

Prayer That Leads To Life 1 -1 John 5:16-17 – (25 Jan 15)

So if you have your Bibles or you have it on your phone, it will be good if you can open that to 1 John and chapter 5 and in particular verse 16 today. We're just going to consider one verse but let me warn you, alright? Let me say in advance, it's one verse, it's short but it is not an easy text to consider. I hope that you will bear with me, at least for the first 15 - 20 minutes, which is quite difficult, but it will...I hope make sense right at the end. 1 John 5, verse 16.

One of my recent hobbies or one of my recent things I like to do, is to see chess games on the Internet. Ever since young, I love chess, I love Chinese chess. I would sometimes go to HDB blocks downstairs and see the uncles play chess and when I got older, I watch more and more of international chess. I'm terrible at it. I'm not good at it but I just love to see how people play and... and in the video chess games today, um...there are people who show you the moves and they explain to you the moves - why they do this, why can't you do that. And in one particular commentator, he loves to show the chess games. It develops over time and when it arrives at a critical juncture, he would say, "I'd like you to pause the video and find the best move for white or the best move for black." He says by doing this you will learn more; by doing this you will enjoy the game more. And so there are times when I obey him and I pause and I try to think for myself what would be the best move for white or the best move for black. Many times I don't follow, but many times I do and I do think it is very exciting to do that. I learned more that way.

This morning I'd like you to find the best move for white, uh...not this one, but this one (referring to verse on screen), alright? What's the best explanation for 1 John and 5:16 and I want you to be able to pause and consider. The good thing is, this is not a video, you can't fast-forward. I'm not going to talk, so I just want to give you a moment. It's not very long, just a moment for you to think for yourself - 1 John 5:16. I want to say firsthand, it's not an easy text. There are debates, even right up till today as to what the precise meaning is. There is no general consensus but I think it is meaningful for us as God's children, nonetheless, to study, to consider and to know the reasons why he says what he says. 1 John 5:16.

(A short pause)

For all our friends who are new, I want to assure you this is not what we regularly do. Difficult texts in the Bible don't occur all the time otherwise the whole book will be so difficult, but this is one example of a difficult text. If you're here today for the first time, I want to say this is not our usual thing. Umm... I'll try to be as simple and straightforward as I can and I hope you'll join us again next week and consider more, the beauty of God's Word as well.

I hope it has been sufficient time for you to at least think about this. I had one week to think about it. You had 1 minute to think about it. I know it's not fair, but let me get started. The key to 1 John 5:16 is

really this question: what is the sin that leads to death? Isn't it? I mean, you can pray to God that He will give life, but one thing, one sin or one area you shouldn't pray for or you need not pray for, is the sin that leads to death. I do not say that one should pray for that. So this is strange. So what kind of sin is this, that John would say, I do not say that one should pray for that? Who sin here? What sin here? And what is the meaning of this death?

There are several permutations and options that people have suggested throughout history. It is all concerning this: what is this sin that leads to death? I'm going to share with you one by one. There're four. One by one, I'm going to tell you why it is, why it is probably not and then at the end of the day, you probably have to make your own conclusions. But here I... over the course of this week have been studying it, praying over it and I believe my own conviction will be shared with you today. But that I want to say is with the caveat that not every commentator in this whole world throughout history, agrees to the final conclusion I'm going to make. Nonetheless, let me reason with you, let me share with you, let me show you from Scripture what is this sin that leads to death.

0:04:49.7

Number 1 - the first option is that this sin refers to a Christian sinning in such a terrible sin that God now says, "That's too much, I'm not going to save you anymore. I'm going to leave you out of my grace, you're going to hell for it." It leads to death, you will not be forgiven.

Tertullian, way back long ago is the first person to say this. He suggests that there are some things called mortal sins. Sins that lead to death like murder, adultery, idolatry, rejection of Christ and er...there are people who may imagine that this sin that leads to death is a Christian sinning until God says, "You're not going to heaven anymore." I'm going to say right from the word 'go', this is absolutely not what John means. It cannot be!

