

Matthew 18:1-11

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[0 : 00] So why have I put up a picture of a donkey? We're about to read about millstones. So that's just to tell you what a millstone is. The millstone referred to in scripture is not some tiddly little stone that you might use in a kitchen, but it's the grinding stone of a mill driven by a donkey.

So they would put grain underneath that stone and use that stone to crush it and it weighs several hundred pounds or kilograms. And that's I've done all that just so that when we get to that, you know what it's talking about because it's quite significant.

So we are now into Matthew 18. We only took about two months to get through chapter 17. Chapter 18 of Matthew. This is a very, very challenging chapter, should be challenging to all of us because it maps out.

The expectation. Jesus has of the behaviour of the righteous. And so we're going to do the first 10 verses this morning.

And I have to say, as I was doing it, I was one of those occasions when I felt grossly underprepared.

[1 : 21] And when I got here this morning, I still felt underprepared. So I apologise in advance if it's if it seems to be a bit fumbling and stumbling.

So what we what we had done is we in chapter 17, we'd seen Jesus transfigured on the mountain. So their minds were blown by the fact that this man that they'd been dealing with suddenly was transformed into a manifestation of glorious godliness in front of their eyes.

And if you recall, he only took three of his disciples with him, Peter, James and John. And I found myself wondering when we come to study the next chapter, whether that fact had driven the questions that they were asking, because they're all together. There's 12 of them.

And three of them get taken off for a special thing with Jesus. And so when they come back down the mountain, they've all had this good time with Jesus.

And it must have been amazing. And there must have been an I say must have been. I would think that if they knew anything about what had happened up the mountain, there would be jealousy. Possibly. They may not have even known.

[2 : 36] And the reason I raise that is because men do get jealous. I don't know if any of you have found this in the workplace. And it applies to both men and women. I would say more for men than for women.

But it applies to both where people get jealous if somebody else gets a pay rise or a promotion or, you know, what about me? I've done just as much as they've ever done. Why didn't I get the promotion or whatever?

You get this jealousy going on. And what you rarely see is someone being blessed for them. Ah, fantastic. You've got a promotion. Brilliant.

There tends to be a more sinful approach than a righteous approach to those situations. So what we read in chapter 18 is this.

Let's start. Let's read the first 10 verses. At that time, the disciples came to Jesus and said, who then is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? You can imagine why that question has arisen.

[3 : 39] You know, he's taken three of them off on their own. Anyway, we'll return to this. And he called a child to himself and set him before them and said, truly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever receives one such child in my name receives me. But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.

And the millstone in question was the one that was pictured just earlier. Woe to the world because of its stumbling blocks. For it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come.

But woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes. If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away from you.

It is better that you enter life crippled or lame than to have two hands or two feet and be cast into eternal fire. If your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw it from you.

[4 : 51] It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be cast into the fiery hell. See to it that you do not despise one of these little ones.

For I say to you that their angels in heaven are continually, sorry, their angels in heaven continually see the face of my father who is in heaven. And I'm going to save verse 11 for another week for reasons that will become clear on another week.

So you've got here. They've asked the question, who's going to be the greatest? And this is recorded in Matthew 18.

It's also recorded in Mark chapter 9 from verse 33. And it's also recorded in Luke's gospel chapter 9 from verse 46.

And when you read these other accounts, you discern a little more. So Matthew gives us the fact that they've turned up and asked Jesus a question.

[5 : 56] You know, the disciples came to Jesus and said, who then is the greatest? Now, Matthew's being quite kind, I think. In Mark's account, so if you turn to Mark 9, verse 33, they came to Capernaum.

And when he was in the house, he began to question them. So Matthew records that they asked this question of Jesus. But that question that they asked of Jesus was provoked by the fact that Jesus questioned them.

And Jesus's question was, what were you discussing on the way? But they kept silent. For on the way, they had discussed with one another which one of them was the greatest.

So they were having a pride discussion. I've got brownie points over you, mate. I've done this and I've done that. I think when it comes to it, I will be seen to be greater than you.

Sitting down, he called the 12 and said, if anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all. And then he took the child and set the child before them.

