

Church Discipline: God's Tool to Preserve and Heal Marriages

by Ken Sande

Church discipline is essential for preserving and healing marriages, and it requires courage and compassion to stand firm on God's Word.

Duration: 1:17:28

Scripture: Matthew 5:21-22, Matthew 5:43-48, Matthew 18:12-14, Matthew 19:3-9, Luke 15:4-32

Topics: "Church Discipline"

Description

In this video, the speaker introduces a brochure that summarizes 18 years of his life's work on peacemaking. The brochure contains biblical principles for resolving conflict and is designed to be used as a teaching tool in churches. The speaker emphasizes the importance of building community among church members and shares examples of events that have successfully achieved this, such as a bridal fashion show where women modeled wedding dresses of other women in the church. The video concludes with a story of a church that showed forgiveness and reached out to a woman who had an affair, demonstrating the power of forgiveness and community in resolving conflicts.

Transcript

This message was given at the Building Strong Families Conference held in Dallas, Texas, March 20th through the 22nd of 2000. This conference was sponsored by the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood and Family Life Ministries. Following the message, there will be information on how to order additional materials on building a strong family.

Let me talk about special events. I'm a big believer in a women's ministry having special events because there's going to be a limited number of women who can come to a monthly or weekly Bible study. I think a women's ministry needs to have that women's Bible study.

And it needs to be sponsored by the church. The church needs to make an investment in it, which means the church needs to provide nursery care for it. I'm a big believer in that.

This is important to the life of the church. And so there needs to be a nursery. Don't make it such that if young moms come, they've got to pay.

They don't have the money. Or if young moms come, they've got to keep the children while they're coming. They need a morning out and they need to be given that.

Your Bible studies should be a time of teaching them but also of facilitating relationships among them. And as much as possible, I think it is so much richer if there can be combinations of ages. And then spiritual mothering goes on within the Bible study if they're interactive kinds of Bible studies.

But do very intentional things to build relationships. The women who plan our Bible study, I teach our Bible study at our church, but other women on the committee that plan it. And they're doing a wonderful thing this year.

Every week they have some special moment going. And most weeks it's what they call a box talk. And what that is is that one of the women brings a box or a basket with things in it that she tells about.

And in doing so, she tells about herself. And what's happening is women who would never stand up and even give a testimony will stand up there with their basket and pull out the pictures of their family or various things and tell us about them. And in doing that, we begin seeing their heart.

And we begin connecting on a very deep level. Recently, one of the young women pulled out a quilt square. And she began talking about how as a little girl, she's been fascinated with quilting.

And she's just always wanted to make a quilt. And she just showed this quilt square and went on. There were about five older women in their 80s who often feel like they don't have anything to contribute anymore.

But those women quilt. One even has one of the frames. You would not believe how they surrounded her and started loving on her.

And they're all wanting to have her make her quilt. And it's precious to watch now. On Sundays, they're talking to her.

You see, it's a wonderful connection. Another young woman held up a baby hat. And she told us about how someone gave this to her with her first pregnancy.

But she had a miscarriage. But she has kept that hat because she said, I grew up as a covenant child. I grew up in the church.

And Jesus was my Savior. But I've never really known the power of God and the presence of God in such a way as when I was at that low point. And I will always keep this little hat to remind me of God's presence and his love for me.

I never knew that about her. And it just gave me a window into her heart. So that's been a wonderful thing to do.

With our special events, we very, very seldom bring in speakers. That's easy. You know, you get a speaker.

You bring them in. You send them up. They talk and they leave.

And what has that done? It's maybe downloaded some information. But has it really connected your women? Let one purpose of your event be to build community among the women. And then do things like telling some of the stories of women in your church.

The kickoff event for our women this year was a bridal fashion show. But what that meant was they modeled wedding dresses of women in the church. They had, I think, the oldest dress was 50 years old.

Someone modeled my wedding dress, all different ones. Younger women had, oh, you would not believe how little the girl was that modeled my dress. It was impressive.

I could not believe I was in a dress. What happened to her? Then they would model the dresses, but then they told the stories. Like the women who said they were married during the war and they didn't have any money.

And the women in the church just did things to help with the wedding. And just precious stories that it built community among the women. And it told our young girls that you don't have to have grand wedding planners and spend thousands of dollars on a wedding, but this is what it's really about, you see.

And our young girls were there and they saw and heard all of this. So those are the kinds of things that you can do with your special events. Your special events can equip women to be caregivers.

Because you can have a panel with a woman who has been widowed or who has had a child to die or all different things like that and ask them questions like, how did women minister to you? What have you learned through this? What could women do to minister to someone who is in your situation? How can we pray for you? And you see that again, it builds community and it teaches women. Plus it will help to bring women out of those caves. For example, if you have a woman who has gone through a divorce on a panel like that and there's another woman sitting there that she has been afraid to get involved because she thinks women would reject her if they knew that she had been married three times or whatever.

You see, it really helps to begin to help with that kind of thing. Okay, does that give you a sense of what women's ministry can be? I hope it gives you resources that you can go to. You'll need to find the approach that your church needs for you to take.

But do take an approach. Don't just react and say we need a women's ministry. What can we do? But stand back and first decide what is the theology out of which you're building this ministry.

How does it connect with the entire life and focus and vision of your church? And then what is it that we need to do to express those realities? Let's pray. Father in heaven, I thank you for every church that is represented in this room. I thank you for these women and for the women in their churches.

And Father, I pray that our churches will have strong women's ministries that are teaching the next generation what it means to be a woman. Father, I pray that you will call out and raise up godly women who live out the realities of our relationship with you, of our creation, design, and our life-giving mission all for your glory. In Jesus' name, amen.

The four traditional clamps that have held marriages together have all but disappeared. And those clamps are that at one point it was legally difficult to get a divorce. Most states in the United States, you had to prove fault.

It was basically a contract type of action. Secondly, there was usually a financial impediment to divorce. Up until this generation, the husband was generally the breadwinner.

The mother was at home maintaining the household. And if they got a divorce, she would immediately have to go back to work in many cases. And or he would have to give alimony for life.

There was a huge financial slowing down effect to that because there were long-term financial implications. Of course, a lot of women now are working outside the home so that they don't have exactly that thing. Judges are very hesitant to give long-term alimony or maintenance anymore.

You might get a year or two. But beyond that, it's difficult. It breaks my heart to see how many women there are in their 50s or 60s or 70s who are being divorced today and cast out.

Now, this is where the whole feminist movement, I think, has done harm in here at all. It has really harmed women in this area, destitute with very little recourse. So that's another clamp that is not there.

Typically, people don't think of it. They think they can get their divorce and move on. I have talked to some godly young women who are in good marriages, who love their husband, who want to quit their job and be at home, yet who have confided in me that one thing that keeps them from doing it is this little nagging fear that maybe our marriage won't make it.

And if I get out of the workforce now, I'm going to lose my ability to support myself. And they're being kept in the workforce out of fear that their marriage will not last, even though today the marriage seems to be pretty good. That is so sad.

The third clamp is that our society typically attached a stigma to divorce, that it was something we did not condone and just treat casually as a serious thing. And I think we can go too far the other way at times of stigmatizing someone who's been divorced too much, but right now we've gone way the other way where it doesn't make any difference at all. You made a covenant, you made a vow, you broke it, so what? Big deal.

So that clamp is no longer there. And the fourth one is the church historically has stood against divorce. It's seen what God says about marriage being a covenant relationship that should not be broken except for very limited grounds, and some people would say no grounds at all.

