

Matthew 18:11-20

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Date: 23 February 2025

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[0 : 00] Matthew 18. We got last time as far as verse 11, which we read but didn't study. And so I'm going to start with verse 11 today and reread it.

But just to refresh your memory, last time we spoke about stumbling blocks, and we talked about stumbling blocks being thrown in front, particularly in front of the young children. What we'll find today as we go through is that this is also applicable to young or immature Christians. They are treated like little ones in Scripture. We'll come back to that. We saw that sometimes these stumbling blocks were individual things that we could throw in front of one another, but also sometimes these were governmental things where our government can throw stumbling blocks before us that try to stop us from practicing our faith or ridicule us for our faith or whatever. And we spent a bit of time talking about how we can cause one another to stumble among the men, particularly things that come to mind are what the Bible calls filthiness, silly talk and coarse jesting. How that is so prevalent among men and much less so among women, although this generation is unfortunately catching up because since the emancipation of women, women are often just as foul-mouthed as the men, which is rather sad.

[1 : 26] But in the main, the men are worse in this regard. And there's also this matter of things like pornography, which is a, you know, quite often men will look at that stuff and tempt themselves into sin, and they'll also show it to other men, which draws them into the temptation.

And therefore, it's a battle. We also talked about our young women who, in this day and age, often look as if somebody's put their clothes on with a paintbrush, so they might as well be naked. And we looked at that and said, you know, when you dress like that, you are causing men to stumble and therefore don't. And understand that God has a plan for these things. He hasn't given you this beauty just so that you can flaunt it everywhere, but he's actually given you this beauty for your husband whenever that comes upon your life.

And so we were instructed, if you remember, to see beauty in the gentle and quiet spirit that the Bible talks about in 1 Peter 3. The gentle and quiet spirit of a woman is what makes her beautiful. [2 : 33] And similarly with men, we should see beauty in men in the righteousness that they portray and the righteousness that is in their speech. We tend to gravitate sometimes towards the life and soul of the party who keeps everybody amused with foul speech.

We shouldn't applaud that. We should applaud the men who speak righteously. And in amongst all of it, which brings us to this morning, really, we read about the attitude that Jesus would have towards sin.

Sin being a much bigger thing than many of us make of it. We think, well, you know, it's sin, isn't it? Everybody does it. But what the Lord says is, if your right hand offends you, chop it off.

If your eye offends you, pluck it out. He is so against sin that he would rather have you maimed but righteous. And that is, it's a kind of a big metaphor, isn't it?

It strikes you that he really, really hates sin. And the general attitude towards sin belies the fact that we make little of it compared to the way God views it.

[3 : 50] And that takes us through to this verse 11, and we'll read from verse 11 to 20. For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.

Now, you may have a note that says this verse doesn't appear in most of the older manuscripts. If your manuscripts come from the Textus Receptus, it's there.

From others, it's not. But the same sentiment is repeated in Luke 19.10. And therefore, whether or not it was in the original, it is a biblical concept.

That Jesus came to seek and save that which was lost. The sentiment is biblical. So let's read on. For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.

What do you think? If any man has a hundred sheep and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go and search for the one that is straying?

[4 : 50] If it turns out that he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine which have not gone astray. So it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.

If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private. If he listens to you, you have won your brother. If he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouths of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed.

If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven. Again, I say to you that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by my Father who is in heaven.

For where two or three have gathered together in my name, I am there in their midst. So, a challenging passage. And if we don't finish it today, I'll carry it on next time.

[6 : 08] So he says he's come to save that which was lost, and then immediately goes on to speak the parable of the lost sheep.

So, the context from the previous verses that we've dealt with is continued. He got to this point where he says, I've come to seek and save that which was lost, and now I'm going to tell you about the lost sheep.

And Jesus in many places is referred to as the good shepherd. You'll find it, the biggest or the most pertinent description is in John 10 verses 7 to 18.

I'm not going to study that this morning, but it just describes the good shepherd and what the good shepherd is like. And this parable was spoken to Hebrew people, and the Hebrew people were primarily shepherds.

So they kind of knew about raising sheep. It wasn't like he was taking some alien concept and introducing it to people who all work in an office or whatever.

[7 : 13] This was a nation of shepherds. Yes, there were fishermen too, but the primary thing about the Hebrew nation, right the way back into the distance in the time of Moses, was that they were a nation of shepherds.

