

Loving Enough to “Go” – Matthew 18:15-18

What is the greatest way you can show someone you love them? Obviously there are the grand gestures: the marriage proposals or the wedding vows. But then again, many say it's just the little things that matter. Remembering a birthday, visiting someone when they're sick in the hospital, sending a card. Or sometimes it's just sitting down and listening. If you love your family and friends enough, you just naturally find yourself doing those types of things right?

So here's a question I want you to consider this morning, do you love your friends and family enough to point their sins? “Wait a minute pastor, did you say ‘loving’...because that sounds kind of like an arrogant thing to do!” That's the kind of action that leads to your friendships going up in flames.

Do friends point out each other's sins? Jesus says they do, at least the good ones do. And today he tells you why, even though it is so difficult and so often misunderstood, brotherly admonition is sometimes one of the most loving things you can do for a friend, a sibling, or even for your own child. Listen to what he says this morning in [Matthew 18 \(text here.\)](#)

Today's lesson is hard. Not only is it an extremely difficult thing to apply as a body of believers and as individual Christians, but it's also hard to reconcile these words with Jesus' other words in Matthew. Earlier in Matthew 7 Jesus says, **“do not judge, or you too will be judged.”** He also tells us in Matthew 13 Do not try to pull out the “weeds” from the church, speaking of the hypocrites secretly living among us in the church. Because in doing so, you can damage the “wheat,” the true Christians.

So how can we lovingly point out sins without judging? How do we properly apply Matthew 18, while following all of Jesus' words in Matthew?

The important thing to keep in mind as we go through this text this morning is this: Jesus' message in these verses of Matthew isn't primarily about excommunication, church discipline, or removing members who we think are hypocrites. Matthew 18 is not about judging someone's heart, for if it were, it would contradict Matthew 13, and 7. No this section is about one thing and one thing only: loving and caring enough for a needy, wandering brother or sister, that you are willing to do something for them that may save them eternally, even if it costs you a friendship. You see, this section of scripture is a continuation of the beginning of Matthew 18 where Jesus talks about the “greatest” in the kingdom of heaven as being the “neediest.” And the sinner in today's section is most certainly in need of a good friend who is willing to show an incredible act of love.

Whether we go to a believer and he repents, or the result of countless attempts is church discipline, the end goal is the same: To reach out and love those who, according to the strange and gracious standards of Jesus, are the most important and greatest of all...the neediest! And Jesus shows us how important and loving it is to do this in this section. Which is why we're going to go through this step by step:

Starting in verse 15, when one of your believing brothers or sisters sins, Jesus has one word for you. The word is not “hope” that it will go away all on its own, “say” that you'd rather not get involved, or “wait” until the sinner comes to you. He says **“Go”** and point out the fault. He doesn't make any conditions. He doesn't say to go if it's murder but to stay if it's gossiping. He doesn't tell you to go if you've never done that sin before, but hold your tongue if you have. **“If your brother or sister^[b] sins,^[c] go and point out their fault, just between the two of you.”** Now you might think, “hey that's a pastor's job,” and you're right it is! But Jesus says it's yours too. And what's more, if you don't, then guess who else has now sinned? You.

Now, that is hard, isn't it? And for a couple reasons. Firstly, it never feels good to point out someone's mistakes, and it's especially difficult when it's a family member or close friend. It makes you uncomfortable. It creates confrontation where there might have been peace. It could even ruin your relationship! The truth is, most people tend not to point out sin because of the damage it can do to the comfort level of their own life.

But consider the damage it does to your loved one if you let sin go. Think of Judas, when he betrayed Jesus, the shine of that silver was so bright that it blinded him from seeing the danger he was really in. And you know that, while 2000 years separated us from him, there is nothing that has changed. It may not be silver that blinds us, but dollar bills, alcohol, dirty websites, adultery, a disregard for God's Word, or whatever other

pleasures we go after at the expense of our morality. If it gives your loved one pleasure now but is going to make them kiss the pavement of hell later, wouldn't you want them to know?

Is it arrogant to point out a person's sin if the goal is to get them back on the track to salvation? Jesus says that, as difficult as it is, reaching out to his wandering sheep is one of the most loving things you can do.

And when you do reach out, when they recognize their fault and turn back, your job is not yet done. Jesus says in Luke ***if they repent, forgive them*** and treat them as if they had never sinned. And if this happens, Jesus says, "You've won! Job's done, complete!" But if they repent, and you keep reminding them of what they've done, it's like you're kicking them back out of the sheep pen.