But in many cases, the church's standing against divorce in an appropriate, loving, compassionate way has evaporated. I was working on a divorce case a while ago and went down to talk to the pastor, and we were trying to find some way to bring the church's influence to bear to bring this man back into the marriage. And I asked if the church had a policy on divorce.

He said, yes, we do, and it was a denominational policy. They'd spent years developing, and I read their position on divorce, and they outlined marriage and the beauty of marriage and the roles. It was actually a pretty good document until you got to the last paragraph.

It said, however, there are situations that are just so difficult and after serious efforts can't be resolved in which divorce is the best thing for all those involved. The loophole swallows the entire commitment to marriage. I mean, there was no limitation at all in that denomination, even though they had something on its face that looked like a good, strong commitment to marriage.

So those clamps are gone. Now, I'm not sure what your experience is, but my experience is that every marriage is like a pressure cooker, almost every. There may be some marriages out there that the couple just gets along, and they are sweet-spirited and loving to each other from the day they're married to the day they die.

That's not my marriage. I'm a sinner. My wife is a sinner.

And there's times in our relationship where the heat comes in and the pressure builds up. And I thank God there's some clamps on the lid of our marriage. Primarily, it's our own conviction as to what God's Word says about it.

So our conscience, as taught, as in being informed by the Church, is a huge clamp. But I also know that if I left my wife or mistreated her in some significant way, I would have the elders there. And I respect these men, and I fear these men, I think, in a holy way.

And so there are some things that when we go through those hard times, and we're unhappy with each other, and there's all that pressure, there's things holding us together. As we work through it, things cool down. And a few weeks later, you just think, how could I have felt so angry back then? I love you so much today.

But that's the course of human relationships. They do other ups and downs. So it is a real problem.

And the impact on families in our society today is just staggering. We can't even begin to measure all the social impacts of divorce in our culture. But what we can measure is frightening.

About 15 to 20 years ago, a woman named Judith Wallerstein began a study called the Children of Divorce Study. And she began to track about 40 families who'd gone through divorce, and track the effects on the children, and use comparisons with other families as well. She later on admitted, when she finally got all the results put together and gave her conclusions, the results were so strong, clearly indicating how detrimental divorce was to children.

When she published her report, she admitted she went into the study with a bias to prove that divorce actually was better for kids in most situations if there's a difficult marriage. She went into it with a preconceived notion that she wanted to prove. The data was so overwhelmingly to the opposite that she was compelled to say, honestly, divorce is destructive to children.

Now, yes, there may be some very unusual, exceptional, extreme situations where separation, divorce may be better for the kids. I'm not denying that can ever happen. But generally, kids are better off in a bad marriage with both parents than they are with just one parent.

Because God's design is for two people to be raising those kids. My wife and I do tag-team parenting. By the time I get home in the afternoon, she needs a break.

She needs some time to sit down and be quiet and pray or walk or whatever, and I've got to get in there. There's a lot of women out there that don't have that relief, and some men now who are gaining custody. And the effect in terms of drug use, crime, eventual divorce, these are all the impacts on the children.

All those indicators, when a child's family has gone through divorce, that child is immediately moved into a much higher category of risk across the board. Now, that doesn't mean that every child is going to have a

catastrophe. Some kids do come out of it.

God graciously supports them, and they become Rhodes Scholars with great happy marriages. That can happen. But statistically, the chances are they're going to struggle a lot more than they would if their parents had stayed together.

So it's a major problem. Now, there's two essential ingredients that you need to have as you go into these situations to shepherd, to pastor, to counsel, to minister to people in divorce. One of those is an enormous amount of compassion.

There is a lot of sin that goes on that has gone on usually for years in these situations. And I've had some situations where I wanted to strangle some guy. When I find out what he had actually done, I wanted to strangle him.

And I found myself with a condemning, judgmental attitude. And I had to say, God, that will not allow me to minister to this man. Give me the compassion of Christ.

So we need compassion for sinners, but we also need courage. And this is where I think, if anything, the church is most lacking today is courage, faith, and trust in God. I think Jesus' rebuke to the Sadducees would apply to many pastors today when it comes to how we handle divorce.

He said to the Sadducees, you err because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God. One, we've not gone in and really dug deeply into the Scriptures and come up with a firm, strong commitment as to what God's Word says. And we need to go back and revisit that issue again.

Every church should have a clear and unequivocal policy that its people know what their position on divorce is. They deserve it, folks. They need to know what God's Word says and also what stand to be held accountable to, especially if you're planning at some point to exercise discipline over those who break it.

You can't have hidden rules on people. But the second thing is, even if we know what God's Word says, there's this fear element. I know it says that.

The worst combination of words I ever hear are these words. I know the Bible says this, but. You never put a but after that statement.

Ever. There is no but. This is what God's Word says and here's how we will follow it.

And here are the safeguards and precautions we will put into place. Yes, we need to be cautious, we need to be shrewd, we need to be careful, but we never compromise God's Word because we believe He will back His Word up. But there's another related element we'll talk about later today.

If you don't have your house in order legally, if you don't have your bylaws in order and your guidelines on church discipline legally in place now before the crisis hits, you won't weather the storm. There are even many denominations that have got pretty solid guidelines on church discipline and church membership and how to remove people from membership, but those guidelines have not kept pace with recent legal development. And we actually consult with various denominations to take our generic bylaws and adjust them to fit into some of the vacant spots in denominational books of church order so they're completely compatible and we fill in some of the gaps by defining terms more carefully.

We'll talk about that. Yes. Oh, they're getting some more notes.

I'm sorry, they're getting some copied and they'll bring them in here shortly so you'll have them before you leave. There's four things we're going to look at today is to talk about some practical guidance on how church discipline, the idea of the church involving itself in people's lives and holding them accountable to God's word, can actually help to preserve and heal marriages. Four things we're going to look at.

One is what we would call formative discipline, and this is the discipline, the fun stuff, the preaching the word, the small groups, the church functions, the programs, all the stuff that's helping us to grow in Christ's likeness, but it's a positive, pleasant experience. But then there's also the preventive or the corrective discipline where someone strays from the line, we have to get involved, and it's not so much fun, either for the pastor or for the person under discipline. But we need to keep both those things in mind.

We're going to talk about one-on-one counseling or coaching, how do you intervene with just one person. Often you'll come in contact with just one spouse initially and the other one may not even be willing to talk with you. And then the next step is where you can get two or three others involved to go and talk to both sides.

And then finally, formal ecclesiastical intervention. The general rule I see in Scripture, Matthew 18 in particular, is you keep things as small as possible, as long as possible. You try to keep things contained, a small group of people, as long as you can, and you bring in other resources only if necessary.

That's just common sense. I mean, it's Jesus, if anybody, knows our nature. And the more people you bring in, the more we get caught up in face-saving and image, and we take positions, it's harder to back off.

Every time you increase the involvement of people, there's an element of some risk involved there. Some threshold questions is what role should the church play in preventing and conciliating marriage and divorce disputes? It should be on the cutting edge. We should be the most actively involved in preserving marriage.

This is not simply a civil legal function where someone gives them a license and a judge announces them divorced and that's the end of it. God has given the church primary responsibility to oversee and to maintain jurisdiction to speak the law to people, to Christians in their marriage relationships. It's a high level.

There's a lot of preventive medicine. I'm just going to quickly go over this because there's so many other speakers here at the conference that are just terrific on all the ways to nurture marriages. But basically, a sound teaching on marriage, the serious of marriage, the limitations on divorce.

I'm really working hard to drill into my kids the realization that marriage is a lifelong commitment. And once you make it, Megan, you've got to stay. And if your husband is not loving and he's not kind and he's not sensitive and he's getting wrapped up in some other things and he's neglecting you, honey, that is not ground to divorce.

