



MEMBERSHIP COMMITMENTS

2012

A VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH DISTINCTIVE

www.villagebible.org/distinctives

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Membership Commitment

By the members of Village Bible Church Our Commitments to One Another in the Sight of God

As a follower of Jesus Christ, it is my sincere desire to unite with this church in membership. God, by His grace alone, has led me to repent of my sins and believe in Jesus Christ,¹ trusting Him alone as my Savior and Lord.² I have confessed my faith and have been baptized.³ Therefore I joyfully and thoughtfully enter into a bond of mutual upbuilding,⁴ fellowship⁵ and accountability⁶ with the other members of this body.

I recognize that I will be part of a larger group of believers who are together making this commitment to each other. The church is not just one person but it is a group of people who are called to love each other and relate to each other in a way that is faithful to scripture.

Even though I know my sin nature will cause me to fail at times, it is the desire of my heart to love the Lord God with all my heart, soul, mind and strength, and to love others as He loves me. Therefore, in humble reliance upon the Holy Spirit and with help from my fellow brothers & sisters in Christ, I intend to the following:

1. I will faithfully participate in worship, prayer, study, fellowship and the ordinances of baptism and communion.⁷ I will strive to use my spiritual gifts for the common good.⁸ And through my involvement, and even sacrifice, I will endeavor to illustrate to my family and to a watching world the immense significance of life in the body of Christ.⁹
2. I will endeavor to diligently train myself and my family in the discipline and instruction of the Lord, seeking to develop Christian character, knowledge and skills.¹⁰
3. I will strive to accept and fellowship with all members, regardless of race, gender, background, social status or level of education, since all are of equal value in Christ.¹¹
4. I desire to pursue peace with all people, and especially with other believers, striving to be slow to take offense and eager to reconcile.¹² I will strive to shun gossip and divisive words, knowing that they are destructive to Christian fellowship.¹³
5. I will endeavor to live a life that is above reproach. I will strive to be just and honest in my dealings and faithful in my responsibilities and commitments. I will abide by the standards of sexual purity and ethical integrity taught in the Bible.¹⁴
6. I will seek the preservation of marriage, knowing that God hates divorce, and will submit to biblical regulations regarding divorce and remarriage.¹⁵
7. I will endeavor to watch over the other members in love, as they watch over me.¹⁶ I will strive to remember them in prayer,¹⁷ help them in sickness and distress,¹⁸ promote their spiritual growth,¹⁹ restrain them from sin²⁰ and stir them up to love and good deeds.²¹
8. I will endeavor to be a faithful steward of my time, talents, treasures and testimony. I will contribute cheerfully and regularly to this church for its general ministry and expenses, the relief of the poor, the cause of reformation and revival and the spread of the Gospel throughout the world.²²

9. If I am called by God and affirmed by this congregation to serve in a leadership capacity, I will strive to faithfully and responsibly shepherd God's flock here at Village Bible Church in accordance with the guidelines set forth in God's Word and in the role set forth in our church constitution.
10. As the leaders of this church faithfully and biblically shepherd this flock, I will respectfully follow and submit to them, trusting and supporting their leadership and God's appointment of them to their role.²³
11. I will submit to the church's discipline upon myself and lovingly assume my responsibility to participate in the discipline of other members, as taught in Scripture.²⁴ If I am offended in connection with a disciplinary matter, I will seek resolution within the church as laid out in the VBC Relational Commitments. I will not initiate or pursue civil legal action against the church in response to its disciplinary measures.²⁵
12. I will seek the salvation of my family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, acquaintances and people of all nations.²⁶
13. I acknowledge that implicit within this commitment is the consent to be governed by the Relational Commitments of this church that address peacemaking and reconciliation, accountability and church discipline, marriage and divorce, counseling and confidentiality, and the protection of our children.
14. I will be in full agreement with the VBC *Statement of Doctrine*. I will also abide by the policies and procedures of the church constitution.
15. I will work toward doctrinal unity with a humble and teachable spirit,²⁷ showing a willingness to be taught according to the VBC *Statement of Doctrine* and the VBC *Teaching Positions* which this church believes to be an accurate summary of biblical truth. If I teach within the church, I will do so in a manner that is faithful to the VBC *Statement of Doctrine* and the VBC *Teaching Positions*.²⁸ Where there is disagreement or a lack of understanding regarding doctrinal convictions, I will ask questions and engage in edifying discussion. I will reject all heretical beliefs and practices, using Scripture as the final authority.²⁹
16. I will remain faithful to this church in membership. Should I ever sense that God is directing me elsewhere, I will have an honest dialog with an elder to share the reasons for my decision. If I must leave, I will strive to unite with another Bible-believing church.³⁰

