following their pilgrimage to Israel, they told him about the sad state of the Holy City:

They said to me, "Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire." - Nehemiah 1:3

Nehemiah was distraught. What could he do? He had no money, he lived hundreds of miles away, and - most importantly - he wasn't exactly a master builder. He held a cup for a living!

Nevertheless, Nehemiah had a vision. He envisioned himself going home and leading the effort to restore the city's ruins. And with the king's blessing, that is precisely what he set out to do.

The best visions are always simple, clear, and doable.

Catching a vision isn't as complicated as it may seem. The best visions are always simple, clear, and doable. Nehemiah, for instance,

didn't set out to rebuild all of Israel, or even all of Jerusalem. He simply saw himself restoring the city's walls.

If some part of your life is in ruins, don't get overwhelmed by everything that you could do. Focus instead on one thing that you can do. The first questions to ask once the storm has passed are, "What does God's preferred future for my life look like? What is a vision that I can claim and commit to?"

Step Two: Take Your Time

When part of your life is in ruins, the worst thing you can do is nothing, but the next worst

thing you can do is to act impulsively. A sense of urgency can be a good thing, but not when it leads us to react at the cost of wisdom and well-being. In fact, it's precisely when your need to rebuild seems most urgent that learning to take your time becomes mission-critical.

Four or five months passed between the day that Nehemiah heard about Jerusalem's fallen state and his decision to ask the Persian king's permission to do something about it. What did Nehemiah do for four or five months? We don't have to guess:

"When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven." - Nehemiah 1:4

Even though the thought of Jerusalem's walls lying in ruins broke Nehemiah's heart, he refused to act on impulse. Instead, he spent weeks and months in prayer, seeking the Lord's will. And once he finally went to the king and received his blessing - along with all the building materials he would need to complete the project - Nehemiah finally made his way to Jerusalem.

But what's interesting is that, after reaching his destination, Nehemiah still took his time. Instead of getting right to work, he stayed in town for three full days (Nehemiah 2:11), resting, praying, and regaining his strength.

When something in your life needs to be rebuilt - a relationship, a career, or your reputation - don't rush into it. Stop and rest. Wait and pray. Take a few days to seek the Lord's will. If you do, when the time comes to get to work, you'll be ready.

Step Three: Rally the Troops

Restoration is a team sport. Try to go it alone, and you'll probably burn out. Keep the people closest to you at arm's length, and you're likely to burn bridges. Rebuilding well requires you to loop others in by informing, inspiring, and encouraging them to help you do the work.

When the time came to begin rebuilding Jerusalem's walls, Nehemiah gathered some men for his Braveheart moment. Remember Mel Gibson's iconic speech in which he said, "They may take our lives, but they can never take our freedom!" Nehemiah's speech, by comparison, lacked William Wallace's charisma:

Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace." I also told them about the gracious hand of my God on me and what the king had said to me. They replied, "Let us start rebuilding." So they began this good work. - Nehemiah 2:17-18

Keep in mind, this was the most important moment in Nehemiah's life, and the most important speech in Jerusalem since the days of King Solomon. Which begs the question: why in the world would he start this speech by saying, "You guys, we're in big trouble. Look at these ruins. Look at these ashes. We're a disgrace." Didn't they know that already? Didn't they have to look at those ruins every day of their lives? Was Nehemiah just being mean when he reminded them what a disgrace they allowed their holy city to become?

No, he was simply telling them the truth. Rebuilding the ruins requires you to see your present situation as it is, not as you wish it was, and not as you hope it will be one day. But as

it is - even if it's unpleasant, inconvenient, or seemingly impossible. When you tell other people the truth about the ruins, they are more likely to rally to the cause of restoration.

I think Nehemiah's big speech was subtly genius. In just two sentences, he informed his friends of the dire situation (You see the trouble we're in), he inspired them with a clear vision (Let's rebuild the wall), and he offered encouragement by reminding them how rewarding it will be to complete the task (Then we will no longer be in disgrace).

If and when you find yourself digging out of a mess - whether or not it's a mess of your own making - it's important to be straightforward and honest with the people who can help you clean it up. Once you've informed them of the situation, your job will be to inspire them with a clear and simple vision and to give encouragement by reminding them of how sweet it will be when the job is done.

Step Four: Get to Work

Now the work begins. Whatever you're rebuilding - a relationship, your career, your reputation, your sobriety, or something else - get after it. I love how the people around Nehemiah responded immediately to his speech:

They replied, "Let us start rebuilding." So they began this good work. - Nehemiah 2:18

At this stage of the process, you need to be aware that you'll face opposition and setbacks. Nehemiah had enemies who did not want to see Jerusalem's wall restored. They threatened to attack him and his fellow builders in hopes of halting the process. But Nehemiah never flinched. Instead, whenever his team was hesitant and afraid, he ordered some of them

to stand guard along the wall while others continued to work. Fueled by this added sense of security, the work continued:

So we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height, for the people worked with all their heart. - Nehemiah 4:16

Pushing through adversity makes all the difference. Many people attempt to restore the ruins of their lives, but when trouble comes, they lose focus and heart. No doubt Nehemiah's preparation to overcome his detractors had something to do with the time that he spent in prayer before the rebuilding began.

At one point, as their opposition was at its peak, Nehemiah even ordered his men to work with shovels in one hand and swords in the other (Nehemiah 4:16-18). This is a good reminder that rebuilding your life won't come easy. You'll need a shovel to rebuild the wall and a sword to rebuff the enemy.

Rebuilding the ruins of your life won't be easy, but it will be worth it. The best news of all is that you won't be alone in the fight because God will be right there with you. So if there is a part of your life that needs to be restored, don't ignore it and don't hesitate to address it. Ask God for a vision, take time to rest and pray, invite and encourage others to help you, and then get to work, pushing through every opposition. ■



FEED MY SHEEP

The Loaves & Fishes Soup Kitchen meets the physical and spiritual needs of Houston's homeless population

By Kathryn Brough, Communications Director



By 10am, the line wraps around the block at 2009 Congress St. in Houston's East Downtown district, just a short walk away from where the Astros play. This line forms - rain or shine, hot or cold, all year round - at the Loaves & Fishes Soup Kitchen where once a month a team from The Story arrives to prepare and serve a warm, nutritious meal to our homeless neighbors.

"We serve lunches Tuesday through Saturday," shares head chef, Richard. He's been leading the kitchen daily since 2022. "On Mondays, we clean and reset for the week ahead. One church in the area serves breakfast on Sunday mornings from our dining area."

Loaves & Fishes has been operating since 1972 under the umbrella of Magnificat Houses, a Christian assistance ministry. Every day over 400 home-cooked meals are prepared and distributed by volunteer teams from all over the greater Houston area. To date they've

served over 10 million meals to our city's most vulnerable.

"In Matthew 25:40 Jesus says 'when you do it for the least of these you do it for me'. That's a commandment for what he wants us to do," shares Story Partner Molly Marks. "Part of our serving the Lord is to be available in circumstances that might not be the most convenient or most comfortable, but it's like you are serving the Lord himself when you are serving the homeless."

The Story first connected with Loaves & Fishes in 2022 when we discovered they had a need to fill: they were low on help for the last Tuesday of each month. Just a few weeks later, the first team from The Story arrived at their doorstep.

"Everyone needs to find a place that they can go and feel like they're touching the lives and hearts of other people. And in return your own



heart is touched by your service,” shares Lois. “Loaves and Fishes does that for me.”

