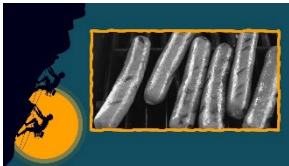




If Your Brother Sins Against You...

Push Me to Be Better #2 • August 23, 2026

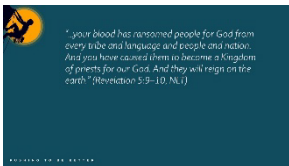
Opening



Here's the scenario: You're at a Labor Day gathering with loved ones, enjoying some hot dogs on the grill, listening to some music and soaking up the last bit of sunshine before the pool is shut down for the winter season. Everyone has been laughing, and they laugh even harder when the host realizes that the dogs have been cooking longer than he thought. They aren't just done. They are *done*. Thankfully you have some hamburgers, too, and dinner will not be a total waste. But the hot dogs are clearly and appropriately headed to the trash!

The host, as he opens the trash can lid, makes an offhand comment about those “dark skinned” hotdogs, and he proceeds to say...more. It's a joke that only you can really hear, and one that you don't particularly like. Honestly, it is offensive. You know it's not the first time he's said something like this. You've suspected a bit of racial prejudice and undertone in previous conversations, but often you've written it off to a misunderstanding or poor humor. This time, though, the statement is too clear to be misunderstood.

You know that your shared Christian faith with this man does not allow for such disrespect of different races. You know that Revelation 5:9-10 paints a picture of our future that *destroys* racism and looks forward to an ethnically diverse eternity.



“...your blood has ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. And you have caused them to become a Kingdom of priests for our God. And they will reign on the earth.” (Revelation 5:9-10, NLT)

Jesus' blood was shed for whites, blacks, Hispanics, Filipinos, French, Russians, Tutsis, Māori, Japanese and Jews. The shades of melanin and the texture of hair make no difference to our Savior; all are loved by Him and are offered the same grace and mercy through the cross! (Amen?)

But your brother in Christ is content to say bigoted things unapologetically and without remorse. He has already walked over to have another conversation near the pool, seemingly unaware of how uncomfortable his comments just made things.

What do you do?



Have you ever been in a similar position? Maybe you came face to face with this – with subtle or not-so-subtle racism. Maybe it was an inappropriate sexual comment or gesture. Maybe it was a quick, hot-tempered reaction that went unchecked. Or maybe it was a clean and calm comment, except it contradicted apostolic truth – denying our Savior, or reducing Him to one of many “coexisting” options.

What do you do when you know someone should be corrected?

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Recap



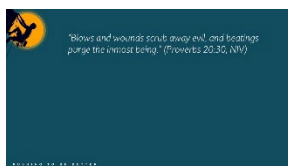
Last week we began a sermon series on the subject of **accountability**. We made it clear that, as Christians, we need to push each other to be better. We need to be willing to say hard things (wisely) when it is needed. We must expect others to do that for us...and we must do that for others.

We gave some general guidance on the subject last week, but this week I want to go further and start talking about specifics. Last week was, “*I **must** say something.*” This week is, “*What **specifically** do I say?*”

If you are at that picnic, you know that you need to push your brother to be better. *But how do you say it?*

Church, this is hard stuff. It might step on your toes. If so, I hope you’re wearing **flip-flops** instead of **steel-toed** boots. Don’t block out the pain – embrace it! Because Proverbs 20:30 says,

“Blows and wounds scrub away evil, and beatings purge the inmost being.” (Proverbs 20:30, NIV)



Sometimes getting beat up by Scripture is uncomfortable...but it’s always right and good! We make ourselves better when we obey. We make our *church* better when we obey. So, if we want to get better, we

need to accept Scripture's tough advice and put these behaviors into practice – behaviors like we find in Matthew 18.

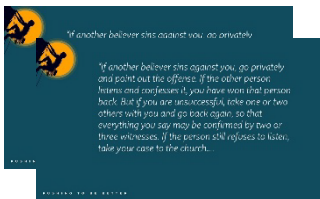
Matthew 18

If you have your Bible with you, please turn to Matthew 18:15-20. This is a well-known passage where Jesus speaks about discipline and correction.

