

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; [verse 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.

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.

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. **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. (2:42-47)

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? It is quite refreshing to see that the values of our church today match the values of the church back then: *faith, community, mission*.

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

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.

So then, 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 Scripture'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.

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 O how you will if you are! Here's to pursuing 20/20 vision together!