

Join a Home Group

How to See with 20/20 Vision



A **Next Steps** Resource of Mercy Hill Church

Join a Home Group

How to See with 20/20 Vision

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"I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house"

Acts 20:20

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A Word of Introduction

At Mercy Hill we define Home Groups as follows:

Home Groups are the place where our values of Faith, Community, and Mission gain traction in the everyday. They are small, typically intergenerational, groups that meet regularly to break bread, seek God in his Word, share hearts and lives, and pursue avenues of service and witness in the surrounding neighborhood and city.

Some years ago, I wrote a brief article for our church entitled *The 20/20 Vision*. In it I tried to make the case that if we are to see and show Christ rightly as a church, as Christians, then we must be gathering together both in large *and* in small groups. One or the other will simply not do.

As a way of encouraging our church to seriously consider joining a Home Group or some other small group of believers, I've included this article in what follows. This Next Steps Resource, therefore, will be a bit shorter than our others, but don't let its size fool you—the matter we're addressing here is still of the utmost importance and worthy of your deep and prayerful consideration.

As an added bonus, if you've ever wondered how the Sunday Service, Home Groups, and DNA Groups all relate to one another here at Mercy Hill, I've included a brief discussion on the subject for you in Appendix 1. Check it out!

But enough commentary from me, it's time to talk about your vision

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Hit pause for a moment before you go any further. Consider your relationship with the church as it stands now. Do participate regularly in the Sunday Services or is your attendance hit-or-miss? Are you a meaningful part of a small group or have you been keeping a “safe distance” from other Christians? Why?

When it comes to these larger gatherings and smaller groups, which do you think is more critical for your development as a follower of Jesus (hint: this is a trick question—nevertheless we all likely have a bent towards one or the other)? Explain.

The 20/20 Vision

How’s your vision? Are you farsighted? Nearsighted? Are things always a bit blurry? Or is everything in focus? If we want to function at full capacity in this world, if we want to experience the manifold richness that this life has to offer, our vision is essential. So is yours 20/20?

Mercy Hill’s 20/20 vision is taken from Acts 20:20, where Paul is describing the ministry he had while with the church in Ephesus. Reading from verse 18 to verse 21 for context, let’s listen in to his conversation:

You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; [v. 20:] **how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in *public* and *from house to house***, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.¹

¹ Any emphasis in Scripture citations has been added by the author.

Paul's gospel ministry fired on two critical cylinders: "in public" and "from house to house"; or, in terms we might be more familiar with, in *large gatherings* and in *small groups*. Any ministry or member that doesn't incorporate both contexts is at risk of vision loss. Both are essential for seeing and showing Christ as he really is.

Paul's gospel ministry fired on two critical cylinders: "in public" and "from house to house"; or, in terms we might be more familiar with, in large gatherings and in small groups.

But, before we go any further, it's important to point out that Paul didn't invent this large-small dynamic. He inherited it. In fact, it's been an essential part of the church from her inception. When three thousand were first added to the church after Peter's Pentecost sermon, we are given window into this new community's life and practice:

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. [v. 46:] **And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes**, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42-47)²

² Cf. also Acts 5:42: "And every day, in the *temple* and from *house to house*, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus."

The “2/46 Vision” doesn’t have quite the same ring to it as the “20/20 Vision,” but the same reality is present here. The church was meeting together in “the temple” and “in their homes”—in large gatherings and in small groups.

But why? Why large and small? And what? What was the church doing in these contexts?

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both contexts into account Faith increases,
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Christ as he really is.*

It is quite encouraging to see that the values of our church today match the values of the church back then. At Mercy Hill we have identified our three core values as *Faith*, *Community*, and *Mission*. And it’s these same three that we so clearly see here in this description of the early church . . .

- Faith: “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching...” (v. 42).
- Community: “. . . and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread...” (v. 42).
- Mission: “And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved” (v. 47).

These values become the *vital signs* of a healthy church. And these vital signs become, then, our *battle guides*. We are fighting to grow in Faith (the upper front), Community (the inner front), and Mission (the outer front). And the 20/20 Vision says this battle, if we are to be most effective, must be waging at both a large gathering and small group

level. When our ministries and members are taking both contexts into account Faith increases, Community deepens, and Mission expands. Again, both are essential for seeing and showing Christ as he really is.

