

March 21st, 2014

To the Executive Elders of Mars Hill Church:

As you know by now, I have resigned from Mars Hill Church. The immediate question is “why?” I have set out to answer that question and several others in this letter. My desire here is first and foremost to honor our Lord, Jesus Christ, without whom we do not have the truth or life itself, without whom this church does not exist, and without whom none of us would know each other.

Along with this desire is to be as honest and forthright as I can be out of love for his church and a desire to see real repentance. I can only hope that the words I share will be taken into serious consideration, prayed over and not easily dismissed as I wrote them seriously, with prayer, and much thought.

Why am I resigning from Mars Hill?

Is this ever a simple answer? The answer is two-fold because my role at the church is two-fold: I’m an employee and a pastor.

My Employee Resignation

I resigned because I believed I was released from doing vocational ministry at Mars Hill Church. In early February I set out to pray and fast for three things: 1) my heart and any sin God wanted to reveal, 2) that God would raise up men in the church to lead, 3) my future with Mars Hill. God was faithful in answering all three clearly over the course of four days.

- 1) After short fight with my wife over prayer, God revealed to me how I wanted to be more of a “Christian” couple than a “godly” couple. I wanted the semblance of a good Christian life without the godliness he desires. In essence, I wanted to say we prayed together, but not necessarily that we prayed *to God* together. I repented to Him and to my wife over this and shared it with Pastor David and the staff.
- 2) Men were being really passive in leading at West Seattle. We had made some plans to correct this, but I wanted to go before the Lord to see what he would do. And, in short, I began seeing more men step up to lead in CGs – those on the fence for coaching saying yes to it, those who didn’t know if they could apprentice saying yes to it. West Seattle is poised to have healthier leaders and more CGs because of the local pastors’ care for them and God’s answered prayer.
- 3) At the end of the fourth day I came home and told my wife, Stacy: “I don’t want to work at Mars Hill anymore.” She confirmed it immediately, with no doubts or reservations. I knew my season as a paid staff member had come to a close. I had no idea what the news of that would look like and it was right before our vacation, so I took some time to consider it and talk with people I trusted. When I got back I spoke with Pastor David and Pastor AJ about it. At the time, I wanted to stay longer, potentially August or December, to leave well. I was developing an elder and wanted to shore up CGs more before leaving. They were both unsure if that timeline would work, but that is where it was left before David departed for Africa.

So as an employee, I felt released to move on. Sunday, March 3rd, I led services and began wondering strongly about staying on as an unpaid pastor. I spoke briefly with Ryan Mount after that service and we had planned to talk this week about how he has worked through it all. But then on Wednesday, with the news of the bestseller stuff breaking, I knew I could no longer be a leader in this church.

This is where further explanation is needed. My desire in writing this letter is to honor Jesus and to do so with integrity. I want to share not just my concerns or my critiques, but the good of Mars Hill and the lessons I have learned. In order to do that, I think the best approach is to start from the beginning and work my way to the concerns.

Why did I come to Mars Hill Church in the first place?

In hindsight this is a good question. If you are leaving now, just over two years of working at Mars Hill, why did you even come in the first place?

Mars Hill is unique

I came because I believe Jesus was at work in a special and unique way at Mars Hill. I had believed that since 2006, when I was first introduced to Mark Driscoll and Mars Hill Church. How does a church that preaches the bible faithfully and unabashedly thrive in a place like Seattle?

Mark is unique

I came because I read *Confessions of a Reformational Rev* and loved Mark Driscoll and listened to the Nehemiah, Philippians, and Religion Saves series. I loved the missiology of the church, along with the fact that a bunch of young people were getting saved. That tugged at me because I came out of college ministry and know how hard it is to preach to jaded, puffed up, horny kids. I heard Mark speak to this generation. I came because I had lived in Italy and saw firsthand the effects of postmodernism a generation ahead of where we are today. I came because I saw boldness in the face of errant doctrine taught by the emergent church. I was thrilled and nervous to be considered a part of a church and behind a pastor that would stand for the truth of Christ in a generation so tickled behind the ears with false teaching.

