



West Side Church Position on Sin, Discipline & Restoration

A Statement from the Elder Council of West Side Church

All of us sin, according to the Bible, failing to live the holy lives that would reflect the pure nature of our holy God (Romans 3:23). Yet, through the death and resurrection of Jesus, God has declared those who believe in His Son to be saved: justified (forgiven at the cross), sanctified (being purified as we grow), and glorified (sure of our future with Him) (Romans 3:24; 5:8-10).

This presents believers in Christ with a paradox: we are declared forgiven through faith in Christ and thus called to live holy lives, yet we continue to experience the real presence of sin both personally and collectively. ***How does the believer—and the church collectively—deal with persistent sin, especially when there is no longer a willingness to change?***

1. Biblical Foundations

Every member at West Side is part of a spiritual community in which we seek to encourage one another's growth toward Christlikeness. When persistent sin enters into our relationships, we covenant together to follow the pattern outlined by Jesus in Matthew 18, humbly seeking to pursue genuine repentance, forgiveness and restoration.

Our by-laws describe this process:

*Ongoing sin in the life of a believer dishonors God and obstructs the believer's walk with the Lord. It also threatens the unity and fellowship within the body, and ultimately weakens the witness of the church among non-believers (1 John 1:7; 2 Corinthians 6:3). Scripture encourages believers to be concerned with each other's spiritual well-being, and teaches them to confront in love and gentleness where there is evidence of sin (Galatians 6:1; Luke 17:3-4; Matthew 18:15-21). Matthew 18 serves as a biblical basis for dealing with the discipline of those members who sin and serves as a guide for dealing with conflict between members. ** (See the full statement in section 3)*

These principles and practices are rooted in the clear and relevant teaching of God's Word. Consider the following biblical foundations for discipline practiced within the church:

A. CHRISTIANS ARE SINNERS SAVED BY GRACE, BUT PERSISTENT SIN STILL IMPACTS US NEGATIVELY

God created mankind to enjoy fellowship with Him in innocence, but man's choice to ignore God's leadership resulted in sin and separation between the Creator and those He loves (Romans 3:23). Sin is the expression of our human independence and rebellion, and God hates it. Every human being has a sinful nature, and the only path to forgiveness leads to the cross where God's grace atoned for sin through the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus Christ (Romans 6:23).

However, forgiveness through Jesus doesn't automatically eliminate the reality of sin or responsibility

for sin in our behavior. A true believer in Christ understands the gravity of sin and one's eternal indebtedness to God's amazing grace (Ephesians 2:8-10), by which we are given the spiritual tools to weaken sin's grip on our lives.

When a person begins new life in Christ, His power and presence give us hope and a desire to please God begins to grow (Hebrews 4:15). Since God is holy and calls us to holiness, the way we please Him is by cooperating with the Holy Spirit, changing our behavior from helpless to holy. But this change is gradual, and sometimes we don't deal well with our persistent sin problem.

How a believer responds to ongoing sin patterns is absolutely crucial to the health of that person and the church family (1 Peter 1:13-16).

B. DISCIPLINE IS AN EXPRESSION OF GOD'S LOVING NATURE

God's love is wonderfully expressed in the sacrificial death of Christ, and that same love guides the spiritual bride of Christ, the Church. And Jesus intends to present the Church to Himself, pure and complete (Ephesians 4:12-14; 5:10, 22-30). To this end, the church is a spiritual family where all share this love-motivated desire to become like Jesus.

Like any family where loving parents use discipline to correct and guide, the church is a spiritual family where we see discipline as God's tool for our growth. God does not expect us to be perfect, but to be responsive to His correction. *"The Lord disciplines those He loves"* (Hebrews 12:6). *"Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline"* (Revelation 3:19).

We as followers of Jesus Christ choose to seek instruction about what is right, and to be lovingly corrected when we do something contrary to what God teaches us in his Word. Therefore, we as a church are committed to help one another obey God's command to be *"self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined"* (Titus 1:8).

The Christian's ability to be self-disciplined is the fruit of yielding to the Holy Spirit's presence and control. *"For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline"* (2 Timothy 1:7). *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control... Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit"* (Galatians 5:22-23, 25).

C. DISCIPLINE IS BEST APPLIED PERSONALLY, INFORMALLY AND PRIVATELY

Discipline is often unseen, an aspect of personal growth as the believer in Christ studies God's Word, seeks Him in prayer, and draws on His grace to grow in godliness, learning to overcome sinful habits.