In fact, they were hated because they were shepherds, because they were treated as the shepherds of the riffraff. And as we read on, he says, If any man has a hundred sheep and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go and search for the one that is straying?

This gives me a few problems and makes me think about this parable. You see, if I had a hundred sheep that I was looking after in the mountains and one went missing, I actually wouldn't go off and find the one, because while I'm gone, the bears and the lions might eat the other ninety-nine.

So there's a certain, you think, hang on, let me think. Now, there are lots of, when people preach on this passage, what they tend to do is they tend to quite sensibly apply things like, well, the hired shepherd, if he loses a sheep, he's got to pay for that sheep.

So the sheep are actually very, very important. If he doesn't find that lost sheep, then he's lost a chunk of income. However, this isn't a hired shepherd.

[8 : 41] This is the owner of the sheep. This is Jesus. And lots of, another one that I heard is shepherds used to work in twos and threes. And so if one of you had to go off and find the lost sheep, the other couple of shepherds would be able to look after the flock.

And typically they use this picture of the sheepfold, which you'll find in the notes. But the sheepfold is a sort of stone enclosure. And they picture all the sheep inside the stone enclosure with the shepherd sitting across the doorway, while some other shepherds wandering off and looking for the lost sheep.

The problem with that is these are not sheep in the sheepfold. They're in the open pasture. So we kind of get lost a bit when we don't stick to the context of the passage.

These are sheep in open pasture. Psalm 100. In fact, you can turn that. Psalm 100 and verse 3.

And you'll find the same thing said in Psalm 95 verse 7. Psalm 100 and verse 3. So the analogy with Jesus as the shepherd is with us as the sheep.

[10:03] Now when we walk this earth having been saved and therefore become part of his flock, are we in the sheepfold or are we wandering around in the pasture?

And I would say the latter. I would say that if you looked at us as we are on earth, we are like sheep wandering in the pasture. And the pasture is full of predators.

All sorts of things trying to drag us away from the Lord, trying to not allow us to walk in our salvation. And again, that's both governmental and it's people who come across our path who say, surely you don't believe that nonsense, do you?

And so on. So what this paints for me now, because so many people get this wrong, I'm not arrogant enough to think that I haven't also got it wrong.

But this is what it means to me. We are in the open pasture, but for some reason we are secure. In fact, it's something that Joe already prayed earlier on that eternally.

[11:06] And when he read the psalm, dealt with the psalm, eternally we are sorted. Our protection is now assured. We may as well be locked in the sheepfold because we are secure in Christ.

So what this is trying to portray is actually an alien concept to an earthly shepherd who would think, well, I've lost that sheep, but I can't go looking for it because I'll lose the rest.

He has made the rest secure. Therefore, he can go looking for the lost sheep. And what's more, what he says here is, and I can just picture the shepherds going, what are you mad?

But what he portrays here is not only does he look for that lost sheep, but he incessantly looks for the lost sheep until he finds it.

And then there is a party when he finds it. And he's far more concerned over the lost than with the ones who were not lost and are therefore secure. And you find that same concept when you look at the parable of the prodigal son, which is in Luke 15, verse 11 to 32.

[12:17] In fact, we'll read that because it's a pertinent concept, although it doesn't deal with a flock. It only deals with an individual. But Luke 15, if you turn there, verse 11, we'll start reading.

And he said, a man had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me. So he divided his wealth between them.

And not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey into a distant country. And there he squandered his estate with loose living. So would you say he was lost?

Mm hmm. Now, when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country and he began to be impoverished. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country and he sent him into his fields to feed the swine.

So now he's properly lost. He's gone from living in clover, so to speak, with his dad. And now he's not only living on his own, but he's now beholden to the very people.

[13:23] And the fact that he's feeding pigs means he's beholden to Gentiles because he wouldn't be feeding pigs if he landed up with Jews, would he? And he would have gladly filled his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating.

And no one was giving anything to him. So he was so hungry that he was prepared to eat pig food. You don't get more lost than that. And when he came to his senses, he said, how many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger.

I will get up and go to my father and will say to him, father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me as one of your hired men.

So what you have is a kind of enforced humility has come upon him. He's realized his error. And instead of his arrogance, he's now very humble and says, dad, just take me back, even if you treat me like a hired servant.

So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight.

[14:40] I am no longer worthy to be called your son. But the father said to his slaves quickly, bring out the best robe and put it on him and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet and bring the fattened calf.

