

# Covenant Membership

## Session 3: An Introduction to Mercy Hill Church

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### Introduction

#### Key Text

*"I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor 2:2).*

#### The Outline

- A. We are now **two sessions** deep in the Covenant Membership Series. Sessions 1 and 2 provided **An Introduction to Church Membership** in *general*. This morning we start to look at what it means to be a member at **Mercy Hill Church** in *particular*.
  - 1. The title of this session is: **"An Introduction to Mercy Hill Church."** We are going to look primarily at three headings: (1) **Our Mission and Vision**; (2) **Our Values**; and (3) **Our Ministry Strategy**.

### Our Mission and Vision

#### Our Mission

- A. I preached a full message on these statements back in **January** of this year, so I'm not looking to do that here (see Appendix 2). But I do want to take a moment to unfold the basic idea for you because there's really nothing more **fundamental** to a church than it's Mission and Vision statements. They answer the questions: *"Why do we **exist**?"*; *"What are we **doing** here?"*; and *"Where are we **going**?"*
- B. Our mission statement reads as follows: **"Mercy Hill Church exists to Adore, Manifest, and Proclaim the glory of God as revealed in the gospel of Jesus Christ."**
  - 1. Before we tackle the **action verbs** (*Adore, Manifest, Proclaim*), I want to look at the **two objects** of those verbs that come into view at the end of this statement: namely: *"the **glory** of God as revealed in the **gospel** of Jesus Christ."*

**"The Glory of God as Revealed in the Gospel of Jesus Christ" (Our Eyes Are Opened)**

- A. The glory of God is best understood as the **radiance** or **outshining** of all His **perfections**. It is the **beauty** of all that God is put on **display**.
  - 1. And the Scriptures make plain that God's glory is **preeminently** revealed to us in His **Son** (**Heb 1:3**). As Paul would say: *"[We see] the glory of God in the **face** of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor 4:3).*

- B. And, ironically, nowhere does that glory shine brighter from His face than when it is **smacked bloody** for us on the **cross**.
  - 1. It is at the cross that God's **holiness**, God's **purity**, God's **power**, God's **justice**, God's **compassion**, God's **mercy**, God's **love**, etc. are put, not just on display, but in **high definition**.
    - a. The glory of God is revealed in the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- C. Our eyes are **opened**...

### “Adore” (Our Hearts Are Enthralled)

- A. And when at last we see God's glory as it has been revealed in Jesus and His work on the cross, we Adore Him for it. Our **hearts** come **alive** with **love** for the God who has **first loved** us. As Jesus implies in **Luke 7:47**—*“He who is forgiven much loves much.”*
- B. Our eyes are opened; our hearts are **enthralled**...

### “Manifest” (Our Lives Are Transformed)

- A. Adoration leads to Manifestation. This is why Paul writes in **2 Cor 3:18**: *“[W]e all, with unveiled face, beholding the **glory of the Lord** [in the face of Jesus Christ], are being **transformed** into the same **image** from one degree of **glory** to another.”*
  - 1. As I **look upon** Him, I start to **look** more and more **like** Him. I start to look like the **cross**. I start to give others a glimpse of the Savior in the way I lay my **life down** for them. I start to **manifest** in my life the glory of the One I so **adore**.
- B. Our eyes are opened; our hearts are enthralled; our lives are **transformed**...

### “Proclaim” (Our Tongues Are Loosed)

- A. Manifestation leads to Proclamation. We are not content to merely look **upon** Him. Nor are we content to merely look **like** Him. We want others to be **swept up** by Him as well. So we **speak**: *“[H]ow are they to believe in him of whom they have never **heard**? And how are they to **hear** without someone **preaching**?”* (**Rom 10:14**).
- B. Our eyes are opened; our hearts are enthralled; our lives are transformed; and our tongues are **loosed**! We Adore, Manifest, and Proclaim the glory of God as revealed in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

### Gospel AMPlification

- A. Taking the **acronym** established by the action verbs (A-M-P) we call this process **Gospel AMPlification**. We exist to turn up the **volume** on God's glory by Adoring, Manifesting, and Proclaiming the gospel of His Son.