The Bible tells us all of us are saved by grace and we are also kept by grace. You are not a Christian because God saves you and you're not kept...you're a Christian because God saves you by grace and you remain a Christian not because you are so good that you obey God, you never sin big sins and He says, "Now that you have done so well, I'm going to let you get into heaven." That's not how God saves us. You're kept in God's salvation because of the grace in Jesus Christ. We stand in Christ. You see, if we lose our salvation because we sin a sin like murder or adultery, then let me say, David would be probably the first to go to hell. I mean David, he's the Lord's beloved, but he murdered, he had adultery with Bathsheba but nonetheless he is God's beloved. Where sin abounds, grace much more abounds. The key is not whether you have been a good boy or good girl; the key is whether you have Jesus in your life.

Pastor, when you say something like this, doesn't it make Christians then take advantage of that and sin some more, since it doesn't matter how they live anymore? Well, if you are truly converted in your

heart; if Jesus really lives in your life; if you are born again; If you're a new creation, you wouldn't say such things because your heart is changed. So everyone who is going to heaven today, goes to heaven not because of our merits, but because of Jesus' merits. We are saved not because we've been good boys, we're saved because He is our good and perfect Saviour. So I suggest to you this is not what John says. The sin that leads to death is not that a Christian sins until God says, "I'm not going to forgive you anymore."

But there is a second option that people have suggested and maybe this is the option you immediately thought of. Orr...the sin that leads to death, I remember in the Bible there is a sin that when someone commits it, it will not be forgiven him. And the sin is the... (someone responded in the congregation) very good! It's the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit or blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Haar... so maybe John is referring to the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit when he talks about the sin that leads to death. Ahh...this is the sin that God will not forgive; this is the sin we should not pray for, in that person.

This is one of the FAQs in our Q&A session here in this church. Somehow, many people have heard about the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit and they are not sure what it means. They have asked this many times. To many, this is a scary thought because blasphemy means to speak something dishonourable, alright? So they have always thought that this sin is referring to a Christian, somehow, somewhere he's careless, he has a slip of tongue and he said something terrible against the Holy Spirit. Urgh...and now, it will not be forgiven him! So they live in terror and fear and uncertainty.

But what really is the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit? Where do you find it? It's found in Matthew. Jesus Himself said these things, "Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven." Da...da! That's the one that strikes fear into my heart! "And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come." (Matthew 12:31-32, ESV) Oh no! This is terrible! I remember last week I just said something terrible against the Holy Spirit, it's a slip of tongue...but I said it and does it mean that I'm not going to be forgiven anymore? Is this then the sin that leads to death?

Well, the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is not a slip of tongue committed by a believer. You say, "Pastor how do you know that?" Well you know that when you read Matthew chapter 12. You read...you know that when you read the context. You read that when you see the setting why these verses are written. See, in that...in those days, Jesus was doing great things. He was healing people on the Sabbath; He was performing great miracles. They were clear evidences that Jesus is no ordinary man; He's no ordinary teacher; He's God, come as man to be our Saviour. But as He did those things, there were people who were jealous of Him. They were the religious leaders in those days, you call them the Scribes, the Pharisees. And so people when they flock to Jesus, the Scribes and Pharisees

says, "Nah! Yes, I know that He did some wonderful things, but they are not the works of God. They are the works of the...devil. He has a demon in Him!" So in the light of clear, incontrovertible evidences and great works Jesus did, the Scribes and Pharisees persistently, stubbornly, wilfully, proudly, reject him and say, "He has the devil."

The blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is not a slip of the tongue by the believer. It's a persistent, wilful rejection of the 'Messiahship' of Jesus, in the light of clear evidence. So my friends, if you are a believer today, God has so worked in your heart that I'm sure you acknowledge Jesus as the Lord and Saviour of your life and there will be no chance that you will say, "Ahh! He is a fake, He has a devil." No chance and yes, maybe there is a slip of tongue somewhere, but this is not the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. This is a persistent, wilful rejection by an unbeliever. So, if that is the meaning of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, is this the sin that leads to death? I suggest to you, "No". Because right in the beginning in verse 16, we're told that this person is called a brother. He's not a malignant enemy against Jesus Christ. He's a brother! He called Jesus, "Lord". He...at least superficially, he will be part of the Christian community. He doesn't stand outside and criticise Jesus. He's part of the gang. So I say to you, the second option is not a biblical... biblically proven position. That is not the sin unto death.

