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There are four (4) learning sessions to complete the membership requirements. The four sessions are:

1. Intro to Membership
2. Gospel
3. Community
4. Mission

The attached documents will be reviewed and “taught” in this first session. Successive sessions will include more materials for your review.

Online Information:

You will also receive an email this week with a link to an online version of the Membership Class. The online resource will also provide copies of all printed documents you receive in the “live” class on Sunday mornings.

Again, thank you for choosing the LH Membership process. May God richly bless you as you prayerfully consider Living Hope as your church home and place to be part of Gospel, Community, and Mission in your relationship to God.

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Questions & Answers

What is the Church?

Who it is...

Universal/Invisible Church – made up of all people who profess Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, the called out, chosen people of God, from every place and every time.

Local/Visible Church – a covenant community of Christ followers who have committed themselves to Christ and to one another.

What it does...

“The work of the church, in fellowship with and obedience to Christ, is divine worship, mutual edification, and gospel witness. The means appointed by Christ through which the church does this work include the confession of the name of Christ before mankind; the exercise of fellowship in encouraging one another; the reading, teaching, and preaching of the Word of God; praying; singing; fasting; administering baptism and the Lord's Supper; collecting and distributing offerings; showing mercy; exercising discipline; and blessing the people” –Book of Church Order

What Does the Bible Say About Church Membership?

The Bible says that the church is the body of Christ, that He is the head, and that we are individually members of His body. It says that God himself composed the body as He chose to be a display of His wisdom (1 Cor. 12:12-27, Romans 12:5, Eph. 3:8-10, Eph. 4:15).

While the Bible does not explicitly speak to formal membership in a local church, the concept of a defined covenant community is implied throughout the New Testament. Some examples include:

Church Discipline – in 1 Corinthians 5, Paul calls for the expulsion of an unrepentant brother from the community. Formal exclusion implies formal inclusion in a defined group.

Christian Life - Romans chapter 12 urges

us to live lives of worship in response to the Gospel. The specific ways that we do this, that are outlined throughout the New Testament, including the concepts of operating under biblical authority, living out the “one anothers” of scripture (serving one another, encouraging one another, etc.), and utilizing our spiritual gifts within the church for mutual edification and growth, make no sense outside our commitment to and involvement in a local covenant community.

Lists and Records - there is evidence throughout the New Testament that lists and records were kept. In Acts 2, you see a numerical record for the people that came to Christ. In 1 Timothy 5, you see a record of

widows that the church is caring for (as a matter of fact it actually says to enroll them). And finally, in 2 Corinthians 2:6, you see the church at Corinth voting by majority over an issue of Church Discipline.

Leadership - 1 Timothy and Titus have very specific qualifications for church leaders. 1 Peter 5 exhorts these leaders to “shepherd the flock that is among you.” If there is not an identifiable group, who are these leaders supposed to lead? Hebrews 13:17 commands us to “obey and submit to our leaders.” Submission to the leaders’ authority doesn’t make any sense unless the group they are leading is attached to them in some way.

Is a Formal Membership Process Necessary?

While it may be possible to exercise a high level of commitment to the local church without a formal process, Living Hope believes that the best way to enter into this type of covenant community is by having such a process. Our process includes attending classes that strive to clearly articulate our vision and values, and signing a membership covenant that signifies our commitment to one another, and an alignment with the mission and leadership of Living Hope.

Statement of Basic Belief

The following beliefs represent the core of central orthodox beliefs from a biblical and historical perspective. While a full understanding and the ability to adequately articulate these beliefs is not required, the explicit rejection of anyone of these particular beliefs disqualifies one from membership in Living Hope Church.

I believe ...

- that the Scriptures are true, authoritative and sufficient (Psalm 19:7-11; 2 Timothy 3: 16; 2 Peter 1 :20-21).
- that there is only one God (Deuteronomy 6:4; Isaiah 45:5-6; Isaiah 46:9-10; John 17:3; 1 Corinthians 8:4-6; 1 Timothy 2:5).
- that the Father is God, the Son is God and the Holy Spirit is God; and that the Father is neither the Son nor the Holy Spirit, the Son is neither the Father nor the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son (Genesis 1:26; Psalm 45:6-7; Psalm 110:1; Matthew 3:13-17; Matthew 28:17-20; 1 Corinthians 12:4-6).
- that I am, along with all humanity (Christ excluded), by birth and action a sinner (Genesis 6:5; Psalm 51:5; Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 3:23; 5:8, 12-21; 7:18; Ephesians 2: 1-3).
- that the deserved penalty for sin is death, both physical and spiritual (Genesis 2: 15-17; Genesis 3:19; Romans 5:12; 6:23; James 1:14-15).
- that Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God, was born of a virgin and is both fully God and fully human (Matthew 1:20; Luke 2:52; John 1:1-4, 14; Colossians 1: 15-20; Hebrews 1:1-3).
- that Jesus Christ died as my substitute to pay the penalty for my sin (John 1 :29; 10:1-18; Romans 5:8; 1 Corinthians 15:1-4; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 1 :4; 1 Peter 3: 18).
- that Jesus Christ physically rose from the dead (Matthew 28:1-20; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-53; John 1:20-21:25; 1 Corinthians 15:12-34).
- that Jesus Christ physically ascended into heaven and will one day physically return (John 14:3; Acts 1:11; 1 Thessalonians 4: 16; Hebrews 9:28; 1 John 3:2; Revelation 1 :7).
- in a future physical resurrection of the dead. Those who trust in Jesus Christ alone will be raised to eternal reward. Those who have not trusted in Jesus Christ will be raised to eternal punishment (Matthew 25:31-46; John 5:28-29; Acts 24: 15).
- that only by trusting in the person and work of Jesus Christ alone can I be reconciled to God and experience true life and joy (John 3:18,14:6; Acts 4:12; Romans 3:21-26; 1 Timothy 2:5-6).

Statement of Biblical Doctrine

While the doctrines expressed in the "Statement of Basic Belief" are those that are recognized to be universal and primary within the Church, there are a number of secondary beliefs about which the leadership of Living Hope Church is passionate. Complete agreement is not required for the sake of membership, but it should be known that Living Hope Church will preach, teach, and counsel in accordance with these theological convictions.

It is a responsibility of covenant membership to have read the "Confessional Statement" of Living Hope Church in its entirety and address any questions, comments, or concerns with an elder.

Living Hope Church has certain theological convictions to which it is strongly committed. For instance:

- The distinction between law and gospel
- The gifts of the Holy Spirit
- The role of men and women in the church and home
- Baptism as a testimony of salvation

Finally, each member should understand the importance of submission to church leadership and be diligent to preserve unity and peace. One of the ways we do this is by adhering to Living Hope Church's "Statement of Basic Belief," and committing to not be divisive over Living Hope Church's theological distinctives found here in the "Statement of Biblical Doctrine" and expounded in the "Confessional Statement".

Confessional Statement

1. The Tri-une God

We believe in one God, eternally existing in three equally divine Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, who know, love, and glorify one another. This one true and living God is infinitely perfect both in his love and in his holiness. He is the Creator of all things, visible and invisible, and is therefore worthy to receive all glory and adoration. Immortal and eternal, he perfectly and exhaustively knows the end from the beginning, sustains and sovereignly rules over all things, and providentially brings about his eternal good purposes to redeem a people for himself and restore his fallen creation, to the praise of his glorious grace.

2. Revelation

God has graciously disclosed his existence and power in the created order, and has supremely revealed himself to fallen human beings in the person of his Son, the incarnate Word. Moreover, this God is a speaking God who by his Spirit has graciously disclosed himself in human words: we believe that God has inspired the words preserved in the Scriptures, the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments, which are both record and means of his saving work in the world. These writings alone constitute the verbally inspired Word of God, which is utterly authoritative and without error in the original writings, complete in its revelation of his will for salvation, sufficient for all that God requires us to believe and do, and final in its authority over every domain of knowledge to which it speaks. We confess that both our finitude and our sinfulness preclude the possibility of knowing God's truth exhaustively, but we affirm that, enlightened by the Spirit of God, we can know God's revealed truth truly. The Bible is to be believed, as God's instruction, in all that it teaches; obeyed, as God's command, in all that it requires; and trusted, as God's pledge, in all that it promises. As God's people hear, believe, and do the Word, they are equipped as disciples of Christ and witnesses to the gospel.

3. Creation of Humanity

We believe that God created human beings, male and female, in his own image. Adam and Eve belonged to the created order that God himself declared to be very good, serving as God's agents to care for, manage, and govern creation, living in holy and devoted fellowship with their Maker. Men and women, equally made in the image of God, enjoy equal access to God by faith in Christ Jesus and are both called to move beyond passive self-indulgence to significant private and public engagement in family, church, and civic life. Adam and Eve were made to complement each other in a one-flesh union that establishes the only normative pattern of sexual relations for men and women, such that marriage ultimately serves as a type of the union between Christ and his church. In God's wise purposes, men and women are not simply interchangeable, but rather they complement each other in mutually enriching ways. God ordains that they assume distinctive roles which reflect the loving relationship between Christ and the church, the husband exercising headship in a way that displays the caring, sacrificial love of Christ, and the wife submitting to her husband in a way that models the love of the church for her Lord. In the ministry of the church, both men and women are encouraged to serve Christ and to be developed to their full potential in the manifold ministries of the people of God. The role of elder in the church, given to qualified men, is grounded in the overarching narrative of scripture and must not be sidelined by appeals to cultural developments.

