

RIVERVIEW CHURCH

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CHURCH DISCIPLINE.

BY NOEL HEIKKINEN

With three competitive boys obsessed with the game of baseball, our yard has become a miniature “Field of Dreams.” Every sunny day (and occasionally on a rainy or snowy day) a game of wiffleball breaks out, with countless neighbor boys wearing a base path into my otherwise perfectly manicured lawn. I’m OK with this particular type of lawn nuisance because baseball is our family sport. Over the years, my boys have played on nearly 20 teams, ranging from recreation ball to highly competitive travel leagues. I have watched hundreds of games, assisted with hundreds of practices, and learned from the leadership styles of a wide variety of coaches. On several teams, I served as “Assistant to the Coach” (my lack of baseball knowledge kept me from ever confidently holding the title “Assistant Coach”) All of this experience has taught me one fundamental principle of the game — **The Best Teams are the Most Disciplined Teams.**

Some coaches have a haphazard approach to the game. They arrive late to practices, sometimes skipping them altogether because “something came up.” They rarely have the team run and stretching is an afterthought. Practice drills are made up on the fly and feel more like recess than baseball. These coaches spend much of the game time chatting with other coaches about the up-coming Tigers game rather than the game on the field in front of them. This lack of discipline leads to a team that is not prepared to win, so they rarely do.

On the other extreme are coaches who expend all of their energies yelling and screaming at the team, often for unknown offenses. It is assumed that the players already know how to play the game and very little coaching or strategy is discussed. This goes very poorly for the players who are chewed out when they make an innocent mistake that they could have avoided had they been properly instructed.

The best teams have an altogether different environment. The coaching staff expects a lot out of both the players and themselves. They work the team incredibly hard and expect the players to improve their skills in between practices. They run, stretch, condition, bat, field, pitch, catch, and throw until the team collapses from the exertion and then they do it again. Coaches on these teams never expect the players to do anything they wouldn’t do themselves and often run and play along with the teams during practice. At game time, the coaches come prepared with a well thought through strategy, although they are prepared to make on the fly changes. They remain focused on the game and consistently coach the entire team and individual players. When the team is down, they encourage. When the team is slacking, they yell. When the team is excelling, they challenge them to take it up a notch. When a player is out of line, they deal with it, making a quick decision whether to do it privately or in front of the team. When a player’s performance or attitude crosses the line, he will find himself “benched” for an inning or in extreme cases removed from the game altogether. Such is a disciplined team.

It is the same way in the church. **The Best Churches are the Most Disciplined Churches.**



A DISCIPLINED CHURCH

Churches and individual Christians often gravitate toward the same extremes as baseball coaches and players, haphazardly living their Christian life with the attitude “I am free to live however I want” or rigidly demanding everyone lives by a set of rules no one knows. These extreme ways of thinking are clearly condemned in Scripture (1 Romans 6:1; Galatians 3:1-3), but often practiced in the church.

Rather, we are to live a life of discipline, in light of the reality of our salvation. Jesus’ friend Peter challenges us this way:

THEREFORE, PREPARING YOUR MINDS FOR ACTION, AND BEING SOBER-MINDED, SET YOUR HOPE FULLY ON THE GRACE THAT WILL BE BROUGHT TO YOU AT THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST. AS OBEDIENT CHILDREN, DO NOT BE CONFORMED TO THE PASSIONS OF YOUR FORMER IGNORANCE, BUT AS HE WHO CALLED YOU IS HOLY, YOU ALSO BE HOLY IN ALL YOUR CONDUCT, SINCE IT IS WRITTEN, “YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY.”

1 PETER 1:13-16

Confident of the grace shown us through the person and work of Jesus Christ, we prepare our minds for action so we may live holy lives that are reflections of his. Nothing short of God’s reputation is at stake in the way we live.

Living that kind of life takes discipline.

Unfortunately, the word “discipline” has a bad rap in our culture. We tend to think of discipline as punishment for something we have done wrong, much like being grounded as a teenager or being thrown into prison as an adult. While discipline does carry these elements, it is short-sighted to think that is all it is. Jesus’ closest companions when he walked the earth became known as his “disciples.” In English, this word comes from the same word as “discipline.” At Riverview, our mission is “to make Sacrificial Followers of Jesus” which is a fancy way of saying “Disciples of Jesus.” We intentionally use the phrase “Sacrificial Followers” because it reflects the type of discipline required to live the life to which Jesus calls those who follow him.