We were called

When I first learned about the opportunity I told Stacy, whom I was dating at the time. By that point I knew we were going to get married (I don't know if she knew, but that's a different story). I brought the opportunity up with her and told her that I would not leave Chicago if moving to Seattle jeopardized our relationship. I knew that I was first called to her and then to wherever God would lead us together. She supported pursuing Mars Hill and in time we both felt led here together.

To provide for family

I came because it was a way to provide for my future family. This I have to admit. I had just gotten engaged. I wanted a job lined up before that even happened. I had heard that Mars Hill takes good care of pastors in terms of remuneration. I have never been disappointed by my pay and other benefits. I believe much grace was extended to me last July when I was told that I was going to be taken out of the Lead Pastor Residency Program (which I wholeheartedly agree was the right decision), but was allowed to keep my salary, vacation, and benefits. I am grateful that I have been able to provide for my family and establish ourselves well in the last two years, especially since we've had Asher.

To take on the challenge

I came because I wanted to stretch myself and see how Jesus might use me in a role that I had talent and gifting in, but no experience or training. I admitted this much to Matt Jensen when I first was told about the Executive Pastor role. Through the interviews and my visit, we saw that it could work. I loved college students. I loved the challenges the U-District had. I wanted to see how I could serve there and serve him well.

Inspiration

I came because I was inspired. Like many at a distance, Mars Hill is an attractive place because the front face presents a solid church with crazy stories of powerful conversions to Jesus. Who doesn't want to be a part of that? So, like many at a distance, I came here because I "wanted to be a part of where God was working."

What do I agree with at Mars Hill Church?

There is much about Mars Hill with which I agree. If that were not the case, I would not have come. I think this is an important point because I have seen how bitterness can cause someone to hate every aspect about Mars Hill and that is not the case for me. There is much that I love and agree with regarding the church.

Doctrine

I agree with the doctrine. So for me, this is not an issue of core doctrine and I wholeheartedly hold to the inerrancy of Scripture, One True God, the Trinity, sin, Jesus Christ's substitutionary sacrifice, salvation by grace through faith, a literal hell, etc. I am grateful that Pastor Mark teaches these essential truths regularly in his sermons and writings and I trust he will continue to do so as long as he has air in his lungs, working vocal cords, steady hands, and any semblance of a pulse.

Mission

I agree with the mission as laid forth in the Bible. No matter where I go or what church I am involved in, I will always be about "making disciples and planting churches" in Jesus' name and for his glory.

Philosophy of Ministry

I agree with much of the philosophy of ministry. Stacy and I were driving home the other day and were talking about how much we actually love the way the church functions. We love the emphasis on local churches as opposed to campuses. We love that there are elder teams at each church who carry the load. We love how few programs are offered and the emphasis on Community Groups as the heart and driver of mission of the local churches. We love, for the most part, how lean the churches are, further emphasizing the Bible's strong call for the priesthood of all believers and to "equip the saints for the work of the ministry."

What do I question?

Regarding what I question, these are areas in the church that I have wrestled with since nearly day one. I brought many of my concerns to the leaders directly above me, and at times, to peers. In one instance, in an XP call, these questions were raised directly to Pastor Sutton. These are questions that I believed could be worked out over time, in conversation with fellow elders or other staff. My questions were not all answered, nor did they need to be. As I wrestled with them more, I discovered that I am diverge from the polity and mission of Mars Hill Church.

The polity

I do not agree with the polity. I have searched the bylaws to get some help as to how the Full Council functions. The power of elders is very limited, in terms of voting and making decisions. I can understand that, to a degree, but I question the wisdom in it. There is nothing in the bylaws regarding how the elders are informed about the dealings of the Executive Elders or the BoAA.

