

I want to start this off by saying I had originally decided not to go public with my story. I figured if the Elders at Mars Hill want to accuse me of being divisive then I wouldn't add any fuel to that charge by going on the Internet and doing some kind of tell-all. I thought all that people needed to know was that I was accused of being divisive and asked to step down, and that I had submitted my resignation as a member of Mars Hill.

That changed only hours later when I heard the following news.

"Elder Phil Poirier at MH Everett has been removed ("disqualified") for refusing to sign the new "Unity of Mission" contract. They are all being required to get permission from the BOEE before being allowed to participate in any church within a ten mile radius of an existing Mars Hill location."

I was stunned. I had just told my Head Coach – sorry, my ex-Head Coach – that I wasn't going to go public with my story, but the news about Pastor Phil made me realize that not to do so would be to do a disservice to the truth, to all the people like Pastor Phil, and to the many others who have been harmed, slandered, and spat out of the Mars Hill machine. So after confirming that this news was true I decided to speak out.

A little background...

I have been a member at Mars Hill since May of 1998. I served in several worship bands in the past 16 years, and served as a Community Group leader and a Coach (at Mars Hill a community group leader is a small group leader, and a coach is a mentor for small group leaders.)

Much has been said about the early days of Mars Hill, as well as the 2007 trial when the power shifted from all the elders to only five men. I don't wish to go over all of that here, but in my opinion it was the beginning of the end and is the most important landmark in the history of Mars Hill.

To my shame I stayed at Mars Hill while pastor after pastor was either fired, forced out, or left 'to pursue other interests'. I heard many of their stories personally. I remember thinking that there has got to be another side to all of this. In my mind, I justified my continuing presence at Mars Hill because people were being saved, the message was always about Jesus, and Mars Hill was booming. That meant God was blessing the church, right? Yet every year more pastors seemed to disappear. Where did Bill Clem go? What happened to Tim Gaydos? You mean Brad House left? I just talked to him the other day!!! Those were the kinds of things going on, and it really made me nervous and very concerned about the church my family and I were attending.

Luckily for me I was (and still am) in the unique position of knowing many of these men, and I was able to speak to them and hear their stories. Over the years a pattern emerged that even a dull-minded and thick headed fool like me could follow. So I started praying, asking God if He

wanted me to stay or if he wanted me to take my family and find another church. He made it very clear to both me and my wife and me that we were to stay, that I was to lead my Community Group, and to learn and grow. So we stayed.

Enter 2014. I was now a Coach and was excited and ready to do my best to lead the three CG leaders and do whatever it was that God wished me to do. My head coach was a good, godly man and a friend. I felt like great things were going to happen, and that God was going to use us in awesome ways for His glory.

And then the double-whammy of the Resultsource fiasco and Dave Kraft's public charges against Mark Driscoll hit the fan.

Now, Dave Kraft had (and has) a stellar reputation in the Mars Hill community. I had trained under him in a couple of classes back in the day, and would take him at his word – as would most of us – on just about anything. When these two events became public, I started asking questions. I had been around a long time and had no problem in being able to speak to many of the elders to whom I reached out. As I spoke with them, what I heard stunned me even more. Many of them agreed with Dave Kraft, but they also understood that they had very little power as Elders, if any, and would rather work from within to try to get true accountability in place. Some also admitted if they spoke up they would get a visit from Sutton or another Executive Elder and they would be accused of not being 'on mission' or not being 'all in', and when that happens...it means you are done as an Elder at Mars Hill.

I was about to start the process to become a Deacon at Mars Hill. When the time came to begin the interview process, I asked them to put it on hold because I couldn't, in good conscience, agree to serve in that capacity while I had so many concerns. The reaction by the deacon interviewing me and the pastor with whom I was working was very supportive, and they were very understanding. They told me that at that time they were already seeing members leave the church, and they were going to do their best to make sure people were loved on their way out.

I was struggling over what to do one Friday, when my wife came home and told me that God had prompted her to tell me I needed to fast and pray. So I spent the entire weekend holed away in my bedroom with my Bible, praying and fasting for three days. While I was studying Isaiah, the Holy Spirit revealed a passage of scripture calling for repentance of sin and warning of consequences for not heeding this call. The Holy Spirit prompted me to give this passage (Isaiah 1:15-31) to the Elders of Mars Hill.

I did so – which in and of itself is a remarkable story in how those events unfolded – however, I am told not one of the elders at Mars Hill believes that this message was from the Lord. One of them even told me, 'In the old days, we threw rocks at people like you until you were dead.' That was a pretty clear picture of how the message was received by Mars Hill. A month or so later, Mark preached about people who used the 'God told me so,' line and Mark's response was, 'Well... we'll see.' My actions were not meant to gain recognition for myself, but to be obedient to the Lord and do as the Holy Spirit instructed me.

I believe we are already seeing the effects described in the Isaiah passage. People are fleeing Mars Hill by the droves every week. Tithing is down. The church is in emergency mode. In place of the old Mark who was able to lay out the Gospel with such passion, his sermons contain less about Jesus each week. Instead, we hear Mark using Scripture to make himself look like the Apostles and those who speak out against him look more like the enemies of the early church. It's chilling to listen to, and unfortunately, I believe that many people are completely unaware that they are being manipulated with such ease.

Once that scripture (along with some pretty harsh commentary from me) was sent to the elders, I believe my fate was sealed. My head coach started trying to reel me in and wanted me to 'chill out'. The more I found out, the more I realized things were much worse than I originally thought. I reached out to even more Elders, including the famed '20' with whom Mark was supposed to be working to reconcile. I met with elders and deacons during my lunch hour. I took notes. I made phone calls. I sent emails. I did my absolute best to do my homework. With my connections and my history at MH, I decided at last that I had to stand up and be heard. In addition, I put my monthly giving to Mars Hill on hold and looked for another place to give our tithe.

