



SouthBrook
Leadership Guide

We hope you are reading this guide because you are someone who has felt the call on your life to live like Jesus forever. We also hope you are reading this because you have felt the call to share your life with others and to show them what following Jesus looks like.

We want you to know that everything in this guide has been prayed over, argued over, cried over. Also, everything in this book is an attempt to let the word of God lead us. We believe in the authority of Scripture over this church and our lives. This guide reflects our best attempt to understand and translate the word of God into a community of faith.

It's our hope to equip you and to give you some resources as you follow and as you lead. We hope you all see yourself in this great description Paul gave us of the church:

“So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”

— Ephesians 4.11-13



Charlie McMahan

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Leadership & Followership

Imagine yourself as the lead car in a caravan road trip. Things can be going along fine for a while as you all coast along waving at each other out the windows and turning up the Bon Jovi song on your stereo so the other cars know why you're banging your head. And then there's a traffic light. Part of the group makes its way through but the other part gets left behind. You try to slow down or pull over but traffic is getting heavier and before long, you have no idea where the other cars are. Plus, you start to realize that a lot of people drive gray cars that look a lot alike. Not everybody in the group feels comfortable with the "Speed limit plus 5" policy you've decided on. So they hang back, trying to correct your obvious disobedience to the laws of the road. On top of that, they're starting to lose focus. A couple people stop because they drank too much Mountain Dew. Another car decides to stop at the place across the highway because it looked like they had better snacks. And before long, you are leading a caravan of one.

Can you feel the tension? The frustration? That's only the beginning. Imagine that there is something far greater than a road trip at stake. Imagine that you are trying to lead people to places like peace and grace. Imagine that the distractions and the obstacles are things like death, doubt and diseases. Imagine something far greater than traffic is trying to force people off course.

Whether you are leading a home group, or a discussion around a table, or a mission trip, it's going to be tough to navigate. There are going to be lots of things that might get in the way. You may be at risk of losing your own direction and may forget where you're going because you're so busy trying to keep track of the road behind you. This is why it's so important for all leaders to remember that we are all ultimately followers.

This guide will help you with information. Hopefully, you will feel more equipped to have spiritual conversations and to deal with difficult relational issues. But most importantly, we hope this guide helps you as you try to follow Jesus. That's the most important thing. We hope all our leaders keep Christ ahead and before them. He is after all "the way, the truth and the life." (John 14.6)

The Apostle Paul makes a lot of really bold statements in his letters to churches. One of the bravest things he ever wrote was to the church at Corinth:

"Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ." — 1 Corinthians 11.1

He understood the pressure of being a leader and feeling responsible for getting people further along the road. But he also understood that his leadership only mattered when he himself was following after Jesus.

This is a great picture of what God has always been trying to do with people: Use people to show everybody else what it looks like to honor and love God with our lives. For all leaders, the greatest thing we can do with our lives is follow Jesus and show that to the world.

If you take on a leadership role at SouthBrook, there will be people watching you, hoping that your life will show them something about who God is and why God matters.



It's incredibly important that you understand and embrace the truths represented in these next few pages. What you believe will matter. Whether you practice the tried and true ways of growing spiritually will matter. Whether you seek God's direction for your words and behavior will matter. Whether you follow the lead of Scripture in dealing with conflict and confusion will matter.

If you are leading, remember to follow first.

- Follow someone further along than you.
- Follow the authority of Scripture.
- Follow the leading of God through the way of Jesus and the counsel of the Holy Spirit.

Statements of Faith

As a church, we recognize that faith can be a difficult thing—it can be hard to know who or what to believe. Our mission statement says it best: We exist “to help de-churched skeptics live like Jesus forever.” Faith is a lifelong struggle. Ultimately, as we are talking through the things that we believe as a church, we want you to know that we do not believe these things lightly. We believe in being very responsible with what we teach people to believe. And in the end, whether you decide to also believe these things, we hope you will also research them, pray through them, cry, fight, wonder, and yes, struggle. Know we are doing our best to present what we believe and then asking you to take a step of faith.

God is a community made up of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We will pursue God because rich and deep relationships come from God.

This statement of faith is about the importance of living in community. While the Trinity is mysterious, think of it as God living in community with Jesus and the Holy Spirit. While He walked the earth, Jesus lived in community with his disciples. To that end, SouthBrook seeks to make it easy for people to connect with others in small community groups where life change is most likely to happen.

Jesus Christ is God graciously and truthfully showing Himself to our world. We will be fully devoted followers of Jesus.

There are many facts that point to Jesus' claim to divinity. One of the acid tests of a belief is its effectiveness. Does it work in practical daily life? Skeptics have tried to explain Christianity away as a delusion, a psychological quirk, but the bottom line is it works. The transforming power of the resurrected Christ has positively influenced people's lives for centuries.

The Bible is God's love story with humanity and complete guidebook for life. We will communicate its amazing relevance to our world.

The Bible claims to be the inspired word of God and there is compelling evidence to back up that claim. SouthBrook's top priority is to communicate the Bible's relevance to our everyday lives using transformational teaching. In other words, our goal is not to "feed" people, but to make them hungry to know more, because that's the way Jesus taught.

God in us gives us the power to live like Jesus forever. We grow by living authentically with God and with each other.

Authentic community with God, as well as with others, is what makes it possible to live like Jesus. The ability to live like Jesus happens when you engage with what we call the Five S's: reading and applying Scripture, spending time in Solitude, finding Support in healthy relationships, giving your life in Service to God, and surrendering the Significant Events in your life to the direction of God.

Living with God forever or without God forever is our choice. We will make de-churched skeptics our first priority.

Heaven and hell are really about God giving us in eternity what we desired on earth. Jesus described heaven as a vast community of people who loved and served Christ on earth, forever released from the ravages of sin, with no more sorrow, death, disappointment, guilt or remorse.

Jesus also described hell. He said there would be utter darkness (isolation, separation), intense fire (discomfort) and gnashing of teeth (extreme remorse). In hell unbelievers will experience what they spent a lifetime attempting to experience on earth: a life of total separation from God. God doesn't hurl people into hell; people choose it.

SouthBrook's mission is to help de-churched skeptics live like Jesus forever. We want to help all people, whatever their background or experiences, learn to live and love like Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ designed His church to serve the world and make His presence real in it. We will serve our world like Jesus did his.

Jesus challenges us to reorient our "me-first" mindsets to a servant mindset. When we live with a servant's mindset, when we make Jesus' presence known in practical ways, the church becomes a powerful, unstoppable force for change in the local community and around the world.

Our Story

As someone who is investing your time and hopefully, your heart, in this community, we think it's important for you to know some about our roots. Knowing the bigger story helps us to see God at work and to place ourselves in that work.