4. The Fall

We believe that Adam, made in the image of God, distorted that image and forfeited his original blessedness—for himself and all his progeny—by falling into sin through Satan’s temptation. As a result, all human beings are alienated from God, corrupted in every aspect of their being (e.g., physically, mentally, volitionally, emotionally, spiritually) and condemned finally and irrevocably to death—apart from God’s own gracious intervention. The supreme need of all human beings is to be reconciled to the God under whose just and holy wrath we stand; the only hope of all human beings is the undeserved love of this same God, who alone can rescue us and restore us to himself.

5. The Plan of God

We believe that from all eternity God determined in grace to save sinners from every tribe and language and people and nation, and to this end foreknew them and chose them. We believe that the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ was sufficient for all, but efficient for the elect. We believe that God justifies and sanctifies those who by grace have faith in Jesus, and that he will one day glorify them—all to the praise of his glorious grace. In love God commands and implores all people to repent and believe, having set his saving love on those he has chosen and having ordained Christ to be their Redeemer.

6. The Gospel

We believe that the gospel is the good news of Jesus Christ—God’s very wisdom. Utter folly to the world, even though it is the power of God to those who are being saved, this good news is christological, centering on the cross and resurrection: the gospel is not proclaimed if Christ is not proclaimed, and the authentic Christ has not been proclaimed if his death and resurrection are not central (the message is Christ died for our sins . . . [and] was raised”). This good news is biblical (his death and resurrection are according to the Scriptures), theological and salvific (Christ died for our sins, to reconcile us to God), historical (if the saving events did not happen, our faith is worthless, we are still in our sins, and we are to be pitied more than all others), apostolic (the message was entrusted to and transmitted by the apostles, who were witnesses of these saving events), and intensely personal (where the Gospel is received, believed, and persevered in, individual persons are saved).

7. The Redemption of Christ

We believe that, moved by love and in obedience to his Father, the eternal Son became human: the Word became flesh, fully God and fully human being, one Person in two natures. The man Jesus, the promised Messiah of Israel, was conceived through the miraculous agency of the Holy Spirit, and was born of the virgin Mary. He perfectly obeyed his heavenly Father, lived a sinless life, performed miraculous signs, was crucified under Pontius Pilate, arose bodily from the dead on the third day, and ascended into heaven. As the mediatorial King, he is seated at the right hand of God the Father, exercising in heaven and on earth all of God’s sovereignty, and is our

High Priest and righteous Advocate. We believe that by his incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension, Jesus Christ acted as our representative and substitute. He did this so that in him we might become the righteousness of God: on the cross he canceled sin, propitiated God, and, by bearing the full penalty of our sins, reconciled to God all those who believe. By his resurrection Christ Jesus was vindicated by his Father, broke the power of death and defeated Satan who once had power over it, and brought everlasting life to all his people; by his ascension he has been forever exalted as Lord and has prepared a place for us to be with him. We believe that salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name given under heaven by which we must be saved. Because God chose the lowly things of this world, the despised things, the things that are not, to nullify the things that are, no human being can ever boast before him—Christ Jesus has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness, and redemption.

8. The Justification of Sinners

We believe that Christ, by his obedience and death, fully discharged the debt of all those who are justified. By his sacrifice, he bore in our stead the punishment due us for our sins, making a proper, real, and full satisfaction to God's justice on our behalf. By his perfect obedience he satisfied the just demands of God on our behalf, since by faith alone that perfect obedience is credited to all who trust in Christ alone for their acceptance with God. Inasmuch as Christ was given by the Father for us, and his obedience and punishment were accepted in place of our own, freely and not for anything in us, this justification is solely of free grace, in order that both the exact justice and the rich grace of God might be glorified in the justification of sinners.

9. The Power of the Holy Spirit

We believe that this salvation, attested in all Scripture and secured by Jesus Christ, is applied to his people by the Holy Spirit. Sent by the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ, and, as the Paraclete, is present with and in believers. He convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment, and by his powerful and mysterious work regenerates spiritually dead sinners, awakening them to repentance and faith, baptizing them into union with the Lord Jesus, such that they are justified before God by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. By the Spirit's agency, believers are renewed, sanctified, and adopted into God's family; they participate in the divine nature and receive his sovereignly distributed gifts. The Holy Spirit is himself the down payment of the promised inheritance, and in this age indwells, guides, instructs, equips, revives, and empowers believers for Christ-like living and service.

10. The Kingdom of God

We believe that those who have been saved by the grace of God through union with Christ by faith and through regeneration by the Holy Spirit enter the kingdom of God and delight in the blessings of the new covenant: the forgiveness of sins, the inward transformation that awakens

a desire to glorify, trust, and obey God, and the prospect of the glory yet to be revealed. Living as salt in a world that is decaying and light in a world that is dark, believers should neither withdraw into seclusion from the world, nor become indistinguishable from it: rather, we are to do good to the city, for all the glory and honor of the nations is to be offered up to the living God. Recognizing whose created order this is, and because we are citizens of God's kingdom, we are to love our neighbors as ourselves, doing good to all, especially to those who belong to the household of God. The kingdom of God, already present but not fully realized, is the exercise of God's sovereignty in the world toward the eventual redemption of all creation. The kingdom of God is an invasive power that plunders Satan's dark kingdom and regenerates and renovates through repentance and faith the lives of individuals rescued from that kingdom. It therefore inevitably establishes a new community of human life together under God.

11. God's New People

We believe that God's new covenant people have already come to the heavenly Jerusalem; they are already seated with Christ in the heavenlies. This universal church is manifest in local churches of which Christ is the only Head; thus each "local church" is, in fact, the church, the household of God, the assembly of the living God, and the pillar and foundation of the truth. The church is the body of Christ, the apple of his eye, graven on his hands, and he has pledged himself to her forever. The church is distinguished by her gospel message, her sacred ordinances, her discipline, her great mission, and, above all, by her love for God, and by her members' love for one another and for the world. Crucially, this gospel we cherish has both personal and corporate dimensions, neither of which may properly be overlooked. Christ Jesus is our peace: he has not only brought about peace with God, but also peace between alienated peoples. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both Jew and Gentile to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. The church serves as a sign of God's future new world when its members live for the service of one another and their neighbors, rather than for self-focus. The church is the corporate dwelling place of God's Spirit, and the continuing witness to God in the world.

12. Baptism and the Lord's Supper

We believe that baptism and the Lord's Supper are ordained by the Lord Jesus himself. The former is connected with entrance into the new covenant community, the latter with ongoing covenant renewal. Together they are simultaneously God's pledge to us, a divine ordinance revealing His grace, our public vows of submission to the once crucified and now resurrected Christ, and anticipations of his return and of the consummation of all things.

13. The Restoration of All Things

We believe in the personal, glorious, and bodily return of our Lord Jesus Christ with his holy angels, when he will exercise his role as final Judge, and his kingdom will be consummated. We believe in the bodily resurrection of both the just and the unjust—the unjust to judgment and eternal conscious punishment in hell, as our Lord himself taught, and the just to eternal blessedness in the presence of him who sits on the throne and of the Lamb, in the new heaven and the new earth, the home of righteousness. On that day the church will be presented faultless before God by the obedience, suffering and triumph of Christ, all sin purged and its wretched effects forever banished. God will be all in all and his people will be enthralled by the immediacy of his ineffable holiness, and everything will be to the praise of his glorious grace.

Core Values

The Gospel

The Gospel is the ‘good news’ that through Christ’s death and resurrection, God’s kingdom has entered history to renew the world. This is the message and mission of the local church. The Gospel is both the invitation and the means of discipleship. The proclamation and practice of the Gospel drives everything we do. Specifically, the Gospel is at the heart of...

Teaching: Jesus proclaimed that the whole of the Scriptures pointed to and were fulfilled in him. We teach the Gospel message as the means to living the life God intended for humanity to live. Becoming like Christ (discipleship), and loving God are not add on steps to the Gospel, but are the practical expressions of the Gospel.

Worship: The message of the Gospel encompasses our worship as well. Worship is our response to the grace of God, extended to humanity in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Community

The Gospel creates a new humanity, rescuing people from individualism and isolation, and bringing people together as a foreshadowing of God’s coming kingdom. Living in community is therefore essential to becoming a follower of Christ. This is expressed at Living Hope through...

Small Groups: Rather than being a church with small groups, Living Hope is a church of small groups. Our small groups connect people together in relationships for spiritual growth, accountability, and discipleship.

Leadership: Living Hope is lead by a plurality of elders, called by God to lead the church and model the necessity of community. Our aim is to reflect the value of community and plurality in all we do.

Mission

The Gospel message is a message wrapped up in mission. Because Christ was sent into the world for a mission, the Gospel calls all followers of Christ to be on mission. We believe that our calling as followers of Christ is to serve our world, thus embodying the mission and message of Jesus Christ. This mission is expressed at Living Hope through...

Missional Living: We believe that God has placed us in a particular place, with particular gifts, in a particular time, for an intentional purpose. Therefore, mission is not reserved only for super-Christians with a higher calling, but is the norm for any who would follow Christ. The Gospel calls us to integrate all

aspects of life and work with our faith. Living Hope aims to equip people to live out and proclaim the Gospel in all walks of life.

Local and Global Mission: We believe that we are both responsible for and called to the transformation and well-being of Memphis (Jeremiah 29) as well as the proclamation of the Gospel to the ends of the Earth (Acts 1). Therefore, Living Hope focuses on particular areas of our city and world to engage in meaningful service and Gospel proclamation. By caring for the poor and the least reached, Living Hope seeks to fulfill the great commission through strategic mission.

Church Planting: Realizing that Living Hope cannot be all things to all people, we seek to plant Gospel-centered churches in and around Memphis and our world.

