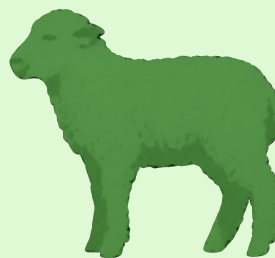


Fellow Workers...
...Unite
...Work Together
...Become an Example



September 2025 (October & November to Come)
Congregational Community Group Emphasis
Leader's Guides 1C-2G-3F-4I

September 7 — Covenant Statement **1** & Church Covenant **C** p. 2-4

September 14 — Covenant Statement **2** & Church Covenant **G** p. 5-7

September 21 — Covenant Statement **3** & Church Covenant **F** p. 8-10

September 28 — Covenant Statement **4** & Church Covenant **I** p. 11-14

*Some of the Covenant Statement Numbers are content-coordinated with the Church Covenant Letter.
Some of the Covenant Statement Numbers do not content-coordinate with the Church Covenant Letter.*

Different Community Group Approaches:

Percent of Group Time Option A or B:

- A.** Primary Curriculum—The focus of the group in this quarter will be this curriculum.
- B.** Including the Covenant—The Covenant will be addressed in addition to the group's other focus.

Use of Scripture:

There is a primary text for each week that is written out.

There are other references each week included in the green box and in the questions, if desired.

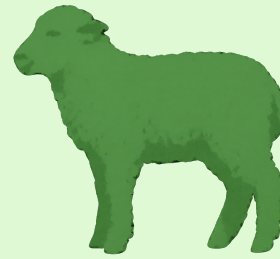
Use of Questions:

The leader's guide will have questions and some answers.

The leader has liberty to pick the question/s best for their group's discussion and context.

The leader also has liberty to use other scriptural references and/or questions.

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Covenant Statement 1

I will faithfully participate in the worship services and ministries of the church.
(Hebrews 10:23-25)

Church Covenant C

We will not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, and further, we will be a house of prayer for all the nations and faithfully pray for one another, as well as for those not yet a part of the Body of Christ.
(Hebrews 10:25; Mark 11:17; James 5:16; Matthew 9:38)

“And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near” (Hebrews 10:24-25).

Q1: “Let us consider” (*katanōōmen*) is in the Greek present tense, which signifies that the action of the verb should be performed repeatedly. What is the significance of this observation for the God-glorifying church member?

A: Considering “how to stir up one another to love and good works” for the purpose of “encouraging one another” is to be a continual practice of the godly church member. When gathering with fellow believers, we should sooner ask God, “How can I uplift a brother or sister today?” than, “How am I going to be edified today?”

Q2: What does it mean to “stir up one another to love and good works”?

A: The author of Hebrews compares the Christian faith to a race that all believers must run with endurance like Christ, for the sake of Christ (Heb 12:1-2). It is the responsibility of every church member to motivate, cheer-on, and inspire others to finish the race strong, so that Jesus might receive praise for what he has done in, for, and through us.

Q3: What are some practical ways a church member can “stir up one another to love and good works” when we assemble as a congregation or community group?

A: Answers will vary.

Q4: Why might the author of Hebrews have warned against “neglecting to meet together”? What is the harm to the individual and to the church as a whole—emotionally, spiritually, financially, effectually, etc.—when its members “[forsake] the assembling of ourselves” (KJV)?

A: Answers will vary; but here are some examples:

