

What is Gospel Community?

a path to covenant membership

A nine-session class on the foundations
of our faith and life together

Brought to you by
Glory of Christ Fellowship
Elk River, Minnesota, USA

www.gcfmn.org

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Session One

Introduction: The Good News of Jesus Christ

Welcome to “What is Gospel Community? A Path to Church Membership”! At Glory of Christ Fellowship (GCF), we believe wholeheartedly in the concept of covenant membership. However, we don't think about it like membership at a gym or a civic club, rather, we think about it in more biblical terms. As the Apostle Paul wrote,

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but of many...Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it (1 Corinthians 12:12-14, 27).

Therefore, Christians are covenant members of a local church in the same way that hands and ears and feet are members of a particular body. Members of a church are intimately connected to, and profoundly committed to, all of the other members of the body because in Christ they are one. Covenant membership makes visible the fact that we are members of Christ and his body.

Over the next nine weeks, we will press more deeply into these things together. We will talk about (1) the gospel, that is, the good news of Jesus Christ, (2) how the gospel creates gospel community and preserves healthy individuality, (3) how the glory of God is displayed in the life of the church, (4) the history of the church, (5) the mission, vision, and values of GCF, (6) the strategy of GCF, (7) the Holy Spirit and the life of the church, (8) truth and the life of the church, and (9) the path to covenant membership at GCF.

With this in mind, let's take a few minutes and get to know each other a little better.

1. Personal Introductions
 - a. What is your name?
 - b. Where are you from?
 - c. What is your religious background?
 - d. What brought you to Glory of Christ?

2. The Story (see handout provided in class)
 - a. The Creation
 - b. The Fall
 - c. The Rescue
 - d. The Restoration
 - e. The Response

Session Two

The Gospel and Gospel Community

In the last session we talked about the gospel: what it is and how it relates to our lives. In this session we will see that when Jesus saves a person, his vision is to bind them together with other Christians. Therefore, the main point of this session is that the gospel creates gospel community. Let's begin by considering the three major biblical metaphors for the church, after which we will consider how the Bible uses certain words to communicate Jesus' vision for his church.

1. Three biblical metaphors for the church

a. The church is the temple of the Holy Spirit

"Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple" (1 Corinthians 3:16-17).

"Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

"What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, 'I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people'" (2 Corinthians 6:16).

"So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit" (Ephesians 2:19-22).

"And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb" (Revelation 21:22).

b. The church is the body of Christ

"For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another" (Romans 12:4-5).

"Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Corinthians 10:17).

1 Corinthians 12:1-31 (please turn there in your Bibles).

"And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all" (Ephesians 1:22-23).

“This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel” (Ephesians 3:6).

“I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift. Therefore it says, ‘When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.’ (In saying, ‘He ascended,’ what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth?) 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, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love” (Ephesians 4:1-16).

“For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior...For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church” (Ephesians 5:23, 29-30).

“And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross” (Colossians 1:18-20).

“Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God” (Colossians 2:18-19).

“And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful” (Colossians 3:15).

c. The church is the bride of Christ

“This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband” (Ephesians 5:32-33).

“After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying out, ‘Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for his judgments are true and just; for he has judged the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality, and has avenged on her the blood of his servants.’ Once more they cried out, ‘Hallelujah! The smoke from

her goes up forever and ever.' And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who was seated on the throne, saying, 'Amen. Hallelujah!' And from the throne came a voice saying, 'Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, small and great.' Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, 'Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure'—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. And the angel said to me, 'Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.' And he said to me, 'These are the true words of God'" (Revelation 19:1-9).

"And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband...Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me, saying, 'Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb'" (Revelation 21:2, 9).

"The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come.' And let the one who hears say, 'Come.' And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price" (Revelation 22:17).

2. The "One Another" and You-All" Language

- a. What follows is a sample of the "one another" passages in the New Testament. As you read them, ask yourself, "What do these passages imply about Jesus' vision for the life of the church?"

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35).

"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:12).

"Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor (Romans 12:10).

"Live in harmony with one another" (Romans 12:16).

"Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother" (Romans 14:13).

"May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God" (Romans 15:5-7).

"I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another" (Rom 15:14).

"Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you" (Romans 16:16).

"But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together" (1 Corinthians 12:24-26).

"Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you" (2 Corinthians 13:11).

"For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another" (Galatians 5:13).

"I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love..." (Ephesians 4:1-2).

"Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another" (Ephesians 4:25).

"Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you" (Ephesians 4:32).

"And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Ephesians 5:18-21).

"Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive" (Colossians 3:12-13).

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God" (Colossians 3:16).

"Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing" (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

"See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone" (1 Thessalonians 5:15).

"But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin" (Hebrews 3:13).

"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).

"Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law.

But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge" (James 4:11).

"Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door" (James 5:9).

"Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working" (James 5:16).

"Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace..." (1 Peter 4:8-10).

"Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble'" (1 Peter 5:5).

"Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us" (1 John 4:11-12).

- b. In addition to the "one another" passages, the New Testament persistently uses the plural form of the word "you" when addressing the church. This implies that Jesus' vision for the church is more about the community than the individual. Consider, for example, Paul's words in Ephesians 4:1-6.

"I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you [all] to walk [plural verb] in a manner worthy of the calling to which you [all] have been called [plural verb], with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing [plural verb] with one another in love, eager [plural verb] to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you [all] were called [plural verb] to the one hope that belongs to your [plural] call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift."

3. Conclusion: we are the body of Christ and individually members of it (1 Corinthians 12:27)

- a. The gospel creates gospel community. The church is not a collection of individuals who are only more or less related to one another. Rather, the church is the temple of the Holy Spirit, the body of Christ, and the Bride of Christ. We are intimately and profoundly related to one another, and the purpose and promise of Christ is to unite us together in him for his glory and our joy. Indeed, life in Christ is life together.
- b. Paul summed up the matter well in 1 Corinthians 12:27 when he wrote, "Now you [all] are the body of Christ and individually members of it." As individuals we do not melt into the community of the church, and yet we find our purpose in the context of that community.

Session Three

The Glory of God Displayed in the Life of the Church

In the first two sessions we have discussed the gospel and how the gospel creates gospel community. In this session we will consider Jesus' design for the church and how that design displays the glory of God in the world. Let's begin by looking at Ephesians 4:1-16.

1. Gospel community and church leadership

"I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it says, 'When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.' (In saying, 'He ascended,' what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth?) 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, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love" (Ephesians 4:1-16).

- a. As Christians, we are one in Christ and we are equal in standing before Christ. We share "one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father who is over all and through all and in all." Therefore, we should strive to protect the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.
- b. However, Christ has given gifts to each Christian according to the measure of his grace, and he has placed some in authority over others. This authority does not make certain people better than the rest, rather, it is granted so that they might serve the rest and help bring them into the fullness of their own giftedness in Christ.
- c. This passage specifically mentions four "offices" that exist in the life of the church, and 1 Timothy 3:8-13 adds one more. Let's look at each of them in turn.
 - Apostles: We believe that this office is restricted to the twelve apostles listed in Matthew 10:2-4 (minus Judas, plus Paul). We believe that their authority continues to guide the church through the writings of the New Testament which represent the teaching of the Apostles and which were either written by an Apostle or one closely related to an Apostle (see Ephesians 2:19-20).
 - Prophets: We believe that this office still exists today but that the teachings of modern prophets will not, and cannot, add to the teaching of Christ through his person and the Word (see Hebrews 1:1-4). We believe therefore

that God uses modern prophets to interpret the teaching of the Bible for the life of the church. People like John Piper, R. C. Sproul, and Tim Keller, though they are primarily Pastor-Teachers, also function as prophets, for the Lord has given them a platform by which to speak to the broader church around the world.

- Evangelists: While all Christians are called to overflow into the world with the love of Christ, some have been given a special gift of evangelism which is primarily displayed through their fruitfulness in winning people to Christ. Prominent examples of modern evangelists are Billy Graham, Greg Laurie, and Matt Chandler.
- Pastor-Teachers: Though Ephesians uses the words “pastor” and “teachers,” the construction of this sentence in the Greek New Testament makes clear that we are to understand this as one office: Pastor-Teacher. One way to think of it is that “pastor” is the title of the office and “teacher” is the function of the office. Pastor-teachers are the primary leaders of the local church. They may be paid or unpaid, but in either case they are equal with one another in authority. They are not priests but servants of the Lord and his church who are called to equip the church by teaching the Bible.
- Deacons: This office is described in 1 Timothy 3:8-13. Deacons serve God and the church under the authority of the Pastor-Teachers and fulfill both pastoral and practical functions. That is, they may lead ministries that directly serve people or ministries that help advance the mission, vision, and ministries of the church.
- Each of these offices, and all of them together, exist to equip the people of the church for the work of the ministry, so that as each person plays his or her part, the church grows into the fullness Christ. This vision displays that Jesus’ vision for his church is that we be built into one temple, one body, and one bride. We are the body of Christ and individually members of it (1 Corinthians 12:27).

2. Gospel community and church membership

So far we have seen that the gospel creates gospel community, and that gospel community is organized in a certain way according to the will and wisdom of Jesus. Now let’s briefly consider the purpose of covenant membership in a church.

- a. Covenant Membership, though called different things by different churches, simply formalizes the gospel community that is created by Christ. At Glory of Christ we call it “Covenant Membership” because our commitment to one another is based on the “covenant” God has made with us in Christ. This commitment...
 - Makes our union with Christ visible.
 - Makes our union with one another visible.
 - Makes clear the call to leadership and submission in the life of the church.
 - Makes clear to the Pastor-Teachers who they are called to shepherd.

b. Why then should Christians join a church?

- For the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31—worship).
- For the good of other believers (community).
- For the salvation of non-Christians (mission-evangelism).
- For the blessing of the nations (mission-mercy).
- For the good of our own souls. The Lord prospers and nourishes us when we walk in obedience to his will and ways.

3. Gospel community and church structure

See the handout entitled "Organization Chart"

4. Gospel Community and the Glory of God

"This mystery [of the gospel] is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him. So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory" (Ephesians 3:6-13).

- a. Gospel community displays the glory of God because it shows that God keeps his promises through Jesus Christ (see especially Genesis 12:1-3).
- b. Gospel community displays the glory of God because it demonstrates "the working of his power" among his people and therefore manifests "the unsearchable riches of Christ" for all to see.
- c. Gospel community displays the glory of God because through it the wisdom of God is made known in heaven and on earth.
- d. Gospel community displays the glory of God because it fulfills, in part, the eternal purposes of God.

A Brief History of the Church

In the first three sessions we have discussed the gospel, how the gospel creates gospel community, and how covenant membership formalizes this truth and displays the glory of God. In this session we will take a brief look at church history so that we can see where Christians have come from and where we're going. First, let's talk about an important question: why should we care about church history?

- Church history, and to a lesser extent general history, reveals the glory and purposes of God.
- Church history provides perspective on our lives and times.
- Church history affords us wisdom for living in the present times.
- Church history prospers our faith as we see the hand of God at work in the world.
- Church history should matter to us because it matters to God (the Old Testament, the four Gospels, and the book of Acts set a precedent that others have followed, and that we should follow as well).

1. Jesus to Constantine

- a. The book of Acts provides us with the earliest history of the church, and the theme of the book is that the purposes of God in Christ cannot be stopped. Acts tells us stories of attacks that came from outside the church, and problems that rose up from inside the church, but with each story there is an affirmation that the good news of Jesus Christ kept progressing by the power of the Holy Spirit.

In fact, here's how the book ends: "He [Paul] lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance" (28:30-31). This is the theme that reverberates throughout history: the purposes of God in Christ cannot be stopped!

- b. Alexander the Great: In the fourth century B.C., this Greek political and military leader conquered most of the known world. Because of his exploits, three things transpired that set up the spread of Christianity in the first century A.D.
 - Under Greek, and later Roman rule, there was relative peace among the nations of the world. There were always skirmishes and even wars here and there, but Greece and then Rome maintained control over these kinds of skirmishes, creating relative peace in the world.
 - Alexander invented several ways of securing the lands he conquered, and the Romans followed suit. They also built good roads and other infrastructure that are necessary for travel. This may seem like a small thing to us, but in the ancient world it was revolutionary. People could now travel to far distant lands in relative safety. In the days of Jesus and the Apostles, this was called the *Pax Romana*, or the Peace of Rome.

- Alexander succeeded in making common Greek the trade language of the world. This meant that when the disciples of Jesus traveled to far distant lands, they could speak in Greek and some would be able to understand them. Further, it meant that, since the Old and New Testaments were available in Greek, people throughout the world could read the Bible, understand the gospel, and believe in Jesus Christ.
 - God used Alexander to accomplish his purposes in Christ!
- c. In the book of Acts, we read the story of a persecution that broke out against the church. This caused lovers of Jesus Christ to spread in every direction and preach the gospel as they went. In this way, the church grew and prospered throughout the world, although they endured much difficulty and suffering along the way. Between the first and the fourth centuries, the church in fact experienced some periods of intense persecution, but the purposes of God in Christ went forward nonetheless. As Tertullian, the second and third century pastor and leader, once said, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church." In other words, when the world tries to kill those who preach the gospel, the gospel spreads all the more.