We all struggle with sin, but when a fellow believer's life reveals a persistent, ongoing sin, that person's need is best addressed by the one who observes it: personally (face-to-face), informally (as a simple conversation), and privately (without the need to involve others).

This is why the Bible says, *"Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently"* (Galatians 6:1). In obedience to this command, we are committed together to give and receive loving correction whenever a sin—whether in word, behavior or doctrine—seems too serious to overlook. *"A person's wisdom yields patience; it is to one's glory to overlook an offense"* (Proverbs 19:11).

But the way we approach someone about a concern is an important part of the healing and may determine whether the person responds well or not. So, it is always important that a person humbly searches his or her own heart for error in thought or action prior to going to someone else privately to surface a concern. *"For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you"* (Matthew 6:2).

If repeated private conversations do not lead another person to repentance, Jesus commands that we ask other brothers or sisters to get involved. *“If he will not listen, take one or two others along”* (Matt. 18:16). If informal conversations with these people fail to resolve the matter, then we may seek the involvement of more influential people, such as a small group leader, teacher or church leader. If even these efforts fail to bring a brother or sister to repentance, and if the issue is too serious to overlook, we will move into what may be called “formal discipline.”

D. DISCIPLINE MAY NECESSITATE INFORMING THE WHOLE CHURCH

Scripture teaches that confrontation should be approached and carried out with an attitude of love, concern and humility. It should be motivated by the sincere desire to see repentance and restoration of fellowship (Matthew 7:1-6; Galatians 6:1-5; Ephesians 4:31-32). Reflecting Christ’s grace and forgiveness, believers are taught to be willing to forgive and restore when there is the genuine expression of repentance on the part of a fellow believer (Matthew 18:21-35; II Corinthians 2:5-8).

If an individual persistently refuses to listen to personal and informal correction to turn from speech or behavior that the Bible defines as sin, Jesus commands us to *“tell it to the church”* as a last resort in the discipline process (Matthew 18:17a). The goal is to see the erring believer brought to repentance before Christ and ultimately to restoration with the church family.

FOUR PROGRESSIVE STEPS OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE

What is the process for addressing persistent sin in someone’s life? The following procedures describe how to deal with persistent, unrepentant sin in the life of a member of the church, and for dealing with conflict within the membership. Building on the biblical foundations described above, the by-laws of West Side call us to follow these four steps:

STEP 1: PRIVATE CONVERSATION—If a person has knowledge of sin in the life of a fellow believer, he/she should go to the individual privately, with kindness and compassion, in order to verify the sin and then encourage him/her to deal with the sin biblically (Matthew 18:15; Ephesians 4:32; 1 Corinthians 16:14). The individual will be given every reasonable opportunity to explain and defend his or her actions. If the individual recognizes the sin and repents, the matter usually ends there, unless a confession to additional people is needed.

STEP 2: ADD WITNESSES IF NEEDED—If the sin is known and there is no acknowledgement of sin and expression of repentance, he/she should confront the errant individual in the presence of one or two others. These others should be spiritually mature members of West Side who ideally (but not necessarily) have direct knowledge of the sin. They shall provide biblical counsel and wisdom, and serve as witness(es) (Matthew 18:16). The purpose of informing others in the church is to bring godly influence to the unrepentant individual through meaningful relationships, such as close friends, a small group or ministry, as appropriate.

STEP 3: COUNSEL FROM SPIRITUAL LEADERS—If there is still no acknowledgement of sin and expression of repentance, he/she, accompanied by the others, shall bring the matter to the Vice-Chairman of the Elder Council as a representative of both the Elder Council and the church. He, along with one or two elders chosen by the Elder Council, shall hear testimony from witnesses so that every matter shall be established. If sin is substantiated and there is still no evidence of genuine repentance after loving confrontation, the Vice-Chairman will take the matter to the full Elder Council as representatives of the church (Matthew 18:17).

STEP 4: REMOVAL FROM MEMBERSHIP—If, after a reasonable period of time, the individual still refuses to change, then the individual may be removed from membership by a two-thirds vote of the Elder Council and the membership shall be informed. If removed from membership, believers should consider the individual as an unbeliever, using discretion concerning social contact and praying for repentance and restoration (Matthew 18:17; 1 Corinthians 5:11; 2 Thessalonians 3:14,15). This

means that we will no longer treat this person as a fellow Christian. Instead of having casual, relaxed fellowship with the individual, because we don't know the true condition of the heart, we will consider the person separated from God (Isaiah 59:2). As with any other unbeliever, we will look for opportunities to lovingly bring the gospel, remind the person of God's holiness and mercy, and call the person to repent and demonstrate an authentic faith in Christ (Matthew 18:17; 1 Corinthians 5:5; 1 Timothy 1:20).

