

## Church Discipline Process

Friend and fellow church member,

We – your campus elders and church family – appreciate your willingness to have a potentially difficult conversation. It is never easy to have people raise concerns about your life or faith, but concerns have come to our attention for which it would be unloving for us to ignore. We want to come to you as an act of honor to discern the validity (or lack thereof) of these concerns.

This document helps us make sure that we handle concerns about the moral-relational lives of our members in a way that is loving, consistent, and as effective as your level of cooperation will allow. *We will walk through this document together, and (if concerns are valid) use it to document the restorative process to ensure that you and everyone on your restoration team understands their role.*

It may be helpful to first review what it means to be a part of a church. A church is a covenant community and belonging to a church entails:

(a) *professing our need for and belief in the gospel* – not just at the moment of conversion but for all of life (I Corinthians 6:9-20; Ephesians 4:17-25),

(b) *a desire to submit to the Lordship of Christ* evidenced by living in accordance with the teaching of Scripture and repenting – both **emotionally** (remorse) and **volitionally** (tangible change) – when we fall short of biblical standards (Romans 10:9-10; I Corinthians 1:9; Ephesians 5: 23) in such a way that makes our lives as Christians an identifiable contrast to the world around us (I Peter 2:9), and

(c) *allowing other believers to spur us on* in living a life that brings honor to the name of Christ (Romans 12:4-5; I Corinthians 12:12-26; Galatians 6:1-5; Hebrews 10:24-25).

When a church member departs from living under the Lordship of Christ, the loving implication of being in a covenant community is that your elders and fellow believers seek to call you back to a holy life that honors God, represents Christ well to our city, blesses others, and leads to your personal flourishing. This process of calling you back to your commitment to Christ is often referred to as church discipline.

The process is meant to be restorative and only results in involuntary consequences (i.e., removal from church membership) when an individual resists making changes that Scripture would require that believer to make. In that sense, *the conclusion of this process – if the concern proves to be valid – will be chosen by you, not the church*, on the basis of whether you choose to repent of your sin and actively pursue a holy life.

The process of church discipline is outlined in **Matthew 18:15-20** (ESV).

“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.”

This passage outlines a three stage process.

- ) Pre-Stage One: Voluntary Confession
- ) Stage One: Individual Confrontation
- ) Stage Two: Collective Confrontation
- ) Stage Three: Church-Wide Confrontation

That I, as an elder, am reviewing this document with you indicates that you are, at least potentially, at **the second stage** in this process. Before we look at those three stages, the areas of concern that prompt this conversation are:

- ) [type area of concern]
- ) [type area of concern]
- ) [type area of concern]

Are these areas of concern present in your life?<sup>1</sup>

[Type summary of response and ask church member to confirm that you've represented him/her accurately]

In the process of having this conversation, we want to not only address the area of sin (if present) in your life, but also disciple you about how God intends repentance and life-in-community to be a part of his protection over you.

- A. **Pre-Stage One: Confession**<sup>2</sup> – *Before it is the responsibility of another believer to address an area of sin in your life, it is your responsibility to confess sin and seek change (James 5:16). As a member of a church, you are to view the awareness and support of your fellow believers as a protection from God, not an invasion of privacy.*

To whom have you voluntarily made these sins known for the purpose of accountability in the pursuit of change?

) [Name]  
) [Name]  
) [Name]

How<sup>3</sup> have you sought to hide the presence or growth of these sins?

[Type summary of response and ask church member to confirm that you've represented him/her accurately]

Who<sup>4</sup> have you lied to or hidden from during the growth of your sin?

[Type summary of response and ask church member to confirm that you've represented him/her accurately]

- I. **Stage One: Individual Confrontation** – When one believer sees another believer living in sin it is their duty to lovingly and humbly bring this concern to the attention of their friend. Even if done imperfectly, who has raised concerns about this area of sin? Do you believe these individuals are willing to be a part of your restoration process?