SouthBrook was planted in 1986 by Tom Jones with the name Centerville Christian Church. As South Dayton grew, the church grew with it. In 1992, Lead Pastor Charlie McMahan took on the leadership of the church, and in September 1994, Centerville Christian Church officially became SouthBrook Christian Church and moved into the Spring Valley Pike building. We have gone from meeting in an elementary school to sharing a building with Seventh Day Adventists to eventually building our own place on Spring Valley Pike and outgrowing it. By 2004, we had more people than spaces so we opened a second campus on Washington Church Road. After adding a main theater, we completed the official move to the new location on Easter Sunday in 2008 and have been making this place our home ever since.

But our story goes back further than that. Of course, technically, it goes all the way back to the very first day when God made some people in His image, asked them to live together and gave them some jobs to do. It goes all the way back to the tiny little family of Abraham's wandering through the desert looking for home. It goes all the way back to the first followers of Jesus and to the early church meeting together in synagogues and homes. God has always worked through communities of faith, trying to show the world what it looks like when people try to live under the rule of God together.

But usually, when people ask questions about what kind of church SouthBrook is, or when we run into questions about Scripture, or doctrine, or decision-making, people are asking about denominations.

Lots of churches have different ideas about what churches should look like, how they should behave, what songs they should sing, what kinds of buildings they should have. Many of those choices are just variations on a theme; the ultimate purpose of Jesus in commissioning His church was simply to tell the world and show the world who He was and who He is.

As a leader, you will probably find yourself answering questions or having conversations about decisions SouthBrook has made. Many times people come to our church and they already have ideas about things they think churches should or shouldn't do.

► HERE ARE SOME THINGS YOU CAN DO WHEN THIS HAPPENS:

- Try and understand the church culture that this person may have experienced.
- Try to understand if they have wounds from other churches.
- Try to understand if they have strongly held traditions.
- Try to honor other churches in these conversations and be careful making comparisons between us and other places.

We think it also helps to know some of the "back-story" to how churches like SouthBrook came to be.

SouthBrook is an independent Christian church. There are a number of churches like ours that share similar roots and beliefs. In many ways, these churches are a "non-denominational denomination." There is no governing body or hierarchy. We are supported by our own resources and internal leadership.

These kinds of churches got their start in America during the 19th century. The idea of an "independent" church started when frontier churches were trying to define themselves apart from European leaders and church governments. They wanted to figure out how to simplify church life. They were also very concerned with church unity and finding common ground with other believers. A lot of times, these churches are referred to as "Restoration" churches—because of the priority of "restoring" the simplicity of the early church. There are a couple of phrases that these churches repeated over and over (they may have even had these bumper stickers on their horses):

**"In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty,
and in all things love."**

Although this did not work out exactly as they hoped, their idea was to try and agree on the big things and not let the little things cause conflict. They thought if they agreed on ideas about God and salvation and interpreting Scripture, everyone would get along. It really was a great idea, but then organs and pianos came along. It got harder and harder for them to distinguish the "essentials" from the "non-essentials."

"Not the only Christians, but Christians only."

This was their way of reminding themselves that there was room around the communion table for Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, Quakers, and whatever other expressions of Christianity they found on the frontier. Their hope was to get rid of all the other allegiances that people were holding onto. Again, it was a great idea but it's one that we don't always remember today.

The "Restorers'" favorite passages in Scripture were Acts 2 and John 17. If you look these up, you'll see a great description of the early church and their commitment to following Jesus with their whole lives. You'll also read about the time when Jesus prayed for his followers to experience unity.

Although church life is hardly ever as simple as it probably could be (churches are made up of people, after all), we still think these simple, beautiful pictures of community are worth pursuing.

Today, many of these churches are still loosely connected through conferences and colleges. But each one looks a little different. While SouthBrook shares roots with these churches, we also connect and learn from lots of other kinds of churches. We try to stay true to the ideals of the Restoration church—as a local church body but also as a member of the body of Christ that transcends time, space and titles.

If you want to know more about the history of churches like SouthBrook, try googling these names and phrases:

Thomas Campbell
Alexander Campbell
Barton Stone
"Declaration and Address"

Church Values

When you have questions about our church or find yourself answering questions about our church, it may help to describe the kind of culture we hope to have around SouthBrook and why we do things the way we do. These are the values we have landed on and we hope they help us to fulfill the GREAT big calling that God places on communities of faith.

► **GENEROSITY IS OUR MARK OF GRACE ON THE WORLD.**

God has been generous and gracious to us. We are alive by grace. By faith in Jesus Christ, this grace is accessible to us every day. God's grace is a gift that frees us to be generous people. Grace is the life-changer that upsets all the fallen systems of this world. We can extend the grace of Jesus to the world by living generous lives.

Ephesians 2:8; 1 Corinthians 15:9-10

► **RELATIONSHIP IS OUR REASON FOR LIVING.**

True richness is found in authentic relationship. As we were made to be in a relationship with God, it is our desire to move beyond casual interactions into a deep, meaningful friendship with God and each other. Authentic relationship is knowing and being known, loving and being loved, celebrating and being celebrated, serving and being served.

Philippians 3:17; 1 Thessalonians 1:5

► **EXCELLENCE IN ALL WE DO HONORS GOD.**

Excellence is the right people doing the right things for the right reasons, and doing them to the best of their ability to honor God, not themselves. To try and attain perfection is not realistic. We simply want everything we do to reflect excellence for Jesus Christ and be an inspiration to others. We are bringing our "A-game" in all that we do. We believe the church of Jesus ought to be the most excellent place in the world.

1 Corinthians 10:31; Philippians 4:8

► **ACTION IS WHY WE STUDY SCRIPTURE.**

The Bible, written thousands of years ago, still has amazing application in the 21st century. We desire to connect God's timeless Word to our lives today and allow it to make a difference in us. We not only want to hear God's Word, we want to be doers of the Word. We use the modern language and experiences of our culture to communicate the enduring relevance of Scripture and apply its teachings to our lives.

2 Timothy 3:16; James 1:22-25

► **TRUTH WILL SET US FREE.**

Truth is ultimate reality. Truth does not exist because we choose to believe in it. Truth is the way it is, whether we believe it or not. Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life." We believe Jesus embodies truth and represents the way things are in this life. Jesus exposes us to the deepest levels of our existence and shows us what it is like at the root of everything. We are not inviting people into a religion, but into reality, so they can be set free by aligning themselves with reality.

John 8:32-36; John 14:6

Salvation

One of the most exciting things about being a follower of Jesus, and of being a leader in a church, is getting to play a part in leading people to salvation. As people who are modeling the love of God and living like Jesus, our hope is that our lives point people towards the God who made them, loves them and wants to rescue them too.

When it comes to salvation, almost all Christian denominations agree that the life, death and resurrection of Jesus is the world's saving grace. We are saved right now and forever because Jesus died on the cross and rose from the tomb. But churches have taught different things about what that means for us.

► **WHO DOES GOD WANT TO SAVE?**

One of the questions people sometimes have about salvation is whether or not people really have a choice in the matter. For a very long time, the Presbyterian tradition has taught Predestination—the idea that God determined who would be saved or not saved long before they made a choice about it. This idea is gaining some momentum right now with the Reformed movement. But even people who don't know the word "predestination" or who don't know anything about John Calvin may still wrestle with the question of why some people seem to fit right in with faith and some people struggle with faith.