- ◆ Emotional Harm: God created man for fellowship with himself (1 Cor 1:9) and with one another (Gen 2:18; Acts 2:42; Gal 6:2; 1 Jn 1:3). When a sheep fails to gather with his flock, connection is lost with his spiritual family, which can lead to loneliness and purposelessness.
- ◆ Spiritual Harm: Corporate worship, in both the singing of songs and the parsing of God’s Word, by its very nature, is synergistic. That is, when church members gather to praise the name of God and celebrate being in his presence, the combined effect of their worship is weightier and more glorifying to God than the sum of their separate expressions of praise. In other words, we worship God together far better than we could ever hope to worship God individually. Therefore, whenever one member of the Body is missing from congregational worship, everyone suffers. Let us, then, magnify his name *together!*
- ◆ Financial Harm: It is the responsibility of every believer to support his local church financially, to care for the physical needs of those in ministry (1 Cor 9:13-14), to relieve the burdens of his fellow Christ-followers both near and far (Acts 2:44-45; 2 Cor 9:7), and to bring honor to the name of God (Prov 3:9). However, believers who make a habit of not gathering together also tend to neglect supporting the church financially. This can put undue strain on ministers and can even force churches to close their doors permanently.
- ◆ Effectual Harm: According to Ephesians 2:8-10, Christians are not saved by works, they are saved to work and accomplish more together than they do separately. If 120 disciples sent out from Jerusalem 2,000 years ago turned the world upside-down for Christ, imagine what our church could do in the world if we all worked together as a family.

Q5: In what ways can technology help or hinder obedience to the command to meet together in today’s culture?

A: Technology can facilitate gathering together by...

- ◆ Providing a means for the sick or travelling to have access to sermons via livestream;
- ◆ Enabling members to encourage and fellowship through calls, texts, social media, and video and group chats; and,
- ◆ Giving a broad audience access to teaching materials, articles, and podcasts.

Technology can hinder gathering together by...

- ◆ Replacing in-person, human-to-human interaction altogether; and,
- ◆ Promoting “Consumer Christianity,” where believers do not engage in churches but treat congregational worship like a form entertainment.

Q6: What are a few of the reasons why some Christians have made a “habit” of “neglecting to meet together?” Are these reasons valid? Why or why not?

A: Answers will vary; but here is a fictional story that can stimulate conversation and thought: “Seven-year-old Timmy hits a baseball that clears the in-field. Logically, his parents assume from this rather mundane feat that Timmy is destined for the Majors, or at least for a sizable scholarship playing D1 baseball. Even though this dream is hardly attainable, his parents prioritize sports over everything, including assembling together as a church. When Timmy grows up and leaves home, there is a good chance he won’t be playing baseball anymore, unless it is for recreation on the weekends. But there is an even better chance he won’t value the church, and he may not even value his relationship with Christ.” Was his parent’s reason for “neglecting to meet together” valid or invalid? Why?

Q7: Some members of the flock cannot assemble due to health concerns. What are some practical ways the gathering Body can keep those who can’t gather from feeling isolated, neglected, or forgotten?

A: Answers will vary.

Q8: What is “the Day” referred to at the end of verse 25? How should the nearness of this “Day” influence a Christ-follower’s behavior?

A: “[T]he Day” to which the author refers is generally considered to be “the Day of the Lord,” that is, the moment when Jesus Christ will return on the clouds of heaven to judge the living and the dead. Knowing that the Day of our Master’s coming draws near, we should spend our time wisely, building up others around us in Christ, so that together we might work for his praise and honor in light of his glorious return (Eph 4:11-13).

Q9: How does your community group as a cohesive unit help fulfill the command to “stir up one another to love and good works”? Are there avenues for practical improvement?

A: Answers will vary.

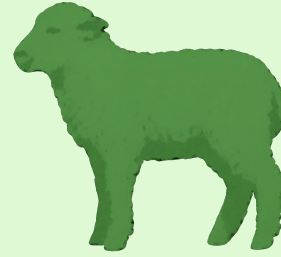
Q10: What defense might an active church member give for the healthy habit of assembling as a church body?

A: Answers will vary; but the leader should press for both scriptural and anecdotal evidence.

Q11: Are there specific people in the church that God is calling you to be more intentional about encouraging? What steps could you take this week to stir them up to love and good works?

A: Answers will vary.