[7 : 00] So the point that Jesus makes in Mark's gospel is, if you want to be great, you've actually got to be humble. More of that in a moment.

And then in Luke 9, verse 46, I think it is, which puts it this way. An argument started among them as to which of them might be the greatest.

I don't know if any of you have been here, but I was part of a construction company. And when anybody got a promotion to a director level, the amount of posturing that went on in the room when the meeting was on with sort of puffing out of chests and trying to make out that they were greater than the one who'd just been promoted and all this.

What you rarely saw was real humility. This is just what men are like. This is the sinful nature of men. And Jesus always turns everything on its head and he says, if you want to be the greatest, you've got to be the least.

I'll draw your attention. I'm not going to study it this morning, but to John, John's gospel, chapter 13, beginning at verse 5, what you find is Jesus washing the disciples' feet.

[8 : 14] Now, when you read it through a Western mindset, you probably miss out on what some of that passage means. But the one thing you're likely to miss out on is the fact that washing feet was what was done by the most menial servant.

It wasn't even done by the general servants, but whoever was the lowest of the lowest of the low in the household would get to wash the feet. And washing the feet in those days where they didn't wear enclosed shoes and nice socks to keep their feet clean was absolutely disgusting.

It was not a job that anybody would want to put their hand up for and say, I'll do that. But Jesus did. He washed their feet as an example to them of what they needed to be to each other.

And so God's view of greatness is you have to be humble and you have to be prepared to serve. You don't give yourself airs and graces. If you're blessed enough to get to do this job that I do, so many men that do this job put themselves on pedestals.

I've said to you many times, don't ever put me on a pedestal, because if you do, God will come and kick the pedestal away and it will hurt me greatly. I've just got a job to do.

[9 : 33] That's all. I'm nothing special. And so what Jesus was effectively saying is you've got to be the least if you're going to be the greatest.

So go back to Matthew. How did he drive that point home? Back to Matthew 18. He drove the point home by putting a child in front of them.

We see that in verse 2. And he called a child to himself and set him before them and said, Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Whoa. So there's a couple of things here. First of all, conversion means you change your ways and become childlike. I found myself thinking this.

He took men who were being childish and asked them to be childlike. So what's the difference between childish and childlike? Well, I think you know, don't you?

[10 : 33] I mean, the, the, the, the, well, I'm greater than you are. No, you're not. I'm greater than you are. Type of discussion is childish. But to become childlike is to become like a child.

And therefore to realise your utter dependency on a greater power. Most of our children realise their utter dependency on their parents. Sometimes they even recognise that they're dependent on their grandparents.

But, but the point is that this, the word used for this, a child, was a word that means a small child, sort of like a toddler, a child that was very dependent.

Such a toddler does not go and change its own nappy. Does not even take itself off for a shower on its own. Probably wouldn't even change its clothes when they got torn and ripped and filthy.

Dependent upon the parents for everything. So in order to be great in the kingdom, you have to be childlike, not childish.

[11 : 39] Childlike. And we have to realise that we are nothing without him. It's one of the things that kind of gets under my skin and makes my skin crawl a bit is when you go into some churches and you get preachers who stand up there and say, I've got God's anointing.

The very fact that you stand up and shout that means you haven't. You know, where is the humility in that statement? And it's far healthier to be able to say, I can't do a thing unless God moves.

And we are praying at the moment for God to move in several circumstances. We're praying that God will move in his life and deal with his pain. We're praying that God will move with people who need to come to Christ.

We're praying that God will move in the arena of these besetting migraines that some people seem to get all the time. But actually, outside him, there's not a thing we can do.

And it's the realisation of that that should then make us pray more and make us reach in to him. So let's read on. Verse 4. Whoever then humbles himself as this child, and when you sit a toddler in front of you, that child is, I mean, it might be misbehaving or doing something rebellious or whatever, but the one thing it's not doing is claiming superiority over everybody else.

[12 : 59] It's too dependent for that. And whoever receives one such child in my name receives me. In other words, when we are saved and when we are adults in churches, we need to give ourselves to receiving children, to making sure children thrive.