In summary, I will strive to love the Lord my God with all my heart, soul, mind and strength, and to love others as Christ loves me.³¹ I will not allow my weaknesses and failures to deter me from my intention to abide by these Christian standards. I will pursue holiness through genuine repentance and persevering faith in the One to whom I owe all obedience for time and eternity, the Lord Jesus Christ.³²

Signature

Date

Print Name

Elder's Signature

Date

Membership Commitment Scriptural Support:

- ¹ Matthew 4:17; Mark 1:15; Luke 13:1-5; Acts 2:38; 17:30; 26:20; 2 Corinthians 7:10
- ² John 3:16; Acts 4:12; 16:30-31; Romans 10:9-10
- ³ Matthew 28:19; Acts 2:38; 8:36-38; 10:47-48
- ⁴ Romans 14:19; 1 Corinthians 12:7; 14:26; Ephesians 4:16, 29; 1 Thessalonians 5:11
- ⁵ Acts 2:42; 1 Corinthians 1:9; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Ephesians 4:1-3; Philippians 2:1-4
- ⁶ Proverbs 27:17; Matthew 18:15-17; Galatians 6:1; 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14-15; James 5:16; 2 John 8
- ⁷ Matthew 28:19; Luke 22:14-20; Acts 2:41-47; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; Hebrews 10:24-25
- ⁸ Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-7, 18-27; Ephesians 4:11-16
- ⁹ Matthew 6:19-21, 24-26; 16:24; Hebrews 10:24-25; James 4:1-5; 1 Peter 2:9-10; 1 John 2:15-17
- ¹⁰ Deuteronomy 6:4-7; Proverbs 22:6; Ephesians 6:4; 1 Timothy 4:7; Hebrews 5:13-14; 1 Peter 2:1-3; 2 Peter 1:5-11; 3:17-18
- ¹¹ Romans 10:12; Galatians 3:26-28; James 2:1-5
- ¹² Matthew 5:23-24; Romans 12:18; 14:19; 1 Corinthians 13:4-7; Colossians 3:12-15; Hebrews 12:14; James 1:19-20
- ¹³ Proverbs 6:16-19; 10:19; Romans 16:17; Ephesians 4:29, 31; 1 Timothy 5:13; Titus 3:10-11; James 3:6-10
- ¹⁴ Proverbs 10:9; Micah 6:8; Matthew 5:16, 37; Luke 16:10; 1 Corinthians 6:18; 2 Corinthians 6:3; Galatians 5:22; Ephesians 4:25; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-7; Titus 2:6-8; Hebrews 13:4
- ¹⁵ Malachi 2:16; Matthew 5:31-32; 19:3-9; Mark 10:2-12; Luke 16:18; 1 Corinthians 7
- ¹⁶ 1 Corinthians 10:24; Galatians 6:1-2, 10; Philippians 2:4
- ¹⁷ 2 Corinthians 1:11; Ephesians 6:18; Philippians 1:19; 1 Thessalonians 5:25; James 5:14-16
- ¹⁸ Matthew 25:34-40; Romans 12:13, 15; Galatians 6:2, 10; Philippians 4:14; 1 John 3:16-18
- ¹⁹ Titus 2:1-15; Hebrews 5:12-14; 2 Peter 3:17-18
- ²⁰ Proverbs 24:11; Galatians 6:1; 1 Timothy 5:20; James 5:19-20
- ²¹ Ephesians 2:10; Titus 2:1-10; 3:8, 14; Hebrews 10:24; 13:16
- ²² Malachi 3:8-10; 2 Corinthians 8:1-7; 9:6-7; Philippians 4:18
- ²³ 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13; 1 Timothy 5:17-20; Hebrews 13:7,17
- ²⁴ Matthew 18:15-17; 1 Corinthians 5; 2 Thessalonians 3:6,14-15; 1 Timothy 5:20
- ²⁵ 1 Corinthians 6:1-8
- ²⁶ Matthew 9:36-38; 28:18-20; Romans 10:14-15; 1 Corinthians 9:19-22; 2 Corinthians 5:18-20; 1 Peter 3:15
- ²⁷ Psalm 133:1; Romans 15:5-6; 1 Corinthians 1:10; 2 Corinthians 13:11; Ephesians 4:1-6; Philippians 2:2
- ²⁸ Ephesians 4:11-14; 1 Timothy 4:16; Titus 1:9; 2:1; Hebrews 13:17; James 3:1
- ²⁹ Isaiah 8:20; Acts 17:11; 2 Corinthians 11:3-4; Galatians 1:6-9; 1 Thessalonians 5:21; 1 Timothy 1:3-4; 3:15; 6:3-5, 20-21; 2 Timothy 2:15-18; 4:3-4; Hebrews 13:8-9; 2 John 9-11; Jude 3
- ³⁰ Proverbs 3:5-6; 11:14; 12:15; 15:22; 18:1; 19:20; 20:18; 24:6; 1 Corinthians 12:18; Philippians 2:3-4; Hebrews 10:24
- ³¹ Mark 12:28-31; John 13:34-35; 1 Corinthians 13:1-3; 1 John 3:16-19; 4:7-21
- ³² Matthew 5:6; Philippians 3:12-14; Hebrews 12:1-4; 1 Peter 1:14-19