Fellow Workers...
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Covenant Statement 2

I will gladly give my regular financial support, through tithes and offerings,
to the ongoing work and ministry of the church.
(2 Corinthians 8:1-5; 9:6-7)

Church Covenant G

We will work together for the continuance of a faithful evangelical ministry in this church,
as we sustain its worship, ordinances, discipline, and doctrines. We will contribute
cheerfully and regularly to the support of the ministry, the expenses of the church,
the relief of the poor, and the spread of the Gospel through all nations.
(Hebrews 12:12-14; 2 Corinthians 8:1-2; 9:6-7)

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“For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed. Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no “root of bitterness” springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled...” (Hebrews 12:11-15).

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Q1: According to v. 11, “discipline...yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.” How does the righteousness of church members promote peace in the Body of Christ?

A: When individuals pursue righteousness—that is, imitating Christ by living in obedience to God’s commands—they are more likely to exhibit the “fruit of the Spirit” (Galatians 5:22–23). Bearing such fruit prevents conflict by reducing sin’s disruptive influence, gently resolves conflict when it arises, and promotes deeper harmony in the church by sowing the seed of love (Col 3:14). Therefore, righteousness benefits more than the individual; it has communal effects.

Q2: The ability to act rightly in accord with God’s commands is a trait that must be “trained.” The Trainer is the Spirit of Christ and the instrument he uses to train the believer is “discipline” (v. 11). How does God use discipline to train us to produce the fruit of righteousness?

A: God's discipline is not destructive; it is formative—it creates in us holiness. Discipline points out areas of our spiritual lives where we are not aligned with Christ, but have trailed off into disobedience, compromise, or apathy. The Father, like a vinedresser, prunes us by removing elements of our lives that prevent spiritual growth (Jn 15:2). It hurts; all pruning in the moment feels like loss. But it is for our good and God's glory in that it makes room for more and better fruit of righteousness to grow (Phil 1:9-11).

Q3: Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17 together. God uses another device in conjunction with discipline to accomplish the goal of “training in righteousness.” What is that instrument and how does God use it to accomplish his will in us?

A: God uses his inspired Word to train us up in righteousness. God's Word is the authoritative expression of God's will for the believer. It teaches us the difference between right and wrong, between that which pleases God and that which grieves his Spirit. It reproves the wicked in their unrighteousness, demands repentance, and provides the tools for the God-honoring correction of sinful habits. And so that one might not fall again into sin—or, at least, not to the same depths of sin as they had fallen before—the Word is used by the Spirit to train the believer to remain on the paths of righteousness for Christ's name's sake.

Q4: The Lord's discipline often leads to grief that weighs heavily on our hearts and can even manifest physically: “lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees” (v. 12). Read 2 Corinthians 7:9-10 together. What is the difference between “godly grief” and “worldly grief”?

A: “Godly grief” leads to repentance. It draws us near to the throne of grace to seek the forgiveness of Jesus, who is “gentle and lowly in heart” (Mt 11:29). Meanwhile, “worldly grief” buries a person under the shame of their sins, discouraging them from seeking the kindness of a King who forgives even the most heinous forms of treason. This grief leads only to death—eternal separation from a God who extends the hand of mercy, pardon, and fellowship.

Q5: Perhaps the greatest living parables of godly and worldly grief are Peter and Judas. How did Jesus use discipline and godly grief in Peter's life to produce “the peaceful fruit of righteousness”?

A: Answers will vary.

Q6: The author states that a Christ-follower must “[s]trive for peace with **everyone**...” (v. 14). What subgroups does “everyone” include? How does your church seek to make peace with them or bring peace to them?

A: Answers will vary; but there should be consideration of genuine brothers and sisters in Jesus—both in the local church and universal Body of Christ—the lost that call themselves “believers” but are false, and the lost world that does not know what real peace looks like.

Q7: Peace is such a precious commodity that the author of Hebrews demands we “strive” for it; that is, we must strain to chase after peace with the intent to catch it, as a lioness pursues a gazelle. Why is peace in a church—ironically—worth fighting for so aggressively?

A: Answers will vary.