As I ask questions of polity, I see that I am much more aligned with, at most, a modified form of plurality that keeps all elders informed of important matters and allows them to have some insight into each other's lives, especially those who are leading them. This is a form of modeling for our people and

fosters an environment of trust and unity, a unity that can't be dictated from higher authority figures. Elders at Mars Hill have no idea what is going on in Mark's life and what is often communicated by him to elders is "I'm great. Grace is great. Kids are great. Life is good. Mars Hill will have a huge year. It will be the most fruitful year. We have the best team assembled to make this happened." What is the intention behind those words? To inform us? The blanket statements inform us of nothing. To assure us? Why would we need blanket statements to assure us? To be honest? I do not see this as helpful to anyone. Even if it is true, these glimpses into his life models no level of transparency, vulnerability, or repentance when needed. And while we may not catch the public flak Mark gets, both for the gospel and for his own character, the elders of Mars Hill are implicated with him. So sadly, the elders have no voice into his life, but are guilty by association for all the public stunts that hinder the advancement of the gospel along with any controversy that is raised (and I do not mean controversy surrounding real gospel issues).

I believe that the EE, and especially Mark, given that his personal name carries much more weight than the name of Mars Hill Church, should submit themselves for accountability first to the Full Council at Mars Hill and secondly submit themselves to the external BoAA. In doing this, the elders of Mars Hill have more skin in the game and the BoAA is still there for accountability and advisement on issues that cannot be handled internally with active elders who are actually involved in Mars Hill Church.

Additionally, I believe that one of the most important functions of the EE is to invest in the elders intentionally, both paid and unpaid. I would encourage monthly or bi-monthly Full Council meetings (shorter, around an hour over VC), and having elders at local churches to prepare for the meetings ahead of time, and to collaborate more effectively via VC. I would encourage visits to the churches throughout the year, just to meet with the elders. And, perhaps most importantly, is to inform elders before the rest of the church – and the public – of what is happening. It is inexcusable that elders learn about potential plagiarism issues and the ResultSource issue through journalists and breaking news.

The mission of Mars Hill

I do not agree with the mission as laid out by Mars Hill Church. This is different than merely "making disciples and planting churches." It is how Mars Hill does that uniquely. This mission seemed to shift as soon as I got here. There was a move away from Acts 29 and local church distinctives and a greater move toward centralization and the focus strictly on Mars Hill Churches planted strictly with Pastor Mark as the preacher. So it became a focus of planting more and more Mars Hill churches as fast as we can.

I mentioned in a VC call when I was an XP, "we care much more about the churches that don't exist than the ones that do." I stand by that. Even in the Full Council meeting in February, there was a call to focus on the 35,000 who aren't a part of the church and a downplaying of the 15,000 that are. While I very much care about those who aren't Christians or in churches, I think the best way we get there is by strong discipleship of those who are – caring well, shepherding well, loving well, training well. Many may think the best "brand" for Mars Hill is Mark Driscoll – his influence and platform are surely strong. But the way to 50,000 isn't by building bigger buildings and increasing his platform, but loving the leaders in our church well, allowing their voices and actions to serve as the brand for the church and the example of Christ to the nations. This is just basic discipleship. From a marketplace standpoint, that's just savvy marketing – your customers are your most important brand asset.

Instead, there is much distrust among the body; the turnover of longterm staff is telling; dozens of elders have left the church in the last two years; and I suspect, if we were to audit our churches, we would see that the longevity of involvement with Mars Hill is on the decline, meaning that that backdoor isn't so much the new people, but those who've invested years in the church and are just finished. So

while there is talk of health and unity, I believe it is only lip service, something nice and right to say, much like a child who says “I’m sorry” because mom and dad told him to.