Why did Judas hang himself? Because no one took away his guilt. After he was sorry for his sin, the chief priests told him, ***"what's this to us, that's your responsibility."*** No one told him he was forgiven. This text is a really difficult one to follow because it tests both our courage and our pride.

People kill Christians. Others deny they've ever heard of him. Some cheat their customers to take more money for themselves. And those are just Jesus' disciples, all of whom are forgiven. Today, more than 4000 kids are murdered every day with abortion. People rape. They molest children. People killed his prophets and crucified his child; and all those are sins which are included in his promise to purify those who repent of any and every sin.

Whatever sin you have committed, however long it has taken to prick your heart and turn to him; after God has invested so much time, effort, blood, and life into winning you back, he is not going to give you up by piling on the guilt. As far as the east is from the west, he removes it from you, and he never brings it up again, which is exactly what Jesus calls us to do. And, granted, sometimes people won't listen to you, which is why Jesus gives us a step two.

(16) But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.'

Step two is not step one. Make sure that's clear today. Involving other people is step two. Step one when you see someone sin is not to tell your friends, your coworkers, and your mother about it. It's not to call the pastor. It is not to call a friend on the phone and get advice about what to do. The reason God gave us his law in written form is so that each of us as individuals would be able to learn it, to evaluate people's actions against it, and to call a spade a spade, a sin a sin. The number one reason people talk to a friend before talking to the person who sinned is not because they don't know whether or not it was a sin. It is because they're scared to confront the person.

Confront the person. They will react in one of two ways. They will repent and be won over or they will ignore you and continue to sin, which happens often. And if they don't listen to you, sometimes you need to go to step two, and if that fails, then Jesus gives us step three.

(17) If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector. (18) I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

Step three is tough. It doesn't happen often, but if the person refuses to see God's law in steps one or two, step three needs to happen. Step three is for you and the church to treat them like an unbeliever. That sounds really harsh doesn't it? But if they refuse to believe what God's Word says about them after you and others have pointed out where God speaks of it, aren't they refusing God? And doesn't that make them unbelievers? This is excommunication. Now let's be clear: The message of excommunication is not, "We're shunning you and will never talk again, we're punishing you and don't want you to be a part of our church because of what you did" but rather, "We believe that your relationship with God is more important than your relationship with me, this church, or anyone else."

Is this too harsh? Is this too much? Is it right to be that serious about every sin?

Ask God. How many sins caused Jesus to be sent to this earth? One sin was the difference between Adam and Eve's heaven and hell. One sin, and one sin that many would categorize as a pretty minor sin, brought their shame. One sin made them scared. One sin turned God from a loving Father to an angry judge.

One sin made him search out Adam and Eve in the garden. It was one sin and only one sin that caused the crucifixion. And if it would have been you who had committed that one sin, the Father would have made the same one promise that the blood of Jesus, his Son, would purify you from it.

One sin made all the difference. And it can today too. I sin. And I need you, whether you are my wife, my children, my friends, or complete strangers, for the sake of my soul, I need you to call a sin a sin, remind me of my sins, but then I also need you to assure me of forgiveness of those sins when I repent. And you need me and everyone else here to do the same for you. When we let sin go, this building becomes nothing more than a temporary safe haven for people who are going to be barbequed with the devil. But when this is practiced, this building becomes an eternal hospital for all those longing to be forgiven.

It's not hypocritical to point out sin. It's not judgmental. It's not arrogant. It is the toughest but most necessary aspect of Christian love when it is done out of love.

As a Christian, you speak for God, and not a judgmental, arrogant, angry, I'm-going-to-get-you God, but a God who wants absolutely nothing, not even one sin, to separate him from you. We are brothers. We are sisters, all of the same Father, who is serious about his love for you. Today he calls you to be serious about your love for one another.

The legendary coach Vince Lombardi famously said, "Winning isn't everything, it's the only thing." Jesus wants us to think about the soul of our fallen brother or sister today in that manner. ***"If he listens to you, you have won your brother over."*** The soul of the sinner is a prize to be won back. Thank God, that Jesus didn't give up when someone didn't listen to him. No, winning wasn't everything to Jesus, it was the only thing. He considered us such a prize that he was willing to suffer and die to win us back. That was the greatest act of love Jesus showed to you.

So what's the greatest way you can show love to someone else? Sometimes it's a hospital visit, sometimes it's a card. But sometimes it's to remind them of their greatest need. It takes a lot of courage to "Go," many times you'll see no results, but when you go with a heart solely motivated to bring a person back, it will always be nothing but an act of love for a soul that is deeply loved by their Lord.

There may be a person in your life today or in the future who needs this. When that day comes, remember Jesus love for you, the lost, and love enough to Go.