

A FIVE-WEEK CLASS FOR CHURCHES

Church Discipline: Leader's Guide

Text	Jay E. Adams, <i>Handbook of Church Discipline</i> (Zondervan, 1986)
Written by	Rev. Dr. Nathanael Devlin, Senior Pastor
Format	Five sessions of about fifty minutes, taught as lecture with discussion
Recordings	https://beverlyheights.org/classes/church-discipline/

Where there is no order, there is no peace.

How to use this guide

This guide is the teaching outline we used for a five-week adult class on church discipline at Beverly Heights Presbyterian Church in Mt. Lebanon, Pennsylvania, in the fall of 2026. We are giving it away because we could not find anything like it when we went looking, and because a congregation that has never been taught what discipline is cannot be expected to practice it well. If it helps your church teach the subject, it has done its job.

The class is built on Jay E. Adams' *Handbook of Church Discipline*. The book is short, about 120 pages, and it is still in print. You should own it, and you should read it before you teach, because this guide summarizes Adams' argument in our own words rather than reproducing it. Where we quote him, the quotation is brief and the page is given. We have kept it that way on purpose: the book is his, and your people should buy it rather than be handed a substitute. [Buy the book.](#)

Each session below has the same parts: the aim of the session in one sentence; the argument, in the order Adams makes it, as a teaching outline; the key texts; a section on relating the material to your own church's constitution, using ours as the example; two or three questions for the room; and a note on what to watch for. The recordings of all five sessions as we taught them are on our website at the address above, with a written summary of each. Your people can watch or listen to them between classes, or you can use them to prepare.

A word about handouts. Our participants had a one-page handout each week built from the outline below. We have not included those pages here, because they leaned on the book more heavily than a published document should. Make your own from the outline: aim, the main points, the key texts, and the questions. One page is enough. Nobody needs to have read the book to follow the class if the handout and the teaching carry the material.

Before you teach

Two things to settle before the first Sunday.

The chapter numbering in circulation is wrong

Several online listings of the book, including Google Books, show ten chapters and omit chapter 7, “Tell It to the Church,” which begins on page 67. The book has eleven chapters. Any announcement or reading list built from those listings will send people to the wrong pages from chapter 7 onward. The correct list: 1. What Is Church Discipline? (13); 2. Preventive Discipline (21); 3. Corrective Discipline (27); 4. Self-Discipline (39); 5. One-on-One (45); 6. One or Two Others (57); 7. Tell It to the Church (67); 8. Removal From the Midst (77); 9. Restoring to Fellowship (91); 10. Cross-Congregational Discipline (99); 11. Encouragement (111). The class teaches chapters 1 through 9. Chapters 10 and 11 are not taught; cross-congregational discipline is a matter for your elders and your polity rather than for a classroom.

Know what your constitution calls excommunication

Adams uses the word in its literal sense: excommunication is exclusion from the Lord's Table, and it happens at step four, when the church is told. Removal from the midst, at step five, is something else, and he says so plainly on page 74, where he also confesses to having confused the two in earlier writing and corrects himself. Many books of order, ours included, call the step-four censure suspension from the Supper and keep the word excommunication for the final act. The substance is the same; only the label moves. Look up how your own constitution uses the word before you teach, say in session five which vocabulary you are using, and your people will not leave believing you excommunicate two steps earlier or later than you do.

Relating the book to your own constitution

The most useful thing we did in this class was to read our own Bylaws beside Adams every week. It established that discipline is our own standard and not an outside author's enthusiasm, and it kept the personal and the judicial senses of the word from collapsing into each other. Before you teach, find the sections of your book of order that state the purpose of discipline, the ordinary course of discipline, the censures, and restoration. Each session below has a “From our constitution” note showing what we read from ours. Replace it with yours.

The class at a glance

Session	Subject	Adams	Aim
One	What Is Church Discipline?	Chapter 1 (13 to 20), first part	Replace the working definition people walked in with.
Two	The School of Christ	Chapter 1, concluded	If discipline is education, the church is the school and the elders are its faculty.
Three	Preventive and Corrective Discipline	Chapters 2 and 3 (21 to 37)	Show that most discipline is preventive, and map the five steps.
Four	Self-Discipline	Chapter 4 (39 to 44)	The step before the steps, where every other step is meant to end.
Five	The Rest of the Way	Chapters 5 to 9 (45 to 97)	Walk steps two through five, and finish on restoration.

