RESTORATION FELLOWSHIP · MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE



MEMBERSHIP COURSE · READING EDITION

DISCOVERING RESTORATION

Who we are, what we believe,
and what it means to belong.

WELCOME

We're so glad you're here. Whether you've been with us for a few Sundays or a few years, this guide is for you. It explains who we are as a church family: the gospel at our center, how we live together, how we're led, and what it looks like to belong.

This guide is the reading companion to **Discovering Restoration**, our membership course. You can work through it on your own, at your own pace.

As you read, keep three questions close:

1. What stood out to you?
2. What was new or different from what you've known before?
3. What questions do you have?

We'd love to hear your answers. There's a short response form on the Discovering Restoration page at restorationmemphis.com, and any of our pastors would be glad to talk with you.

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01

THE GOSPEL IS CENTRAL

Jesus redeems.

What is the most important thing to look for in a church?

If you've been searching for a church family, you probably had a list in mind: warm hospitality, a heart for the city, faithful Bible preaching, Christ-centered music. Those are all good things to want. But we hope the first thing you notice about Restoration is something deeper: the gospel is at the center, and Jesus is at the center of the gospel.

That is the most important thing to know about us, or about any healthy church. **Jesus is our head, and his gospel is our message.** The good news is that Jesus lived the righteous life we couldn't live, died in our place for our sins, and rose again, beginning God's new creation. That news is the bloodstream and the bones of our church body. We want it at the core of every Sunday gathering and every conversation between members. It is the reason behind everything we do together.

The apostle Paul called this message "of first importance":

> **1 CORINTHIANS 15:3–4 · ESV**
>
> For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.

And he reminded believers what that news means for people like us:

> EPHESIANS 2:4–5 · ESV
>
> But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved.

We were once "foolish, disobedient, led astray" (Titus 3:3). But God saved us "not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy" (Titus 3:5). Everything else in this guide grows out of that mercy.

For further reading: Titus 3:3–6; 1 Corinthians 15:1–5; Ephesians 2:1–10.

02

WHY THE CHURCH?

Jesus reconciles.

When we say we're "going to church on Sunday," we usually mean we're going to a particular place at a particular time.

But the church is more than a building, a name, or a history. **The church is the people God has reconciled to himself, who commit to share life together in the gospel.**

In Ephesians 2, Paul describes what Jesus has done. People who were once far from God, and far from each other, have been brought near by his blood. Jesus "has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility" (Ephesians 2:14). The result is a new kind of family:

> EPHESIANS 2:19–20 · ESV
>
> So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone.

WHAT MAKES A CHURCH A CHURCH?

Baptists have thought carefully about this question for a long time. In 1774, Samuel Jones, a Baptist pastor in Philadelphia, put it this way:

> *“A particular gospel church consists of a company of saints incorporated by a special covenant into one distinct body, and meeting together in one place, for the enjoyment of fellowship with each other and with Christ their head, in all his institutions, to their mutual edification and the glory of God through the Spirit.”*
>
> SAMUEL JONES · BAPTIST PASTOR, PHILADELPHIA, 1774

Notice the four things Jones names. A church is:

1. **A company of saints.** It is made up of people who belong to Jesus.
2. **Covenanted together into one body.** These believers have made real promises to one another.
3. **Meeting together in one place.** They actually gather, week after week.
4. **For fellowship and edification.** They gather to enjoy Christ together and to build one another up.

So a church isn't just a building, or the continuation of a legacy in a neighborhood. It is a gathering of Christians who take responsibility for one another's spiritual well-being. And it is through this reconciled people, living in renewed unity as one body, that God shows the world his greatness and power.

For further reading: Ephesians 2:11–22.

03

WHY CHURCH MEMBERSHIP?

Jesus unites.

Membership in the church of Christ is for the people of Christ.

That means church membership isn't for those who aren't yet Christians. It isn't a privilege handed down through family, or earned by years of attendance or generous giving. It is a commitment for followers of Jesus: people who have repented of sin and believed the gospel, and whose lives show credible evidence of new birth as they keep turning from sin and following God in obedience.

Why does this matter so much? Because God has chosen to show his wisdom to the world through the church. Paul writes that his calling was to make known God's plan, "so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 3:10).

When Jesus forms a people for God through the gospel, the way they live toward God and toward one another puts God's grace on display. In the church, God shows his kindness to undeserving sinners and shows how he transforms them. We are a body reconciled to God, with bold and confident access to the Father through the Son and by the Spirit. And we are a body committed to one another, for our growth and for the spread of God's glory to people who haven't yet heard and believed.