It's one of the things that's exercised us from day one. And at this moment, it really grieves me that there's at least one family outside this church that would love to come, but their children are so young that we can't deal with them.

We haven't got the facilities or the scope or the people. And it grieves me to be in that situation. And I'm praying that God will change that because we should be and need to be embracing children.

And by children, I mean from zero to 18, at least. We need to be embracing children because when we reject children, we are in a sense rejecting him. And he makes it very clear.

But look at verse 6. And here is a scary verse, not just for anybody that's been doing this or done this in the past, I hope. I hope it's a past thing. But for us as a nation, whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.

[14 : 18] Firstly, what a horrible way to go. Several hundred pounds of concrete around the neck and buried in the depths of the sea whilst still alive. An awful way to go. And why does Jesus put it like that?

And I suspect it's because he wants us to understand the huge grief that he feels when faced with sin. That it's not a small thing to him.

Small sins to us are not small sins to him. His standard is absolute perfection. A standard to which he has promised to take us in eternity. But meanwhile, we shouldn't be trying to get away with stuff.

Now, I'm not in any way preaching that, you know, you've got to get saved by works. That's a different, you know, unless you're righteous, you won't be saved. That's not what this is saying. I think what Jesus is doing here is he's saying, understand just how huge a matter sin is in my mind.

And fight it. And we come to the fighting it, as we move on to stumbling blocks. It goes on and says, woe to the world because of its stumbling blocks.

[15 : 29] I just want to note, we're talking about children. Then we seem to go on to general talk about stumbling blocks for people. But don't forget that in that verse 10, it goes back to little ones.

So the passage is sandwiched. It's got little ones at the start and little ones at the end. So the predominant thing here is little ones. But he's exhorted us to be like little ones.

So in that respect, it applies to us. Because we're supposed to be like kids and not think we know it all. So woe to the world because of its stumbling blocks. For it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come.

But woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes. This passage scares me a bit. In the next chapter, in verse 13. And you'd think from the previous chapter they would have learned, wouldn't you?

But in the next chapter, in verse 13. Then some children were brought to him so that he might lay his hands on them and pray. And the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, let the children alone and do not hinder them coming to me.

[16:32] For the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these. So clearly he made a priority of children. But he also made a priority of disciples understanding that they should be childlike.

So when you think of stumbling blocks, we are living in an age where there are more stumbling blocks thrown in front of people than probably any other age that has ever lived.

I mean, to use a little bit of a silly example, which always makes people giggle until they think about what God has said about sin. A little while ago, this nation was turning to Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and Prime Minister Boris Johnson to tell us what a woman was.

And at that very moment when somebody who was senior in the nation should have been standing up and saying, of course we know what a woman is. Let's get rid of this utter nonsense that we're purveying and thrusting to upon our children and creating gender confusion amongst children.

And we're unpacking all this stuff onto the nation and the people in charge did not stand up and say, this is ridiculous, let's stop it. Unfortunately, very few churches did either.

[17:50] So we finish up in a situation where somebody comes along with a stumbling block and our government provides a load more stumbling blocks and the churches are throwing stumbling blocks out there to cause parents and children to trip up.

And instead of giving strong counsel to children to say, it's OK, you are a boy or you are a girl and you don't need to worry about changes.

We can deal with that as time goes on. You've got the rest of your life in front of you. No, let's take them to the Tavistock Clinic and give them surgeries. Ridiculous. That will not go unpunished. I don't claim to be a prophet.

But just when you think of the huge anathema sin is and the casting of stumbling blocks is before people, when you think of the anathema that is to God, those who do not repent of it will be judged.

One could look at the freedom with which people can get abortions. And I'll preempt what I'm going to say. I don't know if there's anybody in the room who's had an abortion as either mother or father sanctioned an abortion.

[19:00] But if you are repentant and if you are saved, God's grace is there for you and you don't need to fear. But governments who put their weight behind abortion are lining themselves up for the same kind of judgment that was poured out upon Sodom and Gomorrah.

And so I find myself somewhat fearful of being in a nation that has so avidly thrown away godly principles. And I'm old enough to know that within my lifetime that has changed.