2. Constantine to Luther

- a. In the fourth century, as the church continued to grow in numbers (though not in earthly power), the Emperor of Rome, Constantine, believed in Jesus Christ and devoted his life to him. At this time, Christianity was illegal, not because Christians believed in Jesus or even because they promoted Jesus, but because they denied the "gods" of other peoples. Having become a Christian, Constantine made Christianity legal and otherwise worked hard to prosper it in every corner of his vast kingdom.
- b. One of Constantine's successors, Emperor Theodosius, made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire and even submitted his political power to the church. At one level, this sounds like very good news because it meant that Christianity, which was founded by an unknown Rabbi in an obscure corner of the world, was now on top of the world—literally in control of the greatest power in the world. And indeed, Christianity spread like wildfire in these days, sometimes by political coercion but often times by the authentic preaching of the message of Christ.
- c. At another level, though, the decrees of Theodosius were very bad news because it meant that political and religious power was now married through the church. From the fourth century to the sixteenth century, there were many people in many parts of the world who loved Jesus and served him and sought to spread his fame. But at a grand level the story of this part of history is that the church became very corrupt. This leads us to Martin Luther and the Reformation.

3. The Reformation

- a. No matter what the rising difficulties in the church, the purposes of God in Christ cannot be stopped. Therefore, in the early sixteenth century, a Catholic Monk named Martin Luther became convinced that the teaching and practice of the church were unacceptably corrupt. He thus sought to confront the church regarding these issues by writing 95 Theses and debating them publically. We don't have the time to go into the details of what happened, but Luther's words set off a fire storm of controversy that ended up splitting the Roman Catholic Church in two: Catholic and Protestant (the word "Protestant" refers to those who were

“protesting” against the church). The fact of the matter is that many smaller “reformations” took place throughout the history of the church, but at this time God saw fit to allow for a revolutionary reformation for his glory and the good of the nations.

- b. While there were serious political implications of this split, and wars that followed, the heart of the Reformation can be summarized by “The Five Solas” (“sola” means “alone”): the Word of God alone, by faith alone, through grace alone, through Christ alone, to the glory of God alone. The design of these five statements was to foster an appropriate division between the church and the state, to rid the church of political powers that sought to control her message and method, and to reinstate the basic truths of the gospel to the center of Christianity.
- c. Although Protestants divided into many branches after the initial split with the Catholic Church, they were for the most part agreed on these vital points of truth. Because of the Reformation, the preaching of the Word of God spread in every direction and is indeed filling the earth to this day. In a very real sense, the Reformation is alive and well today because the biblical issues involved in it are still being debated and the church around the world is still in need of reform: Glory of Christ Fellowship is in need of reform.
- d. But despite the on-going problems in the church, the most important thing for us to understand is this: God is in total control of history and his purposes in Christ cannot be stopped.

4. The Baptists

- a. Glory of Christ Fellowship is affiliated with the Baptist General Conference (formerly Swedish Baptists and now called Converge Worldwide). The banner we wave is not that of “Baptist” but that of the glory of God in Christ (2 Cor. 4:1-6). Our supreme allegiance is to Jesus Christ and his kingdom, which we believe is made up of more than Baptists. Having said that, we have chosen to affiliate with the Baptists for a number of reasons that are outlined in our brochure entitled, “Why We Are Baptist.”
- b. Briefly, Baptists arose and came to prominence in the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries. In contrast with other Protestant groups, they believed that baptism was to be reserved for those who professed faith in Christ. They therefore rejected the historic practice of baptizing children, along with several other key practices, and for this they paid a very high price.

5. Modern Church History

- a. As the message of the gospel spread throughout the earth, America eventually replaced Europe as the global center of Christianity. There was a fire for Jesus in the hearts of Americans that was unique in the world, and therefore they trained many leaders, planted many churches around the country, sent many missionaries around the world, established theological colleges and schools, and established hospitals, orphanages, and various kinds of relief agencies to minister to those in need.
- b. As the modern missions movement, centered in America, gained success in countries like South Korea, Nigeria, and Brazil, the global center of Christianity has shifted yet again from America to second and third world countries (better called “majority world countries”). While the USA is still the number one missions sending

country in the world, South Korea, Nigeria, and Brazil are not far behind. They are in fact sending many missionaries to our country!

- c. Whether this or that part of the world is at the center of the Christian movement is not nearly so important as this: the purposes of God in Christ cannot be stopped! God will see that the message of life in Christ reaches every corner of the earth so that some people from every tribe, tongue, and nation will be saved (Revelation 7:9-12).

6. The Current Evangelical Milieu

- a. In our day, the American church is made up of three major branches: Catholics, liberal Protestants, and conservative Protestants. Conservative Protestants are most often labeled “evangelicals” because of their desire to “evangelize” or share the good news of Jesus Christ with those who don't know Jesus.
- b. Glory of Christ Fellowship is a conservative evangelical church that seeks to exalt and promote the glory of Christ in the world. As such, we are passionately committed to preaching and teaching the Bible on its own terms, and to inspiring people to live lives of worship, community, and mission. While we are not ready to divide from those churches most often labeled “seeker churches” in our day, we are very concerned about the compromise of core biblical truths for the sake of church growth.

Therefore, we are deeply committed to sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with people who don't know him in our neighborhoods and among the nations, and we are deeply committed to the “Five Solas”: the Word of God alone, by faith alone, through grace alone, through Christ alone, to the glory of God alone.

Our Mission, Vision, and Values

In the first four sessions we have discussed the gospel, how the gospel creates gospel community, how covenant community formalizes this truth and displays the glory of God, and how God has prospered and protected his purposes in the history of the church. Today we're going to look at the history of Glory of Christ along with our mission, vision, and values.

1. A brief history of GCF and our affiliations

- a. The dream for this church was born in the heart of Mike Perry in November of 2000 who later found a visionary partner in Greg Chaffin. Together they submitted a church planting proposal to the Church Planting Committee of Bethlehem Baptist Church, and then met with the Committee in June of 2005.
- b. The Committee was hopeful about the possibilities, and thus in December of 2005 they appointed Pastor Charlie as the official liaison between the group and the Committee. In the course of Pastor Charlie's work with the group, the group asked him to consider being the Pastor and within a few weeks he said "yes." Thus, Bethlehem Baptist Church hired Pastor Charlie as their Church Planting Resident for one year and gave him the task of starting this new church. With the help of the staff at Bethlehem, Pastor Charlie was able to recruit Kevin Feder to be our Pastor for Family Discipleship, both of whom began serving the church full-time on August 1, 2007.
- c. The group met for some months at the Springfield's home in Rogers, and then moved over to the "barn" on Twin Lakes Road—thanks to Craig and Lisa Howse! In August of 2007 we secured office space in Rogers, and then later in Elk River, and in September of 2007 we began to conduct Sunday morning worship at the Handke Family Center in Elk River. We are currently in the process of raising money so that we can buy our own property someday.
- d. Glory of Christ Fellowship is a member of the Treasuring Christ Together Network and the Baptist General Conference, which is now called Converge Worldwide.

2. Our mission: to make disciples for the glory of Christ

- a. Please turn in your Bibles to Matthew 28:18-20. Since Jesus gave clear marching orders to his church, we feel that we must focus all of our efforts on making disciples.
- b. Disciples are those who believe in Jesus Christ as he is revealed in the Bible, who are learning to love him with all their heart and soul and mind and strength, and who are learning to love others as they love themselves. In other words, disciples are lovers of God and others who gain the power to love through Jesus Christ.
- c. Disciples are "made" in a most unusual way: God has chosen to send his disciples into the world to preach the good news of Jesus Christ to unbelievers and as they do, some will believe. Those who believe are to be baptized in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and they are to be taught to obey everything Jesus commanded in the context of Christian community. As they are taught these things and move toward full maturity in Christ, they are also to be sent

on mission with Christ and work with him to make yet more disciples. In this way the church grows up in love and perpetuates itself from generation to generation by the power of Christ and for the glory of Christ.

- d. This means that everything we do as a church must be laser focused on the task of making disciples. If a particular activity is rightly focused on this task, we fan it into flame until it reaches its full potential. If a particular activity is not rightly focused on this task, we either adjust or abandon it. If particular activities vital to the making of disciples are missing from the life of the church, we seek to begin new ministries and trust that the Lord will bless us as we walk in obedience to him.
 - e. If you choose to join Glory of Christ in covenant membership, we will expect you to play your part in this vital mission, whatever that part is.
3. Our vision: to be enthralled with the glory of Christ and so be transformed into the image of Christ

- a. As we engage in the mission to make disciples of all nations, we believe that Jesus Christ will cause his church to grow to full maturity for the glory of his name. In the words of the Apostle Paul, by his grace, God the Father made us alive together with Christ and raised us up with Christ and seated us in the heavenly places with Christ "so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:4-7). Or in the words of the Apostle Peter, Jesus created his church to be one people that we "may proclaim the excellencies of him who called [us] out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9-10).
- b. God did call us to himself through Jesus Christ for the joy of our souls but we are not the center of his design. Rather, the center of God's design is the exaltation of his own name as every living thing in heaven and on earth and under the earth sees the glory of what he's done in us through Christ. God is the blazing center and the ultimate end of the church and, therefore, our vision for glory of Christ is this:

We envision a people enthralled with the glory of Christ who are being transformed into the image of Christ. Our vision is that we, as a people, will grow up to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ for his glory and our joy.

4. Our values: the vision of Acts 2:42-47

- a. As we grow together as disciples of Jesus Christ, our desires and pursuits will slowly transform until they are one with Jesus' desires and pursuits. In other words, as we are shaped into the image of Christ, we will come to value what Christ values and then live our lives accordingly.
- b. To value a thing is to esteem it, or to acknowledge its intrinsic worth, and the lengths to which we go to have that thing display the value we place on it or see in it. For example, it is one thing to see a treasure in a field and acknowledge its value; it is quite another to go and sell everything you have that you might buy that field (Matt 13:44). Thus, as followers of Jesus Christ, the questions become, What would Jesus have us value? and, How far would he have us go to acquire these values?
 - In answer to the first question, we think that the primary thing Jesus would have us value is God himself. All of the blessings and benefits of knowing and walking with God are subservient to this one great treasure (see Romans 5:10; 7:4; Ephesians 2:14-16). The message of the cross of Christ is that God himself

is eminently valuable, and the hope of the cross of Christ is that, through his death, burial, and resurrection, we might be reconciled to God and have him as our highest treasure!

- Now for the second question: how far would Jesus have us go to acquire this treasure? The answer to this question is somewhat complicated because, on the one hand, he would have us give up everything, even our very lives, that we might acquire it (Luke 9:23-27; 14:33; Revelation 2:10).

But, on the other hand, the price for the treasure of God is immeasurably higher than our ability to pay, and so Jesus Christ paid that price for us on the cross. And the way we make his payment effective, thereby receiving God as our Father and treasure, is by confessing with our mouths that Jesus is Lord and believing in our hearts that God has raised him from the dead (Rom 10:9).

Then, as a visible display of the fact that Christ's payment has become effective for us, we joyfully deny ourselves, take up our crosses daily, and follow him. We joyfully die to our will and our ways that we might see and savor the wisdom of God. We joyfully die to lesser pleasures, like possessions and power and prestige and illicit sex, that we might indulge ourselves in the greater pleasures of the glory of God (Psalm 16:11). We joyfully open our mouths and "proclaim the excellencies of him who called [us] out of darkness into his marvelous light" even at the cost of our time, convenience, pride, relationships, possessions, and even our lives.

- c. We believe that Jesus would have us value God himself above all things and that the means of doing so is belief in Jesus expressed through joyful self-sacrifice. Practically speaking, we aim to help the people of Glory of Christ embrace this one all-encompassing value by teaching them to integrate three practical values into their lives:
 - *Worship*: To make disciples for the glory of Christ, we live lives of praise and obedience before God. When the glory of Christ is exalted in our eyes, the praise of Christ will be found in our lives. We will freely and gladly sing to his name and submit to his will and ways.
 - *Community*: To make disciples for the glory of Christ, we pursue Christian community. Jesus commanded us to love one another as he loved us, and then the apostles expanded on this command by providing us with a host of "one another" commands. For example, they teach us to encourage one another, to forgive one another, to teach and admonish one another, and to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ (John 13:34-35; 1 Thessalonians 5:11; Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:16; Ephesians 5:21).
 - *Mission*: To make disciples for the glory of Christ, we share the love of Christ locally and globally, baptizing new believers in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:18-20). Therefore, we always seek to grow in our passion and skill for personal evangelism, mercy ministry, and global missions.