2. Helpful Suggestions for Thinking and Living Redemptively

Summary

"Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy.'" 1 Peter 1:13-16

Two great dangers continually face the believer in Jesus:

I may become fixated on sin to the degree that my view of a relationship with God is warped and inaccurate. This leads to a judgmental attitude toward myself and others who cannot measure up to the perfect holiness of God.

I may become increasingly comfortable with God's grace and my stubborn sin. Over time, I may lose sight of God's holiness, ignoring sinful behavior in my life, and not cooperating with His transforming plan for my life.

We all sin, regardless of one's faith in Christ. We are all justified by faith in Christ alone, regardless of my sin before or after the decision to follow Him. But God's call to holiness is real, and I must continue learning to view sin in the light of God's grace. Sin is not overcome simply by trying harder. But holiness is also not possible without the hard work of obedience.

Walking with a holy God in this new relationship is a gradual process of shedding those ideas and habits that reflect the sin nature and choosing more and more to trust in God's provision (Romans 12:1-21). The believer has been justified by Christ, is being purified through the transforming power of God's Word and ministry of the Holy Spirit, and will be brought to complete holiness when entering God's glorious presence.

Loving restoration always stands at the heart of the disciplinary process. If an individual repents, we will rejoice together and gladly extend God's forgiveness by restoring the person to fellowship within the body (see Matthew 18:13; Luke 15:3-7, 11-32; 2 Corinthians 2:5-11; Colossians 3:12-14).

However, should the individual fail to respond to the loving discipline of fellow believers, we are called to love that person through the grace of discipline. Perhaps through the tough love we express and through constant intercession the unrepentant individual would relent and humble himself or herself before the Lord. This is always the goal of the church family, to see the glory of redemption and transformation among us.

As we pursue the blessings of accountability and church discipline, we will hold fast to the promise of Scripture: *"God disciplines us for our good that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it"* (Hebrews 12:10-11).

Practical Suggestions for Living a Disciplined Lifestyle

With God's help, I will seek to GLORIFY HIM by:

- Doing everything in my power to live at peace with those around me.
- Remembering that Jesus' reputation is affected by the way I get along with others.
- Asking God to help me to trust him, obey him, imitate him, and acknowledge him in the midst of conflict.
- Guarding against Satan's schemes and false teachings, which are designed to promote selfishness and incite conflict.
- Using conflict as an opportunity to serve others.
- Cooperating with God as he prunes me of sinful attitudes and habits and helps me grow to be more like Christ.

To decide whether something is really worth CONFRONTING, with God's help I will:

- Overlook minor offenses.
- Change my attitude by rejoicing in the Lord and remembering how much he has forgiven me, being gentle toward others, replacing anxiety with prayer and trust, deliberately thinking about what is good and right in others, and putting into practice what God has taught me through the Bible.
- Carefully consider how much it will cost (emotionally, spiritually, and financially) to continue a conflict instead of simply settling it.
- Use my rights only to advance God's kingdom, to serve others, and to enhance my ability to serve and grow to be like Christ.
- Examine myself. Before talking to others about their wrongs, with God's help I will examine myself by asking: Am I guilty of reckless words, falsehood, gossip, slander, or any other worthless talk? Have I tried to control others? Have I kept my word and fulfilled all of my responsibilities? Have I abused my authority? Have I respected those in authority over me? Have I treated others as I would want to be treated?
- Be quick to deal with my own sin. When I see that I have sinned, I will ask for God to help me repent (change the way I have been thinking so that I turn away from my sin and turn toward God), confess my sins, and change my attitudes and behavior.