There are some passages in Scripture that seem to support the idea that God picks some people and not others. But we have to be careful with how we read those.

For instance, the whole story of the Old Testament is about God "choosing" Israel to save, protect and bless.

In the story of Abraham's family, it sure seems like Jacob gets the favor of God over Esau (and it's not just because he is the youngest and they are always the favorites).

After the life of Jesus, his followers are left wondering whether Israelites, or Jewish people, get "grandfathered" into the kingdom of heaven or whether they are supposed to make some kind of choice. It's the same kind of thing we wonder about sometimes—is it enough to just be part of a family that has faith, or is there some personal action required?

The Apostle Paul actually has a whole lot to say about God's election of Israel over other nations. If you really want to think about this, you should read the book of Romans, especially chapters 6 through 11.

► **HERE ARE SOME HIGHLIGHTS OF WHAT PAUL HAS TO SAY:**

- All people are prone to the perils of sin. — *Romans 6*
- No one, not even the Jewish community, can live perfectly in line with the Old Testament law and be righteous by their own strength. — *Romans 7*
- The grace of God through the work of Jesus and the life of the Spirit is the only solution to the problem of sin. Even the people who seem the least likely to ever become "righteous" can be righteous because of grace. — *Romans 8*
- The grace and mercy that people thought was only for the Jewish people is also offered to the Gentiles. This is not what they expected but it is God's choice. — *Romans 9*





- There is still a chance for Israel to accept the grace of God offered in Jesus, but they have a pattern of being disobedient and stubborn. — *Romans 10*
- God is far more merciful than anyone can imagine. — *Romans 11*

Now, there are some specific things Paul is trying to work out with the Jewish people. But in some ways, their story is also our story. Like them, we are prone to sin, rebellion and disobedience. Like them, God longs for us to turn to Him for rescue and redemption. Like them, when we are saved, it is by the grace of God and it is so that we can lead others towards God.

Think about the choosing of the twelve disciples. Yes, Jesus goes to certain people and invites them to follow. Maybe he knew ahead of time that they would be the ones to say “yes.” But they are chosen so that they can invite others.

Take a minute and read *Ephesians 1.11-14* (I’ll wait). In this passage, it sounds like God pre-picks people to be saved. But even their salvation is meant to bring God glory, so that others can join in.

There may be a few passages that can be used to support the idea that God picks some people to save but that’s not the biggest possible picture. This is:

Every page of Scripture is filled with stories and songs and sermons about God’s great hope for humanity and the lengths God will go to rescue us from the hells we make for ourselves.

Every act of God’s, every word is intended to draw humanity near. Even the punishments. Even the wars. Even the times when God calls on armies to take people out—it’s to protect the righteous so they can tell the world that God reigns.

We see God empowering men and women to lead tribes and kingdoms to live lives that bring them closer to the heart of God. To lead communities where the poor are taken care of and the defenseless are defended.

We see God come in the flesh as a child and finally as a compassionate, wise, brave man who tells stories about the lost being found. We see Jesus looking into the eyes of the people on the streets and the sinners around the table and pleading with them to drop what they’re doing and follow him instead.

We see Jesus carrying his own cross up a hill so that he can lay his life down to cover over the past and future failures of you and me. We see Jesus walking away from the tomb that held him in the name of victory.

And we see Jesus calling his people to go around, everywhere, telling people what they’ve heard and seen him do, making disciples of all nations, so that someday, in some real kingdom, we can gather together at the table of the king and feast and celebrate.

God wants people to be saved—saved for the sake of eternity but also saved in the present—saved from selfish lives, destructive habits, dismal conditions. We try as a church to help people understand that there is a “forever” element to salvation but there is also a “right now” element. We can help people understand the invitation to follow Jesus is for everyone, for right now, and forever.

▶ HOW DO I “GET SAVED?” DOES IT EVER GO AWAY?

Since we believe God wants all people to be covered in grace and to live in a relationship with God forever, we have to talk some about how that happens and what it means.

As we said, we believe there is a “forever” element to salvation. To be saved means to secure your place in the forever kingdom of God. It means that you want to live with God forever. The idea of heaven, of worshiping and serving God to Infinity is all right with you. There is certainly a part of salvation that has

to do with where we belong both in life and in death.

But it’s important to us to make sure people also understand that there is a “right now” element to salvation. Salvation starts right now. Life with God can start right now.

Some people can fall into the trap of thinking that all it takes to “be saved forever” or to get a ticket to heaven, is to make a one-time decision—to just have one moment where you say or believe the right thing.

For a lot of people, it certainly starts with that one moment. Almost all Christ-followers can tell a story about one moment when it became clear to them how they wanted to live. It may have been during a worship service, or around a church campfire, or during a conversation with a friend. For some people, it comes in more difficult moments, when they have hit bottom because of an addiction, or a loss. But most people experience some moment of clarity when they know that following Jesus is the best choice they can make for their life.

It’s a moment when people decide that they believe Jesus is who he says he is. It’s a moment when they believe that there is something more to this life than just what we can see. It’s a moment when they accept the primary teachings of the church about the nature of God.

When you experience that moment, or when someone tells you about that kind of moment, it’s important to mark it. We think the best way, and the obedient way, to mark this kind of moment is to be baptized. But we’ll talk about that in a few pages.

Here’s what’s important about that moment: It’s just the beginning.

When Jesus goes to his disciples and says, “Follow me,” it would be kind of funny if they said, “Yes” and then stayed right where they were. If you go and read the stories in *Matthew 4.18-22*, *Mark 2.13-14*, and *Luke 5.1-11*, you can see that the disciples leave whatever they are doing and they start to follow after Jesus.

Now, for us, we are not always called to completely just drop our nets and physically follow in Jesus’ footsteps. (Although there may be some who should.) But when we decide to give God our lives and follow Jesus, we also cannot just stay right where we are, spiritually and emotionally-speaking.

Saying “yes” is incredibly important. For some people, it takes a lifetime to get to the point where they are even willing to say “Yes.” Sometimes saying “yes” means overcoming years of doubt and struggle and pride. Saying “yes” is an important and beautiful step. Saying “yes” is exactly what we all need to do to say definitively that we want our forever destination to be with God. That’s step one. It’s the beginning.

Following Jesus and living with God forever means living out the reality of salvation.

It means waking up everyday and deciding over and over to follow the way of Jesus as you live. Consider these passages from Paul about what the Christ-centered life looks like:

“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself up for me.” — Galatians 2.20





“Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him in this way no longer. Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” — 2 Corinthians 5.16-21

Salvation is certainly security for when we die but it is just as important to understand that salvation is a way to live.

Of course, one of the questions people ask is whether or not it is possible to experience this moment of salvation, when everything is clear, and then fall away. Some traditions have taught the principle of “Once Saved, Always Saved.” They have taught that if you have ever had that moment when you believed in Jesus, or have even been baptized, that you can’t ever lose your place in heaven, no matter what kind of life you live. The other phrase you might hear people use is “Eternal Security.”