Other volunteers have felt the same way as Lois. Molly Marks describes it as “a calling the Lord wants you to do” that goes beyond just serving food.

“We live in a bubble and you pass by homeless people on the street corners, but to get to know them and to recognize their faces and know a little bit about their stories, it makes you realize that the Lord created them and they are made in his image just like the rest of us,” said Molly. “Whatever brought them to their current situation, they still deserve to be treated just like everyone else. I treat them like I would if they were in my home because that’s what they deserve.”

A warm meal. Human connection. The light of Jesus. Each person who walks through the lunch line receives these and much more. Every month, the bridge between “us and them” closes a little bit more as dozens of volunteers from The Story greet each guest and pray with them.

“I was out on the patio with a pitcher and was refilling water and it was the first day that they called me by name,” Lois Wright shares with teary eyes. “Even though I only go once a month they remembered who I was and appreciated what I was doing. I love it and it makes me feel like I’m serving the Kingdom in some small way.”

To learn more about serving with Loaves & Fishes, visit thestory.church/serve ■



“I treat them like I would if they were in my home because that’s what they deserve.”



BREAKING CHAINS & BARRIERS

How Jubilee Prison Ministry is Redeeming Lives through Jesus

By Kathryn Brough, Communications Director

“I was on my way to leave and my mom said, ‘When you go to Texas, you’re going to go to prison.’ And six months later, I was behind bars.”

Kenyard White grew up in a large Haitian family - ten boys, three girls - in New York City. His mom was a Christian, and his father a Five-Percenter, a branch of Islam. Kenyard loved school and learning, and from a young age, found himself drawn towards a Catholic education.

“They were doing different things - they were going on retreats and learning how to start fires, they were learning how to act,” shares Kenyard. “I wanted to be part of that community. It’s what kept me in school.”

Kenyard loved being an academic and didn’t care that he wasn’t a “popular” kid. He went on to graduate from college shortly before deciding he wanted to get away from New York City. He made the move to Texas in 2002, and a few months later, found himself in a county

jail cell. By 2003, he was transferred to his first state prison.

“My mom used to fly down to come see me,” shares Kenyard. His mother had heart issues, likely coronary artery disease, and always wore a nitroglycerin tablet in a necklace around her neck. On a particular visit in July 2007, he noticed something was off. “I immediately noticed it was missing and she said she had left it at home in New York. I got upset with her for not having it and leaving it behind.”

That same day as she left, she collapsed in the airport. “She died a month later in the hospital. And my life got dark.”

His father and brothers blamed Kenyard for her untimely death; they believed she’d still be alive if he hadn’t gone to prison.. His father wanted nothing to do with him and often told Kenyard how much he despised him.

“I asked the guards to put me in lock up,” said Kenyard. “I had so much frustration inside of me and got into 20 fights in two months.” The guards - for the safety of Kenyard and other inmates - honored that request, and put him into an isolated cell. But his grief caught up with him.

“I was so tired. I didn’t want to keep doing this all on my own. I didn’t have my mom. I believed that God hated me. My brothers constantly threatened to hurt me.” Kenyard, in the confines of his solitary cell, placed a chair in the middle of the room, tied a sheet around his neck and attempted to end his life.

“I was about to push the chair aside and God

came to me in the voice of my mother. I heard her say, ‘What are you doing? Get down and get these eggs.’ I told her how tired I was, but she repeated it. Here’s the thing - my mom’s eggs were my favorite thing in the world to eat. I would stop anything to eat her eggs.”

Kenyard removed the knotted sheet from around his neck. As he stepped down from the chair, the slot in his door opened and in slid his breakfast: a plate of scrambled eggs, just how his mom made them. “That’s when my faith was renewed. God wasn’t done with me yet.”

Kenyard went on to spend another 17 years in Texas state prisons, a total of 20 years for his sentence. His last stay was in Stringfellow, where he had the opportunity to attend a

Jubilee Prison Ministry weekend just a few months before making parole. That’s when he met multiple men from The Story - Jim Lawnin, Martin Giescecke, Eric Wood, and Todd Boring.

It was Todd’s first time serving with Jubilee, and after six hours on the first

of three long days, he was ready to leave. He questioned why he was even there and struggled to relate to the inmates at his table. But on the second day, it was Todd’s turn to share his testimony with the entire group.

“I really poured my heart out in this talk and it was really personal for me,” shares Todd. “I was really struggling at the time with having meaning in my life, asking things like ‘why am I here?’” Todd told the men about his inability to have children with his wife Shondra and the deep pain that had caused them. After being prayed over by a team of inmates called the “Stewards” - previous participants in Jubilee

“I was about to push the chair aside and God came to me in the voice of my mother. That’s when my faith was renewed. God wasn’t done with me yet.”

who now get to serve their peers throughout the weekend - he was intercepted by Kenyard, who told him “I’ll be your adopted son.”

Todd’s talk had unexpectedly brought Kenyard to tears. He felt like he was having an out-of-body experience and couldn’t find the words to describe his tears to the men around him.

“After that hug and that conversation, it was almost like God was aligning us together. We didn’t need to do anything. He was my dad.”

Kenyard’s biological father passed away from stage four cancer in 2016. Up until his death, his father wouldn’t talk to him, calling Kenyard a “disgrace to the family”. His father tried calling him once to share the news, but Kenyard didn’t find out about the cancer until after his father passed away.

“I didn’t answer his call. It’s one of the things I will always regret. I never got to tell him that I still love him and to hear what he wanted to tell me.”

But here was Todd, standing in front of him. Months later, Kenyard was released from prison, and through a series of miracles and answered prayers, found himself hitching a ride with Martin (whom he had met at the Jubilee weekend) to the church he called home - The Story. As they crossed the parking lot, Kenyard saw Todd entering with his wife. “I didn’t even know he went to The Story Church,” says Kenyard. “I turned to Martin and said, ‘That’s my dad right there.’”

Over the past year, the four Story men he met at Jubilee have taken care of Kenyard. They’ve taken him to doctors appointments, helped

him furnish his home, offered advice on what TV or washer and dryer to purchase. They’ve encouraged him to apply for jobs and offered rides. No matter what his questions or needs are, they are there to help.

Todd and Kenyard both describe the other as their “best friend”. They talk constantly about life and their faith, and go out for pizza and rock climbing. “I think God knew I needed to kind of get outside of myself,” says Todd. “It was an unexpected relationship for sure.”

Every week, Todd or Martin pick him up for church, where Kenyard is part of a Sunday morning class at 9:45. At 11, you’ll find him worshipping in the front row with his new family.

“Jubilee healed me,” shares Kenyard. “And that’s different from just loving someone. It’s different than being brought some food and offered a handshake. Where I thought I would have been stuck like most returning inmates that come out of prison, I had a family. That’s the reason why I’m so vibrant when I see people. Because truthfully, that is really me. I just suppressed it for years. And I thank God for restoration because he brought it all back to me.”

The Story’s relationship with Jubilee Prison Ministry started about nine years ago, shortly after The Story launched. Reynolds Lawnin - the son of Jim and Ann Lawnin, two longtime faithful volunteers at both The Story and Jubilee - met with Pastor Eric in a Montrose coffee shop to pitch the idea of sending volunteers to an upcoming weekend. Eric didn’t need a pitch; he was immediately on board. Just a few weeks later a team of men from The Story was on its way to serve in a state jail for the first time.

