

ONE HEART, ONE MIND
Experiencing Jesus and Sharing His Love
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Acts 4:32
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Early in 2019 our staff began the process of refining McBIC's mission and values. We were blessed to receive help in this process from Doreen Lecheler, who at that time attended McBIC, but recently moved to Florida with her husband, Brent, and from Dr. David Hagenbuch, a marketing professor at Messiah University, who attends McBIC along with his wife, Lili. At the time, I thought the process might take 6-9 months and I anticipated preaching this series in 2020, but like a lot of things the COVID pandemic disrupted our process. None of us could have anticipated how long COVID would last or how disruptive it would be, but the timing for this series couldn't be better.

When you hear I'm preaching on our mission and values some of you might have a response along the lines of, "*Awww... I know mission and values are important, but I came to hear from the Bible.*" If that's your thinking, I ask you to give me and this series a chance. Today, I'll lay some foundations and then over the next 8 weeks we'll walk through values I believe will resonate with you as you think about our culture here at McBIC and what God has for our church in the years ahead.

The Early Church, is looked at today as an example of God's design for his Church. The church wasn't perfect, no church is, but their focus on God, the community they built together, and their commitment to doing Jesus' work in the power of the Holy Spirit is a model for us. We read about the Early Church throughout the 28 chapters of Acts, but chapters 2 and 4 give detailed accounts of the Early Church's worship, prayer, community, and outreach. I want to invite you to read the first part of Acts chapter 4 verse 32 aloud with me from the screen. "*All the believers were one in heart and mind.*" Acts 4:32a That's a short but remarkable statement, especially when we consider the make-up and identity of the believers.

- Women and men served together in a culture that kept genders separate. The New Testament mentions many women by name who along with men served in leadership roles.

- There were people of different races/ethnicities—including Jews and Gentiles, who according to Jewish Law were forbidden to be in close proximity with each other. Jews and Gentiles social distanced long before COVID. The names and home areas of the 7 deacons listed in Acts chapter 6, who were chosen to assist the apostles in their ministry, demonstrate that these deacons came from all over the world.
- The Early Church consisted of people with different political persuasions. Among Jesus’ disciples there was one and probably 2 Jewish nationalists (Simon and Judas Iscariot) and at least one Roman collaborator (Matthew). Before they met Jesus, these men would have killed one another more quickly than they would have eaten together in the same room.
- There were wealthy and poor people in the church. We see this variety among the disciples, throughout the Book of Acts and from references the Apostle Paul makes in his letters.

The New Testament Church was very diverse, and yet, Luke tells us, *“All the believers were one in heart and mind.”* As we think about the Early Church and consider McBIC and Jesus’ Church today it’s critical for us to remember that **Unity is centered on our shared commitment to Jesus and His Church, not on our similar background, beliefs or ideologies.**

The past 18 months have been marked by division across our state and nation, in our local community, and even within churches and families. We’ve not been immune to unrest and division at McBIC. We’ve seen people who have worshiped with us for decades make the choice to begin worshiping elsewhere and we’ve seen people from other area churches connect with our church during this season as well. There has been a “reshuffling of the deck,” not only in our church, but in every church I know. Churches are families and when people transition, friends and family members are impacted emotionally—sadness, grief and even anger are normal responses. Our staff was blessed back in late April to have Doris Barr and Curt Stutzman lead us through a time of corporate spiritual direction, which we found very helpful in bring healing and restoration for us and since I’ve come back from Sabbatical our staff has been discussing how we can provide something similar for our entire church family. We’re planning on having a worship and prayer night in October.

I share that with you, not to dredge up painful emotions, but because it impacts the core of who we are as a church. Our staff and I view this season as a time of regrouping as we say “goodbye” to those who have left and welcome those who have recently joined us. I’ve likened it to a church plant scenario, because there is a sense in which this is a new start. That’s

why I think this is a very fitting time for us to focus on our mission and the values that shape us and propel us forward.

