



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

REDISCOVER CHURCH

Staying Healthy Requires Discipline

Matthew 18:15–20

Tim Badal | October 15, 2023



Turn in your Bible to Matthew 18. We'll be there and also in 1 Corinthians 5. We'll use these as a springboard in our discussion as we continue to "Rediscover Church." We'll be rediscovering things that may have fallen into inactivity, things we haven't thought about or practiced for some time.

We have used this series to reacquaint ourselves with things that may have become ritual or rote, or maybe because we haven't done them and have forgotten all about them. So your elders thought it would be good for us to remind ourselves of these important things that make the church, the church. Things that help us understand the place of the church in our lives and in our world today.

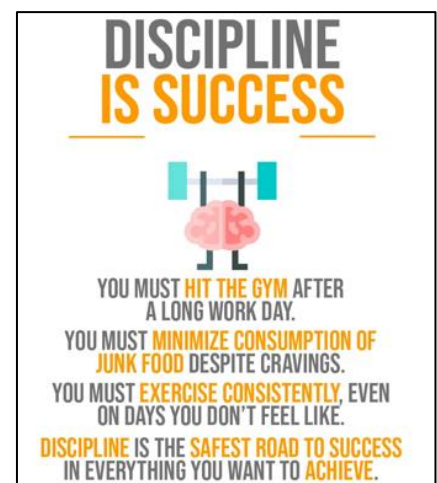
At the beginning of each sermon, we have been reminded of what the church is. In the opening video, we've been given a definition of church, then each week we've been tackling a part of that definition. This week we come to the idea that the church is a group of Christians who are to display God's holiness and love.

I want you to know right away that one of the purposes of the church and your involvement in it is to display Who God is to a watching world. I know you don't feel like this is happening, but you are displaying to the community around us Who God is, how holy God is, as well as how loving and kind God is to His creation. We do this by living life with one another. So if we're going to show the world that God is holy, then it's incumbent upon us to be holy. If we're going to show the world that God is loving, then it's important that we ourselves are loving. One of the reasons why the world calls us hypocrites is because we talk about the holiness of God and the love of God, but we don't practice them. So the watching world says, "Whatever you're offering, you can keep it."

A healthy and vibrant church is a church that declares and demonstrates the holiness of God through our own holiness. It also demonstrates the love God through the way we love not only those closest to us, but those who are in the world. This is what we have to rediscover as a church. It's not so much that we've lost it; we need to rediscover it so we don't lose it. We need to reacquaint ourselves with it so we don't forget it—that takes discipline.

For us to be successful in anything, it takes discipline. When it comes to our physical bodies, it takes discipline if we want them to be healthy. It takes discipline to be in shape.

I like what one person has said: "Discipline is success. You must hit the gym after a long workday. You must minimize consumption of junk food despite cravings. You must exercise consistently, even on days you don't feel like it." Then notice what he says at the end: "Discipline is the safest road to success in everything you want to achieve." So discipline doesn't just apply to our physical bodies; it's in everything we want to achieve.



Discipline for School Students

- 1 Focusing on homework and projects
- 2 Stress-free environment with a regulated schedule
- 3 Getting better grades with routine learning
- 4 Staying active for long
- 5 Time management for diverse activities
- 6 Improving the ability to listen in the classroom

things so you can say yes to other things. It takes discipline in the moment, in the present, to enjoy something greater in the future.

I can talk about discipline *ad nauseum*. Wherever you want to find success, in every avenue—whether it's work or play—it takes discipline.

So what is the church? As followers of Jesus Christ, we want to be a healthy, vibrant church. We want to be a church that gives God glory. We want to be a church that accomplishes what God wants us to do. As we've seen in these three examples, the way to success in any pursuit is discipline. Therefore, for the church to be vibrant and healthy—more importantly for it to be holy—it requires discipline.

As we'll see today, the very mention of practicing discipline often results in people pushing it away. So you'll understand this is not just me coming at this subject with my agenda, let's spend some time in God's Word. This is an agenda that the Bible itself brings forth.

We'll start by reading Matthew 18:15-20. This is Jesus talking to His disciples—and to us today. Here's what He says:

¹⁵ "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. ¹⁶ But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. ¹⁹ Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them."