That when I was at school, abortion was something that was frowned upon every day in school. You started the day's schooling with an act of worship.

It was God focused. Counsel given to, you know, sexual education for children was based upon marriage, not on sexual freedom. And as for the gender ideology stuff that hadn't even been thought of.

So stumbling blocks have come and we've just read stumbling blocks are inevitable. What we have to do is, A, make sure we don't fall over them. And B, don't be the ones that put the stumbling blocks out there.

[20 : 12] And unfortunately, the church at large is doing so. Is putting stuff out there that we shouldn't be entertaining. What's implied by what's stated and what we've read is God's outpouring of wrath on those who harm children, whether they're in or out of the womb.

So it's a sobering thing to consider. So one has to ask, how come the world doesn't fear God's judgment? Because it's promised, just as it was promised when Noah was building the ark, the judgment of God was promised.

In fact, he named his son in such a way that when he dies, it's going to come. There was a promise to the earth that the judgment of God was going to fall.

Well, I think that same promise is here when it with regard to children and stumbling blocks and so on. It's there. God has said he will he will judge to the extent that he will he will foist on them a judgment that is even worse than having a millstone around your neck and being thrown into the sea.

And that graphic description is put there for us to go. Well, better not do that then. It's not going to be easy, but they've missed it completely. Why? Well, firstly, many of these days claim that they don't even believe God exists.

[21 : 38] Now, actually, if you read Romans one, you will discover that everybody knows God exists in their heart of hearts. They just choose to ignore it. But in choosing to ignore it, they get given over.

Romans one says people are given over, captured by. So they say there's no God. I can do what I like. And they finish up ruled by the sin that they've gone into. Captured by it, given over to it.

Many believe he does exist, but he's so nice he wouldn't ever do something like this. That's a common thing. You know, there's not really a hell. There's not really a hell to fear. God wouldn't do that.

He's too loving. They completely misunderstand the God of justice. Many believers just don't take this word seriously anyway. They don't have this view that this is inerrant.

There are no errors in Scripture. You might find one or two because of translational issues. But in its original autograph, the word of God is completely inerrant.

[22 : 37] They don't believe that. And what this comes to really is mankind has eaten from the tree of the knowledge of good and of evil and has taken it upon themselves to judge what is good and what is evil.

A job that belongs to God. So when we make excuses for conduct, oh, it's okay to steal in those particular circumstances.

God doesn't make that allowance anywhere. He's very clear. His parameters are set out clearly. Then the passage moves on to if your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it from you.

It is better that you enter life crippled or lame than to have two hands or two feet and be cast into eternal fire. Now, this is extreme, isn't it? I'm tempted to steal.

So I better chop my hands off. And you think that's ridiculous. Well, yes and no. So what Jesus is doing here is he's trying to make it clear just how he views sin.

[23 : 42] And if something will stop you getting into heaven, you should hate it so badly you're prepared to go without your hands rather than entertain that. Or you're prepared to have your eye put out.

Now, I'm going to raise this is this is to do with sin generally, but also to do with stumbling blocks. And I'm going to raise a couple of issues that are common. One is men generally are they receive a lot of their temptation through their eyes.

And that can be all sorts. It's one of the reasons why pornography is so rife, because one can tempt men away from godliness with pornography.

But it isn't just pornography. It's, you know, they see shiny things and want them. So they steal them. You know, they see that car. I've got to have that car. That car is amazing.

Can't afford it. Go into debt for it, though, because I want the car. Do you see what I mean? It's all through the eyes that it's coming. And I remember there was a there was a chap. I think it was not a preacher.

[24 : 47] I refer to a lot. But David Pawson years ago was dealing with a man who was blind. And he said to the man who was blind, you know, in one sense, I envy you because all of my temptations come through my eyes.

And you will never suffer the temptations I suffer because of your blindness. That might seem a bit perverse to be envious of a man who is blind. But you can understand the heart cry for godliness.

I can't speak for you. I read about the end times when we will be in the new heaven, the new earth, and there will be no sin. My sin will be completely removed.

I can't wait to walk free of temptation. And I admit I haven't yet put out either of my eyes. But I think all of us, to some extent, wage war on our sins.