“When I thought I would have been stuck like most returning inmates that come out of prison, instead I had a family.”



Kenyard is part of a Sunday Morning Group at The Story, led by Jason & Rebecca King, sitting to his right

Over the years, an estimated 70 participants from The Story have served in dozens of weekends in at least six different prisons. As the ministry grows into more locations and more weekends available to inmates, the need for new volunteers continues to grow.

Kelly McCall arrived at The Story in 2023. Later, while looking for ways to serve the community, she discovered Jubilee and volunteered for the first time during a weekend in early 2025.

“I had no idea what I was getting myself into, and it was very overwhelming for me,” Kelly shares about her recent experience. “I felt I was under spiritual attack. The enemy kept telling me, ‘You’re not good enough. You’re not a good public speaker. You can’t even write a birthday card, let alone 36 cards to women that you don’t know.’ This overwhelming sensation came over me and I broke down crying during the training. But God showed up and he gave me the confidence and the courage to show

up. And it truly was the most powerful serving experience of my life. I am hooked on Jubilee.”

It’s evident to Story pastors and leaders just how powerfully God has transformed lives through Jubilee over the years - both the lives of volunteers and former inmates, like Kenyard, who now call The Story home.

“What I have found is that usually you’re blessed more than what you give,” shares longtime Story member and Jubilee volunteer, Alicen Swift. “It’s centered around not just saying we love Jesus, but what are we going to do about it? There’s this arrogance that makes you think, ‘Oh, I’m going to go do God’s work, I’m going to be the hands and feet of Christ.’ And then when it’s all over, you walk away thinking, ‘Was I the one serving or was I the one being served?’”

Todd Boring, the adoptive “father” of Kenyard, echoes the same sentiment. “Initially I was



Outside support members work on “Agape” gifts, including cakes, all meals, and surprise gifts such as Bibles and notes

the past 9 years]. It really does help break down those barriers and show people that we’re real church. We believe in this. We have connection and communion with these people. They are our brothers and sisters in Christ and we need to be with them.”

If you’re feeling a tug on your heart to serve with Jubilee, but you’re not sure - maybe you’re afraid of what it will be like or who you’ll encounter or you don’t think you possess the right skills to serve - just take it from one of Jubilee’s newest volunteers, Kelly: “Trust God and don’t let the enemy discourage you to show up and walk through it. God will give you the courage; just stick with it. You will be blessed beyond measure with this ministry.”

To learn more about serving with Jubilee Prison Ministry, visit thestory.church/serve ■

thinking that I’ll have an impact on these guys’ lives, but it’s really impacted my life a lot. You don’t have to be afraid of going in. I’ve never felt unsafe,” shared Todd. “Be ready to really receive from God because ultimately, God shows up in this just unreal way and touches not only the lives of the people we’re serving, but us as volunteers as well. It’s just been good to get out of my own little narrow life and the people that I normally hang out with and get to meet some guys from different walks of life.”

“From the outside looking in, there is no way a church on the corner of River Oaks Boulevard and Westheimer would have a comfort level or want to get together with a bunch of state jail inmates,” shared Reynolds Lawnin. “It’s absolutely incredible to see how pervasive it has been through the ethos of the church [in



Right: Kenyard in the front pew with Todd & his wife on a Sunday morning



Eder and his girlfriend, Savannah, were baptized together in the courtyard on Sunday, March 2, 2025

MADE NEW

Two Young Men Reflect on Their Recent Baptisms at The Story

Q: Why did you make the decision to be baptized? Why do it now?

Dillon: I became a Christian in late December of 2024, and I got baptized January 19, 2025. I understood baptism to be a Biblical commandment, one which I hastened to accomplish. The fact that Jesus tells us to

get baptized is a very strong reason to do so without delay.

Eder: I decided to get baptized because, in my heart, I wanted to follow after Jesus. Given that he died for sins, I want to live for him, and getting baptized put me on a path to follow after him with a purpose.

Q: What did it mean for you to be baptized in front of your friends, family, and church?

Dillon: I had been a vocal atheist for about 12 years. My parents' assuredness of my lack of salvation was a source of significant pain to them. The fact that they were both able to witness my baptism was a moment of great pride and also of relief for them—relief that

their prodigal son who had strayed for so long had had come. I never realized that this was an aspect of baptism beforehand, but getting baptized in the middle of a service brings you much closer to your congregation. I still regularly see people at service whom I do not recognize but who wish me well and say it is good to see me and mention having been present at my baptism.

Q: In your own words, what was the significance of your baptism?

Eder: The significance of baptism to me is being born again with a purpose to continue to walk the faith of God.

Dillon: Having long been an atheist, I lived a life of grievous sin for many years: I stained my soul with drunkenness and with sexual sin. Baptism for me represented repentance from these sins and a sustained commitment to sobriety and abstinence. Emerging from the water, I felt clean. Surprisingly to me, baptism also represented surrender. When Eric grabbed me with his strong hands and submersed me in the water, my every survival instinct rebelled within me. In hindsight, this unpleasant feeling came to have great significance for me, representing a complete surrender of my life to the Almighty.

Q: How has your faith changed since your baptism? What blessings or challenges have you witnessed since then?

Eder: My faith strengthened knowing I've decided to dedicate my life to God. One blessing I witnessed was the Holy Ghost. I used to think it was my "intuition," but the Holy Spirit has always guided me through life. The only challenge is walking away from things of the world, but God is the Truth. The more I read the Bible, the less challenging it is to be in this world.



Dillon's mother looks on in tears as he is embraced by members of The Story after his baptism in January 2025

Q: What would you say to someone who is considering baptism, but scared to make that jump into the water?

Eder: We face challenges every day. God is eternity; don't be of this world, be of God. God is waiting on you, never leaving you, and is with you. Don't be scared to be baptized because you might not be ready. Jesus, the Bible, the Holy Spirit, our Father God will guide you. Just as our parents did when we were young, but remember that God created us, so he knows us better than anyone. God is love, so get baptized to discover what true love is.

Dillon: I hold a personal belief - confirmed by my own experience - that the blessings of God are not only in the next life but come upon us in this life when we obey Him. I personally struggle with anxiety, and it was quite nerve-racking to stand before the whole congregation. However, I can also say that it was well worth it. The tremendous outpouring of love from my fellow congregants, the hugs and the well wishes, made me finally feel at home in the church. ■

FAITH BEYOND THE PEWS

Launched in 2019 at The Story Church, the Maybe God Podcast was created to inspire doubtful believers and hopeful skeptics to fearlessly explore life's toughest faith questions. Through compelling storytelling and thought-provoking conversations, each episode dives into the biggest and most controversial questions about God, religion, the meaning of life, science, and the cultural battles shaping our world today.

By 2024, the Maybe God team recognized the growing impact of their podcast interviews on YouTube and strategically shifted their focus to expanding the platform. As a result, the Maybe God Podcast YouTube channel has surpassed 2.6 million views, cultivating a vibrant community of believers and skeptics.

In 2025, Maybe God host Eric Huffman launched The Story Pastor, a dynamic new reaction channel aimed at younger generations. Through it, he offers a biblical perspective on Maybe God interviews, current events, entertainment, politics, and the growing trend of faith deconstruction—engaging viewers in honest, eye-opening conversations about Christianity in today's world.