OUR COMMITMENT TO JESUS COMMITS US TO HIS PEOPLE

You can't follow Jesus without loving his people. So as we commit to Jesus and his church, we make real promises to each other, based on what Scripture commands. Paul wrote to Timothy so that the church would "know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15).

By the power of the Holy Spirit, we aim to live holy and gracious lives together. The church is God's household, the place where he dwells by his Spirit now, as a preview of the day when the whole earth will be filled with his glory.

SO WHAT IS MEMBERSHIP?

Put simply, **church membership is a covenant commitment to a community of fellow followers of Christ, for the sake of God's glory in our growth and our mission.**

Pastor and author Jonathan Leeman describes membership as "a declaration of citizenship in Christ's kingdom." In his words, it works like a passport. Membership is the church's public affirmation that a person truly belongs to Jesus and represents him. More concretely, it is a formal relationship between a local church and a Christian. The church affirms and oversees that believer's discipleship, and the believer agrees to live out that discipleship under the church's care.

Adapted from Jonathan Leeman, "What Is Church Membership?" at 9Marks.org.

For further reading: Ephesians 3:8–12; 1 Timothy 3:14–15.

04

PURPOSE & IDENTITY

Restoring confident hope in the gospel.

Every church needs to know why it exists and where it is headed. Here is how we say it at Restoration.

OUR MISSION

Restoration Fellowship exists to restore confident hope in the gospel by knowing God, growing together, serving the Lord, and making disciples.

OUR VISION

We long to be a diverse community of believers, united by confident hope in the gospel. We want to be a people who covenant together to know God, grow through biblical truth, gather for genuine, Christ-centered worship, faithfully serve the Lord, and see lives transformed as we make disciples.

OUR CORE VALUES

1. **Biblical truth.** God's Word is our authority and our guide.
2. **Genuine, Christ-centered worship.** Our worship is about Jesus, offered from the heart.
3. **Unity in diversity.** The gospel makes one family out of very different people.
4. **Faithful service.** Every member has a part to play.
5. **Transformational disciple-making.** We help one another follow Jesus, and we invite others to follow him too.

OUR DISCIPLESHIP PATHWAY

Our mission isn't just a statement on a wall. It shapes the ordinary rhythms of church life. Each part of the mission has a place where it happens:

KNOW GOD	GROW TOGETHER	SERVE THE LORD	MAKE DISCIPLES
Sunday Gathering	Community Groups	Ministry teams & outreach	Everyday disciple-making

You'll read more about these rhythms in chapter 8.

05

OUR POLITY

Led by elders. Served by deacons. Affirmed by the congregation.

"Polity" simply means how a church is organized and governed.

At Restoration, we want to be led by shepherding pastors (elders), served by deacons, and affirmed in our direction by the whole congregation. Each part matters, and each part is accountable to the others.

LED BY ELDERS

Our elders, also called pastors, are responsible for the day-to-day leadership of the church. Through prayer, they guide the church's direction and make decisions about operations, ministry, and staff. They also set policies that protect the church's purity and purpose.

Our elders lead as equals. Every pastor carries the same shepherding responsibility and the same leadership authority. Their main work is spiritual: nurturing, training, and making disciples so the church keeps growing toward maturity. They are accountable to one another and to the congregation, both for how they live and for how they do their work.

Scripture gives elders a serious charge:

> **ACTS 20:28 · ESV**
>
> Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.

Peter tells elders to shepherd "not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock" (1 Peter 5:3). And Hebrews asks the church to make that work a joy, since elders "are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account" (Hebrews 13:17).

SERVED BY DEACONS

Deacons help the elders care for the congregation by meeting the church's practical, physical, and relational needs. Deacons are not a policy-making or decision-making board. They are servants who lead the way in mercy and care: visiting those in need, overseeing benevolence, and making sure no one falls through the cracks.

At Restoration, each deacon takes responsibility for a particular area of ministry, and many lead teams that handle ongoing needs such as hospitality, children's ministry, and building and grounds. When deacons help the body run well, the elders are freed to focus on the ministry of the Word and prayer, and that ministry multiplies (see Acts 6:1–7). The qualifications for deacons are found in 1 Timothy 3:8–13.