Okay, are you lost? (Response in the congregation) Yes ah? Well, if you're lost, you can sleep for another 5 minutes, I'll tell you when it's...when you can get 'unlost', alright? But let me push you further into...out into the sea.

The third option that people suggest about the sin that leads to death...now you've got to appreciate, you've got to go through this because you don't just arrived at the answer, just because someone tells you so. You've got to know why, what the Bible is saying and I think that's responsible - knowing of God's will; studying of God's will. The third option is that this sin that leads to death is really not committed by a Christian. This brother that is written, is a brother in inverted commas. He looks like a 'brother' but he's really not one of us. So this fake Christian sins, and then he is led to death. He loses...not that he loses salvation but he doesn't get salvation. And so the third option is a sin in a hypocrite that leads to damnation. 0:13:49.8

This is one possible view people have suggested and it seems to be able to fit into 1 John, because John has earlier alluded to the possibility and the reality that there are people who went out from us because they were not of us. They look like they are part of the church; they look like they are God's children; they come to church, they...they sing the same songs, they read the Bible, but they ultimately went out from us. If they had been of us; if they were really born again; if they really have 'Zoe'; if they really know Jesus, they would have continued. But now they went out because this is to make clear; this is to make manifest that they are not all of us. So they were hypocrites; they were fakes; they were people who look like Christians, but were not within the Christian community. Aahh...then when these

people sin, of course they're not saved. So this sin that leads to death is the sin of a hypocrite that leads to damnation.

Now if you're lost already, I'll tell you the next verses I'm going to show you, you'd be even more lost. This position is in a sense, not unique. In a sense that a person who is not a Christian can deny Christ, leave Christ and they will never be brought back to Christ because elsewhere it is also referred to in Hebrews 6. Why I say it's complicated because Hebrews 6 is not an easy text by itself. So I'm using a very difficult text to prove a difficult text. Not very clever but that's what it is.

Hebrews 6 says, "For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, (who have) tasted the heavenly gift, (and have) shared in the Holy Spirit, (and have) tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come..." (Hebrews 6:4-6, ESV) This refers to someone possibly, who has heard the Gospel; seen life changed; tasted of the blessings within the church, had all these experiences of blessings that God pours out upon His people. So this is probably what this means. Now, it is impossible for someone who has been in this Christian community, tasted all these good things, to have fallen away and now, to restore them again to repentance.

In other words, this man who has been in this church, been experiencing the blessings of God, understood the teachings of God's Word, now he decides to fall away from Christ. He decides to say, "Sayonara" to Jesus. He decides to turn his back against the Saviour. God says it is impossible for this man to leave and to be restored again. Sounds like the sin in a hypocrite that leads to damnation. No more forgiveness. They...they...why? Because they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt. By leaving Christ after experiencing all that, is saying, "Har...He's no Saviour." No chance. 0:17:00.8

If that already is not complicating, look at this one, another complicated one. One day we will study Hebrews together, alright? One day. Hebrews 10...first we have to negotiate the Old Testament book first, alright? In Hebrews 10, "For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth," so you have heard these things, you have heard the Gospel, after you hear it, you still go on sinning deliberately, you...you refuse to follow Jesus, then "there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but..." all you can expect is "...a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries." (Hebrews 10:26-27, ESV) You were never God's child. You were an adversary; you were an enemy; you never submitted to him. So if you have heard these things, you have tasted of the blessings and you leave, I'm sorry, what else is there that can convince you that Jesus is your Messiah? There is no more sacrifice for you.

So when we read all that, it sounds very much like this sin that leads to death, may be about a hypocrite who sins in such a way he rejects the Saviour and now he faces condemnation. Some

respected preachers, pastors, commentators take this position or at least they allow for this position. As for me, I think this may be possible but I don't think this is what John meant, for several reasons.