Pacing. This is the class as we taught it, and the recordings follow this order. Chapter 1 took us two Sundays, which was not the plan but turned out to be right: the first morning is spent undoing what people walked in believing, and the second lets the idea of the church as a school land. That left one Sunday for chapters 5 through 9, so session five is a walk through the remaining steps rather than a close reading. If you have six or seven weeks, give chapters 5 through 7 their own Sunday and chapters 8 and 9 another. Whatever you do, end on restoration. If the last word of the series is removal, the class has taught the wrong thing.

Session One: What Is Church Discipline?

Adams, chapter 1, pages 13 to 20, first part. Our recording: September 13, 2026.

Aim

Replace the working definition people walked in with. Most hear “discipline” and think punishment, and think it belongs to the elders. Adams’ thesis is his subtitle: discipline is the right and privilege of every church member.

Why teach it at all

Open with your reasons. Ours were three: it is a significant biblical principle; we had never taught it; and our own experience of disorder had shown us what its absence costs. Read 1 Corinthians 14:26-40 and point out that order is Paul’s conclusion to a chapter about spiritual gifts, not an aside; the remedy for disorder is not less Spirit but more order. Then name the modern wish, peace without the necessity of constraint, because that is the sentence the whole class answers. If your constitution charges the pastor to instruct the congregation in discipline, as ours does, read that sentence and say that this class is that charge being kept.

The teaching outline

1. **The book and the man.** Adams was a classicist by training, with a doctorate in speech, a Westminster professor, founder of the Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation, and the author of more than a hundred books. The classics training is why etymology does so much work in chapter 1. His subtitle is the argument: discipline is “A Right and Privilege of Every Church Member.” Set it beside your constitution’s statement of who is subject to discipline.
2. **One root, two words.** Disciple and discipline share a Latin source tied to education. Education is the positive expression of discipline; punishment is the negative expression, the consequence of an offense. Both are discipline. We have collapsed the word into the second and then recoiled from it. The job of the morning is to get it back to full width.
3. **Education with teeth.** Both the Old Testament *musar* and the New Testament *paideia* mean education backed by force. Adams: biblical education is “education with teeth; it is education that sees to it that the job gets done” (page 13 and following). American education informs. Biblical education forms, and it follows through.
4. **Hebrews 12:7-11.** *Paideia* is the whole work of rearing a child, not a spanking. Note the inversion in verse 8: the absence of discipline is not kindness but evidence that you are not treated as a son. Note the order in verse 11: painful now, peaceful later. The fruit is righteousness; the flavor is peace; nobody gets the flavor who refused the tree.
5. **The chain of dependence.** Draw it: no discipline, no order; no order, no peace; no peace, no learning. Read it down, then back up. Hence Adams’ definition, discipline is “at its heart and core, good order.” This is why a class on discipline is really a class on formation.
6. **Paideia as enculturation.** Start the Pledge of Allegiance and let the room finish it; nobody studied, everybody knew it, because they were habituated to it over years. That is a *paideia*, and there is a Christian one. The discussion that followed, discipline as “the Second Amendment of

the church,” order with teeth, Romans 13, and self-discipline as the goal of maturity and the place discipline begins, carried us to the end of the hour. The school of Christ waited for the next Sunday.

Key texts

1 Corinthians 14:26-40; Hebrews 12:5-11; Romans 13:1-4; Galatians 5:22-23.

From our constitution

Our Bylaws (3.2) say that all members “are entitled to and subject to the benefits of discipline.” Put that sentence on the screen beside Adams’ subtitle. Both halves matter: every member has a claim on discipline and a liability under it. That phrase keeps the personal and the judicial senses of the word from collapsing into each other, and you will want it again in session five.

For the room

- When you heard this class was on church discipline, what did you assume it was about?
- If discipline is a right, what has a member of a church that does not practice it actually lost?

Watch for

Adams opens the chapter with five thumbnail cases, and they make ready openers. Use one, but change the details enough that no one in the room hears a neighbor. His historical thesis, that the abandonment of discipline is what allowed the mainline churches to be taken over with so little opposition, is contestable and will provoke; decide in advance whether you want it on the first Sunday. Expect to run long. We did, and it was worth it.

Session Two: The School of Christ

Adams, chapter 1, concluded. Our recording: September 20, 2026.