Therefore, on the one hand, if we are only pursuing Faith, Community, and Mission at a large gathering level, then many children of God might fall between the cracks, faltering and failing to grow. Anonymity would become the new norm as people are allowed to slip in and out without ever knowing others or being known themselves. We would miss the richness of the Bible's "one-another"s. Our Faith, Community, and Mission would be big and loud but lack the depth required to sustain such magnitude. Consider our physical bodies. However big and strong they appear, they are only as healthy as their smallest cells.

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But, on the other hand, if we are only pursuing our values at a small group level, the church and her members can become ingrown, cliquish, self-centered. Myopia would become the new norm as people grow closer to their small groups but further from the church's membership and mission at large. We would miss the grand theater of God's glory that is the gathered church—the fully functioning body of Christ that puts the myriad facets of his personality, ministry, and authority on display.

So how's your vision? Are you farsighted? Nearsighted? Anonymous? Myopic? Are you pursuing our values—the vital signs of a healthy church and battle guides for our spiritual mission—at both a large gathering and small group level? You won't see and show Christ clearly if you aren't. But oh how you will if you are! Here's to pursuing 20/20 vision together!



Reflecting on what you just read, why might engaging the church at both a large gathering and small group level be especially important for you personally? What does a large gathering offer that a small group can't? What does a small group offer that a large gathering can't? Why do you need both? What needs to change for you to more intentionally pursue this 20/20 Vision along with us?

Read Luke's description of the early church in Acts 2:42-47 once more. What stands out to you here? Does your own experience of the Christian life actually look like this? If not, what's keeping you from it? How might getting involved with a Home Group be a good first step?

Want More?

If you are wanting to engage the subject matter found in this booklet further, you might consider the following resources:

- *Life Together* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer
- *Relationships: A Mess Worth Making* by Timothy Lane and Paul Tripp
- *Saturate* by Jeff Vanderstelt

Need Help?

Our leaders at Mercy Hill would love to help you take this next step! If you'd like someone to chat, pray, or read with along the way please don't hesitate to reach out to us at info@mercyhillchurch.org.

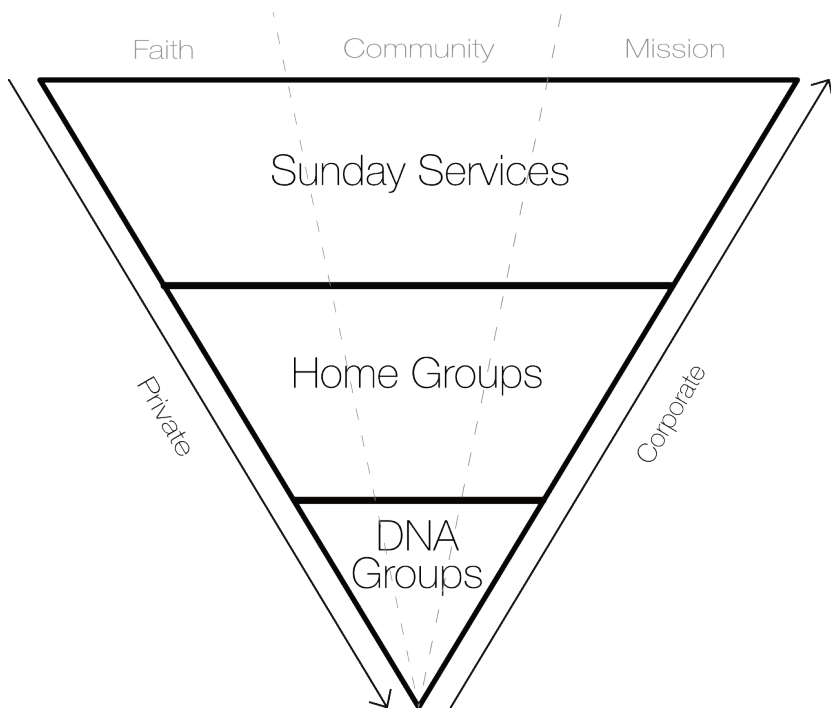
What's Next?

Now that (hopefully!) we see the importance of being involved in smaller groups as Christians, let's consider in more detail the smallest type of group we have on offer at Mercy Hill: namely, DNA Groups. For this, check out the next step: *Pursue Discipleship*. Find more info at the Next Steps Table on a Sunday or online at mercyhillchurch.org.