I'm trying to make sure my daughter has a very, very high standard of what she is looking for in a husband. And mostly I'm trying to convince her that the safest way to see that is to trust daddy. And I really believe that God has given me that as one of my most important jobs is to help my daughter find a godly husband.

So it's a high goal. I was with two young ladies from our office. A bunch of us were at a sledding party and they were talking about some young men they were dating.

They were both in their late teens, early 20s. And they talked about wanting, yeah, I'd like some of the black Porsche and this and all these worldly things. And then one of the young ladies stopped and said, but actually, when it comes to selecting a husband, I'm going to let my dad do it for me.

I looked at her and said, are you serious? She said, oh, absolutely. He is so much wiser than me. He knows what would really work for me.

And I'm convinced it's the smartest thing I can do. And I just went, God, please, let my daughter say that. Ten years from now.

So providing also basic conflict resolution skills to your congregation. There's a little brochure most of you should have received when you came in. This brochure is almost an embarrassment to me.

This summarizes 18 years of my life. One piece of paper. That's everything the Bible teaches about peacemaking in summary form.

And I encourage you to take a careful look at this. It's a teaching tool you can use. A lot of pastors do a preaching series on it.

You can teach. So we've got Sunday school curriculum. We've got discipleship courses built around it.

There's a resource brochure you should have all received. That's all laid out there. But basically, it's to lay out to your people certain biblical principles resolving conflict.

And you'll see there's a diagram here called the Slippery Slope. It just illustrates the typical ways that people respond to conflict. On the left-hand side are the escape responses, denial, flight, even suicide that generally are not good.

Flight occasionally is appropriate in an egregious situation. We've got to get out of it temporarily to get some help. And there's some danger of harm and things like that.

It's like Joseph running from Potiphar's wife. He fled because he could not resolve that situation properly at that time. But too many people use flight as a permanent solution.

They get a divorce. They quit their job. They leave their church.

They leave town. We're a nation of people running away. And we should use that only as a very unusual response.

On the other side of the Slippery Slope, you'll see the attack responses. And this is where we either resort to civil litigation, which I'm an attorney. I believe there are times when Christians can make proper use of our civil courts.

Romans 13 talks about God establishing them. But there are Christians today using our courts in a way that is totally contrary to Scripture. The Bible clearly indicates that civil courts are a last resort.

The church is the court of first resort. If two people in your church or a member of your church has a dispute with another person, maybe had them build on a wing to his house, and things didn't go right, and

they've got a legal battle over it, they should not be in a civil court. 1 Corinthians 6 says you are to appoint godly people in the church who sit down and judge it.

And the word there is to make a final, binding decision. God has given that authority. In fact, Paul goes on to say, are there not men of little account, wise enough to judge these things? The Holy Spirit is resident in the church.

The Scriptures are resident in the church. We've got these incredible resources to resolve conflict, and yet time after time when our people have got legal problems or substantial problems, you need to see a professional. That's wrong.

So we need to be avoiding litigation except in extreme situations, certainly staying away from verbal and physical assault or murder. I've been involved in a lot of murder cases. Some of them have been actual physical murders where someone came in, a man wasn't happy with the counsel a pastor was giving his wife, came in and shot the pastor in his study and killed him.

We've seen those cases. But more often we see the murder that Jesus talks about, if you hate your brother in your heart, you're guilty of murder. There's a lot of murder going on in the church today, and we should stay away from that.

Where we need to be is up on top of the slippery slope, up in that work-it-out zone, overlooking minor offenses, going and talking in person, confessing, lovingly confronting one-on-one, and if need be, involving other people to sit down with us and the other person. If our congregations are well-trained in these skills, leaders rarely need to get involved. But one of the reasons leaders are dragged into these situations is that people never were taught how to deal with them at the low level, and so they just build and build and build, and pretty soon you're just sucked into it, and it's very destructive at that point.

So one of the best things you can do for your church in the era of marriage, and really every other relationship you can think of, is teach your people the amazing promises and commands of Scripture with regard to peacemaking and conflict resolution. Also, certainly effective premarital counseling is a key here. I think it can eliminate so many problems.

Encouraging close mentoring relationships, where a young couple has an older couple they can talk with and get to know. Be alert for early signs of danger signs. I've been involved in so many divorces, where as I talked to people that were friends of the couple, where I would hear so many of those friends say, yeah, I thought he was getting a little bit close to that woman at work, and sort of flirting, but who am I, and I think it was my business.

There's so many of these situations where Christians knew about it, saw the warning signs, had never been taught that it's not only their right, but their responsibility to go and to say something. I had one woman one time who literally dragged a friend into my office. She would not come voluntarily, so she went and picked her up and invited her to lunch.

I'm not condoning this as standard practice. She was earnest, and they just drove to my office. This other woman had never been there before, so she didn't know where they were coming.

She said, I need to run in here. Do you want to come with me? And she went in, and then she saw the sign on the door, so I don't want to go in. She grabbed her arm and literally opened the door and brought her in.

She says, Ken, we need to talk to you. She was just getting involved in an affair at the hospital she worked. The day before, she snuck into a closet with another worker there, and they'd been kissing.

Her conscience was bothering her. She told that to her friend. Her friend knew this was about to get out of control completely.

That marriage is together today because her friend intervened. In fact, that was some years ago. Last year, I was teaching at their church, and a couple walked up to me.

They had a hard reconciliation process. There's some real painful things to go through. They walked up to me with their two little kids and a baby in her arms.

She said, this is God's reward. This is God's reward for us working things out. So train the people in your church.

They're your best workers. They're the ones who are out there in those friendships, one-on-one, to go to one another, work on these issues. If serious problems come up, it's to offer, if necessary, require marriage counseling.

We are often way too timid on these things, folks, and we've got to be careful not to prematurely rush in. But once we see the danger signs, we've got to be pretty pushy. If my personal doctor saw I had cancer and I said, I don't think, son, I want to get treated, I pretty much know what Gene would do.

He'd be pounding my door. He'd be calling me up day and night. He would be pressing me.

He says, Ken, let's get in. Let's get this dealt with. And that's what we need to be.

We are spiritual doctors, and the cancer is sin, and it's deadly. When we see it, it's starting to eat away at people's lives. We need to intervene.

If one spouse refused to be reconciled, we should support the cooperative one in every way we can and help them to be faithful regardless of what the other person does. And that's the point where you need really godly counsel because you're walking a tightrope between wanting to restore the marriage, you don't want to antagonize the spouse that wants out unnecessarily, but you've got major issues. Child custody, support, visitation, maintenance, property settlement.

And that's where the person needs some godly people to come back to and count the cost on should I fight for this issue or should I give in on this issue. That's where the church can play a major role. My opinion is if a Christian is going through a divorce, unless you have absolute confidence that her attorney is an absolutely committed, thoughtful, well-taught Christian, because there's a lot of Christian attorney folks who don't know the Bible very well.

They've got a Sunday school education, and they certainly don't have a systematic theology on marriage, divorce, and remarriage. If that's the case, you better be in that office with your member when they're talking about legal strategies because there's also spiritual strategies that come to play. And then finally, if divorce is biblically legitimate, reconciliation is not feasible, the church can participate in mediating.

And part of what we're going to talk here today just very briefly is how you can actually mediate. We have much more extensive training on that. I think churches should be involved in these situations.

Some of you may know about Tony Evans Church down in, oh, it's here. This is Dallas, isn't it? They're one of our favorite partners. They've made a deep commitment to biblical conflict resolution.

They've trained 20 or more people as conciliators in that church. And every Wednesday night is reconciliation night. If you've got a conflict, go to the church.

