

ONE HEART, ONE MIND

Togetherness

Layne Lebo

Romans 12:1-21

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For the past 5 weeks we've been walking through a sermon series on our church's core values titled, "One Heart, One Mind." I had a bit of trepidation going into this series, because sermons on mission and values can degenerate into what feels like promotional hype. Our staff's hope was that this series would give us an opportunity to refocus our church family on the values that lie behind who we are and what we do. I've had different staff members preach and today we'll have some folks from McBIC share how the value of *togetherness* lives for them, to give a picture of how these values are lived out at McBIC.

Our focus on living our faith is evident in the words we've chosen for our mission statement: *Experiencing Jesus and Sharing His Love*. *Experiencing* and *sharing* aren't passive words; they describe how we're called to live our lives. And our vision statement, *Disciples who bring restoration and wholeness to Mechanicsburg and to the world*, isn't theoretical; it calls followers of Jesus to infuse our world with Jesus' love and healing. A verse from Scripture that immediately comes to mind when I think about Jesus' active vision for our world is found in John 10:10 where Jesus said, "*I have come that they might have life and have it to the full.*"

So far in our series, we've explored the values of Worship & Prayer, Transparency, Maturity and Integrity and Healing. The value we're looking at today is **Togetherness** and we've described that word with the statement: "***We commit to one another by bearing burdens and loving unconditionally.***" *Commitment to one another, bearing burdens and loving unconditionally* are phrases that describe what it means to walk in community as brothers and sisters in Christ. When our staff was processing these value statements, we considered using the word *community* instead of *togetherness*, because we like what the word *community* connotes. We chose not to use *community* because it can also refer to a town or group of people outside of a church and that might be confusing.

As I thought about preaching on *togetherness*, the *one another* statements which are prominent in the New Testament, came to mind. Over 35 times statements like these occur...

Be at peace with one another – Mark 9:50

Love one another – John 13:34; Romans 12:10; 1 Peter 4:8; 1 John 3:11, 23; 4:7, 11, 12

Serve one another – Galatians 5:13

Be devoted to one another – Romans 12:10

Care for one another – 1 Corinthians 12:25

Be kind and forgiving to one another – Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13

Comfort one another – 1 Thessalonians 4:18

Encourage one another – 1 Thessalonians 5:11; Hebrews 3:13

Pray for one another – James 5:16

Accept one another – Romans 14:1; 15:7

I whittled the list down to 10, but there are many more. The frequency of the *one another* statements throughout the Bible highlights the importance of togetherness. The New Testament is clear that our life together has a profound impact on our lives as individuals, on our churches, on our local communities and ultimately, on our world.

The passage I want us to focus on today is found in Romans chapter 12—Paul’s letter to followers of Jesus living in the city of Rome. The 2nd half of this chapter contains 3 of those *one another* statements. Romans chapter 12 is divided into 3 sections. I’ll read each section separately and make some comments on it, before moving on to the next one. The Bible’s paragraph headings and verse breakdowns are helpful for us as we read, study and memorize Scripture, but they can also do us a disservice by breaking up the ideas of Scripture into isolated sections and keeping us from seeing how one section connects with the sections before and after it. As I read this chapter, take note of the thread that runs through the entire chapter and the letter as a whole—walking closely with God, leads to health in our relationships with others. I’ll begin by reading verses 1 & 2 under the heading of “A Living Sacrifice.”

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. Romans 12:1 & 2

I frequently reference this passage in sermons for 3 primary reasons. First, I find Paul’s definition of worship to be a helpful reminder that corrects our tendency to compartmentalize our lives and view worship of God as confined to an hour on Sunday mornings or the time I take during the day or week to read Scripture, pray or sing to God. Secondly, I find Paul’s challenge not to conform to this world, but instead to have our minds renewed in the process of being transformed to be a needed focus for us as people who Jesus said in John’s Gospel, live in this

world, yet are not of this world. Third, I love the connection Paul makes here between having our minds renewed and being able to know God's will. I've found it so true in my life and in observing others' lives, when my mind is being renewed, I'm able to quickly sense God's will and when I'm being squeezed into the world's mold, God's will seems elusive and unclear.