Membership Covenant

Through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the Lord has rescued me from my sin and his wrath. I have placed my faith in Jesus Christ, repented of my sin, and been baptized into the church. I now joyfully covenant with Living Hope to make disciples, through the power of the Holy Spirit, centering my life on the gospel, embracing community and living on mission in the following ways:

Gospel:

- Gathering regularly and consistently with the church for worship and service.
- Submitting to the authority of Christ and our elders, always seeking to maintain unity.
- Engaging with God through His word and prayer.
- Practicing the discipline and grace of giving.

Community:

- Embracing a shared life through meaningful relationships in a small group.
- Encouraging and advising each other with the truth of God's word.
- Serving the body of Living Hope with joy.
- Partnering for the spread of the gospel.

Mission:

- Sharing the hope of the gospel with others.
- Remembering and caring for the poor, vulnerable and hopeless.
- Serving others in my community, my city, and the world.
- Praying, going and sending for the advancement of the Gospel among the nations.

Print Name

Gospel

Introduction

Opening Discussion Question: What do you look for in a church before you are willing to join it as a member?

Note: some possible answers include friendly people, sense of community, sense of belonging, authenticity, strong leadership, strong doctrinal commitments, same denomination, a good kid's program, "good" preaching (subjectively defined), notoriety of the preacher, skilled musicians, emotional response to worship songs, atmosphere, social connections...

Proposal: A church worth joining should faithfully preach the gospel. That is the first and primary commitment of a church.

Our membership covenant begins with a statement that requires some unpacking:

Through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the Lord has rescued me from my sin and his wrath.

Bound up in this simple statement is the gospel of Jesus Christ. At Living Hope, we believe that the gospel of Jesus is the main point: the point of the Bible, the means for our transformation, and the only reason we exist as a church. We believe that the main reason for going to church is bound up in this concept, this teaching we call "the gospel." The first question we believe any prospective member should be asking is: *does Living Hope teach the truth?*

In this class, we are going to first spend some time *defining* what "the gospel" is, *distinguishing* it from what it is not, and then briefly *applying* this understanding to our context at Living Hope Church. Finally, we will *note some other doctrines* in Living Hope Church's confessional statement.

Defining the Gospel

What do we at Living Hope mean when we say "the gospel"? For those who did not grow up in the church, and indeed maybe even for some of those who did, this can be a vague or even cryptic term. It is becoming more and more popular for Christians of all denominations to rally around this term, but it is not always clearly defined, and that can lead to more confusion.

There is no need for confusion, however. English dictionaries give simple, adequate definitions. A gospel is simply a truth of primary importance, or it may just be another way of saying "good news." It has become tradition to refer to the first four books of the New Testament as "gospels" (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) because they sum up Jesus' story.

Gospel as "story of the Bible"

In one sense, the gospel is even broader than the account of Jesus's 33 years on earth, because it is the entire story of the Bible. This is one legitimate and important way of talking about the gospel, as the "main

point of the Bible.” It is how God orchestrated events over thousands of years and countless generations to redeem a fallen humanity and a broken world. Therefore, there is a kernel of the Christian gospel in every story from the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, no matter how obscure or irrelevant the story may at first seem.

Gospel as “life and work of Jesus”

In another, specialized sense, the Christian Gospel refers to the work of Jesus Christ. And this seems to be how the earliest New Testament believers used the term gospel: to talk about the good news found in Jesus’s life and message. Jesus’s life and message is filled with “good news.” Through his life he ministered to and called disciples; in his death he took on the sins and penalties of the world; through his resurrection he now reigns as King of kings and Lord of lords. This is why the Apostle Paul, in his letter to the Romans, said that he “was not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16).

Living Hope’s member covenant uses both of these senses when it talks about the gospel message. These definitions do not need to be held in tension, but actually complement each other very well and give us a fuller view of what the “gospel” really means. Every page of the Bible points to Jesus in some way or another, even those that are hard to understand.

There are many passages that helpfully sum up the Christian message, and show how Jesus’ life relates to the rest of the Bible. Three helpful ones for this context are 1 Corinthians 15:3-5, Acts 10:39-41, and John 3:16.

1 Corinthians 15:3-5 and Acts 10:39-41

It is helpful to consider 1 Corinthians 15:3-5 and Acts 10:39-41 together, because they are similar:

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve.

We are witnesses of everything [Jesus] did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a cross, but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen— by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.

These are two ways the earliest Christians summed up the gospel. In these summaries, notice that three things are emphasized:

- 1. Christ died in Jerusalem by crucifixion; he died for our sins and was buried.*

Christ lived a bodily life, was actually killed in history, and was given a burial. This is important because there are some churches that teach that Christ’s life serves as a metaphor or did not happen as the Bible says it did. Peter and Paul both show how these false teachings fly in the face of eyewitness testimony,

and make the Christian message clear: Jesus of Nazareth really lived and really died. People knew him and recognized him and followed his teachings.

Paul and Peter also emphasize a further point: that Christ's death was special and meaningful in a way ours are not. Because he was the perfect Son of God, Jesus bore the penalty for sin.

2. Christ was raised on the third day and appeared to the Apostles.

Paul also claims that Christ did not stay dead. After three days he was raised through the power of God, and walked the earth once more. He appeared to the Apostles – and Paul even goes further in the coming verses to state the Christ appeared to over 500 people. Jesus walked, talked, ate and drank with people after being raised from the dead.

3. Christ's life and death was anticipated and predicted by the Old Testament Scriptures and chosen by God.

This gets back to looking at the gospel as the fulfillment, the focal point, of the entire Bible. It would take too long to unpack all of the Old Testament Scriptures, but it is enough to say that both Paul and Peter thought of Jesus' life as the culmination of the Bible. Jesus was the promised Savior. He was the king of kings the prophecies pointed to – the one the Jews would call "Messiah," or in Greek would be translated "Christ." His coming was God's way of making good on a whole host of past promises to patriarchs, kings, and prophets.

John 3:16

Another popular way to sum up the gospel comes from John 3:16, the words of Jesus himself:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

1. God loved the world (i.e., his creation, fallen humanity).

It was God who saw creation's brokenness and need. He saw how messy the world had become because of sin. A theologian might say "God took the initiative" here. Or as the Apostle John put it: we love God because he first loved us (1 John 4:19).

Often it is easy to think of the gospel as something we accomplish or advance. But from a biblical perspective, the gospel originates and finds its power only in God's intentions. It only exists because God loves this world dearly and is willing to sacrifice on its behalf.

2. God gave his Son to the world.

To address creation's brokenness and need, God did not just send a prophet or king or some type of spirit or even an angel. God sent his Son. The doctrine of the Triune God is a mystery, but Christians believe that through his Son, God sent us himself. The story of Jesus is the story of God coming to earth as a man.

3. *Whoever believes in God's Son will have eternal life.*

This is what informs the hope of the gospel. This is why it is good news for people. Through his Son, God has provided a means to be saved from the just penalty for our sins.

It is a core conviction of Living Hope Church that those who believe in Jesus the Christ will have their sins forgiven and will outlive death. It is the foundation that provides hope for anyone in any situation.

Discussion Question: Does this explanation of the “gospel” line up with your understanding? What are some other Bible passages or ways of explaining the gospel?

Living Hope Statement of Faith: authority of the Bible, the Trinity, the deity of Christ, the work of Christ to save humanity, the future resurrection of the dead

There are several doctrines, or truths, that make up the necessities of the gospel. In order to trust Jesus through faith, there are some aspects of who he is and what he has done that we must believe in order to know the Jesus of the Bible.

At Living Hope, we summarize those basic necessities of the gospel in our “Statement of Basic Belief”. We feel that this statement encapsulates the essentials of the faith, handed down through the church, throughout history. These essential doctrines provide the definitions necessary to summarize the gospel and give us a common understanding of what the Bible teaches. Our statement of basic belief says:

We believe ...

- that the Scriptures are true, authoritative and sufficient (Psalm 19:7-11; 2 Timothy 3: 16; 2 Peter 1:20-21).
- that there is only one God (Deuteronomy 6:4; Isaiah 45:5-6; Isaiah 46:9-10; John 17:3; 1 Corinthians 8:4-6; 1 Timothy 2:5).
- that the Father is God, the Son is God and the Holy Spirit is God; and that the Father is neither the Son nor the Holy Spirit, the Son is neither the Father nor the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son (Genesis 1:26; Psalm 45:6-7; Psalm 110:1; Matthew 3:13-17; Matthew 28:17-20; 1 Corinthians 12:4-6).
- that I am, along with all humanity (Christ excluded), by birth and action a sinner (Genesis 6:5; Psalm 51:5; Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 3:23; 5:8, 12-21; 7:18; Ephesians 2:1-3).
- that the deserved penalty for sin is death, both physical and spiritual (Genesis 2: 15-17; Genesis 3:19; Romans 5:12; 6:23; James 1:14-15).
- that Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God, was born of a virgin and is both fully God and fully human (Matthew 1 :20; Luke 2:52; John 1:1-4, 14; Colossians 1:15-20; Hebrews 1:1-3).
- that Jesus Christ died as my substitute to pay the penalty for my sin (John 1:29; 10:1-18; Romans 5:8; 1 Corinthians 15:1-4; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 1:4; 1 Peter 3:18).

