

ON MISSION with JESUS
Shining Like Stars
Isaiah 58:6-14 & Philippians 2:14-16
Layne Lebo
September 24th

In 1999, McBIC's Senior Pastor Ken Hepner began feeling that his time leading our church was drawing to a close, and he sensed God was calling me to succeed him as McBIC's Lead Pastor. Over the following 12 months, our bishop and church board confirmed that call, and after interviewing me, they invited me to become McBIC's Lead Pastor.

I had grown up in this church and had served 10 years on our staff in a variety of different roles. I sensed God's calling to move into the lead pastor role at McBIC, but I had some reservations: "What would it be like to prepare sermons and preach Sunday after Sunday?" "Am I ready for all the responsibilities that came with being lead pastor?" "Will people accept me in this new role after Pastor Ken had so successfully led McBIC for 16 years?" And probably most concerning to me: "Is McBIC ready to move from more of an inward focus to an outward community focus?"

This last question was especially important to me, because for several years, God had been stirring a growing desire in me to see our church move beyond the walls of what happened inside our church to focus on serving our community and reaching people who didn't know Jesus. In the months prior to stepping into my new role, I distinctly remember leading our staff at a planning and brainstorming day away from the office. Following our meeting that day, I was frustrated with a growing concern that our staff and our church weren't in step with my desire to see our church change to more of an outward focus. On the drive back to the church, I remember praying something like, "God, are you sure I'm the person for this role? It doesn't seem like our staff and church have the same desire to be community focused." God didn't respond audibly, but I distinctly sensed Him telling me, "Who McBIC is today isn't who it will become, and you're the person I want to lead the church to a different place."

Some hiccups following Pastor Ken's 16-year pastorate could be expected, and my first 5-6 years as lead pastor weren't easy ones for me or for our church, but we continued moving toward what we sensed God had for us. As I think back to our church's transition from Pastor

Ken to me as lead pastor, I realize that while I sensed God had change for us, at the time I had no idea what the change would look like.

On a personal level, my transition into the role of McBIC's lead pastor came before I invested 13 years in coaching multiple youth sports teams that my kids were part of, it came prior to me serving in various capacities in service organizations in our community, and it came before I began serving on our local school board. As a church, since 2001, McBIC has increasingly viewed our facility and grounds as an activity center for the community to use, and we've developed a strong partnership with our local school district. We've seen missional communities like At The Cross Recovery, Peace Promise, Eternal Hope, and Our Father's Hope begin as well as currently developing ministries focused on ministering to refugees and foster and adoptive families, and we've seen growing numbers of individuals embrace the mission God has for them of partnering with Jesus in doing his work at their jobs, at the schools they attend, and in their neighborhoods. I share that with you not to pat myself on the back or to give an "atta boy" to our church but to emphasize my conviction that what we've seen unfold at McBIC over the past nearly 25 years is an outgrowth of God's calling for our church family and is evidence of his blessing resting on us in response to our pursuit of his heart for those who don't know Jesus.

Being on mission with Jesus or partnering with Jesus in doing his work—however you choose to word it—reflects God's desire for each of us to share his love with people who don't know Him. Throughout this series, to help us envision what being on mission with Jesus could look like, I've had various people from our church family share how they partner with Jesus in doing his work in the world. Today we're blessed to have Julia and Dwayne Johnson with us. Dwayne and Julia are the co-founders of a wonderful ministry called One80 Ministries. One80 grew out of the Johnsons' involvement in their home church, Grantham Brethren in Christ, and McBIC partners closely with them—there are a number of people from our church who are heavily involved in this ministry. Dwayne and Julia, thanks for being willing to share with us how this ministry gives you a platform to be on mission with Jesus.

Julia and Dwayne Johnson

Thank you, Julia and Dwayne. I appreciate your willingness to join us today, and I'm so grateful for the ministry of One80. This ministry is a blessing to our community, and it's a wonderful opportunity for local churches to partner together.

