

Title: **Critical Tensions of a Healthy Church (Part 1)**

Text: **Acts 8:1-25**

Date: **May 19, 2024**

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## Big Idea

The church must keep certain things in tension in order to be healthy and function as Christ designed it to. In these sermon we'll see that the church must be devoted to both word and deed, and maintain a synergy between both clergy and laity.

### 1. Word and Deed

The first thing we can't help but notice is there's this emphasis throughout the whole narrative on the word of God. So in v. 4 we read: "Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word." Then in v. 14 we read that the people of Samaria "received the word of God . . . ." And down in v. 25, we're told that that the church was testifying to and speaking "the word of the Lord . . . ." This "word"—above anything else—it's the word of the gospel; it's the good news of Jesus concerning his victory for our sake at the cross.

But there's another side to this critical tension that a healthy church must maintain. We're not just concerned with word, we're also concerned with deed. We don't just talk about Jesus. We start to look like Jesus. We share the gospel with our lips and we show the gospel with our lives. I love how Harvie Conn puts it: "[The church] has been placed on the earth to *proclaim* the kingdom and to *exemplify* it" (Evangelism, 19). Or as he says elsewhere: "Evangelism must become gospel show-and-tell, showing mercy and preaching grace" (Evangelism, 33). This is what really comes out there in vv. 6-7 of our text. Did you notice? There's not just preaching going on in Samaria. There's spiritual and physical care being shown. Demons are being cast out. Paralytics are being healed. And it's because of this—because of the critical tension that's maintained here between word and deed—that the people tune in.

### 2. Clergy and Laity

"There has always been a strong tendency, as John Stott says, for Christians to 'withdraw into a kind of closed, evangelical, monastic community.' This is not, of course, how things were in the early church. . . . In Michael Green's seminal [book] *Evangelism in the Early Church*, he conveys the conclusion of historians that early Christianity's explosive growth 'was in reality accomplished by means of informal missionaries.' That is, Christian laypeople—not trained preachers and evangelists—carried on the mission of the church not through formal preaching but informal conversation—in homes and wine shops, on walks, and around market stalls . . . they did it naturally, enthusiastically" (Tim Keller, *Center Church*, 277).

But now here's what's so great and balanced about all this: Just because the laity were engaged, doesn't mean they had no need for the clergy. Just because this was a grassroots movement in many ways doesn't mean they've gone rogue and they're just doing what they want. Just because it's decentralized doesn't mean it's not organized. It is. And there's still this healthy relationship between laity and clergy. There's submission and accountability and respect for the leaders of the church. As one commentator notes: The apostles become "the stabilizing, verifying, and unifying element in a mission that moves to new areas and groups without their planning or control" (PNTC).



### Reflection Questions

- Have you been merely living *around* the Word of God lately or truly living *in* it? Have you been more of a spiritual "second-hander" or have you been spending time with God in his Word on your own? Why would such a thing be so important to develop? Why is it often so hard?
- Who's in your *oikos*? Who's in your network of relatives and close associates? Who's in your circle of influence? Who do you rub shoulders with at work and in the neighborhood and the marketplace? How might God use you to reach them?
- Which of these critical tensions seems hardest for you to maintain? Why do you think? What can you do to grow in this?

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## Our Mission & Values

*Mercy Hill Church exists to help restore us to God, neighbor, and city through the good news of Jesus Christ.*

**FAITH:** The Way Back to God | We are redeemed to enjoy intimate presses our church *upwards* in love

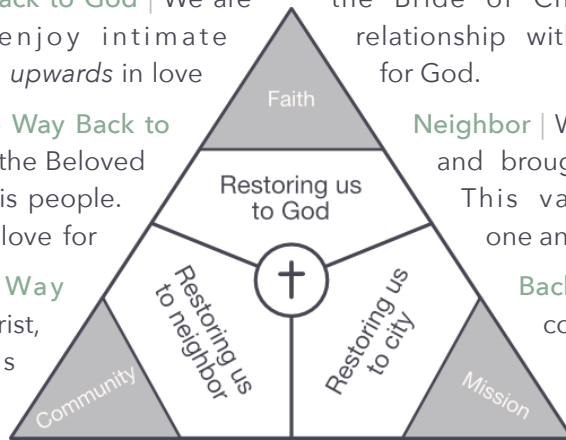
the Bride of Christ, created and relationship with him. This value for God.

**COMMUNITY:** The Way Back to Christ, adopted in the Beloved relationship with his people. church *inwards* in love for

**Neighbor** | We are the Family of and brought into covenantal This value presses our one another.

**MISSION:** The Way the Embassy of Christ, Savior to be his value presses our in love for the

**Back to City** | We are commissioned by the ambassadors. This church *outwards* unbelieving.



## Your Next Steps

When approaching the Christian faith and life, it can be confusing to know where to even begin. Come find us at the Next Steps Table after the service—it would be our joy to help you along in the journey! And if you're a visitor, we have a special gift bag for you. Don't miss it!



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## Announcement Spotlight

### Barnabas Ministry Support Sign-Up

We (as a church and individuals), much like Barnabas in the book of Acts, are called to support our Global Outreach workers and ministries. The purpose of these "Barnabas" teams is to engage with our external ministry teams and support them through prayer, communications, understanding their mission, and meeting needs. You can support a ministry as a Home Group, family, or individual.

Please scan the QR code below to find a link to sign up!

If you have any questions, feel free to reach out to us at [info@mercyhillchurch.org](mailto:info@mercyhillchurch.org).

**Members' Meeting - Today!**

**All Church Prayer - Tonight!**

**All Church Campout - Save the Date!**

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Or find it online at [mercyhillchurch.org/communications-hub](https://mercyhillchurch.org/communications-hub).