We use this Scripture when attendance is really bad on a Sunday morning, saying, "Well, we've got three, so Jesus is here. That's good." As I said a few weeks ago, we can take things out of context. The context of this passage is when two or three agree about the sin of someone, it's binding. This is serious business. God says, "Whatever you do here on earth will be done in heaven." We're ambassadors who are given a heavenly purpose to live out here on earth.

We need to go next to 1 Corinthians 5. What Jesus has given us here is the theoretical "If..." But I want a little more and am so thankful the Holy Spirit has given us more on this subject. Let's look at an example of a bad church that is not living out church discipline.

We read about a real-life situation, beginning in 1 Corinthians 5:1: *"It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans."* In other words, the unbelievers don't even do this stuff. People who never attend church don't get involved in this type of sin that is evident in the church, among the people of God. That's what Paul is saying.

So we move out of the weight room into the school room, then we see that discipline is necessary in education. Students, you will not pass the class, you will not achieve graduation, if you're not disciplined. If you don't discipline yourself to be a good student, do your homework and study for the tests, you will fail in your effort to be a good student.

When it comes to finances, if we don't discipline ourselves, we're going to run out of money. We're going to waste money. We are going to see our money flow right through our hands. So every money manager will tell you that it takes discipline to be a good money manager. It takes discipline to put yourself on a budget. It takes discipline for you to say no to certain

Habits and Strategies to Promote Financial Discipline as a Family



1. Build a plan that fits your goals
Consider both the short term and the long term.



2. Budget together
Review spending and saving as a family.



3. Stay flexible
Life changes, and your budget should adapt when it does.



4. Build your savings
Before spending, set up automatic savings.



5. Eyes on the prize
Check your progress often and adjust to stay on track.

Here's the sin: *"...a man has his father's wife."* This is not his mother. This man is being intimate with his stepmother. Not even the unbelievers do that. Paul goes on, *"And you are arrogant!"* You're celebrating this. You say you're this great church, but we've got this guy who's shacking up with his stepmom." Paul says, *"Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you."*

This guy calls himself a Christian and is doing this heinous thing, and you're going along as if everything is just fine. Paul says, *"Get this guy out from among you."* He goes on in verse six: *"Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?"* A little sin contaminates the whole. *"Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump"*—that you might be clean. *"For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."*

Here's the principle for the whole congregation: *"I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world."* He's not talking about unbelievers. They needed to associate with those people, because if they didn't, how would they ever hear the gospel? But the church should not associate with Christians who say they love Jesus but are sexually immoral.

He then goes beyond just the sexually immoral to include the greedy, swindlers and idolators. *"But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one."* In other words, don't interact with believers who have thrown the commands of Scripture away and are living for themselves.

Paul continues, *"For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. 'Purge the evil person from among you.'"* One of the reasons why the church isn't very vital and vibrant in our day is because we're too busy judging the world and not ourselves. Far too often I see on social media Christians judging the world. God says, *"That's My problem. That's My issue. The thing you should be judging is your own life and the life of the believers you're in community with."* We fail at this. We're like petulant teenagers and don't want discipline in our lives. We have a problem with discipline. Some of you saw what we're going to talk about today and thought, *"You've got to be kidding me. I'm out."* Or, *"Here goes Tim. He's going to be all authoritative and I don't want that."* You don't like the idea of discipline.

There are different reasons we don't like discipline, but the basic problem is our sin. All of us are sinners who fall short of the glory of God—including me—and the last thing sinners want is to be confronted with their sin. We saw that with our first parents, Adam and Eve. When sin came into the world, the last thing they wanted to do was face God. Like them, we run away in shame, trying to hide our sin. The last thing we want is for our sin to be exposed. God says, *"I'm going to discipline you for your good,"* but we don't trust Him.

When I'm talking about discipline in the church, I'm talking about loving correction. If you separate discipline from love, you end up with abuse. I certainly am not talking about or approving abuse. I am speaking of the love of a Father Who loves us so deeply that He wants the best for us—and that means He has to correct us from time to time.