Aim

If discipline is education, then the Christian life is schooling and the church is the school. Follow that thought home: to the Great Commission, to the office of elder, and to what an undisciplined church teaches its members anyway. This was a discussion-heavy Sunday for us, and the discussion is on the recording; budget for it.

The teaching outline

1. **Recap the chain.** Ten minutes. Adams, page 17: discipline is not the negative task of reading troublemakers out of the church; it is God's provision for the good order that makes instruction and growth possible. Order, peace, learning.
2. **The Great Commission is a mission of moral education.** Not "teaching them to know" but "teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:20), and the word is the word of *paideia*: a way of being, not a transfer of information. We say at Beverly Heights that we make Christians: people who think, believe, and act like Christians, and whom the church disciplines until behavior matches confession. Evangelism is not lost in this; it is completed by it. The argument of Galatians in a sentence: I insist that you act like Christians.
3. **The purpose of discipline, from your constitution.** Ours: to maintain the honor of God, to restore the sinner, and to remove offense from the church. Sin is missing the mark; restoration is not punishment but a call back into the garden from the wilderness, where only weeds grow. Removal happens only when a person, shown from Scripture that he is outside, refuses to come in; the church then concurs with his own decision and treats him as an unbeliever, which means evangelizing him. The worst thing a church can do is pretend.
4. **Judgment and judges.** Expect the word "judgmental." Judgment is a biblical good; judgmentalism is an attitude. God has set judges in the church and the answer is in their name: ruling elders, with the yellow card and the red card and a rule book, the Bible. A church slow to use them for fear of men has a fear-of-God problem. Discipline for the weak believer is developmental, not corrective; telling the two apart is what discernment is for.
5. **Words from the pulpit.** Adams: if words from the pulpit are not enforced by action from the congregation and the elders, members learn that the church does not mean what it says, and every other claim is undermined with it. Discipline must be swift, severe enough to be remedial, and public, because Jesus says "tell the church." Who speaks matters: official communication from the pastor or the Session, following due process, is biblical; the same information from anyone else is gossip.
6. **Preview the steps and their off-ramps.** Self-discipline, one-on-one, one or two others, the elders, the whole body, and only then treatment as an unbeliever. The circle stays as small as possible as long as possible, and the invitation at every step is come to Christ. Introduce preventive discipline as the steady hum that keeps people on the straight path, and close on the band: good discipline produces the conditions for maximal glory.

Key texts

Matthew 28:18-20; Matthew 18:15-17; Matthew 5:23-24; Galatians (the argument of the letter); 2 Timothy 2:15; Mark 9:24; 1 Corinthians 5.

From our constitution

Our Bylaws (3.2) state the purpose of discipline as “to maintain the honor of God, to restore the sinner, and to remove offense from the church,” which borrows from Adams on purpose. The same section charges that “the Pastor must instruct the officers and congregation in the use of discipline and jointly practice it in the context of the congregation,” and it says that regular attenders who are not members are subject to pastoral admonishment but not to discipline. Say that last point aloud; someone will ask.

For the room

- What does a congregation learn from a pulpit whose words are never backed by action?
- We all agree with this in principle. What changes when it is applied to your spouse, your child, or your neighbor?
- What is the difference between judgment and judgmentalism, and who in the church is in the seat of judgment?

Watch for

If you illustrate from a real case, choose one with enough distance that no one in the room can name the person, and say why the church spoke about it publicly (due process, and the person's own request, in our case). The elder-as-judge picture lands differently with elders in the room; say it to them, not about them. And if your church has recent history with disorder, this is the Sunday it will come up; name it once, briefly, and keep moving.

Session Three: Preventive and Corrective Discipline

Adams, chapters 2 and 3, pages 21 to 37. Our recording: September 27, 2026.

Aim

Show that most discipline is preventive, and that a congregation cannot be corrected in matters it has never been taught. Then lay out the map of the five steps that the rest of the class walks.