Our Strategy: Worship, Community, and Mission

In the first four sessions we discussed the gospel, how the gospel creates gospel community, how covenant community formalizes this truth and displays the glory of God, and how God has prospered and protected his purposes in the history of the church. In the last session we looked at the history of Glory of Christ Fellowship along with our mission, vision, and values.

By way of reminder, our mission is to make disciples for the glory of Christ, and our vision is to be enthralled with Christ and so be transformed into the image of Christ. This mission and vision lead us to value God himself above all things, and thus to value three practical things in our daily lives: worship, community, and mission.

In this session we're going to look at GCF's strategy for making disciples, or put another way, we're going to look at our plan for implementing our values. At first glance, it may seem that our three-fold strategy is simply a restatement of our values. But by the end of this session we hope you will see that by engaging together in worship, community, and mission, we honor all of our values, we mature as disciples of Jesus, and we grow together into the image of Jesus.

1. Worship: praising God together

a. What is worship?

- In the Bible, the original words for "worship" mean "to bow down" and they are used in two ways. First, we are to bow before God in acts of worship. This includes physically bowing, but also things like singing, praying, and preaching. Second, we are to bow before God in acts of submission to his will. So we worship God in singing and submission, by praising his glory and prizing his will, by offering him our lips and our lives. Viewed in this way, we see that worship encompasses everything in our lives.
- Several years ago, the elders of Glory of Christ offered this vision for worship to the church: *the aim of worship is to exalt the glory of Christ in the eyes of his people that they might see, sing, seek, and submit to him.*

First, the foundation of all true worship is the sight of the glory of God in the face Christ. True worship emerges from a heart that has encountered the living God. Therefore, the calling of all involved in worship ministries is to exalt the glory of God in Christ as high as they can so that his people might enter into communion with him.

Second, the sight of the glory of God in the face of Christ naturally evokes expression to God. The gift of singing was given that we might give tangible release to the deepest feelings of our hearts, and when a heart beholds the glory of God in some measure it cannot help but sing to him. Therefore, one of the reasons we are called to exalt God in the sight of his people is to call forth heart-felt expression from them. In other words, the display of the glory of God is not intended to inspire us to analyze him but rather to praise him. The heart of a true worshiper is much more akin to that of a lover than a scholar.

Third, the purpose of such heart-felt expression is to inspire a heart after God. That is, as God's people catch sight of his glory and express their passion to him in song, they ought to want more of him. They ought to be inspired to re-think their way of life, to make more room for seeking the God they love. Therefore, our hope is not only to have good worship services but to inspire God's people to seek him with all of their hearts, all the days of their lives.

Fourth, seeking God should ultimately lead to submission to God. True worship inspires true worshipers to obey their Father's commands, and this is in fact the height of worship. Biblical texts like Isaiah 29:13, 58:1-14, and Amos 5:21-24 rebuke the people of Israel for going through the motions of worship while living lives of disobedience. It is possible, in some sense, to obey the commandments of God without expressing our praise to God but it is impossible to live lives of disobedience and please him in any way.

In summary, our desire for worship at Glory of Christ is not simply to provide moving experiences but to enter into a life-shaping encounter with God. Every worship event should seek to move every soul to seek hard after God and ultimately submit their lives to him for his glory and their joy.

b. How do we seek to live lives of worship at Glory of Christ?

- We sing, pray, and receive from the Lord through his Word and monthly communion on Sunday mornings—exaltation and encouragement.
- We sing, pray, and apply the Word of God to one another's lives in the context of Community Groups—exaltation and application.
- We encourage the families of our church, no matter what shape or size, to sing and submit to the Lord as part of their daily lives—exaltation and application.

c. How does living lives of worship advance the mission and vision of Glory of Christ?

- Living lives of worship advances the mission and vision of Glory of Christ because it causes us to grow together in heartfelt love for God and disciples are lovers of God.
- We were born again to worship and as we worship together we come to delight in God with God.

2. Community: doing life together

a. What is community?

- The biblical idea of community is expressed by the Greek word *koinonia*. *Koinonia* is rooted in the word "common" and therefore it means that all Christians have a commonness of life in Christ. Since each of us is one with Christ, by grace through faith, each of us is one with each other. Christians share in common the most profound and important things of life, and therefore we are inclined to share in the daily things of life (see Acts 2:42-47).
- We believe that God has designed the church to walk together toward full maturity in Christ that we might become one in Christ, and ultimately one with Christ. We do not believe that God desires, or blesses, "lone-ranger" Christianity. This implies that Christians must spend time with one another and

pursue one another and encourage one another and speak truth to one another and rebuke one another and put up with one another and forgive one another and serve one another and worship with one another and be on mission with one another.

- In short, we believe that Christians must learn to do life together by the power of Christ, for their growth in Christ, and for the glory of Christ.

b. How do we seek to walk in community at Glory of Christ?

- Glory of Christ is organized geographically into a number of Community Groups. These groups are led by a Pastor or deacon of the church (or someone who is on track to become one), and they are designed to facilitate significant life interaction for the sake of individual and corporate growth in Christ. (See www.gcfmn.org for details regarding our current Community Groups.)
- In addition to the Community Groups, Glory of Christ offers a number of men's and women's events that are designed to further facilitate the application of the gospel to daily life.
- In addition to these formal gatherings, the people of Glory of Christ spontaneously gather as the Lord leads them for the purpose of discipleship, service, and ministry.

c. How does a walking in community advance the mission and vision of Glory of Christ?

- Walking in community advances the mission and vision of Glory of Christ because Jesus' vision for our lives is that we would be deeply united to one another in him. Growing in Christ together is an integral part of discipleship.
- We were born again to delight in God with one another.

3. Mission: sharing Jesus together

a. What is mission?

- By "mission" we mean two main things: evangelism and mercy ministry. Evangelism refers to sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with those who do not believe in Jesus, in the hope that they might embrace him as their Lord and Savior. Mercy ministry refers to reaching out to the poor, the hungry, the disadvantaged, the prisoners, and those like them in the name of Jesus and for the glory of Jesus. Our motive in loving people is simply to love people with the love of Christ—in other words, we do not use practical acts of love as a "bait and switch" by which we can share the gospel and grow the church. Having said that, we are bold to proclaim that we love people in Jesus' name and for his glory.
- At Glory of Christ we see mission flowing out of the communion we share with God and one another. Just as Jesus Christ was sent into the world out of the overflow of his communion with the Father, so Jesus sends the church into the world out of the overflow of the communion we have with him and one another (John 17:1-26). In this way, worship and community propel us into mission that others might be enfolded into the love of God in Christ that we've come to know and cherish.

b. How do we seek to engage in mission together at Glory of Christ?

- Local missions: Glory of Christ is locally involved in personal evangelism, Community Group based outreach, Abba Pregnancy Resource Center, Community Action Elk River (CAER), and the Marie Sandvik Center of Minneapolis.
- Global missions: Glory of Christ currently supports the ministries of (1) Vijay Meesala who founded and leads Reach All Nations in central India; (2) Amos and Meredith Anderson who are church planting with World Venture in Albania; (3) Catherine Rivard who serves with Wycliffe Bible Translators in Papua New Guinea; (4) David and Carmen Gunderson who serve Somalis in the Twin Cities with Arrive Ministries; and (5) Ethan and Elysia Larson who serve the cause of the theological education around the world with Training Leaders International.

c. How do local and global missions advance the mission and vision of Glory of Christ?

- Engaging in mission advances the mission and vision of Glory of Christ because thereby we obey the words of Jesus from Matthew 25:40 and 28:18-20. "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me." And, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."
- We were born again to delight in seeking the lost with God.

In summary, Glory of Christ aims to make disciples by growing upward toward a life of worship, inward toward a life of community, and outward toward a life of mission—and we would love for you to join us in this adventure in Christ!

Session Seven

The Holy Spirit and the Life of the Church

Over the last two sessions we have looked at the mission, vision, values, and strategy of Glory of Christ. In this session we're going to look at the source of power we have for implementing these things in the life of the church: the Holy Spirit.

1. The Identity of the Holy Spirit
 - a. Although it is the greatest of mysteries, God has revealed himself to be one God who exists in three persons: God the Father, God the Son (Jesus Christ), and God the Holy Spirit. God is a "tri-unity," or as he is more often called, a "trinity." While the word "trinity" is not found in the Bible, it accurately describes what we learn about God in the Bible.
 - b. The Holy Spirit is, therefore, the third person of the trinity, and the one by whom God draws intimately close to his people. Let's look now at some of the roles that are fulfilled by the Holy Spirit in the life of the church.
2. The roles of the Holy Spirit
 - a. Drawing: the Holy Spirit and conversion
 - Early in his ministry, Jesus had a very important conversation with a leader of the Jews named Nicodemus—here's part of that conversation. "Jesus answered him, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.' Nicodemus said to him, 'How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?' Jesus answered, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, "You must be born again." The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit'" (John 3:3-8). In other words, spiritual birth is a work of the Holy Spirit and unless he moves upon the human heart it will never be born again. Eternal life begins with the drawing, regenerating work of the Holy Spirit.
 - A little later in his ministry, Jesus got into a dispute with some of the leading Jews over his teaching. "Jesus answered them, 'Do not grumble among yourselves. No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day'" (John 6:43-44). After explaining himself in more depth, even some of the disciples grumbled against Jesus and so he said to them, "'Do you take offense at this? Then what if you were to see the Son of Man [Jesus] ascending to where he was before? It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But there are some of you who do not believe.' (For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.) And he said, 'This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father'" (John 6:61-65).

- From this brief discussion, we learn that God the Father draws people to himself through the Son (Jesus Christ), by the power of the Holy Spirit. Since the church is made up of those who have believed in Jesus Christ alone for the eternal forgiveness of their sins, we can say that the process of building the church begins with the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of believers.

b. Sanctifying: the Holy Spirit and holiness

- Once the Holy Spirit draws us to the Father through the Son, he begins the process of making us holy as he is holy. This process is called "sanctification." In one sense, when we are saved, we are made perfectly holy in the sight of God, for when God looks upon us he sees Jesus. This is called "positional holiness." In another sense, God desires for our daily behavior to come into conformity with who we are in Christ. This is called "practical holiness." Both positional and practical holiness are the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts and lives, on the basis of the blood of Christ, according to the will of the Father.
- As the Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Thessalonica, "But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter" (2 Thessalonians 2:13-15).
- And as the Apostle Peter wrote to various churches, "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you" (1 Peter 1:1-2).

c. Unifying: the Holy Spirit and Christian community

- The purposes of God in Christ, worked in his people by the Holy Spirit, are communal and not individualistic purposes. As he causes each of us to be holy as he is holy, his desire and design is to build us into one temple, one body, and one Bride for his glory and our eternal joy. "In him [Christ] you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit" (Ephesians 2:22).
- Because this is so, Paul strongly urges us to pursue the things that the Spirit himself is pursuing: "I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph 4:1-3).
- And when maintaining the unity of the Spirit is hard—when we find ourselves in conflict with our brothers and sisters in Christ—Jesus has given us specific instructions about what we're supposed to do, by the power of the Holy Spirit. "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).

- Whether it is a joy or a difficulty, the growing unity of the church is a work of the Holy Spirit. It is an evidence that he is literally present in our midst. The knowledge of his presence should outweigh all the pain and difficulty that is involved at times in striving for unity with one another. As the Apostle Paul wrote, "For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:17-18).

d. Gifting: the Holy Spirit and the edification of the church

- One way that the Holy Spirit builds unity in the church is by granting various gifts to each member of the church and then calling them to use those gifts for the glory of his name and the common good. Consider, for instance, the words of Paul from 1 Corinthians 12:
- "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills" (1 Corinthians 12:4-11).
- Perhaps the best way to discover your spiritual gift(s) is to prayerfully engage in the life of the body, and then to pay careful attention (1) to the fruit you bear in various endeavors, (2) the feedback you receive from your brothers and sisters in Christ, and (3) the joy you have in using certain gifts. Whatever your gifts are, the most important thing to remember is that your gifts are a work of the Holy Spirit in your life that are designed for his glory and the common good.

e. Empowering: the Holy Spirit and the power for gospel community

- All the power we need to do all the will of God in the life of the church comes from the Holy Spirit. Consider the opening words of the book of Acts:
- "In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, 'you heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.' So when they had come together, they asked him, 'Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?' He said to them, 'It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my

witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.' And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight" (Acts 1:1-9).

- When the time was full, the Holy Spirit did in fact descend upon his church and give them power to witness to the truth and glory of Jesus through their preaching and through the kind of life they lived. "And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved" (Acts 2:42-47).

3. The joy of the Holy Spirit

- a. As we learn to live day by day in the conscious knowledge of the presence of the Holy Spirit, we are more and more filled with his joy. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law" (Galatians 5:22-23).
- b. One reason for the experience of joy in the Holy Spirit is that he is the guarantee from God that one day we will be in the visible presence of God forever. "In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory" (Ephesians 1:13-14). The present experience of the Holy Spirit is but a dim foretaste of the ever-increasing joy we will experience, without end and without measure, forever!