Appendix 1: Large Gatherings and Small Groups at Mercy Hill Church

Drawing from Acts 20:20, we believe that if we are to see and show Christ rightly (i.e. with 20/20 vision), we must be meeting in both large gatherings and small groups. The largest gathering we have is the Sunday Service. Our standard small group is the Home Group. And, drilling down even deeper, we have the DNA Group.

In the diagram below, you can see how at every level we are pursuing our values of Faith, Community, and Mission as a church, but we do so in different and equally vital ways.



Sunday Services

Initially, it seems the early Christians gathered formally for worship on the last day of the week, Saturday (the Sabbath), with the Jews in the temple and synagogues. But as it became clear that the Jews were rejecting their Messiah and that the Christians were now a distinguished religious people—called “Christians” (Acts 11:26)—they began meeting on Sunday, the first day of the week, the day of Jesus’ resurrection, appropriately called “the Lord’s Day” (Rev. 1:10; cf. Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2).

Jesus’ resurrection on this first day of the week initiated a new creation, with a new humanity and, hence, a new day of worship!

It seems people are prone to neglect or downplay the Sunday gatherings because they don’t quite get what’s going on. For some it’s just another event on the calendar. And if something better comes up, well, there’s always next week.

The author of Hebrews comes in to help us at this point. Hebrews 10 begins with a discussion of Christ’s high priestly work in offering a full and final sacrifice for our sins (vv. 1-14). Then it moves to a discussion of the New Covenant Christ has made with us in his blood (vv. 15-18).

And then in verses 19-25, the author begins to draw out implications for the covenant community, the local church. And with these implications he gives us a breathtaking vision for the local church in general, and the Sunday Service in particular:

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

In light of Christ's work on the cross for us, the author calls us to three "let-us"s—three things we ought to do when we meet together:

- First, when we meet together, *"let us draw near"* to God (v. 22). We gather together and we rush the throne of grace. Coming together is ultimately about coming into God's presence!
- Second, when we meet together, *"let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering"* (v. 23). We encourage one another to keep holding onto the One who is holding onto us. Hearts can drift into doubt and denial. And we're here to hold up each other's arms.
- Third, when we meet together, *"let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works"* (v. 24). Hearts can grow cold and embittered, lazy and apathetic. And we're here to stir one another up.

Therefore, in view of such things, the author of Hebrews closes with a final plea: "[Do] not [neglect] to meet together, as is the habit of some, but [encourage] one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near" (v. 25).

You're going to need one another in the days ahead. Your faith will be tested. Trials will come. If you're not gathering with the saints, you're not going to make it. The world, the flesh, and the Devil are doing everything they can to keep your eyes off the coming Day and fixate them on the here and now. "Eat, drink, and be merry. Get your revenge. Indulge your lusts. Live it up." But we come into our services on Sundays and we say, "No way! Let's rush the throne. Let's hold fast the confession. Let's stir each other up. And let's keep waiting for that Day that is drawing near (cf. Rev. 22:20)!"

Consider a story that's told of Charles Spurgeon at this point:

One day a young man came to visit Spurgeon and the young man said to him, "I can be a Christian without the church; I don't need others." They were sitting in the lounge by an open fire and Spurgeon picked up some tongs, took a coal from the blazing fire,

and placed it on the hearth. They continued talking and after awhile, Spurgeon said, "Look down at the hearth. What happened to the coal I took out of the fire?" The young man answered, "Well, it's become black. It's lost its heat and its flame." Spurgeon replied, "Young man, that's why you need to be part of the church, because it is only together we are stimulated and together that we grow. But like this coal taken out of the fire, on its own it dies out. But in the heat of the fire all the other coals are stimulating it to go on glowing and give off heat."³

What an image! When we gather on Sundays, we are helping one another burn! O church, let's not neglect to meet together, as is the habit of some. It is not good that man should be alone. But "[b]ehold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers [and sisters] dwell [together] in unity" (Ps. 133:1)!

Home Groups

Moving towards smaller groups at Mercy Hill, let's consider Home Groups for a moment. In the application I filled out to apply for the pastorate here some years ago, I was asked to describe my understanding of and vision for Home Groups. I still today stand behind what I wrote back then:

Home Groups are a central component to what I would term my 20/20 vision for the church. This vision comes from Acts 20:20 where Paul states that he taught the Ephesian saints the Word of God both "in public and from house to house." So his pastoral practice, it seems, included both large gatherings and small groups.