Introduction to Relational Commitments

These Commitments¹ are designed to help the people who are members of Village Bible Church (VBC) relate to one another in a way that honors God and promotes authentic relationships. These Commitments cover important relational issues, such as peacemaking and reconciliation, marriage and divorce, protecting children from abuse, counseling and confidentiality, and mutual accountability.

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

We know that true community isn't easy to achieve. Each of us brings our own expectations and agendas into the church. This diversity usually leads to rich discussions and creative ministries; but sometimes it can lead to conflict. As James 4:12 warns, "*What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it.*"

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

- They remind us of our mutual commitment to work together to pursue unity, maintain friendships, preserve marriages, and build relationships that reflect the love of Christ.
- They help to prevent surprises, disappointed expectations, confusion and conflict by describing how we expect to relate to one another within the church.
- They provide clear direction when conflict threatens to divide us, and they remind us how to move quickly toward reconciliation.
- They establish guiding principles for how our leaders will counsel others, guard confidential information, and protect our children from abuse.

¹ These Relational Commitments are adapted from *The Peacemaker Church*. Used by permission of Peacemaker Ministries (www.PeacemakerChurch.net). Revised by Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis, MN and Village Bible Church, Sugar Grove, IL.

- They define and limit the spiritual authority of the elders of the church and thereby insure that all members are treated fairly.
- Finally, they reduce our church's exposure to legal liability by clearly establishing our relational practices and by affirming our mutual commitment to resolve conflict biblically.²

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

Non-members are always welcome to attend Village and participate in its ministries while they continue to consider the wisdom and biblical faithfulness of what membership here involves. We take membership seriously, however, so if you, with a clear, biblically informed conscience, cannot be a member at Village, we hope in due time you will be a committed member at another Bible-believing church where you can thrive in the fullness of all that membership means.

Sincerely,

The Guiding Elders of Village Bible Church

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

A TALE OF TWO FAMILIES

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

COMMITMENT TO CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

We believe that God wants every Christian to become a member of a local church. While all believers are part of the universal church, the New Testament also stresses the importance of all believers being a part of a local church. A local church is comprised of a definable group of people who, on the basis of their commitment to the Lord, have identified themselves with and committed themselves to one another. While membership in a local church does not impact one's salvation, it is imperative for all believers to be connected to a body of believers for the sake of encouragement, edification and equipping.