Q8: One act of peace-making and holiness that might be overlooked by some is giving cheerfully to the ministry and the ministers of the local church. How do financial offerings promote peace and holiness in the Body of Christ?

A: Sacrificial offerings are a reflection of the love of Christ that meet practical needs and relieve the burdens of others (Acts 4:34). Financial giving supports pastors and evangelists, as well as their efforts to equip saints, break through boundaries in sharing the gospel, and plant churches. By cheerfully giving, believers are united in causes that can ultimately bring glory and honor to God (2 Cor 9:13).

Q9: Read Hebrews 12:15 again. This verse alludes to Deuteronomy 29:18-19, which claims that certain Israelites rebelled against God’s standard of holiness, yet thought to themselves that they would be spared coming judgment. Instead, they are a “root bearing poisonous and bitter fruit” that will bring God’s judgment upon one and all. Who, then, is the “root of bitterness [i.e., poison]” in the modern church (I am not looking for names!), and what should genuine believers do with this “root”?

A: The “root of bitterness” is not a “what” but a “who.” They are individuals who fall short of the grace of God by shaking their proverbial fists in stubbornness at the heavens any time the thought of seeking peace or holiness crosses their mind. Often, they are self-deceived into thinking they are in the right and will experience God’s blessing. But in truth, they poison churches, bringing judgment on themselves and others around them. In accord with Matthew 18:15-20, absent repentance and change, they must be plucked up and removed before they defile others or bring judgment upon the flock.

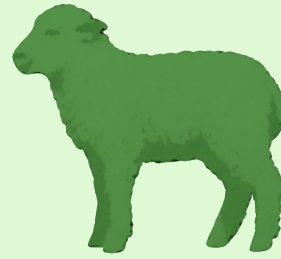
Q10: Where have you seen peace-making in the church at its finest?

A: Answers will vary.

Q11: Is there anyone in the local church with whom you need to make peace? Has a lack of holiness hindered your relationship with another person or with God?

A: Answers will vary. Stress, though, that if they need to make peace with God or man, they need to do so with haste (Mt 5:23-24).

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Covenant Statement 3

I will eagerly serve Christ through the unique talents and spiritual gifts with which He has endowed me for equipping of the saints, the furtherance of the Gospel, the up building of the Body of Christ, and for the glory of God.
(Romans 12:6-21; 1 Corinthians 12:1-31; Ephesians 4:11-13)

Church Covenant F

We will seek, by Divine aid, to live carefully in the world, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, and remembering that, as we have been voluntarily buried by baptism and raised again from the symbolic grave, so there is on us a special obligation now to lead a new and holy life.
(Ephesians 5:15; Titus 2:12; Romans 6:3-4; 1 Thessalonians 4:1; 1 Peter 1:13-25; 1 Peter 2:9-10)

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“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ...” (Ephesians 4:11-13).

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Q1: The words “[a]nd he gave” in v. 11 call back to Ephesians 4:8 that reads: “When [Jesus] ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.” Paul uses Psalm 68:18 to argue that the offices of apostle, prophet, evangelist, and shepherd-teacher (the Greek suggests that “shepherds” and “teachers” refer to the same office) are gifts Christ gave to the church. How are these offices good gifts from God?

A: Apostles were men specifically called by Christ Jesus to carry his authority to the world and the church. It was the apostles (like the Twelve, Paul, and James) and fellow-workers with the apostles (like Luke and Mark) who created Scripture under the inspiration of the Spirit (2 Tim 3:16-17). Prophets in the early Church primarily forthtold God’s will as was given to them by the Spirit (1 Cor 14:3); though, there were prophets who foretold—that is, provided predictive prophecy to churches. This appears, however, to be a rare, secondary gift of those who held the office of prophet. Evangelists called people to Christ and established churches, which were, then, overseen by shepherd-teachers that rightly divided the Word of God and discipled “faithful men” (2 Tim 2:2). Each of these offices were or are necessary for the church to “equip the saints for the work of ministry.”