## Our Vision

- A. And this Gospel Amplification leads to what we've called **Gospel Reverberation**. For as we AMPLify the glory of God as revealed in the gospel of Jesus Christ, others come to Adore Him, Manifest Him, and Proclaim Him.
  - 1. The amplification is ***multiplying, getting louder, reverberating*** until at last our ***grand vision*** is fulfilled and the glory of God finally ***fills the earth*** as the waters cover the sea (***Hab 2:14***).
- B. Bringing our Mission and Vision Statements together, then, we read: [Mission:] ***"Mercy Hill Church exists to Adore, Manifest, and Proclaim the glory of God as revealed in the gospel of Jesus Christ..."***[Vision:] ***until that glory fills the earth as the waters cover the sea."***
  - 1. **Gospel Amplification for Gospel Reverberation**. That's why we exist. That's what I am going to give my life for in this church!

## Our Values

### From Three Aspects to Three Values

- A. As we transition now to look at our **Values**, I need to remind us of the way I defined the **church** back at the very beginning of this series: **The church is that blessed assembly that exists in the presence of God, as the people of God, with the purpose of God.**
  - 1. This is who we were at first **created** to be in **Adam**, and who we are now **redeemed** to be in **Christ**. **One blessed assembly, three distinct aspects.**
- B. Understanding that this is what God has **created** and **redeemed** us to be as *the* church, I want to make sure that this is what we are aiming with all our might to be in *this* church.
  - 1. Therefore, these **three aspects—Presence, People, Purpose—flow into and correlate** with, what I would identify as our **three values—Faith, Community, and Mission**.
- C. I will unfold each of these Values further in **future sessions**, but for now I just want to quickly **define** them and **relate** them to one another.

### Defining Each Value

#### (1) Faith: Knowing and Loving *the Lord*

- A. We, the church, exist in the **Presence** of God. **We are the Bride of Christ, created and redeemed to enjoy intimate union with Him. This value presses our church upwards in love for Him.**

1. Consider **1 Cor 8:6**—*“For us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.”*
- B. We were **created** for Him. To **know** Him, **love** Him, **obey** Him, **worship** Him.
  1. We once had been **exiled** from Him in our sin, but through **Christ** we have been **brought back**.
    - a. We value **Faith** in this church.

## (2) Community: Knowing and Loving *the Church*

- A. We, the church, exist as the **People** of God. We are the **Family** of Christ, **adopted** in the Beloved and brought into **covenantal relationship** with His people. This value presses our church **inwards** in love for one another.
  1. Consider **Eph 2:19**—*“So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the **household of God**.”*
- B. We were **created** for community. To **know** and **love** others and to let ourselves be **known** and **loved** by others.
  1. We once were at **enmity** with one another—bitter enemies like Jew and Gentile. But in **Christ**, we have been **reconciled**, brought into the **same family room** under care of the **same Father**.
    - a. We value **Community** in this church.

## (3) Mission: Knowing and Loving *the World*

- A. We, the church, exist for the **Purpose** of God. We are the **Embassy** of Christ, commissioned by the Savior to be His **ambassadors—salt and light** in a decaying and darkening world. This value presses our church **outwards** in love for the unbelieving.
  1. Consider **2 Cor 5:20**—*“We are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.”*
- B. You were **created** for something so much bigger than yourself. You were created to take part in the **rush** of working alongside your Creator—in **pushing back** darkness and **calling rebels** to lay down their arms and live.
  1. We once had **abandoned** such a high calling, building **towers of Babel** instead of **temples of God**. *“I’d rather be in business for myself than partner with You!”* But now, in **Christ**, we’ve been called off the **bench** and put back in the game! Our lives have regained their **grand meaning**.
    - a. We value **Mission** in this church.