And if we if we're not doing so, we should be not in order to stay saved, but just in order to enjoy our relationship with God. So that tells you about a temptation of men.

[25 : 52] Now, the reason I've raised it is because I could have gone down the road of listing, murder, thieving, all the rest of it. And these are all things we know we should fight against. And they're all very, very obvious.

But sometimes we don't realize how easy it is to put a stumbling block in front of someone. And so I'll speak personally. I find it very unhelpful, for example, when I get locked into discussion with men that turns to be full of innuendos and mucky jokes.

I have enough struggles steering clear of my own sin. I don't want people helping me to stay in sin. So please don't tell those jokes when I'm there.

One doesn't always have the choice. But if you're a Christian, you shouldn't be telling those jokes anyway. In Ephesians 5, verse 3, it says, Let there be no filthy talk, coarse jesting or silly talk among you.

And we lapse so easily into that if we're not careful. Men do anyway. But you see, there's another one. The Bible says, if you turn with me to 1 Timothy 2, verse 9 and 10, it says this.

[27 : 10] Likewise, I want women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold pearls or costly garments, but rather by means of good works as is proper for women making a claim to godliness.

Modesty is something we expect from women who are making a claim to godliness. I could not resist this quote. Turn to Proverbs 11 and verse 22.

Now, get this. I thought if ever you wanted a scripture to bring you up sharp if you dress immodestly, it's this one. Right? Verse 22. As a ring of gold in a swine's snout, so is a beautiful woman who lacks discretion.

So, I remember when my kids were growing up and taking them to various things and I would see children, and by children I mean young teens, on the street with skirts that were actually more like pelmets than they were skirts.

They covered very little. And plunging necklines and lots of revealing stuff and behaving very indiscreetly. And what God would say is that is like a ring, a gold ring in the snout of a pig.

[28 : 29] And I think that is such an apt description because, girls, you are sometimes led to believe that when you flaunt yourselves and everybody pays attention to you because you do, that's a good thing because people like me.

And it plays on all your insecurities and it makes you a target for all sorts of unhealthy attention that you'd be better off without. And in the background, what God would be saying is, I gave you beauty for your husband one day.

And to everybody else, that beauty should remain a mystery. It's not for anyone else. I gave it to you for your husband. So let your beauty show through your character.

And a lot of these girls, given half a chance, have got great characters, but they've been led, they've had stumbling blocks thrown before them and they've been led to believe that this is a good thing to go out with showing off a cleavage or showing too much leg.

In fact, it used to be a fashion. Sharon reminded me of it when she was a schoolgirl. They used to put their school uniform on and then on the way to school, they'd roll the waistband down so that the skirt got shorter.

[29 : 47] Been there, done that. But why do you do that? Well, because there's been a stumbling block thrown in front of you that says, if you don't do that, you will be unpopular.

You'll be seen as kind of staid and boring if you don't become a bit risqué. Okay, we want our girls to retain their innocence right through to the day they're married, if we can.

It's harder and harder in our current society because of stumbling blocks. Now, when that stumbling block is thrown in front of you girls and you respond to it, we men have a stumbling block caused by what you've done because we've got these semi-naked women walking about that represent a visual temptation to us.

It'd be more helpful if you didn't. Wearing clothes that look as if they've been put on with a paintbrush is not helpful. Well, why should I help? You will find this will come across like, you know, man should just learn to live with it.

Well, we do learn to live with it, but we shouldn't have to because according to God, what we're looking at is the equivalent of a gold ring in the nose of a pig. Do you follow the... So if you have any influence over girls, encourage them to cover up their assets and get them to keep them for their husband because it's for that special relationship.

[31 : 11] It's for no one else. I shouldn't have the privilege of looking upon such stuff and then having to deal with the temptation that it might provide me. And it doesn't matter how old you get.

You don't become less tempted because you're a bit older. So we read that in 1 Timothy 2, verse 9 and 10. You will find a similar point made in 1 Peter 3.

Go there. Verses 2 to 5. In fact, you'll have to read verse 1 because verse 2 is the middle of a sentence. In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives.