Number 1 - this is clearly I think, using the word 'brother' and throughout John, a brother is a brother. A brother is a believer. It's not a brother in inverted commas. So this is not really about the hypocrite's sin; it's about a true believer's sin.

Number 2 - this is a sin that leads to death. A hypocrite is not led to death because he did this; a hypocrite already abides in death. He never had life to begin with, in the first place.

And thirdly, this text is saying when someone sins in this way and when you pray, there's no chance for him. That's why you don't even need to pray. Because if he really does this, you don't even need to pray for him. There's no chance for him to come back to God. But that's not what Hebrews is all about, isn't it? Hebrews is written because someone is dangerously approaching that state, but you can pray for him so that he can...not pray for him, the writer wrote those words so that he can possibly encourage the person to turn back and be remaining in the faith. So it...for all those reasons, I don't think that the sin that leads to death is either of these 3. There're some preachers who say, "Oh, you can take maybe 2 or 3 positions, maybe God meant all 2 or 3 positions." I really don't think so. I think when God wrote this or John wrote this, he had one primary meaning and certainly that should be the one we pursue.

Okay, now is time to wake up! (Pastor claps his hands) This is just the logic behind it to...and the apologetics behind it, you might say. Er... so that you may know for sure today, why something are being said. I don't think it's a sin in a Christian that is so hideous that God cannot forgive. I don't think it's the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit because that is not committed by the believer. I don't think it's a sin in a hypocrite because I think this refers to a believer's sin. What is it?

Actually the most commonly accepted view is the fourth one which I think is the correct one. The fourth view is that this refers to a sin in a Christian that leads to physical death. Now, like I said, there's no general consensus and the difficulty of accepting point number 4 is that the word 'life' here is the word 'Zoe' and er... 'Zoe' is predominantly use for spiritual life, but it is not exclusively use for spiritual life. That's just a caveat by the side for you to know. But I think this sin that leads to death refers to a Christian sinning till the point God says, "It's enough! I'm going to take you home."

0:21:23.6

Now, let me ask you. In the Bible, are there sins that lead to death? Now you say, "Pastor, that's a lousy question because ultimately every sickness and every death is a result of sin." Ultimately, not directly but ultimately. The reason why there is even death and sickness on this earth is because sin came in. The wages of sin is death. But I'm not saying every time you have a cough and flu, it's because

you sin. I hope you don't say that ah? "Eh you cough ah? Alah! You better repent ah you, you must have sin ah." No, it's not direct. Ultimate reason is sin - yes, I agree.

So let me ask you, are there examples in the Bible where someone died as a direct result of their sin? (Response from the congregation) Ananias and Sapphira. Yes, that's a good example in Acts. Anyone else? The hall of death because of sin, anybody remembers? So we have Ananias and Sapphira, who else? (Response from the congregation) Lot's wife. Wah, that's a very good one! Yah! Lot's wife, strike dead, turn into a pillar...it's a painful way to die lah... become salt, I mean. Okay, that's a good one. Okay, let's play er...what do you call that? Pictionary, alright? I draw for you and you guess. (Laughter in the congregation) I drew in advance though.

First incident I can think of (picture shown on screen), you don't "Or, or, or," tell me.... first service also "Or, or, or" but no one knows (laughter in the congregation). (Response from the congregation) Not the ark, I know you will say "Ark", but it's not the ark. Notice that there is er...flames, there is smoke, so this is not the ark of the covenant. No! (Response from the congregation) Aaron's 2 sons. Their names are...Nadab and 'Bah Hu' (Hokkien dialect words meaning meat floss)...Oh sorry, Nadah and Abihu. The 2 sons of Aaron offered what? Strange fires. God has specific instructions how He is to be worshiped, but Nadah and Abihu tried to be creative; do things on their own; brought in strange fires and immediately was struck dead. Their death is a direct result of their sin, example one.

Another example is this (referring to picture shown). Well, this man was playing 'pick-up sticks' on the Sabbath day. He picked sticks on the Sabbath when God says there is no work that should be done on the Sabbath and he was struck dead as a result of his sin. No name given to this man. That's why we do not know his name but he was struck dead as a result.