## The Larger Ecosystem

- A. Our Values, while they can be **distinguished**, cannot be **divided**. They are **distinct**, yet **inseparable**.
1. You might think of them along the lines of an **ecosystem**. There's an **interdependence** among them such that, if ever we **abstract** one from its larger ecosystem, the whole system **collapses**.
- B. A church is either pursuing **all** of these at once or it is truly pursuing **none** of them at all.
1. Some churches make it all about **Faith**—They want to teach the **Bible**, spend hours in **prayer**, encounter Jesus in musical **worship**, etc.
    - a. But they don't **go anywhere** with it. It's just a **doctrine**, or it's just a warm **fuzzy feeling**, but it doesn't **propel** them into **community** or out on **mission**.
  2. Other churches make it all about **Community**—They've got the **warm fellowship**, the **support groups**, the **coffee hour**.
    - a. But, at the end of the day, they're more like a **social club** than a church. The **gospel** is rarely mentioned and their **mission** to the lost seems **irrelevant**:  
"We've found **our people**."
  3. Still other churches make it all about **Mission**—They're tired of the **institutional** church. It just gets in the way. They want to finally get out from within the **four walls** and **do something**! So they're active in the **city**, they're serving at the **soup kitchens**, they know the **poor** by name.
    - a. But somewhere along the way they stopped reading their **Bibles** and doing life with **God's people**. Their Christianity got **reduced** to a movement for **social reform** or **philanthropy**.
- C. **Faith** is meant to flow into **Community**. **Community** is meant to flow out on **Mission**. When even one of these three Values is **distorted** or **disregarded**, you no longer have the church as God **designed** it. The whole **ecosystem unravels**.
- D. Truthfully this is a good **diagnostic grid** even for our own lives. What the **church** is to be **corporately**, in a sense, each **member** is to be **individually**.
1. How are **you** with Faith, Community, and Mission? Which way do you **lean**? **Beware** of leaning towards one at the expense of the others.
    - a. Now don't **misunderstand** me, your leaning is not in and of itself a bad thing. Often it is a sign of God's **calling** and **gifting** you. But in all of your passion for one of these Values in particular, don't neglect the others. That's why we **need each other**.

- i. I'm prone to lean towards **Faith**. I need people in my life leaning towards **Community** and **Mission**. And, perhaps, you need people like me.
- E. The church is that blessed assembly that exists in the **Presence** of God, as the **People** of God, with the **Purpose** of God. Therefore, Mercy Hill values **Faith, Community, and Mission**.

## Our Ministry Strategy

- A. Let me now address our ministry strategy at this church. How are we going to get **Gospel Amplification** going? How are we going to develop **Faith, Community, and Mission**? How are we going to **grow** the church—both **qualitatively** and **quantitatively**?
- B. I have a **3-part interlocking Ministry Strategy** that I want to present to you in the time that remains.

### (1) Strategic Focus: We Are a One-Issue Church

- A. Churches can be **known** for all sorts of things—*“That’s the church where the band is **radio-quality**”; “That’s the church where the pastor is pure **comedy**”; “That’s the church where they’ve give away fresh **pour-over coffee** that tastes like it just dripped down from heaven.”*
  - 1. Do you know what I pray people come to say about us? *“That’s the church where they just can’t **get over the cross**. They’re always **teaching** about it, **singing** about it, **talking** about it, **moved** by it, **showing** it, **sharing** it.”*
- B. In this sense, then, I want to be a **one-issue church**. There are so many things our focus could **drift** to, but I will labor with all of my might to keep us **focused here**. Because I think **God** is focused here.
  - 1. Do you remember Jesus’ rebuke of the Jews? *“You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me” (John 5:39).*
    - a. *“Everything in the Bible—**every word** God ever said—is pointing you to **Me** and what I’m about to accomplish for you on the **cross**!”*
  - 2. Or do you remember what Paul says is of *“first importance”* in **1 Cor 15:3**? *“The gospel” (v. 1)—namely, “<sup>3</sup> that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup> that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures” (1 Cor 15:3–4).*
    - a. **Whatever else** we believe or do as a church, this gospel is to take **first place**!
  - 3. Or when Paul knows he’s **leaving** the church in **Ephesus**, never to see them again, what does he leave them **with**? *“And now I commend you to God and to the **word***