Let's be honest. As a parent, any time I've disciplined my children, at no point do our children thank us for what we're doing. They don't say, *"I'm grateful you have grounded me from driving. I'm in such good hands. Have I told you I love you? I'm going to tell all my friends how great you are."*

We're all teenagers at heart. When discipline comes, we don't see it as good. We don't thank God for that goodness. We strike out in anger. *"This isn't fair. This isn't right. You don't love me."* But God is saying, *"I do love you,"* which means you're making God out to be a liar.

Where does this attitude come from? It comes from sin, but it also comes from our society. I like what Albert Mohler says about this problem: *"The decline of church discipline may be the most visible failure of the contemporary church. No longer concerned with maintaining purity of confession or lifestyle, the church today sees itself as a voluntary association of members with minimal moral accountability to God, much less to one another."*

So we think, *"We don't want to be holy. Even if we do want to be holy, we don't need God to help us with it. Surely we don't need other sinners to help us in the process."* So we push it away, not because we're following God's Word, but because we're following society. So let's talk about some societal things that produce this lackadaisical approach to church discipline.

The problems with this strategy

Our American culture

Thanks to our founding fathers, we're revolutionaries. We wave the flag that says, "Don't tread on me." That flag waves not only in our political realm, but also in our Christian realm. "Hey, other Christians, stay in your lane. Preacher, don't get in my business. You deal with your stuff; I'll deal with mine. Let's put up fences. You stay on your side; I'll stay on mine, then everything will be great."

That may work in America, but it doesn't work within the church. That may work in paganism, but it doesn't work in Christianity. God says we're the body of Christ, which means we need one another. We are connected to one another. There are no fences. We are bound together as one. But our American culture says, "That's not the case."

Our consumer-driven model of ministry

At some point churches took on the idea that we're a business. What comes with business is the need for customers. That means it's the job of the business to do what the customers want. You live by the golden rule in business, which is the customer is always right. As a result, who am I to tell you—the consumer, the customer—that you're wrong? Who I am to tell you, through God's Word, that you're wrong? You think you're right and that my job is to cater to your needs so you'll keep coming back. The most foolish thing I can do right now is preach the kind of sermon that says you and I are wrong and God is right. Our thoughts are not His thoughts. His thoughts are higher than our thoughts, so we need to be quiet and He needs to speak. I'm including myself among those who need to hear Him. Because of this, we can lose the ability to confront.

Our ignorance

Some of you are new to this idea. You're thinking, "You guys do what? You confront people?" You might be thinking about the Amish way of shunning people; that's not something you would like. Or maybe you don't have any idea about this. "Really? I thought God was a loving God. Why would He do this?" It's because He's actually a loving parent, and loving parents discipline their kids for their own good. My prayer and hope is that a message like this will help you see why this is such an important thing.

Our misinterpretation of Scripture

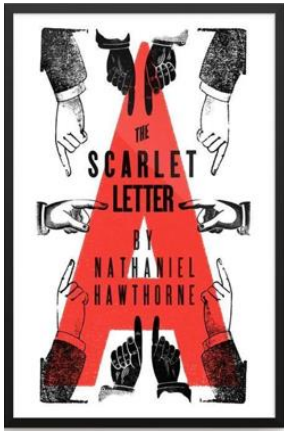
Fourth, we have misinterpreted Jesus' words in Matthew 18. You'll often see someone say on Facebook, "Why is there so much judgment in the church when Jesus says, 'Judge not lest you be judged?'" Is Jesus saying we're never to judge? No, that's not what He's saying. Jesus is saying when we judge people, we need to judge others by the same standard we judge ourselves, given the same circumstances. In 1 Corinthians 5 we're told we're not to judge the world, but we're actually to judge one another. We're to be examining one another's lives and to speak convicting truth to one another. We need to be careful not to misinterpret the Scriptures to fit our own narratives.

We haven't been taught it

Finally, most of us have never heard a sermon preached on church discipline. Perhaps the only time we've ever heard it talked about wasn't in the church, but in high school English class. You're thinking, "What is Tim talking about?" I read two books in high school which were assigned by my public school teachers that were about church discipline. Let's start with The Crucible. This is a story of a church in Salem, Massachusetts, that put people to death because they thought they were witches. Oh, that's a good way to introduce a bunch of high school students to church discipline. A bunch of people got together and tried to figure out who the witches in the community were. I can't remember whether they floated or didn't float—I wasn't that good in English.