While church membership gives believers certain rights within a local congregation, its purpose is far more biblical. In the God-ordained environment of a local church, members function as one body, building up each other in love according to the rule of Scripture. Throughout scripture, it is clear that God intended for his people to enter into covenants with Him and with one another. Membership at Village Bible Church is a covenant relationship among fellow believers, as well as with their leaders under Christ. In order to implement the principles of accountability and commitment to the local body of Christ as defined in the New Testament and practiced in the early church, Village Bible Church recognizes the need for formal membership (Acts 11:26; Romans 16:1; 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 8:1; Philippians 1:1).

The preaching, teaching, fellowship, opportunities to use your gifts, and mutual accountability that you experience in a church can dramatically change your relationship with the Lord and with the people he places in your life.

Membership at Village Bible Church demonstrates in a concrete way our desire to unite with each other to advance Christ's mission in the world.

COMMITMENT TO PEACEMAKING AND RECONCILIATION

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

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

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

Personal Peacemaking

- Whenever we are faced with conflict, our primary goal will be to glorify God with our thoughts, words and actions (1 Cor. 10:31).
- We will try to get the “logs” out of our own eyes before focusing on what others may have done wrong (Matt. 7:3-5).
- We will seek to overlook minor offenses (Prov. 19:11).
- We will refrain from all gossip, backbiting and slander (Eph. 4:29-32). If we have a problem with others, we will talk to them, not about them.
- We will make “charitable judgments” toward one another by believing the best about each other until we have facts that prove otherwise (1 Cor. 13:7).
- If an offense is too serious to overlook, or if we think someone may have something against us, we will seek reconciliation without delay (Matt. 5:23-24; 18:15).
- When offering a word of correction to others, we will do so graciously and gently, with the goal of serving and restoring them, rather than beating them down (Prov. 12:18; Eph. 4:29; Gal. 6:1).
- When someone tries to correct us, we will ask God to help us resist prideful defensiveness and to welcome correction with humility (Ps. 141:5; Prov. 15:32).
- When others repent, we will ask God to give us grace to forgive them as he has forgiven us (Eph. 4:32).
- When we discuss or negotiate substantive issues, we will look out for others’ interests as well as our own (Phil. 2:3-4).

Assisted Peacemaking

- When two of us cannot resolve a conflict privately, we will seek the mediation of wise people in our church and listen humbly to their counsel (Matt. 18:16; Phil. 4:2-3). If our dispute is with a church leader, we will look to other leaders for assistance.
- When informal mediation does not resolve a dispute, we will seek formal assistance from our church leaders or people they appoint, and we will submit to their counsel and correction (Matt. 18:17-20).
- When we have a business or legal dispute with another Christian, we will make every reasonable effort to resolve the conflict within the body of Christ through biblical mediation or arbitration, rather than going to civil court (1 Cor. 6:1-8). If the other party attends another church, our leaders will offer to cooperate with the leaders of that church to resolve the matter.
- If a person coming to our church has an unresolved conflict with someone in his former church, we will require and assist him to make every reasonable effort to be reconciled to the other person before joining our church (Matt. 5:23-24; Rom. 12:18).
- When a conflict involves matters of doctrine or church discipline, we will submit to the procedures set forth in our *Commitment to Accountability and Church Discipline*.
- If we have a legal dispute with or within our church and cannot resolve it internally through the steps given above, we will obey God's command not to go into the civil court (1 Cor. 6:1-8). Instead, we will submit the matter to mediation and, if necessary, legally binding arbitration, in accordance with the *Rules of Procedure for Christian Conciliation* of the Institute for Christian Conciliation, a division of Peacemaker Ministries (www.Peacemaker.net).³

Above all, we pray that our ministry of peacemaking will be a means of loving Jesus to the point of transformation, loving each other to the point of sacrifice and loving our neighbors to the point of action.

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

COMMITMENT TO PRESERVING MARRIAGES

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

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

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

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

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

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

Guidelines for Mutual Accountability

We agree to live by the following guidelines concerning the nurturing of marriages and the exercise of redemptive church discipline wherever needed.