I love this t-shirt—it's ratty looking, but clean. It says "*McBIC...established in 1890.*" It's an old t-shirt from a McBIC softball team someone gave me over 10 years ago. I love wearing it around the house to do yardwork, because it's so soft and light, but Greta and Kerrigan hate it. They make me change it instead of wearing it to the dinner table. I love that it highlights the fact that our church was established 131 years ago. McBIC has existed through WWI and II, the Spanish Flu in 1918, the Great Depression, the Korean and Vietnam wars, the tumultuous 1960s with the assassinations of JFK, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Bobby Kennedy, Watergate, the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and many other things. We've been through all of that and more in the last 13 decades, and we'll make it through the 2020's in spite of pandemics, racial justice tension and political turmoil. I say that with confidence, because our unity and our stability rests in Jesus, not the stability of the world around us.

We say our church was founded in 1890 because that's when our first building was built at High & Marble Streets—by the large cemetery in town—but the church family itself is likely 10-20 years older than that. For a number of years our church family met once at least every several months at the Union Church building located on East Main Street in Mechanicsburg. That church building was constructed in 1825 for the purpose of providing a building for congregations that didn't have a building in which to worship.

At our church building's dedication on November 2nd 1890 Pastor Noah Zook preached the dedicatory sermon—one of 3 sermons preached that day—from Mark 11:17 where Jesus said, "*Is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer?*" Mark 11:17 KJV From the start, the focus of our church has been on communion with God and creating an environment through which all the nations can meet with God. Isn't that awesome?!

Mechanicsburg Brethren in Christ, known in our community as "The Church on the Hill," because of its location at the top of High Street, had a long and rich history of good preaching in worship services and revival meetings, commitment to taking God's Word seriously in how people lived their lives, and a strong ministry to children—kids from all over the town attended our Vacation Bible Schools each summer. Throughout the late 1800s and into the late 1900s,

the church was sustained by the faithful prayers of its saints, regular attendance of its people, strong financial giving and willing volunteers who served in myriad ways.

In 1985 McBIC welcomed Ken Hepner as our new senior pastor. Ken was just 32 years of age and had come to Christ out of drug addiction just 7 years earlier. God had placed a vision in Pastor Ken's heart to reshape McBIC's culture into one that focused on evangelism that leads to discipleship and to become a Community Church—priorities that continue to lead us today 36 years later. Other priorities Pastor Ken spearheaded, which shaped our culture were: a deepening focus on worship and prayer, a commitment to leadership development and raising up pastors from within our church and an emphasis on experiencing Jesus' healing and wholeness. I frequently have pastors from outside our church ask me, *"How is McBIC so healthy?"* My quick answer is, *"We've been pulling in the same direction for over 35 years."* God placed values in Pastor Ken Hepner's heart that our church leadership embraced in the mid-1980s and we continue to pursue those same values 3 & ½ decades later.

After serving on staff under Pastor Ken's leadership for 10 years in a variety of pastoral roles, I was invited to become McBIC's senior pastor in 2001. For the past 20 years we've continued to build on foundations that have been laid since our church's founding in 1890. Every era is shaped by the passion and personality of the senior leader at that time, but much of what I've led us in is continuing what God has already been doing. Three areas that I'm particularly passionate about and have sought to drive deeper into McBIC's DNA during my time as Lead Pastor are, community engagement, leadership development and helping people embrace wherever they live, work, go to school and recreate as their mission field.