Q2: Read Ephesians 2:19-21 together. Since the Latter Rain Movement in the 1940's, numerous Pentecostal preachers and teachers have claimed that the offices of apostle and prophet, which had faded into nonexistence by the end of the First Century AD, have been reinstated by the Spirit. What in those verses suggests otherwise?

A: The apostles and prophets are called a “foundation” for “the household of God”—the Church—in Ephesians 2:19-20. Foundations are only laid once unless the structure above it, of which it is a part, has been demolished. And since the Church cannot be destroyed, but is, in fact, the one that destroys (Mt 16:18), there is, and will only ever be, one foundation for the Church in the apostles and prophets of old.

Q3: Ephesians 4:11 speaks of an office of “evangelist.” But do all Christians, then, have the responsibility to share the gospel with others? If so, why?

A: Yes. Every Christ-follower has the responsibility to share the gospel with the lost, because all have received a mandate to, “Go...and make disciples of all nations” (Mt 28:19). This is a universal constant for believers. However, the way one participates in sharing the gospel varies from person-to-person. Some may preach, while others may share their testimony over a cup of coffee. Some may support missions financially, while others do so through prayer. Some travel to the uncharted ends of the earth to plant the banner of Christ in a land that has never heard the name of Jesus before, while others take the short walk to their neighbor's front door to bring the good news. All these expressions of evangelism are good and honor God. The key is to be intentional.

Q4: Paul compares teachers in the church to “shepherds.” In what way are pastors like “shepherds” to the people of God?

A: Answers will vary; but here are a few examples:

- ◆ Shepherds are responsible for the physical wellbeing of the sheep under their care, just as pastors are responsible before God for the spiritual wellbeing of the sheep the Father has placed in their care;
- ◆ Shepherds place themselves between the wolves and the sheep to help the flock when they are helpless, just as pastors help to protect the flock of Christ from wolves within and without the local congregation; and,
- ◆ Shepherds are responsible for feeding their sheep by leading them through green pastures, just as pastors are responsible for feeding their sheep with a diet of the Word of God.

Q5: Too often Christ-followers have been led to believe that the work of the ministry is the sole responsibility of the evangelist and shepherd-teacher. However, Paul claims that the officers of the church have been given “to equip the saints for the work of ministry” (v. 12). What gifts or roles has God given you to serve the body of Christ, and how are you using them?

A: Answers will vary. Read 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 for a list of spiritual giftings.

Q6: In what ways are you being equipped for ministry? How can you better receive or seek out this equipping? What does CCBC do in order to train disciple-makers?

A: Answers will vary; CCBC encourages its members to embody, through grace, the priorities of a disciple and pass them along in relationship for God's glory.

Q7: How can you personally encourage someone else to use their spiritual gifts for the glory of God?

A: Answers will vary.

Q8: Paul states in v. 13 that one of the goals in equipping saints is presenting them before Christ "mature." What are some indicators of spiritual maturity?

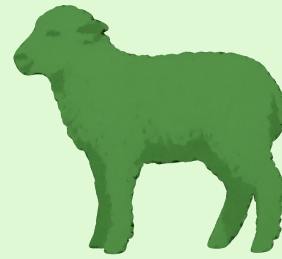
A: There are potentially many answers to this question; these stand out as some of the most important:

- ◆ A mature Christ-follower replicates: A disciple of Christ cannot be thought of as complete until he reproduces Christ in others. Disciple-making is a multi-generational endeavor that ends in the established Kingdom of heaven at the foot of Christ's throne (Rev 7:9-10).
- ◆ A mature Christ-follower surrenders: Surrendering to the will of God is not about giving up but giving in, coming to Christ continually in a posture of humility, faith, obedience, thankfulness, and praise. When the desires of a mature disciple do not align with that of the Father, a mature believer does not hesitate to conform his will to God's will.
- ◆ A mature Christ-follower abides: Christian maturity is not found in self-dependence, but in humble reliance on and desperation for God, his Word, and his power. The mature disciple confesses his weaknesses and finds his strength in Christ by dedicating himself to the study of the Word and bathing his life in prayer.
- ◆ A mature Christ-follower repents: On this side of heaven, maturity does not equate to moral, sinless perfection—though, such completeness will become a reality for believers when Christ returns (Phil 1:6). Maturity has less to do with sinning less, and more to do with repenting quickly. When obedience is missing, the mature believer recognizes his deficiencies and runs with haste to Christ for confession and restoration.