Kill it and let us eat and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and has come to life again. He was lost and has been found. And they began to celebrate.

So you've got this over the top reaction from dad, who's not just, oh, hiya. Good to see you back. OK, come on in. But you've got this exuberance to see the son saved, which describes the reaction of the Lord when sinners turn to him.

So you can imagine the Lord. It says in the Old Testament, I think it's in. I want to say Second Chronicles seven or something like that.

I might have the scripture reference wrong because I didn't note it. But the eyes of the Lord rove to and fro over the earth, seeking those whose hearts are perfect towards him.

[15:45] So you can imagine. His reaction as the father. When when this son returns to the fold is not just pleased.

He's really pleased to the point where he's dancing and singing and putting out a feast and killing the fattened calf and all of that. And verse 25.

Now his older son was in the field. And when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. And he summoned one of the servants and began inquiring what these things could be. And he said to him, your brother has come and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has received him back safe and sound.

But he became angry and was not willing to go in. And his father came out and began pleading with him. But he answers and said to his father, look, for so many years I've been serving you and I have never neglected a command of yours.

And yet you have never given me a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your wealth with prostitutes, you killed a fatted calf for him.

[16:53] And he said to him, son, you have always been with me. Not lost. You've always been with me. And all that is mine is yours. You don't need anything.

You are saved. You're secure. Everything that's mine is yours, which is what the Lord would say to us. Everything that is mine is yours. As Joe's already said, you have to have an eternal perspective on these things, because sometimes in this life it doesn't feel like that.

But that's the truth. Verse 32. But we had to celebrate and rejoice for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live and was lost and has been found.

So coming back to Matthew 18, you've got the picture painted of this shepherd who's lost a sheep. And knows the rest are okay.

Despite being in the open pasture. But relentlessly searches for the lost sheep. And I want to just draw your attention to the beginning of verse 13, which says, if it turns out that he finds it.

[18:01] And this expresses the view that not all sheep can be found. Now, there are those who can be found because they're soft hearted or they are.

They've had enough and they want. You know, I'm sick of eating with the pigs now. I want to find home. There are those who can be found, but there are those who stubbornly and rebelliously refuse to be found.

But if he finds one, says, if it turns out that he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the 99 which had gone astray.

So you've got this party in heaven, really, when an unsaved person gets saved. The good shepherd never stops searching. And it's important.

And it goes on and says, so it is not the will of your father who is in heaven that one of these little ones perishes. And that's where we make the link between little ones as in children and little ones as in immature Christians.

[19:06] Immature Christians are like little ones. There's an awful lot they don't get. My first two years of being saved, I knew everything. And then I realized I was immature.

I had a lot of growing up to do. And it is a blessing on the kingdom of God that I didn't start a church back then. It's not the will of your father for any of these little ones to perish.

Now we get on to the really interesting bit. Well, it was all really interesting. But this bit was interesting in that it challenged me to get to grips with it. If your brother sins, this is verse 15.

Go and show him his fault in private. If he listens to you, you've won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses, every fact may be confirmed.

If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

[20 : 14] If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault. Now, let's just paint. I haven't practiced this. I haven't made notes on it. But let's get a scenario that we can kind of get.

Let's suppose that someone, Keith or Malcolm or somebody, has caused me offense. So I read this and I think, right, I'm going to go and tell him that offense.

Not so fast. Because the first thing I have to deduce is do I have a right to be offended?

Is this really a sin? Has he actually sinned against me? We are very fickle and very sensitive sometimes. And for instance, when a brother comes along and corrects me, brother or sister, for that matter, I get quite a few corrections from Linda on a regular basis.

And I love them. But the point is, when someone comes and corrects me, I have a choice. I get the hump. Who do they think they are?

[21 : 19] Not talking to them again. In fact, I'm going to tell the rest of the church how self-righteous they are. Or should I look inwardly and think, has this person sinned against me?

First of all, are they right? And secondly, even if they're wrong, did they intend to offend? Which is a very, very critical question. Because quite often people will inadvertently offend you.

And if it's inadvertent, there was no malice in it. It wasn't spiteful. You've got no right to be offended.

Behind all of this scripture are other scriptures.

Let's see if I can find the reference. Ephesians 4 verse 2 and Colossians 3 verse 13. You don't need to turn there. What those scriptures tell us is that we should bear with one another and be long-suffering towards one another.