*of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified” (Acts 20:32).*

- a. “Oh I know you’ve **already heard** the gospel Ephesians, but you need to hear it **again and again and again**. For it is not only how you get **saved**, it is how you are **sustained** unto glory.”
  - i. When I preach the gospel in this church, Paul is saying, I might as well be **mixing cement** and laying down **bricks**. For it is the word of His grace that **builds** us up!
- 4. That’s why he would say to the Corinthians: *“I decided to know nothing among you except **Jesus Christ and him crucified**” (1 Cor 2:2).*
  - a. And that’s why the **first sermon series** I ever preached through at this church was on this same verse!
    - i. The cross of Christ was the **first note** I struck, and I pray by God’s grace I will strike that **same note** until the day I drop! May my ministry be a **never ending riff** on this one **master theme**: “Jesus Christ and him crucified.”
- C. This is not to say that we will not talk about **anything else** in this church. We most certainly will! It is to say, however, that **whatever else** we talk about, we will approach it through the **lens** of the gospel. You see, this **one issue** touches **every issue**. We may focus in on this **one issue**, but this one issue has **one million** implications.
  - 1. This is the flow of almost every **epistle**.
    - a. First, let’s get the **gospel** right.
    - b. Then, let’s talk about what it **implies** for your **Faith, Community, and Mission**. What does the gospel imply for your relationship with **God**, with your **spouse**, with your **kids**, with your **work**, with your **finances**, with your **neighbor**, with the **orphan** and the **widow**, and on and on?!
- D. Knowing God’s **unconditional**, even **counter-conditional**, love for us in Christ is what gives rise to **fire-hearted Faith, deep-rooted Community, and life-sacrificing Mission**.
  - 1. By God’s grace, we will keep this **one issue** at the **center**. But, in the years to come, we will set out to **discover** the **one million** implications that flow out from it.

## (2) Strategic Rhythm: We Gather and Scatter

- A. With the gospel as our **Strategic Focus**, we operate within a **Strategic Rhythm**. As a church, we **gather** and we **scatter**. We gather together as **believers** and then we scatter out into the **world** for Christ.

