

Preparing to Move & Leave a Restoration Church

Given the demographic makeup and geographic location of Restoration Church, it's not uncommon for covenant members to move and have to look for another church home. Sometimes, it's not necessarily a relocation that prompts finding another church as other factors may also come into consideration. Whatever the case may be, as you think about how to leave Restoration Church, here are some suggestions on how best to care for yourself and the church body during the process.

Seek Insight from Others

As a member of Restoration Church, you are part of a body, which means you are connected to others—and not only are you connected to fellow brothers and sisters, in some ways you're dependent upon them. This body of interconnected, interdependent relationship is God's design for his children. While these might seem like obvious statements, we're tempted to default into making decisions alone and then only after doing so informing others of the choices we have made. However, biblical prudence compels us to seek insight from others when making major life decisions.

As it's been said, personal insight is the product of community. In God's infinite, kind wisdom he put others around you to help you see yourself and your situations more clearly. With this truth in mind, it's wise, good and appropriate to invite others to speak into our lives. So, in considering leaving the church, have you sought input and insight of fellow church members? If not, consider who you might involve in this decision. For those who have no idea where to start, we invite you to reach out to the elders who will happily walk alongside you and perhaps ask other members to do so as well.

Express Thanks to God

Every person's time as part of the Restoration Church body will be different. Spiritual growth will be the primary mark for some, while others will experience struggle and stagnation. Some will enjoy every part of all that we do; others might wish a few things were done differently. However, at least one thing should be the same for all covenant members – everyone will experience God's grace in some measure.

To be clear, this is not because of how "great" Restoration Church is, but because of how kind our God is. No gospel church is without God's grace. The church in Corinth, by many standards, would not be considered a healthy church. Yet, the apostle Paul still commended this church writing, *"I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given to you in Christ Jesus, that in every way you were enriched...so that you are not lacking any spiritual gift"* (1:4-5, 7). That's quite a statement for a church that he goes on to rebuke for divisiveness and tolerating sexual immorality, among other sinful behaviors.

Paul, in his gospel appreciation for Corinth, gives us a lens by which to see the church. We should reflect on God's grace to us through the ministry of our current local church. Note where God has used the ministry and members of Restoration to bless you spiritually and help you grow in Christ-like maturity. Think about how the Spirit has used brothers and sisters at Restoration to help you find joy in Christ. After remembering specific evidences of God's grace to you, thank God for all that he's doing through the Restoration Church body.

So before you leave, spend time reflecting on God's grace to you through the covenant members of Restoration Church. As you do that, express thankfulness to God for his kindness to you through this one local church.

Encourage Fellow Members

As you reflect on God's grace to you in specific ways, certain individuals will come to mind. Perhaps it's your Community Group leader or unlikely friend you've grown to truly care for and love. Maybe it's the particular shepherding of one of the pastors or a member you don't know that well, but still had a significant impact on you.

Remember Paul's words to the Corinthians. Yes, he was ultimately thanking God, but remember he was speaking to saints in *"the church of God that is in Corinth"* (1:2). Again, Paul gives us a pattern.

As you leave the church body, use it as a time to encourage others and spur them on in good deeds. Celebrate God's grace to you in the presence of others, telling them specifically how God has used them to help you more fully delight in Jesus Christ. Look for ways other members invested in your walk with Jesus and write a note of thanks to those fellow brothers and/or sisters. Express your appreciation to those members who helped you during particularly hard times or ministered to you in the midst of life's difficulties. Speak words of affirmation to your Community Group, recounting the ways they've served you. For those with whom you spent dedicated time in a discipling relationship, encourage them to continue making disciples that delight in the supremacy of Jesus.

As you go, celebrate God's grace knowing that as you do, what is celebrated gets repeated. Encourage your fellow church members in this way leaving a wake of God's grace behind you.

Resolve any Conflicts

Restoration Church is not perfect. And neither are you. When you take an imperfect church and fill it with imperfect people, conflicts arise. Yet, the blood of Jesus Christ brings reconciliation across any and every conflict, for in Christ hostility is killed and peace is cultivated (Eph. 2:11-16). Therefore, as you talk to others about your departure, don't grumble about what might have been "wrong" or less than desirable to your personal preferences. Rather, do all you can to bring about peace and unity inside the body of Restoration Church.