[Type summary of response and ask church member to confirm that you've represented him/her accurately]

How did these conversations go? What repentance occurred? What tangible effort at change followed?

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<sup>1</sup> This section is intended to gather the initial response to the validity of the concerns being raised. It is not uncommon for the denial-admission of the presence / severity of the concern to vacillate during the church discipline process. We record this response not to “trap” you in your words, but to help you see the significance of being accurate and consistent in what you acknowledge during this process.

<sup>2</sup> In the “Pre-Stage One” and “Stage One” sections you are gathering history of things that have already transpired. The purpose of this history gathering is three-fold:

- A. *To alert the member under discipline of how the church has already sought to care for them.* Often people think if a pastor is not involved, the church hasn't been present. We want to protect the member under discipline from passivity towards changing their sin pattern because of resentment over the church's non-involvement.
- B. *To clarify how the member may be distorting the loving actions of other members as intrusive.* The opposite response to “A” is belief that loving confrontations were “uncalled for.” If present, we want to warn the church member against the distraction this misguided resentment often becomes.
- C. *To identify church members who need to be encouraged or instructed.* It may be that church members who confronted earlier did so with less skill or compassion than they should have. We, as elders, want to know this so we can help them become more effective at caring for their fellow believers.

<sup>3</sup> Being honest about your pattern of sin and hiding sin reveals essential information for the development of an effective plan for rooting out that sin from your life. This information is helpful in devising the pastoral care plan that will follow.

<sup>4</sup> These are individuals to whom, during the restoration process, you will need to confess not only the area(s) of concern above, but also your lies that prevented them from being the brothers and sisters in Christ they desired to be.

[Type summary of response and ask church member to confirm that you've represented him/her accurately]

Have you made yourself known to other believers well enough to avail yourself of "one another" level care?

[Type summary of response and ask church member to confirm that you've represented him/her accurately]

What were the biggest factors in your sin continuing to grow past the point of initial confrontation?<sup>5</sup>

[Type summary of response and ask church member to confirm that you've represented him/her accurately]

\*\*\* This section – "Stage Two" – marks a new focus in this document. Everything before this point has been gathering history (past tense focus). In this section, we begin to assess the current situation (present tense focus) and devise a plan (future tense focus) with which you can begin to actively fight against your sin (primary responsibility) and your church can come alongside you (supportive responsibility) in that effort. \*\*\*

2. **Stage Two: Collective Confrontation** – Reviewing this document with an elder is evidence that you are, at least potentially, at this stage of church discipline. We want you to know that this is called a "church" discipline process for a reason; it involves the church. In the plan that we will develop with (not for) you in the pages that follow, we will be involving more than the elder team because *your restoration* should be worked out in *your community*.
  - ) The next pages of this document walk through the steps of creating a restoration plan. But before beginning that process, we will complete our walk through Matthew 18.
  - ) If stage two is deemed necessary, then the elder body at your campus in addition to those listed as having roles on the restoration team will be made aware of your need for prayer and restorative care.
3. **Stage Three: Church-Wide Confrontation** – You need to understand that if you are unwilling to profess your need for the gospel and actively engage in removing these sins we will – as an act of love – call on the larger church (your campus) to relate to you as your life indicates that God sees you; that is, as an unsaved individual whom God loves but is not a part of his covenant family – a non-Christian.

This is not what we desire, but your response to the first stage of God's protection (either by resistance, passivity, or hiding your sin) leads us to believe it is appropriate to warn you of the implication of continued persistence in your sin.

## Restoration Plan

The more disrupted our life becomes, the more intentionality we must bring to restoring order. This principle is true whether the life disruption is caused by sin, folly, or suffering. That is the purpose of this document and the process it facilitates. *We want to partner with you to bring a high level of intentionality to your restoration process.*

However, if this is going to be effective, it must be *your plan*. We are coming alongside of you to make your plan a better plan and to ensure that key people, sins, or effects of sin are not neglected. If you are sincere in your desire to follow Christ and to be free from the sin(s) that led to this conversation, we want to rally the Body of Christ to walk alongside you to victory.