The third one (picture shown on screen). Uzzah. And the story is as what Eugene had shared – they were bringing the ark back to Jerusalem but they didn't bring it back the right way. So when it was about to topple, someone touched the ark and God has clearly forbidden the touching of the ark and when he did that - he touched the ark, he was struck dead right there and then. That's another example. o:24:42.2

The fourth example (picture shown on screen). (Response from the congregation) That's right! So this is the couple, their names are Ananias and Sapphira. During the early days in the church, they had a property. They sold their 'Bukit Timah house' for maybe \$10 million and they told the church leaders, "Eh, I sold my house - \$10 million. I got all the money for you. Here's \$2 million." The pastor go and check propertyguru.com, where got 2 million? Ah well, the effect is that they lied to the church; they lied to the Holy Ghost; they lied to the Holy Spirit and the Bible says: Ananias and Sapphira were struck dead because they lied. It's very interesting! One was struck dead because they offered strange

fires; another because they disobeyed the Sabbath; another because they disobeyed the command to touch the ark, very different things and here we have a case of lying.

And then another example of death in the Bible is explicitly given in 1 Corinthians 11, “For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body, eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.” (1 Corinthians 11:29-30, ESV) This refers to the church at Corinth, when they were observing the Lord's Table very flippantly. They did not come preparing themselves. They did not come understanding what this all meant. To them, the Lord's Supper was all a feast, a fun, a game and they disregarded the poor. So they were absolutely desecrating this ordinance. They were not giving it a proper regard it should be given. So as a result of this taking of the Lord's Supper without judgment, without discerning, many are weak and ill, and some have even died. This is scary! I think the next time you take the Lord's Supper, remember this. But these are examples of how there is sin that leads to death. My suggestion to you is that, there are examples in the Bible but let me go textually to this text itself.

I think the sin that leads to death is a sin in a Christian that leads to physical death. That's why elsewhere in the Scripture, like James 5 verse 14 tells us, “Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.” (James 5:14-15, ESV) There is a link between sickness and sins. There is a link, this is a biblical link. Once again, I'm not saying and I don't think the Bible is saying every sickness you have is a direct result of sin, but certainly there is a possibility that your sickness today is related to sin. There's a possibility.

Now if this is still not clear to you, James continues in 16, “Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed...” spoken in the context of healing, in introducing the concept of sin and the mutual confession and getting right with regards to sin. So I think this is what John is saying. If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death...now we do not know exactly what these sins are, because we do not really have one specific sin that leads to death. He shall ask and God will give him life, to those who commit sins that do not lead to death. But there is a kind of sin that leads to death - various kinds of sins. God doesn't tell us what kind, there are examples given, but we can't be precise about it absolutely. But if he does sin in a sin that leads to death, then when you pray, God is not going to answer. That's the point that he is making.

I want to say...to clarify. Number 1, this is not about any particular or specific sin. So if you see someone lie, you don't say, “Ahh! You're going to die tomorrow!” “Lu si liao! (Hokkien dialect words meaning you are dead) Lu si liao! You remember Ananias and Sapphira? You lied! You're going to die tomorrow!” No, no, no, no! I don't think God says when you sin a sin of lie, you should be struck dead.

I don't see that. Or let's say, you pick up sticks later on, you'll be struck dead. No! You pick up chopsticks all the time but you're not going to die as a result of that. So we can't be crystal-clear.

Number 2, this is also not saying you cannot pray. Precisely because you don't even really know what that sin is. So John is not saying, when you see someone sin a terrible sin, ahh, then you don't have to pray. No! He's saying, you can pray but I'm not commanding you to pray because, should there be no favourable answer you have expected, you should remember this is a sin that leads to death. If he eventually passes away, realise that it's not because God is unfaithful and didn't answer, but this is the exception clause that is given in the Bible. But by all means pray. Just that when the answer doesn't come, it's not that He failed to answer your prayer.