Truth and the Life of the Church

In the last session, we talked about the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church. In this session, we're going to talk about the equally important role of truth in the life of the church. Just as the Holy Spirit was responsible for the revelation of the truth about God through the Scripture (2 Peter 1:16-21), so he is responsible for the application of that truth to the life of the church. This is, in part, why Jesus called him "the Spirit of truth" (John 14:17). Let's begin by defining a couple of key terms.

1. What is "doctrine" or "theology"?

- a. In the context of the church, the words "doctrine" and "theology" are often used as synonyms for the word "truth." The word "doctrine" simply means "teaching," and the word "theology" is made up of two Greek words which together mean "words about God" or "teaching about God" or "the study of God." Here it is important to note that we do not study God as though he is a subject to be understood, but rather, we seek him as a person who is to be known, worshiped, loved, and adored.
- b. The first purpose of theology, then, is to know God that we might love him with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength. In order to love God in truth, we must know him in truth, and we come to know him in truth through the Bible by the ministry of the Holy Spirit.
- c. The second purpose of theology is to know the truth about ourselves, others, and human culture as God sees it so that we might love as God would have us love. Again, in order to love in truth, we must know the truth as God sees it.
- d. The third purpose of theology is to know the truth about all other things as God sees them, and the fourth purpose of theology is to do the will of God. In order to do the will of God, we must know and grasp the purposes and commands of God as they are revealed in the Bible.
- e. The fifth purpose of theology is to build up the church. This is why the Bible commands pastors to teach sound doctrine and rebuke those who oppose it (Titus 1:9), and why it refers to the church as "the pillar and buttress of truth" (1 Timothy 3:15). Understanding and applying truth is required in order to grow up into Christ together. As Paul wrote, "Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love" (Ephesians 4:15-16).

2. What is meant by "reformed theology"?

- a. Now that we've come to understand some basic truths about theology, we must further understand that different branches of theology have developed in the life of the church over the last twenty centuries. Glory of Christ embraces the branch most often known as "reformed theology."

- b. In one sense, reformed theology refers to the systems of truth that were developed by Martin Luther and others who broke from the Catholic Church during the sixteenth century. But in a narrower sense, reformed theology refers to the various streams of truth that have developed through the work, and influence, of John Calvin.
 - c. Glory of Christ identifies itself with the broad streams of teaching that have flowed from Calvin's work, not because we follow a man, but because we are persuaded that he, and others after him, accurately interpreted the Bible on most matters. Although we respect Calvin and others, our primary commitment is to the Word of God and we strive to follow where it leads.
 - d. If you want to learn more about the details of reformed theology, we recommend R. C. Sproul's helpful book, *What is Reformed Theology?* (This is also available in a DVD lecture format.)
3. What is the "membership affirmation of faith"?
- a. At Glory of Christ, we require all covenant members to affirm the doctrines taught in our Membership Affirmation of Faith. This document is broadly evangelical and helps define the foundation on which Christian unity, worship, fellowship, and mission are developed.
 - b. Let's now turn to the Appendix and read through this Affirmation together.
4. What is the "elder affirmation of faith"?
- a. In addition to the Member Affirmation of Faith, Glory of Christ also has an Elder Affirmation of Faith. We have adopted both documents because, as a person rises in leadership, it is important that they share more detailed theological agreement with the Elders and Deacons of the church. The Elder Affirmation of Faith is a much more detailed document and can be accessed on our website (www.gcfmn.org/vision-and-beliefs.php).
 - b. Although we think this document can help all the members of Glory of Christ grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ, we only require the Elders and Deacons to affirm the essence of it.

Session Nine

The Path to Covenant Membership

In the first eight sessions we have covered many topics and enjoyed many fruitful discussions. The Elders hope that this time together has helped you understand more about the glory of Christ, the value of his work in the church, and the call upon all believers to seriously commit themselves to Christ, to one another, and to his purposes. In this final session, we will talk about our church covenant, two other key documents, and the next steps for entering into covenant membership with us at Glory of Christ.

1. Our Church Covenant (see the Appendix)
2. Our key documents (see the Appendix)
 - a. Our Constitution and By-Laws
 - b. Our Relational Commitments
3. Next steps...
 - a. If after praying about this decision you do not feel compelled to pursue covenant membership at Glory of Christ, you are welcome to continue attending any of our services, classes, or special events. We do, however, require people to covenant with the church before serving the church in any significant way. Our conviction before the Lord is this: covenant before contribution. We hope that the teaching you've received in this class will help you understand why this conviction is so important to us.
 - b. If after praying about this decision you do feel compelled to pursue covenant membership at Glory of Christ, please inform one of the elders of your decision and he will work with you to schedule an in-home interview. In this interview, he will ask basic questions to ensure that you know Christ, to ensure that you understand our vision and expectations, and to ensure that we understand your needs and expectations as well.
 - c. If after the elder-interview, you still desire to enter into covenant membership and the elder is willing to recommend you to the church, he will bring your name before the other elders and then the members of the church in a regular member's meeting. The members will vote on your request for membership and if you receive a simple majority of votes, you will become a member of the church.
 - d. Whatever your decision, please let us know how the Lord is leading you. If we do not hear back from you after four weeks, we will contact you.

Key Documents

1. Our Membership Affirmation of Faith
2. Our Church Covenant
3. Our Constitution
4. Our By-Laws
5. Our Relational Commitments

GLORY OF CHRIST FELLOWSHIP

OUR MEMBER AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

At Glory of Christ Fellowship, we require all members to affirm the following theological statement. The purpose of this statement is to express the truths that a Christian must not deny, or preferably, would affirm. It is not meant to represent all that a Christian should believe, but rather to lay a general theological foundation upon which this church can unite "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, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes." (Ephesians 4:13-14).

I. THE TRINITY

We believe that there is one living and true God, eternally existing in three persons, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit; and that these are the same divine essence and are equal in every divine perfection, but that they have different roles. (Genesis 1:1, 26; John 1:1-3; Matthew 28:19; John 4:24; Romans 1:19-20; Ephesians 4:5-6)

II. GOD THE FATHER

We believe in God the Father, an infinite, personal spirit, perfect in holiness, wisdom, power and love. We believe that He concerns Himself mercifully in the affairs of men, that He hears and answers prayer, and that He saves from sin and death all who come to Him through Jesus Christ. (Luke 10:21-22; Matthew 23:9; John 3:16; 6:27; Romans 1:7; I Timothy 1:1-2; 2:5-6; I Peter 1:3; Revelation 1:6)

III. JESUS CHRIST

We believe in Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son, conceived by the Holy Spirit. We believe in His virgin birth, sinless life, miracles, and teachings. We believe in His substitutionary atoning death, bodily resurrection, ascension into heaven, perpetual intercession for His people, and personal visible return to earth. (Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-38; John 1:1; 20:28; Romans 9:5; 8:46; II Corinthians 5:21; I Peter 2:21-23; John 20:30-31; Matthew 20:28; Ephesians 1:4; Acts 1:11; Romans 5:6-8; 6:9-10; Hebrews 7:25; Hebrews 9:28; I Timothy 3:16)

IV. THE HOLY SPIRIT

We believe in the Holy Spirit sent into the world by God to glorify the Son of God. We believe that without his work no one would come to faith. We believe that His work in regeneration is not the result of water baptism or any outward ritual. We believe He indwells everyone who trusts in Christ, and helps them make progress in overcoming sin and in becoming more like Jesus Christ in thought, deed, and love for God the Father. (John 14:16-17,26; 15:26-27; John 16:9-14; Romans 8:9; I Corinthians 3:16; 6:19; Galatians 5:22-26)

V. THE WORD OF GOD

We believe that the Bible, consisting of the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments, is the infallible Word of God, verbally inspired by God, and without error in the original manuscripts. We believe that God's intentions, revealed in the Bible, are the supreme and final authority in testing all claims about what is true and what is right. In matters not addressed by the Bible, what is true and right is assessed by criteria consistent with the teachings of Scripture. (II Timothy 3:16; II Peter 1:20-21; 3:16; I Corinthians 2:13; 14:37; Mark 13:31; John 8:31-32; 14:26; 16:13-14; 17:17; 20:31; Acts 20:32; Matthew 22:29, 43-44; 24:35; Numbers 23:19; Proverbs 30:5; Psalm 12:6; Hebrews 6:18; Titus 1:2)

VI. THE HUMAN CONDITION AND SALVATION

We believe that man was created by God in His own image and for his glory; but that man sinned and fell short of God's glory, and thus incurred physical, spiritual, and eternal separation

from God. We believe that all human beings are born with a sinful nature and so are under divine condemnation. We reject justification by works of the law, and we believe that only those who trust Jesus Christ as their Savior, by virtue of His atoning death on the cross, submitting to him as Lord, and embracing Him as supreme Treasure of their lives, are justified, delivered from condemnation, and receive eternal life. We believe that this faith leads to a heartfelt turning from sin. The Christian life involves growth in grace through persevering, Holy Spirit-empowered resolve to reckon ourselves dead to sin and alive to Christ. (Genesis. 1:26-7; Genesis 3; Genesis 2:17; 3:19; Eccl. 2:11; Matt 13:44; John 1:13; John 3:14-16; 5:24; John 5:30; 7:13; 8:12; 10:26; 17:3; Psalm 51:7; Jeremiah 17:9; James 1:14; Romans 3:19; 5:19; Phil 3:7-8; I John 1:9; II Corinthians 5:17; Romans 6:11; 8:1; I Corinthians 15:1-2; Hebrews 3:12-14; Hebrews 6:11-12; Hebrews 10:39; Romans 3:28)

VII. THE CHURCH

We believe in one holy, universal Church made up of all who trust Jesus Christ as Savior, Lord and Supreme Treasure of their lives. We believe that God calls us to unite with other believers in local churches to help each other to value Christ above all, to praise Him together, to grow in our love and knowledge of Him, to stir each other up to good works, and to spread a passion for the supremacy of God in all things for the joy of all peoples through Jesus Christ. We believe that Christians should be baptized and regularly eat the Lord's Supper together. (Ephesians 1:22-23; Acts 15:36, 41; 16:5; I Corinthians 16:1; Galatians 1:1-3; Revelation 1:4,10-11; Hebrews 10:24-25; Romans 6:3-4; I Corinthians 11:23-26)

VIII. THE LAST THINGS

We believe in the personal and visible return of the Lord Jesus Christ to earth and the establishment of His kingdom. We believe in the resurrection of the body and the final judgment of all people, leading to the eternal happiness of the righteous in the Lord's presence, and the eternal separation of the wicked from the presence of the Lord. (Matthew 16:27; Mark 14:62; John 14:3; Acts 1:11; Phil. 3:20; I Thessalonians 4:15-8; II Timothy 4:1; Titus 2:13; I Corinthians 4:5; I Corinthians 15; II Thessalonians 1:7-10; Revelation 20:11-15)

CHURCH COVENANT

By the Members of Glory of Christ Fellowship Our Commitments to One Another in the Sight of God

Having been led, as we believe, by the Spirit of God to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior, and, on the profession of our faith, having been baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, we do now, in the presence of God, angels and this assembly, most solemnly and joyfully enter into covenant with one another as one body in Christ.

1. We covenant, therefore, by the aid of the Holy Spirit, to walk together in Christian love, to strive for the advancement of this church in knowledge, holiness, and comfort; to promote its prosperity and spirituality; to sustain its worship, ordinances, discipline, and doctrines; and to 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.

2. We also covenant to maintain personal and family devotions; to educate our children in the Christian faith; to seek the salvation of our relatives and acquaintances; to live prayerfully and carefully in the world; to be just in our dealings, faithful in our engagements, and exemplary in our behavior; to avoid all gossiping, backbiting, and excessive anger; and to seek God's help in abstaining from all drugs, food, drink, and practices that bring unwarranted harm to the body or jeopardize our own or another's faith.

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4. We moreover covenant that if we must leave this body of believers we will, if possible, unite with a church where we can carry out the articles of this confession and the spirit of this covenant.

5. Finally, we acknowledge that we have received and read the Member Affirmation of Faith, the Constitution and Bylaws, and the Relational Commitments of this church, and we hereby covenant and agree to support and submit to them.

Signature

Date

Print Name

Pastor's Signature

Date

OUR CHURCH CONSTITUTION

Article I: Name

The name of this church shall be GLORY OF CHRIST FELLOWSHIP.

Article II: Foundation, Object and Priorities of Ministry

1. The foundation of this Church is the Lord Jesus Christ (I Corinthians 3:11), and its code of guidance in all its affairs, the Word of God, and this Church does here affirm its faith that the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the Word of Almighty God (Mark 13:31).