1. **Both sides** of this rhythm are **critical** to our pursuit of **Faith, Community,** and **Mission.**
- B. I want to help you see how the two relate by putting an **image** on it. For the sake of time and clarity, let me just read to you from my notes at this point: *“When I speak of our gathering and scattering think of the ebbing and flowing of the ocean’s tide. The water recedes out into the depths and then pushes back onto the land. But even as the water recedes it leaves something of the depths on the shore—shells, sand-dollars, even sea creatures in some of the tide pools.*
- My dad’s side had a family reunion this past summer in a place called Fripp Island off the coast in South Carolina. At low-tide we would walk the beach looking for these sorts of things. If we got there too late, the best treasures would have already been taken by other tourists. But without fail, the tide would come back up from the depths, with more shimmering treasure in its flow.*
- Think about our Strategic Rhythm along these lines. We have gatherings—some larger, some smaller—scheduled throughout the week—opportunities to move towards the breathtaking depths of God’s glory with His people.*
- But we don’t stay out in the depths anymore than the tide stays out at sea. The tide returns, it comes back in towards land, towards the world. And when we move back in from the depths we bring tokens of our time with us—precious shells, as it were, that speak something to the world of the beauty and glory of our God. And we lay these shells out along the banks, like a trail of crumbs leading back to their source in Him.*
- Our family members, friends, neighbors, co-workers see our faith, our hope, our love, our joy, our peace; and they hear us speak of a world they’ve not yet seen but always longed for. They hear us speak of the love of God for sinners, of a redeemed and reconciled community, of a mission bigger than our day-planners and board meetings. They hear us speak of the church gathered.*
- And perhaps they’ll be inclined to follow the crumbs, the shimmering shells, the sightings of glory, back out to the sea. Perhaps they’ll want to catch a glimpse for themselves. Perhaps they too will find themselves breathless before the vast expanse of God’s glory and grace. Perhaps they too will come to know the love of God for them in Christ. Perhaps they too will start to bring shells up from the deep and lay them out for the world to see.”*
- C. I am not one of those that **pins** the **gathered** church against the **scattered** church.
1. Some think that Christians spend so much of their **time gathering** that they have no time to scatter out and reach the world. Now this is a legitimate concern. But many **overreact** in the other direction and start to spend so much of their time **scattering** that they lose the **glow** and **shimmer** that comes from spending time in worship with God’s people.
    - a. Both extremes are problematic. We **gather** so that we can **scatter**, with renewed energy and zeal. We **scatter** so that we can **gather**, so that more and more people might come into the redeemed community of God.
- D. Beyond this, I believe that the **gathering** is **equally as missional** as the **scattering**. We might be prone to think that the **gatherings** are where we really work out our **Faith** and



**Community**, and the *scattering* is where we finally do **Mission**. But the Bible knows nothing of this **disparity**.

1. The gathered church is, in fact, a **compelling witness** to the power and validity of the gospel. It is the **theater** of God's glory, the **showcase** of a new humanity. What the unbelieving might not get from our **tracts** or **gospel presentations**, they just might get from witnessing our **gatherings**!
  - a. Read [Acts 2:42-47](#). It was in light of the **gathered church**—their **apostolic Faith**, their radical, **self-sacrificing Community**—that they were given *"favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were beings saved"* ([v. 47](#)).
  - i. Faith and Community worked out in the context of the gathered church is not **at odds** with the mission, it's a **critical component** of it!
  - b. **Paul** Himself assumes **unbelievers** will come into our **gatherings**. And he imagines some *"falling on [their] face[s] . . . worship[ing] God and declar[ing] that God is really among [us]"* ([1 Cor 14:25](#)).
  - c. **John Bunyan** describes how, before his conversion, he came upon a gathering of poor Christian women talking about the things of God: *"I thought they spoke as if joy made them speak. They talked with such pleasantness of scriptural language and with such appearance of grace in all they said that they seemed to me as if they had found a new world"* (Grace Abounding, p. 25).
  - i. Don't you want people to come in here and say that of **us**?
- E. So we **gather** in our **Services**, in our **Home Groups**, in our **DNA Groups**, in our **prayer meetings**; and we **scatter** into the **city**, into the **neighborhoods**, into the **workplaces**, into the **grocery stores**. We are not **either/or** on this issue. We are **both/and**. We gather and we scatter.

### (3) Strategic Activity: We Pray, Preach, Prune, and Persist

- A. So many are **scrambling** these days, looking for new ways to **grow** the church. If I'm honest, I must admit that I feel **the pull** myself.
  1. But we have to know that **God cares** infinitely more about **church growth** than we do. As such, He has not left the subject up to us. We do not **need**, nor should we **dare**, to **reinvent** what He has already laid down for us on the matter in **His word**.
- B. The book of [Acts](#) is concerned at a **fundamental** level with **church-growth**. It's **grand thesis** is [Acts 1:8](#): *"[Y]ou will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."*

1. And the **rest** of the book is given over to **detailing** the **unfolding fulfillment** of this thesis. The **gospel**, the **church** is **growing**.
- C. While I would never claim that the book of **Acts** is a **manual** for church growth, I do think it identifies a **dynamic**, a **strategic activity**, that should not go ignored.
  1. It's an activity that works out in **four key steps**: (1) We **Pray**; (2) We **Preach**; (3) We **Prune**; (4) We **Persist**.
    - a. Let me just give you **one illustration** of this from the book of Acts, though it really runs through the whole thing.