They had a stupid subjective test by which they were going to exercise discipline. It was vengeful and vindictive. So high school students heard about this form of discipline and thought, "I don't want that. You're saying that comes from God? You can keep that, Arthus Miller."



Then the English teacher told us to read another book, [The Scarlet Letter](#). A young lady in the church is impregnated. She has no husband, so the church community kicked her out of the church. Not only that, by law they put the letter “A” on every garment she wore, so everybody would know her sin.

Now this is also ugly for a high school student to read. “I don’t want to be part of church if that’s what the church is going to do.” Then it gets even uglier. As you read in [The Scarlet Letter](#)—and yes, I finished the book—it’s the preacher who is her father. [Spoiler, sorry. Watch the movie. Or don’t watch the movie—I don’t know what’s in it. Read the book.] But it’s the preacher, the one who led in the discipline, who was actually the secret sinner.

Why do we approach the subject of church discipline with such hostility? Because we’ve allowed society to tell us what it is, instead of going to God in His Word. So let’s start talking about God and His Word. What’s the policy for addressing this situation? Why do we need Matthew 18? Why do we need 1 Corinthians 5? Why do we need 1 Timothy 5 when it comes to leaders who sin? Why do we need these passages?

The policy that addresses the situation

God’s holiness demands it.

God is holy. So because He’s holy and has invited you into His family, the thing He wants and demands from His family members is holiness. That’s the house rule. God requires holiness for His people. Jesus said in Matthew 5:48, “You are to be holy as My Father in heaven is holy.” If we’re not holy, we need to be brought into holiness through corrective measures, because God knows we are sinners. That’s why He, as a holy God, leads, guides, corrects and disciplines us into holiness. We read in Hebrews 12:5-11 about God as our heavenly Father correcting us in a way similar to the way our earthly fathers did—for our good.

The Scriptures declare it.

Throughout the Bible, we see that God corrects sin. God doesn’t overlook sin; there are consequences to sin. We see this in the Garden in Genesis 3. We see it in Joshua 7 when the people of God were advancing into the Promised Land and all of a sudden they came to a screeching halt. They lost a battle God had told them they would win. Joshua went to God and said, “Wait a minute? What gives? You said we were going to win, but now we’ve lost.” God said, “There’s sin in the camp.” It would be easy for us to say, “Well, that’s terrible. All of the people must have been bad, so that’s why the consequences came to all of them.” Listen, God’s covenant people were kept from receiving the blessing, not because they had all sinned, or even the majority had sinned. Joshua 7 says it only takes one of us having sin to stymie the forward advance for all.

Why would it be that way? The weight of responsibility in this area crushes me. If I blow it, it will have dramatic negative results in this church. I will allow the name of Christ to be defiled in our community. “I thought that church was about God’s holiness, but their pastor did what? Their pastor said what?” If we want to stop the advance of God’s Kingdom, it only takes one of us. It could be a leader. It could be anyone. But know one of us can stymie what God wants to do.

So let’s do a math problem:

God’s holiness demands it + God’s Word declares it = The church must do it.

Is that simple enough? If God’s holiness demands it and Scripture declares it, that means we have to do it. If we’re going to call ourselves God’s people, and God says, “I want you to do it,” we should be doing it. When we don’t do it, we don’t do it to our own demise. So let’s look at the people and the scenarios this involves. Who is to receive church discipline?

The people and scenarios involving it

All Christians

This might surprise you, but church discipline is for all Christians. We’re told in Romans 3:23, “*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*” If you have fallen short of the glory of God, you need God to correctively bring you into His holiness. So all Christians need it. You need it. I need it. We all need it.

Those who are caught in sin

The second group of people who need church discipline are those who are caught in sin. Galatians 6:1—this is an important passage that we all need to know: *“If anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.”*

Let's break this down. Church discipline is for those who are caught in sin. Notice the generalities. Any one of us could be caught in sin. It also points to any sin. It doesn't just list the major vices we tend to work up in our head, thinking these are what should bring church discipline. It says *“if anyone”* of you are caught in *“any”* sin, you who are spiritual—that means the other believers in the mix, those who aren't caught in that sin—these are the people who are to restore the sinner.