- that Jesus Christ physically rose from the dead (Matthew 28:1-20; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-53; John 1:20-21:25; 1 Corinthians 15:12-34).
- that Jesus Christ physically ascended into heaven and will one day physically return (John 14:3; Acts 1:11; 1 Thessalonians 4: 16; Hebrews 9:28; 1 John 3:2; Revelation 1:7).
- in a future physical resurrection of the dead. Those who trust in Jesus Christ alone will be raised to eternal reward. Those who have not trusted in Jesus Christ will be raised to eternal punishment (Matthew 25:31-46; John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15).
- that only by trusting in the person and work of Jesus Christ alone can I be reconciled to God and experience true life and joy (John 3:18,14:6; Acts 4:12; Romans 3:21-26; 1 Timothy 2:5-6).

At Living Hope, we believe that these basic doctrines summarize the essentials of the Christian faith for us. Acknowledgement and agreement with these doctrines are essential for one to possess saving faith in Jesus Christ.

Distinguishing the Gospel

In every era of Church history, it has been important to distinguish the true gospel from false religion. This goes back to the earliest days. In Galatians 1 and 2 Corinthians 11, for example, the Apostle Paul had to warn early Christians about false gospels.

One common way this happens today is by trying to make the Christian gospel into another religion. In other words, we make the gospel into a merit-based system, where believers are saved on the merits of what they do, rather than on the merits of what was done for them when Jesus died for their sins. This kind of distortion has been briefly addressed in other sections, but requires special attention. We must be clear: Living Hope Church understands the gospel to mean that, on our own, we cannot save ourselves from God’s wrath or the consequences of their own sin. We need Jesus the Christ to be our mediator.

In the last section, in the discussion of John 3:16, it was pointed out that it is easy to think of the gospel as something we accomplish or advance. When we think this way, it is actually distorting the gospel by reducing it to a religion. Understanding Christianity as a merit-based system robs it of “distinctives” – the things that distinguish Christianity from any other world religion. This kind of distortion happens all the time, in both subtle and explicit ways. Sometimes it pollutes entire denominations and shapes church teaching on a massive scale. Other times it creeps into our own idle thoughts as we consider our personal relationships with God.

Consider a simple comparison of religion vs. the gospel:

Religion-oriented life

Motivation: Obedience is the reason God accepts us, and we obey in order to get things or status from God.

Gospel-oriented life

Motivation: Acceptance from God is the reason we obey. We obey as an

Self-Image: It is critical that we think of ourselves as ‘good people.’ Threats to that self-image must be destroyed, and when standards are not met, we feel like failures.

Prayer: We pray in times of need for things and for help; our main purpose in prayer is control of the environment.

Source of Hope: It is possible to be saved and delivered from trial through hard work. Those who obey God are rewarded.

expression of love; as a way of delighting and resembling Him.

Self-Image: We know that we are not ‘good people,’ and do not have to pretend to be. Our identities are based on God’s love for us, and we can be confident in that even when we fail.

Prayer: We pray in times of need and in times of abundance; our main purpose in prayer is fellowship with God.

Source of Hope: No matter the circumstance, we are already saved through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

In this simple comparison we can see the attitudes and beliefs not just of other world religions, but also of people in churches who claim to be Christians and yet believe and act otherwise. This affects how we evangelize and how we disciple. The Christian life is lived by continuing to identify areas of weakness in our own views of ourselves and God, and seeking out a gospel-oriented life, rather than a religion-oriented one.

Discussion Question: Imagine two friendships: one informed by religion and the other by the gospel. How are they similar? How are they different?

Note:.. We tend to think of our relationship with God differently than we do with other people. The “religious” friendship may be nothing more than a transaction, with both seeking their own ends, looking at their own needs, and very critical of themselves and each other (getting back to self-image). Meanwhile, the gospel relationship is built on trust, service, and identities that take our fallen nature into consideration. There is room for mercy, forgiveness and grace.

Applying the Gospel

Gospel implications: individual and corporate

As Tim Keller says, “the gospel is not just the ABC’s of Christianity, it is the A-Z of Christianity.”¹ This means that, instead of thinking of the gospel as one catchphrase or easy answer, or something basic that only new immature believers talk about, we should think of the gospel as something that all Christians should constantly be revisiting, whether you’ve been a Christian two days or ninety years. This is part of why it is important to think of the gospel as specifically about the news of Jesus (which can be explained in

¹ Tim Keller, *Paul’s Letter to the Galatians: Living in Line with the Truth of the Gospel* (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2003), 2.

simple, basic language) and also about the broader news of how God is saving humanity throughout history (which sometimes takes a more complicated explanation).

Ray Ortlund writes,

Gospel doctrine creates a gospel culture. The gospel does more than renew us personally within. The doctrines of grace also create a culture of grace, called a healthy church, where the gospel is articulated at the level of doctrine and incarnated at the level of culture and vibe and ethos and feel and relationships and community. Without the doctrine, the culture is unsustainable. Without the culture, the doctrine appears pointless and powerless. The gospel alone creates a culture of acceptance and warmth and beauty and safety: “Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God” (Romans 15:7). The more clearly that doctrine is taught, and the more beautifully that culture is developed, the more powerfully a church will bear prophetic witness to Jesus as the mighty Friend of sinners.²

Living Hope Gospel Commitments

We care deeply about our statements of faith because we believe those truths – when believed and put into practice – produce a culture of grace that brings glory to God. As our opening paragraph to the membership covenant reads, “*I now joyfully covenant with Living Hope to make disciples, through the power of the Holy Spirit, centering my life on the gospel, embracing community and living on mission...*” Living Hope desires to embody a culture that exhibits the grace and mercy of God in practice.

For this reason, our covenant identifies specific practices that give shape to a gospel culture. We feel that these practices summarize many of the commands given to the church, in the New Testament, in order to bear witness to the good news of Jesus Christ. The gospel we profess in our statements of faith is embodied in the lifestyle we commit to live out together. We call this a ‘covenant’ because this is an act of self-giving, much like the covenants described in the Bible.

Jesus calls his disciples to “lose their life for his sake” (Matthew 10:38-39). Our hope is that the gospel culture we seek to embody in our covenant will be the means for making disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19). We desire to be a church that makes disciples and plants churches, and we believe that this covenant is our means to that end. As we give our lives to calling, God will produce more disciples through us.

The practices we commit to under the heading of “gospel” are:

1. *Gathering regularly and consistently with the church for worship and service.*

We gather weekly. We do this because the scripture commands our gathering (Heb. 10:25), but also because the weekly rhythm of hearing, singing (Eph. 5:19), and celebrating the gospel is essential to sustain a culture of grace (Acts 13:42-44, 14:21). Our worship services are structured to communicate

² Ray Ortlund, *Justification vs. Self-justification* (The Gospel Coalition National Conference, 13 April 2011), 3. <<http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/rayortlund/files/2011/04/TGClecture.pdf>>

the fullness of the gospel. We follow a liturgy (form of worship) that communicates the greatness of God (adoration), our need for mercy because of our sin (confession), the truth and hope of the gospel (absolution), and our mission to the world (benediction). We preach the gospel in every message as the means for reconciliation with God, others, and our spiritual growth. We take communion bi-weekly to remember the gospel and receive the grace that God gives us through that sacrament (1 Cor. 11:23-26).

We also call on our covenant members to worship an hour and serve an hour at Living Hope. One of the most profound ways that we embody a gospel culture is through the act of humbly serving one another (Galatians 5:13). We use the gifts that the Lord has given us to steward the grace we have received (1 Peter 4:8-11).

2. Submitting to the authority of Christ and our elders, always seeking to maintain unity.

Living Hope is an elder-ruled church. Our elders are men of character who have been set aside and screened according to the scriptures (1 Tim. 3 and Titus 1). They serve to lead the church under the authority of Jesus Christ, the head shepherd of Living Hope. The elders are servant leaders, who do not lord authority over others, but instead seek to lead in a manner consistent with Jesus' leadership. As Hebrews 13:17 states, the elders give an account for the souls of the members at Living Hope. This is a calling they take seriously and soberly.

The church is called to submit to the authority and leadership of the elders (Hebrews 13:17). Submission is not a popular word in our culture, but the scripture holds it up as a virtue and high calling. In fact, when we practice submission, we are embodying a crucial aspect of a gospel culture, because Jesus was continually submitted to the will of his Father.

Unity is a high priority and value at Living Hope. Unity is also an essential component of a culture built on the gospel. The church is called to unity because it reveals an aspect of God's character to a watching world. In a society where divisiveness is celebrated, the church shines like a light in the darkness when it is unified.

One of the primary tasks of the Living Hope elders is to strive to maintain unity with our church. We call on our covenant members to resolve disputes face-to-face, and to seek to be peacemakers in all their relational conflicts (Matt. 5:23-25, Matthew 18:15-20, Rom. 12:18, Ephesians 4).

3. Engaging with God through His word and prayer.

In John 15:4-5, Jesus says,

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

At Living Hope Church, we want to abide in Jesus. Our hope is that each of our covenant members will diligently pursue Jesus in their day-to-day activities. Following Jesus consists of a daily pursuit of him; to

preach the gospel to ourselves, to apply the love of God to our struggles and sin, and to pursue the Lord in our prayer life.

4. *Practicing the discipline and grace of giving.*

In 2 Corinthians 8-9, the Apostle Paul demonstrates how an understanding of the gospel creates a generous church. He says in 8:9, *“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.”*

In view of the gospel, we believe that giving is both a discipline and a grace. Our giving is to be disciplined because the ever-encroaching threat of greed lives within us all. Jesus warned us that our treasure and heart were intimately connected (Matthew 6:19-24) and the Apostle Paul warned us that greed could overtake us (1 Timothy 6:6-10, 17-19). We need the discipline because greed is an ever-present temptation.