I spoke out against what was going on at the three Community Group Syncs in March, April, and May. I asked a number of questions: I asked about tithe money being used to purchase a NY Times Best Seller title. I also asked why Mars Hill allows a lead pastor who admitted he was involved to carry on without any serious consequences. I pointed out that if any one of us did this, we'd be removed and rightly so! Other elders have been fired for much less (just ask Phil Poirier). Furthermore, I asked why elders who leave are seemingly forced (or heavily pressured) to sign NDAs and non-compete agreements. (In some cases they were told if they did not sign the agreement, they would not receive their severance).

The elder at the CG Sync responded to everyone in the room saying, "I don't care at all about NDAs and non-competes.' You could hear a pin drop in the room after that. I remember quickly looking around and seeing people with their mouths literally open in utter shock. Other questions I have asked include why Mars Hill forces elders who follow a Biblical process of bringing charges against another elder must also submit their resignation at the same time. I was told from an elder that he believed this procedure was put in motion in the very same Executive Elder meeting in which Dave Kraft's charges were thrown out.

But probably the worst thing I did was asking the questions listed below. They are as follows, word for word:

"Hello,

I have two questions that I'd like to humbly and respectfully submit in advance as I imagine it will require some research ahead of time.

1. What are the salaries of the Executive Elders? And if we are not allowed to know this, why not?

2. At least once a year, the On Mission CRUT must distribute a percentage of its assets to what is termed the "non-charitable beneficiary". Since this is tied directly to the Real Marriage finances, who is the beneficiary of this CRUT? I would imagine much of the backlash against Mars Hill could be deflated if it could be shown that this was paid out to Mars Hill, instead of an individual or individuals who benefit directly."

I asked these questions on The City, Mars Hill's website, in the Bellevue Leadership forum and posted them in advance of the CG Sync so that all the meeting participant could see them in advance and there would be no option for MH leadership but to address the questions. As it turned out, someone else brought up my questions during the latest CG Sync and the response from the elder was, 'Why is that important?'

The answers in the room from at least three people were some form of 'because we pay their salaries with our tithes.' The elder who was in the hot seat on this one pushed back on this response, continuing to suggest that this is not important, but when he realized the people in the room were not in agreement, he turned to another elder who got up to explain how the process of setting the Executive Elder salary worked. It was a nice speech, and it made it sound like there were multiple layers of oversight – just not from the thousands of members who pay their salaries, of course. Mars Hill members are not allowed to know something that any church with integrity should be willing to share, especially during times when the members have lost trust in the Executive Elders.

So they refused to answer these questions, and it did not sit well with many in the room.

Twice during this same meeting, the elder leading this meeting labeled everyone who is speaking out against Mark Driscoll and Mars Hill as people who 'only want to hurt the gospel, the church, and Mark Driscoll'. I called him out on that in front of everyone saying that was a misrepresentation of godly people with valid concerns, but at the end of the meeting he made the characterization again. I've heard now from two different people that elders and leaders are visiting Community Groups personally and labeling anyone who speaks out on these concerns as 'divisive' and 'only wanting to tear down the church'. In other words, wolves. Couple that with one of the latest sermons entitled 'Empowered by the Spirit to Face Wolves," and you get the picture.

So five days later I was sitting at Starbucks with my Head Coach for an early morning meeting, and he was telling me that the elders at Mars Hill considered me divisive and were removing me as a Coach. I asked if I had sinned in some way, and he said no, they did not consider me in sin. They just thought that the way I was going about asking these questions was done with a 'divisive spirit'. They said that I didn't have to leave Mars Hill, and that after 'a season' I could petition to be a Coach again and they'd consider it. I had spent the previous three hours in prayer (I couldn't sleep, I was pretty stressed over all of this,) and I already knew God was

finally allowing me to walk away. I let him know that my wife and I wished to submit our resignation from Mars Hill, but I implored him to fight the good fight and to not simply accept everything that he was told as truth. I asked him to reach out to others and to stand up for what is right. I believe that he will come around, because he does listen to the Lord, and God *has* called him to lead. However, like me, it will probably take some time for the realization to take root. I pray for him whenever I can, and love him and his family very much.

I also want to say that I love Mark Driscoll, as well. He has been there for me in the past many times, and I owe him much. I do not want to see Mark destroyed. I am not trying to tear down the church.... I have absolutely no reason to! But I do call myself a Christian, and I do believe I am under the authority of the Bible – not over it. That means that sometimes I have to make hard choices and take hard stances. I want to see the elders at Mars Hill walk in truth and humility. I want to see Mars Hill healthy and whole.

Right now Mars Hill is rotting from within. Many pastors want to see real accountability and transparency and believe Mark is in sin, but many of them are afraid to speak out. This effect has been labeled Mars Hill's "Culture of Fear". Before this, I had never belonged to a church that had a term like this within its own leadership. This culture of fear is very real. Even now, I am concerned that because I am speaking openly about these issues, I must be on guard.

Allow me to close with a quote: "Soft words produce hard people, and hard words produce soft people." These words were spoken by Mark Driscoll, himself, on several occasions. It is time now for hard words, because this will hopefully produce the repentance and change that is deeply needed at Mars Hill.

I can rest in the fact that God is on His throne and He gets the final say. My wife and I will continue to pray for Mars Hill.