So if somebody gets right up my nose, it doesn't necessarily mean they've sinned. It might just be that there's a little bit of friction there.

[22 : 23] And it's not sin. It's something we need to deal with through patience and long-suffering. It could also be that the reason I'm offended is because in my heart of hearts I know I'm wrong.

But I can't admit to being wrong. Especially if you're the pastor. Can I tell you if you're the pastor, it's especially important that you do admit when you're wrong. And I don't see it in many churches, but it's so important.

It's one of the reasons why occasionally I will stand up here and say, last week I said this and it was wrong. Because we need to be prepared to do that. There's a humility involved in that that is necessary to have a healthy church.

So behind these scriptures is this exhortation. First of all, bear with one another. So when my brother sins against me, it's perfectly legitimate for me to do nothing at all about it.

Except go away and reflect and challenge myself. I was once challenged in a particular time in my Christian life. Somebody said I was prideful. Not prideful.

[23 : 29] Me, I'm not prideful. But I didn't tackle the person. What I did at the time, and it's by the grace of God, I'm not claiming any great accolade for this, but it led me to think, well, why would they think I was prideful?

Am I prideful? And so I prayed about it. And over the next few days, the Lord showed me several occasions when I'd been really prideful. And so in the end, I had to go back to this lady and say, thank you for that.

You were absolutely right. And I need to deal with it. But we miss that opportunity if we all get defensive. So what is the motive behind this scripture then?

If most of the time I'm just going to be long-suffering and patient, and I'm going to go away and personally reflect on things and so on, what's the reasoning behind this? Well, as we read on, it says this.

If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private. If he listens to you, you have won your brother. The motivation behind challenging sin in one another is to improve their situation.

[24 : 40] It's got nothing to do with you. Or if it was me, it's nothing to do with me. The only point in me challenging something that is actually sinful is to put them in a better place with the Lord and make them aware of their sins so they can repent and be right with God.

The motivation for challenging has to be selfless, not self-centered. When it goes on, what you then see is that unfolds as when we deal with sin in our brother and sister, what it unfolds into is we deal with it as a community.

Now, if I then take a couple of witnesses and see the safeguards in this, the Lord has built safeguards into this. So my brother offends me or sins against me, or you could read it as just sins because the Greek isn't absolutely clear whether it means general sin or personal sin.

In Luke's gospel, it seems to reflect personal sin, sin against me personally as opposed to general. But whatever, when we are challenging sin, we take two or three witnesses.

Now, that fulfills an instruction given in Deuteronomy 19, verse 15, that says everything must be confirmed out of the mouths of two or more witnesses.

[26 : 05] So you don't just depend on the testimony of one man if you're bringing a charge against somebody. You actually depend upon the testimony of two or more witnesses.

So you take your problem to two or three other witnesses, and they get to examine your case before you then go before the person who has caused offense.

So there's a safeguard there for them to say, actually, Ray, this is not their problem. It's yours. So you have to be, if you're going to challenge somebody on their sin, you have to be vulnerable yourself to being challenged, to whether your attitude is right or to whether this really is a sin, whether it really needs anything doing about it.

So you've got the beginnings of a community answer to the problem that is only interested in one thing, and that is restoring that brother or sister. There's no other motivation.

You've got right up his nose. He's not good enough. There has to be an actual sin behind it. And in this case, two or three witnesses have to agree that that is a sin.

[27 : 19] So then when you act upon it, you have agreement between you as to what you're dealing with and what they need to do to put it right. So important. And then what the Lord advises, as we read on, is if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church.

Again, we've engaged community. And we've taken it from two or three witnesses to a number of other witnesses. And engaging the church could mean several things. It could mean go to the church elders, and as a group of elders, they'll deal with it.

Or it could be, in the case of some sins, I've been in churches where this has happened, somebody's refusal to repent and come away from their sin has resulted in the whole church being told, you need to know that this brother, sister has sinned.

Now, once again, there's a safeguard. Are these two or three witnesses just his cronies and therefore are agreeing with him because they don't want to upset him? When you put it before the whole church, you've got a further safeguard.

The whole church can say, actually, this is a load of fuss about nothing, or actually, there's no real sin here, or actually, the guy who's making the complaint is at fault, or whatever. It involves vulnerability on the one bringing the complaint.