AFFIRMED BY THE WHOLE CONGREGATION

The congregation plays a vital role in the life of our church. Members nominate elders and deacons, and they affirm the direction and major decisions the elders bring before them.

When it's time to recognize new elders or deacons, we ask the church to pray and fast, then nominate people they see as godly, capable, and already active in the life of the body. The elders assess those nominations, and qualified candidates come back to the church for a vote of affirmation. We follow this pattern because of the example in Acts 6, where the whole church identified those who would serve.

We hold all-member meetings about once a quarter. At these meetings, the elders share updates, invite feedback, and bring major decisions to the members for approval. Our bylaws describe which decisions belong to the congregation.

In short, elders lead, but they don't rule the church alone. They don't make every decision, and they are not above accountability. The whole church shares in nominating and affirming leaders and in weighing in on major decisions.

HOW THIS WORKS WHEN SOMEONE JOINS

The clearest picture of our polity is how we welcome new members. Someone who wants to join takes the Discovering Restoration course, submits a membership application, and meets with an elder. The elders seek to discern whether the person is a believer whose life shows evidence of new birth. They then recommend the candidate to the church, and the members have the joy and responsibility of affirming them into membership.

06

OUR DOCTRINE

The Baptist Faith and Message 2000.

Restoration Fellowship affirms the Baptist Faith and Message 2000 (often called the BF&M) as our statement of faith.

A statement of faith is never more authoritative than Scripture itself. But it gives us a clear, shared summary of what the Bible teaches, offering clarity where it's needed and charity where it's appropriate. The BF&M serves two main purposes for us.

1. A SHARED STANDARD AMONG OUR MEMBERS

Holding a common statement of faith gives us a solid doctrinal foundation as one committed body. When questions about doctrine come up, as they will, we have a common starting point for talking them through together.

2. A SHARED STANDARD WITH OTHER CHURCHES

The BF&M also connects us with churches far beyond Memphis. Its story actually begins here. In 1925, the Southern Baptist Convention met in Memphis and adopted two things at the same meeting: the first Baptist Faith and Message, and the Cooperative Program.

The Cooperative Program is a shared missions fund. Before it existed, missionaries had to travel from church to church raising their own support. Pooling our giving meant missionaries could spend more time on the field and get real rest when they came home. But if churches were going to send missionaries together, they needed to agree on what those missionaries believed. The BF&M became that shared standard.

Today, when the Southern Baptist Convention appoints missionaries, churches like ours can trust that they affirm the same gospel doctrine we do, and our giving helps send them to the nations.

You can read the full Baptist Faith and Message 2000 at **restorationmemphis.com/aboutus**.

07

OUR COVENANT

How we walk together in love.

What does it actually look like to be a member here? What can you expect from others, and what will they expect from you?

Every church has expectations like these. Some churches leave them unspoken, and newcomers only discover them over time. We'd rather say them out loud.

A church covenant is a short summary of what Scripture teaches about why and how we live together as a church body. It describes the commitments we make to one another as members. Here is ours.

MEMBERSHIP COVENANT

I will gather to worship the one true God with other Restoration Fellowship church members for as long as I am physically able. The goal of my regular weekly worship is to give God glory.

I will grow spiritually through regular involvement in groups and classes at Restoration Fellowship Church in addition to regular personal devotional times. I understand the purpose of these groups and classes is building community with other believers and holding each other accountable.

I will serve Christ through the mission work of Restoration Fellowship Church. I am created to serve others through good works. I am commanded by God to make disciples of every nation, tribe, people, and language through the local church. I will support the church's mission to make Jesus known and his kingdom visible.

I will give sacrificially and joyfully to support the shared mission of Restoration Fellowship, recognizing God as the owner of all things.

I will seek unity with other church members. I recognize God's design for the church is unity in diversity, and I will put the interests of others above my personal preferences. I will guard the reputation of the church and submit to discipline for any sin problems in my life.

I will pray for and submit to the leadership of Restoration Fellowship. I will pray privately and with the church corporately. I will pray for people to accept Christ, and I will pray for more disciples to grow in their faith.

I will share the good news of Jesus with others. I will make my attitude that of Christ and, through humility, make the gospel my priority through selfless, good works and evangelism.

WHAT THE COVENANT DOES FOR US

It sets clear expectations. Joining a church often means bumping into unwritten rules. (Is everyone secretly expected to serve in the nursery?) The covenant puts our shared commitments in writing, so you know what you're agreeing to and what you can expect from the members around you.