To begin the process of gently RESTORING a relationship, I will seek God's help:

- When I am estranged from someone else, I will ask God to help me discern the most effective way to approach the person to confess my sins or point out a concern.
- Even if I work through other people at first, I will do all I can to talk face-to-face eventually so we can both express and confirm repentance, confession, and forgiveness.
- When I learn that someone has something against me, I will go to that person to talk about it, even if I don't believe I have done anything wrong.
- When I need to show others their fault, with God's help I will:

- Draw on God's grace so that I can breathe grace to others*
- Listen responsibly by waiting patiently while others speak, concentrating on what they say, clarifying their comments through appropriate questions, reflecting their feelings and concerns with paraphrased responses, and agreeing with them whenever possible*
- Make charitable judgments by believing the best about others until I have facts to prove otherwise*
- Speak the truth in love*
- Talk from beside people, not from above them, as a fellow sinner who needs forgiveness and grace as much as they do*
- Choose a time and place that will be conducive to a productive conversation*
- Talk in person whenever possible*
- Communicate so clearly that I cannot be misunderstood*
- Plan my words in advance and try to anticipate how others will respond to me*
- Use "I" statements when appropriate and state objective facts rather than personal opinions*
- Use the Bible carefully and tactfully*
- Ask for feedback*
- Offer solutions and preferences*
- Recognize my limits and stop talking once I have said what is reasonable and appropriate*
- If I cannot resolve a dispute with someone in private and the matter is too serious to overlook, with God's help I will:*
 - Suggest that we seek help from one or more spiritually mature advisors who can help both of us see things more objectively*
 - If necessary, ask one or two others to talk with us*
 - If necessary, seek help from our church leaders and respect their authority*

With God's help, I will seek to be RECONCILED...

- When someone has wronged me, I will ask God to change my heart so that I want to forgive the person.*
- When I forgive someone, with God's help I will make these promises:*
 - I will not dwell on this incident.*
 - I will not bring up this incident again and use it against you.*
 - I will not talk to others about this incident.*
 - I will not allow this incident to stand between us or to hinder our personal relationship.*

- When I am having a difficult time forgiving someone, with God's help I will:
 - Renounce the desire to punish the other person, to make that person earn my forgiveness, or to demand guarantees that I will never be wronged again*
 - Assess my contributions to the problem*
 - Recognize the ways that God is using the situation for good*
 - Remember how much God has forgiven me, not only in this situation but also in the past*
 - Draw on God's strength through prayer, Bible study, and, if necessary, Christian counseling*
- With God's help I will demonstrate forgiveness by:
 - Replacing painful thoughts and memories with positive thoughts and memories*
 - Saying positive things to and about the person whom I have forgiven*
 - Doing loving and constructive things to and for the person whom I have forgiven*
- When others continue to mistreat or oppose me, with God's help I will:
 - Control my tongue and continue to say only what is helpful and beneficial to others*
 - Seek counsel, support, and encouragement from spiritually mature advisors*
 - Keep doing what is right no matter what others do to me*
 - Recognize my limits by resisting the temptation to take revenge and by remembering that being successful in God's eyes depends on faithfulness, not results*
 - Continue to love my enemy by striving to discern and address his or her spiritual, emotional, and material needs*

(Suggestions adapted from "The Peacemaker" by Ken Sande, Baker Books, 2003)

3. Explanation of the By-laws

If the Bible outlines how Christians should handle sin issues in the Church, why do we need a "by-laws" document?

As Christians, our guide book for life is the Bible. A passage in the Bible (Romans 13) tells us to be submissive to the governing authorities. So, even though we obey scripture first and foremost, as citizens we also have an obligation to obey the laws of the land so far as they do not violate scripture. As a local body of believers, we have chosen to incorporate in order to receive certain legal protections as well as comply with the laws of the land regarding Property Taxes, employment issues, etc. This legal document is always written and amended using scripture and prayer as our guide.

We include our biblical beliefs and practice of church discipline in the by-laws to document our convictions for those who choose to become members, but also to protect us legally, as citizens, should an unrepentant person be removed from church membership and challenge that biblical decision in court.

By-laws Statement on Discipline

The following is excerpted from West Side's official by-laws. Our unity as a church family depends on the members understanding and following these principles.

Article III. Principles of Discipline

Ongoing sin in the life of a believer dishonors God and obstructs the believer's walk with the Lord. It also threatens the unity and fellowship within the body, and ultimately weakens the witness of the church among non-believers (I John 1:7; II Corinthians 6:3). Scripture encourages believers to be concerned with each other's spiritual well-being, and teaches them to confront in love and gentleness where there is evidence of sin (Galatians 6:1; Luke 17:3-4; Matthew 18:15-21). Matthew 18 serves as a biblical basis for dealing with the discipline of those members who sin and serves as a guide for dealing with conflict between members.