Whenever we hear words from Jesus, those are the best words to listen to. If He tells us how to pray (like in Matthew 6), we pray in that manner. If He tells us how to prepare for His return, we prepare.

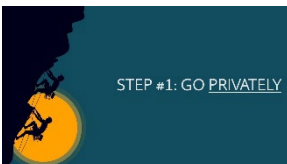
And if Jesus talks about how to confront someone, His words need to become our practice.

Let's hear from Jesus as He shares the **process for pushing others to be better**:



“If another believer sins against you, go privately and point out the offense. If the other person listens and confesses it, you have won that person back. But if you are unsuccessful, take one or two others with you and go back again, so that everything you say may be confirmed by two or three witnesses. If the person still refuses to listen, take your case to the church. Then if he or she won’t accept the church’s decision, treat that person as a pagan or a corrupt tax collector. “I tell you the truth, whatever you forbid on earth will be forbidden in heaven, and whatever you permit on earth will be permitted in heaven. “I also tell you this: If two of you agree here on earth concerning anything you ask, my Father in heaven will do it for you. For where two or three gather together as my followers, I am there among them.”

(Matthew 18:15–20, NLT)



Step #1: Go Privately

What do you do when you know someone should be corrected?

Step #1 is to “Go to them privately.” Listen to verse 15 again:



“If another believer sins against you, go privately and point out the offense. If the other person listens and confesses it, you have won that person back.” (Matthew 18:15, NLT)

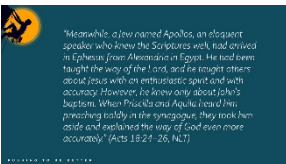
Private speech, or one-on-one speech, is a great first step!

- It’s **quiet**. It keeps unnecessary people from getting involved.
- It’s **personal**. It shows concern for the individual.
- It’s **small**. It’s less likely to be viewed as an attack.

Back at the picnic, you decide that you can’t stay silent. You pray (hard!) but also you look for an opening when your friend has moved away from everyone else. You say, “Hey, I’ve noticed you’ve been saying some stuff that sounds like you’re putting down black people. I don’t think it would build up our church family if they heard you saying it...especially since some in our church family are black! Could you check your heart on that issue, or at least have more discernment in what you are saying?”

Jesus doesn’t give lots of pointers here, but it’s safe to say a Holy-Spirit-reliant heart and an approach sharing facts (not just emotion) would be preferred. We must be mature and helpful, confronting the person while remaining aware we are *family* in Christ.

Those tough conversations can be scary! But if you talk to someone privately, remember that good things can happen! Scripture shares a great example of success in the book of Acts.¹



“Meanwhile, a Jew named Apollos, an eloquent speaker who knew the Scriptures well, had arrived in Ephesus from Alexandria in Egypt. He had been taught the way of the Lord, and he taught others about Jesus with an enthusiastic spirit and with accuracy. However, he knew only about John’s baptism. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him preaching boldly in the synagogue, they took him aside and explained the way of God even more accurately.” (Acts 18:24–26, NLT)

¹ Technically, it is two people approaching another, but a married couple often counts like a 1-on-1...so I’m using it! Lol

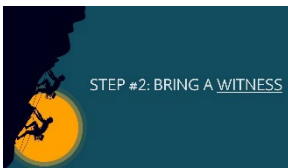
In that situation, Apollos received a **private** doctrinal correction...and it went well! Apollos listened, adjusted his teaching, and was soon used powerfully in the early church!

(Notice that Priscilla and Aquila did not gossip about it for days with their friends. Nor did they record the conversation and then broadcast it on TikTok. They simply “took him aside” privately and shared truth.)

Public speech is too dangerous and hurtful to risk on a first encounter. Instead, a **private** one-on-one appointment is better.

If the person backs down, repents, or apologizes...great! Forgive and move on.

