

**“Going Deep in a Shallow World”**  
**Pastor Brent McDougal**  
**Wednesday Evening Bible Study, June 9, 2021**

“All the believers were **one in heart and mind**. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but **they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus**. And God’s grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were **no needy persons among them**. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need. Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means ‘son of encouragement’), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles’ feet. (Acts 4:32-37, NIV)”

**4 dramatic shifts that are happening in the world** (adapted from Neil Cole: <https://www.100movements.com/articles/why-we-cannot-afford-to-stay-where-we-are>)

### **1. Population growth**

It took us from the days of Noah until 1804 AD to pass our first billion people on this small blue planet. Within less than a century we tripled that number. In our lifetime we have grown by 4 billion...and we’re still breathing. What will the world’s population look like in our children’s lifetime? Or in the lifetime of our grandchildren?

### **2. Increase in Technological Innovation**

Like the proverbial frog in a kettle, unaware that his surrounding is coming to a boil, we are immersed in rapid technological changes that affect us every day without us even being aware of how drastic the change truly is. A man invented a printing press and civilization was changed for centuries to follow. Today that sort of world altering technological advance is happening almost every week.

### **3. The Growing Economic Divide**

At the risk of sounding like Bernie Sanders, we are in the midst of an historic shift of wealth and power to a select few. Some chide Sanders for proposing a redistribution of wealth, but the truth is we already are experiencing the largest redistribution of wealth in human history.

Since the economic crisis of 2008/9 the number of billionaires has quadrupled from 793 to 3,288. The world added 412 billionaires last year alone. While the rest of us ride the ups and downs of elevated joblessness, shrinking paychecks, increasing debt, decreasing value of our currency and the rising cost of living, there has been a steady upswing in the number of obscenely rich people. The 85 richest people in the world increase their wealth by \$688 million per day. That’s \$500,000/min. or \$30 million an hour.

### **4. Changes in Religious Views and Experience**

The American religious landscape is undergoing a dramatic transformation. White Christians, once the dominant religious group in the U.S., now account for fewer than half of all adults living in the country. Today, fewer than half of all states are majority white Christian.

Christians are declining, both as a share of the U.S. population and in total number. In 2007, 78.4% of U.S. adults identified with Christian groups, such as Protestants, Catholics, Mormons and others. Today it is less than 50%.

## **What has been the impact of these four shifts?**

1. More and more people get their information, including religious instruction and encouragement, in a variety of places, especially from the Internet.
2. More and more people feel anxiety in rapidly changing world.
3. More and more people view the decline in religion with fear but feel powerless to do anything about it.
4. More and more people opt out of “church” but still see themselves on a spiritual quest.
5. More and more people don’t know the core teaching and stories of the Bible.

The future of Christianity will eschew shallow belief and watered-down theology in favor of **deep theological reflection**, in small groups as well as in worship. **Deep, Christ-centered relationships** are essential to the continuation and expansion of the church in our community. **Deep missional engagement** is required beyond the walls of the church building, a deeper, more relationally-driven evangelism rooted in God’s love for the whole world.

So let’s address those three areas. For shorthand, we’ll call them deep faith, deep relationships and deep mission.

### **Deep faith**

Deep faith as revealed by Jesus as one that consistently confounds people’s expectations. We call this method “discipleship.” In our day, it could also be called “leadership development,” but is more than a business understanding. It includes Jesus’ teachings and way of sacrifice.

### **Deep relationships**

If the love of Christ is really in us, then we above all people should have deep, amazing relationships. Jesus made a new family by putting into practice the power of love. It transformed everything around Him. They shared everything in common with no one in need.

### **Deep mission**

The Great Commission offers a beautiful, invitational aspect of what Jesus is saying and doing. Before He ascended back to heaven, He said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me...” Everything was under His rule and dominion, and He shares the fullness of His authority and rule with us. His commission is not a burden. He’s inviting us to take on the yoke with Him, like oxen, to walk with Him as the work is done. Jesus said, “My yoke is easy and my burden is light.” It’s like he is saying, “I am not forcing you, I am inviting you in this family of brothers and sisters and father and son and Holy Spirit, on the greatest of journeys together. In that spirit of intimacy, I am issuing you the challenge to go.”

## **How do we reach people in a post-Christian culture, one that we often don’t understand?**

We have a great opportunity post-COVID to be the authentic church. Leaders need to embody the grace of God. People who are sold out and compelled by an idea — that’s what draws people in. We need to build a church with absolute identity with our mission. We need the people take the missionary task unto themselves .