It holds us accountable. The covenant draws its expectations from Scripture. It doesn't say everything that could be said, but it sets the tone for a life of repentance, faith, and loving obedience that marks Jesus' people. By making these promises, we invite our brothers and sisters to lovingly speak the truth to us if we begin to drift.

It reminds us of what we've promised. We read the covenant together in our worship gatherings from time to time. Hearing it and saying it together stirs us to keep living out the commitment we've made to Christ and to this church.

08

OUR PRACTICE

Gathered worship and Community Groups.

Our church life is shaped to grow a deepening love for Christ through the gospel, as a family that wants to make Jesus known.

Two rhythms carry most of that life: our Sunday Gathering and Community Groups.

1 GATHERED WORSHIP

Why we gather. In the New Testament, the church gathers on the first day of the week to worship the risen Christ and to encourage one another (Acts 2:42; 20:7; Ephesians 5:18–21; Colossians 3:16–17; Revelation 1:10). In the same way, our Sunday Gathering is the centerpiece of our life together. Our worship is grounded in the Bible and centered on the gospel.

What we value in worship. We want our worship to be:

1. **God-centered.** God is the focus. We worship him for his glory, through Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit.
2. **Biblical.** We let Scripture shape how we worship.
3. **Participatory.** Worship isn't a performance to watch. Everyone is invited to take part.
4. **Authentic.** Worship that pleases God matches what is in our hearts and how we live.
5. **Transforming.** Our gatherings should shape us into the likeness of Christ.

What happens on a Sunday. Acts 2:42 describes the earliest church devoting itself "to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the

breaking of bread and the prayers." Our Sunday Gathering follows that same pattern:

PRAYER. We pray throughout our gathering for a variety of needs, expressing our dependence on God for life and godliness. We also spend time in quiet, reflective prayer in response to the sermon.

SINGING. Psalm 96 calls us to "sing to the LORD, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day." Singing together lets us proclaim God's greatness with one voice. We choose Scripture-soaked, gospel-rich songs so that we magnify Christ and encourage one another, "singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart" (Ephesians 5:19).

EXPOSITORY PREACHING. Preaching God's Word is the centerpiece of our gathering, because hearing from God is the most important thing we do together. We usually preach through whole books or large sections of the Bible, so our lives are shaped by the whole counsel of God's Word and our hearts and minds are renewed.

THE LORD'S SUPPER. We share the Lord's Supper every week. The earliest church broke bread when they gathered (Acts 2:42), and by Acts 20:7 it was a regular part of their weekly worship. Each time, we remember Jesus' death for our sin and proclaim what he has done for us. The Supper builds us up as God's people and reminds us that we are united with the crucified and risen Christ.

GIVING. As part of our worship, we give our financial offerings to the Lord with cheerful hearts. God invites us to give generously and sacrificially. Together, our giving funds the proclamation of the gospel in Memphis, across our nation, and around the world through our gospel partnerships and missions connections.

2 COMMUNITY GROUPS

Community Groups help us carry Sunday's message into the rest of the week. Groups meet regularly to discuss the sermon and apply God's Word to everyday life. They include men and women and are open to every age and stage of life. As we encourage one another

through Scripture and prayer and join in God's mission together, we grow in faith, build deep friendships, and learn to follow Jesus side by side.

09

RESTORATION KIDS

Partnering with parents to raise disciples.

Our mission for Restoration Kids is to partner with parents to help children develop a confident hope in the gospel, know God personally, grow in their faith, and become disciples of Jesus who serve him faithfully and make him known in their everyday lives.

We take that mission seriously, and we know we can't do it alone. Consider the math:

40 hours a year at church

3,000 waking hours a year at home

That changes how we approach children's ministry. The home and the church can't be two separate efforts. We work together as one team with one goal: helping kids know and follow Jesus.

Our prayer is that Restoration Kids would build deep partnerships and lasting relationships with families, raising up disciples, missionaries, and worshipers who will change the world for Jesus' sake.

WHAT SUNDAY MORNINGS LOOK LIKE

On Sunday mornings, we create a safe, energetic environment where every child hears a gospel-centered lesson, along with Scripture memory, games, art, music, and videos. We use *The Gospel Project for Kids*, a three-year curriculum that walks through the whole Bible. It shows kids that Scripture isn't a collection of separate stories but one big story that points to Jesus.

