

**IMAGINE**  
**One Church**  
**Ephesians 3:20-21**

Next month, I will celebrate 10 my tenth anniversary as the Sr. Pastor of Colonial Hills Church. This has been the most challenging, invigorating, exciting period of my entire life. I love leading CHC! You are an amazing group of humble, motivated, and passionate people! Recently, I spent some time looking over the very first message that I ever preached as your Sr. Pastor. I was blessed and encouraged by what I read because of how it has been lived out by us at CHC over these 10 years. **My message was focused on the answer to one simple QUESTION: *Where is God leading us?*** This was the thing that I felt was most important for me to address as I began my journey as the Under-Shepherd of this congregation. **The answer to that question was, I believe, both simple and profound because it was also GOD'S ANSWER; not mine.** I have learned over the years that we as Christians do NOT get to decide where we will go or what we will do as we follow Jesus; we only get to decide whether we will follow him or not! Jesus said, **"My sheep hear my voice, and they FOLLOW me!"** **So, the answer that God gave to me for my simple question was one simple word: CLOSER.**

We are always to be about moving closer as a church. **We are first called to move CLOSER TO GOD.** I want us to stay right on the heels of our Shepherd! I want to be able to hear him whisper, and I want to be closest to the action when he begins to work and move. **Is that your desire? Be careful; it can be a very uncomfortable place!** Many have made that discovery at CHC over these past 10 years. He seldom leads us where we think we need to go! **When we make it a point to move closer to God, then we will also begin to move CLOSER TO ONE ANOTHER!** I love the community that we share as brothers and sisters in Christ. The members of this church family are as close to me as my own blood family. I treasure what we share as we serve God side by side. **But that closeness to one another can also be difficult and uncomfortable. People are flawed, and getting close to flawed people will mess you up! I have said it often: Relationships are MESSY. But they are always worth the trouble.** Close community is part of our calling. But our call to move closer also involves **one other move** that is both costly and inconvenient. It is also glorious!

**The call to move closer is also a direct command from God for us to move ever CLOSER TO UNBELIEVERS.** We do not exist for ourselves. We do not exist to be happy and contented as a church family. We do not exist to build our little nest and stay close and warm inside of it. Ironically, we have to be pushed out of the nest (which makes us feel frightened and far away from God at times) in order to move closer to the LOST. This is the way of Christ. He said that he came **"to seek and to save that which was lost."** He left the glories of heaven to come down to the miseries of earth in order to reach the lost. **We are not following HIM if we are not pursuing THEM!** We have lived in light of that vision for many years now, in spite of some very difficult challenges. We have seen hundreds of people come to Christ in the past ten years. We have made it a point to ATTRACT OUTSIDERS IN

even as we simultaneously sought to BUILD INSIDERS UP. And I believe that CHC has excelled in SERVING INSIDE AND OUT to help accomplish those two goals. This is exactly what the Lord commanded us to do.

After ten years, we can look back over our shoulders and see the fruit of all that God has done in and through us over these years. I think that is an important thing for us to do. **On September 20<sup>th</sup> at our One Church service, we will again look at some of the highlights of our history as a church. But we will also make it our major focus to look again at where we are going!** Recently, I have been captured by two verses in Scripture that greatly encourage me. These verses speak the truth about what God will accomplish through CHC as we move CLOSER to HIM, to EACH OTHER, and to the LOST WORLD! **Ephesians 3:20-21 NIV**

**20 Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.**

God is able to do immeasurably MORE than all we could IMAGINE for him or ASK of him by his power that works within us. That is a mouthful! If God is working in you, then there is NOTHING that you could ask of him or dream for him that he is not able to accomplish for his own glory. And he will do it NOW. I love the FIRST WORD of that passage. **“NOW, unto him . . .”** God’s vision for CHC is not some far off dream that will not come to pass for many years. He wants to fulfill those dreams and requests right now, in order to reach EACH GENERATION for his glory. This is true for each of our lives, if we are bold enough to dream it and ask for it for the glory of God! **So, What are you DREAMING FOR God, and what are you ASKING OF God?** I cannot answer that question for you. You must find that answer alone before God. **I do know that God has been faithful to give us the answer to that question as a church family for 10 years now.** For God’s glory, we have dreamed, and we have asked. Over these years, he has allowed us to make a difference in this world through our WORKS and our WORDS. We have served wherever we were allowed to serve, and we have shared our faith wherever people have listened. **We have also been BLESSED to INVEST in a number of other great works that God is doing in churches and ministries all over this world.** Just this week, we built 8 more little blue houses in Jamaica to go with the other 52+ that we have built over the last 10 years (not to mention 120+ other houses that were built by churches who caught the vision from us in these years!) We helped to start the Freedom Biker Church that is reaching many people in the Biker community in the Mid-South. We were one of the only churches that invested in High Point Church in Memphis several years ago. Today, High Point is one of the largest churches in Memphis, and she is reaching scores of young adults for Christ. We have a part in their reward! We also invested money and hours of labor in helping to launch Life Point Church in Columbus, Ohio. They are now running over 2,000 in worship week after week! We invested in many other churches and works that I will remind us of later on this

year. Sufficient to say, we have been faithful to dream with others and joyfully invest in whatever we felt that God was leading us toward!