1. A believer and unbeliever should not marry each other (1 Cor. 7:39; 2 Cor. 6:14-15).
2. Since death breaks the marriage bond (Rom. 7:23; 1 Cor. 7:39), remarriage is permissible without sin for a believing widow or widower, if the marriage is with another believer.
3. Separation or divorce may be permitted by scripture when an unbelieving spouse decisively and physically deserts the relationship or when a spouse commits repeated, unrepentant adultery, or is guilty of protracted, unrepentant life-endangerment (1 Cor. 7:15; Mat. 19:9; 1 Cor. 7:11). We do not believe that separation or divorce must be the last word. Even after long periods of separation and alienation, reconciliation can happen, as when the people of God return to the Lord after periods of waywardness (Hosea 2:14-23).

The phrase "separation or divorce may be permitted" holds out the possibility that inquiry may reveal that the deserted partner engaged in a wrong behavior that drove the other away, so that a change is called for at home rather than divorce. Forgiveness and reconciliation between sinning spouses (and God) is always preferable to separation or divorce even where adultery has occurred. This is implied in Matthew 18:21-22, "*Then Peter came and said to Jesus, 'Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?' Jesus said to him, 'I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven'*" (see Luke 17:3-4).

4. We affirm the goodness and beauty of a life of singleness in God's service both before marriage and after divorce or death. It is commended in 1 Cor. 7:7, 11, 32-35, and elevated by the examples of Jesus and Paul and hundreds of great single saints.
5. The aggrieving partners referred to in #3 should repent and be reconciled to God and to their spouses (1 Cor. 7:11; 1 John 1:9). If it is too late because their spouses have remarried, then they should remain single because they left their first marriage without Biblical warrant (Matthew 19:9; Luke 16:18; 1 Cor. 7:11).
6. If a second marriage ends in death or divorce, the widow or widower in this case is not permitted to return to the first spouse in marriage (Deuteronomy 24:1-4).

Even though divorce may be scripturally *permissible* under the circumstances described above, it is by no means *required*. It is not the best testimony to the covenant-keeping love of Christ and his church. God patiently bears with our sins, repeatedly calls us to repentance, and freely forgives us when we turn back to Him (Ps. 103:8-12; Isa. 55:7).

When divorce seems inevitable, an offended spouse can imitate God's love by offering a straying spouse these same evidences of grace (Eph. 5:1-2). This may involve patiently bearing neglect or lovingly confronting serious sin (Col. 3:12-14; Gal. 6:1). In some situations, love may require asking the church to initiate formal discipline to rescue a spouse and a marriage from the devastating effects of unrepentant sin (Matt. 18:12-20).

Just as church leaders are involved in beginning a marriage, they should be involved when it is threatened with seeming dissolution. Therefore, when a member of Village is considering divorce, he or she is expected to bring the situation to the elders and cooperate with them as they determine whether biblical grounds exist for the separation, and as they endeavor to promote repentance and reconciliation, and pursue redemptive discipline, if appropriate.

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

Genesis 2:24; Deuteronomy 24:4; Ecclesiastes 5:4-5 ; Hosea; Malachi 2:14-16; Matthew 5:29-32, 19:4-12, 19:26; Mark 10:2-12; Luke 16:18; Romans 7:1-3; 1 Corinthians 7:10-16, 7:39, 10:13; Ephesians 5:22-33; Colossians 3:13-14

COMMITMENT TO PROTECTING OUR CHILDREN

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

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

Since sin affects every person and organization in the world, it is possible that children could be harmed even during church activities. We cannot guarantee that such things will never happen at Village, but we are committed to taking every reasonable precaution to protect our children and youth from foreseeable harm.

- We require all of our youth workers to complete a detailed application and screening process.
- We do not allow anyone to work with our youth (children or teenagers), unless he or she has regularly attended our church for at least six months, or has been granted permission by the Guiding Elder Team.
- We require that workers serve in teams of two or more and be visible to other workers.
- See our *Village Bible Church Child Protection Policy* for further details.