Upon consideration, we can see how critical such Home Groups are for all ministry fronts—*upward* (to God), *inward* (to fellow believers), and *outward* (to the unbelieving world).

Regarding the upper front, Home Groups give people a chance to digest, question, meditate on, and personalize the Word of God.

³ It is not clear whether this story is historically accurate or apocryphal. Either way the essential meaning is true and the image exceedingly helpful.

Opportunity is given for the church to act as Bereans and examine the Scriptures for themselves (Acts 17:11).

Regarding the inner front, Home Groups provide the primary context in which the church can live out the “one-anothering” spoken of in the New Testament (e.g. Rom. 12:9-18). Here is where we can truly get to know and love other saints and where we can be truly known and loved ourselves.

Finally, regarding the outer front, Home Groups should serve as “missional communities,” strategically located in neighborhoods not to be dams of God’s grace but estuaries—places where the ocean of God’s love meets the parched riverbeds of this world. Small groups are the arms of the church, reaching into the neighborhoods. They can also serve as wonderful places to raise up young leaders and as potential seedbeds for future church plants.

In short, Home Groups are the place where our values of Faith, Community, and Mission gain traction in the everyday. They are small, typically intergenerational, groups that meet regularly to break bread, seek God in his Word, share hearts and lives, and pursue avenues of service and witness in the surrounding neighborhood and city.

We strongly encourage you to take a tour of our various Home Groups and commit to one as God leads!

DNA Groups

If Home Groups are the place where these things start to gain traction in our lives, DNA Groups drill down for even more. They create space for us to get personal and specific. How is my Faith *really* doing? Am I *really* living in Community or am I running away, harboring bitterness, etc.? What would it look like for me to *really* be on Mission with Jesus in my home, my neighborhood, my office, etc.?

We define DNA Groups as follows: *A DNA Group is a smaller group of committed people who meet on a consistent basis to Discover, Nurture, and Apply Christ together until He is all in all.*⁴

DNA Groups are essential to our understanding of discipleship at Mercy Hill. When you think about it, as Jesus set out to make disciples, he was really just calling people to follow him (Discover), trust him (Nurture), and obey him (Apply). And in this they would come to look more and more like him. Discipleship was a critical part of his plan to renew a people in his image.

But then he left. Well, not really. But we no longer see him with our physical eyes. Instead he has given us his Spirit, and he now calls us to follow him together. We too are to make disciples, though not ultimately of ourselves, but of him: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations . . . , teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19-20). DNA Groups exist for this very purpose.

⁴ DNA Groups are usually kept much smaller than Home Groups (and can even be composed of just two people meeting one-on-one). They are, therefore, more versatile and intimate.

Drawing from Acts 20:20, we believe that if we are to see and show Christ rightly (i.e. with 20/20 vision), we must be meeting in both large gatherings and small groups. Here at Mercy Hill, the largest gathering we have is the Sunday Service and our standard small group is the Home Group.

We define Home Groups as the place where our values of Faith, Community, and Mission gain traction in the everyday. They are small, typically intergenerational, groups that meet regularly to break bread, seek God in his Word, share hearts and lives, and pursue avenues of service and witness in the surrounding neighborhood and city. This Next Steps Resource has been created to help you discern the importance of such groups and encourage your meaningful participation in them!



Consider Jesus

For those skeptical or curious about Christianity and the claims of Jesus.



Be Baptized

For those ready to say yes to Jesus and "go public" with their faith.



Walk the Sacred Path

For those wanting to grow in their devotional lives (e.g. Bible reading, prayer).



Become a Member

For those interested in going all in with this local church and committing to "be the body" here and now together.



Join a Home Group

For those wanting to move towards community and live on mission for Jesus with others in the church.



Pursue Discipleship

For those interested in going deeper in their faith and growing more in the image of Christ.



Use Your Gifts

For those interested in identifying the gifts God has given them and using those gifts to serve in the church.



Spread the News

For those interested in evangelistic training and opportunities.



Serve the City

For those interested in getting their hands and feet dirty in love for others in our city and world.

Our leaders at Mercy Hill would love to help you take this next step! If you'd like someone to chat, pray, or read with along the way please don't hesitate to reach out to us at info@mercyhillchurch.org.