MAYBE GOD PODCAST

Watch or listen as Pastor Eric sits down with leading theologians, Christian apologists, scientists, authors, and everyday people who share extraordinary testimonies of faith and transformation.

maybegodpod.com • youtube.com/MaybeGodPodcast



THE STORY PASTOR

Since his return to Christianity, Eric has been driven by a passion to inspire new generations to ask bold questions, challenge their doubts, and discover the truth of God through Jesus Christ. On this channel, he does just that by offering thoughtful reactions to trending TikToks, news clips, and other videos—all through the lens of the Christian worldview.

youtube.com/TheStoryChurchPastor

STAY TUNED! Later in 2025, the Maybe God team is launching a brand-new storytelling channel that highlights powerful testimonies of God's miraculous work in people's lives.

THE NEXT GENERATION

How Our Students are Encountering Jesus in New Ways

By Ashton Wascom, Student Ministry Director



The future of The Story Students is looking pretty awesome. We're all about creating a place where students don't just show up—they belong. Whether they're coming in for the first time or have been around forever, we want every student to feel like they have a home here.

At the core of what we do is real, meaningful relationships. We're not just another program or a place to kill time; we're a community where friendships happen, questions are welcome, and life gets shared. As Ella put it, "I think it's important for students to get involved at Story Students because it is a great way to build a Christian community! It's where I've met some of my closest friends. I have been able to grow in my faith with people my age who can relate to the same struggles I'm going through. I always look forward to it every Sunday!"

More than anything, we exist to be a part of The Story Church's greater mission: inspiring non-religious people to follow Jesus. That means everything we do—every game, every conversation, every message—is centered on making Jesus known in a way that's real, relatable, and life-changing. We want students, whether they've grown up in church or are just checking things out, to feel like this is a place where they can ask big questions, be themselves, and experience the love of Jesus in a way that sticks.

Sawyer, a student who has gotten plugged in recently, shared how getting involved in Story Students has changed his outlook: "Before joining the Story Students ministry, it was hard

to find a group where I could talk about my faith and worship God. Now, being a part of it has greatly strengthened my faith, and I'm surrounded by people who help me grow closer to God."

Sunday mornings are all about connection. Our "Sessions" are a time to gather, wake up (donuts and Dr. Pepper helps with that), and kick off the morning with fun. We've decked out our space known as the Loft with ping-pong, pool, pop-a-shot, video games, and cozy hangout spots. After some time to just be together, we jump into a big group game before breaking off into middle and high school groups for applicable messages that speak into students' lives. We want this space to be warm, welcoming, and something students are excited to invite their friends into.

"It was hard to find a group where I could talk about my faith. Now I'm surrounded by people who help me grow closer to God."

Then there's Wednesday night "Small Groups"—our midweek reset. Think of it as a chance to breathe, laugh, and get intentional with a smaller group of people who want to dive deeper into Scripture. These nights start

with dinner (because food makes everything better), then we split into age and gender-specific groups to talk about life, faith, and how the two actually connect. Some students are all about shooting hoops before or after, while others love just hanging in the loft with games and good conversation. No pressure, no pretense—just a space to grow and be known.

This year, we've added something even more exciting—"Overflow" our once a month Sunday night gathering. Formerly known as "Youth Nights," Overflow happens on the first Sunday of every month and is designed to be



Middle and high school students come together in The Loft space for Overflow - a monthly Sunday evening gathering for worship, teaching, and fun games

the perfect place for students to invite their friends. It's a night where we pack out the Loft, worship together, hear a message that speaks to where students are in life, and end with a high-energy big-group game. And the best part? Raffle prizes. Who doesn't love the chance to win something just for showing up? Overflow is exciting, welcoming, and a chance for students to experience God in a fresh way while having an absolute blast with their friends.

Beyond Sundays and Wednesdays, we want to give students opportunities to grow in their faith in real, tangible ways. That means creating moments where they can ask honest questions, hear relatable teaching, and actually see how God is working in their lives. As Josie shared, "It is important for students to get involved at Story Students because it encourages our

faith with others and strengthens our church community as one body and spirit. Over the past few years of being a part of The Story Church, I have truly seen God working through each and every one of us. He is present in every Bible Study, Youth Night, and prayer. I am so blessed and grateful to get to share my faith with my siblings in Christ, and I hope to inspire everyone to follow Jesus!"

We also believe students don't have to wait until they're older to make an impact—they're the church now. Whether it's serving in the community, going on mission trips, or just stepping up to encourage a friend, we want students to know they have a role to play. As Oliver put it, "To grow with God you need a community to help you when you're struggling. Story Students is a great supportive community that will always be there for you."

All of this is made possible by an awesome community of volunteers who are dedicated to spending time with our students and leading them through activities and Scripture. Noah - one of our long-time volunteers - had this to say about serving with Story Students: "Serving grants me an opportunity to look at my own faith journey with fresh eyes. Ministering to and with the next generation of believers is not only encouraging, but uniquely edifying. Since my time serving with the Story Students, I have seen the group grow from a skeleton crew of faithful few to a group of strong young believers that walk in faith together. The old name of the youth meetings, Foundations, serves as a reminder of how far we've come and what our current state has been built upon."

Looking ahead, we're hoping to grow in the years to come as our welcoming and inviting culture continues to cultivate relationships and friendships. Here's what we hope to accomplish in the next few years:

1. Move all small-group meetings to Wednesday nights so that all students have a midweek opportunity to reconnect and dive into Scripture together. Middle and high schoolers would meet at the same time but in separate spaces for an hour and a half. It would make Wednesday nights busy—but full of life, giving students a great time to grow in their faith together!
2. Create & launch a Story Students middle school and high school retreat at a summer camp near Houston. We want to encourage students to slow down, reflect, and grow in community with one another. Our goal is to launch a High School Fall Retreat and a Middle School Spring Retreat next school year, building on tradition with in-house



Current high school boys show off merch in an Instagram-worthy shot in the game room area

speakers from The Story and plenty of fun and community-building activities.

3. Expand our ministry outreach efforts by creating a partnership with another domestic ministry for a middle school mission trip. This would give younger students the opportunity to serve, much like the Dominican Republic trip for high schoolers. We're excited to brainstorm and begin searching for a location where we can build long-lasting relationships and make an impact—while being impacted by what God is already doing there!

At the end of the day, this isn't just another student program—it's a family. That's our vision—walking together, growing together, and making this journey of faith something real and life-changing for the next generation of believers. ■



A HOME AWAY FROM HOME

How The Story's Newest Partner, Houston Haven, is a "Miracle" for Cancer Patients

By Kathryn Brough, Communications Director

In late 2018, Jay and Carla Dubose, residents of Thomasville, Georgia, received unexpected news: Jay was diagnosed with Diffuse Large B Cell non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, an aggressive and fast-growing cancer with a thankfully low mortality rate. At home in Georgia, he received chemo and radiation treatment for his cancer, but the relief was short lived.

By 2023, Jay had relapsed twice, and the couple found themselves planning for a 70-day stay in Houston's Texas Medical Center to receive emerging treatments at M.D. Anderson. Through a social worker, they began the strenuous process of going through their housing options and submitted multiple applications to short-term opportunities.

"We weren't exactly sure about our timeline, but we knew that we would be temporarily relocating to a city we didn't know within a couple weeks. Houston Haven's support just took so much of the pressure off so we could focus on and digest the medical part of things."

Just a few weeks later, they were moved into an apartment run by Houston Haven - at a fraction of the cost of their other options - less than a mile away from where Jay would receive CAR-T therapy.