Notice, he uses the word “restore,” not rebuke, chastise, beat up or threaten. You are to restore the sinner with all gentleness. The word gentleness gives us a picture of a mother cradling her child. We're handling something very precious. We're to be gentle, always remembering that we too could be caught in sin ourselves. We could fall prey to the devil's trap as well. This keeps us from being haughty or arrogant. It keeps us from being judgmental. It keeps us from saying, “I can't believe you got caught in that sin. No Christian I know would do that.”

Those who are in conflict with others

The next group of people who need discipline are those who are in conflict with others. Matthew 18 is the ‘policy handbook’ for how to deal with sinners who offend sinners. Jesus says, “I'm going to be leaving soon and I don't want you to keep fighting with one another. So when a fight breaks out among you, when you're offended by someone, the first thing you should do is go to that person and you try to make it right.” He also tells us that the first thing we are to do is to show them their sin. That means this has to be a legitimate gripe. It can't be that you're just offended because your sensibilities were disturbed. This means you can point to a place in Scripture that clearly says what they did was not just offensive to you personally, but it was offensive to God.

The Bible says love covers a multitude of sins. But if someone offends you and your love doesn't go far enough to cover it, then you have to go to the person and address it. This is the most omitted thing in the church. Instead, we gather others around us to “pray about it.” “Can we just get together? Pastor Tim offended me. Can we just pray for him, the sinful preacher that he is? He should have known better. Can I tell you how he offended me?” That makes you feel really spiritual because you had a prayer meeting about it. It was really gossip, but you added prayer, so my hat's off to you.

We avoid going to the specific person; instead, we gossip about them or even slander them. We tell others about what they did. But the Bible says we're to go directly to the person. If they don't respond well, we're supposed to take one or two other people. The purpose of this is so they can verify through evidence that what we say is true. They can tell the one who sinned, “We know this happened and you need to ask for forgiveness. What you did was sinful. It was offensive to God, and it was offensive to your brother or sister in Christ.”

If at that point the person says, “No,” then you go to the church leaders who then assess the situation and determine what the next step should be. This is why it's so important to have good leaders. They must be men of judgment and discernment in order to evaluate the situation. Is this just a spat that everybody needs to let go of, to let bygones be bygones? Or is there a real offense? Is there a posture of rebellion in that person, such that even in the company of two witnesses, they still say, “Forget you guys”?

Then the church leaders, as representatives of the church, should say, “This needs to be fixed.” But if the person says, “Forget you,” Jesus says to the church, “Cast them out as a tax collector or pagan.” That means you can't keep living life with them as if everything is okay. Rather, in every encounter with them, you must bring them back to their need to repent. This is what God's policy describes.

Those who live in contradiction to the Word

Now the situation in 1 Corinthians 5 isn't a fight between two individuals; rather, it's a matter of believers who live in contradiction to the Word. There was a guy who said he was a believer. He made that known publicly. He knew the Word of God. He had committed himself to walk in light of that Word. But now he starts telling his small group, “I've started being

romantic with my dad's new wife. Isn't that awesome?" And the small group agrees. "Good for you. Bring her with you next time we meet, so we can be one happy family."

Paul gets word of this and says, "You've got to be kidding me. I go to the marketplace, but I don't hear about guys getting it on with their stepmoms. This is unbecoming in the world, let alone in the church. And you guys are arrogant about it?" So what does he say? "Kick that boy out of here. Get rid of him."

The reason why you get rid of people like this is because you cannot endorse sin. This may scare some people but listen to me. The church cannot endorse Christians who live like sinners, then when they're confronted, they say, "I don't care." That's the important part we can't forget. This guy said, "I don't care what God's Word says, I am going to announce to the church and the world that I do what I want to do. I'm a law unto myself."