Specifically, if there's any unresolved conflict, be it with a pastor or fellow church member, do not leave without joyfully obeying our Lord Jesus who tells us to *"First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift"* (Matt. 5:24). In other words, do not go worship with another church family without first being reconciled to your current church family. Before you depart Restoration Church do all you can to bring the healing grace of God into any broken relationship.

When you follow the commands of Jesus in this way, everybody matures in Christ. You mature as you work out your salvation holding fast to the steadfast promises of God. Your brother or sister grows as they see the gospel applied in a fresh and personal way. Restoration Church grows because you've sought to *"walk in a manner worthy of the call to which you have been called...eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace"* (Eph. 6:1, 3). Further, the church that welcomes you also benefits, as you'll not be carrying the baggage of guilt or feelings of being disgruntled into new relationships.

So before you move on from Restoration Church, seek out brothers and sisters to resolve any outstanding conflicts. Strive to build the unity of the body even as you move on to another church family.

Switching to Another Church in DC

Sometimes it's not a geographical move that prompts a person to think about going to another church. It's already been stated that no church is perfect. With this reality before us, on occasion it may be wise and helpful for a member to move to another faithful church in the same vicinity as Restoration Church.

Sometimes a church switch happens because a covenant member has been making a long commute to Restoration Church and God begins to stir their heart to move to a church closer to their physical home. In these instances, it's best to simply let the pastors know what you're thinking, so they can help you identify another church, if you've not already done so. It'll also be helpful to personally reach out to those fellow members closest to you to explain why you're moving on from Restoration Church. In short, do the same things mentioned above: express thankfulness to God, encourage your fellow members and resolve any conflicts.

Other times, people begin to think about moving churches because they are unhappy with a certain aspect of Restoration Church. Given the complex nature of a church, and us as people, there are almost an endless variety of issues that might arise. Since these situations tend to be much more personal, you'll want to be especially careful not to cause division if you decide to move on from Restoration.

Further, you'll want to bring other trusted brothers and sisters into your thought process well before finally deciding to move on from Restoration Church. While this certainly includes inviting input from other members to help you think through the decision (without seeking to cause division), it also includes talking to one of the pastors regarding any issues you have with the ministry of Restoration Church.¹ Don't just try to slip away or leave without a healthy, respectful conversation in person with one of the elders. The discussion might not be easy, but it's the God-honoring course of action. Hopefully, as you talk with the church leaders, they too will humbly admit Restoration's imperfections. When all of us admit we're not perfect, we can seek to more fully understand and learn from each other.

During the course of these conversations, seek to clarify the problem as much as possible. Is it a preference issue? Or is it a philosophy of ministry issue? If the issue lies in the realm of personal preference (e.g. music style), you'll want to think hard and long about whether this is a sufficient reason to leave the church body with which you have covenanted. No matter what church you belong to, there will likely be personal preferences left unmet. As we seek to follow Jesus we should strive, by God's grace, to place faithfulness to the gospel over our personal preferences. Therefore, as long as the gospel is not compromised, it's likely best to not leave a church over personal preferences alone.

If the issue lies more in the realm of philosophy of ministry (e.g. not enough attention given to mercy ministry), then you'll still want to think hard about whether this is a reason to leave the church. You'll want to ask questions like:

- *Are there ways Restoration is striving in this area, even if not exactly how I would go about it?*

¹ The assumption here is that we are talking about secondary matters and those in the realm of personal preferences. If faithfulness to the gospel or biblical fidelity is compromised, then you have every reason to look for another church that faithfully preaches and practices the gospel.

- *Is this issue significantly hindering my spiritual growth or my ability to minister the gospel to other believers and unbelievers?*
- *Are there things I have done or can do to help the church body increase in her maturity in this area?*
- *Is this issue such that I feel the overall ministry of Restoration Church is misaligned with Scripture?*

After asking and seeking input from others to help you work through these questions, it may be that finding another local church is wise. Praise God that just as the local church is one body with many diverse parts, so is the universal church diverse. God uses the diversity of local churches to bring about the fullness of his glory as each congregation ministers to others in distinct ways. If you decide to move on, it will be good for your soul and the unity of the body at Restoration for you to do what has already been suggested above: express thankfulness to God and encourage fellow members while seeking to resolve any personal conflicts.

In these instances of local church moves, the pastors of Restoration Church try to communicate with the pastors of the church you're planning to join. This interaction provides a wonderful example of local churches in the same city working together to provide pastoral continuity while we all strive to advance the gospel together.