I also want to say, as I have been saying so far, not all sicknesses and deaths are result of sin. You have diarrhoea yesterday doesn't mean you sin the day before; you're hospitalised today is not because always... you know, the last thing we...if you are in visitation ministry should do, is when you visit a member in the church you say, "You see lah! You deserve it! You never repent, right? You see..." (Laughter in the congregation) I think that's the last thing we should do. Now, it may be true but that's not what we should presume, because elsewhere in the Bible there are many reasons why someone gets sickness. There are many reasons so I'm not saying they are a direct result of sin, all the time.

Number 4, this is what you really need to know for sure, is that even when you are sick, and even when you're unwell, banished from your thought that you're unwell and sick because God has stopped loving you. This is so important! See, there are some steps you jump if you want to come to this conclusion. Now, I'm sick. Ahh...it must be because of sin. This link is already flawed; it's not always true. That is even more dangerous when you think, "Oh, I have sinned. Therefore, God doesn't love me." No! Doesn't work this way! You may be sick, but let me tell you, you are sick absolutely because God loves you! "Wah! Pastor you are crazy! Are you sure?" You have many problems in life because God loves you. "Huh? This is bizarre!" No, I didn't say this, God said this.

In fact, if you never had any difficulties; you never had any pain in your life, you really should ask yourself, are you even God's child? "Aiyo eh! Wah, this church is crazy." No, I'm not crazy because I'm not speaking of myself. God says, "Have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons?" Now I know you guys are going through hardship. I know it's very difficult, but remember this: have you forgotten what I've told you? What I've shared with you? What God has said to you as sons? "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives. It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons." (Hebrews 12:5-8, ESV) You... in the King James, it uses a very strong word: "You are bastard". You are not God's child; you are illegitimate. Wow!

I mean I have 2 sons. And let me tell you something, I spank them. I sometimes give them a really good whack. They cried, their backside swelled, the stroke... the cane's mark swelled. 'Ang, ang' one (Hokkien dialect words meaning red), red one. "Aiyoh...this kind of father! How can he cane his son?" My question to you is: how can you not discipline your son? My friends, every stroke on Shawn's or Matthias's backside is a stroke to my heart, you know? I hate...I tell you that I hate to spank my sons. I hate it! I wish I can delegate it all to my wife (laughter in the congregation), but I suspect she doesn't have the same strength as I do. I wish I could delegate; I wish I don't have to ever see them cry when I whack their backsides. But I must do it because I love them. I'm a stupid, lousy father if my sons are doing wrong things, I absolutely say, "Oh, I love you. I don't want to cane you." You don't love them, you love yourself. 0:34:18.0

Our Father loves you. That's why He bothers to discipline you. That's why there are trials; there're difficulties; there are even sicknesses and pains in your life because they are God's loud hailer. They're God's cane to say, "Eh! Shawn, Matthias, turn around. Stop being naughty! Stop being disobedient! Stop ruining your own life! Turn back to me. I love you." This is what I do with my sons. I get them in, I tell them why they are wrong. But when I tell them why they're wrong, they are already crying. I'm not sure whether they are listening but I tell them why they're wrong (Pastor imitates crying sound). But I still have to tell them and then I have to spank them. And after I spank them, I got to say, "Come Shawn! Come Matthias! Daddy hugs you. Daddy wants to tell you, I love you." I don't spank them because I hate them. No! No father should spank their children because he is angry with them, in a sense of hating them, but that you love them.

So I say to you, when God gives us illnesses, oh, it's not because He's helpless and Satan is so strong and Satan got to give you the illness and He is helpless against it. No! He is sovereign and He allows it for a good purpose. Sometimes the purpose is to grow you; sometimes the purpose is to humble you but sometimes the purpose is to chastise you. In a sense, He's got to wake you up from your sins so that you may turn back; so that you will not ruin your spiritual life. That's God's love.