Scripture teaches that confrontation should be approached and carried out with an attitude of love, concern and humility. It should be motivated by the sincere desire to see repentance and restoration of fellowship (Matthew 7:1-6; Galatians 6:1-5; Ephesians 4:31-32). Reflecting Christ's grace and forgiveness, believers are taught to be willing to forgive and restore when there is the genuine expression of repentance on the part of a fellow believer (Matthew 18:21-35; II Corinthians 2:5-8). WSBC will use the following procedures to deal with sin in the life of a member of the church, and for dealing with conflict within the membership.

A. Member Discipline and Restoration

If a person has knowledge of sin in the life of a fellow believer, he/she should go to the individual privately in order to verify the sin and then encourage him/her to deal with the sin biblically, with kindness and compassion (Matthew 18:15; Ephesians 4:32; 1 Corinthians 16:14).

If the sin is verified and there is no acknowledgement of sin and expression of repentance, he/she should confront the individual in the presence of one or two others. These others should be spiritually mature members of WSBC who ideally (but not necessarily) have direct knowledge of the sin. They shall provide biblical counsel and wisdom, and serve as witness(es) (Matthew 18:16).

If there is still no acknowledgement of sin and expression of repentance, he/she, accompanied by the others, shall bring the matter to the Vice-Chairman of the Elder Council as a representative of both the Elder Council and the church. He, along with one or two elders chosen by the Elder Council, shall hear testimony from witnesses so that every matter shall be established. If sin is substantiated and there is still no evidence of genuine repentance after loving confrontation, the Vice-Chairman will take the matter to the full Elder Council as representatives of the church (Matthew 18:17).

The individual may be removed from membership by a two-thirds vote of the Elder Council and the membership shall be informed. If removed from membership, believers should consider the individual as an unbeliever, using discretion concerning social contact and praying for repentance and restoration (Matthew 18:17; 1 Corinthians 5:11; 2 Thessalonians 3:14,15).

4. Common Questions

(1) Doesn't the Bible say that we are not supposed to judge one another?

The Bible never indicates that judgment is inappropriate, rather that it is wrong to be judgmental toward someone (Matthew 7:1-6). Here is the difference: God is our Judge (James 4:10-12), and His Word reveals the standards by which we must guide our living (Hebrews 4:12). When I begin to judge the choices others make, I run the risk of usurping God's role of Judge in that person's life (1 Corinthians 4:5). This was precisely the problem the religious leaders confronting Jesus failed to see in themselves.

Does this mean that someone's sinful behavior should not be judged? Of course not (Galatians 6:1-5).

But the condition of one's heart determines the appropriateness of coming alongside another believer to encourage obedience to God (James 2:12-13). Christians cannot grow to holiness in isolation. We need one another to speak up with a pure heart and a loving attitude to encourage growth. But this is difficult to do with integrity.

Of course, God has established overseers in the church to bring needed correction at times (Acts 20:28-32), but how much better for believers to encourage one another to holiness rather than waiting until a problem grows to the point of requiring intervention by spiritual leaders. In the loving exercise of spiritual encouragement to obedience we help one another stay in step with God's Spirit (Hebrews 12:11-17).

(2) Why does West Side agree to a mutual church covenant to express that we are members of one another?

Historically God has used covenants as a way to clearly express His desire for those He loves. In the New Testament we also find the believers working diligently to be in agreement with God's Spirit and with one another (Acts 2:42-47). When a man and woman get married, before God they have entered into a covenant that includes certain biblical agreements about their relationship. In the same way, our church covenant is simply a way of clearly communicating several important agreements about our beliefs and behavior, made to one another before God (1 Corinthians 1:10).

(3) What does the Bible mean by "repentance"? How do we know if someone is truly repentant about their sin?

When God's love is ignored through persistent sin, repentance is needed. To repent means *to turn around*. God's grace expressed in the sacrificial death of Jesus moves sinful people to respond in humility and repentance. When speaking of sin, repentance means confessing what is true and seeking true change. The repentant person is first convicted of sin, convinced of personal responsibility, and committed to choosing a different course of action.

Repentance is an expression in behavior of authentic heart change. A person may claim to be repentant, but the fruit of genuine repentance is seen in changed attitudes and changed behavior. As a result, it may be some time before the claim of repentance is convincingly demonstrated.