The teaching outline

1. **The two-part definition** that is the spine of the book (page 21): positively, the functions of a school that promote and maintain the conditions of learning; negatively, the functions that root out whatever hinders them. Ask which half people pictured when they signed up. The remedial side, Adams says, “like the proverbial squeaky wheel, gets all the grease” (page 22).
2. **Preventive discipline** is teaching truth in such a way that it promotes godliness, the “teaching to observe” of Matthew 28. Where members are fed a regular diet of Scripture, straying is caught early, and formal discipline becomes largely unnecessary. His rule, page 25: the more preventive discipline there is, the less corrective discipline there needs to be. The goal is not a church that disciplines well but one that rarely needs to.
3. **Concept before practice.** “There will be no wholesale change in practice until there is a wholesale change in concept” (page 24). Restoring only the corrective half would do harm and would get discipline abolished all over again. In all its aspects discipline must be seen as a blessing, a privilege the church does wrong to withhold. Note the sting: a church that does not practice discipline is not being gentle; it is withholding something that is theirs by right.
4. **Whose job it is.** Formally the leadership, Ephesians 4:11-12. Informally every member, Hebrews 10:24-25 and Colossians 3:16. Adams’ homely example: it is good order when believers attend the meetings of the body, and good informal discipline when they encourage others to.
5. **Corrective discipline** is the other edge of the same sword, the negative half of the definition, and even here it is a privilege: the care of other members, and the care of Christ working through the officers of his church, to bring a straying member back. Say that before the diagram, so nobody hears the five steps as a machine for getting rid of people.
6. **The five steps** (chapter 3). Lay them out as a widening band: (1) self-discipline; (2) a private word, one-on-one; (3) one or two others; (4) tell it to the church; (5) removal from the midst. Steps one through three are informal; four and five are formal. Through step four the offender is a brother; at step five he is treated as an unbeliever. Matthew 18:15-17 gives four steps; Adams prepends self-discipline, crediting Roger Wagner (page 29), because Jesus is addressing a matter already between two brothers.
7. **Never promise absolute confidentiality** (pages 30 to 32). It blocks obedience, since a promise of silence at step two makes step three impossible, and it is a rash vow. What a Christian may promise is confidentiality consistent with what the Bible requires. Adams’ formula begins, “I am glad to keep confidence in the way that the Bible instructs me” (page 32). Give it word for word and let people write it down. Expect a question about counseling and legal confidentiality; it is a real question and a separate one.

8. **Not every case starts at step one.** In 1 Corinthians 5 the sin is public and Paul begins at step five. The rule of thumb (page 37): deal with the problem at the level at which it presents itself, involving no one who is not already involved. A refusal to listen, not a clock, moves a case forward, and except in cases of divisiveness err on the side of caution, giving the benefit of the doubt in love.

Key texts

Ephesians 4:11-12; Hebrews 10:24-25; Colossians 3:16; Colossians 2:5; Matthew 18:15-17; 1 Corinthians 5; 1 Corinthians 13:7.

From our constitution

Bylaws 3.2, “the Pastor must instruct the officers and congregation in the use of discipline,” is Adams’ preventive argument written into our constitution and the warrant for the class. Section 3.3 then makes the informal course the ordinary one, putting self-discipline and the covering of offenses first and Matthew 18:15 second, which is Adams’ order for steps one and two.

For the room

- What in our life together already counts as preventive discipline?
- Someone starts a sentence with “promise you will never repeat this.” What do you say?

Watch for

This is the Sunday to draw the map and leave it on the wall. We redrew Adams’ diagrams from pages 27 and 30 for the screen; if you do the same, credit him on the slide. The confidentiality formula is the thing people will remember from the whole class, so do not rush it.

Session Four: Self-Discipline

Adams, chapter 4, pages 39 to 44, with the Westminster Confession II.1 and Joe Rigney alongside. Our recording: October 4, 2026.

Aim

The step before the steps, and the step where every other step is meant to end. Six pages in the book, so there is room for questions, and room to set two things beside Adams that he does not supply: the doctrine of God under the chapter, and the outward-facing twin of self-control.