A lot of people wonder about this because life can be tough. Faith that you once had can get lost in the shuffle of being busy, or being hurt. We catch glimpses of who God is and then life, or sin, gets in the way of us experiencing salvation in present moment.

This idea is appealing for all kinds of reasons. But there are a number of Scriptures that speak against this. There are a number of passages about the ongoing danger of sin, even for those who believe in Jesus.



“You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.” — Galatians 5.4

“But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called ‘Today’ so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness. We have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold firmly till the end of our original conviction.” — Hebrews 3.13-14

“If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and are overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning.” — 2 Peter 2.20

It is entirely possible that a person could experience the fullness of God’s grace for a season and then fall away. Relationally speaking, God gives us what we want when it comes to this life and to eternity. If we decide we want to live according to our own will, and if we want distance from God, that is exactly what we get. On the other hand, if we spend our lives chasing after the heart of God, we will most likely find ourselves getting closer to God forever.

▶ DO I HAVE TO BE BAPTIZED?

If you have the chance to answer questions people have about salvation, you will probably eventually find yourself talking about baptism. You may have questions yourself: What does getting soaked in water in front of friends, family and strangers have to do with following Jesus?

It’s a fair question. But it is a question with lots of good answers.

▶ WHY BAPTISM?

Because Jesus did it.

In *Matthew 3.13-17*, Jesus himself is baptized by John, who baptizes so many people he gets labeled “John the Baptist.” For Jesus, it’s the beginning of his public ministry. It is a moment when he is letting the world know that his life and his words are not his own. They belong to God, his Father, maker of the Universe. For Jesus, his baptism marks the start of his life as a public figure. His baptism is also a way of stating a purpose for his life.

For us, baptism can also mark the moment when we are proclaiming to the world that our lives are not our own. It is a physical way of telling the world, and ourselves, and God, that we want to live by the hand of God. For us, it is also a way of remembering and marking our purpose.

Much like a marriage ceremony, baptism is a way of publicly committing ourselves to a life of faithfulness.

For us, as followers of Jesus, baptism is also a physical and symbolic way to represent dying to ourselves and coming back to life in Christ.

Paul talks about this in *Romans 6.3-6*:

“Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him in a death like this, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.”

If you find yourself questioning baptism, or in a conversation with someone who is, you may want to explore why. If there is resistance, it may not be to the act itself but to what it symbolizes. For many of us, we have to spend our whole lives practicing surrendering and giving up our own will for the will of God. Baptism is a great place to start figuring out what it means to lay ourselves down.

If you need a quick answer to this question, like you’re in an elevator and somebody wants you to explain baptism between the 12th floor and the 21st, you could always tell them that it is a great way to experience the saturation of the grace of God. As for whether or not you have to be baptized to go to heaven, we leave those questions up to God. Based on our best understandings of Scripture, being baptized is the absolute best way to mark the decision to follow Jesus. Leading people to baptism is also one of the last commands Jesus leaves with his disciples in *Matthew 28.18-19*:

“Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’”

JUST A NOTE: Sometimes people wonder about why we completely immerse people in water instead of “sprinkling” like some other church traditions. Our best understanding of the Greek word for “baptism” is something closer to “immersion”—being fully covered by the water. We don’t say this to discount other practices—we are only trying to live out our best understanding of the text.

JUST ANOTHER NOTE: There are a number of church traditions that practice infant baptism. We believe baptism is a decision people need to make for themselves and encourage people to guide their children toward making the decision to be baptized when they can understand what it means. We do offer parents the opportunity to participate in a Child Dedication service, where they can commit to raising their children as followers of Jesus.



Okay, one more note. Occasionally, we get asked why we don't do regular altar calls. Other than church traditions, we don't see a mandate for a permanent invitation as a part of worship. A couple times a year, we do a series focused on baptism and on the initial call to follow Jesus. We also regularly have people respond to the call of Christ through their participation in support groups and service groups. We hope to set the stage and build a community so that the invitation is always open.

— FURTHER RESOURCES —

Baptism Orientation Class
Baby/Child Dedication Orientation
SouthBrook Kids Baptism Class

Communion

There are some things we do as a church that make perfect sense to everybody, whether you come from a church background or not. Free coffee makes sense to everyone. There are other things we do as a church that are a little more mysterious. Things that might not make perfect sense at first but can become more and more meaningful as God becomes a part of your life. Communion may need some explanation for people, but it's an incredibly rich way to experience the presence of God and to honor what God has done for us in Christ.

Here's the lowdown on how ordinary crackers and juice can taste like heaven:

Jesus shared a lot of meals with his followers. There are a ton of stories in the Gospel that start with all of them eating and drinking together. It was one of the last things he did with them before his arrest and death. You've probably seen the painting of "the Last Supper." Or the jigsaw puzzle, or the coffee mugs. It was a pretty important meal. You can read the full story in *Matthew 26.17-30*.

At this meal, as Jesus "breaks the bread" with his disciples and passes around the cup, he tells them to keep on having meals like this to remember his sacrifice:

"While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Take and eat; this is my body.' Then he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.'" — Matthew 26.26-29

They might not have completely understood this at the time, but after seeing him die, rise again, and ascend to heaven, they understood that this was definitely something they needed to remember. They came to understand that his body was broken for them, just as the loaf of bread was broken. His blood flowed freely for them, like wine being poured in a cup.

In the book of Acts, they understand it and know they need to keep this sacred practice going:

"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." — Acts 2.42-47

We also know from Paul's letter to the Corinthians that this practice had spread and the purpose and meaning of it continued to grow. As their memories of the life and death and life again of Jesus started to fade, the breaking of bread and the passing of the cup became a way for them to remember, reflect and experience the presence of God with them.

As much as it's a chance to look back and remember, it's also a chance to look forward. There are a number of times in Scripture where the image of a feast is used to describe heaven. In some ways, communion is a taste of the meal to come.

Sometimes people wonder whether or not they are allowed to take communion at SouthBrook. We want to make sure people know that there are no requirements for taking communion other than a true desire to remember and honor Jesus Christ. There were all kinds of people gathered around the table with Jesus and he passed the bread and the cup to everyone.

We do encourage people to make sure they are fully engaged in communion—Don't take it just because it's there. Make it a quiet moment or take it with family and friends. As long as you are honoring the purpose of communion, the table is set for you.

"So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and the Lord. Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves." — 1 Corinthians 11.27-29

We usually offer communion as the conclusion of our worship services and people are free to take their time celebrating the sacrifice of Jesus. Occasionally, we will pass it during the service, but for the most part, we want to give people the freedom to either miss the moment or make the most of it.

There are not really any details in Scripture about the logistics of communion. The disciples did not pass along exactly what kind of bread to use or what kind of drink. They didn't say exactly when to have it or what to say. It is a remarkably simple practice—just bread and drink—the body and the blood—broken and poured for you.