But giving is also a grace from God. He has blessed us in every spiritual blessing. Everything we own is a gift from God. Therefore, giving is just the logical conclusion for those who understand what they have received in the grace of Jesus Christ.

Discussion Question: If you had to rank these gospel commitments in order, from easiest to most challenging, what would that list be?

A Note on Some other Doctrines

Because our statement of basic belief is simple, there are a number of doctrines, beliefs, and teachings left unaddressed. This is intentional. We believe that the gospel is simple. All those who call upon the name of Jesus will be saved (Romans 10:10). Having given a brief synopsis of the essential teachings of Scripture, we believe that those who trust in the Jesus of the Bible are a part of the family of God.

This does not mean that we believe all other doctrines are insignificant or unimportant. We have included our “Statement of Bible Doctrine” to shed light on our beliefs on so-called “secondary doctrines” - beliefs that are important for the local church, but do not determine whether or not one knows Jesus Christ. Here is how our statement of Bible Doctrine reads:

While the doctrines expressed in the “Statement of Basic Belief” are those that are recognized to be universal and primary within the Church, there are a number of secondary beliefs about which the leadership of Living Hope Church is passionate. Complete agreement is not required for the sake of membership, but it should be known that Living Hope Church will preach, teach, and counsel in accordance with these theological convictions.

Again, none of the doctrines listed below fall into the category of “the gospel.” They are not truths of *primary* importance; they do not separate believers from unbelievers. However, they still have a profound impact on the practice and life of the church, and so they are of secondary importance.

1. *The distinction between law and gospel.*

Much could be said here, but basically, we believe that the gospel saves us and the law directs us. What we do for God cannot save us, but instead, our works reveal that God has saved us.

2. The gifts of the Spirit.

Living Hope believes and practices that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are operative today in the church. We do not believe that the gifts of the Holy Spirit ceased, as some do, with the closing of the canon of Scripture (cessationists), nor do we believe in a secondary filing of the Holy Spirit (evidenced through tongues) that is necessary for faith in Christ (charismatics).

3. The role of men and women in the church and home.

Living Hope is a complementarian church. We believe that the role of elder is reserved for qualified men. Other than the role of elder, we encourage women to be involved in all aspects of ministry at Living Hope.

4. Baptism as a testimony of salvation.

Living Hope is baptistic - meaning that we baptize professing believers in Jesus Christ. Our elders will evaluate other forms of baptism for membership on a case-by-case basis, but we will practice believer's baptism, by immersion, as our practice of baptism at Living Hope.

Our comprehensive statement of faith is our confessional statement. It details all of the beliefs that Living Hope Church professes. All of our elders at Living Hope are in agreement with our confessional statement, though alignment with that document is not necessary for membership at Living Hope.

The confessional statement is included in your membership packet and can be accessed at <http://lhchurch.com/about-us/what-we-believe/confessional-statement/>.

Gospel Class Participant Guide

What do you look for in a church before you are willing to join it as a member?

I. The Gospel: What it's all about.

- A. Gospel as “story of the Bible.”
- B. Gospel as “life and work of Jesus.”
- C. Summary of 1 Corinthians 15:3-5 and Acts 10:39-41

1 Corinthians 15:3-5

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve.

Acts 10:39-41

We are witnesses of everything [Jesus] did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a cross, but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.

1. Christ died in history for our sins.
2. Christ was raised on the third day and appeared to the Apostles.
3. Christ's life and death was orchestrated by God.

D. Summary of John 3:16

John 3:16

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

1. God loved the world.
2. God gave his Son to the world.
3. Whoever believes in the Son will have eternal life.

Does this explanation of the “gospel” line up with your understanding? What are some other Bible passages or ways of explaining the gospel?

E. Living Hope Statement of Faith.

The authority of the Bible...

The Trinity...

The deity of Christ...

The work of Christ to save humanity...

The future resurrection of the dead and reality of judgment...

II. Distinguishing the Gospel

A. Four points of comparison: Religion vs. the Gospel

Religion-oriented life

Motivation: Obedience is the reason God accepts us, and we obey in order to get things or status from God.

Self-Image: It is critical that we think of ourselves as 'good people.' Threats to that self-image must be destroyed, and when standards are not met, we feel like failures.

Prayer: We pray in times of need for things and for help; our main purpose in prayer is control of the environment.

Source of Hope: It is possible to be saved and delivered from trial through hard work. Those who obey God are rewarded.

Gospel-oriented life

Motivation: Acceptance from God is the reason we obey. We obey as an expression of love; as a way of delighting and resembling Him.

Self-Image: We know that we are not 'good people,' and do not have to pretend to be. Our identities are based on God's love for us, and we can be confident in that even when we fail.

Prayer: We pray in times of need and in times of abundance; our main purpose in prayer is fellowship with God.

Source of Hope: No matter the circumstance, we are already saved through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Imagine two friendships: one informed by religion and the other by the gospel. How are they similar? How are they different?

III. Applying the Gospel

A. Gospel implications

Gospel doctrine creates a gospel culture. The gospel does more than renew us personally within. The doctrines of grace also create a culture of grace, called a healthy church, where the gospel is articulated at the level of doctrine and incarnated at the level of culture and vibe and ethos and feel and relationships and community. Without the doctrine, the culture is unsustainable. Without the culture, the doctrine appears pointless and powerless. The gospel alone creates a culture of acceptance and warmth and beauty and safety: "Therefore welcome one another as Christ

has welcomed you, for the glory of God” (Romans 15:7). The more clearly that doctrine is taught, and the more beautifully that culture is developed, the more powerfully a church will bear prophetic witness to Jesus as the mighty Friend of sinners. – Ray Ortlund³

B. Living Hope Gospel Commitments:

John 15:4-5:

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

1. Gathering regularly
2. Submission and unity
3. Engaging God and his word
4. Giving

If you had to rank these gospel commitments in order, from easiest to most challenging, what would that list be?

IV. A Note on some other Doctrines

A. Primary and Secondary Doctrines

Living Hope Statement of Bible Doctrine:

While the doctrines expressed in the “Statement of Basic Belief” are those that are recognized to be universal and primary within the Church, there are a number of secondary beliefs about which the leadership of Living Hope Church is passionate. Complete agreement is not required for the sake of membership, but it should be known that Living Hope Church will preach, teach, and counsel in accordance with these theological convictions.

1. Law and Gospel
2. Gifts of the Spirit
3. The role of men and women
4. Baptism

³ Ray Ortlund, *Justification vs. Self-justification* (The Gospel Coalition National Conference, 13 April 2011), 3. <<http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/rayortlund/files/2011/04/TGClecture.pdf>>

Community

Introduction

Opening Discussion Question: When is the last time you experienced a good community? What made it so good? What was it like?

Note: some possible answers include groups that are bound by common interests or stage of life, perhaps previous church experiences in another part of the country or world. Good community, whether in a church or some other setting, usually is a result of feeling valued, understood and needed.

Proposal: True community in the church finds its basis in the gospel, and only comes through the hard work of sharing, encouraging, serving and partnering.

Last week, we discussed the gospel: defining it, distinguishing it, and applying it to the context of Living Hope's statement of faith and church life. While Christianity is a personal relationship with God, it is not a private relationship, and following Christ in the ways that the Bible instructs us, only makes sense in the context of biblical community.

As Nate Larkin puts it:

The church is a body -- a living, breathing organism whose members are so intimately connected that they can only move together. On any given day, every member of that body needs help, and every member has some help to give.⁴

God himself exists in community. Before creation, God lived in community as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Gen 1:1-2). Because we were created in God's image, we are hard-wired for community. A longing for community with God, and with others, is part of what it means to be human.

When Jesus came, He chose to minister within a framework of relationships, and did life with a small group of men. Ever since the church was born, the Holy Spirit has been at work building communities of believers where life change and spiritual growth take place.

Defining Community

The *Gospel in Life*⁵ study gives a good summary of the biblical definition of Christian community in this way:

The people of God – those who are created by faith through the gospel.

A Christian community consists of those who have repented and believed and have a common experience of the gospel, which is the message of grace.

⁴ Nate Larkin. *Samson and the Pirate Monks* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 73.

⁵ Tim Keller, *Gospel in Life Study Guide* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010).

The Body of Christ – those who are members of one another in Jesus Christ

A Christian community consists of people who deliberately share life together. The controlling Biblical metaphor for this aspect of community is family (Gal. 6:10, 1 Peter 4:17, Eph. 2:19, Rom. 12:10). A family shares all of life together – eating, living, and working alongside one another.

The Fellowship of the Spirit – those who are a model of life in God’s kingdom

Christian community is a distinctive, Spirit-filled community that models an alternative way to do everything in life. Jesus says his community is a “city on a hill” and a “light to the world” (Matt. 5:14-16). The behavior of the community is meant to shine out and show the world the glory of Christ.

Discussion Question: What is the difference between a community united by the gospel and one united by anything else (political/social ideals, hobbies, etc.)?

Confronting Expectations

“Community” has become a buzzword in the American church, but merely having a small group structure is not a guarantee of biblical community. True community is born out of “counting others more significant than yourselves” (Phil. 2:3). Sociologists describe unhealthy small groups as “occasions for individuals to focus on themselves in the presence of others.”

One of the obstacles small groups face at Living Hope is the weight of expectations, often brought by members from previous group experiences. In other words, we all become a part of a group with certain ideals and goals in mind. Without intending to, a group can often find itself tossed back and forth by the different hopes each person has for the group.

Over our history, Living Hope has seen many groups struggle with competing expectations that often seem at odds with each other. Below are some of the most common, along with examples of how they might be approached in an unhealthy way. None of these expectations are wrong, but when taken to extremes, not accompanied by grace, or not balanced with other biblical goals, they can create a frustrated small group.