Houston Haven was founded in 2019 with a mission "to love people undergoing cancer treatment by providing a haven for their physical, emotional, and spiritual needs". Their first property was a townhouse owned and leased by the founder, shortly after her mother passed away from cancer. In the organization's first three years, they expanded

from that first home to seven homes and one garage apartment. Now, at the end of year five, that number has grown to 12 homes and four garage apartments, all within a five mile radius of the Medical Center.

"They don't have to get on any freeways or anything like that, which is huge because so many folks come from small towns and they're petrified of Houston," says Mike Moore, a member of Houston Haven's board and longtime volunteer. "We were originally thinking of building a community of 10 to 15 apartment units in a complex, but the first guests loved staying on a neighborhood street with other families. It provided a sense of normalcy in a difficult time. We really want people to, as best as they can, feel like it's their own home while they're here."

Jay and Carla witnessed this "sense of normalcy" and community first hand. Houston Haven is entirely volunteer led by a team of

over 250 individuals serving as Ambassadors, meal runners, and prayer warriors. Every guest that is welcomed in a Houston Haven home is assigned an Ambassador to serve as a friendly face and a point of contact. They

answer questions about the area, provide recommendations, and so much more.

"You just immediately felt like you had a friend," Jay says about the Ambassadors. "At a time where otherwise we might have felt very lonely and confused, they were there. They knew our names, and they brought us meals. That humanness, that connection, was one of the biggest things that made a difference."

"At a time where otherwise we might have felt very lonely and confused, Houston Haven was there."



Story Students at a Houston Haven work day on Saturday, September 28, 2024

In the five years Houston Haven has been operating in our city, they've welcomed over 150 guests, including 55 families in 2024 alone. They estimate that over 500 meals have been delivered.

"I am always a little sensitive to the fact that these people are in a really uncertain time of their lives," says Grace Moss, a member of The Story and long-time volunteer with their organization. "I think when you go in just trying to be the hands and feet of Jesus, you get to see the way that people walk into this kind of unimaginable thing."

Jay and Carla's 2023 stay in Houston was unfortunately not their last. In July 2024, Jay's cancer returned, and they spent another three weeks receiving treatment, staying in a 3-bedroom Houston Haven home where they could also house their daughter and son-in-law

for visits. And again, just before last Christmas, they received the news that the cancer was back, this time in a different part of his body. After being blessed on two different occasions by Houston Haven, they were reluctant to make another ask, this time for a stay that would keep them away from home and their family for the holidays, what they described as a "real downer on top of dealing with the cancer".

"I thought to myself, I can't ask again. I don't want to take somebody else's blessing who needs it," shares Carla. "But that wasn't for me to figure out. I realized that God was going to help us and would help those who need it too." Once again, Houston Haven had an opening for them.

"Oh my gosh, it was wonderful! We got there and there was this beautifully decorated Christmas tree, and the whole house was

decorated," Carla shared. "This act of love certainly took the sting out of being away from home and gave us a true sense of peace."

Last December, just before the holidays, Jay was able to be relieved from treatments for a few days to fly to Atlanta to spend Christmas with their children.

"Had we not been able to fly back home, so many people were offering for us to stay with them or have a Christmas meal or go to church with them," shared Jay. "The weekend after Christmas, a bunch of people came over for a work day at the house, just to help with the landscaping and such. It was such a joy to meet the founder and to work alongside the people who had shown us so much love."

At the time Jay was interviewed for this article, he was back at home in Thomasville, in remission after receiving his latest round of experimental treatments at M.D. Anderson. Unfortunately just a few weeks later, he was back in Houston for a biopsy that showed the cancer had returned once more. Jay and Carla will be back soon for another clinical trial.

"The support provided by Houston Haven and their community makes us feel like we have a true home away from home in Houston and we are not alone in this battle," shared Carla. "They just took us in and helped us so much. I cannot say enough about how much they just show love. That's what they do."

To learn more about serving with our new partner Houston Haven, beginning in late 2025, visit thestory.church/serve ■





THREE TRUTHS ABOUT PRAYER:

Why Talking to God Matters More Than You Think

By Kathryn Brough, Communications Director

In a viral Instagram reel, Pastor Joby Martin posed an unnerving question: “If God were to immediately answer ‘yes’ to all the prayers you prayed in the last week, what would change in your life?” You could have the dream job, the dream spouse, the dream home. Your loved one could miraculously be healed of the incurable disease. Your neighbor, friend or co-worker could suddenly believe in God. But for many of us, we could face a harsh reality: nothing would change, because we didn’t pray about it.

We can often catch ourselves talking about prayer: “Sending you my thoughts and prayers.” “I’ll be praying for you.” “I wish I could pray more often but I don’t have the time.” Maybe you believe that your faith isn’t strong enough to pray and that it’s better to have a “stronger Christian” pray for you. Perhaps you aren’t sure where to start and it’s easier to just go about your day rather than try it out. Many of us don’t know what to pray for, or if it’s even okay to pray for certain things in our lives, or we’re afraid of what the response might be from God when the answer comes.

Jesus, in his ministry on earth, repeatedly taught about the importance of prayer to his disciples and to the crowds. He regularly went away - sometimes for hours - to spend time with his Father in prayer. If we’re called to live like Jesus, how can we have the same posture towards prayer? Why was prayer so important in Jesus’ life and how should that influence how we pray today?

Truth #1: God WANTS to talk to us.

John 10:27 - My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me...

Prayer is crucial to a relationship with God. Jesus didn’t pray just to check a box and say

he completed his quiet time for the morning. Jesus prayed to hear from Him and to trust God to lead his steps.

Kim Perich, a leader at The Story had this to say about prayer: “Prayer is our lifeline. It’s our direct connection to God, and without it, there’s no relationship. It’s kind of like with our spouses, children, family or friends. If we are not talking or taking intentional time to connect we wouldn’t really know them.”

Since Genesis and the beginning of Creation, God had a relationship with humanity. He created Adam and both worked and conversed alongside him in the garden. He saw a need from Adam and created companionship through Eve. Throughout the Old Testament, God regularly speaks directly to others - Moses, Hagar, Abraham, King David, and many more - and offers them direction, protection, and promises of what their future looks like. He had a close relationship with each of them.

Relationships - whether with friends, significant others, or children - don’t always come naturally. They require time, patience, and a commitment to loving the other person even when things are difficult. So what if we approached our relationship with God in the same way?

Lesley Lilly, a longtime prayer warrior of The Story, says, “Because I do believe in the power of prayer and in the Lord’s desire, I have a need to have faith in the Lord’s desire to want to hear us.”

Adenia Narinesingh started coming to The Story a few years ago after moving with her husband, Leon, from Trinidad. She and her husband both work in the medical field and have seen God repeatedly work miracles.

Despite their surroundings, working alongside people from all walks of life and religions, they have seen the difference communicating with God can make.

“As a physician, if somebody told me that they’re sitting in their living room talking to somebody who they can’t see but they can hear, they can feel and they know is present, I would question that,” shared Adenia. “But yet those who pray and have an active prayer life know they’re going to hear from God.”

So if we know that God wants to talk to us and hear from us, then how should we spend our time in prayer?

Truth #2: There’s no equation or “right way” to pray.

Philippians 4:6-7 - Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

“Prayer is weird. If you think about praying in your closet or praying in your living room, you’re basically talking to yourself unless you are talking to God.” That’s Adenia again. “So in order for prayer to be what it is, it requires faith. The act of prayer in itself is an act of faith.”