The teaching outline

1. **Put the map back up** for thirty seconds and point at the left end. Steps two through five exist because step one failed, and every one of them, done well, ends by bringing a person back to step one. That is the argument of the chapter; say it before the Greek.
2. **The word.** *Enkrateia*, Galatians 5:23, part of the fruit of the Spirit, usually translated self-control. Adams (page 39): the English “control” stresses the effect, “discipline” the cause. Self-control names the result; self-discipline names how you get there, which is why this is a step in a process and not a personality trait. The root is holding or gripping: a grip on one’s desires and habitual responses (page 40). The second is the one people forget. Most of what needs disciplining is a practiced reaction, not a dramatic desire.
3. **The theological floor.** Westminster Confession II.1: God is “without body, parts, or passions.” He is not acted upon, not moved about by forces outside himself, never swept along. Clarify at once that impassibility does not mean God is cold; it denies that anything outside him changes him. His love and wrath are perfections he is, not reactions he suffers. That is the character we are being conformed to, so a man governed by his desires, or by the emotional weather around him, is unlike God at precisely that point.
4. **What step one looks like, and what it is not.** Step one is the Christian with such a grip on himself that he handles problems and relationships without needing help from others (page 40). Two corrections must follow immediately. Not a lone wolf: there is “no such thing as a submarine Christian,” and the self-controlled Christian is the one who knows when to seek help himself rather than waiting to be found out. Not self-generated: his control comes from the Spirit, and it is self-control only in the sense that he does not depend on other people for it. Without that sentence the chapter is moralism.
5. **Sober-mindedness alongside self-control.** We set Joe Rigney’s *Leadership and Emotional Sabotage* (2024) beside Adams, and told the class what kind of book it is: Rigney translates Edwin Friedman’s family-systems thought into biblical categories and corrects Friedman’s theology as he goes, which is a different method from Adams, a biblical counselor writing a procedure. Rigney recovers *nephalios*, sober-mindedness, the capacity to keep good judgment under pressures that play on the passions, lost when we get “drunk on other people’s passions.” Titus 1:8 lists self-controlled and disciplined side by side, and 1 Timothy 3:2 pairs sober-minded with self-controlled, so Paul distinguishes them. One virtue, two directions: inward, a grip on your own desires; outward, judgment not steered by other people’s. The lone wolf and the man

with no judgment of his own are both undisciplined. Leave Rigney's later book, *The Sin of Empathy*, alone unless someone raises it; that argument is contested and will eat the hour.

6. **The beginning and the end.** Self-discipline is the most basic form of discipline and the most mature (page 41). Child training, *paideia* and *musar*, brings a child to the point where the control of parents is replaced by the control of the Spirit through the Word; Proverbs is written to a young man to produce exactly this (16:32; 17:27; 19:11). The mature person obeys not for fear of punishment or hope of reward but out of gratitude to the God who sent the Savior, and wants to please God rather than his parents, others, or even himself. Self-discipline is not self-pleasing.
7. **Why every other step ends here.** Each of the other four stages, when successful, should result not merely in setting a matter straight but in helping the restored person become more self-disciplined (page 42). Second Corinthians 2:7 requires that he be assisted, and a large part of that is teaching him discipline in the area of his offense; without it he will more than likely fall the same way again. Adams' footnote on page 43 answers the objection that discipline is heavy-handed where counsel would do: often the counsel was already going nowhere, and discipline is what first makes it fruitful. Close on the pattern, not the incident (page 44): most offenses grow out of a pattern of life, and repentance is essentially a desire to think, be, and do differently.

Key texts

Galatians 5:23; 1 Corinthians 9:25; 1 Corinthians 7:9; Titus 1:8; 1 Timothy 3:2; Proverbs 16:32; 17:27; 19:11; Romans 8:2; 2 Corinthians 2:7.

From our constitution

Our Bylaws (3.3) put self-discipline first: members are encouraged to self-discipline, overlooking the failings of others in love (1 Peter 4:8). Our own document already agrees with Adams that the ordinary course begins with the member himself.

For the room

- What is the last offense you decided to cover rather than confront, and how did you decide?
- What is the difference between a self-disciplined Christian and a self-sufficient one?
- Where have you seen a person with real self-control still steered by other people's passions?

Watch for

This is the pastoral heart of the class and the session most likely to surface a live grievance. Expect someone to stay afterward, and leave room for it. If the hour is tight, the two Rigney points can be dropped without loss to what follows; the Confession cannot, because session five leans on it when the pressure on a Session peaks.

Session Five: The Rest of the Way

Adams, chapters 5 to 9, pages 45 to 97. Our recording: October 11, 2026.

Aim

Walk steps two through five and the restoration that follows, in one hour, as a walk through the remaining steps rather than a close reading. Say that at the start so nobody expects chapter and verse on fifty-three pages. Protect five things whatever you cut: the governing text, the hinge, the reason people are disciplined, your constitution's answer on excommunication, and the ending.