People can mean a host of different things when they talk about “living in community.”

1. Theological Expectations

I expect my community to value and uphold my particular theological positions to the same degree as I do. I prefer to be in community with those who agree with me on every detail of theology.

I expect my community to major on theological education and information transfer. If the majority of our time is not spent in deeper Bible study or studying what I deem important, I am not interested.

2. Missional Expectations

I expect my community to value and support my specific mission project with the same passion, fervor, and resources as I do.

I expect my community to spend our time working on my particular issue and focusing all our efforts there. If other projects compete with my calling, or too much of our time is spent focusing “on us”, then I am not interested.

3. Therapeutic Expectations

I expect my community to listen as I vent my frustrations and sort through my personal problems. Any disagreement or challenge is unacceptable, because I don’t want you to fix my problem, just listen and empathize.

I expect my community to spend our time listening to one another and supporting one another. If our time is spent on Bible study or service and we can’t focus on sharing our feelings and struggles, I am not interested.

4. Convenience Expectations

I expect my community to schedule and plan everything around my stage of life and current schedule demands. My preferences should be considered and largely honored in all programming and planning by leadership.

I expect my community to spend a minimal amount of time together, considering my stage of life and demands. If being a part of the community requires sacrificing some of my time or rearranging my schedule, I am not interested.

5. Relational Expectations

I expect my community to be my primary source of friends and social activity. Being a part of my community means attending movies, sporting events, and concerts together, while shopping together, eating together, and hanging out together.

I expect my community to spend the majority of our time together just hanging out and being friends. If our time together is not primarily about building friendships and doing stuff together, I am not interested.

Our membership covenant seeks to redirect us from these personal preferences toward the biblical ideal of community, something we are always striving for but, admittedly, never achieving. As you will see, the first point under community calls us to “embrace a shared life through meaningful relationships in a small group.” This is an impossible task without the Holy Spirit working in and through us. It takes deep reflection and costly commitment to share life with one another.

Discussion Question: Which of these expectations resonated with you? How have you seen them affect previous small groups?

Practicing Community

Our membership covenant is meant to give shape to our community in such a way as to uphold these various Biblical views of community and go beyond our individual expectations. It is important to include all of the various aspects of a Christian community as depicted in the Scriptures.

We call on all of our members to practice community in the following ways:

1. Embrace a shared life through meaningful relationships in a small group

We need to elaborate on a few of our terms in this commitment. What do we mean by “embracing a shared life.” Essentially, we feel that it is impossible to embody all of the commandments and callings of a Christian community with limited interaction with one another. In order for Living Hope to be a church that reflects the truth that we are the people of God, the very body of Christ, and an embodiment of the Spirit of God, we must spend time together. In other words, we will not be able to live up to our calling to be a “city on a hill” if we only interact with one another once or twice a month. Embracing a shared life means that we are present with one another, that we sacrifice our time and energy for one another, and that we are willing to be inconvenienced for each other. Being a part of a small group at Living Hope should mean that you are prioritizing your relationships with other members of your group, that you are present with them regularly, and that you are invested in each other’s spiritual growth.

What do we mean by “meaningful relationships”? Nearly 60 times in the New Testament, the Bible directs our life together with “one another” statements. “Love one another”, “submit to one another”, and “carry each other’s burdens” are just a few examples.

The New Testament envisions a depth and sincerity to all of our relationships with each other. Our relationships are full of meaning because we take our call to love and care for one another very seriously. Being a disciple of Jesus means that we will share each other’s joys and help carry each other’s burdens. Following Christ means we will sacrifice our time and energy for each other, and that we will provide safe space to grow and mature in Christ together.

To create meaningful relationships in the context of a small group, we will need to:

- *Share space with one another* – Inviting each other into our living space, where we eat together, study together, pray together, and recreate together.
- *Share goods with one another* – Simply stated, we help one another. We may do practical tasks for each other, give financial gifts, or provide for our basic needs in concrete ways.
- *Share time with one another* – This means we will commit to be available for each other, as well as committing to meeting together regularly.

Tim Keller’s comments on Galatians 6:2 (“carry one another’s burdens”) sheds some helpful light on meaningful relationships. He writes, “Notice that it does not say “carry other’s burdens” but “carry each other’s burdens”. It means something like this – live in community where you don’t let others carry their loads alone, and where you also don’t try to carry your load alone. Help others help you. It is a form of

hypocrisy to be willing to help others with their weaknesses but to hide your own and refuse help. It takes a gospel-changed heart to give help unselfishly to others, and it takes a gospel-changed heart to receive help unashamedly from others.”⁶

This is what it looks like for us to “embrace a shared life through meaningful relationships in a small group”.

2. Encouraging and advising each other with the truth of God’s word

One of the key aspects of Biblical community is learning and applying the truth of God’s word to each other’s lives. Hebrews 10:24 reminds us to “consider how to stir up one another to love and good works” and “encourage one another daily”. The beauty of the Christian community is the way we share in God’s word together.

Evangelical Christianity has often been guilty of individualizing the faith. We are sometimes told that our “personal relationship” with Jesus is the pinnacle of the faith. We are encouraged to have a “quiet time” and “work on our relationship with God”. This is all well and good, but the New Testament shows that none of our spiritual maturity and development is meant only for our individual enjoyment. God matures and grows us for the sake of the church. His word is meant to flow through us, not to terminate on us. We are called to exercise encouragement, admonishment, instruction, and rebuke, all throughout the New Testament. Encouraging and advising one another with the truth of God’s word is the practice of living out our faith, together.

3. Serving the body of Living Hope with joy

1 Peter 4:8-11 instructs us to serve one another. The amazing thing about that passage is that Peter says that when we serve one another, we become “stewards of God’s varied grace”. Think about that. The grace that we receive from Jesus through his life, death, and resurrection, is imparted to others as we serve them in love.

The grace that you have received from Jesus is meant to be channeled into the lives of others through your loving service. God gifts every believer with spiritual gifts that are meant to grow and develop other believers as those gifts are exercised. The way that the grace of God will be experienced and applied throughout Living Hope is through the exercise of Spiritual gifts within the community of faith.

Knowing that our gifts and service play such a vital role in the process of making disciples of Jesus, we can serve with great joy. Philippians 2 shows us that when we serve selflessly, without grumbling, we are acting like Jesus. Jesus served with joy (Heb. 12:1-4), took on the cross, and now gives us great grace. When we serve with joy, we reveal the greatness of Jesus to one another.

4. Partnering for the spread of the gospel

⁶ Keller, 65.

Evangelism is a community project. We believe that we all have a role to play in seeing those far from God brought near. Being a part of a small group at Living Hope means that you will be signing up to partner to spread the gospel to the ends of the Earth, just as Jesus commanded.

For some, this may mean that you are the voice of evangelism – speaking the good news in a compelling and Spirit led way, so as to see others come to faith in Jesus.

For some, this may mean that you regularly intercede for those who are far from God. Perhaps you play the role of leading others in prayer for their friends, loved ones, and the nations to come to know Christ.

For some, this may mean that you are the connector for people far from God to come to see the light of the Body of Christ. Perhaps you are the link in the chain for your network of relationships to the local church, so that the “City on a Hill” can be seen.

Still others may play the part of financing and resourcing those who will travel to the nations (either short-term or long-term) to preach the gospel, make disciples, and plant churches.

We all have a role to play in our collective witness for King Jesus. Being a part of a small group at Living Hope means that you will become a partner for the spread and the expansion of the gospel around the globe. Our hope is that all of our small groups would see themselves as missionaries sent to their neighborhoods and cities to faithfully proclaim the good news of Jesus, and to invite others into their community of faith. We long for Living Hope to be a church made up of groups of people who are committed to sharing the gospel together.

Conclusion

At Living Hope, we believe that the only way to honestly confront and move past individual expectations of community is to look back to the gospel. It will not be perfect or easy by any means. But if we remember our identity as the people of God, the body of Christ, and the fellowship of the Spirit, and work to keep our commitments to embrace, encourage, serve and partner, it will go a long way to lessen the burden of expectations and create an environment for true, lasting spiritual growth in the community.

Discussion question: In light of your expectations, which commitment will be the biggest challenge for you personally?

Community Class Participant Guide

When is the last time you experienced a good community? What made it so good? What was it like?

Proposal: True community in the church finds its basis in the gospel, and only comes through the hard work of sharing, encouraging, serving and partnering.

I. Defining Community

- A. Community of the Godhead
- B. Community of the first believers
- C. Three ways of thinking of the believing community (from Keller)
 - 1. The people of God
 - 2. The body of Christ
 - 3. The fellowship of the Spirit

What is the difference between a community united by the gospel and one united by anything else (political/social ideals, hobbies, etc.)?

II. Confronting Expectations

- A. Five Categories
 - 1. Theological Expectations
 - 2. Missional Expectations
 - 3. Therapeutic Expectations
 - 4. Convenience Expectations
 - 5. Relational Expectations

Which of these expectations resonated with you? How have you seen them affect past small groups in which you participated?

III. Practicing Community

- A. Living Hope Community Commitments:
 - 1. Embrace shared life in a small group
 - 2. Encourage and advise other believers
 - 3. Serve the church with joy

4. Partner for the spread of the gospel

In light of your expectations, which of these commitments will be most challenging?

Mission

Introduction

Opening Discussion Question: If you had to sum up the church's "mission statement" in one sentence, what would it be?

Proposal: The church finds its purpose in the mission of God: to redeem the world.