Now, there's a background lesson there that you ladies can lead men towards righteousness with the way you portray yourselves and your character.

Let's read on. They can be won without a word by the behavior of their wives as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior. Your adornment must not be merely external braiding the hair and wearing gold jewelry and putting on dresses, but let it be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God.

[32 : 30] For in this way, in former times, the holy women also who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands. So we note here that the key in this time was the way you portray yourselves can affect your husband's walk with God.

But how much more is it not the case that those kids out there who desperately need saving, who are at the moment beset by temptation and sin, when you parade yourself in front of them, you're helping them to stay out of the kingdom of God, not helping them to move into it.

One of the questions that's likely to come up is, so why are you different? Why don't you do what all the others do? Well, because I don't want to be a gold ring in the nose of a pig.

It's going to be my favourite quotation for this year. That said, there's nothing wrong with looking your best. You can look your best without looking available, should we say.

Back to Matthew. Let's finish off in Matthew. When you get the notes for this, you'll find that they bear very little relation to everything I've said. It's not quite true, but there's truth in it.

[33 : 51] So what we've had is, if your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw it from you. It's better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be cast into the fiery hell.

Now, of course, if you're saved and you get into sin, you will not be cast into the fiery hell. But what can happen is you can have this life cut short. If you persistently and rebelliously sin against God, he can take you home.

But of course, you're not just, you're not even necessarily witnessing to Christians. What you're also doing is witnessing to those who are not Christians. You're... Verse 10.

See that you do not despise one of these little ones. The word despise means to distance yourself from, means to cast aside and to just despise.

You just think of the outpouring of God's judgment that's going to come from the likes of... What was his name? It was Epstein, the island. Epstein, the island. Where he trafficked, effectively children, slightly older children, but he trafficked children out there, plied them with all sorts to get them to be available for this gang of men, some of whom were very high flyers in society, which lets you realise why the supposed backbone of our society is not standing up and saying, enough.

[35 : 22] Whether you like Trump or hate him, what he's doing at the moment is exactly that. He's bringing out the fact that all these things have got to stop. And child trafficking is one of the things that he is coming down on like a ton of bricks.

But see that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I say to you that their angels in heaven continually see the face of my father who is in heaven.

So a little bit of instruction. Every child is angelically protected, which does leave you thinking, my goodness, how do some children finish up in such huge besetting difficulty where they do get trafficked or they become child prostitutes or gangs of thieves or belong to murderous gangs on the streets or any of those things?

How do children finish up there? The answer is, I have no idea. But that protection is there for them. And secondly, when you mess with kids, you start messing with angelic forces that will bring God's judgment upon you.

So we should fear handling our children wrongly. And I don't mean be scared so much as be in awe of just how much God loves kids.

[36 : 41] And I wasn't going to do this. And I'll return to it next week anyway. But verse 11, For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost. As the chapter goes on, we get into the sort of the lost sheep.

Or you could view it as the searching shepherd, depending on which view you take. But just to finish up today, the lost, Jesus coming to save that which was lost.

At the fall of man, God lost humanity. Now, he didn't lose us as in, oh, I wonder where they've gone. Not that kind of lost. But lost fellowship with them.

Lost closeness. Lost intimacy with them. So the Son of Man coming to save that which was lost looks for a restoration of that intimacy that was lost.

And I think what God is doing with this passage we've just read is encouraging us to make sure our children are taken into that intimacy with God along with us. That we don't treat them as a separate.

[37 : 50] I mean, we have children's church and things like that. But there are many churches where the children don't do any learning about God. They go and play for an hour while the sermon is preached. They go and do colouring. And one of the reasons we invested in a curriculum because we want our children to be taught the things of God.

And that's me done. So, Father, I thank you for this word. Challenging though it is. And I do pray we will take it to heart. We will understand how awful sin is in your eyes.

And how it is something with which we should do battle. That we should seek first the kingdom of God and then all these things will be added unto us. That we should seek righteousness.

Pursue righteousness. And even though we are not going to be perfect in this life, we should seek to improve our fellowship with one another and with you by righteous conduct.

And we would ask you to help us and empower us to succeed in that. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.