(4) If a person is unrepentant, is their profession of faith in Christ real?

West Side's statement of faith says that *"spiritual regeneration is by the power of the Holy Spirit, influencing us through divine truth and securing our voluntary obedience to the gospel through faith in Jesus Christ our Savior. This new creation of God produces genuine repentance, faith and newness of life (John 3:3-7, 16; Romans 10:9; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21)."*

The Lord God alone knows the heart of each human being, but the scriptures are clear that authentic faith will be expressed in spiritual fruit that reveals the transformative work of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:19-26). When a person claims to have a personal relationship with Jesus yet rejects the convicting work of the Spirit of truth, that person is deceived and is either not a true believer or is quenching the Spirit and should expect God's discipline in his or her life.

(5) Why does the church get involved in "discipline" issues at all?

Accountability and discipline are expressions of God's love. While our society may view discipline as intrusive and negative, according to God's Word He seeks to discipline us because of His love for us (Hebrews 12:6). And this loving discipline extends to the church as the body of Christ (1 Timothy 5:20).

Much like loving discipline has a place in a healthy family, God's discipline in the church is intended to be instructive and encouraging. Discipline occurs constantly as the church grows together through the preaching and study of God's Word, prayer, small groups and many other expressions of the fellowship of

spiritually growing believers. However, when someone chooses to ignore God's Word, discipline will need to become corrective.

(6) Why do some sins get addressed publicly while others do not?

Most of our sin occurs privately and involves very few people. As we practice the principles of discipline, it is expected that private sin issues are dealt with privately, following the process outlined in Matthew 18. However, sin issues may need to be addressed publicly in two situations: (1) if attempts to address sin privately are rejected, there may be a need to bring others into the process even to the point of eventually removing the individual from membership; and (2) if the sin is done in a public way or impacts the public so that a public confrontation and reconciliation would be needed.

(7) If church leaders could potentially mishandle a discipline issue, what protections are in place to prevent abuse at West Side?

The spiritual leaders at West Side are bound to follow the instructions provided in our church by-laws. Those instructions describe their responsibilities and procedures for addressing discipline.

(8) I understand that we are sinful and that God is not. Why can't we just leave it at that? Why should other "sinful men" be allowed to rebuke me?

God is holy, unlike human beings who are thoroughly affected by the sin nature. We often deal with problems in wrong ways because we are flawed in our motives and assumptions. God, on the other hand, perfectly sees what is true and, because He is holy, cannot simply look the other way. To do so would be incompatible with His holiness, because sin has no part in His nature.

God's remedy for our sinfulness is the substitutionary death of His Son, the just dying in place of the unjust, so that sin would be atoned (Romans 3:21-26). God hasn't ignored sin, rather He has poured His holy wrath out on His Son Jesus and as a result we are adopted into His family, experiencing the blessings of sonship and being clothed in the righteousness of Jesus (Romans 5:1-11).

When a believer rejects loving discipline from fellow believers, it cheapens God's grace and exudes selfish pride rather than the humility that should characterize those who are graciously forgiven (Philippians 2:1-11). When I am confronted about my sinful attitudes and actions, I must recognize that my natural desire is to defend myself, but God is looking for me to humbly receive correction and grow through it (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

(9) What is the purpose of discipline?

The purpose of church discipline is to turn a fellow believer from error and sin to truth and restoration. Matthew 18:15 speaks to the desire to encourage our sinning brother or sister back into a correct response to the sin in his or her life; so that they might again enjoy the Christ-filled life that God desires for them. It is also the goal of the church discipline process to restore fellowship among believers.

(10) If I know someone who is straying from a healthy walk with Christ, what am I supposed to do?

When we encounter a fellow Christian in a habitual state of sin or straying from a healthy relationship with Christ, we should gently and respectfully confront them about it, following the process outlined in Section 1: Biblical Foundations (Matthew 18:15).

(11) What happens when one of our pastors or elders is unrepentant about a sin issue? What if he is repentant?

The biblical qualifications for service on the Elder Council are laid out in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and the church's by-laws explain how qualifications and correction of Elders are implemented at West Side. Should an El-

der or Pastor at West Side be involved in unrepentant sin, he will immediately be removed from participation with the Elder Council and subject to specific disciplinary actions that go beyond the disciplinary process established for members. Should he remain unrepentant throughout the process, it will be necessary to rebuke him publically in front of the church membership (1 Timothy 5: 20-21). A sin issue for which an Elder or Pastor is repentant may or may not call for his removal from the Council, and the disciplinary process might not move forward.