We also know what it is like to fulfill a DREAM that is BORN out of our God-given BURDENS. The BURDENS of CHC have become great BLESSINGS for others! About five years ago, I asked you to fast and pray with your staff as we sought God for our NEXT STEP as a church in the fulfillment of God's vision for us. I was wrestling with the problem of how we could move closer to the people that we were trying to reach in our community. I began to ask God what that would look like, and his answer was something so big that it scared me to death. **He began to lead me toward the idea of becoming ONE CHURCH in more than one location!** As we fasted and prayed, it became clear that our first step was to move toward establishing a second campus in Hernando with Denny Burt as the Campus Pastor. That was new for us, and it was new for Denny. It was a venture into the unknown, and there were many who did not like the idea. Some still don't. Change is never easy, and moving closer REQUIRES CHANGE! By faith, we moved forward and chose to ASK GOD to give us what he had led us to DREAM. He has already done more than we could have imagined.

At the end of August in 2012, CHC voted to buy 11 acres in Hernando, Mississippi. **You did this as a church BEFORE we ever had our first regular service there.** You stepped out in faith and gave money to buy the equipment that we would need for creating every excellent environment that we would be setting up and taking down EVERY WEEK for over 34 months now. That's right. We have members who have been setting up our preschool and children's class areas, our beautiful "made from scratch" foyer, and our major sanctuary setup with chairs, lights, sound, pipe and drape, and decorations every week for almost 3 years. That is over 150 individual times of setting up and 150 more times of taking down. And that does not include the set up and tear down that is necessary on a lesser scale every Wednesday night! Many of you who give to support CHC Hernando and some of you who help to set up and tear down every week do not even attend at that campus! Do you know why the members of CHC SERVE like this and GIVE like this? It is not to get "kudos" from me on Sunday morning. It is not to win some sort of "Greatest Christian" award. I will tell you why they do this.

**[Show pictures of those who have been baptized.]**

**They do it because it brings PEOPLE to God and GLORY to God!** This is called MISSIONS. Since we started our campus in Hernando, we have seen 93 people (counting the one from the early service this morning!) come to Christ and follow him in baptism. There have been even more who have been saved who have not been baptized yet. The great majority of those who have been saved are unchurched individuals (and mostly young people) that we would not have been able to reach if we were not actually IN THE CITY with them! They are now a part of our CHC family because we obeyed God's command to GO! Every one of you who help to provide for or create these environments for the purpose of telling people about Christ will "shine as the stars in the heavens" because you have been a part of

helping “bring many people to righteousness!” I know that you do what you do simply out of LOVE for God and a desire to see people come to know him. HE is your reward, but their salvation is the FRUIT of your labor together. I thank God for you!

**So, what are we to do NOW?** You see, we ARE a MULTI-SITE CHURCH. Our vision was not to be a church with a “multi-site,” but to be a MULTI-SITE CHURCH. God has called us to establish unified, strategic locations wherever in the world he wants us to BE. Today, we are in Southaven, Hernando, and Bolivia. I can only imagine where God will have us to be next. But each location will BE US. **This requires true unity!** Right now, we are in the middle of a great vision, and we must continue to move forward in it. Do you remember the words of Nehemiah when he was being pressed to stop the work that God had called him to do? **Nehemiah 6:3 NASB**

**3 So I sent messengers to them, saying, "I am doing a great work and I cannot come down.**

Like the people in Nehemiah’s day, we tend to get TIRED and even feel discouraged when we are in the middle of the work to fulfill a dream. If we are not careful, we will allow ourselves to get frustrated and even feel disconnected from one another as we carry out our work. The people who were working on the wall in Nehemiah’s day had to face their own weariness as well as opposition from outside enemies. They also had to contend with discouragement that came from within their own ranks as some insiders complained about the cost and undermined the commitment that was required for completion of the task. **As I lead CHC, I have found that we have had to deal with some of these same things. Yes, it is costly to move closer. Yes, it takes a lot of energy and time to FINISH STRONG. I have even found some traces of resentment and jealousy between our two campuses as we carry out our mission and vision week after week. Must I remind you? Our campuses are NOT in competition with one another! We are ONE FAMILY with ONE VISION. And both of us are required for each other’s success!** It actually grieves my heart when I hear anyone from either of our campuses COMPARING one to the other. That will mess us up. Instead, I want each of our campuses to INSPIRE the best in the other. **Do you remember what I said when we opened our campus in Hernando?** I said that we were not going to detract from or deplete the work of any other Christ-honoring church in Hernando, but we were going to act the same way we always have. We were only going to GO AFTER people who were not involved in other churches. **We were going to partner with other churches in order to sharpen them as they sharpen us, and our presence was going to press them to be on their “A Game.”** We have done that in Southaven, and we are doing it now in Hernando. And we are making a difference in our communities. Now, if we are cooperating with other churches in that way, then why in the world would we not cooperate with one another this way in our OWN BODY! A spirit of jealousy and resentment NEVER accomplishes UNITY. **So, I plead with you: Guard your heart against comparing our campuses or tearing each other down. Instead, pray for one another, give to one another, and work hard for one another’s success.**