► **A NOTE ON SYMBOLS:**

While communion is a regular symbolic act for us, occasionally, we get asked about the general lack of symbols around our building. For people from other traditions, the lack of a cross, or of pictures, can seem strange. While there are no permanent crosses around the building, we do occasionally use images of the cross to direct and guide worship. Symbols, particularly the cross, can certainly be powerful and while we believe in everything the cross represents, we believe we don't need a physical cross present to keep the truth of the cross at the core of our teaching.

For a while, in some more traditional churches, the cross was treated almost like an idol—as if the physical cross itself brought the presence of God—we want to be careful to respect the symbol without attaching more to it than we ought.

If you ever get questions about the use/lack of symbols, or if you wonder yourself, the section in this guide on Restoration churches, and also on our Core Values can be helpful in this conversation.

Five S's for Spiritual Growth

One of our great hopes for our church is that people would learn how to experience the presence of God in their daily lives. We believe there are several time-tested practices that can lead us all closer to a personal knowledge and intimacy with the God who desperately wants to know us.

Solitude

In Solitude, you remind yourself that you were created by God primarily to be in community with Him. Find a time and place where it's easy for you to practice solitude. If you're unsure what to do, just

P-R-A-Y:

PRAISE Thank God for who He is and for everything He's done for you.

REPENT Come clean and confess your shortcomings or sin.

ASK Ask God for what you need today.

YIELD Surrender your life, spirit, gifts and ego. Say to God, *"Not my will, but Your will be done."* And then be quiet and listen for God's still, small voice.

Scripture

Read Scripture daily and apply its truths to your life.

Service

Practice humbly Serving others. Volunteer around SouthBrook or find a way to serve people in need in the community or beyond.

Support

Find "your people." That is, find people with whom you can build supportive relationships over time.

Significant Events

God will use Solitude, Scripture, Service and Support to help you interpret the Significant Events of your life and grow to live more like Jesus Christ.

— EXPERIENCES —

Bible Crash Course
Sacred Pathways Class

— BOOKS / WEBSITES —

Practicing the Presence of God by Brother Lawrence
God is Closer than You Think by John Ortberg
Celebration of Disciplines by Richard Foster
YouVersion.com for Bible reading plans and helps

Membership

Once in a while we have people ask questions about becoming a member of SouthBrook. While we do not have a membership at SouthBrook, we do ask people who attend to commit to an annual covenant. Covenants are used throughout the Old and New Testament to demonstrate a deep commitment between God and His people. We are all joining a bigger story being played out between God and people, and we believe there are things we ought to do to play our part. We ask Christ-followers to commit to practicing spiritual disciplines, to commit to serving the church and the world, and to give generously towards the causes of the kingdom of heaven. If people attend regularly and consider this their church home; if they are connected via a group or other growing relationship; and, if they support the church with their time, talent, and treasures—they are a part of our community.

Tithes & Offerings

It's important for leaders and people who are committed to SouthBrook to understand the church is financially supported and resourced through the gifts of the people in this faith community. Giving is a way of showing that God is ultimately the owner and ruler of this world and our lives. One aspect of spiritual growth is to trust God's directives in our lives, including the way we manage our finances. The principle of tithing, or giving 10% of your income, is a helpful guideline from the Old Testament. In their agricultural world, there are several references in Scripture to "tithing" a portion of a year's crop to God as a sacrifice. One of the clearest statements comes from the prophet Malachi in *Malachi 3.10*:

"Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in my house, and thus put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts; see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing."

We believe giving is an area where God invites us to a challenge and then meets us there with more than we can imagine. When we give, we receive.

We encourage people who want to experience the faithfulness of God to try tithing, or to move toward tithing as their circumstances allow.

In addition to the tithing principle of the Old Testament, we see this giving thread come to life in the churches of the New Testament as they send gifts to communities in need. There are several references to the early church taking up offerings and using their collected resources to do greater things than they could have ever done on their own. Paul writes to the church at Corinth about this kind of offering:

"This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, people will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. And in their prayers for you, their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you."
— 2 Corinthians 9.12-14

Investing and participating in the local church is a way to make the kingdom of God more visible in this world.

Particularly for leaders, regular giving is also a way to mark your investment in a local place of faith. In the words of Jesus from *Matthew 6.21*: *"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."*

The Role of Women in the Church

One of the difficult issues the church has had to work out, and one of the issues that you may end up having to talk out with someone, is whether or not women should serve as leaders and teachers in the church. Christians and churches have been talking about this for a long time and surprisingly, they do not always agree.

Some people, who are used to a world where women are encouraged to succeed and achieve, are surprised to find that this is even an issue in the church. People from other church backgrounds, where women are sometimes discouraged from playing certain roles, are surprised when they find women playing those roles here. Either way, it can be an intense conversation and one where we all need to speak carefully and with love.

For the record, SouthBrook affirms the role of women in the church and believes God calls all people to serve, lead and model the life of Jesus to the world. SouthBrook believes women can and should serve the church as preachers, teachers and leaders. But not all churches come to that same conclusion.

It's important to note that people on both sides of this issue are trying to stay faithful to the teachings of Scripture. But there is a whole lot more at stake here than just the way we see women—it's about how we see the whole world.

► THE FALLOUT

If we go back to the very beginning of the story, in Genesis 1 and 2, God made men and women to be beside each other—to keep each other company, to be fruitful and to work and enjoy creation. It's all going great for awhile, as they frolic around (Thanks to picture Bibles we had as kids, some of us can't help but picture them wearing carefully placed leaves as they frolic.) But then sin enters the picture. Adam and Eve do the one thing God asked them not to do and they have to face the consequences. If you go back and read Genesis 3.14-24, you can see the reaction of God.

There are consequences for their sin. God says there will be “enmity” in the system now between people and animals. God also says there will be separation between the sexes, telling Eve that the man will now rule over her. So now we have a cause for all the differences between men and women—why boys hit girls on the playground, why girls break boys' hearts in high school, why men and women fight over the remote control. The result of sin. It's not the way God wanted the world to be. God wanted men and women to cooperate as they enjoy each other and the world.

This “enmity” and separation has taken all kinds of shapes in our world. It has led to both men and women being less than what God made them to be. It has led to divorces. Occasionally, it has been legislated. Enmity has become so enmeshed in our culture that we can start to think that's the way God wanted it to be.

But we don't think so. This is the curse, not the creation. We can either live up to the curse, or live up to the creation. In the coming of Christ and his ministry, we see God restoring creation, trying to get the world and the people back to the way things were supposed to be. The way men and women work together is at least a small part of that very big picture.

► SO WHAT ABOUT JESUS?

By the time Jesus shows up in the story, separation has really sunk in to the world. There are extreme divisions between men and women, almost exclusively in favor of men. Women cannot receive an education. They are dependent on husbands for any kind of financial stability. In the literature, art and legislation of the ancient world, women are often characterized by hurtful, oppressive stereotypes.