Q9: How well do you know Jesus personally? What steps can you take to grow in the "knowledge of the Son of God" this week? What about this year?

A: Answers will vary.

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Covenant Statement 4

I will humbly participate in the biblically prescribed process of church discipline.
(Matthew 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 5; Galatians 6:1-5; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15;
1 Timothy 1:8; 5:19; Titus 3:5-11)

Church Covenant I

We will, when we move from this place, as soon as possible, unite with some other church where we can carry out the spirit of this covenant and the principles of God's Word.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

(2 Corinthians 13:11-14)

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“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them” (Matthew 18:15-20).

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Q1: Jesus’s outline of the church discipline process is given on the heels of the Parable of the Lost Sheep (Mt 18:12-14). What is the connection between the parable and the process of restoring a brother (or sister) to Christ? What is Jesus attempting to teach his audience about church discipline through the story of the Lost Sheep?

A: The parable teaches the reader that...

- ◆ Every member of the flock is valuable to God and should be valuable to his fellow believers. Therefore, when a member begins to stray from God, like caring shepherds, his brothers in Christ should seek his restoration to the flock, even if the process is difficult, awkward, time-consuming, or painful.
- ◆ There are few victories worth celebrating more than the restoration of a brother to Christ and to the local church. Celebration lifts the spirit of the repentant, applies

salve to the wounds of the believer sinned against, and sets fire to the thorns of bitterness that so easily entangle.

- ◆ To bring back a brother to Christ is to fulfill the will of our heavenly Father. It is one of the greatest, most glorious, most beautiful expressions of “thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Mt 6:10).

Q2: Prior to approaching a brother to “tell him his fault” (v. 15), the offended disciple is told in Matthew 7:3-4 to do what?

A: Before reproving a brother, it is paramount that the believer first evaluate himself to determine if there is any outstanding sin in his life for which he has not repented. Neglecting this step may result in adding hypocrisy to the believer’s ever-growing list of unconfessed sin. It may also cause his sin to obscure his spiritual vision, so that he might not be able to help his brother properly.

Q3: What specific steps after self-reflection and confession does Jesus outline in Matthew 18:15-17 for addressing a brother who is in rebellion and sin?

A: There are four steps one should follow in his attempt to bring a brother back to Christ:

1. The offended party is to go to the offending party *privately* to explain to him his fault. Since God’s Word is designed to reprove and correct (2 Tim 3:16), he should be prepared to support his case against his brother with Scripture, making sure his words are “gracious, seasoned with salt” (Col 4:6), and that the truth he speaks is spoken in love (Eph 4:15). By the grace of God, he will win over his brother.
2. If the sinning brother does not heed private admonishment, he should be approached again, this time with two or three witnesses (Deut 19:15) to act as third-party arbitrators between the offending party and the one offended. These men may not be witnesses to the transgression itself, but they should be of such spiritual caliber that they can act as witnesses to the truth.
3. If he still does not repent, the matter is to be taken to the church (*ekklesia*). In the original context, this likely referred to the gathering of the saints and not to the pastoral leadership of the church. Nevertheless, it would be wise to approach church leadership first before sharing the sins of a brother with the congregation, even for the simple fact that someone needs to verify Steps #1 and #2 have been taken. Once taken to the congregation, the church should make a collective effort to draw the one lost sheep back to the sheepfold. This may be through public calls for repentance, expressions of love and care, and corporate prayer. All available, godly options for restoration should be exhausted.
4. The congregation *must* remove the wayward brother from their midst and approach him as one would a “Gentile and a tax collector” (Mt 18:17). He is

now known to have been a “brother” in name only (1 Jn 2:19) and in need of evangelization.