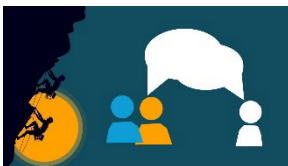
But if they resist, deny, reject, or refuse... you have the responsibility to go further.



Step #2: Bring a Witness

What do you do when you know someone should be corrected?

Step #2 is to “bring a witness.”



Your private conversation at the picnic ended with irritation, not repentance. Your brother in Christ said he didn’t think his jokes or attitude were a problem. Sure, he might say something off-color, but he’s not going to change, ‘thank you very much.’

It was awkward.

So, you show up a week later with two friends. They are big. They are musclebound. They are intimidating. One is carrying a baseball bat, smacking it into the palm of his hand in a threatening way. “*I don’t think you quite understood what I was saying,*” you say menacingly.

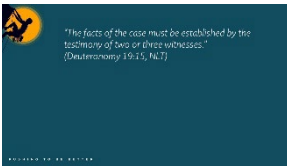
OK, that is not really the next step. If things don’t go well, bullying intimidation is not the goal. Forceful compliance and “persuasion” aren’t on Jesus’ mind as He continues talking. Listen to the next step in Matthew 18.

“But if you are unsuccessful, take one or two others with you and go back again, so that everything you say may be confirmed by two or three witnesses.” (Matthew 18:16, NLT)

Your additional people aren’t there to add pressure. They are there to provide **confirmation**.

In American courtrooms, there are rules of evidence whereby *words* and *items* verify the truth of a situation. A friend overhears a threat to kill someone; an investigator finds a murder weapon in the suspects’ home; a neighbor’s video camera shows the suspect entering the victim’s home at night. Those “witnesses” provide **confirmation** that the accusation of murder is right.

In Bible times, witnesses were equally important. It was commonly accepted that you needed the testimony of two or three witnesses to **confirm** a claim. Jesus’ words echo the Old Testament.

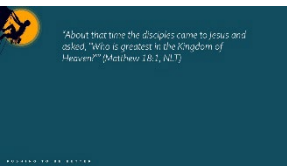


“The facts of the case must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.” (Deuteronomy 19:15, NLT)

So, does Jesus intend for us to pile up testimony so we can convict the person as guilty?

Not quite.

I need you to understand the heart of this entire passage. Matthew 18 is not written as a **rulebook** for church discipline; it is written as a **response** to a question.



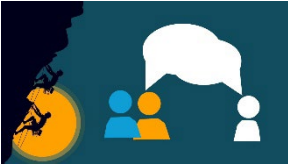
“About that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Who is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?”” (Matthew 18:1, NLT)

“Who is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?” Jesus answers that question in several ways. Through examples, discourse, warnings, parables, and more, Jesus expresses care for those who are pulled away, misguided, or lost. He prescribes radical effort and forgiveness.

His answer to the question “*who is greatest in the Kingdom*” is simple: the one who is concerned about **humbly finding and restoring the lost**...in light of the fact that we, too, were humbly found and restored

when we were lost... *THAT* is the person who is greatest in God's kingdom!

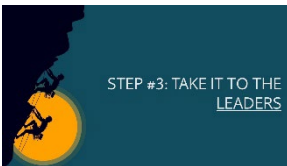
The comments about accountability and "church discipline" Jesus makes in Matthew 18 do not scream order and power. No, they express care for those who are wayward – care to humbly bring them back to God...and to help them renew fellowship with those who love God.



Two or three extra witnesses don't simply add pressure. They add **confirmation**. They ensure that *your* claims about that person's sins aren't misguided (*i.e. it's actually sin, not just a difference of opinion*)...and they make sure that *the other person's* refusal to repent is actually refusal (*i.e. not a misunderstanding, or an old habit they are in the process of fixing, albeit slowly*).

If the person backs down, repents, or apologizes...great! Forgive and move on.

But if they resist, deny, reject, or refuse... you have the responsibility to go further.



Step #3: Take it to the Leaders

You love your brother enough that you don't quit. Your meeting with a mutual friend was cordial...but he doubled down on some of his racially charged language. Your mutual friend agrees afterward – there is a sinful heart issue going on, and it is out of line with Christ.