But Jesus doesn't play by the “fallen world” rules. The Gospel accounts are full of stories of Jesus coming into contact with women who would have been discounted and devalued by the world around them. But Jesus pays attention to them. He speaks with them and listens to them. He heals them. In Luke 13, in one very poignant, perhaps symbolic, moment with a woman who has been crippled for eighteen years, Jesus literally straightens her up and tells her to stand up tall and be free.

Over and over again, Jesus shows mercy and kindness to women who would have been ignored, abandoned, overlooked. He is restoring the created order. He is showing his followers how life should be done.

— HERE ARE SOME OTHER STORIES YOU MIGHT WANT TO READ —

Jesus and a sinful woman — Luke 7.36-50

Jesus and a bleeding woman — Luke 8.40-56

Jesus and a woman on the outside — John 4.1-42

► THINGS PAUL SAYS:

Of course, like a lot of the things that Jesus said and did, his early followers struggled to make them a part of their life. They had to wrestle with how to live like Jesus in a world and culture that were hostile to the ways of Jesus.

In the book of Acts and the letters of the New Testament, we see the early Christians trying to figure out what the life of Jesus means for the community of faith. Some of the things they wrestled over were eternal issues and some of them were cultural. It can get difficult sometimes to tell which is which.

The Apostle Paul, who writes the majority of the letters in the New Testament, instructs the early church on everything from circumcision to hat-wearing to what kind of food to have at parties. Some of the things Paul talks about that seem cultural have eternal implications. Some of the eternal things Paul talks about have cultural implications. It's tricky. Especially when he talks about men and women. In all kinds of ways, Paul is trying to work out how to live in a certain time and place with eternity in your sight.

Consider that the same guy who wrote this:

“There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.” — Galatians 3.28

Also wrote this:

“Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says.” — 1 Corinthians 14.34

Why do these sound different? Well, for one, they were written to different communities with different needs. In Galatia, they were putting too many rules and too much structure on people. In Corinth, they had lost a sense of order and integrity. Paul is addressing very specific contexts. And Paul is all about making sure people understand the biggest possible picture, no matter the settings or surroundings. And sometimes we have to read carefully to understand the world around the words. Sometimes the Gospel

of Christ is preached by going against the culture and sometimes it is preached by going with the culture.

But you might wonder (because we sure have), why does Paul ever limit the role of women in the church? Even if it's just for that culture, or that time, why would he limit what women can do in the kingdom of God, especially since Jesus was trying to lift women up?

Remember that Paul is trying to protect the integrity of a vital message. He is trying to communicate the good news of the life, death and life again of Jesus Christ. In a world that did not educate or trust women, it made sense to deliver the message of Jesus primarily through male messengers. Particularly in the Corinth church, women had gained a reputation for making a lot of noise and causing public disruptions.

Also, even though it sometimes seems that Paul says strong things about women being quiet and submissive, in many of his writings, Paul actually encourages ALL believers to learn and live in a submissive way. In his world, this would have been remarkable. In the bigger picture of Paul's writings, he affirms and teaches on the spiritual gifting of all people. For more on this, you can read *1 Corinthians 12*.

It's important to note that even though there are a couple of soundbites from Paul that are often used to limit the role of women in the church, Paul also name drops several "co-workers" of his who are women. He calls them "sisters" and lifts them up as partners in the work of the Gospel.

- Pheobe, is called a servant, or minister of the church. She is mentioned a couple of times, but most famously, for delivering Paul's letter to the Romans. Not only is she carrying the letter, but she most likely would have helped the Romans to understand the letter. — *Romans 16.1*
- Priscilla and her husband Aquila are also mentioned in the book of Acts and Romans 16. The fact that Priscilla's name is always listed before Aquila's probably means something significant in a world where the man would have always been mentioned first, if the wife was mentioned at all. — *Romans 16.3-4, Acts 18.18-19*
- Junia is actually given the description of an "apostle." — *Romans 16.7*
- There are accounts of women "prophesying" in the early church. This would have been the equivalent of preaching—speaking a word to people from God. — *Acts 21.9*

We believe there's a good reason Peter repeats this prophecy from Joel on the very first day of the Christ-centered church:

"In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy." — *Acts 2.17-18*

Men and women getting along, in marriage, or in service, is a remarkable picture of the bigger reconciliation God is working on. Through serving beside each other, we have the chance to show the world that the things that are broken in the world, do not have to stay that way.

— FURTHER RESOURCES —

Beyond Sex Roles by Dr. Gilbert Bilezikian
 Gifted to Lead by Nancy Beach
 The Blue Parakeet by Scot McKnight

Conflict / Restoration

We probably do not have to tell you this, but when you are dealing with people, conflict happens. Sometimes we think a church community should be immune from this kind of thing but in fact, with the stakes so high, and with people who are passionate, conflict happens. Sometimes conflict is even an occasion for God to work on people and for great things to happen. But it doesn't always feel that way when we are in the middle of it.

As someone who is working with people and trying to support the work of God in individuals and in this community, you should expect conflict. It may rise up because people are dealing with truths that are hard for them to accept. It may rise up because people have been hurt before and have not yet healed. It may rise up because people can be prone to darkness.

You may find yourself in the midst of different kinds of conflict. Here are some situations and some scriptural guidance for redeeming them:

► PEOPLE VS. CHURCH

Believe it or not, sometimes people have grievances against decisions the church has made. Or they have things about the church at large that they think should be done differently. If you are a leader at the church, especially if you are on the "front lines" as a volunteer representing the church, people will come to you with their thoughts, opinions, and occasionally, their anger.

If people come to you with ideas, and good intentions, that's an easy one. We hope people feel invested enough in the church to come up with new ways of doing things. If the spirit of the person seems right to you, hear them out. Affirm their passion. Use your discernment to figure out the next step. Let them know if you are passing their thoughts along and what may be next in the communication process. You may want to bring their thoughts back to the staff person who is responsible for your area of ministry.

In the book of Acts, we get to see the early church wrestle through new ideas and new situations. In Acts 15, a difficult decision is brought before the leaders of the church. The dialogue and decision-making that follows makes the church a completely different place than it was before the conflict. Someone's concern may lead the church somewhere new.

This is more difficult when people come to you with complaints. You will probably know right away by their tone and their approach if they are coming with hurt or angry feelings. This can be an incredibly uncomfortable place to be in. But God may be able to shape both you and the other person involved through this moment. Here are some ideas on how to handle this situation:

- Resist any temptation you may feel to join them in negative conversation. You may agree with them a little. Let's say someone complains about the colors of the walls and you have always thought the colors were a little off. You might be tempted to encourage their complaint. Or you may think the walls are great but you don't enjoy conflict so you decide to agree and go on to also talk about how you think there should be different carpet. We all do this kind of thing all the time. We follow the conversational trail. But if you resist this, you will be better able to speak with them about things that really matter.
- Ask more questions. For some of us, whenever we run into conflict, our first instinct is to defend. Someone complains about the color of the walls and we launch an explanation of why they are in fact the perfect color. But if we go right into defensive mode, we may end up missing the real source of the conflict. Sometimes when we ask more questions, we learn that the person is hurting over

something. Or we learn that there is some specific reason why they care about this particular issue. Or you may learn that this person has a genuine cause for concern that needs to be addressed.