The governing text and the hinge

Read Matthew 18:15-17 whole and slowly; it is the only time the class hears it in one piece, and everything in chapters 5 through 8 is commentary on it. Three of its four turning clauses are refusals. The steps are not a schedule but a response. Adams (page 58): it is neither the length of time a step takes nor the number of attempts that determines when to move on, but the unwillingness of the parties to continue. The refusal must be genuine, so if he will not listen in the heat of the moment, wait and try again. And unwillingness to listen is not failure to agree: while reasonable discussion continues, you cannot charge him with refusing to listen.

Step two: one-on-one (chapter 5)

- Adams counts six elements in Matthew 18:15: Jesus commands the offended brother to go and speak with him privately so as to convict him. "Jesus does not suggest, He requires the use of informal discipline" (page 48). If there are problems in pursuing it, he expects you to solve them.
- Matthew 5:23-24 sends the offender; Luke 17:3 sends the offended; neither waits on the other. But the one with the sore toes must go, because he is always the one who knows (page 50).
- Begin with the tentative rebuke of Luke 17:3, *epitimaō*, and only arrive at conviction, *elengcho*. Adams' sentence to give word for word (page 50): as far as I can see you have wronged me in such and such a way, but if you have an explanation I am ready to hear it before passing final judgment.
- Conviction is a courtroom word: the effective use of objective evidence, not the production of guilty feelings (page 51). The other edge is severe and usable: if you do not have a good case with facts behind it, you should not take offense in the first place, and 1 Corinthians 13:7 means giving the benefit of the doubt wherever there is the slightest doubt. This is the slide that keeps the class from leaving armed.
- Forgiveness is a promise (page 53): never to raise the matter again, to him, to others, or in your own brooding, and a promise can be made and kept whether or not you feel like it. "I am sorry" reports a feeling and asks nothing; "will you forgive me?" asks for a decision. Most cases should be settled here.

Step three: one or two others (chapter 6)

- Still informal, and adding people is adding help, not escalation. The one or two others are not witnesses to the offense; they are first counselors who try to reunite the parties, and only when a refusal takes place do they become witnesses, to the words spoken at step three (page 60).
- Officers may serve, but only as private Christians and not in their official character (page 61), and everyone must understand that an officer's presence does not mean step four has begun. In a small church this is the point to say plainly. Do not reveal the offender's name to a prospective counselor until he has agreed to serve.
- The counselors refuse to hear negative material before the accused is present (James 4:11; Proverbs 18:17), gather the facts from both sides, and say whether the accuser has a convincing case. Step three can end with the accuser in the wrong, urged to drop the accusation and restore fellowship (page 63).

Step four: tell it to the church (chapter 7)

- Here the church officially takes cognizance; a brother under official discipline is in a danger zone and should be told so. A matter can also originate here, as in 1 Corinthians 5.
- Not from the floor on a Sunday, where unbelievers are present by design: "At this point, the world has no right to know about the matter" (page 69). Either a closed meeting of the membership called by the elders, or the elders told as representatives of the church, on the Old Testament pattern where God addressed the elders and they conveyed his word (Deuteronomy 31:28, 30).
- The congregation is told as little as necessary and enough to act: that the brother is under discipline and for what, so he can be marked (2 Thessalonians 3:14); that normal fellowship is broken and he is barred from the Table; and that they must counsel him, which is why he is named at all (pages 72 to 74).
- The footnote to read aloud (page 72): people are not disciplined for particular sins but for their unwillingness to give them up; it is always refusal to listen that moves a case forward, and a member may repent at any time and remain a member.
- Vocabulary. Adams (page 74): nowhere in the Bible is excommunication, exclusion from the Table, equated with step five; it happens already at step four, and he corrects his own earlier confusion of the two. Say which word your constitution uses for which step. Ours calls the step-four censure suspension from the Supper and keeps excommunication for the outcome of a formal hearing; the substance matches Adams exactly.

Step five: removal from the midst (chapter 8)

- The greatest leap in the book, from the kingdom of light into the kingdom of darkness: handed over to Satan, whom God uses to chastise and bring back, as he used the nations in Judges and the exile.
- The church does not judge his heart; it judges his words and actions, and the judgment is a functional one (page 80). You still owe him evangelism (page 81), and removed from the midst

does not mean barred from the building; he is removed from the care and discipline of the church, not from the preaching of the Word (page 83).