If a child or youth is harmed in our church, we will take immediate steps to inform the parents, to inform authorities (if appropriate), to accept responsibility for our role in the situation, and to hold offending workers fully responsible for their actions. We will also regularly review our policies, practices and procedures, to consider changes that might reduce the likelihood of such harm to children in the future.

COMMITMENT TO BIBLE BASED COUNSELING AND CONFIDENTIALITY

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

Our goal in providing counseling is that we may “*present everyone mature in Christ*” (Col.1:28) - to help you meet the challenges of life in a way that will please and honor the Lord Jesus Christ and enable you to enjoy fully His love for you and His plans for your life.. We believe that the Bible is God-inspired guidance, instruction and power for faith and life (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Therefore, our counseling relies on Biblical teachings and principles applied with “*all wisdom*” through the Holy Spirit to each situation we counsel. We are committed to asking the question, “What does Scripture say regarding this matter?” and to counseling in the light of the response to this question.

We believe that Christ has equipped His body, the church, to provide wisdom, knowledge and instruction to one another (Rom.15:14) in order for each member to live a godly and holy life, pleasing God in all ways. Christ has also equipped His church with spiritually mature leaders who are able to shepherd, lead, teach, and counsel others (Heb.5:11-14) in the church. Though the educational and experiential background of each leader who counsels at Village is unique, the essential training and practice for all leaders who counsel at Village centers around their ability to apply Scripture to the situation they are counseling. For this reason, those who counsel for Village do not present themselves as psychotherapists nor mental health professionals but as Biblical counselors.

In order to avoid misunderstandings regarding the role of leaders in the church that provide “spiritual counsel” these clarifications should be kept in mind.

1. Accountability is a necessity for counseling to be effective. Because of this, our leaders will normally counsel more than once only with individuals who are members of Village Bible Church.
2. Our leaders are not licensed, professional counselors. They will use the Word of God as our text, the Holy Spirit as our guide, and Jesus Christ as our model. We assume that most conflict in our lives is the result of a spiritual problem. While this will not always be the case, that will be our starting point.

Leaders may also be trained in other areas of life that are outside of the realm of providing spiritual counsel. Thus, if a doctor provides “spiritual counsel” through the church, you need to understand that this is separate

from his providing “medical counsel” at his clinic. Therefore, if you have significant legal, financial, medical, or other technical questions, you should seek advice from an independent professional. Our pastoral and lay counselors will be happy to cooperate with such advisors and help you to consider their counsel in the light of relevant scriptural principles.

3. God calls the leaders in His church to set an example in “*speech, in life, in love, and in faith and purity*” (1 Tim. 4:12). If any leader should not live up to this standard in any counseling situation, the counselee needs to report to the leadership team any conduct that fails to meet this standard.
4. Confidentiality is an important aspect of the counseling process, and we will carefully guard the information you entrust to us. There are situations, however, when we will share information with others:
 - when the person who disclosed the information, or any other person, is in imminent danger of serious harm unless others intervene (Prov. 24:11-12);
 - when a person refuses to repent of sin and it becomes necessary to promote repentance through accountability and redemptive church discipline (Prov. 15:22; Matt. 18:15-20);
 - when it is helpful to confidentially involve other elders of the church for prayer, direction, wisdom or further understanding.
 - when leaders are required by law to report suspected abuse (Rom. 13:1).
5. There are no financial fees for pastoral counseling. However, it will cost you time, honesty, and hard work. There may be some financial costs for tests administered, books required, or materials distributed; but we will not let the lack of funds stand in the way of this counseling process.
6. It is not our practice or purpose to counsel individuals or couples over an extended period of time. If such counseling is needed, we will connect you with a reputable Christian counselor and will continue to touch base with you and your counselor if you give written permission to do so.
7. It is our policy to not counsel someone of the opposite gender alone more than one time - and then only when others are in the general vicinity. After this one session, if there is a need for further counseling or discipleship, a mature person of the counselee’s gender will be added to the ongoing dialog.
8. On rare occasions a conflict may develop between a counselor and a counselee. We will handle these conflicts in a Biblical way, submitting to the procedures set forth in our *Commitment to Peacemaking and Reconciliation*.