(12) What happens after someone goes through the discipline process? How should we treat them?

When a person has been disciplined by the church and is still living with an unrepentant heart, Matthew 18:17 informs us that we should treat him or her as an unbeliever. As a result, our relationship focus changes from one of fellowship to one of evangelism; we should continue to be concerned about the person with regard to salvation, because we don't know the true condition of the heart.

Instead of having casual, relaxed fellowship with the individual we will consider the person separated from God. As with any other unbeliever, we will look for opportunities to lovingly bring the gospel, remind the person of God's holiness and mercy, and call the person to repent and demonstrate an authentic faith in Christ (Matthew 18:17; 1 Corinthians 5:5; 1 Timothy 1:20). Our responsibility is to pray, live consistently as with any other unbeliever, and do everything we can to see the individual come to a saving knowledge of and relationship with Jesus Christ.

(13) I know there is much talk of restoration but do we really want them back? How do we know if we can ever trust them again?

In Luke 15:11-32, Jesus relates the famous story of the lost or "prodigal" son. It is very important to remember that the process of church discipline is for the purpose of seeing our brother or sister restored to fellowship with our Savior and the church, as well as serving to warn us and promote spiritual health and purity as we learn from the sin we see in others.

We need to remember that, like the prodigal son, we are all prone to wander. The biblical instruction on this is clear. When someone is repentant, we welcome them back with open arms, forgiving them to the best of our ability, as Christ forgave us. This does not mean that leadership or positions of influence within the church will immediately be restored but it does mean we recognize our own sinfulness and the amazing sacrifice that Jesus made on our behalf. Who are we, in light of that, to be unwilling to extend that same grace to others?

(14) What does it mean that a person has been "removed from membership" by the church?

First and foremost, our most important relationship is with Jesus Christ and serving and honoring Him. As Christ followers we are also in fellowship with other Christians who make up the body of Christ and join with them in fellowship in a local church. Many churches, including West Side, ask those people to commit to membership in the church body by agreeing together to statements such as the biblically-based Church Covenant, Articles of Faith and corporate by-laws. As members, we have certain responsibilities and privileges within the local church such as serving, leading and voting.

When a person is persistently sinning and unrepentant and has been taken through all the biblical steps toward restoration yet continues to be unrepentant, the final step is to remove that person from membership in the local church, resulting in the loss of privilege to serve, lead or vote as a believer in that community.

(15) I have heard that if I do something wrong West Side will "throw me out." Is that true?

The Bible is a story of grace and redemption and, even as believers, we sin. The goal is to become more and more like Christ. In that light, our main objective is to help each other grow and become closer to

Christ. We also encourage and challenge each other to repent when we sin. The very last resort is to remove someone from membership with the goal always being restoration to fellowship with Jesus Christ and other believers. These concepts are clearly explained to those considering membership at West Side.

(16) This whole idea of discipline scares me. There are so many things in my life that are not good. I came to the church to seek forgiveness, will I now be asked to leave?

If you are truly seeking forgiveness and grace, you will be welcomed, not asked to leave. The church is a place where those who are seeking love and grace are welcomed with open arms. We all come, in some way, broken and in need of a savior, Jesus Christ. Forgiveness is given freely to those who confess their sins, turn away from that sinful behavior, and seek forgiveness (1 John 1:9).

(17) What does Jesus mean when He says to "tell it to the church" (Matthew 18:17)?

A church is a spiritual family of those who share a common relationship with Jesus who is Head of the church (Ephesians 1:15-23). But as a church grows numerically, just as with a family, it becomes more difficult to be intimately involved in each other's lives. Larger churches function as a collection of smaller communities where a person has relationships with some, but not all, who comprise the church. The difficulty with "telling" the whole church indiscriminately is that church members are then expected to be intimately informed about discipline issues affecting someone they don't even know.

Jesus' instruction in Matthew 18:17 states that confessing and seeking forgiveness must extend to the community that has been directly damaged by the sin. In practice, "the church" (those who have a relationship with the unrepentant individual) may need to be involved in the discipline/restorative process. The "whole church" (members of the local body who may or may not have a relationship with the unrepentant individual) need to be informed and instructed how to treat the unrepentant individual without needing to know the intimate details of the sin.

Approved by the Elder Council 01-22-13