- You may need to lead them to a more appropriate outlet. Be sure you know, from your ministry leader, what you should do when issues arise. Know their contact info and the best way to bring issues to their attention. We all sometimes end up serving as conduits for conversations that need to happen between other people. Direct the person quickly and personally to the person they should contact. This may mean doing more than giving them an email—it may mean introducing them or arranging a moment for them to get together at the church.
- Familiarize yourself with our statements of beliefs and our values. We believe these speak loudly and clearly about the kind of place we are trying to be. We believe these are worth fighting over and provide the bigger context for the kinds of things that sometimes upset or frustrate people. Know them so you can talk about them, but also so that you have confidence in the mission of this church as we fit in the bigger story of God's kingdom.

You may also want to give some attention to *Romans 12.9-21* as you face these kinds of conflict.

▶ PEOPLE VS. PEOPLE

We can also use these words from Romans to help people who are caught up in conflict with one another. As someone who leads, you may find yourself with the opportunity to lead people through relational conflict. Again, God may be working on people and we get the chance to help in that work by helping people to resolve conflict in healthy ways.

Jesus gives us some very clear advice on how to handle difficulties that come up between two people:

“If a brother or sister sins, go and point out the fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.” — Matthew 18.15-17

We know that sometimes conflict can get very messy. Sometimes people are locked into battle in a way that makes it hard to see where the sin is hiding. But the approach outlined here by Jesus is very clear:

- Direct confrontation must happen first. When we are hurt by someone or disagree with someone, our tendency is to try and deal with it indirectly. We may go to other people for advice. We may try to bury our feelings. We may engage in long-term subterfuge as we try to make the other person's life miserable without ever really addressing the problem.

As a leader, people may come to you to solve their problem. You may be tempted to insert yourself into the conflict. Counselors call this “triangling” and in their wisdom, they advise against it. Here is your first question if someone comes to you to vent about someone else: “Have you talked to him/her about this?”

People will go to great lengths to avoid direct confrontation or conversation. They may play emotional games, send strange emails, or practice avoidance. But the wisdom of Jesus is clear here: Face to face conversation heals.

But Jesus also knows that sometimes sin can blind us in situations. He gives a second step in case the first one doesn't solve the issue:

- Credible people can help. Jesus says other people can be invited into the process to see the situation clearly. Encourage people to make sure any second or third party person will be fair and welcomed by the person who is being approached.

- When necessary, involve church leadership. If conversation and confrontation somehow do not bring peace, there may be a need to bring the matter to church leadership. Conflict has a way of poisoning a community and unresolved feelings can take any number of forms.

Many times when conflict cannot be resolved, there is some kind of sin in the way. There are occasions where someone's sin is either the cause of relational conflict or becomes a detriment and hindrance to the mission of the church. In this case, when the church leadership gets involved, more intentional action may be necessary.

As Jesus says at the conclusion of the passage, sometimes the only way to restoration is a time of separation. At SouthBrook, we have a process in place to lead people away from the sin entangling them and hopefully closer to the God who wants to redeem them. These measures come into play when someone has failed morally and is not expressing any repentance for the sin in his or her life.

When the church leadership gets involved in a conflict, here is the path that an individual will be asked to take:

- 1 There will be a time of separation from his/her current ministry area for a time period determined by the ministry leader. During this time, the ministry leader will provide some specific guidance for the person to work on moving towards restoration.
- 2 When the ministry leader determines that there has been some evidence of repentance, the leader will slowly allow them to re-engage in active ministry. In some cases, this may mean serving behind the scenes or a limited role. There are several things ministry leaders may look for as evidence that God is at work and a person is moving towards repentance:
 - Expressions in their life of the fruits of the Spirit — *Galatians 5.22-23*
 - Ongoing changes in behavior — *John 8.1-11*
 - A humble spirit — *James 4.10*
 - No residual anger towards people involved — *1 Thess. 5.12-13*
 - No justifying behaviors or shifting of blame — *Matthew 7.3-5*
 - No defiance towards church leadership — *Hebrews 13.17, 1 Cor. 15.15-16*
 - No divisive speech or behavior — *Romans 16.17-18, Titus 3.10.11*
 - Honesty and transparency — *John 8.32*
- 3 A person will be asked to establish an accountability relationship with the ministry leader or someone whom the ministry leader determines.
- 4 There should be some demonstration of healthy and fruitful involvement in group life.
- 5 The person submits to a re-education to ministry standards and shows adherence to expectations.
- 6 The person offers an apology to the appropriate people as an act of restoration. It is expected that he or she will tell the story and offer recompense to any and all individuals or groups who were affected by their behavior. The setting and audience for this is determined by the ministry leader.

If you are the person leading the person towards restoration, here are some guidelines for how this should work:

1. Have a meeting in advance with all leaders involved:
 - Pray
 - Agree on strategy and approach
 - Ensure that others are committed to supporting you as a leader
2. Do not meet one-on-one with the individual involved for the confrontation.
3. Make sure the person understands this is not a negotiation.
4. If the person is married, involve his or her spouse in the process.

When it comes to living out these steps, it is important for everyone to understand that there is no negotiating. We believe God wants us to live as Paul says in Romans 6—“*dead to sin and alive to Christ.*” When people are repentant and honest about their lives, we hope that as a church, we always reflect the grace of God.

▶ PEOPLE VS. SIN

As a leader in a community of faith, you may often find yourself trying to represent both grace and truth in the middle of difficult conversations and situations. As Bill Hybels of Willow Creek Church often reminds leaders: “*To lead is to traffic in other people’s pain.*” And as Paul tells the church at Philippi, we are all in the process of “*working out our salvation with fear and trembling.*” — *Philippians 2.12*

People are sometimes fighting battles on many different fronts. They are battling their pasts. They may have conflicting voices of authority in their lives. They are fighting against the patterns and temptations of a fallen world. We are all locked in a battle against sin and darkness and when we try to fight it on our own, we often lose. You may end up in the middle of some of these fights.

Remember that our real battle is never against the person caught in sin. Our real battle is also never about just being right. This fight is bigger than us:

“*For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.*” — *Ephesians 6.12*

Here are some tough issues we may face and some ways to talk about them with people you are leading:

▶ HOMOSEXUALITY

It is incredibly important, especially when talking about an issue that has been as volatile and divisive as homosexuality that we always remember to talk about it carefully and graciously. For many people, this is not just a cultural debate—we are talking about their child, or their friend, or maybe even their own struggle. This is about people. People who are loved by God. Particularly in this conversation, it’s important that we remember we are all beloved children of God. That’s our first and only identity. In this debate, people on both sides have made the mistake of jumping to labels and reducing people to lesser identities. We don’t want to make that mistake.