Building Mark’s platform

I do not agree with the direction to further enhance Mark’s platform and diminish the Lead Pastor’s. While I don’t know the best balance, I believe the Lead Pastor should be preaching more on Sundays and have a greater degree of autonomy. We do not know the effects video preaching will have on the church in the future, but I know in the least, video with no personal presence creates an illusion of grandeur and celebrity for the pastor and the churchgoer feels as though he is untouchable and unreachable. The argument may be that technology affords us a way to get the gospel out like never before. I’ve heard the argument that if video was available, the apostle Paul would have preached like that. I do not agree in whole. He didn’t just preach and plant churches, he shared his life with the churches he planted: “Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, so we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well” (1 Thess 2:7-8 NIV). On his journeys he always stopped at churches and encouraged the brothers and sisters there (Acts 14:21-23). I share the comparison to Paul because there is a greater emphasis on considering Pastor Mark more as an apostolic-type leader, but I believe the comparison to Paul is thin at best by him and others.

What are my deep concerns?

These deep concerns led to my immediate resignation. They had built up over time. Again, with some of them, I voiced to peers, fellow elders, and supervisors. With them, I prayed for change, desired repentance, and hoped against hope that the change would come much sooner, rather than later. However, I have now gotten to a place where I, in good conscience, cannot be complicit with the actions of Mark and the EE, nor can I ask anyone else in the church - elder, deacon, member, or attendee to participate or lead in the church. I cannot willingly submit to a leadership and leadership structure I no longer trust, respect or want to model my life after. It would be dishonest.

No repentance for son-in-law statements

Back in May of last year, I was a part of the Lead Pastor Residency final interviews. On that day, Pastor Mark spoke strongly about how each of the churches are his daughters and the Lead Pastors would be like sons-in-law. He said that if you are a good son-in-law, you will be taken care of, but if not, there would be dangerous consequences. The way he spoke sounded as if each church, and thus all of Mars Hill, is his and that if any Lead Pastor left for any reason they would be betraying the church. In all honesty I wish I had the courage to talk to Mark directly about it that day as I was very jarred and angry that kind of language could be used and the view that this is *his church* was being presented to a bunch of new guys who were looking to serve Jesus faithfully here. It was very unsettling to me, so I spoke with Pastor Dave about it. He said that it was a bit strong and to Mark’s credit I haven’t heard anything like that since. But the problem is he never once, to my knowledge, owned that what he said revealed a tendency to be puffed up and think he’s built Mars Hill (which has admitted in general in the past), that Mars Hill is his baby, and that he used bully scare tactics to ensure that future Lead Pastors were put in their place before they ever got here.

No repentance for Strange Fire or plagiarism

I voiced my concerns in high volume to several leaders in the church regarding the Strange Fire shenanigans and the plagiarism issues that continue to this day. David Fairchild was helpful regarding my concerns and how they relate to eldership. In doing so, he challenged my understanding of eldership at a church as complex as Mars Hill. I don’t agree with the structure. It follows the concept of “borrowed trust” – that because David trusts the EE and I trust David, I should trust the EE. The

problem is that it is organizational trust established through the structure unilaterally; it is not relational trust built mutually over time. The trust has eroded organizationally through actions such as Strange Fire and plagiarism. The questions and concerns are never really addressed, so the trust has disappeared. Relational trust can't be built given the structure and pace at Mars Hill. This is not to say it could not be built, but trusting a person and trusting their leadership are two different things as well. So no matter how much David may trust the EE, in my situation, I can't trust the EE in leading the church for the reasons mentioned here. And the problem is there is no place, except through my Lead Pastor, where I can truly voice my real, legitimate concerns. I admit that I have stronger desire for a plurality of eldership in which, in the least, elders of a large church are informed privately regarding the motives of public stunts (as with Strange Fire) or how to navigate serious charges raised by the media (as with the plagiarism). I see that as wise leadership and so I concede that I believe how the EE and other people involved is supremely unwise. I have shared more of my thoughts above.