In the first week, we looked at the "gospel" – what it was, how it applied to our lives, and how it was the most important thing for a church to get right. Without a clear understanding the storyline of the Bible in general, and the identity, life, and work of Jesus in particular, Living Hope cannot function properly as a church.

In the second week, we looked at the concept of "community" – how the gospel informed it, some of the challenges to doing it well, and what Living Hope hopes to foster in its members.

So we might say that in the first week we discussed "what" the church believes and in the second week we discussed "who." But if the discussion ends here, there is still a danger that the members will start to look internally, as if the church existed simply to meet individual needs or the corporate needs of believers. We must also look at "why." The church certainly does exist in part for meeting needs (consider the example set in Acts 4:32-37), but the church is called to a much higher task than that: participation in God's mission. This comes through declaring the gospel to the nations, and introducing God to people who may have never heard of him.

So, in this final class in the series, we are going to look at "mission" – what the Bible has to say about it, how the "gospel" and "community" play into it, and how the leadership at Living Hope envision this playing out in our context.

We are going to first spend some time looking at *how the Bible links the church with the mission of God*, and then we will look at Living Hope Church's membership covenant and see how this plays out in our context through four actions: *sharing, remembering, serving, sending*.

Mission in the Bible

The church is the people of God, who embody the presence of God, sent into the world for the purposes of God. To be a part of the church is to be a part of God's mission to rescue and restore his entire creation.

In other words, the Bible is a missionary document. By its very nature, the Bible exists to communicate the truths about God, Jesus, and his church - all for people who do not know Him, told by people who have been sent by Him. From beginning to end, it tells the story of a God who creates and sends.

Often we think of "mission" as something we do or something we own and are responsible for. But biblically speaking, this is inadequate. Mission is God's work, we are mere participants. As Christopher Wright puts it:

“Mission is not ours; mission is God’s. Certainly, the mission of God is the prior reality out of which flows any mission that we get involved in. Or, as has been nicely put, it is not so much the case that God has a mission for his church in the world but that God has a church for his mission in the world. Mission was not made for the church; the church was made for mission--God’s mission.”⁷

We can speak of “mission” even when we talk about the earliest figures in the Bible. For example:

Adam and Eve (Gen 1-2)

Adam and Eve were created by God and sent into the Garden of Eden to enjoy his presence and fulfill his call on their lives. Adam and Eve were called by God to “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”(Genesis 1:28) Being made in the image of God, Adam and Eve were to extend that image into all the creation and fill it with God’s presence by creating and cultivating the creation at their disposal.

Noah (Gen 6-9)

Noah was sent by God to care for his creation and extend his rule into the creation after the flood. Noah was on mission from God, for God’s glory. Like Adam and Eve before him, he was called by God to construct the place for his presence (the Ark) and carry the mission of God into the world.

Abraham (Gen 12)

Abraham was promised by God to have a place to call home and a people to carry out the mission of God. Through Abraham’s obedience to the mission, God would create a nation to bless all the nations of the world and extend his presence into the world.

On and on we could go.

From the beginning, God has created a people to embody his presence and live for his purposes in the world. From Moses, to Israel, to Jesus, the Holy Spirit and the church, God reveals himself as a sending God, who desires to extend his presence and glory into every corner of his creation.

Perhaps the most foundational text for the mission of the church in the New Testament is Matthew 28:18-20, commonly referred to as the Great Commission:

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

The church spread from her inception through the faithful proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is because Jesus appointed his disciples with the call to “go into the world and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:18-20) and the Holy Spirit filled those disciples with the power of God (Acts 2:1-13), that the

⁷ Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 62.

church came into being at the hearing and receiving of the gospel (Acts 2:37-41). All throughout the book of Acts, you see the faithful proclamation of the good news about Jesus Christ serving as the catalyst for the faith and conversion of those who were far from God.

This is a text to which we will be returning, because it informs each of Living Hope's commitments to "mission." For now, as a tie-in to "gospel" and "community" themes, it is worth looking at what Steve Timmis writes in the book *Total Church*:

"The term mission is from a Latin word meaning 'sent.' Jesus sends his followers out into the world with his gospel word to make other followers who will go out into the world with his gospel word to make other followers in perpetuity. Mission begins in our own hearts as the gospel word of Christ crucified is effectively applied by the Spirit. And it does not stop until the far corners of the world. It is a constant continuum because mission is what we might call the steady state of God's people. The church is God's mission strategy. At the heart of God's plan to bless the nations are the people of God. The church is formed by mission and for mission."⁸

These convictions and beliefs shape the value and priority for mission at Living Hope. As Charles Spurgeon once said, every Christian is either a missionary or an imposter. We believe that the church and her members are most healthy and fulfilling their mandate from Christ when we are serving God's mission together.

Living Hope's Commitments

Here is how we covenant to live on mission together:

Sharing the hope of the gospel with others

Evangelism has been God's method for church growth and gospel expansion from the beginning of the church. For this reason, we feel that we all have a role to play and a responsibility to bear in making the good news known to the world around us.

In the book of Acts, Jesus calls on his disciples to bear witness (Acts 1:8) to him and his good news. Bearing witness happens throughout the book of Acts, as the church seeks to obey Jesus' command and live out the mission that he has given them. You can summarize the way the church bears witness to Christ in two ways:

"Come and See!"

One way the church bears witness to Christ and shares the hope of the good news of the gospel is by inviting others into the community of faith. In this way, the church's ministry to the surrounding community, the gathering of the church for worship and gospel preaching, and the love the saints have for one another all serve as a picture of the truth of the gospel.

⁸ Tim Chester and Steve Timmis, *Total Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 103.

As covenant members, we are called to share the hope of the gospel with others. For those who seek to bear witness in this way, inviting others into the life of Living Hope is one way to bear witness. Another way is to invite others into your small group, to see how those in your group love, care for, and serve one another.

The gathering of the church is a great time to invite someone to “Come and See”. Living Hope’s church gathering is centered on the gospel, where the good news will be read, sung, preached, and observed through communion and baptism. In this way, we can share the hope of the gospel with others.

“Go and Tell!”

Another way the church bears witness to Jesus is by going and proclaiming the good news. All throughout the New Testament, Christians are sent to places where the gospel has not yet been heard in order to make known the message of Jesus Christ.

According to the New Testament, some are also given a spiritual gift of evangelism. Those gifted with evangelism tend to have a desire to make the gospel known in places where Christ has not been made known. Some of those gifted with evangelism carry a heavy burden for those who are far from the Lord. Their minds and hearts tend to consider those who do not know Christ and how they can hear the good news and be made a part of the family of God.

Though we do not all possess the spiritual gift of evangelism, we are all charged with being ready to speak the hope we have in Jesus when the opportunity arises. All members of Christ’s church have a responsibility to bear witness. We do so by inviting others into the community of faith and the love of the church, and we ultimately bear witness by making known the good news of Jesus to those who have not heard or who are far from the Lord. We all work together in the mission of God to share this hope that we have in Jesus Christ.

Discussion Question: Where in Memphis would a “come and see” approach be more appropriate? Where would a “go and tell” mentality probably be more appropriate? Are the answers to these questions different than they were 10 or 20 years ago?

Note: There is no right or wrong answer, but “come and see” approaches tend to work better in “churched” areas – places where the church historically has had a presence. Many Christian ministers are starting to see a shift in American society, such that a “go and tell” mentality is now required on college campuses and in businesses. There are a growing number of “unchurched” people.

Remembering and caring for the poor, vulnerable and hopeless

One of the hallmarks of the ministry of Jesus was his mission to those on the margins of society. As Jesus worked amongst the outcasts, hurting, and vulnerable, God displayed his power over sickness and death, while showing the world his love and compassion.

Followers of Jesus who pursue his mission for the world will be no different. God's care and concern for the poor and marginalized is a trademark of the mission of the church since her inception.

Tim Chester writes,

"We take seriously the suffering and injustice of this world. We weep with those who weep. The parable of the Good Samaritan is universal and indiscriminate in its scope. We respond obediently to the instruction to do good to all people. We give bread to the hungry and water to the thirsty. We raise our voices on behalf of the oppressed. We demonstrate by our lives together as Christians what it means to live under the reign of King Jesus and so invite others to live under that reign. Integral to Christ's community are people whose hearts have been changed and softened so that we reach out instinctively and sacrificially to those at the margins of society. After all, that is what Jesus did, and we follow his example. As we do so, we explain our actions by commending the Savior who has so transformed us and the means by which he worked that miracle of grace."⁹

Unfortunately, it has become all too common to see the church pit evangelism and caring for the poor against one another. Some would say that feeding someone who is hungry is just a temporary fix to a much larger problem, and that if you really want to help, you should provide eternal, spiritual food through the good news of the gospel.

Others say that until we feed the hungry and give clean water to the thirsty, we have no business spreading our message. Evangelism is seen as a distraction at best and an obstacle at worst when it comes to caring for those in need.

At Living Hope, we want to hold both of these covenant commitments in high regard. We do not see evangelism and compassion for the poor as competing activities in the church, but rather as complimentary tasks that fully embody the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ. Jesus healed the sick and preached the gospel. He fed the hungry and called people to repentance. He cared for the poor and taught the Bible. God's mission for the world demands we do both as well.