2. The object of this Church shall be to worship God according to the teaching of His Word, to practice the precepts and examples of the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ as set forth in the New Testament, to sustain its ordinances and doctrines and to preach and propagate among all peoples the Gospel of Salvation which is by personal faith on Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

3. The priorities of ministry of this church flow from the vision of God's glory revealed in Jesus Christ. We exist to savor this vision in worship (John 4:23), strengthen this vision in nurture and education (I Corinthians 14:26 ; II Peter 3:18), and spread this vision in evangelism, missions, and loving deeds (I Peter 2:9; 3:15 ; Matthew 28:18-20; 5:16).

Affirmation of Faith

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Our Church Covenant

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1. We engage, therefore, by the aid of the Holy Spirit, to walk together in Christian love, to strive for the advancement of this Church in knowledge, holiness and comfort; to promote its prosperity and spirituality; to sustain its worship, ordinances, discipline and doctrines; to 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.

2. We also engage to maintain family and secret devotions; to educate our children in the Christian faith; to seek the salvation of our kindred and acquaintances; to walk circumspectly in the world; to be just in our dealings, faithful in our engagements, and exemplary in our deportment, to avoid all tattling, backbiting and excessive anger; to seek God's help in abstaining from all drugs, food, drink, and practices which bring unwarranted harm to the body or jeopardize our own or another's faith.

3. We further engage to watch over one another in brotherly love; to remember one another in prayer; to aid one another in sickness and distress; to cultivate Christian sympathy in

feeling and courtesy in speech; to be slow to take offense, but always ready for reconciliation and mindful of the rules of our Savior to secure it without delay.

4. We moreover engage that when we remove from this place, we will, if possible, unite with a church where we can carry out the articles of this confession and the spirit of this covenant.

5. Finally, we acknowledge that we have received and read the Member Affirmation of Faith, the Constitution and Bylaws, and the Relational Commitments of this church, and we hereby covenant and agree to support and submit to them.

Article III: Membership

The membership of this Church shall consist of persons who confess faith on the Lord Jesus Christ as personal Savior, who give evidence of regeneration by living consistent with their profession and with the views of faith, doctrine, and practice of this Church, who have been baptized by immersion, and who have been received into its membership according to the By-Laws of this Church.

Article IV: Leadership and Organization

1. Under the authority of Jesus Christ and the Word of God, the congregation of the members of the Church is the final authority within this local Church. This authority is normally exercised through the election of officers to govern the Church. However, the vote of the membership of this Church at a properly called meeting, as provided in the By-Laws, shall be required to effect the following actions:

a. Accept members into the Church, give letters of transfer or recommendation to members, or drop members from the Church roll;

b. Elect officers of the Church;

c. Discipline members by dismissing them and discipline officers by removing them from office;

d. Approve annual budgets of the Church, and approve any transactions regarding real property;

e. Accept, reject, or otherwise dispose of any matter submitted to the membership of the Church by the Council of Elders, or raised by motion at a business meeting;

f. Adopt, amend, or repeal the Constitution or By-Laws of this church;

g. Approve the call, job description and initial salary of Vocational Pastors and Ministers.

2. The offices of the Church shall be Elder and Deacon. The purpose of the officers of the Church is to lovingly govern, care for, and equip the membership to do the work of the ministry.

3. The leadership of the Church shall be vested in the Council of Elders who are responsible for governing the Church, teaching the Word and tending the flock of God in this Church. The Elders shall be equal in authority but may be specialized in function.

4. Deacons shall assist the Council of Elders by performing services of congregational care, advice, administration and implementation.

Article V: The Church Property

1. In the event of a division of this Church, from which may God in His mercy save us, the property of this Church shall belong to that group of such division as represents the largest portion of the Church membership, provided such group is loyal to this constitution; otherwise it shall belong to the group remaining loyal to this constitution though it may not be the largest group in such division. Should any controversy arise as to whether such loyalty exists, the question shall be submitted to the Ruling Board of the Minnesota Baptist Conference, and their decision shall be final.

2. Should a condition arise at any time in the future when for any reason, the Church work cannot continue, the Church property shall be transferred to the Minnesota Baptist Conference or its successor.

3. Should conditions arise where a consolidation with another church of the same denomination be advisable, the Council of Elders shall be authorized by the Church to negotiate the terms of such consolidation in so far as the property of this Church is concerned.

Article VI: Revisions, Additions and Amendments

1. Revisions, additions or amendments of this constitution may be made only in the following manner:
 - a. at the annual meeting; and
 - b. by a two-thirds majority vote of those members present and voting at such meeting, provided at least ten percent (10%) of the resident membership of the Church is present at such meeting; and
 - c. after presentation by written motion at a quarterly or special business meeting held at least three months before the annual meeting; and
 - d. if notice of the proposed change or addition has been given, in writing and from the pulpit on at least two Sundays in the interim period between said meetings.

2. Article II (1) and VI (2) of this constitution shall not be repealed, amended or revised.

GLORY OF CHRIST FELLOWSHIP

OUR BY-LAWS

Article I: Membership

Section 1: General Procedure

All actions regarding membership, either of admission or dismissal, shall be by majority vote of the Church upon recommendation of the Council of Elders. At any of the regular meetings for worship, the Church may, without special notice, act upon the reception of members, or upon dismissal of members from the church. Although the means set forth in sections 2 and 3 of this article are the normal means of becoming a member of this church, the elders may consider exceptions to these means and recommend a person(s) for membership, so long as the elders disclose to the congregation, in writing, the nature of the exception. The vote of the church shall be the deciding factor.

Section 2: Admission by Baptism

Any person professing faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, giving evidence of change of heart, and having accepted the faith, aims and ideals of this Church as expressed in the affirmation of Faith and Church Covenant, may be received into membership by baptism (immersion), upon recommendation of the Council of Elders.

Section 3: Admission by Experience or Restoration

All applicants for membership other than by baptism, that is by Christian experience if previously baptized, or by restoration, shall be received into the church in the same way as those by baptism, except the ordinance shall not be administered.

Section 4: Instruction to New Members

All persons uniting with this Church in any of the ways set forth in Sections 2 or 3 above shall previously, by the Council of Elders, be made acquainted with the Church Covenant and the Affirmation of Faith. New members shall pledge themselves to fulfill their stewardship obligations as to worship, service, and giving, when they make public profession of faith and join the church.

Section 5: Dismissal of Members

Members in good standing who have fulfilled their obligations to the Church, or satisfactorily arranged the same with the Elders, and who desire to unite with a church of the same or another denomination, shall receive a certificate of character and be dismissed.

Article II: Church Government

Section 1: General Statement

a. Officers. The Officers of the Church shall be a Council of Elders and the Deacons. Officers shall be called to office by vote of the membership of the Church as provided for in Article II, Section 2 and Section 3 of these By-Laws. All officers of the Church shall be members of the Church in good standing. The Council of Elders shall be composed of men, the Deacons shall be composed of both men and women. Except as provided in paragraphs (b) and (c) below, the Council of Elders and the Deacons are the only bodies and positions created by these By-Laws.

b. Clerk, Treasurer, and Financial Secretary. The Church, upon nomination by the Council of Elders shall elect at the annual meeting, members to the positions of Church Clerk, Treasurer and Financial Secretary. The functions of Treasurer and Financial Secretary shall not be performed by one member. The Treasurer and Financial Secretary shall be bonded by the Church in a suitable amount. The Elders shall provide a written description of duties to the Clerk, Treasurer, and Financial Secretary.

c. Committees and Appointees. The Council of Elders has the authority to create committees and positions to which it may delegate any specified aspect of its responsibility. The Council of Elders has the authority to dissolve any committee or position which it created. The Council of Elders also has the authority to appoint Elders, Deacons or other members of the Church

to serve as members of such committees and to act as its agents in such positions. The Deacons may nominate candidates for any committee or position, but the appointment shall be by the Council of Elders. The Council of Elders may delegate to the Deacons the authority to appoint Deacons or other members of the Church to serve as members of such committees and as agents of the Council of Elders in such positions. Every committee shall have a chairperson, responsible for the overall operation of the committee, who shall be appointed by the Council of Elders. The Council of Elders may delegate the responsibility for selecting the chairperson to the Deacons or to the committee. (For example, such committees and positions may include a Missions Committee and a Christian Education Committee, among others.)

Section 2: Vocational Pastors and Ministers

a. Definition. Vocational Pastors are the ordained Elders of the church, who in response to God's call, have devoted their vocational lives to the ministry of the Word and prayer in the service of the church of Christ. Vocational Ministers are the non-ordained ministers of the church who, in response to God's call, serve the church of Christ as their primary vocation. Both Vocational Pastors and Vocational Ministers are supported financially by the church in return for their vocational labors.

b. Duties. In addition to the duties of their office as described in Sections 4 and 5 below, Vocational Pastors and Ministers shall perform the duties determined by the Council of Elders and approved by the congregation. The duties shall be in writing at the time of the call to service, and substantial changes shall be approved by the church. The church's call of a Vocational Pastor is a call to the Eldership of the church. Therefore Vocational Pastors shall be members of the Council of Elders and have all the Biblical qualifications of an Elder. Vocational Ministers are not necessarily called to the Eldership, but as assisting partners in the ministry. Therefore, Vocational Ministers shall be Deacons. Vocational Ministers may, when appropriate, be called by the church to the Council of Elders from the Deacons.

c. Vocational Call by the Church. The members shall call Vocational Pastors and Ministers (1) by ballot upon recommendation of the Council of Elders and (2) by at least a two-thirds majority of those members voting at the meeting with at least ten percent (10%) of the membership of the Church present. Oral notice of any such meeting, stating its object, shall be given from the pulpit on the next two successive Sundays preceding the meeting. Notice shall also be given by mail to the resident membership at least one week before the meeting. Vocational Pastors and Ministers shall stand for reaffirmation not later than the third annual meeting following their call or previous reaffirmation. Reaffirmation of a Vocational Pastor or Minister shall be by two-thirds vote of those members present and voting at the meeting.

d. Termination of Vocational Call by the Church.

1. By resignation. The question of terminating the vocational call of a Vocational Pastor or Minister shall be considered at any time by the church upon the presentation of the Pastor's or Minister's resignation.

2. Grievance. Where a grievance exists against a Pastor or Minister, either due to his preaching or teaching contrary to the beliefs of the Church as set forth in Article II of its Constitution or to alleged conduct on his part unfitting an Elder or Deacon, such grievance may be brought before the Council of Elders by any two members in good standing, following the procedure prescribed in Article V of these By-Laws. If the Council, after thorough investigation and consideration, believes the grievance to be true and substantial, then the vocational call of the Pastor or Minister may be terminated at any business meeting upon the recommendation of the Council of Elders when supported by closed ballot of a majority of those members of the Church present and voting with at least ten percent (10%) of the membership of the church present at such meeting. Oral notice of any such meeting, stating its object, shall be given from the pulpit on the next two successive Sundays preceding the meeting. Notice shall also be given by mail to the resident membership at least one week before the meeting.

3. Lack of reaffirmation. If a Vocational Pastor or Minister fails to be reaffirmed to the office of Elder or Deacon as provided in paragraph (c) above, a special business meeting shall be called to consider the question of terminating the vocational call with that Pastor or Minister. The vocational call shall be terminated only if supported by closed ballot of a majority of those members of the Church present and voting with at least ten percent (10%) of the membership of

the church present. Public notice of any such meeting, stating its object, shall be given on the next two successive Sundays preceding the meeting. Notice shall also be given by mail to the membership at least one week before the meeting. Removal from office and termination of the vocational call by this means shall not be considered disciplinary action.

e. Licensing and Ordination. In the matter of licensing and ordaining any person to the Gospel Ministry, the church shall follow, as far as possible, the procedure recommended by the Baptist General Conference.

Section 3: Lay Officers

a. Definition. Lay officers are the non-Vocational Elders and Deacons of the Church.

b. Duties. Lay Elders and Deacons shall have the duties of their offices as described in Sections 4 and 5 below.

c. Calling. The Council of Elders shall recognize, interview, and investigate candidates for lay Elder and Deacon. The Council shall provide for individual members of the Church either to nominate candidates or to present themselves to the Council as candidates for office and for the Council's further investigation. In no instances shall any individual be considered a nominee for the office without the nominee's consent. In those cases where the Council of Elders concludes that a nominee is not qualified for office they shall so inform the nominee stating the reasons for this conclusion.

The Council of Elders shall present a ballot of candidates for calling or reaffirmation as Elders or Deacons to the congregation at the annual meeting. The Council of Elders may also nominate candidates for election to office at any quarterly or special meeting, provided that the written ballot of nominees is available for review in the church office at least ten days in advance of the meeting, and is announced publicly to the church by mail to its members or in the Sunday morning worship at least ten days in advance of the meeting.

Lay Elders and Deacons shall be called by the Church for a normal term of three years. They shall stand for reaffirmation not later than the third annual meeting of the church following their call or previous reaffirmation. Calling or reaffirmation of a lay Elder or Deacon shall be by two-thirds vote of those members present and voting at the meeting. Lay Elders and Deacons shall serve no more than two consecutive terms. Following two consecutive terms the Elder or Deacon will not serve actively in office for a period of one year. Following this period they are again eligible for nomination as Elder or Deacon. For purposes of this provision a term during which an Elder or Deacon serves not more than one year shall not be considered a term in office.

d. Removal.