We recognize that this is an incredibly complex issue. We do not pretend to know more than we do. A lot of times this conversation raises questions about whether people are born with an orientation towards same-sex attraction. The reality is that we just don’t know. We do know that many of us are born with certain sinful tendencies. Some of us might be more prone to addictive behaviors. Or we may be

born with quick tempers. The real issue is never our nature—we all lean towards sin. Here’s how Paul describes the bad news and the good news:

“*All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.*” — *Ephesians 2.3-4*

We need to recognize that we all struggle with sin. But there is a greater truth at stake here—we can all be made alive together with Christ and free from sin. We may all be born with orientations toward different sin but our behavior matters. And Scripture makes some very strong statements about homosexual behavior:

“*Or do you not know that that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor practicing homosexuals nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.*” — *1 Corinthians 6.9*

Notice that “practicing homosexuals” are just one of a longer list of behaviors that leads away from the kingdom of God instead of toward it.

Also, notice in this passage that Paul says this is what some of the people were. Not what they are now. They used to be people who acted on what felt right to them. They did whatever they wanted. But not anymore. We don’t know from this passage from Paul if these people still felt the draw towards these sinful behaviors. We don’t really know if it’s possible for a person’s orientation to change but we do know that Paul himself encourages a life of celibacy for those who are not married. He does not see this as a lesser life, but as a way of honoring God with one’s body. For more on this, see *1 Corinthians 6.12-7.40*. Paul had to write to the Corinthians a lot about sex. There’s a reason we call it the Vegas of the ancient world.

Paul also had to deal with this in his letter to the Romans: Look for the whole story in *Romans 1.24-32*

In this passage, homosexuality is just one manifestation of a much bigger sin problem—people exchanging the worship of God for lesser gods. We are all guilty of this in all kinds of ways. It’s important that we always understand this issue in the larger context of our shared struggle with sin and idolatry.

Because of our shared struggle, we need to make sure we show humility and mercy to people dealing with this particular sin. In our culture, it can very easily become not just a struggle, but an identity. And people, and the church can lose sight of the greater truth that God loves us all.

We hope as a church to be a voice for both truth and grace when it comes to homosexual behavior. We encourage people who are struggling with this issue to be a part of our church and our hope is that they feel welcome here.

▶ SEXUAL SIN

The reality is that the temptation towards destructive sexual behavior can show up in all kinds of ways. As a community, we often have to address or counsel people who are struggling with adultery, sexual addictions or temptations. Again, the hope is that we would be a voice for both truth and grace.

Paul tells the church at Corinth: there is something particularly harmful about sexual sin. — *1 Corinthians 6.16*

Sexual sin can ruin families. It can destroy friendships. If left in the dark, it can do incredible damage to a person's heart and soul.

For all leaders and volunteers, we take the danger of sexual sin seriously. We encourage everyone to avoid even the appearance of impropriety. As we try to serve alongside each other, there are a few safeguards we keep in place to stay above reproach.

- Whenever possible, we try to avoid cross-gender counseling. If someone you lead needs some support or counsel, try to find someone of the same gender to reach out to him or her.
- Be careful with emails and extended online communication.
- When someone you lead is struggling in his or her marriage, be careful with how you talk about your own marriage or your own feelings. Resist the temptation to join in their complaint or to over-sympathize. Try to remain emotionally neutral and encourage towards our marriage counseling resources here at the church.
- If you are married, see your own marriage as a chance to demonstrate a strong relationship. Serve with your spouse. Express affection for your spouse.

Remember Paul's challenge to the churches: *"Follow me as I follow Christ."* Remember the bigger picture of living a life filled with healthy relationships and healthy intimacy. Ultimately, the greatest picture the church can give the world is a community marked by love and support. The arguments we make and the protest signs we hold have nothing on living lives that honor God. Our lives make the strongest statement about what it means to love well.

Bottom line: We believe sexual intimacy is a gift God intended to be shared between men and women in marriage. We believe this because we believe in the authority of Scripture. We believe this because God wants us to live our lives directed toward the worship of God and not lost in our own desires.

For those considering marriage or trying to keep their marriage strong, we try to offer as many resources as we can to help SouthBrook families honor God with their lives. For those in crisis, please direct people to our marital counseling services.

— FURTHER RESOURCES —

www.xxxchurch.com
 Holy Longing by Ronald Rohleiser
 Support Groups
 Pre-Marital Mentoring
 Marital Counseling

► THE STUFF IN BETWEEN

For all of the clarity in Scripture, there are some things we may experience in community that are left open to interpretation. Sometimes we call these "gray issues." They are the stuff of life. They are issues where we believe there needs to be some room for people to understand them differently. In some cases, they are things that may not be inherently sinful but can become dangerous. In some cases, they are just issues where the Bible is silent and the best we can do is try to honor God by the way we handle them.

Here's a list of gray-ish issues:

Drinking alcohol. (This is a big one.) Gambling. (Online, the lottery, the racetracks, who "The Bachelor" will pick.) Cussing. Watching certain movies or TV shows. Watching Ultimate Fighting. Voting

Republican. Or Democrat. Or for Ralph Nader. Coffee addictions. Celebrating Halloween. Being Green. Church decorations. Bill's Donuts vs. Donut Haus.

It's a long list that we're sure you could make longer. We are all tempted to turn gray issues into litmus tests that decide who is really "in" and who's definitely "out." But Scripture does not allow for that. Scripture leads us towards freedom.

In the book of Romans, Paul is trying to direct the church in gray matters. They are struggling over what kind of food to eat at parties. Of course, it's more serious than that—it involves pagan idols and rituals—but that's the basic idea. Gray matters are often the stuff of everyday life. You should read the whole section in *Romans 14* right now if you wonder about this stuff. You should also consider *1 Corinthians 8* where they are having the same struggle.

Here are the highlights and some things that can be helpful for us:

- Some gray matters can lead to abuse or to dangerous behavior. It may be that some of us are more prone to abusing gray things than others. We ought to be careful both for our own hearts and for the sake of our brothers and sisters in Christ. Paul says that gray issues can become "stumbling blocks" for people. Make sure that in your freedom, you do not cause someone else to fall.
- Keep your eye on the biggest possible picture: life in the kingdom. If exercising your freedom, or enjoying a gray issue becomes more important than following Jesus, something is out of order. Also, if choosing a black or white perspective becomes more important to you than following Jesus, something might be off.

"For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and receives human approval." — *Romans 14.17-18*

- Don't let gray issues become divisive. It can be tempting to promote or defend your way of thinking, sometimes to the detriment of relationships.

"Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food." — *Romans 14.19-20*

- Leave judgment to God. While most of us would agree that judgment belongs to God, we are all prone to silently condemning people for certain gray matters. We do this over politics and church issues all the time. If people are not for us, they must be against us. We have ways of letting condemnation sneak into our relationships and destroying the community trying to live by faith.
- Be obedient to the things in Scripture that are clear. Jesus and his followers give us great descriptions of what a God-honoring life looks like. For all the gray stuff of life, there are some things that are black and white. Live these well.

This is Paul's prayer for the church struggling over gray matters and it ought to be our prayer also:

"May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." — *Romans 15.5-6*



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