Q4: What are the possible consequences if a believer skips one or more of the first two steps in the process?

A: If a believer does not go to the offending brother in private before taking the matter to witnesses, or, if the offended believer takes the matter straight to the church:

- ◆ It puts on display a subject of embarrassment and shame that could have been handled privately with dignity and grace;
- ◆ It may create resentment and hardness of heart in the brother being pursued; and,
- ◆ It opens the believer who should be in the right to a charge of disobedience and hypocrisy.

It ought to be noted that Jesus, in his infinite wisdom, created the step-by-step process of church discipline, in part, to prevent believers from being falsely accused before the congregation. On rare occasion, the party that looks like the one sinned against is, in reality, the guilty party; but their guilt is not revealed until two or three wise witnesses uncover the details of the trespass (“The one who states his case first seems right, until the other comes and examines him” [Prov 18:17]). If church leaders do not verify that Steps #1 and #2 have been completed before the matter is taken before the congregation, the righteous man may be accused of wrongdoing, and the leadership may fall into the snare of an unrighteous man.

Q5: How did Jesus treat Gentiles and tax collectors? What do his expressions of kindness to outsiders teach believers as they attempt to express kindness to false brothers?

A: Here are some examples of how Jesus treated Gentiles and tax collectors—sinners on the fringe of Jewish society—to help stimulate conversation:

- ◆ Jesus crossed social boundaries (e.g., he ignored kosher laws and the traditions of the Pharisees) to be in their homes and to eat with them (Lk 5:29-32);
- ◆ Jesus offered them restoration, as opposed to rejection (Lk 19:1-10);
- ◆ Jesus called them to follow him, even inviting a tax collector to be among his Twelve closest disciples (Mt 9:9);
- ◆ Jesus celebrated their repentance and called others to do likewise (Lk 15:3-32);
- ◆ While they were yet sinners, Christ died for them (Rom 5:8); and,
- ◆ The risen, exalted King Jesus offers them a place in his presence for eternity (Rev 7:9-10).

Q6: Read 1 Corinthians 5:9-11 together. How do we harmonize Jesus's example with Paul's commands?

A: There is most certainly a difference between meeting to evangelize an unbeliever and, as we would say colloquially, "hanging out" with an unbeliever. The former can be done in a God-honoring manner, even over a meal. Jesus did it. But there must be mental and spiritual safeguards put in place before coming to the table. Never should a believer place himself in a compromising position where he could fall into sin, even if the motivation is evangelism. May we never suggest that sinning alongside the sinner is "relationship building"!

Q7: The language of "binding and loosing" comes from the Jewish legal tradition. To "bind" something was to forbid it; to "loose" something was to allow it. Therefore, Jesus was delegating his authority to the church to judge its members by his teaching and in his name. If they conducted themselves in righteousness, where two or three were gathered in his name for judgment, he was with them. How is this promise of Christ's presence simultaneously a comforting and sobering thought?

A: It is comforting to know that when the church must go through the humbling and painful process of disciplining one of its own, Jesus is present alongside the two or three witnesses, as well as the church as a whole, providing authority and consolation. It is also sobering to know that as believers gather to adjudicate on earth, God, from his heavenly court, presides over the meeting and the outcome.

Q8: Have you ever seen the process of church discipline in action? If so, was the process carried out in God's way, and what were the results?

A: Answers will vary.

Q9: Are there any past or current relationships where you have avoided these steps? What would obedience to this passage look like now?

A: Answers will vary.

Q10: How can exercising church discipline create a healthier culture of accountability in your church, family, or community group?

A: Answers will vary.

Q11: Is there anyone who has sinned against you that you need to approach in humility to encourage repentance? Is there anyone you need to be reconciled to by means of repentance and restitution?

A: Answers will vary.