The next section of Scripture, along with I Corinthians chapter 12, Ephesians chapter 4 and I Peter chapter 4 speaks to how the variety of spiritual gifts God has given people are exercised in the church. Here, Paul notes that using our gifts well starts with not thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought to. He then goes on to challenge his readers to use the spiritual gifts God has given them to build up the Body of Christ. As I read this next section from Romans 12—verses 3-8—think about the relationship of the passage I just read to this one with the heading, "Humble Service in the Body of Christ."

For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully. Romans 12:3-8

That brings us to verses 9-21 of Romans chapter 12—the verses that most clearly describe what togetherness or healthy relationships look like in the Body of Christ. I encourage you to follow along as I read this section of Scripture with the heading, "Love in Action."

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary:

"If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Romans 12:9-21

As I re-read these familiar words, I realized how much they have in common with the words Jesus spoke in Matthew chapter 5 in his Sermon on the Mount. The actions and attitudes Paul calls us to as followers of Jesus run counter to our natural inclinations and to the ways of our world. Take for example, *“Honor one another above yourselves; be patient in affliction; bless, rather than curse those who persecute you; be willing to associate with people of low position; don’t repay evil for evil; do not take revenge; and, bless your enemies.* To help us absorb the truth of what Paul is saying here and to think about the implications for our lives and our interactions with others, I want to invite you to meditate on these words as I read them from The MESSAGE Paraphrase. Feel free to close your eyes or bow your head or focus on the words on the screen—place yourself in the posture where you can most readily receive the truth of God’s Word.

Love from the center of who you are; don’t fake it. Run for dear life from evil; hold on for dear life to good. Be good friends who love deeply; practice playing second fiddle.

Don’t burn out; keep yourselves fueled and aflame. Be alert servants of the Master, cheerfully expectant. Don’t quit in hard times; pray all the harder. Help needy Christians; be inventive in hospitality.

Bless your enemies; no cursing under your breath. Laugh with your happy friends when they’re happy; share tears when they’re down. Get along with each other; don’t be stuck-up. Make friends with nobodies; don’t be the great somebody.

Don’t hit back; discover beauty in everyone. If you’ve got it in you, get along with everybody. Don’t insist on getting even; that’s not for you to do. “I’ll do the judging,” says God. “I’ll take care of it.”

Our Scriptures tell us that if you see your enemy hungry, go buy that person lunch, or if he’s thirsty, get him a drink. Your generosity will surprise him with goodness. Don’t let evil get the best of you; get the best of evil by doing good.

To help make this passage and the concept of *Togetherness* tangible for us I’ve asked a panel of folks from McBIC to share with us what *Togetherness* means for them. I’ve asked them to focus both on the giving and receiving sides of what *Togetherness* looks like in their experience. Pastor Cindy is going to guide our panel discussion.

Panel Discussion

This value of *Togetherness* lies at the heart of what it means to be part of a church family. As people we’re designed to love and be loved; to know and be known; and, to serve

and be served. And God's design is that our *Togetherness* wouldn't just be a blessing to those inside our church family, but that it would spill over into the lives of those who don't know Jesus. Admittedly, our track record as followers of Jesus in living this out is mixed—sometimes we do it well and at other times we fail, but I want to share an example from history of how the Church got it right as an encouragement to us.

In the 4th Century, the Roman emperor, Julian, who was an opponent of Christianity, wrote to his pagan priests, challenging them to follow the example of the Christians, so they might recruit more people to their religion. He highlighted the compassion of the Christians—and I quote—“*Put their deeds on everyone's lips, and they glorified the God of the Christians. All day long some of the Christians tended to the dying and to their burial, countless numbers with no one to care for them. Others gathered together from all parts of the city a multitude of those withered from famine and distributed bread to them all.*” The sense of togetherness and community in the 4th Century Church that spilled over into caring for the needs of people outside of their faith was well known outside the Church. I see this as an example of Jesus' words in Matthew chapter 5 verse 16: “*Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.*”

Over the past month or so I've shared with you that our staff views this time that we're in as a season of regrouping following COVID. I'm convinced that this is a fitting time for us to be exploring our church's core values and I believe that *Togetherness* is essential for us during this season—essential for us a church family as we reconnect and move forward, essential to those from the outside looking on and viewing how the church responds, and essential in reaching out to those who don't know Jesus with his love and compassion. I'd like each of us to consider, what role we play in *Togetherness*. How do we *commit ourselves to one another by bearing burdens and loving unconditionally?*