[28 : 33] We are supposed to be like iron sharpening iron, Proverbs 27, verse 17. And it's good to read that proverb. I won't read it now because I shall run out of time. But the whole proverb teaches us a lot about the need to be willing to be corrected.

And so, when correction comes, we should welcome it. Particularly if you've got the church behind it, because if they've prayerfully considered this matter, and are bringing it as a correction from the Lord, one would be a fool to reject a correction from the Lord.

And the Lord's way of bringing correction to us is through his people who are filled with his Holy Spirit, who will give us a godly view of what needs to be done. Now, of course, what we often do is we turn this whole thing on its head.

We don't start with talking to them as an individual. We start with blabbing it to the whole church. Do you know what he said to me? And we miss out these steps that are vitally important for the protection of the person and the protection of yourself.

Verse 22 of Proverbs 27 implies strongly that only the foolish reject correction. One other thing before we move on, and that is in Matthew 5.

[29 : 47] Turn to Matthew 5, 23 to 26. Matthew 5, 23 to 26. It says, Therefore, if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, so hang on then, if I've got something against my brother, I must go to him and talk to him and try to be reconciled.

But if my brother has something against me, sorry, I've lost the verse I was reading, 23. If you remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go first to be reconciled to your brother and then come and present your offering.

Make friends quickly with your opponent at law while you are with him on the way so that your opponent may not hand you over to the judge and the judge to the officer and you be thrown into prison.

Truly, I say to you, you will not come out of there until you have paid up the last cent. So whether my brother sins against me or I sin against my brother, I have to be seeking reconciliation at all costs.

I'm not supposed to take a brother to court. Bible tells us that. So what I'm trying to say is, it doesn't matter which side of the fence you're on in this matter. So whether reconciliation, putting your brother or sister back where they belong in front of God is the prime motivation.

[31 : 14] It's getting them free from the burden of whatever sin has got in the way. If you turn to Galatians 6, verses 1 and 2, this is a teaching of the Apostle Paul.

Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one. In a spirit of gentleness, each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.

Bear one another's burdens and thereby fulfill the law of Christ. So once again, the Apostle Paul carries this teaching from the parable that we're reading through into his teaching in churches and says, notice the first ingredient here is, let's restore.

And the second is, let's be gentle. Gentleness is a fruit of the spirit. All too often when these challenges are around, we lose gentleness. We have a cross and I'm not going to have this.

I want him cast out of the church and all of that stuff. When in fact, what Paul says is, be gentle.

And if it be possible, restore such a one.

[32 : 24] Now, just before we move on to the last couple of verses of this chapter, he says, finally, if they don't respond to any of this, treat them as tax collectors or Gentiles.

And immediately, I'm sure this is not the case with you, but immediately for me, that made me think, so what you want is you, at that point, you get rid of them, don't you?

You push them out of the church. They just know better than a tax gatherer or a Gentile. And then I thought, what did Jesus do with tax collectors and Gentiles?

He went and had dinner with them, as Denise said earlier. He fellowshipped with them. He prayed for them. He continued to preach the gospel to them.

It doesn't mean that they get rejected or ejected because of what they've done. It means you step up the prayer and you step up the attention and you love them even more.

[33 : 25] And you pour out as much of the fruit of the spirit that you can, the love, the joy, the peace, the patience, the kindness, the gentleness, the goodness, the self-control. Self-control comes when you really want to hit them, but you don't.

But you pour out as much Holy Spirit love on them as you can. That's what you do with tax collectors and Gentiles.

And that was a wake-up call for me because sometimes I'm not the most patient of people with such people. Well, you must also remember that Romans 18, sorry, not Romans 18, Romans 1 verse 18 and following teaches us that it is quite possible for people to be given over to their sin.

So one of the reasons you might not be getting repentance, despite repeatedly pointing out someone's failings in love and gentleness, you might not be getting a response because they have become so rebellious against the Lord that they become given over to their sin.

And that does happen. And we warned about it in Romans 1 verses 18 and following, that people can be given over to a sin or a perversion or whatever, simply because they refuse to repent.

[34 : 43] Everybody gets a chance to repent, but God's patience is limited. And sometimes the purpose, you remember Paul says he would hand people over to Satan for the destruction of their flesh so that their soul might be saved.

So God might well leave someone in their sin and give them over to it so that they get sick of it. A bit like the prodigal son became sick of eating with the pigs. And therefore he eventually returned.

But the motivation even in that is that people will eventually return. And the important thing for the next, the next bit that we're going to look at is the final bit. We're going to look at this morning.