No repentance for ResultSource

I am deeply disheartened by the recent news of how *Real Marriage* got on the NYT Bestseller List. I arrived to work at Mars Hill right when the book was being released. When it happened I was blown away and was sharing all about it on social media. I remember the buzz around the church. I have since gone back to look at what was being said at the time. On *pastormark.tv* Pastor Mark wrote that "we're prayerfully hoping that this book will be a *New York Times* bestseller for Jesus' fame..." I shared on Facebook & Twitter, "What's the top selling book on Amazon right now? Might surprise you" with a link to the book. Instead, we learned now that there was a company hired that specializes in gaming the system to ensure that books who hire them get on the right kinds of lists. So while praying may be happening, *paying over \$200,000* to use a shady group was surely happening. I personally feel betrayed, misled, and lied to. Justin Dean's initial comment did not help matters. Now I'm aware that many people such as politicians use this kind of method, but the group exists to work around the structures in place to ensure quality on those lists. Those are two red flags right there -- being associated with political methodology and highly speculative practices. Neither to me puts Pastor Mark and the EE in a place of being "above reproach" or being thought well of by outsiders. I believe Jared Wilson explains it out best in his post on The Gospel Coalition. He lays out five major concerns, but the first is the most important in my opinion. There he mentions dishonesty. It's just plain dishonest to be talking about "praying" to be on the NYT Bestseller list using basic marketing practices or even innovative social media ones, while behind the door dropping a quarter of a million dollars on a company that guarantees you being on the list using shady practices. It's unethical. And while it may be legal, it doesn't make it right, just like getting drunk or having sex before marriage.

What has come out from Mars Hill and Pastor Mark still shows that no one is taking ownership of the original decision. In his letter, Pastor Mark wrote "I am sorry I used this strategy." How were the elders of Mars Hill never informed about it to begin with? How did *no one* raise any questions about it? And if the questions were raised, surely they were regarding what Pastor Mark now sees in retrospect. So what happened? Who made the call? How was the origin and purpose of the company not investigated? How did the contract not raise red flags? Again, there's not enough transparency here with the elders. It diminishes trust. And when questions are asked, it's considered insubordinate.

A lack of walking in the light

I am deeply concerned about the character flaws that continually get swept under the rug. Jesus told the disciples regarding the Pharisees to "do and observe what they tell you, but not the works they do. For they preach, but do not practice. They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger. They do all their deeds to be seen by others" (Matt 23:1-5). I can listen to Pastor Mark's teaching and even seek to be obedient to

what he says. I believe he is an extremely gifted and talented preacher and communicator who gets the gospel out there, calls people to repentance and to turn to Jesus and they do! He has great insight into the human condition and the culture around us. There's so much about what he says I agree with; but I refuse to do as he does because he doesn't practice what he preaches. It's all public. It's about platform. It's about influence. It's about being seen by others. The claim is it's for the sake of the gospel, but the platform and being seen (Pastor Mark, #1 Best Seller, Founding, Preaching, Vision Pastor, 3rd Fastest Growing Church) is like a megaphone with the name Jesus spoken in plain voice. And by this I simply mean a general disposition of repentance is severely missing with Pastor Mark.

“Progress” is downplaying the issue

“But you don't know Mark at all, Andrew” is what I'm told. That's right. I don't have any kind of personal relationship with him. I know this may just get dismissed because of that. However, I think that just feeds the problem. It's not that I don't know Mark; it's also that he doesn't make himself known. He does not pursue more opportunities to walk in the light with his elders, the men entrusted to lead the mission at the local level. He may very well be a leader in repentance in his home and with his family, perhaps even those closest to him. But I know enough to know that we expect more from those who become members of our church than we do Mark. Some leaders in the church I have talked to say they “see progress” and that's enough for them, but as I see it, it's like an abused woman saying, “well he's only hit me three times this year instead of like five last year - that's progress.” I fear that because of his savvy way of communicating, forceful language, and bully tactics (name calling, caricaturing, etc.) along with success in ministry Mark got a free pass for his actions long ago and those who knew him then say “he's so much better than 10 years ago!” When it's the kind of progress an abusive boyfriend makes, I'm not telling the girl “well that's great, I'm sure it will get better.” I'm saying, “get out and get out fast.”