We know the deceptiveness of sin. We are not immune to it. Scripture warns that we are all prone to be double-minded (James 1:7); wanting to change and not wanting to change.

That is why we say - if you are not committed to walking in repentance and faith, we want your lack of commitment to the things that freedom from sin would require *to be obvious to you as a warning*.

As sinners, we are all prone to deceive ourselves when our heart is divided, make our situation worse, hurt more people that we love, and use the sense of being overwhelmed as an excuse to give up or blame others. We don't want that for you.

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<sup>5</sup> A key mark of repentance at this stage is the ability to talk about the earlier stages of your sin without blame-shifting or minimization. Again, we ask for this information to be more effective in restoration; not increase a sense of shame.

Warning: An unwillingness to be honest and cooperative with this process is a sign that you are more committed to preserving your sin than honoring Christ. Yes, this is hard statement to hear. But continuing to deny or avoid your sin in isolation from the church with which you have covenanted is not an option.

## **PART ONE: ACCURATELY DEFINING THE PROBLEM, ITS DEVELOPMENT, & ITS IMPACT**

**Concretely define the history, growth, and current expressions of your sin.**

*\* You will never be more free from sin than you are honest about sin.*

- ) [the elder overseeing the discipline process would make notes here]
- ) [this would be a more in-depth version of the pre-stage one and stage one responses]
- ) [as you gain history throughout the discipline process update this section accordingly]
- ) [this will ensure the restoration team is on the same page and not being divided by getting different versions of events]
- ) Date: [note the date when new information is added after the initial conversation]

**List the people affected by your sin and describe the effects.**

*\* Self-centered thinking leads us into sin; other-minded thinking leads us away from sin.*

- ) [minimization or blame-shifting at this stage is a red flag that the individual has a low level of commitment to change]
- ) [this list makes sure that we are also caring for others who have been affected by this person's sin]

**Resources for Defining the Problem and Assessing Motivation:**

These resources are drawn from subject-specific seminars (mainly addiction-related), but the underlying principles are relevant to any pattern of immoral behavior that has (a) become deeply ingrained, (b) relies on secrecy, and (c) is resistant to change in spite of its destructive effects.

- ) [5 Levels of Motivation for Change](#)
- ) [10 Ways to Lie About Addiction](#)
- ) [Examining the Impact of Your Addiction on Others](#)

**List the key changes that need to occur in order to evidence fruit in keeping with repentance (Matt. 3:8).**

- ) [if motivation is low (section above), then these practical steps will likely be sabotaged]
- ) [this should be a list of the way this person's life would be different when they are loving God and loving others well]
- ) [this section helps inform the questions the accountability team will ask and who will serve on that team]
- ) [include spiritual discipline practices that are important to give change deep spiritual roots]
- ) [include life practices – adequate sleep, time with family, etc. – which would make change sustainable]

## **PART TWO: INVOLVING THE RIGHT PEOPLE IN A WISE PROCESS**

We are going to ask several people to be a part of your restoration team. We are going to ask your permission to share this document with each person on that restoration team, so that each person knows what their role is (and is not) and who is filling the other roles.

*\* As the elder overseeing your church discipline, while I may serve other roles, my primary role is overseeing and holding you accountable to enacting the plan that we are creating together.*

### **Accountability**

Remember, you do not *have accountability* (passive mindset); you *make yourself accountable* (active mindset). **No one who is caring for you should have to ask “the right question” to get needed information.**

The less you volunteer the relevant information, the more invasive you will feel like your care team is being and the more “unfair” or “silly” you will feel the entire process to be.

Each member of your care team is voluntarily serving you out of their love for you and Christ. Honor their service by cooperating in such a way that their service produces the fruit of a changed life they are praying God will give you.