If we go back to Matthew 18, you've got these really awkward verses that can be so troublesome. Verse 18.

Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven. And whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven. And again, I say to you that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by my father who is in heaven.

[35 : 49] For where two or three have gathered together in my name, I am there in the midst. Now, I'd quite like a helicopter. So who's going to agree with me that I should have a helicopter and then God's got to give me a helicopter?

No takers? There are people who interpret this scripture this way and it means ripping it right out of context. The context here is church discipline.

Primarily church discipline. But there's one awkward little word in there that expands it beyond just church discipline. And that's the word anything found in verse 19. If you agree concerning anything. We'll return to that in a moment. But first of all, let's deal with the church discipline. That's the context. And the context is that if we want to handle church discipline correctly, and actually most churches don't handle it at all.

Things crop up and they just don't. They kind of ignore it and whistle and hope it goes away because nobody wants a conflict. And it's right that we shouldn't want a conflict. But it's also important that we challenge things that need to be challenged.

[36 : 56] We need to be prepared to do that in kindness and gentleness and with restoration as our motive. But what this verse tells us is when I first go to my brother and I.

You've sinned against me type of thing. When two or more are gathered around that problem. We can get God's answer. And that is a prerequisite that we don't keep it to ourselves, but that we share it with brothers and sisters.

Otherwise, we could easily miss. The benefit of corporate Holy Spirit consideration of something in prayer. And the solutions that come.

And I, by the way, this is an aside, but I am convinced the reason we're seeing such a lot of answered prayer at the moment is because we pray more together. On a Thursday night, we usually pray for needs that we find.

And so we normally start the study with prayer. And when we come here, we have half an hour of prayer. And since we've been praying together, we've seen things shift. So we need to continue to pray together.

[38 : 03] But it says when you agree as touching anything. An agreement doesn't come from me manufacturing an agreement. Actually, if we play our cards right here, Joe, we could have that helicopter.

So if you agree with me, we can put God's arm up his back to give us a helicopter. No. Joe and I sit before the Lord and say, look, what are we supposed to do with this?

And God shows us. So we're in agreement. And this when it says it. I'm glad that this translation says it this way. Not all translations do. When you agree something.

It has already. It shall have already been agreed in heaven. So we do it secondhand. We get to administer what heaven has already decided is the solution.

It isn't a matter of us manipulating God. It's a matter of us making ourselves available for God to manipulate us. It's the complete opposite of the way it's often taught.

[39 : 11] It's the complete opposite of God. So when you agree. And then it makes my life much more complicated by taking it out of the nice comfy context of dealing with sin and says, if you agree on anything.

Oh, hang on a minute. What does this mean? Well, it means what it says. It's possible for us to find God's will on anything. But not by agreeing outside God what we're going to press gang God into doing.

But we come into agreement in prayer because the Holy Spirit has said the same thing to us in prayer. So we've come up with a corporate understanding of what God's answer is to that prayer. One of the principles of the way Joe and I lead. Is that we don't we don't pursue anything unless we're both agreed. Sometimes we even seek agreement on minutia just because we prefer to be in agreement than not or find out that we've overstepped them afterwards.

But we're very careful to bring things before the Lord. And if we can't find agreement, we would bring it before the church and get everybody praying. And as long as there is a sincere heart to get God's solution, not my preferred solution, but God's solution.

[40 : 31] As long as that's the motivation, he will let us find him. Right. In Second Chronicles. The eyes of the Lord rove to and fro over the earth, seeking those whose hearts are perfect towards him.

So when we corporately seek it, we'll find ourselves in agreement. Not because we've worked it out, but because God's worked it out and given us from heaven that which has already been agreed in heaven.

Praise God. We got there. Father, I thank you for this word. Challenging though it is. I hope I got it right. And I say that with sincere concern because it was a passage that made me struggle. But Lord, let us follow this exaltation and pray together more and seek your answers from heaven more rather than try to work it out ourselves.

Father, you've given us graciously of your spirit. And when we come together, we have the corporate benefit. That will protect us from going off on tangents of our own.

[41 : 42] And I thank you that your spirit can be trusted. And, Lord, as we bring things to you in prayer, I just pray that you would demonstrate this in our lives, that when we find ourselves in agreement, we can then rejoice more and more in answered prayer that comes to us.

father thank you so much for this word in jesus name amen