There's people there to resolve conflicts. And if you want a divorce in that church, you have to go to the elders and get rid of divorce. You have to go through a process because they have a position that there's some limited grounds for divorce, but they also realize the people in the problem aren't objective enough to apply those standards.

So you need to come to the elders, explain the situation. They get involved. They walk through it.

They do all they can to try to restore the marriage. If they can't and they believe there's grounds, they will give you that formal decision. So we may vary in our opinion where we draw that line.

I know there's disagreement in the church on grounds for divorce and remarriage. But I think the church needs to at least commit itself to what it believes and support people as they go through it. Now, a threshold question here is, when can a Christian legitimately pursue a divorce? Opinions do vary on this.

I acknowledge that. I would just say that most churches, I don't think, have thought through this thing carefully on their own. The pastor's done a book by one person he read, sounded reasonable.

He's adopted it. It's not that easy. You've got to look at the arguments on both sides, come up with something you thoroughly can support.

Too many Christians believe what they believe because they just get something from someone they trust and accept it there. They can't support it themselves, and that's especially wrong with pastors. There's a workshop we did at our annual conference last year called What the Bible Says About Divorce, and the chairman of our board, Nash, did an incredible study.

All the opposing views deal with a lot of the language issues on divorce and porneia and separation, and I would encourage, if you want to lay the foundation for good, clear policy, get that workshop. It's available through our website, and it would just give you a good theological starting point, and you can draft your policy. My personal convictions are, like the Bible does say, when there's been sexual unfaithfulness and the person is on repentance, that can be legitimate grounds.

If you have a real awkward question, what if there's been sexual unfaithfulness but the offender repents? Can you still have it? I've talked to people I really love and respect, and we have different views on that issue, so it's a hard one. The other one is desertion by an unbeliever, but there's another thing we have to always keep in mind here, even if you take the view that there are some narrow grounds for divorce, is we can always choose to take the high road. God doesn't say you must divorce in these circumstances.

He says you may divorce. I had a friend whose wife, when he was very mature in his faith, had not grounded his wife closely to the Lord. She was in a singing group.

She fell in love with one of the other people, had an affair, left her husband, divorced him, went off. Two or three years went by, hadn't seen her. He'd met another young woman in his church and fell in love with her.

Went to the pastor. The pastor said, we believe you have biblical grounds to remarry. They approved it.

And the wedding was like two weeks away, and his ex-wife called him up and says, I hear you're getting married. And talked to her in two years. He said, yeah.

He said, is it too late for us? And at first he was just angry. How could you even say that or do that? But after he got off the phone, he talked to some friends. He talked even to his pastor.

And they all said, you've got a legitimate right to pursue this. She divorced you. She deserted you.

She was acting like an unbeliever. And I think he could have technically done it. But he went to his brother, and his brother said, I think you have the right.

But more importantly, you have an opportunity here to demonstrate the love and the grace of Jesus Christ. He had no obligation to reach out and save us. Take the high road.

And he talked, and he and his fiance prayed for three days, prayed and fasted, came to the conclusion God was calling them to give that marriage a chance. They broke their engagement. They canceled the wedding.

They sent the gifts back. He got into a counseling process with his ex-wife, and they were remarried. They've got three children today.

And when they share the gospel, people listen. Because Jan can talk about her sin, how she didn't deserve this, and how God worked through her husband. Boy, that is powerful.

So we always have that high road. We should always hold that out as an option to people and support them on that. Now, how do we encourage reconciliation? I'm going to start moving a little bit faster through this.

Number one, you need to slow the divorce process down. If you've got a couple in your church and are moving toward divorce, do everything you can within reason. And that's the important thing.

Within reason can slow it down. Time will often work in your favor. A divorce might be precipitated by a crisis in this couple's life.

They're really angry with each other. Sometimes as time goes by, their anger cools. Sometimes it's precipitated by an affair with somebody else.

And anytime that happens, I just start praying that prayer from Hosea. I just say, Lord, put a hedge of thorns around this woman. Make her time with this other man distasteful to her.

I mean, I just pray all sorts of bad things down on her. And I say, you know, put your hands, like Psalm 32, put your hand heavy upon her. Sock her strength as in the heat of summer.

Let her bones ache. Bring physical illness to her. And every time she walks away from this man, especially if they have sex, make her feel dirty and discontent.

Now, it's not a hateful prayer. It's a loving prayer. And I get her, I sometimes often size up the husband if I wanted to do that.

Sometimes he puts a little bit too much zeal into it. But you need godly people who love this person praying that hedge around them and seeing that. There's a case we're dealing on right now here in Texas.

That's what's happened. The woman left for her old high school boyfriend. And they've been together now for three or four months.

And just two weeks ago, he dumped her. And we went, praise God. She's all alone.

She's lonely. She's out there floating around. And her husband is now reaching out to her again.

So delay it if you can. But you've got to be careful. Don't do it in devious ways.

If a legal process has already started, ask the willing partner, spouse's attorney, to just use all the normal delays. There's certain things attorneys do as a matter of course. They file motions to dismiss and all sorts of things.

They just take it for granted. So when they do these things and stretch it out a few more weeks, and the other attorney gets it and tells the other client, he'll just tell you, no, this is standard practice. This isn't unreasonable.

So he can usually mollify the person who wants to move ahead. So do things that are reasonable, but caution the attorney not to do it in a way that's going to just antagonize the other person. There's a fine line to walk there.

As you try to work out to the other person, try to reach out and appeal to that person, usually to self-interest. Someone who's already divorcing is not going to be brought back in by, you know, God says you shouldn't do this. They've already rationalized the way and plugged their ears.

And you need to instead find other ways. Sometimes what I'll do is I'll use various techniques to get that person into my office. Sometimes what I'll say is, you know, I know I can't force you to reconcile.

That's something you've got to decide to do. But I would appreciate your help in helping your husband understand where he blew it. He's willing to come into counseling, and he's committed that whether you come back or not, he wants to deal with the issues in his life that contributed to the breakdown in your marriage.

And he's told me a lot of stuff, but I know he can't be entirely objective. And I don't know if anyone in this world can probably tell me more accurately what he does wrong than you. Could you come in and just share with me? And we don't even have to talk about you.

I just want you to come in and tell me where you think he needs to change. And I find most people are pretty glad to do that. You bet.

I'll be there. Give me two hours. And bring that person in.

And what you're basically trying to do is to get up and get an arm around that person, where they can start to trust you. It's a process we call building passport, where we're building into that relationship where they start to trust us, they believe we really care about them, and then we can really help them. At the end of that process, where I get all this information, then I'll turn to her and I'll say, I appreciate your coming in.

You've given me a lot of helpful information here. I'm glad to see your husband's actually described some of these things already, and we're working on them. In saying that, I'm trying to inject some hope back into the situation that he is going to change.

But then I'll usually turn to her and say, you know, in most cases I get involved in, there's actually some struggles involved on both sides. And I'd be surprised if you haven't done some things to contribute as well. You don't have to, but if you'd like to talk about those things, I'd be happy to do it.

And as she's sitting there sort of pausing, I'll say, you have nothing else, even if it doesn't restore this marriage, the chances are you're going to be with somebody again someday. If you don't deal with those issues now, you're going to carry them into a future relationship. Maybe now's a good time.

So I'm appealing to self-interest to this person. Sometimes you can appeal to the kids. I will get pretty forceful and say, you know, what are you going to say to your daughter, you know, 18 years from now? And she looks at you and says, Mom, why did you do that? Why did you go off and marry this other man you were sleeping with? And I'll paint some pretty vivid pictures, depending on how much I think that person can take from me.