**Assessment of Accountability:** If you were honest with the people above about the questions listed, would there be key areas of change (areas of sin or times of temptation) that would be neglected? If so, what? Update your plan (list of key changes and people involved) accordingly.

**Resources on Accountability:**

- ) [7 Marks of Enduring Accountability Relationships](#)
- ) [5 Questions I Wished My Accountability Partner Would Ask Me](#)
- ) [10 Keys to Ensure Caring is Helping](#)

To Whom	When / Where / Frequency	About What	Contact Information
<i>List the names of people with whom you will commit to being honest with about your change process.</i>	<i>Identify when, where, and how frequently you will meet with each person.<sup>6</sup></i>	<i>What are the specific questions and areas of life about which these people should ask?</i>	<i>The elder overseeing your restoration plan should receive updates at least monthly until formal restoration concludes.<sup>7</sup></i>
Bill	Weekly at small group	1. Have you given or received any contact from you adultery partner? 2. What progress have you made in the False Love study? 3. Did you attend G4 this week?	bill@gmail.com
Sam	Christian friend at work	1. How do you need to invest in or care for your family tonight? 2. Are you going home with an attitude of dread, anger, or service?	sam@yahoo.com

**Counseling**

If formal counseling is a necessary component or beneficial compliment to the involvement of pastors and Christians friends, we want to make sure that everyone on your care team is pulling in the same direction. While we will each be playing different roles, it is important that we have the same ultimate goals.

For this reason, if counseling is part of your restoration plan, we would ask you to do or want you to understand the following:

- ) At your first/next session, ask your counselor to **create a release of information** that will allow him/her to speak with the elder overseeing your church discipline process.
- ) When you go, **take the current draft copy of this restoration plan** to your counselor. We will want the counselor's input, both on the plan as a whole and the unique role he/she is able to play in the restoration process.
- ) An initial conversation will be had between the elder and counselor to review the restoration plan, define the counselor's role, and decide on how / how often input on progress will be reported from the counselor to the elder.

<sup>6</sup> It is better if (a) most of these people are in your natural rhythms of life (to limit excuses for not being accountable) and (b) represent the various spheres of your life in which sin festered.

<sup>7</sup> These updates, which are likely to come to the elder via e-mail before each elder-oversight meeting, should cover:

- ) Faithfulness: How faithful have you been in prioritizing these conversations?
- ) Investment: What level of personal investment have they seen in your engagement with the restoration process?
- ) Progress: From their sphere of interaction with you, what progress have they seen?
- ) New Concerns: Have any new concerns come to light that merit attention?

- ) Please understand, when counseling occurs as part of church discipline, *the counselor's role is not "to advocate for you" (like an attorney seeking a plea bargain) but to assist you towards the character goals set forth in the restoration plan and provide a more objective-experienced voice to the elders about the emotional-relational-addictive obstacles that may be impairing progress.*

**Resources on Counseling:**

- ) [What is the difference between meeting with a Summit campus pastor and a member of the counseling team?](#)
- ) [What is the relationship between Bridgehaven and Summit?](#)
- ) [How do I know if my life struggle merits counseling?](#)
- ) [What can I do to place myself in the best position to benefit from counseling?](#)
- ) [How do I find a good match in a counselor for my needs?](#)

**Legal, Medical, or Clinical Advisement**

We want to be holistic in our care. Our elders do not claim to have legal, medical, clinical, or other comparable professional expertise in areas that may be relevant to your care. We welcome input from these professions and may recommend that you seek their assistance in areas we are uncertain.

If you believe factors in these areas are relevant to your situation, we would ask that you grant permission for these individuals to consult with us. If you are unwilling to do so, we will provide the best pastoral care we can based upon the verifiable information we can obtain and adequately understand.

Please realize it is hypocritical to expect information to change your restoration plan that you will not allow the elder overseeing your discipline process to have access to. To say "trust me" about something that has been hidden for an extended period of time is to invite your church to return to being part of the problem instead of the solution.