In the book *Total Church*, Timmis and Chester make three assertions that are helpful for understanding the relationship between evangelism and social action:

1. *Evangelism and social action are distinct activities.* Good social action is about harnessing the insights and resources of the poor, but the gospel is a message from outside that is addressed to us in our spiritual helplessness and powerlessness.
2. *Proclamation is central.* Social action without proclamation is like a signpost pointing nowhere. Worse still, it is likely to imply either that salvation is synonymous with socioeconomic betterment or that salvation is through good works like those I am doing.
3. *Evangelism and social action are inseparable.* People often talk about evangelism being the priority, but this suggests a list of actions that you work through from the top down; if you do not

⁹ Ibid., 101-102.

have time for the bottom items (like social involvement), then this does not really matter. But evangelism cannot be separated from social action because mission takes place through relationships, and relationships are multi-faceted. As Paul says of his relationship with the Thessalonians, “We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us” (1 Thessalonians 2: 8).

Discussion Question: What is the danger of providing social action without proclaiming the gospel? What is the danger of proclaiming the gospel while ignoring the poor, vulnerable and hopeless?

Note: Proclamation without social action is dead; much like faith without works (James 2). But social action without the gospel is, as written above, “a signpost pointing nowhere.”

Serving others in my community, my city, and the world

Jesus told his disciples that the world would know them by their love. He made this statement in the context of serving his disciples by washing their feet. The mission of God is best expressed through humble, Christ-like service to our fellow humans, those made in the image of God himself.

At Living Hope, we hope to practice this service in our community or “parish”. Historically, to have a parish meant to take spiritual responsibility for a geographic area. We pray that members of Living Hope will take ownership of the spiritual condition of their neighborhood or community, finding ways to not only love one another, but to tangibly love those living nearby through acts of service.

Our hope is that by serving our neighbors and community in this way, we can build deep and lasting relationships with those outside our church as well. We want to see our neighborhood coffee shop as a place of common grace and our local library as a place to build relationships.

Our vision is that Living Hope members will serve in their local PTA, homeowners association, or local government, all to the glory of God. Along with serving our neighbors, we want to serve Memphis. As Living Hope continues to plant churches, we desire to have multiple venues and places where our local congregations can serve the city of Memphis alongside one another. Some church plants may be located in resource poor neighborhoods or areas with obvious material needs.

Members of Living Hope congregations can cooperate together, bridging racial and socio-economic gaps, and demonstrate to the world the hope of the gospel in uniting people from all walks of life together in and through Jesus. Our vision of service doesn’t stop with across the street or across the city. In joining God in his mission to make disciples of all nations, we pray all of our members at Living Hope will be active in serving the nations. Through praying, giving, and going on short term trips, Living Hope members play a huge part in demonstrating the service of our King to the entire globe.

For some, serving in their neighborhood or parish feels like second nature. But the thought of boarding a plane to serve others in another country or culture seems strange. For others, serving in the city of Memphis is appealing and inspiring, but knowing and loving your neighbor seems like a daunting task.

Living Hope desires to be a church that doesn't pit Collierville against Memphis or America against the Middle East. All authority on heaven and on Earth belongs to Jesus! We pray that our members will continue to serve across the street, across the city or across an ocean, while allowing the Lord to stretch and grow their love and desire for areas that may not be immediately appealing for them to serve. A healthy view of the gospel always gives us a healthy view of our world, from our neighborhood to the nations.

Discussion Question: Which category (community, city, or world) seems easiest for you to plug into and be a witness?

Note: It is very likely that most people find their community easiest. Those are the people most like them, most convenient to reach, and most available. However, others are extroverted, ambitious, or adventurous enough to get involved in social or public initiatives in the city, or travel to remote regions of the world. God gives us each unique temperaments, personalities, and callings. Of course, this question is also worded carefully – “easy” does not necessarily mean that is where one is called. It does not necessarily mean that we will be effective, even if the category seems comparatively easier. Sometimes, mysteriously, God calls people outside of their comfort zone.

Praying, going and sending for the advancement of the gospel among the nations

Along with serving the nations, we call on all of our members to be involved to some degree with the spread of the gospel among the nations. Whether we pray, go, or send others to the nations, we call on all of our members to play a part in God's mission to every nation.

The need for gospel advancement around the world can be staggering. Consider what is commonly known as the “10/40 Window”. The 10/40 Window is a term coined by Christian missionary strategist Luis Bush in 1990 to refer to those regions of the eastern hemisphere, plus the European and African part of the western hemisphere, located between 10 and 40 degrees north of the equator, a general area that in 1990 was purported to have the highest level of socioeconomic challenges and least access to the Christian message and Christian resources on the planet.

Two thirds of the world's population – 4.4 billion people – lives in the 10/40 window. Eighty-five percent of those living in the 10/40 window are the poorest of the world's poor. Most staggering of all, nearly ninety percent of those living in the 10/40 window are considered unreached or unevangelized, having very little or no access to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

With this sort of challenge, we feel it is the call of every member at Living Hope to play a role in the advancement of the gospel. We regularly have short-term trips to places of desperate poverty, where Living Hope members can lovingly serve those in poor conditions. We support church plants and church planting organizations, because we believe that church planting is the most common evangelistic strategy found in the scriptures. And we also send out our own members to live in foreign cultures and regions for the sake of the gospel.

In joining Living Hope, you will be joining a movement that, we pray, advances the mission of God around the globe. Our membership covenant aims to shape our responsibilities as followers of Jesus to care for

the poor, bear witness to Jesus, and pray for the expansion of his Kingdom here on the Earth. We simply want to call all of our members to follow our Lord who taught us to pray, “Father, your kingdom come, your will be done on Earth, as it is in Heaven.”

Discussion Question: Why is it important to be thinking about people on the other side of the world? Why isn't caring for the people of Living Hope, Memphis, or Tennessee enough?

Note: This gets back to the proposition of the class. Mission is more than involvement in one community, it is advancing the mission of God throughout the world. Looking at global missions helps us see how God is working in our world.

Mission Class Participant Guide

If you had to provide a one-sentence “mission statement” for the church, what would it be?

I. Mission and the Bible

A. Wright: God’s mission, not just ours

Mission is not ours; mission is God’s. Certainly, the mission of God is the prior reality out of which flows any mission that we get involved in. Or, as has been nicely put, it is not so much the case that God has a mission for his church in the world but that God has a church for his mission in the world. Mission was not made for the church; the church was made for mission--God’s mission.¹⁰

B. Biblical Examples

1. Adam and Eve (Gen. 1-2)
2. Noah (Gen. 6-9)
3. Abraham (Gen. 12)
4. The Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20)

“The term mission is from a Latin word meaning ‘sent.’ Jesus sends his followers out into the world with his gospel word to make other followers who will go out into the world with his gospel word to make other followers in perpetuity. Mission begins in our own hearts as the gospel word of Christ crucified is effectively applied by the Spirit. And it does not stop until the far corners of the world. It is a constant continuum because mission is what we might call the steady state of God’s people. The church is God’s mission strategy. At the heart of God’s plan to bless the nations are the people of God. The church is formed by mission and for mission.”¹¹

II. Living Hope’s Commitments

A. Sharing the hope of the gospel with others

1. “Come and See” – bringing people to us
2. “Go and Tell” – going out to people

Where in Memphis would a “come and see” approach be more appropriate? Where would a “go and tell” mentality probably be more appropriate?

Are the answers to these questions different than they were 10 or 20 years ago?

B. Remembering and caring for the poor, vulnerable and hopeless

¹⁰ Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 62.

¹¹ Tim Chester and Steve Timmis, *Total Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 103.

1. Evangelism and social action are distinct activities
2. Proclamation is central
3. Evangelism and social action are inseparable

What is the danger of providing social action without proclaiming the gospel?

What is the danger of proclaiming the gospel while ignoring social action?

C. Serving others in my community, my city, and the world

1. Community
2. City
3. World

Which category (community, city, or world) seems easiest for you to plug into and be a witness?

D. Praying, going, and sending for the advancement of the gospel in the world

1. Church planting
2. Serving the poor

Why is it important to be thinking about people on the other side of the world? Why isn't caring for the people of Living Hope, Memphis, or Tennessee enough?

Living Hope Membership Covenant

Through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the Lord has rescued me from my sin and his wrath. I have placed my faith in Jesus Christ, repented of my sin, and been baptized into the church. I now joyfully covenant with Living Hope to make disciples, through the power of the Holy Spirit, centering my life on the gospel, embracing community and living on mission in the following ways:

Gospel:

- Gathering regularly and consistently with the church for worship and service.
- Submitting to the authority of Christ and our elders, always seeking to maintain unity.
- Engaging with God through His word and prayer.
- Practicing the discipline and grace of giving.

Community:

- Embracing a shared life through meaningful relationships in a small group.
- Encouraging and advising each other with the truth of God's word.
- Serving the body of Living Hope with joy.
- Partnering for the spread of the gospel.

Mission:

- Sharing the hope of the gospel with others.
- Remembering and caring for the poor, vulnerable and hopeless.
- Serving others in my community, my city, and the world.
- Praying, going and sending for the advancement of the Gospel among the nations.

Print Name

New Member Signature (*Type name if sending electronically*)

(To be completed by prospective member and returned to the church. Follow-up contact to be made by an Elder)

Conversion Questionnaire

Name _____

For the following questions, please model your answers after Paul's conversion story to King Agrippa. This can be found in Acts 26:4-23. In this section you will see that Paul's story includes; who he was before he was a Christian, how he met Jesus, and how his life has changed after becoming a Christian. He concludes his account by giving a statement of beliefs, as you will be asked to do as well.

- I. If you are a Christian, please give an account of how you came to faith using no more than three-quarters of a page:
- II. Please finish the following statement using no more than a quarter-page:
I know I am a Christian because....
- III. If you were baptized since you became a believer in Jesus Christ, please explain when/where/how this occurred. Also, please indicate if this baptism was by immersion.

(To be completed by prospective member and returned to the church. Follow-up contact to be made by an Elder)