The “we're all sinners” line

Additionally, I am told, more or less “sure, Pastor Mark is a sinner, but we all are.” We never would tell our CG Leaders not to confront sin in a group because they themselves are sinners. Fact of the matter is, there is more weight on Mark and his sin in the church than me. This is part and parcel with his role and the federal headship we see in Scripture and he preaches from the pulpit. Individuals in Israel sinned and they had to repent, but when David sinned against God in adultery and murder, the whole nation suffered. If I steal money from the church, that is sin, but if he does, that's sin with greater consequences which affects the whole church. So if that's the case, Pastor Mark's repentance should be up front all the more in his sin than what we would ask of our CG Leaders or local church pastors.

However, I see it as the opposite and I see more and more people defending him and his progress than people calling him out on his sin as the leader of this church and him having the courage enough to repent. And here's the thing -- repentance is not a liability, but a blessing! It's not a sign of weakness in leadership, but strong leadership. It is such a high mark of the beautiful power of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the lack of it robs God of his glory. Of all the conversations I've had, the constant refrain is, “if he would just own it and confess and repent.”

Pastor Mark – your people, your leaders, your elders – are longing for that from you. It's the hope I held on to my entire time at Mars Hill. I would joyfully and gladly follow you if you were willing to repent clearly and without qualification in the areas where you have sinned and do sin as a leader. And I think this should be done with frequency before the elders because of all that you ask of them in this church. I am not saying you need to do it in your preaching, in your blogging, etc. I'm not saying you need to shift and constantly talk about how you fall short. But, I believe you owe it to your elders to model the humility of Jesus which, for you as a leader with sin, is through repentance in your leadership. The EE talk so much of unity and trust. Know that it begins with you, Pastor Mark, and the fastest way to get

there is through your willingness to repent, receive forgiveness from Jesus and others, and trust Him move forward.

The argument from success is overplayed

The argument is “we are baptizing a ton of people.” In this I say - Amen! I am so thrilled to see people get saved and be baptized. But does it tell the full story? 50 churches, 50,000 people. Phoenix was planted with over 600 people on launch day and over 1,700 when Mark preached live. To what end? The majority were most likely Christians from other churches who were gone the next week. On launch day, with 668 adults and 75 children present (743 total), 10 people were baptized. To knock the small church of 75 people who has one baptism, is to point the finger back on ourselves. First, I implore Pastor Mark to stop taking tactless hacks at small churches and consider them lesser because we are “bigger, stronger, faster, better” and have “a ton of baptisms.” Many small churches are just as missional as Mars Hill and God is choosing to use them in a different way. Second, many Christians from those small churches and other larger churches are just transferring to the new, cool church in town. Third, Mars Hill is not seeing the non-Christians come out in droves to be saved. By ratio, we are seeing the same kind of fruit as many small churches.

Still a shortsighted vision

Furthermore, why does the 50,000 have to be reached in Mark’s lifetime? Why not build something great that may not get there in his lifetime, but the inheritance left will get the church there and well beyond? I believe the grand vision is limited. Instead of thinking next 20-30 years, what about 100, well beyond the time when we’re all gone? The pace has always been a borderline train-wreck and it seems to be needless at this point. I am not saying the church should lose its urgency, but I am saying that there is much wisdom in patience. I believe, because we want to run so lean in order to get to 50,000 by 2026, the current churches are suffering more than we’re willing to let on. I implore you to take a look at the strategy and consider whether you want to exclaim “we did it” when your 65 or “Jesus is doing this” through the next generation, much like Moses passing things off to Joshua to get the people into the promised land. Mars Hill is Jesus’ church, not Mark’s, and one of the best ways to show this is by showing how much more we want to see Mars Hill thrive after he is gone.

We do not honor those who’ve left

My concerns are not a reflection at all of the leadership of the local churches. I served under Matt Jensen, Justin Holcomb, Drew Hensley, AJ Hamilton, and David Fairchild in three different churches and in four different roles. All of those men led the local churches faithfully and with great devotion to Jesus and His people. All of these men walked in the light with both their joy in Christ and when they sinned, they repented. And they of course were and are not perfect in every dealing; this should not be taken as “they are great and Mark is not.” That is missing the point.