- Written procedures (page 86): if your congregation has none that members approved when they joined, it is high time to adopt some. Follow them to the letter. Keep records in the elders' minutes, to protect the church and the member (page 87). Mourn as you remove, and let the mourning search the church's own conscience (page 88). Never with a good-riddance attitude; the backdoor revival is nothing of the sort.

Restoration (chapter 9)

End here, and end warm. Adams calls it a happier chapter, and the whole process exists for it. Second Corinthians 2:6-8 gives three things. Forgiven, on his naked word, "I repent" (page 94); do not wait for fruit, and if you err, err on the side of leniency. Forgiving is not forgetting; to remember no more is to work actively at not raising the matter (page 93). Assisted, *parakaleo*: counsel about what caused the fall, reassimilation, old friendships restored, his gifts put back to work, and none of this business of making him wait six months to rejoin the choir (page 95). Reinstated, formally and as publicly as the dismissal, in the same manner, with no probation and no rights withheld (page 96): the robe, the ring, and the party, with the church warned in advance about the elder brother, so that Satan gains no advantage over us.

Key texts

Matthew 18:15-17; Matthew 5:23-24; Luke 17:3-4; 1 Corinthians 13:7; 2 Corinthians 13:1; Galatians 6:1-2; James 4:11; Proverbs 18:17; Deuteronomy 31:28-30; 1 Corinthians 14:23-25; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15; 1 Corinthians 5; 1 Timothy 1:20; 2 Corinthians 2:5-11; Luke 15:11-32.

From our constitution

Our Bylaws (3.3) set the pattern: formal private admonishment by two or three, then formal public admonishment and suspension from the Supper, then a formal hearing which may result in excommunication. Those are Adams' steps three, four, and five under our labels, and his page 74 confirms that the Table is closed at step four. Section 3.4 requires a clear and timely warning that formal discipline has begun. Section 3.6.1 provides for forgiveness and public reinstatement: excommunication ends when the Session judges the person has repented, a confession is read to the congregation on the Lord's Day, and the elders announce the restoration of fellowship. What our Bylaws do not spell out is Adams' second factor, assistance. That gap is worth naming, and worth filling.

For the room

- What is the difference between apologizing and asking forgiveness, and why does the difference matter?
- Adams says the restoration must be announced as publicly as the removal was. Are we as ready to hold the second meeting as the first?
- What would assistance actually look like here, for someone coming back?

Watch for

Twenty-four slides was more than an hour for us, and the recording shows where the hour actually went: half of it on step two, evidence rather than feelings and forgiveness as a promise, with two questions from the floor; steps three and four at speed; and step five, the vocabulary point, and the prodigal in a few sentences each. That was not the plan, but it was the right instinct, because step two is where the class lives and where most cases should end. Decide the cuts before you start, not in the room: the three angles on step two can be reduced to one, and the written-procedures point is for your elders more than your class. If you have the extra Sunday, this is where to spend it. Adams sends readers to buy another denomination's book of discipline as a procedural model (page 87); whether your church wants something more specific than its constitution provides is a question for your elders, so note it and move on.

After the class

Teaching the class will surface things your leadership should settle, and the class is worth more if they are settled rather than left hanging. Ours were these.

- **Vocabulary.** Decide what you call excommunication and use it the same way in every document, announcement, and class.
- **Procedure.** Adams is right that a church should follow its own written procedures to the letter. If your constitution leaves procedure to the elders case by case, consider whether a short written procedure for steps four and five would protect both the church and the member.
- **Assistance.** If your constitution provides for forgiveness and public reinstatement but says nothing about assisting the restored member, write down what assistance will look like before you need it.
- **Preventive discipline.** The strongest argument in the book is that the ordinary mode of discipline is teaching. Put the class on a cycle, so that new members and new officers hear it.

About Beverly Heights

Beverly Heights Presbyterian Church is a congregation of about 165 in Mt. Lebanon, Pennsylvania, in Pittsburgh's South Hills, and a member church of the Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches. We worship Sundays at 10:00 a.m., with Sunday School at 9:00. The recordings of this class, with a written summary of each session, are at <https://beverlyheights.org/classes/church-discipline/>. If this guide was useful to you, or if you teach the class and learn something we should know, write to the pastor at nate@beverlyheights.org.

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