1. Resignation. An officer may resign his office at any time if he finds he is no longer able to discharge the duties of the office.

2. Grievance. Where a grievance exists against an officer of the Church either due to the adherence to and propagation of beliefs contrary to the beliefs of the Church as set forth in Article II, Sections 1 and 2 of its Constitution or to alleged conduct on his part unfitting an Elder or Deacon, such grievance may be brought before the Council of Elders by any two members in good standing, following the procedures prescribed in Article V of the By-Laws of this Church. If the Council, after thorough investigation and consideration, believes the grievance to be true and substantial, then the officer may be removed from office upon the recommendation of the Council of Elders when supported by closed ballot of a majority of those members of the Church present and voting at any annual, quarterly, or special meeting with at least ten percent (10%) of the membership of the church present at such meeting. Oral notice of any such meeting, stating its object, shall be given from the pulpit on the next two successive Sundays preceding the meeting. Notice shall also be given by mail to the resident membership at least one week before the meeting.

3. Lack of reaffirmation. If a Lay Elder or Deacon stands for reaffirmation and fails to be reaffirmed, the Elder or Deacon shall be removed from office. Removal from office by this means shall not be considered disciplinary action.

Section 4: Council of Elders

a. **Composition, Term, and Calling.** The Council of Elders shall be composed of men, both Lay Elders and Vocational Elders. The Council of Elders shall be composed of at least three members, with the number of Elders at any time determined by the needs of the ministry and by the call and qualification of men in the church. There shall be at least one Lay Elder for every Vocational elder. Each Elder shall be called by the membership of the Church to a term of three years. That call and any reaffirmation(s) shall be conducted as provided in Article II, Sections 2 and 3 of these By-Laws.

b. **Qualifications.** Elders and nominees for Elder shall be qualified for the office as specified in the Bible. Relevant texts include I Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:6-9 and I Peter 5:1-4. Elders are also required to be in agreement with the Glory of Christ Fellowship Elder Affirmation of Faith. The Glory of Christ Fellowship Elder Affirmation of Faith shall only be amended by a recommendation of the Council of Elders to the church, following the same procedure to amend the By-Laws.

c. **Responsibilities.** The fundamental responsibility of the Elders is to devote themselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word. The Elders are responsible for governing the Church, teaching the Word and tending the flock of God in this Church.

The responsibilities of the Elders shall include: examining prospective members and acquainting them with the Affirmation of Faith and Church Covenant, overseeing the process of Church discipline, examining prospective candidates for office, scheduling and providing a moderator for business meetings, providing for reporting and recording of official Church business, overseeing the work of the Deacons and appointed church agents and committees, conducting worship services, administering the ordinances of the Gospel, equipping the membership of the Church for the work of the ministry, teaching the whole counsel of God both formally and informally, correcting error, overseeing, coordinating and promoting the ministries of the Church, and mobilizing the Church for world mission.

d. **Organization.** The Council of Elders shall organize itself however it determines to be best to achieve the mission of the Church. The Elders shall be equal in authority but may be specialized in function. The Elders must meet at least once per month. Meetings of the Elders may be held at any location and may be conducted by means of electronic communication through which the Elders may simultaneously hear each other. Unless the Council provides otherwise, meetings of the Council may be held immediately upon notice. A quorum for meetings of the Elders is defined as at least one-half of the Lay Elders plus at least one-half of the Vocational Elders, except for matters on which only Lay Elders are entitled to vote in which case a majority of the Lay Elders shall constitute a quorum. The Council shall annually select its Chairman and Vice-Chairman from among its Vocational or Lay Elders.

Section 5: Deacons

a. **Composition, Term, and Calling.** The Deacons shall be both men and women, both Vocational Ministers and Lay Deacons. The number of Deacons shall be determined by the needs of the ministry and by the call and qualification of men and women in the church. Each Deacon shall be called by the membership of the Church to a normal term of three years. The call and any reaffirmation shall be conducted as provided in Article II, Sections 2 and 3 of these By-Laws.

b. **Qualifications.** Deacons and nominees for Deacon shall be qualified for the office as specified in the Bible. Relevant texts include I Timothy 3:8-12.

c. **Responsibilities.** The Deacons shall advise and be ready to assist the Elders in any service that shall support and promote the ministry of the Word and prayer, new and existing ministries of the Church, and the care for the members of the congregation. Their responsibilities may include:

1. administering a fund to assist the poor and needy and otherwise providing aid in times of crisis or distress;
2. the greeting and welcoming ministries of the church;
3. assisting in administering the ordinances of the Gospel;
4. assisting at fellowship gatherings of the church;
5. caring for and maintaining the Church properties;
6. administering the business affairs of the Church that pertain to its material assets.

d. Organization. The Elders or the Deacons may designate any specific Deacon or group of Deacons to specialize in some particular Deaconal function. Meetings of the Deacons, or subcommittees thereof, shall be held as needed to best fulfill the responsibilities of the Deacons.

Article III: Church Employees

In addition to Vocational Pastors and Ministers, the church may employ additional personnel. The moneys for such personnel must be approved by the congregation at a properly called business meeting. The Council of Elders shall be responsible for determining the duties of and hiring such personnel.

Article IV: Church Finances

Section 1: In General

No method of raising funds shall be entertained which is in conflict with the Scriptural ideals of the Church.

All funds donated for missions by the organizations of the Church shall pass through the Church Finance Secretary and the Treasurer in order that due record may be made and credit given to the Church. The Deacons shall provide assistance for the Financial Secretary in accounting for funds donated.

Section 2: Contributions

It is understood that membership in this church involves financial obligations to support the Church and its causes with regular and proportionate giving. Each member shall be encouraged in Scriptural giving, with tithing as the ideal minimum.

Special offerings may be sought by the Church, or by any of its organizations, with the approval of the Council of Elders. This shall not preclude individuals from making special offerings or designated gifts at any time as the Spirit of God may move them.

Section 3: Financial Planning

The financial planning of the Church shall be carried out through the medium of annual budgets for the carrying out of the various programs of its work. Annual budgets shall be adopted by the Church upon recommendation of the Council of Elders, or, if authorized by the Council, the Deacons or other committee. Matters involving staff compensation shall be the responsibility of the lay members of the Council of Elders. The Council of Elders may delegate this responsibility provided such delegation is to lay Deacons or other lay members of the Church.

Section 4: Accounts

Financial receipts from all sources shall be accounted for by the Finance Secretary according to the purposes for which contributions are designated. The Treasurer of the Church shall disburse these funds promptly according to the financial program of the Church as detailed in the Budgets or other authorized designations. All moneys for missions shall be remitted in accordance with the Mission Budget of the Church or otherwise designated, preferably each month and not less than each quarter.

Section 5: Indebtedness

No note or contract exceeding 10% of the total annual budget whereby the credit of the Church is pledged shall be made except by recommendation of the Council of Elders and approved by the Church.

Section 6: Authority to Bind the Church

The Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Council of Elders are the only officers who have authority, in accordance with these By-Laws, the Church Constitution, and any applicable laws, to execute legal documents relating to real estate, church property, and church finances, including any and all lease agreements.

Article V: Meetings

Section 1: For Worship

Public services shall be held on the Lord's Day. The Lord's Supper shall be celebrated on the first Sunday of each month or at such other times as the Council of Elders may determine. Other religious services may be appointed as the advancement of the work of the Church may require.

Section 2: For Business

a. The Annual Meeting. The annual meeting shall be held some time during the last month of the fiscal year of the Church for the purpose of calling and reaffirming the officers, reviewing proposed budgets and other business. Officers called at the annual meeting shall assume their duties at the beginning of the new fiscal year.

b. Quarterly Meetings. Quarterly meetings of the Church shall be held at anytime within each quarter of each fiscal year.

c. Special Meetings. The Council of Elders, or any ten members in good standing, may call for a special meeting. Notice of the meeting shall be given from the pulpit, or by other notification, at least one week in advance of any such meeting, the particular object of the meeting being clearly stated in the notice. In the calling of special meetings for purposes where an interval after advance notice is required by provision in these By-Laws or according to law, such provisions shall be observed.

d. Quorum. Any number of members shall constitute a quorum at any ordinary meeting of the Church. At meetings dealing with particular matters stipulated in these By-Laws, the quorums prescribed shall apply.

e. Rules Governing Business Meetings. Robert's Rules of Order shall be recognized as the general pattern for the conduct of the business meetings of the Church. Seeking the Lord's wisdom and blessing through thankful prayer and the Word of God shall be a part of every meeting.

f. Notice Provisions. Unless specifically defined in other sections of these By-Laws or the Constitution, "notice in writing" means a written announcement sent by regular U.S. mail, and "notice from the pulpit" means an oral announcement at each of the Sunday morning services.

Article VI: Organization of Members for Ministry

Members of this church shall have the liberty to participate in and organize themselves for ministry, provided that such participation and organization does not conflict with Article II of the Constitution. Any such organization may seek church sanction from the Council of Elders as an official ministry of Glory of Christ Fellowship. Such sanction shall be granted provided that 1) the object, purpose, belief and conduct of the organization and its members is consistent with Article II of the Constitution, and 2) the primary officers of the organization are members of the church, or other regular attenders of the church, who have been approved under guidelines established by the Council of Elders. Sanction by the Council of Elders does not necessarily imply support of the organization by the church with personnel, finances, or facilities. Such support may be requested as provided by the leadership of the church.

Article VII: Discipline

The discipline of members shall be a responsibility of the Council of Elders under such rules and procedures as the Elders have established, on the basis of Scripture, in a document entitled, "Our Relational Commitments." All such proceedings shall be guided by a spirit of prayer mingling Christian kindness, forbearance, and holy firmness under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Article VIII: Amendments

Amendments to these By-Laws may be introduced through written motion at any quarterly meeting, but shall not be acted on until the following quarterly or annual meeting, at which time an affirmative vote of two-thirds of those members present at the meeting and voting shall be required for acceptance, provided that at least ten percent (10%) of the membership of the Church be present at such meeting, and that notice of the proposed change or amendment be given from the pulpit on at least two Sundays and in writing to the resident membership in the interim period between the meetings.

GLORY OF CHRIST FELLOWSHIP

OUR RELATIONAL COMMITMENTS

Introduction

The following Commitments and Church Covenant are designed to help the people who attend our church relate to one another in a way that honors God and promotes authentic relationships. These Commitments cover important relational issues, such as peacemaking and reconciliation, marriage and divorce, protecting children from abuse, counseling, confidentiality, and mutual accountability.

These Commitments are intended to help us build a strong community of faith. By community, we mean a group of people who have voluntarily joined together to encourage and support one another as we worship God, grow in our understanding of His love for us, and seek to tell others about the salvation and peace they, too, can find through faith in Jesus Christ.

We know that true community isn't easy to achieve. Each of us brings our own expectations and agendas into the church. This diversity usually leads to rich discussions and creative ministries; but sometimes it can lead to conflict. As James 4:1-2 warns, "What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it."

That certainly describes us! At times, no matter how hard we try to build a close community of faith, our desires and expectations still clash. That's where these Commitments come in. They pull together key principles from God's Word and serve as our relational guidelines. These Commitments accomplish several important purposes:

- They remind us of our mutual commitment to work together to pursue unity, maintain friendships, preserve marriages, and build relationships that reflect the love of Christ.
- They help to prevent surprises, disappointed expectations, confusion and conflict by describing how we expect to relate to one another within the church.
- They provide a clear track for us to run on when conflict threatens to divide us, and they remind us how to move quickly toward reconciliation.
- They establish guidelines for how our leaders will counsel others, guard confidential information, and protect our children from abuse.
- They define and limit the spiritual authority of church leaders and thereby insure that all members are treated fairly.¹
- Finally, they reduce our church's exposure to legal liability by clearly establishing our relational practices and by affirming our mutual commitment to resolve conflict biblically.²

As you read our Relational Commitments, we encourage you to study the Bible passages that are cited next to particular provisions. We want you to be confident that these Commitments are based solidly on the Word of God. If your study does not answer all of your questions and concerns, please do not hesitate to approach our leaders, who will be happy to talk with you about these principles.

¹ When we use the term "leader" in these Commitments, we are referring to the elders and deacons of our church.

² See www.PeacemakerChurch.net for information on how these Commitments can help to prevent conflict and reduce exposure to legal liability in our church.

We encourage you to expressly embrace these Commitments and formally join our church by going through our membership class, acknowledging your faith in Christ, and signing the Church Covenant provided at the end of this document. If you are not yet prepared to become a member, we hope you and your family will continue to attend our worship services, find fellowship in a small group, and call on our leaders if you need counsel and support in difficult times.