Paul's response is, "Deliver him to Satan." Oh, my goodness. What does that mean? We have a picture of that, by the way, when the father gives the prodigal son his inheritance, allowing the son to live a life of debauchery. It is that life that eventually leads the son back to his father. The church thus should say to the sinner, "You will not listen to us or to God's rules for His house, so we release you. Let that sin and its consequences be your teacher. We're praying that before this life is over the consequences of sin will sober you and bring you back to God and His people." Friends, this is serious business. We need to take it seriously.

Others who need church discipline.

There are a few other groups of people who need church discipline. In 1 Thessalonians 3:6, we read that we are to warn those who are spiritually idle. Romans 16:17-18 tells us we are to warn those who are divisive. First Corinthians 5 points to those who practice immorality.

The process and steps to follow

Finally, let's look at the process of discipline and the steps we need to follow. How should church discipline play itself out?

Church discipline is formative.

The first step will probably surprise you. You're under church discipline right now. Every one of us is under the first step of church discipline. Wait a minute, you say; what does that mean? The first step is formative. You made a decision—a disciplined decision. Maybe you were forced to do it, but I hope and pray you did this of your own initiative. You said, "I want to be with God's people today." You could be home cutting the grass after a rainy week. You could be preparing yourself for another Bears loss. You could be doing a lot of things. But you made the decision, "I want to be with God's people, where God's name is praised, where God's Word is proclaimed, where prayers are lifted up in His name for our betterment." You made a conscious decision to be here. You disciplined yourself for godliness, as Paul expressed to Timothy.

A healthy church has formative discipline going on every day, at every moment. That's what makes churches healthy. I believe Village Bible Church is a healthy church because there is formative discipline taking place. We want discipline in the lives of our kids, so there's formative discipline happening in the lives of children who are hearing God's Word right now. On Wednesday nights, our students are being formed into godliness through discipline. They're picking up His Word and involving themselves in the fellowship of God's people who are their peers. They're doing life together; that's formative discipline.

We do this when we gather in small groups. Every time we pick up God's Word and read it, every time we take time to pray, we're forming holiness in ourselves that will become visible to the outside world. That's healthy; that should be going on. We should be disciplining ourselves toward godliness.

Parents, you get this. You have been forming in your children knowledge of what you expect. You've been teaching them to say "please" and "thank you." You're teaching them to help others. Don't speed. Do this. Do that. Don't this. Don't that. You're forming these things in them. But what happens when they don't do what they've learned? That's where corrective discipline comes in.

Corrective discipline

The tip of the iceberg is corrective discipline—that's what gets all the bad press. But formative is the iceberg underneath the water. It's huge. So a healthy church does all this formative discipline in the lives of its people. It encourages, praises and equips the church in these ways, so that corrective discipline won't be needed.

But we're sinners, so corrective discipline does come. My prayer is that when corrective discipline takes place, you will heed it, whether it's given to you by a peer, by your church leaders or by the collective voice of the church. If you're the one given this discipline, I pray that you will do it with gentleness for the purpose of restoration.

Here's what we need to pray, then I'll close with a statement that I think helps bring my heart into this. We need to pray that we keep doing the hard things. The hard thing isn't just going around correcting people; it's forming in people the holiness that God demands and that the Scriptures declare. So we'll keep picking up this Book and we'll keep looking to Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith. We're going to follow Him. When those who profess to be following Him do not live up to that, we who are also sinners must graciously and lovingly bring correction to their lives. You can read more in the bulletin; there is a QR code there that you can follow.



But let me close with this quote from Warren Wiersbe as the heart of the matter: "Church discipline is not a group of 'pious policemen' out to catch a criminal. Rather, it is a group of brokenhearted brothers and sisters seeking to restore an erring member of the family."

I know you've heard a lot today. This is one of those Sundays when I'll go home and start beating myself up, wondering if I was clear. Listen to me in all love and affection. Our job isn't to be citizen police officers, like the Pharisees who were looking to spot everything the people did wrong. But as loving mothers and fathers, as loving brothers and sisters, we're looking out for one another. Here's why. It's because we want to be the best picture of God's holiness and love to a watching world. If we do that right, how sweet and beautiful it will be to the community of Sugar Grove and the surrounding communities to know that this place is serious about God's holiness and serious about God's love.

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All Scriptures quoted directly English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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