Look at 1 Corinthians 5. Look at this! This is...this is...by the way, a crazy text. I mean a crazy story in the Corinthian church. "When you assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord." (1 Corinthians 5:5, ESV) What is this all about? Well, in those days, there is a church goer in Corinth who committed incest and is committing incest with his stepmother apparently. Paul says this is crazy! This sin is not even known among the Gentiles. Not even known among the non-church goers and here you are, you are the church of God and there's this guy who is living incestuously with his stepmother and you as a church, do nothing about it! Crazy! So Paul says, "When you're assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus, my spirit is present with the authority, with the power of the Lord Jesus, this is what you do: deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh."

One reason - preserve the purity of the church. But the reason actually explicitly given here, is so... now we are very focus on this first phrase here - destruction of the flesh. "Aiyoh! So terrible!" "Wah! 'Jia Lak' (Hokkien dialect words meaning in deep trouble) this guy!" But let me tell you, that's not the main thing, the main thing is so that his spirit may be saved. It is not an act of cruelty to cut this man off from the church, it is an act of mercy. So that he may suffer pain in the flesh; so that ultimately his soul may be saved. 0:37:37.3

That's the intent of God in our lives. You see we're so earth bound. We're so concern about our life here and now; our comfort; our welfare; our food; our health, that we forget these things are just the tent. These things are just the shell. What's really important is what's on the inside. What's really important is your soul, your spirit and your Father who loves you cares for your soul, to turn you around. We are not people with a soul, we are souls with bodies. So God cares for your soul, your spirit far more.

So this is the text, the sin that leads to death is a sin in a Christian that leads to physical death and there are times when someone may have sinned in such a way that he has crossed the line, and God says, "It's enough! I'll bring him home." I love him still but I'll bring him home. Now, you guys pray, pray for one another, but realise that if someone still eventually passes away, it's that God has said, "It is enough." It's not that God is unfaithful towards your prayer.

Can I give you a shocker? I've spent like 40 minutes on this, but let me give you a shocker, alright? What I've said so far, is not even the main point of the text. (Laughter in the congregation) I'm not kidding, it's true. The main point of this text is not the sin unto death, because the main point of this text is about prayer that leads to life. The focus is not about the sin that leads to death. It's just an exception clause. The focus is that when you pray for others, God gives life. That's why we studied verses 14 and 15 last week, and that's why this text is given right after that.

This is the tremendous encouragement I want to leave you with. Let's not be obsessed with orr...the sin that leads to death, let's... let's be clear. God is saying you pray for others because when you pray...when anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death - he's suffering; he's sick; he's unwell, he shall ask and God will gave him life. So encouraging! That when you see people around you, you can have the ministry of prayer for others. You say, "How does this work?" "Is it that this man who is sinning still and I somehow pray for him, he will get well, and he continues with his sin?" No! I don't think that's the case. I think the point is this: when you see someone suffering in illness, probably because of sin and when you pray for him, God hears your prayers and turns him from his sin and he gets well. And that to me is encouraging.

Because in my own ministry and life, I've met with people. I've shared with them what my views are. Of course, I try not to be judgmental but I...I suspect, I detect, I think that there is clear sin in a

person's life but the person won't listen. But I don't want to say that like a policeman, as if I want to be one up over you, holier than thou and er...feel good about it. No, I genuinely want you to turn from sin to live in the will of God. But if the person doesn't listen, what do I do?

This text gives me tremendous encouragement - I pray for him. Now, there are other texts in the Bible like Galatians 6:1, "If you see a brother overtaken in the fault, you who are spiritual, go and restore him." Go help him! Go speak with him! Sure, rebuke, lovingly encourage, those are necessary but here, this is what you have to do behind the scenes - you pray and God gives life. He may not listen to you directly but your God listens to you and when you pray, you can bring life to the brother or to the sister.

My friends, prayer is not selfish. It's not always me, myself and I. Prayer is activated when you see your brother in need. That's what it means to be our brother's keeper. That's why Jesus told us, when you pray say this or pray this: "Our Father...". It's not "My Father"; it's "Our Father". God has called us to a Christian community of being our brother's keeper and so pray. You know why I love this text? I love this text because if you really understand, believe and practise this text, your Pastor very "senang" (Malay words meaning easy or relax). Because so often, people look at life this way: if anyone sees his brother commit a sin not leading to death, go tell Pastor. (Laughter in the congregation) "Wait, wait, wait wait! Where do you read that?" No, no, no, but that's what we do. If anyone sees his brother sin, go tell Pastor. Isn't this the case?