The author of Hebrews makes this astute observation:

“MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD, NOR BE WEARY WHEN REPROVED BY HIM. FOR THE LORD DISCIPLINES THE ONE HE LOVES, AND CHASTISES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES.”

IT IS FOR DISCIPLINE THAT YOU HAVE TO ENDURE. GOD IS TREATING YOU AS SONS. FOR WHAT SON IS THERE WHOM HIS FATHER DOES NOT DISCIPLINE? IF YOU ARE LEFT WITHOUT DISCIPLINE, IN WHICH ALL HAVE PARTICIPATED, THEN YOU ARE ILLEGITIMATE CHILDREN AND NOT SONS. BESIDES THIS, WE HAVE HAD EARTHLY FATHERS WHO DISCIPLINED US AND WE RESPECTED THEM. SHALL WE NOT MUCH MORE BE SUBJECT TO THE FATHER OF SPIRITS AND LIVE? FOR THEY DISCIPLINED US FOR A SHORT TIME AS IT SEEMED BEST TO THEM, BUT HE DISCIPLINES US FOR OUR GOOD, THAT WE MAY SHARE HIS HOLINESS.



FOR THE MOMENT ALL DISCIPLINE SEEMS PAINFUL RATHER THAN PLEASANT, BUT LATER IT YIELDS THE PEACEFUL FRUIT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS TO THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN TRAINED BY IT.

HEBREWS 12:5-11 (EMPHASIS ADDED)

Discipline comes from love. I have seen coaches give up on a player who they have no faith in; they stop disciplining him and he never improves. But when a coach sees potential in a player and wants to see him take it to the next level, he ratchets up the discipline as a necessary step to get him there. Some players don't see it, though--they think they are being singled out for punishment. The opposite is often the case--they are being singled out for greatness. Truly great players realize this and keep pushing themselves as they are being pushed.

The reality is that all discipline seems painful for the moment, but it pays off in the end. This is certainly true for baseball players. I've never met a kid who likes to run a lap because he let a grounder make it through his legs. Eventually, though, he learns to get his glove down to the ground and he becomes a better player because of his hatred of the dreaded lap. Players that are allowed to make the same mistake over and over without correction never get any better.

My wife sometimes finds it uncomfortable to watch my oldest son get reprimanded by his coaches when he goofs up. He sees it differently, though. He is appreciative because he knows the rough edges of his game are being shaved off and he is becoming a better player and a better man even if it is difficult in the moment.

What does this look like in the life of the church?

PRE-GAME DISCIPLINE

I am always amazed when coaches don't require very much practice for their teams. The immediate conclusion I come to is that they don't really care about their players getting better or their teams winning any games. It is only through practice that anyone is ready when the umpire yells, "Play Ball!" This practice comes in two primary forms: team and individual.

TEAM PRACTICE

A consistent, rigorous practice schedule is absolutely essential to the development and growth of any sports team. At these regular times, the coaches are able to communicate the fundamentals of the game, as well as focus on trouble spots for the entire team or individual positions. Players who repeatedly skip practice or don't take it seriously stunt their understanding of the game and stop progressing in their ability to play at a higher level. The wisest man who ever lived doesn't mince words when he reminds us that, "Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates reproof is stupid." (Pr 12:1) It doesn't matter how talented a player is, if they don't value practice and the instruction of their coaches, they are being stupid and they will eventually fail.

In the same way, members of a local church must have consistent, rigorous spiritual development to help them grow in their faith. In the New Testament, there is a pattern of large group and small group meetings that served this function, although in smaller New Testament churches, it seems these meetings were combined into one. It is in these settings that the believers grew through a constant regiment of preaching and teaching of the Word, prayer, and community.



It is easy to become a legalist here, demanding weekly church or Life Group attendance, but I prefer the tone of the author of Hebrews who warns the church not to neglect meeting together, “as is the habit of some.” (2 Acts 2:42-47; 3 Hebrews 10:24) There are weeks where my family skips church (GASP). In fact, when we skip church, we most often do so for baseball (DOUBLE GASP). Our Life Group cancels just about as many meetings as we keep because Friday nights are a common time to schedule other events. The problem starts when neglecting to hang out with fellow believers (for the purpose of preaching and teaching of the Word, prayer, and community) becomes habit. Instead, our regular routine should include gathering together and we should greatly miss this essential part of our personal discipline when we are unable to do so.