I invite you now to turn with me in your Bibles to Isaiah 58. Before I read a section of this chapter, I want to remind you that throughout this series, we've been looking at Jeremiah 28–29. In those chapters, God spoke through his prophet Jeremiah to his people, who were in captivity in the pagan city of Babylon. Rather than simply closing their eyes, gritting their teeth, and hanging on as they awaited God's quick deliverance and their return to their homeland, God told them they should fully engage in life in Babylon, because they were going to be there for 70 years. He told them to build houses, farm the land, have children, and see those children married. Probably most shocking to the Israelites, God told them to pray that the city and its people would be blessed and prosper. He promised them that if they followed his instructions, they, too, would experience his blessing.

This theme of God blessing his people when they bless others—when they look out for and care for those around them—is prevalent in the Old and New Testaments. In Isaiah 58, the prophet Isaiah, speaking on behalf of God, tells the people that God is tired of their fasting and their religious rituals that don't ultimately lead them to care for others and pursue justice. Listen as I read verses 6–14:

“Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?

Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?

Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard.

Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say:
Here am I.

If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.

The LORD will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame.

You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail. Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings.

“If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the LORD’s holy day honorable, and if you honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words.

Then you will find your joy in the LORD, and I will cause you to ride in triumph on the heights of the land and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob.”

For the mouth of the LORD has spoken. – Isaiah 58:6-14

Jesus’ heart for you and me is not simply that we would attend to our own wants and desires, and it’s not that our church would simply focus on ourselves. His heart is that we would share the grace, mercy, love, and forgiveness each of us have experienced with others. McBIC’s mission is “Experiencing Jesus and Sharing His Love.” I’m convinced that’s what our church is called to be about and what each of us as his followers are called to pursue in our lives. The video I have to share with you this morning features Kristen Slabaugh. Kristen is professor of nursing in Messiah University’s graduate program, and I’ve asked her to share how she lives on mission with Jesus.

[Kristen Slabaugh](#)

Thanks, Kristen, for all you do at Messiah, in our local community, and at McBIC. Kristen has served on McBIC's church board for the past five years and was our assistant chair for two years. I appreciate Kristen's wisdom and insight, and her nursing training and experience were especially beneficial to me, our board and our church family as we navigated our response to COVID.

This morning's sermon is the fourth and final message in our series, "On Mission with Jesus." I've titled the sermon "Shining Like Stars," based on the Apostle Paul's words to the Philippian Church in Philippians 2:14-16, where we read, "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." I love the word picture Paul uses of us shining like stars in the sky. It's true that the darker the night is, the brighter the stars in the sky stand out to observers.

During this series, I've mentioned a number of times that the culture we live in has become increasingly resistant, uninterested, and at times even hostile toward Jesus and his followers. For some of us, that has been hard to accept, especially when we compare it to the way things were 30 or 50 years ago. I regularly hear complaints from Christians about what a shame it is that Jesus and the Bible and prayer have been removed from the public square and especially from our public schools. Last week, Pastor Jen shared with us from her experience of volunteering twice a week during the school year at Broad Street Elementary. She told a story of a boy she mentored who was in a difficult place. Her care for that student opened the door for her to pray with that boy's teacher in the school lobby. I'm guessing some of you were surprised Pastor Jen could pray with a teacher in school. As someone who cares deeply about families in our community and our schools, I was blessed by Jen's testimony, and it mirrors my own experience.

Each semester for the past five years or so, our district superintendent has made arrangements for local pastors in our community to meet with him and members of his administrative team at the district offices. In 2022, pastors from our local network were meeting at the school with administrators shortly after the school shooting in Uvalde, Texas.

Our superintendent mentioned how traumatic events like that are for teachers and school staff members, because they remind us that this can happen anywhere. As he mentioned that, I felt impressed to ask him if I could pray over him and the other administrators. At a break in our meeting, I approached our superintendent and asked if he'd be OK with us praying for him and the other administrators, and he agreed. At the end of our time, he nodded at me, and I shared with the group that our pastors would love to take a moment to pray blessing, protection, and wisdom over school leaders. So right there, in a highly visible meeting room in the school, I prayed over some of our district leaders.

Later in that same year, there was an incident at a school in our district in which a student was discovered to have brought a gun to school. I know the principal of that school well, and several days after the incident, I asked if I might stop by to talk with him. The principal brought two other staff members, and I had the chance to listen, to encourage, and to pray with them in the principal's office. I share that with you, because I want everyone to think about the opportunity we have to shine like stars as we hold forth Jesus' truth and love. Even in a culture where people get nervous about mixing religion and education, the opportunities for us to be salt and light are endless.