Some of these men are no longer at Mars Hill and some are. I believe there are godly men within Mars Hill Church with whom I love and respect. One question I’ve been asked is “what do you think about all the godly men who are staying?” To be honest I think it is because we are diagnosing the root problem very differently. Again, I think it has to do with their view of “progress”. Also, as with me for a long time, they love the people and do not want to see the sheep harmed or scattered. One of the reasons I stayed for as long as I do is because I love local churches I served in and wanted to be a good undershepherd where I was placed, even as I wrestled with everything. I believe many of them are there. So I think they both believe in Mars Hill Church, trust their leaders, and love the sheep. At this point, I am only at loving the sheep and believe the best way to love them is leave and speak with my actions.

And still, I am saddened that there is almost no trace of the men who are no longer here. The night before my resignation I went and taught a Doctrine class at Mars Hill Downtown Seattle. I was prepping for the section on Incarnation and wanted to use the “Know Your Heretics” series on *The Resurgence* as a resource for the class. I looked it up and discovered that nothing remained from that series or from Justin Holcomb in general. Justin has given years to this church and was at one point the director of The Resurgence. He was put in a nearly impossible situation of running The Resurgence, overseeing Re:Train, and leading U-District through the transition of its first Lead Pastor, and he left in good standing. There is now no trace of him, other than interviews between him and Pastor Mark.

As with all things, there are two sides to the story. But the side I’m on shows that we do not honor men who leave this church -- regardless of if they left well or not or how they may feel about Mars Hill. They are not heretics, but brothers in Christ. And in that, we always act childish, immature, and foolish. So I looked back for others and the same goes for Tim Gaydos, Bill Clem, Alex Early, Matt Johnson, Nate Burke etc. -- all wiped from the public face of Mars Hill. This just confirms that we are far from celebrating the contributions made while they were present and, since they are no longer contributing, there is no need to keep any trace of them around. Meanwhile, many of the local churches are still reeling from the losses (and yet expected to break attendance barriers to get just one or two more staff that are so desperately needed).

What have I learned through being at Mars Hill?

There is much I have learned and will continue to learn through my time at Mars Hill. Some of it is very good, some of it is from my sin, and some of it is from the sins I see in the church.

I love the local church: Through all of this, I love the local church. I am not running away from Jesus’ bride. I love the people of the churches I served and I love seeing lives changed by the gospel of Jesus. I love making disciples. I love shepherding and plan on being an elder wherever God leads us next. I know the bride of Christ is messy and ugly and I want to “smell like the sheep” the rest of my life.

No church is perfect: I knew this well before coming to Mars Hill. But, like I said earlier, there is a special allure around Mars Hill because of the size of the church and personality of Mark. That’s how it was for me all the way back in 2006 and it continued when I arrived in December 2011. There’s just the idea that “this church is doing it right and may be as close to perfect as we come in our lifetime.” So when the cracks begin to show, and the gaps get wider, the blow is bigger. The beautiful edifice of sleek websites and hi-def video cameras is so amazing, and then the door opens to reveal a house that’s very broken. And while I know no church is perfect, those churches that want to influence all the other imperfect churches should show just how imperfect they are.

I have acted cowardly: There are many instance – more than I can recall for sure – where I acted cowardly. One is in the son-in-law instance. Another were times when I was critical of Sutton while as an XP, but never talked to him directly. Early last year I called him to repent and he pointed out how I acted cowardly. I agreed with his assessment and told him that I would never put myself in that position again and if I had anything against him I would go straight to him. Since that time, nothing direct to me has come up, but I stand by that.

I have been complicit: Because of my cowardice, I’m afraid I was complicit in allowing a culture of fear and a lack of repentance from Pastor Mark to fester. This letter and my resignation are an attempt to change that.

I should have asked more questions: This may be one of the biggest lessons. I believe one of the key aspects to strong leadership is asking frequent, quality questions. It is an area that I see exposed as lacking. I should have asked more questions before I got hired, more questions as an XP, more as an LPR, more as a CG Pastor.

