

Meet pastors Rachel and Jon Howard

Jon Howard's call to follow Jesus Christ precipitated what his wife, Rachel, called "the darkest time in our marriage."

When the two met during their freshman year in college neither was a Christian.

When their second child was born, they decided to find a church, but had not really found God.

Shortly after they began attending the small inter-denominational church, Jon's father was diagnosed with cancer. He died just three months later. He was 50.

"That got me on my journey, trying to find out where he was and is there life after death," Jon said. "I talked to a lot of people; I read a lot of books. I started reading the Bible for the first time in my life, earnestly."

Meanwhile, people at the church wanted to make him a deacon. "I wasn't even a Christian yet," he said, but decided he needed to take reading the Bible seriously. It was while reading the Sermon on the Mount that he gave his life to Christ.



"And everything changed," he said. "I had new eyes, a new heart and a new mouth; I started talking (to Rachel) about Christ and all these truths I had about dealing with my sin, and she was like, 'What?'"

"It was a tough time," Rachel said. Jon had been away from home a lot because of his father's illness. "He came back and he had turned into this new person," she said.

After about six months, Rachel decided things had come to a crisis point. She felt that if something drastic didn't happen, she and Jon could no longer be married.

She recalls driving and thinking: "All right, Jesus, you know what, you obviously have something that I can't give him,' so I gave Jesus an ultimatum: 'Listen, you have to either show it to me or we're not going to be married any longer.'"

"It was like Saul on the road to Damascus," she said. "In one second, everything I knew to be true just dissolved. It was like the scales coming off my eyes. God just gave me a totally different mind. That just happened in a moment for me."

Coming to ministry took a bit longer.

Both Jon and Rachel started filling leadership roles at their church. He was preaching and she was leading the choir and worship. But the church was struggling, and eventually closed.

That's when they came to [Rock Church Ministries](#) in their community of Plaistow, NH. Eventually, they were filling roles at the Rock that were similar to those they held in their previous church. Jon became lay leader and Rachel joined the praise team.

Jon was feeling a call to ministry and had pursued some schooling, but "didn't trust enough that God would make things work out," he said, and felt as if he still had to focus on his secular career. Jon is the co-owner of a copier/printer sales business and Rachel is an attorney.

Meanwhile, Rachel was feeling "a restlessness in my spirit."

She sought answers where everyone does, she joked, at Borders Bookstore. She was looking through cookbooks and considering becoming vegan when she heard God.

"I just heard God speak so clearly," she said. "He said 'put the book down and turn around.'"

She found herself looking at the sports and leisure shelves. Not being much of an athlete, she was confused. "Just run," she recalls God saying, so she bought a book on marathon running for beginners.

Her 20-minute runs became 10-mile runs, and it was during that time, she realized later, that God was speaking into her. She came home from a long run one winter morning and began flipping through the Bible.

"God was leading me from Scripture to Scripture," she said, and it was that afternoon she called Rock Church Pastor Steve Murray. "We have to talk," she told him.

After that, things came together quickly, they said.

"We just stated walking together again in the call that God had initially laid on Jon and had drawn me into," Rachel said. "Within record time, everything fell into place to do local pastor school ..."

And it was at that point Rock Church, a multi-site, was launching its [Amesbury campus](#), where the Howards now serve most of the time.

Their own journeys have given them a heart for the lost and the seekers, Rachel said, and they work to make Amesbury a place where newcomers or those with little experience in the church can feel at home.

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“We don’t have that background growing up in the church, so we tend to question things – for better or worse,” she said. “We want to be theologically sound, but tradition is only part of the quadrilateral.”

“But when you come, we’re unabashed Christ followers, so that message is always there no matter who comes in the door,” Jon said. “We had a salvation message (recently) – two or three new people were there – but we don’t temper the message, and that’s because of the work Christ has done in our lives. We want everybody to come to that knowledge of Christ and have that saving grace.”