Prayer is defined by Merriam-Webster as “an address (such as a petition) to God or a god in word or thought”. Dictionary.com puts it as “a spiritual communion with God or an object of worship, as in supplication, thanksgiving, adoration, or confession.” St. Teresa of Ávila, a 16th-century Spanish Catholic, beautifully described prayer as “an intimate friendship, a frequent conversation held alone with the Beloved”. All of these definitions can be simplified down to the three

words GotQuestions.org - a Christian resource website - uses in its definition: “talking to God”.

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus gives us the closest thing to an “equation” for prayer:

Luke 11:1-10 - One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.” He said to them, “When you pray, say: ‘Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation.’...So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

In this, Jesus tells us that prayer is thanking God for what he’s done in your life, asking for his will to be done, telling him where we’ve fallen short, and bringing all of our needs and desires to him directly. This means we can bring everything to God; there’s nothing off limits when it comes to prayer.

As Pastor Eric wrote in one of his Grace & Truth devotionals titled “Is Prayer Just a Placebo?”:

“When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray, he began his model prayer this way: Our Father. This is a reminder that the primary purpose of prayer isn’t getting what you want from God; it’s intimacy with your Father in Heaven who loves you.”

“Prayer is between you and Jesus,” echoes Lesley. “It’s like when I was a child learning to swim, I had to put on a swimsuit and get into the water even if it was a bit scary. I really think the Lord is waiting for us to just ask, ‘How do I do this?’ If you truly desire to know Him, then tell Him your desires and ask Him to be there.”

Three Tried & Trusted Tips for Prayer:

1. Start small. It doesn’t need to be an hour of sitting in a quiet spot. Start with 5 minutes of just sharing your heart with the Lord.

2. Use Scripture. Read a Psalm and use those words as a prayer. Pray through a written prayer, such as The Lord’s Prayer.

3. Journal. Write down your prayers so you can go back and see how God answered them. It helps you not to forget that God IS working in your life.

Truth #3: Prayer can change your life.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 - Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

Over the years, we’ve seen firsthand how vastly situations can change when people just start praying about them. We’ve seen how God can save broken marriages when both people involved - and their trusted brothers and sisters in Christ - pray for redemption. We’ve seen people coming to faith after years of being prayed for by a loved one to know Jesus. We’ve seen people step into new jobs and into new relationships after years of stress and

heartbreak. When prayers for healing aren’t answered, we’ve seen how praying through those difficult moments provides an anchor of hope in loss and grief.

“We don’t know what the Lord wants to do until we pray. If we would just talk with him all the time, he would really direct our steps.” That’s Lesley Lilly again. We mentioned earlier that she’s been a trusted prayer warrior of The Story for many years. She’s been a force behind many of our prayer initiatives over the years, including the Centering Prayer group, special prayer retreats, and our recent Lenten Weekly Prayer gatherings. She recently witnessed the power of prayer changing a situation in her life unexpectedly.

Lesley has always been prone to kidney stones and for the last seven years was under a doctor’s care monitoring two stones that finally were of a size that justified surgical removal. A few weeks before her scheduled surgery, she and her husband Kevin attended a healing prayer service. They weren’t intending to go up for prayer, but eventually invited others to lay hands on them and pray for both her kidney stones and some pain Kevin had been experiencing in his knee.

“I’ll never forget this,” shared Lesley when reflecting on her scheduled appointment in September 2024. “I was queued up for the OR and had an I.V. going. They had taken a scan of my kidney that morning. My doctor, who’s been my doctor for 15 years, walked in the room and said, ‘Lesley, there’s nothing to take out. The stones aren’t there.’”

Lesley couldn’t believe what she was hearing. For seven years, she’d been watching them grow. She found herself saying “What do you mean it’s not there?” and “Have I been living a lie?” But both she and her doctor, also a



Lesley praying with Sue, a member of The Story

Christian, knew what had happened: this was a miracle. They told her to get dressed and sent her home, receiving a reimbursement for the day's visit. It didn't end there.

As Lesley drove home in a state of shock but praising God, she called Kevin and recounted the day's events to him. Kevin - who was scheduled to visit an orthopedic surgeon just days later for his knee pain - shared something with her for the first time. "Kevin told me on that phone call that ever since the prayer service, his pain had been gone."

Kevin, despite his now missing pain, kept the appointment. He went to the orthopedic to prove to himself, and to them, that prayer had changed his situation. They took some scans and they said, 'Your knee looks like that of a 27-year-old.'

Adenia, the physician who grew up in Trinidad, has seen the medical miracles Kevin and Lilly faced. But Adenia recently had her own prayer experience that helped solidify her belief that

prayer is the most important thing we can do in our relationship with God.

Adenia grew up in the Hindu faith and is the only Christian in her family. For the past 15 years since her conversion to Christianity, she's been praying for the salvation of her entire family. When her father was diagnosed with terminal lung cancer last April, she felt a strong need to pray specifically for his salvation and for him to know Jesus before he passed away. She planned a trip to visit him in September and to pray with him in person. But before she could get there, he breathed his last.

"My prayers at the time were for God to save him, and to tell me that He saved him," shares Adenia. "I was very honest with the Lord. I said 'If my father went to hell, you are sovereign and you know every heart and I will submit to

that. But just know that this is going to affect my joy and I want to continue to serve you.'"

Adenia continued to ask God to reveal if her father had been saved. She prayed some

very specific prayers: 1) to hear a story from someone who had experienced a loved one coming to Christ from the Hindu faith, 2) for God to break down her father's barriers to see Him, and 3) to restore her joy from this grief.

The day before her father's funeral, she encountered a woman in Trinidad, who began telling her the story of her grandmother, a very devout Hindu, and how she unexpectedly turned to "the God of the Christian faith" to save her son from alcoholism. She refused to leave the church altar until he was saved saying, "I don't know if you're real but I need you to save my son. I'm not leaving until you do." Her son, who was at a bar at the time, felt a sudden

compulsion to walk out and go to the closest church. He walked in on his mother praying at the altar. Their entire family became Christian that day. Adenia's first prayer - to hear a story about a Hindu coming to faith in Christ - was answered through the woman's testimony.

This same woman went on to tell her in this story, "Hindus have a lot of pride. In order for them to see God, they have to be broken down. Sometimes that means breaking down their body." The phrase 'broken down' was so specific that it seemed to Adenia like an answer to her second prayer: that God would break down her father's barriers to faith.

Finally, Adenia told this stranger why she was back in Trinidad, and how she had been praying for her father's salvation. Without missing a beat, the woman told her, "He's saved. Let your joy be restored." Adenia's third prayer was answered.

"I was not there when my father accepted Jesus. I have no physical evidence. I didn't hear it. There wasn't anybody at his bedside when it happened," Adenia shares. "But I know - because the Lord revealed those secret things to someone else, a woman of the faith in the present moment and who is living out the Gospel daily. I know he was saved."

When Adenia returned to the States after his funeral, she found herself hearing story after story of people's loved ones turning to Jesus in their final moments on earth. And when she opened her Bible, she found herself reading Jesus' final moments with the thief on the cross next to him.

Luke 23:39-43 - One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear



Adenia pictured with her parents at her med school graduation in 2018

God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus answered him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."

"When we pray, we pray with expectancy that God is powerful enough to meet us in those prayers," says Kim. "I spent the majority of my life not having quiet time with the Lord. But God has shown me how to meet with him to receive his daily bread, and this has changed my life."