### (1) We Pray

- A. It's interesting that, though Jesus says these disciples are going to be His witnesses even to the **ends of the earth**, His first order is that they **"not . . . depart from Jerusalem, but . . . wait"** (**1:4**).
1. And after Jesus ascends and they are waiting in Jerusalem, what is it that they are doing? **Praying**: *"All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer"* (**v. 14**).
- B. In a very real sense, growing the church, whether in quality or quantity, is not in my job description. That privilege belongs to God alone: *"I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth"* (**1 Cor 3:6**).
1. If this is true, than more important than any of my **planting or watering** is my **praying**: *"O God do what only You can do!"* That's why my first move as your pastor was to start the **Sunday evening prayer meeting**.

### (2) We Preach

- A. As they are praying and waiting, the **Spirit** of the risen Christ **falls** upon them. And what to do they do? They **preach**: *"Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice . . ."* (**Acts 2:14**). He proclaims the gospel, and three **thousand souls** awaken from the dead.
- B. I don't care what the **modern world** thinks of preaching. It is the **God-ordained means** by which He calls this world full of **Lazarus'** out of the tomb. So, God help me, I will give myself week in and week out to the preaching and ministering of His Word.

### (3) We Prune

- A. They **Pray**, they **Preach**, and **thousands** are added. The church begins to **grow**. The gospel takes **root** and starts to bear **fruit**. By **Acts 6**, there's so many people to take care of that the Apostles have to **appoint** others for tasks. They develop **systems** and **structure**. In other words, they **Prune** the growth to keep things going **strong**.

- B. In this church, I want to **Pray**, I want to **Preach**, and then I want to sit back and watch how God **stirs** your heart. I want to see what kind of fruit **crops** up in your life. And then I want to **tend** the branches and help you **flourish**.
1. While I am **unswervingly rigid** on certain points of the ministry, I am actually quite **flexible** in my approach.
    - a. Outside of the **broad parameters** I'm laying here with our **Mission and Vision**, Our **Values**, and Our **Strategy** I don't have the **specifics** worked out.
      - i. I know we want **Faith, Community, and Mission**. But who's going to **preach**, what **studies** are we going to have, what **events** will we do to grow together, what kind of **outreach** should we get involved in? I might have things God puts on my heart here or there, but I am trusting God to put things on your heart as well. I want to see what God is moving in you and then equip and release you to do it!

#### (4) We Persist

- A. We minister in a **fallen world**. It's going to be **hard**. After **Acts 6** comes **Acts 7**, and the **stoning of Stephen**—the **first martyr** of the New Testament church. Now you might think that such a thing would cause the church to lose hope or give up. But instead they **Persist**.
1. It seems only to get **stronger**. For the **great persecution** that arises in all of this actually serves to help the church **break** those first **barriers** that Jesus mentioned: "[T]here arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria . . . [And] those who were scattered went about **preaching the word**" (8:1, 4).
- B. I can't tell you **how important** this fourfold Strategic Activity has been for me throughout this last year. I get discouraged. I get **tempted** to turn to other methods. But then I come back to this: "*Oh Nick! Don't lose heart. Pray, Preach, Prune, and **Persist**! Stay the course for the long haul and let God do what only He can do. Let God bring the growth.*"
1. I **live** in those words that the Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy: "*Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. **Persist** in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers*" (1 Tim 4:16).
- C. Will you **join me**, will you join this church in executing this **interlocking strategy**? Will you make the **gospel central**? Will you **gather and scatter**? Will you partner with us in **praying, preaching, pruning, and persisting**? We so hope that you will!