If you choose to continue relating to us in any of these ways without joining the church, we will assume that you have consented to these Commitments, which will guide our relationship with you. (See "A Tale of Two Families" to learn why.) As followers of Christ, we will do all we can to encourage you to grow in faith and godliness and to live a disciplined life that honors our Lord Jesus Christ and enhances the witness of our church.

The Elders of Glory of Christ Fellowship
Adopted on August 1, 2007

These Relational Commitments are adapted from The Peacemaker Church.
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Edition 1.0

A TALE OF TWO FAMILIES

Two boys, John and Luke, lost their mother at a young age. When they were in their teens, their father was reported to have died when his plane crashed into the ocean. The boys had no other relatives, so two neighboring families took them in.

The Friendly family did all they could to make John feel welcome in their home. They gave him his own bedroom, provided his meals, and encouraged him to join in family activities. Not wanting him to feel any pressure, they did not explain to him any of the family rules. Instead they hoped that he would notice how their other children behaved and decide on his own to act the same way.

Not knowing exactly what was expected of him, John frequently disappointed the family by violating unspoken rules. Feeling judged and unconnected to the family, he became increasingly independent. He came and went at any hour, played loud music, and spent long hours in his room with a variety of girls. When Mr. Friendly finally tried to talk with him about his behavior, John said, "I'm not your son, so you have no right to tell me how to live my life. I like having a bedroom and meals whenever I decide to be here, but I'll still do whatever seems right to me."

Tensions continued to build, and finally Mr. Friendly asked John to leave. Fortunately for John, there was another Friendly family in town, and they were happy to take him in. But there the cycle started all over again.

John's brother had an entirely different experience. Luke was taken in by the Loving family. They wanted him to feel welcome, so they gave him a room, provided meals, and encouraged him to join in family activities. But they also wanted to avoid misunderstandings and conflict. So shortly after Luke arrived, Mr. Loving explained the family rules to Luke, so he would know how to get along with the rest of the family. He said, "Even though you are not my son, I will be glad to look out for you the best I can. But as long as you are in my home, I also will expect you to behave as my other children do."

Like any normal teenager, Luke sometimes broke the rules. When he did, Mr. Loving sat down with him, pointed out what he'd done wrong, and held him accountable to the same standards he had established for his other children. Luke sometimes resented this discipline, but he eventually realized it was always done in love, and it kept him out of a lot of trouble.

After a few months, Mr. Loving approached Luke and said, "Since you are living here like part of the family, we would like to make it official. If you feel this is where you'd like to stay, we'd like to adopt you and make you our son."

Luke gladly accepted and formally committed himself to the family. In doing so, he changed from being an orphan who merely resided in the home to being a son who willingly accepted and enjoyed all of the same responsibilities and privileges of his new brothers and sisters.

Suppose that John and Luke's father is rescued from an island two years later. When he is reunited with his sons and hears what has happened to them, which family will he thank the most? The Friendly family, who were kind enough to give John a place to hang out, but could not bring themselves to give him any boundaries? Or the Loving family, who welcomed Luke in, held him accountable to the same rules as the rest of the family, and invited him to be a son?

The answer is obvious. And there is a real Father who one day will evaluate the way we care for the people who come into our church family. Therefore, we are glad to welcome people and give them a place to worship, grow and serve. But being "friendly" is not good enough. We want to be loving, as God defines loving (Heb. 12:5-6; 10:24). Therefore, we will encourage and

expect everyone who attends our church to live out the biblical principles that are summarized in these Relational Commitments.

And when people have lived like part of our family for a while, we will encourage them to “make it official.” Living like an orphan, with its illusion of independence and self-determination, may seem appealing to some. But it cannot compare to the security, privileges, and sense of belonging that come from joining a biblical church and living as truly committed brothers and sisters in the family of God

COMMITMENT TO PEACEMAKING AND RECONCILIATION

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God (Matt. 5:9).

Our church is committed to building a "culture of peace" that reflects God's peace and the power of the gospel of Christ in our lives. As we stand in the light of the cross, we realize that bitterness, unforgiveness and broken relationships are not appropriate for the people whom God has reconciled to himself through the sacrifice of His only Son (John 13:34-35; Eph. 4:29-32; Col. 3:12-14).

Therefore, we look to the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit for guidance on how we can respond to conflict in a way that will honor God, promote justice, reconcile relationships, and preserve our witness for Christ. As God gives us His wisdom and grace, we are committed to actively teaching and encouraging one another to live out the following principles of peacemaking and reconciliation:

Personal Peacemaking

- Whenever we are faced with conflict, our primary goal will be to glorify God with our thoughts, words and actions (1 Cor. 10:31).
- We will try to get the "logs" out of our own eyes before focusing on what others may have done wrong (Matt. 7:3-5).
- We will seek to overlook minor offenses (Prov. 19:11).
- We will refrain from all gossip, backbiting and slander (Eph. 4:29-32). If we have a problem with others, we will talk to them, not about them.
- We will make "charitable judgments" toward one another by believing the best about each other until we have facts that prove otherwise (1 Cor. 13:7).
- If an offense is too serious to overlook, or if we think someone may have something against us, we will go promptly to seek reconciliation (Matt. 5:23-24; 18:15).
- When we offer a word of correction to others, we will do so graciously and gently, with the goal of serving and restoring them, rather than beating them down (Prov. 12:18; Eph. 4:29; Gal. 6:1).
- When someone tries to correct us, we will ask God to help us resist prideful defensiveness and to welcome correction with humility (Ps. 141:5; Prov. 15:32).
- When others repent, we will ask God to give us grace to forgive them as he has forgiven us (Eph. 4:32).
- When we discuss or negotiate substantive issues, we will look out for others' interests as well as our own (Phil. 2:3-4).

Assisted Peacemaking

- When two of us cannot resolve a conflict privately, we will seek the mediation of wise people in our church and listen humbly to their counsel (Matt. 18:16; Phil. 4:2-3). If our dispute is with a church leader, we will look to other leaders for assistance.
- When informal mediation does not resolve a dispute, we will seek formal assistance from our church leaders or people they appoint, and we will submit to their counsel and correction (Matt. 18:17-20).
- When we have a business or legal dispute with another Christian, we will make every reasonable effort to resolve the conflict within the body of Christ through biblical mediation or arbitration, rather than going to civil court (1 Cor. 6:1-8). If the other party attends another church, our leaders will offer to cooperate with the leaders of that church to resolve the matter.

- If a person coming to our church has an unresolved conflict with someone in his former church, we will require and assist him to make every reasonable effort to be reconciled to the other person before joining our church (Matt. 5:23-24; Rom. 12:18).
- When a conflict involves matters of doctrine or church discipline, we will submit to the procedures set forth in our Commitment to Accountability and Church Discipline.
- If we have a legal dispute with or within our church and cannot resolve it internally through the steps given above, we will obey God's command not to go into the civil court (1 Cor. 6:1-8). Instead, we will submit the matter to mediation and, if necessary, legally binding arbitration, in accordance with the Rules of Procedure for Christian Conciliation of the Institute for Christian Conciliation, a division of Peacemaker Ministries (www.Peacemaker.net).

Above all, we pray that our ministry of peacemaking will bring praise to our Lord Jesus Christ and lead others to know His infinite love and peace.³

³ Adapted from *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict*, by Ken Sande (Baker Books, 3rd Ed. 2004).

COMMITMENT TO PRESERVING MARRIAGES

So they are no longer two but one. Therefore, what God has joined together, let man not separate (Matt. 19:6).

God designed marriage to reflect the beauty and permanence of Christ's loving relationship with His bride, the church (Eph. 5:22-33; Rev. 19:7). Therefore, he established marriage to be a life-long, exclusive relationship between one man and one woman (Matt. 19:4-6). God also designed it to provide mutual companionship through life's joys and difficulties, to create stability for raising and nurturing children, and to give strength and cohesiveness to society in general.

In our society, marriages fail under a wide range of circumstances. Many people have gone through a divorce before having a relationship with Christ, and others have experienced divorce through no desire or decision of their own. Still others may have divorced because of their own wrongful choices, but have since experienced the repentance and forgiveness offered through our Lord Jesus. We want all of you to know that you are welcome in our church.

Because our church recognizes both the divine origin of marriage and the devastating effects of divorce, we are deeply committed to preserving marriages and preventing divorce. Toward this end, we will devote a significant portion of our preaching and teaching ministry to strengthening marriages and families. We require and provide thorough premarital counseling to ensure that couples enter into marriage advisedly and are well prepared for its many challenges.

We also encourage couples to nurture their marriages by participating in weekly fellowship groups in which people can grow together in their love for God and for one another (Heb. 10:24-25). As relationships deepen within these groups, we expect husbands to spur each other on in loving, cherishing, and leading their wives, and wives to encourage one another in respecting and loving their husbands (Eph. 5:33).

Our leaders are committed to providing counsel and support to couples who face marital difficulties. We will discourage couples from using divorce as a way to run away from issues that instead can be resolved through Spirit-guided counseling, repentance, forgiveness and ongoing discipleship.

We recognize, however, that there are times when God permits a believer to seek a divorce without sinning against God or a spouse. We believe divorce is permissible when the other spouse has been sexually involved with a person outside the marriage (Matt. 5:31-32), or when an unbelieving spouse abandons a marriage (1 Cor. 7:12-16).

Even though divorce is permissible in these situations, it is not required. God patiently bears with our sins, repeatedly calls us to repentance, and freely forgives us when we turn back to Him (Ps. 103:8-12; Isa. 55:7). When divorce becomes an option, an offended spouse can imitate God's love by offering a straying spouse these same evidences of grace (Eph. 5:1-2). This may involve patiently bearing neglect or lovingly confronting serious sin (Col. 3:12-14; Gal. 6:1). In some situations, love may require asking the church to initiate formal discipline to rescue a spouse and a marriage from the devastating effects of unrepentant sin (Matt. 18:12-20).

Just as church leaders are involved in beginning a marriage, they should be involved when it ends. Therefore, when someone is considering divorce, he or she is expected to bring the situation to our leaders and cooperate with them as they determine whether grounds exist, promote repentance and reconciliation, and exhaust redemptive discipline, if appropriate.

Separated spouses who have filed for divorce should consider themselves married until the day a civil court issues a divorce decree. Thus they should refrain from dating or any other activity that is inconsistent with being married.

We are always interested in helping divorced people restore their previous marriage if that is possible and appropriate. We will support a decision to pursue a second marriage to a different person only when we have determined that it is biblically valid and that every reasonable effort has been made to seek and grant forgiveness of the sins that contributed to a previous divorce.

We rejoice that divorce never diminishes God's free offer of love, grace and forgiveness. He cherishes and loves every person who has been unwillingly divorced, as does our church. God graciously extends this same love to those who have wrongly left their marriages. That love moves Him (and us) to call them to repentance, to encourage and aid reconciliation when possible, and to gladly restore those who have done all they can to rebuild broken relationships.

COMMITMENT TO PROTECTING OUR CHILDREN

The prudent see danger and take refuge (Prov. 27:12a).

Children are blessing from God, and he calls the church to support parents in their responsibility to train children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Therefore, the church should be a safe and blessed place for children, where they can grow, play, form friendships, and learn to experience and share the love of Christ.

Since sin affects every person and organization in the world, however, it is possible that children could be harmed even during church activities. We cannot guarantee that such things will never happen within our fellowship, but we are committed to taking every reasonable precaution to protect our children from foreseeable harm. This commitment includes, but is not limited to, the following steps:

- We do not allow anyone to work regularly with our youth (children or teenagers), unless he or she has regularly attended our church for at least six months and is a formal member.
- We require all of our youth workers to complete a detailed application, submit to a background check, and complete the application process.
- We require that, whenever practicable, youth workers serve in teams of two or more and be visible to other workers.

If a child is harmed in our church, we will take immediate steps to inform the parents, to accept responsibility for our role in the situation, and to hold offending youth workers fully responsible for their actions. We will also evaluate our practices and procedures, considering changes that might reduce the likelihood of such harm to children in the future.

COMMITMENT TO BIBLICAL COUNSELING

I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another (Rom. 15:14).

All Christians struggle with sin and the effect it has on our lives and our relationships. Whenever believers are unable to overcome sinful attitudes or behaviors through personal efforts, God calls them to seek assistance from other believers, and especially from church leaders, who have the responsibility of providing pastoral counseling and oversight (see Rom. 15:14; Gal. 6:1-2; 2 Tim. 4:1-2; Heb. 13:17; James 5:16). Therefore, this church encourages and enjoins its people to seek counsel from and confess sins to each other, and especially to our leaders.

We believe that the Bible provides thorough guidance and instruction for faith and life (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Therefore, our counseling is based on scriptural principles rather than those of secular psychology or psychiatry. Unless they specifically state otherwise, none of those who counsel in this church are trained or licensed as psychotherapists or mental health professionals, nor should they be expected to follow the methods of such specialists.