**This leads me to where we are today in our vision.** In Southaven, we meet in a beautiful facility that has ample room for our children, students, and adults in every service and throughout the week. We have room for CELEBRATE RECOVERY services, for Step Studies, and for The Landing each Friday night. We have a place where we serve meals to the hungry several times a month, and we have a newly renovated sanctuary that allows us flexibility to set up environments for things like student events and family conferences, or school band gatherings and celebrations. It is awesome. **In Hernando, we are in a SCHOOL.** We are so grateful for this. **It was the LAST thing that we thought needed to happen, but it was the BEST thing that could have happened!** God set this up. We are in the public eye every week, and students who live right in our neighborhood come every week to the very place where we meet for worship. **They feel at home in “our worship center!” We never want to lose that.**

**But we do not have the luxury of STAYING in the school.** The School Board required us to give an EXIT PLAN before we ever started meeting at HMS. Furthermore, our contract states that the school only has to give us FIVE DAYS NOTICE for asking us to vacate the premises. There is also a FEDERAL ruling that says we can only use the school for our services 100 days a year. There are 52 weeks in a year, so that means that between Sundays and Wednesdays, we have to find at least four times when we will not meet at HMS. Thankfully, they have been very gracious to us in counting only our actual service dates, and not our set up and tear down days in the total number of days they allow us to meet.

Do you see what this means? We are limited in the amount of days that we can USE or STAY at HMS. Our Hernando Campus has an average attendance of around 500, so we are too big to move to any other location in Hernando. (Trust me. We have looked!) **By itself, our Hernando Campus is too small to build a new building. But thankfully, she is NOT by herself! We are ONE CHURCH in two locations!** Pastor Denny has done a great job of leading the Hernando campus to do everything that it can to help pay off our land in Hernando so that we can move swiftly and wisely toward building the facilities that we need. **In March, Denny led the congregation there to “do what they can” to take small, deliberate steps toward paying off the land. I LOVE the way that you all responded. [Put images of IMAGINE actions up]**

Many of you had garage sales or you sold handmade crafts or you did work for money that went toward the land. Many of your CHILDREN helped to work or give so that the land would be paid off. You all did so well! In just 3 months, you helped to raise over \$38,000 (made up mostly of small bills and change!). You followed Denny’s leadership beautifully, and I am so grateful for that! We are that much closer because of what you have done. As of this date, we only owe \$270,000 dollars on the original \$693,000 amount that we borrowed. That is awesome! But now, it is time to PAY IT OFF. **Here is what I propose. I am going to ask that you pray about what God would have you to give this summer over and above your tithe to help**

pay off the land. Please, do not give your tithe to this. If you have to make a choice, then just continue to faithfully give your tithe to the ongoing needs of the Body.

Lisa and I have been married for 31 years now. In that time, there has NEVER been a time that we were not giving over and above our tithe toward some need that our church's vision had created. Never. And I think that this is just how it OUGHT to be! I love planning our budget with a FAITH VISION in mind. Lisa and I have been giving to the vision of CHC for almost 26 years now. Joe Kelley helped me to remember the names of all of the land and building funds that we have had here over the years. We have "Possessed the Land" and funded "Faith to Freedom." We have walked the "Road to Glory," and we have been "All In." Right now, we are faithfully giving to "One Church" even while we have two kids in college, one child getting married, and four kids living at home. Amazingly – and absolutely by God's grace – we paid off our house last year and we are DEBT FREE! God has truly blessed our heavenly investments in his kingdom. He will do the same for you as you S T R E T C H yourself in your finances for his Kingdom!

I want to ask each of you to PRAY about what God would have you to give to help pay off the land by the end of this summer. **My goal (which I believe is God-given!) is to hold up the note on the land at our One Church Service on September 20<sup>th</sup> and BURN IT . . . to the glory of God!** We need to do this. It is time for us to move forward in our vision and FINISH STRONG. This week in my quiet time, I came across an encouraging reminder: **Proverbs 24:27 NIV**

**27 Put your outdoor work in order and get your fields ready; after that, build your house.**

I am certain that we can do this by the grace of God. Let's finish our outdoor work by paying off the land, and then we can move toward building a strategic home for ministry in Hernando! I only ask that you give this "over and above" amount **before the end of August** so that we will have time before September 20<sup>th</sup> to settle everything with the bank. **We will not be posting the amounts that are coming in over the summer (this will keep the suspense alive!), but we will be keeping this VISION and NEED before you throughout this summer.** Let that stir you to prayer and action.

To finish this message this morning, I want us to spend some time in prayer asking God to give us more than we could IMAGINE in response to the GREAT NEED that our BURDEN for the lost has helped to create.

Let's pray.