INDIVIDUAL PRACTICE

By far, the best baseball players practice a lot outside of the scheduled team practices. The pitchers constantly fiddle with the ball to master different pitches, the fielders practice pop flies in the backyard and have their dads throw them grounders over and over. To these young men, the idea of a great day off of baseball is to head to the batting cages to smack some balls around. In other words, there is never a day off of baseball for these players--the game is their life. A friend of mine has three baseball playing sons and the youngest (who is now a senior in high school) is being scouted by the majors. I asked him recently why only one of his boys got to that level and without hesitation he said, “Because he loves to practice, even when he is at home. He would rather play baseball than do homework, watch TV, or play video games.”

As Christ-followers, this attitude is a marker of growth and maturity. Look no further than the Apostle Paul who wrote,

BUT I DISCIPLINE MY BODY AND KEEP IT UNDER CONTROL, LEST AFTER PREACHING TO OTHERS I MYSELF SHOULD BE DISQUALIFIED.

1 CORINTHIANS 9:27

It is this type of commitment to discipline that drives a player to win. Personal time in the word and prayer, habits of financial generosity and evangelism are not natural. They take time to develop, but they pay off in the end.

Last spring, I was helping my son’s coach determine the skill levels of a bunch of 7 year boys. One of these young jocks declared, without a hint of doubt, “I am the greatest baseball player in the world!” His confidence was commendable, if not sorely misguided. He was a natural athlete, for sure, but he knew nothing about the game. He couldn’t throw straight (although the ball went far), he couldn’t hit the ball (although he swung with enough power to screw himself into the ground), and he caught like a...well...7 year old boy. Another young man quietly made his way to the field and caught every ball that came his way. He hit like a major leaguer and made an unassisted triple play during the first game. He did not need to say a word. It was apparent to everyone that he practiced this game a lot at home.

I am always skeptical of people who talk a big game, both in baseball and in the church. Don’t tell me you’ve got game...show me. Each day, as we go to school and work; as we interact with our family, friends, and strangers; as we encounter joys and sorrows, we are playing the game. Success isn’t always what we think it is. It’s not driving the best car or making the most money. It’s not having the hottest wife or the coolest sleeve of tattoos.

Success is growing in our love for Jesus and the natural byproduct of spiritual maturity.



IN-GAME DISCIPLINE

Practicing baseball is all fine and good, but where it all comes together is on game day. Two teams arrive, both eager to win; but only one team leaves with a win.

DO YOU NOT KNOW THAT IN A RACE ALL THE RUNNERS RUN, BUT ONLY ONE RECEIVES THE PRIZE? SO RUN THAT YOU MAY OBTAIN IT. EVERY ATHLETE EXERCISES SELF-CONTROL IN ALL THINGS. THEY DO IT TO RECEIVE A PERISHABLE WREATH, BUT WE AN IMPERISHABLE. SO I DO NOT RUN AIMLESSLY; I DO NOT BOX AS ONE BEATING THE AIR.

1 CORINTHIANS 9:27

Unless they are participating in the blasphemy known as recreation ball (where there are no winners or losers . . . gag), the teams come to win, the players play to win, the coaches coach to win. Everyone on the team has a role to play in keeping the team disciplined.

That's why it is such a joy that we don't play this game alone.

PEER DISCIPLINE

One team member calls out to the rest of the team, "We've got 2 outs!" The catcher walks to the mound to calm down a frazzled pitcher. An outfielder cries "I got it," while his teammate acknowledges his right to the pop fly with a, "Get it, get it, get it!" It's called "chatter," and it's essential for any winning team.

Reflect on this image as you read these words:

...CONSIDER HOW TO STIR UP ONE ANOTHER TO LOVE AND GOOD WORKS, NOT NEGLECTING TO MEET TOGETHER, AS IS THE HABIT OF SOME, BUT ENCOURAGING ONE ANOTHER, AND ALL THE MORE AS YOU SEE THE DAY DRAWING NEAR.

HEBREWS 10:24-25

IRON SHARPENS IRON, AND ONE MAN SHARPENS ANOTHER.

PROVERBS 27:17

THEREFORE, CONFESS YOUR SINS TO ONE ANOTHER AND PRAY FOR ONE ANOTHER, THAT YOU MAY BE HEALED. THE PRAYER OF A RIGHTEOUS PERSON HAS GREAT POWER AS IT IS WORKING.