God calls our leaders to set an example for us “in speech, in life, in love, and in faith and purity” (1 Tim. 4:12). Therefore, we expect them to treat counselees with every respect and courtesy, and to avoid even the appearance of impropriety or impurity during counseling (Eph. 5:3). We also expect counselees to promptly report to the leadership team any conduct that fails to meet this standard.

To prevent our leaders from being placed in situations that might compromise their pastoral commitments, we, the members and attenders of this church, agree that we will not try to compel them to testify in any legal proceeding or otherwise divulge any confidential information they receive through pastoral counseling or ministry (Prov. 11:13, 25:9).

There are occasions when our leaders do not have sufficient time to meet with every person who asks for counseling. At such times we expect our leaders to give first priority to people who have formally joined the church (Gal. 6:10), and to serve those who only attend the church by referring them to another source of godly counsel.

COMMITMENT TO CONFIDENTIALITY

*A gossip betrays a confidence,
but a trustworthy man keeps a secret (Prov. 11:13).*

The Bible teaches that Christians should carefully guard any personal and private information that others reveal to them. Protecting confidences is a sign of Christian love and respect (Matt. 7:12). It also discourages harmful gossip (Prov. 26:20), invites confession (Prov. 11:13), and thus encourages people to seek needed counseling. Since these goals are essential to the ministry of the gospel and the work of the local church, all members and attenders are expected to refrain from gossip and to respect the confidences of others. In particular, our leaders will carefully protect all information that they receive through pastoral counseling, subject to the following guidelines.

Although confidentiality is to be respected as much as possible, there are times when it is appropriate to reveal certain information to others. In particular, when our leaders believe it is biblically necessary, they may disclose confidential information to appropriate people in the following circumstances:

- when a leader is uncertain of how to counsel a person about a particular problem and needs to seek advice from other leaders in our church or, if the person attends another church, from the leaders of that church (Prov. 11:14);
- when the person who disclosed the information, or any other person, is in imminent danger of serious harm unless others intervene (Prov. 24:11-12);
- when a person refuses to repent of sin and it becomes necessary to promote repentance through accountability and redemptive church discipline (Matt. 18:15-20);
or,
- when leaders are required by law to report suspected abuse (Rom. 13:1).

COMMITMENT TO ACCOUNTABILITY AND CHURCH DISCIPLINE

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds (Heb. 10:24).

Like all of our Relational Commitments, the principles and practices described below apply to all the people who attend our church (both members and attenders).

A. Accountability and Discipline Are Signs of God's Love

God has established the church to reflect His character, wisdom and glory in the midst of a fallen world (Eph. 3:10-11). He loves His church so much that he sent His Son to die for her (Eph. 5:25). His ultimate purpose for His church is to present her as a gift to His Son; thus Scripture refers to the church as the "bride" of Christ (Rev. 19:7). For this reason the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are continually working to purify the church and bring her to maturity (Eph. 5:25-27).

This does not mean that God expects the church to be made up of perfectly pure people. He knows that the best of churches are still companies of sinners who wrestle daily with remaining sin (1 John 1:8; Phil. 3:12). Therefore, it would be unbiblical for us to expect church members to live perfectly. What we can do, however, is confess our common struggle with sin and our mutual need for God's mercy and grace. We also can spur one another on toward maturity by encouraging and holding each other accountable to love, seek after, and obey God with all of our hearts, souls, minds and strength, and to love others as we love ourselves (Mark 12:30-31; Heb. 10:24-25).

The Bible sometimes refers to this process of mutual encouragement and accountability as "discipline." The Bible never presents church discipline as being negative, legalistic or harsh, as modern society does. True discipline originates from God himself and is always presented as a sign of genuine love. "The Lord disciplines those he loves" (Heb. 12:6). "Blessed is the man you discipline, O LORD, the man you teach from your law" (Ps. 94:12). "Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline" (Rev. 3:19).

God's discipline in the church, like the discipline in a good family, is intended to be primarily positive, instructive and encouraging. This process, which is sometimes referred to as "formative discipline," involves preaching, teaching, prayer, personal Bible study, small group fellowship and countless other enjoyable activities that challenge and encourage us to love and serve God more wholeheartedly.

On rare occasions God's discipline, like the discipline in a family with growing children, also may have a corrective purpose. When we forget or disobey what God has taught us, he corrects us. One way he does this is to call the church to seek after us and lead us back onto the right track. This process, which is sometimes called "corrective" or "restorative" discipline, is likened in Scripture to a shepherd seeking after a lost sheep.

If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off (Matt. 18:12-13).

Thus, restorative or corrective discipline is never to be done in a harsh, vengeful or self-righteous manner. It is always to be carried out in humility and love, with the goals of restoring someone to

a close walk with Christ (Matt. 18:15; Gal. 6:1), protecting others from harm (1 Cor. 5:6), and showing respect for the honor and glory of God's name (1 Pet. 2:12).

Biblical discipline is similar to the discipline we value in other aspects of life. We admire parents who consistently teach their children how to behave properly and lovingly discipline them when they disobey. We value music teachers who bring out the best in their students by teaching them proper technique and consistently pointing out their errors so they can play a piece properly. And we applaud athletic coaches who diligently teach their players to do what is right and correct them when they fumble, so that the team works well together and can compete for the championship.

The same principles apply to the family of God. We, too, need to be taught 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 leaders of our church recognize that God has called them to an even higher level of accountability regarding their faith and conduct (James 3:1; 1 Tim. 5:19-20). Therefore, they are committed to listening humbly to loving correction from each other or from any member in our church, and, if necessary, to submitting themselves to the corrective discipline of our body.

B. Most Corrective Discipline Is Private, Personal and Informal

God gives every believer grace to be self-disciplined. "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline" (2 Tim. 1:7). Thus discipline always begins as a personal matter and usually remains that way, as each of us studies God's Word, seeks Him in prayer, and draws on His grace to identify and change sinful habits and grow in godliness.

But sometimes we are blind to our sins or so tangled in them that we cannot get free on our own. This is why the Bible says, "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently" (Gal. 6:1). In obedience to this command, we are committed to giving and receiving loving correction within our church whenever a sin (whether in word, behavior or doctrine) seems too serious to overlook (Prov. 19:11).

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, Sunday school 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."

C. Formal Discipline May Involve the Entire Church

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" (Matt. 18:17a). This first involves informing one or more church leaders about the situation. If the offense is not likely to cause imminent harm to others, our leaders may approach the individual privately to personally establish the facts and encourage repentance of any sin they discover. The individual will be given every reasonable opportunity to explain and defend his or her actions. If the individual recognizes his sin and repents, the matter usually ends there, unless a confession to additional people is needed.

If an offense is likely to harm others or lead them into sin, or cause division or disruption, our leaders may accelerate the entire disciplinary process and move promptly to protect the church (Rom. 16:17; 1 Cor. 5:1-13; Titus 3:10-11).

As the disciplinary process progresses, our leaders may impose a variety of sanctions to encourage repentance, including but not limited to private and public admonition, withholding of the Lord's Supper, removal from office, withdrawal of normal fellowship, and, as a last resort, removal from membership (Matt. 5:23-24; 2 Thess. 3:6-15; Matt. 18:17).

If the straying individual does not repent in response to private appeals from our leaders, they may inform others in the church who may be able to influence that individual or be willing to pray for him or her, or people who might be harmed or affected by that person's behavior.⁴ This step may include close friends, a small group, a Sunday school class, or the entire congregation if our leaders deem it to be appropriate (Matt. 18:17, 1 Tim. 5:20).⁵

If, after a reasonable period of time, the individual still refuses to change, then our leaders may bring the situation before the congregation, with the recommendation that the individual be removed from membership and normal fellowship. If the congregation supports that recommendation, we will treat the individual as an unbeliever. This means that we will no longer treat him as a fellow Christian. Instead of having casual, relaxed fellowship with the individual, we will look for opportunities to lovingly bring the gospel to him, remind him of God's holiness and mercy, and call him to repent and put his faith in Christ (Matt. 18:17; 1 Cor. 5:5; 1 Tim. 1:20).

We realize that our natural human response to correction often is to hide or run away from accountability (Gen. 3:8-10). To avoid falling into this age-old trap and to strengthen our church's ability to rescue us if we are caught in sin, we agree not to run away from this church to avoid corrective discipline. Therefore, we waive our right to withdraw from membership or accountability while discipline is pending against us. Although we are free to stop attending the church at any time, we agree that a withdrawal while discipline is pending will not be given effect until the church has fulfilled its God-given responsibilities to encourage our repentance and restoration, and to bring the disciplinary process to an orderly conclusion, as described in these Commitments (Matt. 18:12-14; Gal. 6:1; Heb. 13:17).

If an individual leaves the church while discipline is in effect or is being considered, and our leaders learn that he or she is attending another church, they may inform that church of the situation and ask its leaders to encourage the individual to repent and be reconciled to the Lord and to any people he or she has offended. This action is intended both to help the individual find freedom from his sin and to warn the other church about the harm that he or she might do to their members⁶ (see Matt. 18:12-14; Rom. 16:17; 1 Cor. 5:1-13; 3 John 1:9-10).

⁴ For example, it is not uncommon for a person to attend a church, develop relationships of trust, persuade people to give him money to invest, and then fail to return the money as promised. Senior citizens are particularly vulnerable to these schemes, and many people have lost much of what they had saved for retirement. When such sinful men are discovered, they usually leave a church, but continue to prey on members who have not heard about their schemes. If our leaders found such a man in our church, they would call him to repent and confess his wrongs. If he refused, they would bring him under formal discipline, and also warn the congregation not to trust him with their money.

⁵ If our leaders inform our entire congregation about a disciplinary situation, they have discretion whether to divulge the individual's name. This decision usually will depend on a variety of factors, such as: how widely known the situation already is; whether there might be people in the congregation who could persuade the individual to repent; or whether the congregation needs to be on guard against potential harm he might cause (see previous footnote). Even if our leaders decide it is not necessary to identify an individual specifically, they may still inform the congregation of the general situation and the disciplinary steps they have followed. This general information can help to enlist wide prayer support, let the congregation know that our leaders are obeying the Lord's command to seek after those who stray, and warn people who may be flirting with secret sin that they, too, may face discipline if they do not turn back to God.

⁶ For example, if we confronted a man in our church for seducing young women, or for acting inappropriately around little children, or for sowing gossip and division, and he left and started

Loving restoration always stands at the heart of the disciplinary process. If an individual repents, and our leaders confirm his or her sincerity, we will rejoice together and gladly imitate God's forgiveness by restoring the person to fellowship within the body (see Matt. 18:13; Luke 15:3-7, 11-32; 2 Cor. 2:5-11; Col. 3:12-14).

People who have been excluded from another church will not be allowed to partake of the sacraments in our church, to become members, or to participate in the regular fellowship of our church until they have repented of their sins and made a reasonable effort to be reconciled, or our leaders have determined that the discipline of the former church was not biblically appropriate.

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" (Heb. 12:10-11).

attending another church, we would consider it our duty to urge the leaders of that church to counsel with him and to protect their people from his harmful behavior.

WE INVITE YOU TO BECOME A MEMBER OF OUR CHURCH

We believe that God wants every Christian to become a member of a local church. To learn why, please read Jonathan Leeman's book, *Church Membership*, Joshua Harris's book, *Stop Dating the Church: Fall in Love with the Body of Christ*, and the third chapter of Donald Whitney's book, *Spiritual Disciplines Within the Church: Participating Fully in the Body of Christ*. These books are available at www.christianbook.com or www.amazon.com.

Becoming a member of a church can be a life-changing decision. The preaching, teaching, fellowship, opportunities to use your gifts, and mutual accountability that you experience in a church can dramatically change your relationship with the Lord and with the people he places in your life. Therefore, we want you to take time to get to know our church, learn how we are fulfilling God's command to build His kingdom, and see how we love and relate to one another in daily life.

If you like what you see in our church, we invite you to attend our membership class. During that class you can learn more about our church's doctrines and vision for ministry, and about the privileges and responsibilities of formal membership. Attending the class will not obligate you to become a member.

If attending the membership class convinces you that joining our church will help to you grow in your ability to love and serve God, we would be delighted to have you become a member of our body. By joining our church, you will demonstrate in a concrete way your desire to unite with us to advance Christ's kingdom. Membership also will allow you to enjoy ministry opportunities and privileges that are not available to people who only attend our church, including the following:

- You may participate and vote in congregational meetings, where we seek to discern and plan how to follow God's vision for our church.
- You will be eligible to minister to the children and youth in our church (after completing our standard screening process).
- You can seek more opportunities to use your spiritual gifts, including those of teaching, serving, and leading within the body.
- If you need counseling or support from our leaders when their time is limited, your request for assistance will take precedence over requests from people who have not joined the church.

If you would like to learn more about the importance of church membership, please read the books mentioned above. You may also meet with our leaders, who would be happy to discuss any questions or concerns you may have about membership.