Every one of us, no matter our age, the length of time we've been a follower of Jesus, our personality, or the specifics of our job situation can shine like stars, but for some of us, being on mission with Jesus seems scary and intimidating, or perhaps we simply can't envision what it looks like for us. After last Sunday's services, I had a conversation with Doris Barr. Doris isn't currently on our staff, having retired in 2016, but she and I served together on McBIC's staff for 23 and a half years, so I think she still deserves to be called pastor. Doris shared an important insight with me, and I asked her if she'd be willing to share it with all of us today...

I shared with Pastor Layne last Sunday after church that when I hear him challenge us to be on mission with Jesus, I love hearing all the stories of people who are actively engaged in all kinds of ministries, on mission with Jesus in the workplace, through kid's sports, in outreach ministries, etc. But I also wonder how this message is hitting my peers: those of us who are retired or like me, are not activists, but are by nature quiet

and more behind the scenes. I have sometimes struggled with feeling like what I do is not enough or not important, so I want to share a bit of my story in hopes that it will encourage and inspire you to be on mission with Jesus in very natural and yet intentional ways in your neighborhoods.

Dave and I have lived in the same place for nearly 27 years. We live in a multi-generational neighborhood with a mix of families and retirees. When I started to spend more time at home in retirement, I realized how much I love our neighborhood and the relationships we have built over the years. I love that I have the time now to have longer conversations with my 95-year-old neighbor, Shirley, who still walks a mile or more on most days. I enjoy walking and intentionally praying in my neighborhood. We happen to live between two schools in the borough, and I personally know teachers and staff at both schools, so when I walk or drive by, I get to pray for them by name. Each morning and afternoon, we have quite a parade of buses past our house. Every so often, I intentionally sit on the porch as the buses pass and pray for the bus drivers, the children on the buses, and their families.

Several years ago, a tragedy hit our neighborhood when the young adult son of a neighbor drowned in the pool of another neighbor. We knew the parents of the young man and knew that they were believers. We reached out to love and support them. A memorial service was held at a church in town, and as we were parking for the service, we met up with another neighborhood couple we know. We walked with them and noticed how shaken they were by this death and how uncomfortable they felt going to the church. We got to do life with them that day as we attended the service together and then gathered with neighbors up and down the street at the home of parents who were grieving.

On another occasion, I heard from Shirley that her neighbor, Don, had a major heart attack. I didn't know these people well but remembered that we had met them at the wake of Shirley's husband years earlier. When I knew Don was back home, I made a phone call to ask how he was doing and to let them know I had been praying for them. I was shocked when weeks later I walked into church, and Pastor John King met me in the

lobby and said, “Your neighbors are here and are asking for you.” Those neighbors are Don and Linda Schlosser. Don told me that his heart attack was a wake-up call for him, and he knew he wanted to reconnect in a church. I had the privilege of praying for Don when he was baptized the following Easter, and Linda is now the leader of our Bible Fellowship group.

A guiding verse for my life in retirement is Acts 17:28: “In Him we live and move and have our being.” As retirees or even just as neighbors, there are opportunities all around us to be on mission with Jesus as we carry His Presence everywhere we go.

Thanks, Pastor Doris. I appreciate you and am grateful that even though you’re retired from vocational ministry, you’re still on mission with Jesus.

I hope and pray that the Holy Spirit has touched your heart and that Jesus has sparked your mind with ideas of what it looks like for you to embrace Jesus’ calling to shine like stars in the sky, viewing the places where you’re positioned and the people you’re in relationship with as your mission field. Again this week, I’m inviting our church family to respond in one of two ways:

- Prayer partners, staff and church board members are available around the worship center to pray with anyone who would like to embrace the call to live on mission with Jesus in their workplaces, school, or neighborhood.
- As we sing, if God is stirring a desire in you to live on mission with Him, I invite you to step out in the aisle and walk toward the front. At the conclusion of our singing, I want to pray a prayer of commissioning over each of us.

“Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” AMEN!