But sin by its very nature, especially in these cases, people are looking straight down at their feet. They are not thinking two inches ahead. They just see the pleasure or the relief that they have now, and they're not thinking about the long-term consequences.

So one of your jobs is to ask questions in a loving way that the Holy Spirit will just sort of echo in their mind after they leave your office. They just haunt them that night, the next day. The downside of delaying one of these things, though, is if someone wants out, initially they may be feeling guilty.

They might be very generous on property settlement, alimony, child support. They might be having some guilt. As time goes by, especially if they're aggravated, some of that may dissipate and they'll start being more hard-nosed.

So you need to pray for wisdom on it. There's been some cases where we've had to trade off those delays. You need to help the parties examine their options honestly.

Usually the person that wants out of the marriage thinks he's only got two options, either stay in this marriage and be miserable the rest of my life or get a divorce. Those are my two options. I say, you know, those are two options.

But there's a third, a redeemed marriage, a radically changed marriage. And I'll say, I don't want to go back to that marriage either. I thought it was a terrible marriage.

I want to go back to one that is redeemed by Jesus Christ. We've got some more outlines here. Who else needs some outlines? Put your hands up.

Thank you. The key that I've found in case after case, I've been a conciliator of probably 600 or 700 divorce cases, and I found the key to turning things around and moving them back in the right direction is hope. This is the key ingredient in turning things around.

Because typically what happens is the person who's filed for divorce has given up hope. They've been in a situation year after year. There have been some crises.

Their spouse has all changed. Things are good for a while. Then they go right back to old patterns.

And they go around that cycle, you know, several times. And finally now they've done it, and the husband's making all sorts of promises she's heard before. She says, I don't believe it's not going to change.

Hope is gone. And she says, why should I stay in a miserable situation? Now, it used to be that people stayed in difficult situations out of commitment. They knew it was the right thing to do.

That's not holding many people into those situations today. So one of your key jobs is to rebuild hope. And there's lots of ways you can do that depending on where this person's at.

One of the things that I found is often most helpful is if you're working with a cooperative party, let's say it's the husband, and in the first meeting, you know, with the wife or what he said during private is something like, I know I haven't been a very good husband, and I'm really going to work harder, be better, and please stay. What's he going to change? He hasn't got a clue. He hasn't got a clue.

She knows it. Nothing's going to change. So you really do some accelerated counseling on this guy.

You really spend some time probing and analyzing and digging deep into his marriage. You identify the sinful habit patterns, the idolatry, the cravings, all the things that have contributed to it. And you help him to compose a godly, sincere, honest confession to his wife.

Not to manipulate her. Not to force her to come back in. Although you hope that God may use it to rebuild hope.

But you do it because it's right, and you have to do it for God. On the back of this brochure, you'll see a little list of things we call the seven A's of confession. And I will walk through, and I will prepare people, and I will even sometimes role play the kind of confession they need.

And when I'm sitting there with a couple in my office, and all the wives heard up until now is, I know I haven't been a very good husband, I'll really change, please come back. I know that's what she's heard. Where instead, she comes in, and the husband has really been doing business with God.

And what she hears is, honey, I've sinned against God, and you. I haven't even come close to living up to the standard he gives to me. He says I'm supposed to love you as Christ loved me.

Oh, I haven't even come close to that. I've worshipped my own idol. I've made my job into an idol.

And I get all my pleasure out of it. And I've neglected you, and I've broken my word. I've not been faithful to my vows to you.

I put all the burden on raising the kids with you because I'm too selfish to get up at night and do these things. When he starts talking specifically about his heart, and about how it comes out in his action, I sat there and watched the color come back into a woman's face. She'll come in with this cold, icy, hard look.

And as she hears this, the Holy Spirit can take that, and a hope starts to come back in. Maybe this time it's different. But folks, it's got to be sincere.

It's got to be sincere. You cannot be part of a manipulative process. But also keep in mind that none of us has an entirely pure motive.

I never have. I think Luther's the one who said that. We always have a taint of sin.

So don't look for a 100% pure motive. Even if someone says that, there's going to be this hope that perhaps the person will change their mind. But just make sure that you're prayerfully trying to keep the focus on the confession, being sincere.

Emphasizing God's wisdom, faithfulness, power, and promises. Opening up the Scriptures, seeing where this person's need is, the divorcing person. Putting them in touch with people who've been down this road.

If you know people in church who've gone through troubled marriages, try and get them with those folks if they were restored. Or even put them with people who've gone through a divorce and remarried. One of the most successful people that I knew for a while at Turning Around Divorce was a good friend of mine who divorced his wife.

He had a relationship with another woman. They divorced their spouses. They got married and had an absolutely wonderful marriage.

They had everything they ever dreamed of. And yet it was miserable. And they could tell this to people.

I saw them do this. They said, you know, we love each other. We can communicate.

We've got everything we ever dreamed of. And yet it was the biggest mistake of our lives. Because we know right now, people like you, the couple that's thinking about the divorce, you look at us and you're saying, see, they did it.

We have the burden we carry around day by day of knowing we are a stumbling block contributing to the divorce of other people, their children having to go on visitation, travel across the country. Our happiness is a source of other people's misery. So what you do is you hold up sort of like the most wonderful result this person can think of.

I'm going to get this great marriage. You point out, it's gravel in your mouth. So you're dealing with these illusions that Satan likes to paint in our mind.

And then helping the person who wants a divorce to start looking at their own sin. It's a delicate thing because usually they're not in the mood to do that. But if there's ways you can get them pointed in that direction, sometimes you can turn things around.

Now, another key step. I'm just going to skip over these quickly because there's enough here for you to read. But I've counseled so many divorce cases that I really feel like Satan has published a little booklet.

Because I hear the same excuses time after time after time. I call this popular divorce mythology. And these are the lines.

When love has gone out of a marriage, it's better to get divorced. Now that's the world talking to us. But Christians buy into it.

And you need to address that and help them see that the basis of marriage is not love. Commitment is the basis of love, in God's design. Secondly, it's better for the children, for the unhappy couple, to divorce.

Since we've got this miserable marriage. Well, you can bring in secular studies to point them to that. Again, it's a rationalization.

And I've often said, do you really believe that's true? They say, oh yes, I really believe that's true. I said, so you're really doing this primarily because you think it would be good for the kids and it's even what they want. Oh yes, great.

Let's have your kids come in here, let's ask them. Now you'd only do that with kids at a certain age. And usually parents don't want to do that because they know if they bring them in what their kids are going to say.

It's simply a superficial rationalization. They're trying to dress up their own selfishness in the guise of doing it for the kid's sake. And it's a lie.

God led me to this divorce. It just grieves me to hear people say, I know the Bible says I shouldn't do this. But in this case, God has given this great peace.

That's the phrase I usually use. It's one of my major problems with a lot of the popular teaching on spiritual guidance. We elevate this sense of inner peace.

We talk about four means of guidance. God's word, the leading of the Holy Spirit through a sense of peace, counsel of other people in circumstances. Now, granted, those last three are considerations we need to have, but people have a tendency to put them all on the same level.

They say, well, I know the Bible says I shouldn't, but three out of four isn't bad. The first one trumps all the other ones. And we need to emphasize that again and again.

Another one is, surely a loving God would not want someone to stay in such an unhappy situation. Oh, it's so popular, folks. They believe it.

They're hearing it from their Christian friends and their ladies' prayer group. People gravitate toward other folks who will feed these myths. They will look for them.

I've dealt with many women who planned their divorce two years in advance. They began to pull away from certain relationships because they knew what these people would say. They began to gravitate toward these relationships because they would be more compassionate and understanding.