COMMITMENT TO ACCOUNTABILITY AND CHURCH DISCIPLINE

*Consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds
(Heb. 10:24).*

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

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

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

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

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

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

sometimes called “*corrective*” or “*restorative*” discipline, is likened in Scripture to a shepherd seeking after a lost sheep.

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

Thus, restorative or corrective discipline is never to be done in a harsh, vengeful or self-righteous manner. It is always to be carried out in humility and love, with the goals of restoring someone to a close walk with Christ (Matt. 18:15; Gal. 6:1), protecting others from harm (1 Cor. 5:6), and showing respect for the honor and glory of God’s name (1 Pet. 2:12).

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

Similarly, in the church, we need to be taught what is right and to be lovingly corrected when we do something contrary to what God teaches us in His Word. Therefore, we as a church are committed to help one another obey God’s command to be “self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined” (Titus 1:8).

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

B. Most Corrective Discipline Is Private, Personal and Informal

God gives every believer grace to be self-disciplined. “*For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline*” (2 Tim. 1:7; cf. Gal. 5:23). Thus discipline always begins as a personal matter and usually remains that way, as each of us studies God’s Word, seeks Him in prayer, and draws on His grace to identify and change sinful habits and grow in godliness.

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

doctrine) seems too serious to overlook (Prov. 19:11).

If repeated private conversations do not lead another person to repentance, Jesus commands that we ask other brothers or sisters to get involved. *“If he will not listen, take one or two others along”* (Matt. 18:16). If informal conversations with these people fail to resolve the matter, then we may seek the involvement of more influential people, such as a small group leader, Sunday school teacher, church leader, or elder. If even these efforts fail to bring a brother or sister to repentance, and if the issue is too serious to overlook, we will move into what may be called *“formal discipline.”*

C. Formal Discipline May Involve the Entire Church

If a member persistently refuses to listen to personal and informal correction to turn from speech or behavior that the Bible defines as sin, Jesus commands us to *“tell it to the church”* (Matt. 18:17a). This first involves informing one or more church elders about the situation. If the offense is not likely to cause imminent harm to others, our elders may approach the member privately to personally establish the facts and encourage repentance of any sin they discover. The member will be given every reasonable opportunity to explain and defend his or her actions. If the member recognizes his sin and repents, the matter usually ends there, unless a confession to additional people is needed.

If an offense is likely to harm others or lead them into sin, or cause division or disruption, our elders may accelerate the entire disciplinary process and move promptly to protect the church (Rom. 16:17; 1 Cor. 5:113; Titus 3:10-11).

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

If the straying member does not repent in response to private appeals from our elders, they may inform others in the church who may be able to influence that individual or be willing to pray for him or her, or people who might be harmed or affected by that person’s behavior.⁴ This step may include close

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

friends, a small group, a Sunday school class, the membership of the church, or the entire congregation if our elders deem it to be appropriate (Matt. 18:17, 1 Tim. 5:20).⁵

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

We also recognize that some situations may require an immediate response of the elders which may deviate from the process listed above.

D. Response to One Who Flees Discipline

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

People who have been disciplined by another church will not be allowed to become members at Village until they have repented of their sins and made a

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

⁶ For example, if we confronted a man in our church for seducing young women, or for acting inappropriately around little children, or for sowing gossip and division, and he left and started attending another church, we would consider it our duty to urge the leaders of that church to counsel with him and to protect their people from his harmful behavior.

reasonable effort to be reconciled, or our elders have determined that the discipline of the former church was not biblically appropriate.

E. Our Commitment to this Biblical Charge

Accordingly, as a member of Village Bible Church we will pursue the blessings of accountability and church discipline, holding fast to the promise of Scripture: *“God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it”* (Heb. 12:10-11).