What do you do now?

Step #3 is to "take it to the leaders."

"If the person still refuses to listen, take your case to the church..." (Matthew 18:17, NLT)

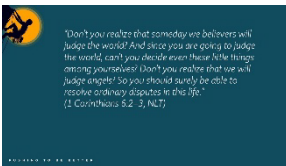
Ugh. Seriously? Do I really need to make a big deal of it?

Yes.

Up to this point, the responsibility has been **personal**. *****And I need you to hear this – the ball is in YOUR court to do the first two steps!**
*** When YOU see sin that needs to be addressed, you don't need *my*



permission or the *Elders'* permission to confront it privately. You don't need any of us to get involved *before* you find a friend or two to join you...because YOU are empowered by the same Holy Spirit and saved by the same Savior! You are a saint – someone being made holy by God! You are expected to have enough Christian wisdom to handle such situations. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 6,



“Don’t you realize that someday we believers will judge the world? And since you are going to judge the world, can’t you decide even these little things among yourselves? Don’t you realize that we will judge angels? So you should surely be able to resolve ordinary disputes in this life.”

(1 Corinthians 6:2–3, NLT)

You have the same Bible, same tools and same spiritual power...and the same responsibility to address sin on your own. So, this next step isn't because you need the “big boys” to help out. Instead, this is another action keeping with the same spirit of “restoring the lost” – if they won't listen to *a few*, maybe they will listen to *many*.



At TCC, our leadership has adopted Matthew 18 as our guiding process for dealing with sin issues in the church. We expect the church to be talking to each other when sin shows up – when we see each other failing to follow Jesus' teachings, teaching falsely, creating division, speaking blasphemy, sinning without repentance, engaging in immorality or idolatry or slanderous talk, being a drunkard or a swindler, facing moral failure, especially among leadership, living idly, gossiping, consistently failing to attend corporate worship, and more.²

If **private conversation** and **further conversation with another** does not result in a change of heart, it's time to make a big deal of it and take it to the church.

“Take the case to the church” initially means taking the conversation to the Elders so we can meet with both parties and witnesses. Our Elders typically meet twice a month (1st and 3rd Thursdays at 7:00 PM) and the meeting is open to

² See Policy on church discipline for more Bible passages that relate.

anyone. When you need us, call to get on the agenda or just come by (with both parties) and let's talk and hash it out.

Please do not ignore this step! It's not because the Elders are better. It's not because the Elders love conflict and potential drama. It's not because our Elders are perfect in how this process has been applied to people and situations over the years.

It's simply because our leaders have the **responsibility** to shepherd our flock and protect them. They need to know if there is a situation that is actively permitting evil or sin to flourish in the life of the congregation. They need the opportunity to push back for the sake of the church.

And yes, the goal is still repentance, restoration and forgiveness at each and every step in this process! We want every knee humbly bowed to Jesus as we work through the situation. We pray that the gospel truth will soften hearts, not harden them.

But if your brother in Christ is adamant in telling the Elders that he will continue to view his darker-skinned church members as inferior and chooses to continue speaking ill of them...

Step #4: Part Ways

What do you do finally?

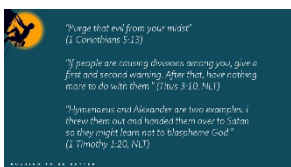
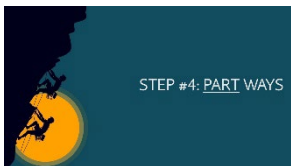
Step #4 is to "part ways."

"... Then if he or she won't accept the church's decision, treat that person as a pagan or a corrupt tax collector." (Matthew 18:17, NLT)

In other words, it is time to separate – to keep them at arm's length. No longer arguing, no longer pleading. No longer inviting them over for dinner. Not allowing that corruption to spill into the life of the church. Instead, as Scripture says,

"Purge that evil from your midst" (1 Corinthians 5:13)

Handle it like the New Testament church handled it.