"Eh! Pastor, I tell you something ah. Wah, my CG - my Care Group, yesterday, wah, the person like that...wah...lalalala... Pastor, can you do something about it?" It's amazing! Christians almost think that I'm just a church attendee and there's nothing I can do. Only Pastor - you are the Superman; you are the anointed man; you are the spiritual guy; you can talk; you can change things. I don't read that in the Bible. I read however a tremendous privilege given to all Christians, to exercise our priesthood in Jesus - praying, recovering, restoring one another. Ministry, folks, it's not for your pastor! Ministry is yours! The Pastors are to equip the saints, so that the saints may do the work of the ministry. Now, it doesn't mean you can never come to me for help or difficulties, sure! But I want you to realise the tremendous privilege John is according to believers, to all of you - to pray for one another. I think, folks, that's the main point of this text.

So I hope...I know it's a circuitous journey and I know you probably were lost for the first 20 minutes. But if you are interested again, go back to the video, listen to it again, it will make sense to you. But this is a tremendous encouragement from Apostle John as he is ending his epistle. Hey, you have real life! You know that you have eternal life and you have the wonderful privilege of prayer. Pray, especially pray for one another. It's a life giving privilege. Let's bow for a word of prayer together.

0:44:52.7

This morning, let's consider what God is saying to us and I want to begin right here in your life. Are you today, afflicted with sickness and problems and trials? You could easily brush it aside this morning or maybe you could take this opportunity to search your heart and to reflect before God. Why am I sick? Lord, it's not because you made a mistake; it's not because you forgot about me but maybe it's because you're grabbing my attention through pain. So brothers and sisters in Christ, I want to encourage you this morning, as you go through pain, this morning, your loving Father is stretching out His arms and saying, "Come back to me, son. This earthly pain is going to work out for your spiritual good. Stop holding out against me; stop refusing and stubbornly continuing in your ways." But ask God to search your heart, which you may repent and come back.

Maybe some of you are already very discouraged. You feel that in this pain, God has forsaken you. He doesn't love you. My son, have you forgotten what I've said to you? Which son is there, who when he is wrong, God will not discipline and lovingly restore? I'm doing this not because I don't love you, I'm doing this absolutely, exactly because I love you. I know you will struggle in your heart; you'd wonder if your Father loves you, but He does. I know it because of Jesus Christ; I know it because of Calvary; I know it because He so loved the world He gave His only Son. He has given you also 'Zoe' or eternal life.

Maybe this morning, God is bringing someone into your mind. A brother, a sister living in sin, in misery and maybe for a long time you've shaken your head at him. Maybe for a long time you've ignored him. Maybe for a long time, you've said I should talk to Pastor about him. Have you ever asked yourself, should I talk to God about him? That through my priesthood, through my ministry, God can give him life? Not that I deserved it, but God wants to use me. Would you be your brother's keeper today?

Would you praise God, all of us for who Jesus is, who God is? Amazing Saviour, He came not just to pay the penalty for our sins, He came really to rescue us from sin that actually ruin us. How loving, how wonderful, how persistent, how faithful His strokes are in our lives. What a Saviour! What a God!

Father, we thank You for this morning. I pray You apply Your Words, severally to all our hearts and I want to pray, particularly this morning as well, for friends and guests who are here for the first time. Maybe they've come, thinking that Christianity is somehow getting the best things in life on earth; about worldly possessions; worldly fame; worldly success, but may we...may You help them to realise it's really not about these things. It's about life with You; knowing You; walking in righteousness and holiness; a rescue absolutely from sin. And we praise You for Jesus Christ, who came not to usher in money and health but He came to usher in true forgiveness and spiritual life. So I pray You will turn the eyes of all our friends today to Jesus alone; who alone saves us and rescue us. So bless each one this morning, we thank You and we pray all this in Jesus' name. Amen.