JAMES 5:16

LIKEWISE, MY BROTHERS, YOU ALSO HAVE DIED TO THE LAW THROUGH THE BODY OF CHRIST, SO THAT YOU MAY BELONG TO ANOTHER, TO HIM WHO HAS BEEN RAISED FROM THE DEAD, IN ORDER THAT WE MAY BEAR FRUIT FOR GOD.

ROMANS 7:4



FINALLY, BROTHERS, REJOICE. AIM FOR RESTORATION, COMFORT ONE ANOTHER, AGREE WITH ONE ANOTHER, LIVE IN PEACE; AND THE GOD OF LOVE AND PEACE WILL BE WITH YOU.

2 CORINTHIANS 13:11

As Americans, we read too much of the Bible through an overly individualistic lens, oblivious to the fact that most of the “you’s” on its pages are plural. It is a shame southerners didn’t translate the Bible, because maybe they we would have seen that the appropriate translation is “y’all.” As followers of Jesus, we belong to one another and have a responsibility to one another. The imagery thread throughout the Scripture is simply “we are all in this together.”

There is no place where this is most essential than when someone is caught in sin.

BROTHERS, IF ANYONE IS CAUGHT IN ANY TRANSGRESSION, YOU WHO ARE SPIRITUAL SHOULD RESTORE HIM IN A SPIRIT OF GENTLENESS. KEEP WATCH ON YOURSELF, LEST YOU TOO BE TEMPTED. BEAR ONE ANOTHER’S BURDENS, AND SO FULFILL THE LAW OF CHRIST. FOR IF ANYONE THINKS HE IS SOMETHING, WHEN HE IS NOTHING, HE DECEIVES HIMSELF.

GALATIANS 6:1-3

Note the goal and the attitude in this verse. The goal is restoration and the attitude is gentleness. When we live a life like that toward those in the church who are caught in sin, we are bearing their burdens and obeying Jesus. When we don’t live like this, we are like the self-proclaimed superstar on the baseball team who gives no thought to his teammates. Paul says this type of person is deceived and they are worth nothing.

Rather, when we see a teammate in trouble, we are to take it upon ourselves to help him get his swing back. “Watch out that you don’t dip your shoulder when you swing!” The tone of a teammate is different than that of the coach. It is one of encouragement, not command. It is a gentle reminder, not a mandatory directive.

Our job is not to expose sin in someone’s life (that’s the Holy Spirit’s job); our job is to respond when sin is exposed. We do so with a spirit of gentleness knowing that we have blind spots in our own lives as well (Matthew 7:1-5). However, when we allow a destructive pattern of sin to rule in someone’s life, it’s like noticing that your teammate keeps going up to bat without a helmet on and not telling him before he leaves the dugout. At best, he’s going to be sent back by the umpire; at worse, he’s going to die from a wild pitch to the temple.

In the Christian community, the most difficult type of sin to be gentle with is often the one that is directed straight at you. Often, we dive right off of either error, becoming harsh or falling into the same sin they are committing toward us. Perhaps this is why, on the issue of lawsuits among believers, Paul advised the Corinthian church, “Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded?” (1 Corinthians 6:7) In other words, if someone has sinned against you and you can suck it up, then suck it up.

Many times, when Christians approach sin in someone else’s life they head immediately to Jesus’ words in Matthew 18, but they forget to couch their approach in the spirit of gentleness commanded in Galatians. Read through Jesus’ words, overlaying this crucial attitude:



IF YOUR BROTHER SINS AGAINST YOU, GO AND TELL HIM HIS FAULT, BETWEEN YOU AND HIM ALONE. IF HE LISTENS TO YOU, YOU HAVE GAINED YOUR BROTHER. BUT IF HE DOES NOT LISTEN, TAKE ONE OR TWO OTHERS ALONG WITH YOU, THAT EVERY CHARGE MAY BE ESTABLISHED BY THE EVIDENCE OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES. IF HE REFUSES TO LISTEN TO THEM, TELL IT TO THE CHURCH. AND IF HE REFUSES TO LISTEN EVEN TO THE CHURCH, LET HIM BE TO YOU AS A GENTILE AND A TAX COLLECTOR.

MATTHEW 18:15-17

In this passage, Jesus maps out a strategy for dealing with someone who has directly sinned against you and it oozes with gentleness and patience. If the sin is too big of a deal to suck up, Jesus offers a different approach than many of us instinctively take. Instead of gossiping, his approach starts with a one on one conversation. I have learned that most of the time, this is all that is needed: one teammate bringing an issue to another. Usually, the relationship is restored and both parties gain a new measure of maturity. If that doesn't work, it moves to a team approach, with a couple others helping their brother or sister out. A mature team does a lot of self-coaching throughout the game. Their chatter in the field and conversation in the dugout handles the majority of tweaks that need to be made. Only in the rarest of situations does it make it beyond that.