As we walk through our core values over the next 8 weeks, I don't think there will be many surprises for you. My guess is that your *"aha moments"* won't be, *"Hmmm, that's a new idea,"* but rather, *"Now I better understand why we do that and why it's so important to us."*

The mission statement our staff landed on is a very simple 6 word statement: ***Experiencing Jesus and Sharing His love.*** In all we do, whether it be our worship services, Children's Ministry, Youth Ministry, Adult Bible Fellowship Groups, or ministries like At The Cross Recovery and Dad Connection, we want people to experience Jesus. No matter what else might occur, if we fail in helping people experience Jesus, we need to shut down and spend our

time doing something else. Hand in hand with experiencing Jesus, we're convinced every one of us is also responsible to share Jesus' love with others. Experiencing Jesus and sharing his love is the bedrock of God's Kingdom. It's why Jesus, when asked what the greatest commandment was, said, "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all you soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.*" Matt. 22:37-40 We receive from Jesus as we experience Him, and we share what He has given us with others.

Underneath the umbrella of our mission—why we exist—we established a vision that gets more specific about what we do. The wording we developed for that statement is: ***Disciples who bring restoration and wholeness to Mechanicsburg and to the world.*** As followers of Jesus, we're all disciples whom Jesus has placed on earth to establish his kingdom—to bring restoration and wholeness in our community and throughout the world. You might wonder why we chose the words restoration and wholeness—what's behind them? We chose those words because they speak to the salt and light each of us are called to be in our world. In Matthew 5—the beginning of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount—He calls us to be salt and light. I love the way Eugene Peterson paraphrases these images in The Message.

Let me tell you why you are here. You're here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the **God-flavors** of this earth. If you lose your saltiness, how will people taste godliness? You've lost your usefulness and will end up in the garbage.

Here's another way to put it: You're here to be light, bringing out the **God-colors** in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We're going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don't think I'm going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I'm putting you on a light stand. Now that I've put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you'll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven. Matthew 5:13-16 The MESSAGE

As Jesus' disciples, you and I are called to bring out the God-flavors and God-colors in our world. And that goes way beyond what happens inside these walls. We bring out God-flavors and God-colors in our homes, in our schools, in our work places, where we hang out and wherever we go. The words *restoration* and *wholeness* tie in with what we've come to identify as the redemptive purpose of Mechanicsburg. I preached on this last November 22nd—if you want to revisit that for more details you can find a written copy of the sermon or watch it on our church website. I won't re-preach that sermon, but I want to give you a quick overview.

Redemptive purpose connects the physical origins and identity of a community with its spiritual purpose and focus.

The name Mechanicsburg was given to our community in the early 19th Century because as signs in our town say, *“named for a settlement of mechanics.”* *“Why did a group of mechanics settle in our town, you might ask?”* Mechanics—people who fixed wagon wheels at that time—settled in this area because Mechanicsburg was the half way point between Carlisle and Harrisburg. We could make that 20 mile trip in under half an hour today—if traffic cooperates—but traveling that bumpy, pot hole filled path in the 1800’s could take more than a day. So travelers stopped in what is now known as Mechanicsburg for food, lodging and wagon repair. Thus, the mechanics.

The concept of redemptive purpose—which I believe was popularized by author John Dawson—asks, “How does Mechanicsburg’s settling and early days tie into God’s design for his people in their community today?” Here goes... Just as weary travelers stopped in our town 200 years ago for food, rest and vehicle repair, we believe Jesus’ design for his disciples and for his Church, is that we would bring Jesus’ restoration and wholeness to weary travelers on life’s journey—that people who interact with us on a personal level and who interact with our church and other churches in our community would experience Jesus’ healing, restoration and wholeness in their lives. That, my friends, will preach! That’s why you and I are here. That’s what it looks like for us to bring God-flavors and God-colors into our community and into our world.

I want to wrap up today by inviting you to look at Isaiah chapter 58 with me. In this chapter God is speaking through his prophet Isaiah to the people of Israel. He’s explaining to them that his primary interest isn’t their religious rituals. What He’s most concerned about is how they treat the people around them. For over 20 years—prior to my becoming our Lead Pastor—we’ve embraced these words as God’s words for us as his disciples, for our church and other churches in this community and for our community of Mechanicsburg.

“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. Isaiah 58:6-12