God wants a relationship with us. He wants us to just spend time with him, bringing all of our joys and burdens to him. All of our dreams and wants and desires for him to move in. God wants us to see how trusting him can completely change our lives in unexpected ways. Start today. Talk to God. And wait to see how God will move. ■



READY TO SERVE

Why Sunday Teams Matter for the Church on Sundays and Beyond

By Alanna Amberger, Connections Director

On any given Sunday, nearly a thousand people walk through the main entrance of The Story for a time of worship, teaching, and communion. They're greeted with warm smiles and fresh coffee. Their questions are answered and directions are given to classrooms, bathrooms, and empty pews. They're served the sacrament of communion after a time of teaching. Whether it's their first time visiting or they've been long time worshipers, everyone is welcomed and connected into The Story Church family. It's all made possible by hundreds of people sacrificially serving on one of our teams.

We asked a few of our current volunteers to share their experience with Sunday teams with our community.

Q: How has serving on a team impacted you?

Scott & Angela: Serving on the hospitality team has really allowed us to feel more connected to our church family. We get to serve alongside some amazing people and have developed friendships that make The Story feel like home.

Cameron: Serving makes me feel connected to The Story, in a way that can bring people a little bit of joy. Getting up early on a Sunday morning to make coffee at home when you're in a rush can kind of be a hassle, especially if you have a family trying to get out the door. It's been fun for me to be able to see the community grow every week.

Q: How has serving impacted your faith, or your relationship with God?

Cameron: It's a form of discipleship and gives me a purpose within the church and helps maintain that servant mindset. We aren't all pastors but we can do our small part. This is what God has called me to do: I'm like the fun uncle who gives parents coffee and the kids donuts.

Angela: It has deepened my commitment to service and the importance of it. I've given up myself and understand that it is where God has called me to be.

Q: Why is it important to serve in the church?

Angela: It's a way for me to glorify God and show him how grateful I am for what he has done for us through Jesus. It's a natural response that has grown throughout my whole life, and a very small way to give back because Jesus gave it all for me.

Scott & Angela: We serve because we are able and we believe that nobody can do everything but everybody can do something. We have also found that serving is more enjoyable than being served.



Q: What is your favorite part about serving on teams?

Angela: My favorite moment - and it happens quite often - is when I recognize someone coming in the door that looks like they might be a first timer and I get to greet them and welcome them to The Story. You can just sense when someone is walking in and they haven't been to church before and immediately hear the relief in their voice when they feel welcome here. It's a big step for people to come to a church for the first time and I love being there to greet them when they come through our doors.

Scott & Angela: Our favorite part of serving at The Story is having an opportunity to actively participate in an amazing community of people and in developing friendships that extend beyond the church walls.

Cameron: One of my favorite moments was serving at Easter sunrise on the lawn a couple years back and I had to be there super early. It was a beautiful morning and I was the only volunteer there at that time. Everything went right and there was enough coffee for everyone, even though it was very packed. God provided for the church in that moment and it felt good to be a part of that. Everything felt like it clicked just right for a meaningful service. ■



GOD CAN USE YOUR STORY

Finding a new home and community in
the midst of life's storms

By Dilan Braddock, Discipleship Pastor and
Kathryn Brough, Communications Director

Rebekah, left, with her original
group members and friends,
April & Ann

On a cold winter Sunday in January 2024, Rebekah first entered the doors of The Story. Rebekah had been a part of a local congregation for years, where she had faithfully attended and served, but she felt like God had other plans for her.

“God just made it very clear saying, ‘Hey, I’m taking you into a new season.’ And it was so fast that I didn’t even realize it was my last Sunday until afterwards.”

At the top of her short list for churches to check out was The Story. When Sunday came around and she woke up to a 30 degree day, she layered on a few sweatshirts and made her way to church. She was immediately taken aback by what she saw. “I walked in and was like, ‘Oh, everyone dresses nicely here.’ I honestly felt a little out of place. But the funny thing is that somehow three different people came up to talk to me because of my Purdue sweatshirt.”

What started as an initial awkwardness quickly turned into warmth as she chatted with new people and found herself walking

with a couple towards the group signup tables for the spring season. Rebekah says that this interaction - this welcome to join them in something intimate as a connection point - was instrumental in her calling The Story home. Within a few weeks, she found herself a part of our Wednesday Evening Women discipleship group.

“I really liked it right away, but I was very hesitant because I didn’t know anybody. I was coming from this season of just profound life change in my own personal life, and there was

a lot of hurt there.” Rebekah didn’t feel like she could immediately trust the women in front of her and share all her heartbreak and burden with them. She showed up each week, learned about them, and asked her questions. By the end of April, she opened up about what was going on for the first time.

“They were so compassionate and were checking in on me immediately. We’re all in different life stages and there were other people in that group dealing with profound grief at that time too, so it was really kind of a place where people were able to really show up for each other because they knew what it meant for people to show up for them as well.”

Rebekah went on to participate in the Summer Bible Study led by our pastors and in a Partnership Course to learn more about The Story’s history, mission, values and ways to be involved. When August came around and she

was eager to be back with her same group, Pastor Dilan Braddock posed her with a big question: Would she lead a new group for women on Mondays?

“What I’ve seen over and over at The Story is that God can use anybody.”

“My first thought was that I have not been here very long - I’m new to this church and I don’t want to overstep.” Dilan had learned that Rebekah had years of experience from serving in her previous churches as a leader and knew she had what it takes to lead. “I think sometimes when you’re going through something that seems so hard, it can make someone feel a bit unqualified. But what I’ve seen over and over at The Story is that God can use anybody. We don’t look at time as a qualifier. We don’t look at situations or circumstances as a qualifier. God’s continually doing work and all of us.”



Rebekah (top left) and her group during Christmas 2024

Rebekah stepped in to co-lead the group, and an amazing thing happened: the women she met were in similar situations to hers or had been through it before.

“It’s just been amazing to see what God’s been doing in our group and in the lives of these women. There’s so many things that people can be walking through, whether it’s financial or health issues or relationships or work. But the fundamentals of being a group remain the same. We are walking together, day by day, in faith. We’re saying, ‘God, I’m trusting you in this and I’m trusting that you’re going to guide me in this.’”

Over the past nine months as a group leader, Rebekah has been continually encouraged by the faith she witnesses in her group and the deep friendships that are being formed. In her group, she sees the church in action - a

community that is reading the Bible together, praying for each other, confessing sins to each other, and forming accountability through vulnerability.

“I look back at my first week when I walked in and felt so out of place in a sea of people looking put together, and can now realize that The Story is just a tapestry of all these individual stories of things that God has brought people through, things God’s still bringing people through, and things God’s preparing people to go through that they don’t even know yet. This community is just a bunch of people like me who are wanting to follow Jesus faithfully, even though it’s imperfect.”

When asked what her encouragement is for someone feeling out of place and maybe desperate for connection, Rebekah had this to say: “Give people the opportunity to show up for you. It’s easy to shy away from putting ourselves in a position to get hurt again, but if we never give ourselves the opportunity to be back in relationship with people, we’re missing out on the healing and growth that God wants to do in us. Even amidst the pain and the hardship and the loneliness, God continually shows up over and over again, and his people have shown up over and over again. And I’m forever grateful for that and amazed by it.” ■



The Monday Morning Group in March 2025

CONNECT WITH OUR MINISTRIES: THESTORY.CHURCH





A GROWING LEGACY

The Bethany Christian School Continues To Shine

By Kathryn Brough, Communications Director

The Bethany Christian School, located on the same campus as The Story church, was established in 1967 as a two-day Mother's Day Out program in the heart of River Oaks. Now almost 60 years later, it continues to shine as one of the best area preschool programs. The school is home to nine classes for ages 18 months to 4 years, with a total of just under one hundred students.