They began to put money aside in the bank. It was a process of disentangling. That's where the friends should have been seeing the warning signs and intervening, if they were trained to do it.

And so we need to hit this one head on. It's just a humanistic presupposition. God's purpose in life revolves around me and my happiness.

And one thing I've used in many cases when somebody, I actually ask them to sort of unfold this a little bit, what they mean by, surely a loving God wouldn't want people to suffer and else. And I say, you know, take a time trip with me. Let's go back 2,000 years ago to the first century of the church.

And you've been assigned the job by the local church of going down to the Colosseum to counsel the Christians. And they're about to go into the lion's den. And you've given that counsel.

Surely a loving God would not want Christians to suffer like this. What would happen to the early church if people took your counsel? They'd start to see it. But you've got to use those kinds of word pictures where, because they won't, they've got walls built up in front.

You've got to get around behind these things. You've got to get around behind them. I talk about even the sense of peace, going back to the other one.

Do not mistake a sense of relief for a sense of confirmation. I've told people many times, I said, I don't have any peace about this. I've got a lot of anxiety, but I have great confidence.

That's right. Confidence is a much more, because confidence is our transformed mind, our thoughtful prayer, seeking counsel. Yes, it's what God's word says.

Even though I'm shaking inside as I think about it. Jesus did not have a great sense of peace in the Garden of Gethsemane. He was trembling.

He was overcome with agony. If he'd walked out the other side of the garden, I don't doubt there would have been this enormous sense of relief that someone might have confused for a sense of peace and the right thing. Certainly he did not.

So you've got to get into those kinds of things with people, and especially, again, help them to realize that God has something far more important in mind for his people than to make their lives hassle-free and pleasant. His purpose is to conform us to the likeness of his Son. And that requires pruning, melting, cleaning off dross, and sometimes Christians die.

Take them to Hebrews 11. There's so much in the Bible on suffering. To 1 Peter.

We've got to get into those scriptures and reinforce them with God's word in these situations. Another one is, I know it's wrong, but God is forgiving. I hear that again and again.

Take him back, I think it's Deuteronomy 29 or 24, the presumption where Moses warns him, if you presume that you can sin deliberately and then just say magic words that God will forgive you, how great his wrath will be upon you. It's a frightful thing to do that. Now, I've got to admit, I have done that at times.

I've had sins that weren't as obvious as divorcing my wife, but I've had sinful thoughts or words or things, and I know it's wrong, and I do it, and I just have to, when God convicts me, I have to go back and just plead his mercy, and he's very forgiving. But sometimes what he does is he leaves a consequence, a painful consequence, not nearly what I would deserve, but often enough to leave a sting there in my life, and I warn people about that. Don't be a sting.

Point the example of David. God forgave David, but what was the sting that God left? The sword would not depart from his house, and his sons were killing each other, and David had to bear that on his conscience to his dying day. The other way to get around this rationale about God will forgive me is I say, well, let's move to a different scenario.

Let's say you're a bank robber, and you need some cash. You go out and you rob a bank. You run down the street, back up an alley.

You clearly got away nothing. You put the money down. You go, God, I'm so sorry.

I know it was wrong to rob that bank. I really ask your forgiveness. Thank you, Lord.

Amen. Could you pick up the money and just walk away? And most people say, well, no. What's the evidence of repentance, sincere repentance, that would give you God's forgiveness? You pick it up, and you turn around, and you walk back.

I say that's the only repentance that's going to adequately deal with the sin of a wrongful divorce. That's the only one. Now, the sad thing is when somebody has wrongfully divorced and then remarried, then you've got another whole scenario.

I think God's grace is sufficient even for that, to bring forgiveness. But people have to live sometimes with consequences. I have some very close friends to me who went through this, and the woman was like a sister to me.

She remarried before she came to repentance, and she knows there's certain problems with her children that flow directly from her decision to run away from the marriage, and she bears that burden. And she has talked more passionately to other people about staying in marriages than I could ever dream of. She's been there.

She bears the weight. Another one is it's the only way to get him to change, get him or her to change. Boy, that's dangerous.

You're taking on the role of the Holy Spirit. You don't force people to change. And then finally, another one on the other side, though, the church is often guilty of, or individual Christians, is the divorce of the unpardonable sin.

A lot of people go through sinful divorces, leave the church because they feel like they can never find forgiveness. And we need to help them see that there's no sin so great that Jesus' blood can't wash it away. Another thing to do is to help people count the cost.

Actually, think through with them. I will sometimes do a time-wise. Okay, John, let's assume you get a divorce.

Let's move the clock ahead ten years. What do you think this is going to do to your relationship with God, your relationship with your children? What are you going to do someday if one of your kids in their marriage is going through a troubled time, and you know it's not a permanent problem, you know they can work it through, but they're going to say, Dad, you did it. How are you going to feel at that moment? I try to get very visceral with these things and try to get into that heart.

Like Nathan going to David about the little sheep. He didn't just go and say, David, you committed adultery or murder. You need to repent.

But he went in around the edge, didn't he? The little lamb. He got David's heart, and when he finally came to the punchline, David, the man is you. David, just go out.

We need to be creative like that, with the Holy Spirit guiding us. I mentioned the thing about a second happy marriage can be a curse. Look for every opportunity to get them into a solid biblical counselor who can help them.

And even offer to pay the expenses. Quite often they'll question your motives as a church, just being legalistic and unloving. You say, no, we're not.

We love you, and we're willing to do anything we can. We'll get you a counselor. If you don't trust anyone here, there's a good counselor over here we really respect, and we want you to go to him, and we'll pay the cost.

You want to take away all their excuses. Pull them all away until their selfishness is laid bare. Because they'll try to say, well, I can't afford it.

Other things. Take those excuses away. Yes, Michael? You have to make sure of what the counselor... Oh, amen.

You've got to make sure what the counselor... There are so many pastors who are referring people outside their church. They don't even know what the counselor's philosophy of divorce and marriage is. I can't believe it.

You haven't even checked on that one item? And there's a lot of counselors out there that just, if they see a hard marriage, they put their stamp of approval on the divorce. So make sure. I mean, ideally, it should be done inside the church, in my opinion.

That's the best place. But sometimes, an outside counselor can play a role. What if one of the other parties is involved with another person? I mentioned the whole thing about praying.

I've, on some occasions, coached a woman to go and confront the other woman in a loving way. I want to really make sure where her heart was at. But on some occasions, that's been what God used to break this adulterous woman's heart and get her to back off.

So you need to pray for wisdom. What if there's spousal abuse? If the couple is in your church boy, the church better get involved right away. If there's physical violence, things going on like that, the church ought to be exercising church discipline, confronting this person, saying this is not acceptable.

And of course, if persuasion and reasoning fail, you implement formal church discipline. We'll be going through some details there. Yes.

Yeah, the question is, and it's a very good one, there are legal implications to a lot of things we're talking about. When a church gets involved in people's lives and there's sin going on, and some of those sins also constitute crimes, physical abuse, sexual abuse of children, abuse of elderly, not to mention embezzlement, and there's all sorts of things people can be doing. If the church doesn't report some of those things, it can incur some legal liability.

The most important place you've got to deal with is abuse of children. Many states now require pastors to report. I think it's a mistake.

I think pastors should reserve that step for their own discretion, bring the civil authorities in when they need to in those cases. Compelling them to do it can have some other side effects I don't think are good, but if the law says that, we need to respect that. Reporting other things like physical abuse of a spouse, in most states that I'm aware of, it's not legally required.