Honor the departed: Mars Hill is notorious for not honoring those who have left the church, especially the elders. I have shared my concerns above, but I am learning that for a church that desires to be heard, respected, and loved, one of the best ways to achieve that is to respect and love those who've left, even if they are uncharitable in their words or actions in the future. This is to be the high ground and the honorable position.

The elders must have more skin in the game: I mentioned much of this earlier, but I believe the elders of a church that is "one church in many locations" should have a greater involvement than they currently do. I strongly encourage you to take a look at the bylaws again and consider what the function of an elder is at both at the local and Full Council levels.

Large platforms call for more intentional internal care: In short, this means creating an environment where questions are welcome. Because of Mars Hill's platform, many people are in awe and intimidated when they first start working here. They see all the good before arriving, and so at first glance of seeing what's off, they fear asking questions. Instead, there's a "there must be a good reason for that" mentality. Internal care begins by saying, "nope, we don't have it all figured out. We actually have made and continue to make a lot of mistakes. We are real about those, our flaws, and our sins. You are here to help with that as we pursue Jesus and his mission together."

The highest leaders must lead with repentance: I believe one of the best, if not the best gifts we can give to our leaders and people in the church, is our own repentance. You will not be the Lead Pastor of a megachurch when we are all with Jesus. You will not deal with the media or critics or bloggers or whomever. You will not be a thought-leader, innovator, powerful communicator, writer of books. You will be a servant of Jesus who falls down at his feet alongside your brothers and sisters. So why not lead with what keeps us all in common - the personal need you have for Jesus and the repentance that reflects that. Should I ever be the Lead Pastor of any church and feel the weight of not only leading the sheep, but also shepherding staff & other elders, I pray that I will be quick to repent both to individual sheep and the flock.

Final Thoughts & Recommendation

Both Israel's and Judah's kings lived under a false sense of security as they lived in constant unrepentance toward God for their leadership. Did God destroy them right away? No. He is patient, slow to anger, abounding in love. It was decades, centuries later before the exile of both nations took place. And did the nations suffer or struggle during the reign of evil kings? Spiritually, yes. Physically and materially, no. We see building projects going on and a general practice that everything's fine the way it is. Solomon writes, "Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain" (Ps 127:1). What is evident is the house got built even though the LORD did not guide it or build it.

I believe Mars Hill is at a crossroads and Pastor Mark has to make a decision. Our church and the people live under a false sense of security because we see more money coming in, more churches being established, higher attendance numbers, and people getting saved. But I don't think it's only the Holy Spirit working through us; rather, it's God working despite us. He is patient, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love. The church has only existed for just over 17 years. That span of time is often just a paragraph in the bible. So, perhaps it can stay this way for decades. I saw God answer the

prayer of men being raised up in leadership at West Seattle, but I don't know for what purpose. Maybe the growth will continue. But the growth we see is a false sense of security. The massive staff turnover and resignation from elders shows that "you reap what you sow." The labor is in vain. Mars Hill has boasted "the only constant at Mars Hill is change" for at least as long as I've lived here. I want that to be true, but it's not, at least not where it matters most. The call is not merely for a further resurgence forward, but a call to repentance now and it begins with the Founding, Preaching & Vision Pastor, the President of the Board of Elders: Pastor Mark. I recommend Pastor Mark take a sabbatical (not a summer vacation) and entrust Jesus' church to others and the Holy Spirit. What can be lost by that? I believe that will set a trajectory that will work all the way down in such powerful ways through Sutton & Dave, the LPs, XPs, other staff and elders, leaders in the church, members, attendees, and even many outside the church to God's glory.

This is what I long for and I know I don't have to be here in order to witness it. I will rejoice wherever the Lord leads as I hear about repentance in Mark for his leadership and a greater desire for him to walk in the light with his brothers and elders and I will be filled with sorrow if that day never comes.

*For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it;
you will not be pleased with a burnt offering.
The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.*

By His Grace,
Andrew