Questions? Stop by the Restoration Kids check-in desk on Sunday, or reach out to our Children's Ministry Coordinator, Rachel Cotton, through the church.

10

HOW DO I PURSUE MEMBERSHIP?

Participate. Evaluate. Apply.

If you're thinking about joining Restoration, here is the path.

1 PARTICIPATE.

Start by taking part in the life of the church: our Sunday Gathering, a Community Group, and serving alongside others. There's no better way to get to know a church than to live life with it.

2 EVALUATE.

Work through the whole Discovering Restoration course, either in person or online through the sermons and this guide. It will help you get to know the church and decide whether you'd like to pursue membership.

3 APPLY.

If you'd like to move forward, fill out a membership application and meet with a pastor. The application helps us get to know you and hear how the Lord has worked in your life. Meeting with a pastor helps the elders recommend you to the church for membership.

Apply online at **restorationmemphis.com/membership**, or ask for a paper application on Sunday.



11

CONSIDERING MEMBERSHIP

Questions to think through.

As you consider membership, it may help to think through a few questions.

You're welcome to talk any of them over with one of our elders.

1 WHAT IS YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR PREVIOUS CHURCH?

If you left your last church for a reason other than moving, are you on good terms with its leaders and members? Is there anything unresolved that you could help make right? Do they know you're considering a new church? We'd encourage you to reach out to your former church if needed. Let one of our elders know, too, so we can pray with you and, if it would help, communicate with your previous church.

2 HAVE YOU MADE CONNECTIONS HERE?

Joining a church should feel like joining a family. You aren't only evaluating the preaching, the music, and the children's ministry. You're asking whether these are gospel-changed people you can commit to love and serve alongside. If you haven't made a connection or two yet, reach out to a Community Group leader or an elder. We'd love to help.

3 HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN WITH US?

There's no required waiting period before applying for membership. But we've found it's usually best to be with us for at least a couple of months first. That gives you time to build relationships and to see what life in this church is really like.

12

HOW CAN YOU LEAVE RESTORATION WELL?

Love, forgiveness, and unity.

It may seem strange to talk about leaving a church while you're thinking about joining one.

But we'd like to talk about it now, on the front end, so we share healthy expectations if hard seasons come.

Some reasons for leaving a church can't be avoided, like moving to a new city. Others can be, like unresolved conflict or an unsettled misunderstanding. When we covenant together as members, we promise special care for one another: to pray, serve, support, and encourage. Membership isn't a subscription you call to cancel, because it isn't mainly about what you receive from the church. It's also about your commitment to serve others. Leaving well serves the members and leaders you leave behind, and it honors Jesus as we show that we're eager to love, forgive, and bless.

SOME THINGS TO CONSIDER

Every church is made up of sinners, and every church will get things wrong at some point. If we want to be like Jesus, we need grace and a willingness to repent. The good news of Jesus means we can turn from sin and keep walking in love together. That's why the New Testament letters say so much about love (1 Corinthians 13), forgiveness (Colossians 3:13), and unity (Ephesians 4:1–7). The apostles knew relational strife would come easily, and that we would need the gospel to realign us again and again.

If you've been hurt or sinned against, have you talked with the person involved? Have you talked with an elder? If you're afraid of

being hurt further, it may help to bring an elder in first.

Look honestly at your own heart. Is there sin you haven't confessed? Are you holding on to bitterness? Have you tried to make peace? A root of bitterness can divide any church, the one you're in now or the next one.

If you feel let down by leadership, or feel that you haven't been spiritually fed, please say so. Leaders can fail people, too. If you believe an elder has disappointed you or sinned against you, we invite you to share it with another elder, who can bring it to the elders as a whole so reconciliation can happen. One gift of having several elders is that we can hold one another accountable in humility.

IF YOU'RE CONSIDERING LEAVING, WE ENCOURAGE YOU TO…

- Talk with an elder about why you're considering a new church.
- Pray and stay open to counsel. If something is unresolved, consider how you can best love and serve the church.
- Be "eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3).

YOUR NEXT STEPS

Thank you for reading.

We hope this guide has helped you understand who we are and what it means to belong here.

When you're ready:

- **Share your reflections.** Tell us what stood out to you, what was new, and what questions you have on the Discovering Restoration page at restorationmemphis.com.
- **Apply for membership** at restorationmemphis.com/membership.
- **Or simply grab one of our pastors** on a Sunday. We'd love to talk.



RESTORATION FELLOWSHIP

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