

ONE HEART, ONE MIND

Missional Living

1 Peter 3:8-17

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October 31, 2021

This morning marks the end of our series on McBIC's core values. My hope is that those of you who are new to McBIC gained greater understanding about who our church is and what we're about and those who have been part of our church family, were inspired to engage more deeply in fulfilling our mission of experiencing God and sharing his love by being disciples who bring restoration and wholeness to Mechanicsburg and to our world.

During our staff meeting on Tuesday, I asked our staff if there was anything they thought I should focus on as we wrapped up our core values series. Pastor Susan made a great point. She noted that our church's values are only realized, as they are lived out in the lives of individuals. I'm reminded of the saying about organizational values, "*What's happening down the hall matters more than statements that are framed and hanging on the wall.*" McBIC's core values only live when they're embraced by individuals. Preaching about them and putting them in writing doesn't mean much of anything if we're not living them out.

Since we began this series on September 5th, we've explored the values: **Worship & Prayer, Transparency, Healing, Maturity and Integrity, Togetherness, Discipleship and Partnership**. This morning I'll be preaching on the value **Missional Living**. Prior to COVID, I was on a schedule of addressing this topic twice a year—at the start of the calendar year in either January or February and again in September after summer, at the start of the school year. John King calls sermons on missional living my "stump speech." I preach on missional living frequently, because I'm convinced it lies at the core of who God calls his followers to be. Each of us was designed to partner with God in doing his work in our world. As Henry Blackaby says, in his book, *Experiencing God*, as followers of Jesus, our job is to find out where God is at work and join him.

Over the past 15 years the word *missional* has become kind of a buzz word in the church. Missional is referenced often, but I think it's often misunderstood. The word *missional* is tied to another word we're more familiar with, *missionary*. Missionaries give up their lives to

move to another region of the word outside of their home area to focus all their efforts on sharing the Good News of Jesus and seeking to lead people into a relationship with Jesus. Similarly, living missionally, means my life is focused on sharing the Good news of Jesus through my life, wherever I am and whatever I'm doing, so people might be introduced to Jesus.

In identifying Missional Living as one of our core values, our staff explained it with this statement: *We carry the hope of Jesus Christ to those in our sphere of influence.* I'm glad we included the word *hope*, because I'm convinced it is the hope we have in Jesus that sets us apart. Hope allows us to persevere in hard times with the knowledge that no matter how bad the difficulty we face is, it isn't the end of the story. Hope enables us to face challenges in the confidence that we're not alone—that Jesus is with us. Hope provides us with perspective when all most people around us can see is the immensity of the problems before us. Our hope in Jesus sets us apart.

Following last Sunday's service, I kept finding myself wrestling with the question, "What passage am I going to preach on next Sunday in conjunction with the topic of Missional Living?" It's difficult for my mind to rest on Monday—my day off—if I don't have a clear sense of what I'll be preaching on the following week. Throughout last Monday I thought of several great passages of Scripture, but I eventually zeroed in on 1 Peter chapter 3, sensing that's where I'd be focusing. On Tuesday morning when I went into the office and pulled up our statement defining missional living, I realized it contains the word *hope*, just as the verse I was focused on in 1 Peter chapter 3 does. ***"Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have."*** 1 Peter 3:15 I like that verse for many reasons. It encourages us as Jesus' followers to be prepared to share the relationship we have with Him with others. It focuses us on responding with an answer, rather than initiating the conversation. I'm not saying starting conversations about Jesus is a bad thing—there are times we need to follow the Holy Spirit's prompting in doing that—but too often we look at sharing our faith as trying to knock down doors or walls and impose our will on people. And I like this verse because of its emphasis on the hope we have. 1 Peter 3:15 is a powerful verse, and its message is strengthened when we view it in its larger context.

1 Peter is the first of 2 letters the Apostle Peter wrote in the New Testament to believers scattered throughout Asia Minor—modern day Turkey. Peter’s letter deals with practical subjects like suffering, holiness, living as God’s chosen ones in a pagan culture and relationships. In the section we’re looking at today, Peter alerts us to the fact that he’s in the process of wrapping up this letter by beginning with the word *finally*, and he talks very candidly about how we as followers of Jesus are to interact with people with whom we’re in conflict. I invite you to follow along as I read verses 8 and 9.

Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. I Peter 3:8 & 9

Peter begins this section with a theme that we first find in Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount and then is echoed by the Apostle Paul in several of his New Testament letters. Love each other; don’t repay evil with evil; and, bless others so that you in turn will be blessed by God.

And as he writes about blessing, he transitions to quoting from Psalm 34. I’ll read verses 10-12:

For, “Whoever would love life and see good days must keep their tongue from evil and their lips from deceitful speech. They must turn from evil and do good; they must seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.” I Peter 3:10-12

These verses reinforce a theme mentioned throughout the New Testament, including Jesus’ comments following the Lord’s Prayer where He says, *“For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”*

And in verses 13-17, Peter homes in on what it looks like for us to give witness for Jesus, even when we’re in difficult situations.

Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. “Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened.” But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. For it is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. I Peter 3:13-17

Peter’s 1st and 2nd letters were written to followers of Jesus who were being persecuted and were suffering for their faith in Jesus. While you and I may encounter some ridicule or have our ideas challenged, we’re hard-pressed to compare any adversity we face with what 1st

Century believers in Jesus faced. Our situation is very different and yet, I believe verses 15 & 16 are very apropos for us. *“But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.”*

Our readiness to share the hope we have in Jesus, begins by revering Christ as Lord in our hearts. The word *revere* is a synonym for *worship*. It’s only as we’re focused on Jesus and his Lordship in our lives, that we’re prepared to share the hope we have in Him with others. Again, I like the phrasing, *“be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.”* That statement presupposes, first, that we’re in relationship with people or in a position where people notice us. Secondly, it’s assumed that others clearly see the hope we have in Jesus displayed.

The hope we have in Jesus is most clearly seen in places where people are wrestling with hopelessness. I’ll say that another way. When you and I are in difficult trying circumstances, the opportunity for Jesus’ hope to shine brightly through us is greatest. As followers of Jesus, we’re called to radiate Jesus’ hope wherever we are—in our families, our neighborhoods, our schools, our workplaces and wherever we hang out. Living missionally, means I view every aspect of my life as a mission field—a place where Jesus can use me to draw people who don’t know Him into a relationship with Him.

Throughout this series, I’ve asked people from our church family to share what living out the core values of our church looks like in their lives. I’ve done that to help each of us be able to see more practically how our church’s core values are lived out. Today, I’ve asked 3 people from McBIC to share with us what it looks like for them to live out their faith and point to the hope they have in Jesus in difficult environments. I’ve asked people to share with us today who are working or serving in some of the most difficult arenas during the past year and a ½ of COVID.

As I prepared this sermon and thought about 1 Peter chapter 3, I was reminded of the Apostle Paul’s words in Philippians chapter 2 verses 14-16:

Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, “children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.” Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life. Philippians 2:14-16

My challenge for us today is to shine like stars in the midnight sky in every area of our lives, as we hold firmly to the hope we have in Jesus.