The law generally exempts two adults, and if she needs help, she goes and talks to them. If it's an elderly person, there may be a responsibility. One of the other, the other side of this thing is there's a lot of legal implications to carry out church discipline.

If you go and actually intervene, and you talk to other people, and maybe even bring it before your congregation, as churches historically have done, today you can get sued for invasion of privacy, infliction of emotional distress, slander, all sorts of other things. So you've got to be careful. We, several years ago, developed a course just for church leadership called *Managing Conflict in Your Church*, and it's basically a seminar on preventive things.

We took all the big conflicts we dealt with in churches and said how could they prevent this conflict. One of the key steps you can take in avoiding legal liability and doing discipline properly is to bring your house into order. Most churches have not, it's like a dusty old book sitting on a shelf.

They haven't done it biblically, and they don't have bylaws and guidelines and membership requirements that are consistent with what the courts are handing us, holding us to this day. Thirty years ago, churches could carry out biblical discipline almost with impunity. The courts just said that's a church thing, we won't get involved.

That attitude is no longer there. If you cannot show that your people had informed consent that they knew this is what you're going to do and they consented to it, you're going to have some legal problems today in some courts. If you want to look at some forms, I encourage you to look at that particular resource.

All those forms are also available on a floppy tape so you can take them and amend them and use them. We were also cautioned about due process is required so that the person you're disciplining has to be notified, given a chance to defend themselves, bring in witnesses on their behalf that this is New York State, that New York State is requiring, even in ecclesiastical where they generally will let it go if there's due process in some way. See, I think the stronger foundation for it is God requires due process.

Matthew 7, 12, do unto others as ye have done unto you. I want to know what process the church has. I want to know, God says if you're accused of something you have a right to confront your accuser.

So there's certain biblical due process things that actually are the foundation for our legal due process things and legally those are required. Again, I've been involved in case after case where the church's entire statement on church discipline was if someone falls into sin we will follow the discipline process laid out in Matthew 18, 15 through 20. What's that mean? I mean, 20 years ago, 30 years ago would have been enough.

Today, it doesn't even scratch the surface. You need to talk about can they bring in witnesses? Can they have somebody there to represent them? Can they have an attorney present? What kind of notice are they entitled to? What kind of appeal do they have if they don't like the decision? Now, you don't have to provide all those things but you better decide what you think is biblically consistent. And again, we've got model forms of church discipline.

You can take those and pull out what you like and throw out the rest. And we've even done some custom work for certain denominations where those generic documents have been adjusted to fit directly into cross references into different denominations like the Christian Church of America, for example. So, I encourage you to look at those sources.

If you have your house legally in order, you've got very low exposure to legal liability. If you don't, you'll often be faced with this dilemma. You'll be sitting there as a church council saying, well, we know God's word says we better do this but if we do, we might get sued.

Any time the church leaders allow themselves to be put in a position where they have to say but, they have failed. You need to be looking at these things in advance. So, I just encourage you to get your house in order beforehand.

Yeah? We have at our church in order to be members, you sign a thing that says are you willing to be taught and disciplined basically by the elders. Would you then suggest that on that same piece of paper that we have a statement saying as a, or becoming a member of this church, I understand that. I subject myself to this is part of the church because they sign it and then it's illegal to bind your house.

You need to even go beyond that, Sean. Even that is not sufficient today. There's two major errors where you run into problems with church discipline.

I'm a little bit ahead of myself but it's okay. One of them is continuing church discipline after someone tries to withdraw. Nine out of ten people when they get confronted just simply handing a resignation they just boogie.

And frankly, what most pastors do they go, whew, it's off our shoulders. And what's the guy do? He goes down to second church. He starts to mistreat people there.

You know, if you had a Boy Scout troop in your church and you expected one of, you suspect one of the counsel of sex abusing boys, you started an investigation, handed his resignation and went down to the church two blocks down. Do you have a responsibility there? You better believe you do. Well, there's a lot of other sin that can do just as much damage.

And we tend to just say it's not my problem anymore. And folks, I think the shepherds should be held responsible for that. But, if you believe in that, and I think it's very clear in the Bible that we have a responsibility to report serious problems to a church where someone might flee.

We need to do it discreetly. We need to do it wisely but we need to reserve that right. If you don't have your bylaws in order you can be sued for giving information to someone who doesn't have a legitimate interest in it.

And the Gwynn case in Collinsville, Oklahoma was a classic case. That's exactly what happened. Marion Gwynn won a \$400,000 verdict against the elders in the church.

And the main thing the court said was they had not clearly communicated to her their policy that if she withdrew and tried to go to another church they reserved the right to inform that church of their unresolved problems. Now you can do this and we often counsel churches who don't have their house in order they don't have the bylaws and we will come up with some very creative careful ways to communicate to the other church something like we just think you should know there were some unresolved issues when he left that we think could have a bearing on your congregation and we encourage you to talk to him and set up a meeting where you and that person and I could sit down and I could share with you in his presence what's going on ask for his permission. Well if he gives his permission he loses the right to sue you for it.

He says no I don't want to do it the pastor at least should be on guard although I've seen a lot of stupid pastors. I mean really they bring someone in they have a warning sign there's a problem but what they're really thinking about is this is going to look good on the statistics at the end of the year. We got one more guy we love to have those people come on board and as a very dear friend of mine once said you do not do yourself a favor when you take a Jonah on board.

Lots of churches take Jonah's on board they never ask questions so that's one legal issue is continuing if you flip ahead let me just jump ahead to that issue on page 8 I know we're going to run out of time here any minute every other page is missing? okay bless your hearts I'm so sorry I'm so sorry what you'll notice on page 8 is a sample from our model bylaws and basically do we have one more or we're out right now? okay we'll get you some more in fact if for some reason I'm sure they're going to try and get you outlines here if any of you do not get an outline here contact our office we'll send you an outline and our website is on your thing but you'll just see there's some model language here to make my point in a membership bylaw it talks about how people can withdraw from membership

you don't lock them into your church you want to give them the right to leave if they're not fitting in but the last line in this bylaw says if it appears to the board of elders that a member has requested removal merely to avoid church discipline that request shall not be given effect until the church has brought the disciplinary process to a proper conclusion it's the same thing a judge in Texas does if someone's charged with a crime and they just want to run across the state line they can't trump the Texas court the court will go after them and say we've got to resolve this the court has the responsibility to say when the process is done now again this is not retribution and trying to hurt this person but it's saying it's got to be done in an orderly fashion if you have your bylaws in

order you can do this with impunity if you don't you can either be sued or you'll back off and obey what God says either one of those is not good okay going back to what do you do when you can't stop a divorce let me just see here real quickly those are laid out pretty well I want to get into preparing for formal church discipline and just hit a few high points here because this is really an important part you need to have your house in order because courts are not sympathetic to churches anymore in many regards we're seeing more and more cases like this you need to lay first of all a very biblical foundation for discipline your people have a right to know that it should be blown into your membership classes for your existing members you probably ought to give a preaching series a lot of

pastors have gone through this seminar have gone back and done like a four to six week series on conflict resolution including biblical discipline so their people are brought up to speed they're told what's going on there's some things here in section C about how God views discipline I'll just say we in the church are often embarrassed and awkward and ashamed about talking about discipline like it's something wrong or bad or dirty nowhere in God's word does God apologize or is He shy or embarrassed about this in fact on the contrary the Bible consistently portrays discipline as a sign of true fatherly love and in contrast Leviticus 17 19 says it's a sign of hatred not to rebuke somebody in sin that's serious so we need to stop apologizing for discipline now the one thing there obviously