**Please sign to indicate the following:**

I recognize that according to [Article IX of The Summit Church's bylaws](#) when I became a member of The Summit Church I was accepting the right of The Summit Church to involve its members in disciplinary processes.

I have reviewed the notes added within the above document. I understand that the information shared and/or learned through this process may not be held in confidence, and I specifically agree to allow this information to be shared with each member of my restoration team.

I also agree to allow the members of my restoration team to share with the church elders any information from my communications (or lack thereof) that is helpful for my restoration plan or church discipline process.

I agree to allow the elder overseeing my care team to give and receive information with any counselor, pastor-elder from another church, law enforcement officer, medical professional, attorney, or other professional involved in matters relevant to my church discipline process.

In the event that church discipline does not conclude with restoration and I decide to join another church, I agree to allow the most up-to-date version of my church discipline case file to be shared with the pastor/elders of the church at which I seek membership in order to allow that pastor/elder team to discern whether I can be a member in good standing with their church and what, if any, restorative care needs remain.

\_\_\_\_\_ Sign \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
*Church Member Under Discipline (Print)*

\_\_\_\_\_ Sign \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
*Summit Elder Overseeing Restoration Plan*

### **PART THREE: TRACKING FOLLOW THROUGH & TANGIBLE MARKERS OF PROGRESS**

The chart on the next page is meant to help the elder overseeing this church discipline case to ensure that the necessary follow through – by the person under discipline and their restoration team – is occurring.

The elder should:

- ) Have an up-to-date hard or soft copy of this entire document (not just progress chart) securely stored
- ) Update this progress chart as needed at each oversight meeting
- ) Communicate any significant progress, regression, or role changes to the restoration team and campus elder team

# Church Discipline Oversight Meeting Progress Notes

Restoration Plan For: [Name]

Elder Overseeing Restoration Plan: [Name]

**List: Key changes to be made**

- ) One
- ) Two
- ) Three
- ) Etc...

**List: Members of care team**

- ) Name (role / type of relationship)
- ) Name (role / type of relationship)
- ) Name (role / type of relationship)
- ) Name (role / type of relationship)

**Restoration Team Member:**

[Name]

**Summary of Role and Key Questions to Ask:** *What is it that the church is asking this restoration team member to do?*

- ) Describe (frequency)
- ) Describe (frequency)

**Verification of Follow Up:** *Set the interval to receive feedback so you and team member are mutually aware (check one and update check-in chart accordingly)*

- Weekly
  Bi-Monthly
  Monthly

Date	Date	Date	Date	Date	Date	Date	Date	Date	Date
Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No

**New Information:** *Update as needed after each interaction with this restoration team member*

- ) Date:
  - positive or negative feedback, new struggle, or key observation
  - positive or negative feedback, new struggle, or key observation
- ) Date:
  - positive or negative feedback, new struggle, or key observation
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**Restoration Team Member:**

[Name]

**Summary of Role and Key Questions to Ask:** *What is it that the church is asking this restoration team member to do?*

- ) Describe (frequency)
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**Verification of Follow Up:** *Set the interval to receive feedback so you and team member are mutually aware (check one and update check-in chart accordingly)*

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- Bi-Monthly
- Monthly

Date	Date	Date	Date	Date	Date	Date	Date	Date	Date
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**Restoration Team Member:**

[Name]

**Summary of Role and Key Questions to Ask:** *What is it that the church is asking this restoration team member to do?*

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**Restoration Team Member:**

**[Name]**

**Summary of Role and Key Questions to Ask:** *What is it that the church is asking this restoration team member to do?*

- ) Describe (frequency)
- ) Describe (frequency)

**Verification of Follow Up:** *Set the interval to receive feedback so you and team member are mutually aware (check one and update check-in chart accordingly)*

- o Weekly
- o Bi-Monthly
- o Monthly

Date	Date	Date	Date	Date	Date	Date	Date	Date	Date
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