TEAM DISCIPLINE

When all else fails, there are times when a coach needs to step in to handle an escalating issue. I distinctly remember coaching a young man who would throw his helmet into the dugout each time he struck out. Gentle reminders from his teammates that major league batters strike out more times than they get a hit fell on deaf ears. Finally, after using his helmet as a bowling ball to knock down the bats (I called it his 4th strike), I called him to the side of the dugout. I let him know in unequivocal terms that the next thrown helmet would result in sitting the bench for an inning and a second would result in sitting the bench for a game.

He never threw his helmet again because he knew I was serious.

It is the same in the church. As Jesus commands in Matthew 18, and we see modeled in 1 Corinthians 5, 1 Timothy 5, and other places in the New Testament, sometimes the elders need to get involved. There seem to be three indicators in Scripture of the type of offense that is escalated to the elders: the sin is outward, serious, and unrepentant. Many thanks to Jonathan Leeman of 9Marks (9marks.org) for this helpful summary:

A sin must have an outward manifestation. It must be something that can be seen with the eyes or heard with the ears. Churches should not quickly throw the red flag of ejection every time they suspect greed or pride in someone's heart. It's not that sins of the heart are not serious. It's that the Lord knows we cannot see one another's hearts, and that real heart problems will eventually rise to the surface anyway. (1 Samuel. 16:7; Matthew. 7:17; Mark 7:21)

Second, a sin must be serious. For instance, I might observe a brother exaggerate the details of a story and then privately confront him over the matter. But even if he denies it, I probably wouldn't draw him in front of the church. Why not? First, something like the sin of embellishing stories is rooted in far more significant and unseen sins like idolatry and self-justification. Those are the sins I want to spend personal time discussing with him. Second, pursuing every tiny sin a church's life will probably induce paranoia and propel the congregation toward legalism. Third, there clearly needs to be a place for love to "cover a multitude of sins" in a congregation's life (1 Peter 4:8). Not every sin should be pursued to the utmost. Thankfully, God has not done so with us.



Finally, formal church discipline is the appropriate course of action when sin is unrepentant. The person involved in serious sin has been privately confronted with God's commands in Scripture, but he or she refuses to let go of the sin. From all appearances, the person prizes the sin more than Jesus.

In other words, the sin must rise to the level of a player throwing a helmet into the dugout repeatedly for the elders to get involved. Sometimes, a person needs to be “benched” or removed from ministry or other service for a season. In other more extreme circumstances, they must be removed from the game. Practically, this means they will be asked to leave the church. This is the most stringent level of church discipline, but is necessary for the health of the player and the team. Scripture gives us many examples of this type of team discipline.

Jesus says that if someone refuses to respond positively to church discipline, “let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.” (Matthew 18:17) Essentially, this is cultural slang which means, “treat him like he is not one of you.” This means that a person who is found guilty of outward, serious, and unrepentant sin will be asked to leave the church and no longer participate in Weekend Services or Life

Groups. There is a decided change in relationship at this moment and all social contact will be used to encourage the person to repent of their sin and turn back to Jesus.

We see the same thing when the Apostle Paul commands the Corinthians “not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one.” (1 Corinthians 5:11) Paul is describing someone with outward, serious, unrepentant sin and he concludes this passage with the command, “Purge the evil person from among you.” (1 Corinthians 5:13)

A divisive person in the church faces quick church discipline, with the abundantly clear directive:

AS FOR A PERSON WHO STIRS UP DIVISION, AFTER WARNING HIM ONCE AND THEN TWICE, HAVE NOTHING MORE TO DO WITH HIM, KNOWING THAT SUCH A PERSON IS WARPED AND SINFUL; HE IS SELF-CONDEMNED.

TITUS 3:10

While each of these may seem like severe measures, never forget the goal and attitude of discipline: restoring the person to the team with gentleness.

FORMAL CHURCH DISCIPLINE

At Riverview, we have established a process for this level of Team Discipline, which we call “Formal Church Discipline.” The timing and pace of these steps vary significantly from case to case.