in many cases discipline has been abused there's been misuses of that authority but the solution to bad discipline is not no discipline it's godly redemptive proper discipline you need to make sure that your members understand are committed to what the Bible teaches on discipline you can lay the biblical foundation for the whole purpose of church discipline the formal process is to teach your people to be self-disciplined my goal as a parent right now with my children is to teach my children to be self-disciplined

so when they're away from home and they're tempted they're going to look at that temptation and say no I don't want to do that and that's what we're trying to do with the members in our church question yeah the question is what's the connect between church discipline and

membership the whole issue the key concept here is what we call informed consent it's a legal concept that means if people are fully informed of a relationship and there's nothing hidden from them and they look at it and they say yes I agree to those terms courts will generally respect it unless they yes you can sacrifice me no they won't take something bizarre but if it's discipline how you can be excluded put out unless it's just totally bizarre the courts will enforce that most churches don't talk about it because they're afraid it'll scare people away there are a lot of people out there I've had the same experience Michael where they're looking for a church that is practicing biblical discipline because they've been in a church that's good in every regard great preaching programs

youth ministry but they're continually sending a signal and their kids are getting it that you can sin with impunity if you're properly teaching what the Bible says about discipline here's what you're going to hear from your people this is whenever we go through our membership classes the elders individually interview each of the people coming into the church we talk to them about lots of aspects they go through a formal class and then there's an interview we're basically getting informed consent and one young man who was in the class as I asked him we ask the question do you understand our guidelines on church discipline what will we do and we want to make sure they can speak back to us what they know we'll do and I'll say why do we practice that and this one young man gave me such a

wonderful answer I asked him to write it down for me here's what a 12 year old boy said he said belonging to a church that practices discipline means a lot to me it makes me feel secure that someone is caring and watching out for me and tries to keep me from going astray the reason this means a lot is this is my nephew just the fact that my brother and I get into so much conflict makes me realize that a church with a lot of members is apt to have conflicts too resolving conflict with my brother makes me feel so good that we are reuniting so in that sense I realize how vital church discipline is to the spiritual growth of a church and its members folks here's a 12 year old boy who understood this concept better than many pastors do this is a profound insight into God's whole dynamic of

relationships in the body so yes I think it is important to do as new people come into your church you should have a thorough membership class and again it's simply do unto others as you would have them do unto you they've got a right to know what your theology is what's your mission what's your vision what's your plans what's your accountability they have a right to know that and you can lay it out in a winsome way we have never seen someone go away from our church because of our disciplinary policy one year we had 15 families coming in at one time we interviewed all 15 and every one of them we said what was the main thing that attracted you to our church the first thing every family said was you've got a reputation for taking accountability seriously so much for this scaring people away

now the fact is you will scare some people away but to be honest with you I'm glad if they don't want that kind of relationship there's lots of churches they can be happy in because they don't want it either now the big question is what do you do with people who are already in your church and haven't gone through memory it's a very simple answer you excommunicate everybody from the church and then you bring them all back it's like cleaning your hard drive on your computer no what you do is you amend your bylaws and these other things through a proper congregational process you have meetings to inform your congregation there's a whole detailed process we talk a lot about managing conflict in your church

because it's a delicate thing a lot of people don't like to shake the boat we've never

done it that way before why are we doing this it's legalistic you've got to be prepared to answer those questions but if you do and you go through this process and people say yes we believe this is biblical yes we want this they vote to adopt it and then you can either have them actually sign a statement that says we understand the church has recently amended its bylaws we received copies of those which we've read we agree to be bound by if you don't feel comfortable getting a signed thing you can just simply send a letter out to everybody in the church saying as you know at the recent congregational meeting we adopted this and these are the key points of it and it is our assumption that anybody who continues to regularly worship with us beyond June 30 if you give them like two or three

months to make up their mind will be assumed to have consented to these new bylaws that's a pretty strong informed consent it's not quite as strong as a signed statement but if you do get brought in the court and you can show that letter out to everybody and everyone else knew about the judge is going to look at this and say you knew what their guidelines were so don't come crying to me today that you didn't like it so it is a delicate process and you've got to be very careful as you work it through that it's vitally important it's vitally important and the more you do this the more you're going to get rid of a lot of egregious cases because people know you're serious you know the whole goal of my kids have finally gotten to the point they know mom and dad are serious about discipline and

more and more they're doing what's right I think out of a right heart toward God but there's times I can read my son's face and that's not what's motivating he's going if I do this I'm going to have some unpleasant consequences and you can see the wheel spinning and he decides to turn around and go the other way folks if that's what keeps somebody inside the fence that's good enough for me get a question Scott I was just wondering would the court consider informed consent without a signed document what happens if you don't have a signed document it's harder to prove it the signed document is so clear when someone sues you in fact it goes back a step earlier than that there's a model letter in here that we write to an attorney someone calls you up he's under discipline he's got an attorney

attorney calls you up and says I'm attorney so-and-so Esquire and I'm representing so-and-so and if you go ahead and do this to my client I'm going to call this my neener neener neener letter and it's I don't know if you use that expression as a kid but as little kids when you're really cotsy you go neener neener neener and this is where you send it back you say thank you for your call we're happy to work with you and close the copy of our bylaws and the consent form that so-and-so signed also the attendance sheet from our membership class indicating he was in class the night we talked about discipline all this documentation you give back to the attorney and the attorney gets it and attorneys in these cases all the time take them on what's called a contingency basis it means they will

take a percentage of what they get he knows his odds of winning are zero 30% is not enough to warrant a lawsuit and they back off altogether if you don't have such clear documentation you have to bring in testimony he was in the membership class you don't have attendance you don't have a signed document you have to assess your congregation how much it will take you still go through the process to prove your case you may have to bring members of the church on to a witness stand you may a witness stand you may have to a friend on to may have to have friend on to witness stand may have to have the witness stand you may have to a on to stand means you've got to also forgive her.

And if any of you hold her at a distance or give her a cold shoulder, I will be coming to visit you." They put the congregation on notice. That's what Paul talks about in 2nd Corinthians 2. Formally restore this person went out that Satan may not outwit us because he loves to get into these things and still pull that person out again.

And he prayed for Cindy and the period wasn't even on a man before people were jumping out of the pews, running up on the stage, throwing their arms around her and restoring her to the body. And you know what went on that day is exactly what Jesus talks about in Luke 15. Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them.

Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after that lost sheep until he finds it? What would happen in your church on Sunday morning you get to the part where the sermon is and one of the deacons gets up and says, folks I'm sorry we're not giving a sermon this morning. One of our members is straying and passers out right now trying to get this person back. Let's pray.

Oh, leaves the ninety-nine, goes out, finds this person and when he finds it he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together. He says, rejoice with me I have found my lost sheep.

I tell you that the same way there'll be more rejoicing in heaven over one sin of repentance than over ninety-nine righteous people who do not need to. This is when you want to have an unbeliever in your church on that Sunday morning. Seeing the gospel lived out.

I've run out of my time so I don't have to quit the formal thing but I'm going to stay and I'll take two questions and then I'll stay as long as anyone wants me to. Yes, the Bible definitely is, but the Bible is representative, not exhaustive. One church I worked with had a list of the sins that they would excommunicate people for.

I said you do not understand the creativity of the human mind. I mean never make an exhaustive thing. They are The thing that kicks the Matthew 18 from one level to the other is they will not listen.

So you could excommunicate somebody for gossip just as much as for adultery. If a gossip will not repent, will not listen, Jesus says deal with it. Usually they're not as invested in that sin as adultery is.

But yes, the Bible is a thing but it's representative of what sins, yeah. This concludes the message. To order copies of this or other messages given at the conference, please call Audio Mission International at 1-800-874-8730.

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