Vicki Stone is the director of Bethany Christian School and has been part of the school community for over 20 years. Her oldest enrolled at Bethany in 2003, and her twins in 2006. When the twins graduated into kindergarten in 2009, the staff at the school weren't ready to say goodbye to Vicki and asked her to begin teaching in one of the classrooms. Just a few years later, Vicki stepped into a new role as the Assistant Director in 2017 and moved into the Director role just a year later.

"Initially I was sad to leave the classroom and not have the same connection with my small group of students, but as the Director I get to know every single student and not just one classroom," shared Vicki. "I love getting to know their funny and sweet personalities, and it's so fun to watch them grow and see their personalities deepen over the years. I used to tell Billy [Vicki's late husband] all the time that my worst day at work is still one hundred percent better than your best day at work."

Every day, Vicki is at the front doors greeting every child as they enter, offering hugs and high fives, and asking each child about their lives. She believes that what makes Bethany Christian School so unique is that it feels like one big family.

"Because BCS is so small, it has a very strong family vibe to it. Each child gets lots of love

and attention and care and the families get the same," shared Vicki. "We get to know the families well, and the families themselves get to have their kids grow up together. It's a very easy-going environment compared to the larger, more commercial schools in Houston."

Her fellow staff and teachers echo the same sentiment. Lori, the Assistant Director, says: "There's a reputation that precedes the school. It's a place with great teachers and a great program. We just keep striving for love and care and don't settle for less."

Carol has been teaching at Bethany for over 40 years. She currently teaches a little girl whose father was one of her students years ago - and it's not the first time she has had a second generation family member in her classroom. "The kids truly love coming to school to see us," says Carol. "The loving care they receive, the warmth and concern every person here has, the quality of the teaching staff, and the program itself - all of it is why they keep coming back."

Vicki says that their goal is to be a "home away from home" for every child, and enjoys getting to see the connections between families grow - including their nannies and extended family members who help with drop offs and events. What has been a mainstay for River Oaks and West University families continues to grow, reaching new families who willingly make a longer commute from areas like the Heights and Bellaire to be part of this legacy.

Bethany Christian School will remain at 3223 Westheimer for generations to come, under the umbrella of The Story Church and with our loving support. ■



OUR JOURNEY CONTINUES

Staying With Our Methodist Roots & Joining The Foundry Network

By Geovanna Huffman, Executive Pastor

Pictured above: The Story's staff team at the Foundry Network Gathering in Atlanta, GA in late 2024

Leaving the United Methodist Church was very difficult for Pastor Eric and I after faithfully serving through various churches in the denomination for 20 years. As young adults fresh out of seminary, we were both ordained through the United Methodist church and the majority of the clergy relationships we had built since we began our careers were Methodist clergy. For a while, we were wondering whether we could belong to another denomination after the heartbreak of leaving the United Methodist Church, or whether we would become independent non-denominational clergy. It was difficult for us to imagine the latter after belonging to a connectional system like the Methodist church for so long. Regardless of the denomination's flaws, we were always in touch with other churches through conferences or clergy gatherings and longed to continue in a similar network of churches.

Thankfully, what we soon discovered during our exit journey was that we were not alone and that there were many other clergy throughout the country who were encountering similar challenges. During our denominational exit in 2021, Pastor Eric received calls and texts from other clergy in the country. These clergy prayed with him, offered much needed advice, and were key in helping us overcome insurmountable challenges during this major change for our church. What started as a powerful friendship during a period of painful transition became a powerful movement among other formerly Methodist clergy.

This initial group of senior pastors agreed to gather weekly and to work together to develop a network. The Foundry Network was established to stand faithful in the Methodist tradition and to forge connections of like minded pastors and churches who are aligned



The original Foundry team: Ted Bryant (Granger Church), Will Mancini (ministry consultant), Shane Bishop (Christ Church), Eric Huffman (The Story Church), Jody Ray (Mount Bethel Church), and Bryan Collier (Orchard Church).

theologically and work together to reawaken the movement of Christ in our communities. This network is made up of accountable relationships that are simple and clear and that provide opportunities to learn, encourage, support and advance the Kingdom of God together.

What started as a group of five clergy and churches has quickly become a group of over 21 churches throughout several states with close to 100 clergy and staff regularly participating in semi-annual gatherings. During the gatherings, connections are made among different ministries like senior leadership, executive pastors, church administrators, children's and youth ministers, communication departments, and worship leaders. Senior pastors also serve as overseers for other congregations, ensuring proper accountability for senior leaders and to assist churches during transitions.

In late 2024, The Story had the opportunity to attend one of these gatherings, hosted in Marietta, Georgia with a few of our staff members, including Campus Pastor Kale Kinchen, Discipleship Pastor Dilan Braddock, Communications Director Kathryn Brough, and Student Coordinator Haley McCloskey. Over the course of three days, they were part of large scale discussions alongside assorted ministry staff from other network churches and participated in breakouts with their counterparts and peers. Here are their reflections from their time:

“Attending the Foundry Gathering this year opened my eyes to what God is doing, not only within our church but across the entire network. It was a powerful reminder that God’s work is so much bigger than just The Story Church. It was refreshing to see churches nationwide united in one goal: to make Jesus known, and I was deeply impacted by how every church is chasing after that same mission. It’s also encouraging to be part of a larger community that prays for you, encourages you, and teaches you new things. After connecting with several other youth staff, I’m confident that I can reach out to them for advice anytime, and they’d be there to help in a heartbeat—and I’d do the same for them! The relationships between these churches are strong, healthy, and genuinely authentic. I’m honored to be part of The Foundry Network and can’t wait to see what God does in the years to come!” - Haley M.

“Sometimes in ministry we mistakenly think we are on an island, and the Foundry Gathering reminded me that we have awesome co-workers in ministry who proclaim the Gospel in powerful and innovative ways. To know you are not alone in this Kingdom work is a great encouragement! Meeting with other Foundry

pastors inspired me to continue to develop a pathway for discipleship at The Story Church. This is a progression of studies and classes that allow for people to jump in wherever they are in their faith journey and then progress to those next steps of their sanctification.” - Dilan B.

“The biggest blessing about being in The Foundry network is the connection of churches across the U.S. with the same missional mindset. It has personally impacted my ministry by providing me with relationships with other campus pastors who I can go to to talk about ministry and life with at any time.” Kale K.

“Over the past two years, I’ve seen firsthand how The Foundry Network has come together as one Church on fire for Jesus. These churches have loved on The Story and supported us (both as a staff team and a church body) through our transitions, and have celebrated with us every step of the way. It’s been powerful to offer that same support to other churches in their time of need - whether natural disaster relief or prayers for their ministries - and to connect with other creative peers across the network. Every person I encountered at the gathering immediately felt like family, and being together with them in worship, prayer, and discussions felt like home. These are such sweet brothers and sisters in Christ and we’re witnessing God moving in big ways through this network, as we all trust and rely on the Spirit.” - Kat B.

It has been powerful to witness the support that churches have been able to offer each other through the Foundry Network, and the network is just getting started! To learn more about The Foundry Network, please visit: www.thefoundrynetwork.org ■

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