Our natural human response to correction often is to hide or run away from accountability (Gen. 3:8-10). To avoid falling into this age-old trap and to strengthen our church’s ability to rescue us if we are caught in sin, we agree not to run away from this church to avoid corrective discipline. Because of this, we waive our right to withdraw from membership or accountability while discipline is pending against us. Although we are free to stop attending the church at any time, we agree that a withdrawal while discipline is pending will not stop the process of discipline until the church has fulfilled its God-given responsibilities to encourage our repentance and restoration, and to bring the disciplinary process to an orderly conclusion, as described in these Commitments (Matt. 18:12-14; Gal. 6:1; Heb. 13:17). We also agree to not hold the church liable in any way for the actions taken during this process of discipline and agree that we will not attempt to subpoena or require any counselor to appear in any legal proceeding related to any matters discussed during counseling; nor will we attempt to subpoena any notes or records related to this counseling.

Loving restoration always stands at the heart of the disciplinary process. If a member repents, and our elders confirm his or her sincerity, we will rejoice together and gladly imitate God’s forgiveness by restoring the person to fellowship within the body (see Matt. 18:13; Luke 15:3-7, 1132; 2 Cor. 2:5-11; Col. 3:12-14).

COMMITMENT TO PURE CHRISTIAN LIVING

"Be holy, because I am holy" (1 Peter 1:16).

God's expectation for His church is that we would be holy as He is holy (1 Peter 1:16). He has provided the resources we need to grow in our likeness to Him, and we are to devote our entire lives to pursuing this standard.

First, God has provided Himself, and that's what makes the gospel so remarkable. Paul says, *"To [us] God has chosen to make known . . . the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory"* (Colossians 1:27). What could be better than that? God has taken up residence in every believer's life, and He is producing the holy character He requires of us. *"For it is God Who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose"* (Philippians 2:13).

Second, God has given His Word, which sanctifies our lives (John 17:17). It's through the powerful Word of God that we come to know Him by faith (Romans 10:17), and that Word is a living, active instrument that God uses to grow us in Christian maturity (Hebrews 4:12). The Bible is a rich resource that is *"useful for doctrine, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work"* (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Third, God has given us His Holy Spirit, Who brings conviction of sin (John 16:8), strengthens us in holiness (Galatians 5:16-18), develops spiritual fruit in our lives (Galatians 5:22-23) and equips us for ministry (1 Corinthians 12:4-7). It is because of the Holy Spirit that we can even have an ongoing relationship with God. He is the One Who illumines our minds (John 14:26; 1 Corinthians 2:12), gives us access to God in prayer (Romans 8:26; Ephesians 2:18) and provides intimacy in our fellowship with the Father (*"Abba! Father!"* – Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6).

Fourth, God has given us elders and teachers *"to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ"* (Ephesians 4:12-13). These leaders are God's instruments to care for the flock and guard against false doctrine. They set the example for the sheep and encourage, edify, confront and lead God's people.

Finally, God has given us each other. We're called to *"spur one another on toward love and good deeds"* (Hebrews 10:24). We're called to confront sin and *"restore [one another] gently"* (Galatians 6:1). We're called to *"carry each other's burdens"* (Galatians 6:2; Ephesians 4:2; Colossians 3:13) and *"love one another"* (John 13:34; Romans 12:10; 1 Thessalonians 3:12). This underscores

not only our responsibility to love each other, but also the necessity of being together. We can't fulfill God's commands unless we're regularly fellowshiping with one another, and we can't grow in our personal spiritual lives unless we're growing in unity and maturity as a church.

God has given us the tools necessary for living the holy life He's called us to live, and through His Word He has faithfully communicated His expectations for us. Below are many of the habits God wants to purge from our lives. Although this is not an exhaustive list, it captures the essence of God's expectations for us. May the Lord help us to live lives "*worthy of the calling [we] have received*" (Ephesians 4:1; Colossians 1:10).

Purge from your life:

Adultery	Fornication	Uncleanness	Lewdness
Idolatry	Sorcery	Hatred	Contentions
Jealousy	Anger	Selfishness	Dissension
Revelry	Homosexual acts	Sodomy	Stealing
Drunkenness	Extortion	Lying	Passion
Evil desires	Covetousness	Malice	Wrath
Blasphemy	Filthy language	Course jesting	Ignorance
Pride	Hardness	Complaining	Disputing

Romans 6:9-11; Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 4:17-19; 5:3-7, 18; Philippians 2:12-16; Colossians 3:5-10