“If people are causing divisions among you, give a first and second warning. After that, have nothing more to do with them.” (Titus 3:10, NLT)

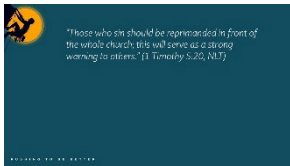
“Hymenaeus and Alexander are two examples. I threw them out and handed them over to Satan so they might learn not to blaspheme God.” (1 Timothy 1:20, NLT)

Let me be clear. This SUCKS.³ We don’t want it to get to this point! No one does. But a church that winks at sin... or yawns at rebellion... or tolerates Satan’s lies... isn’t much of a church. It’s not honoring Jesus.

A tough stance might cause drama and anger and rumors and pain.

But...

...couldn’t it also cause remorse and repentance? Couldn’t it help people know that worshiping the Lord isn’t a game or a hobby?



“Those who sin should be reprimanded in front of the whole church; this will serve as a strong warning to others.” (1 Timothy 5:20, NLT)

Again, none of this is done to flaunt power. It is only done to make sure that Bride of Christ is spotless. It is only done to help those who *claim* Jesus as Lord to live in *submission* to Jesus as Lord.



Your brother listens to all the pain his words are causing, and he stops before he walks out the door. “I’m ticked off at this,” he says.

“But...arrgh...maybe I *have* said some stuff that crossed a line.

Maybe, if you guys are this serious about it, I should talk to someone more about it... and figure out how to be less...biased? I dunno.”

The group celebrates this change of heart and embraces him!

Conclusion

Most situations will never get here. Most of us, if corrected, will quickly admit our sin and pray for the Holy Spirit’s assistance to help us live more patiently and kindly and righteously.

³ Can I say that word?

If a person backs down, repents, or apologizes...awesome!
Forgive and rejoice! Jesus would agree! Repentance and restoration are the goals.



But if someone keeps refusing correction, we must escalate our response as a church. The process in Matthew 18 gives us a godly approach for when you need to push someone to be better.

May you never have to use it!

But if you must, take Jesus' words and confidently use *His process* to bravely, courageously and lovingly push your brothers and sisters to be better!

Prayer

Invitation

A holy God deserves a church that pursues holiness.

Is there any situation you need to confront today...for HIS sake and for the sake of HIS church? If so, pray diligently for that person before you talk to them!

Spend some time doing that as we sing our invitation song, "Holy Holy Holy."

Sermon Notes

The Process for Pushing Someone to Be Better

Step #1: Go Privately

(Matthew 18:15; Acts 18:24–26)

Step #2: Bring a Witness

(Matthew 18:16; Deuteronomy 19:15; Matthew 18:1)

Step #3: Take it to the Leaders

(Matthew 18:17; 1 Corinthians 6:2-3)

Step #4: Part Ways

(Matthew 18:17; 1 Corinthians 5:13; Titus 3:10; 1 Timothy 1:20; 5:20)

Sermon Discussion Questions

- Have you been in any situation recently where you should have challenged another believer's sin personally? Did you? If you did, how did it go? If you didn't, why didn't you?
- Read Matthew 18:15-20. Why is it good to have Jesus' own words to use as a guide for admonishing our brothers and sisters in the faith?
- What is the first step in confrontation (Matthew 18:15)? Why is private conversation better than public?
- Read Matthew 18:15 again. If the person agrees with you (e.g. *apologizes, repents, admits a change is needed*), what should your reaction be? Why must we be quick to accept them when they listen to correction?
- What is the second step in confrontation (Matthew 18:16)? What is the purpose of bringing others along? Should you want an objective voice with you, or someone who is totally on your side of the argument? Why?
- If the situation is brought to the church (18:17), how can such a conversation with the elders help to protect the congregation?
- Why is parting ways with a person sometimes the best decision for the church? Is it more important to keep sin from infecting the church, or to keep the sinner happy? Explain.
- Is there any situation you need to confront today? If so, pray diligently for that person before you talk to them!