STEP 1: ELDER INVESTIGATION

When someone brings an allegation of sin to one of the Riverview elders, we begin an investigation into the situation. Some investigations are fairly simple, while others require a little bit more digging around. Many questions need to be considered, such as:

- Is this sin outward, serious, and unrepentant?
- Is the accuser blowing the sin out of proportion because of their own issues? (Matthew 7:1-5)



- Are we only hearing one side of the story? (Proverbs 18:17)
- Is there evidence of the sin or is it just one person's personal vendetta? (2 Corinthians 13:1)
- If this is a sin against an individual, have they obeyed Jesus' command for how to deal with it? (Matthew 18:15-20)
- Is this a criminal matter that needs to be reported to the authorities? (Romans 13:1-5)
- Is this an accusation against an elder?¹

STEP 2: MEETING WITH ACCUSED

Once the investigation determines this is truly a case for formal church discipline, the elder(s) and the accuser(s) schedule a face to face conversation with the person accused of outward, serious, and unrepentant sin. This may be included as part of step one or it may come at the conclusion of other meetings.

At this meeting, the accused will be clearly presented with the results of the investigation and asked to repent of their sin. They will be offered help if they choose to accept it and the goal of the meeting is immediate repentance and restoration. If the accused refuses to repent, the elder(s) will communicate a deadline for them to reconsider. Again, the desired outcome is restoration and the attitude is gentleness so the elder(s) will be as gracious as they can be in determining the deadline.

Often, instead of repentance, the accused will display "worldly sorrow" instead of repentance (2 Corinthians 7:10-11). The reaction of many in this situation is that they will simply run away. However, just because someone leaves the church of their own volition doesn't mean they cannot be pursued for church discipline. In situations such as these, every attempt will be made to involve the accused but the following steps may take place, even without their participation.

STEP 3: SECOND MEETING WITH ACCUSED

If the accused doesn't respond by the deadline, every attempt will be made to schedule another meeting with them. At that meeting (or in writing if they refuse to meet), the elder(s) will communicate the consequences of not repenting of their sin. In most cases, this will be asking them to leave the church and no longer participate in Weekend Services or Life Groups.

STEP 4: COMMUNICATION TO NECESSARY PARTIES

Depending on the scope and severity of the sin, the elder(s) will meet with the affected parties to explain what transpired during steps 1-3. The general principle of the Bible seems to be that this type of communication is reserved for those involved with the situation and those affected by the judgment (Matthew 18:15-20, 1 Timothy 5:19-21). In most cases, this would mean the person's Life Group and their close circle of friends. If the accused is a leader of an area of ministry or an elder in the church, the affected parties could expand to include significantly greater numbers of people and perhaps the entire church.

STEP 5: REGULAR CALLS FOR REPENTANCE

Every effort will be made on the part of the elders to contact the disciplined party and to call for their repentance. This step is so vital because the goal is restoration in the spirit of gentleness. The New Testament records the outcome of one such disciplined member. We cannot be sure who this man or what he had done that caused the formal church discipline, but he had repented of his sin. Paul instructs the church:

1 - 1 Timothy 5:19-21 offers clear guidelines for both the accusation and discipline of an elder in Jesus' church. In order to protect the church and her leaders from false accusation, it is intentionally more difficult to bring charges against an elder. Evidence must be clear and presented by two or three witnesses to be considered. However, an unrepentant elder faces more severe punitive discipline, including a public rebuke in front of the entire church.



FOR SUCH A ONE, THIS PUNISHMENT BY THE MAJORITY IS ENOUGH, SO YOU SHOULD RATHER TURN TO FORGIVE AND COMFORT HIM, OR HE MAY BE OVERWHELMED BY EXCESSIVE SORROW.

2 CORINTHIANS 2:6-7

It is so inspiring to see this positive outcome of formal church discipline. The church, having performed the difficult task of removing a friend and brother from the church now has the joy of welcoming him home with open, loving arms!

Early in the history of Riverview, a member of the church was removed because of his outward, serious, and unrepentant sin. Each year, one of the elders would call him to see how he was doing and to gently call for his repentance. This went on for over 20 years until one day the man broke down in tears and said, "I am sorry. I was wrong. Please forgive me." The elder met with the man and confirmed he was indeed repentant. He rushed back to the office and fired off a letter to all of the affected parties, sharing the good news of their brother's return.

The result? The disciplined teammate was showered with letters, cards, and gifts that overflowed in loving joy at his restoration to the team. This simple gesture was the tangible demonstration of the arms of the church being thrown wide to welcome him home.

