

It seems to come naturally. Little siblings have no problem tattling on their older brother or sister. Almost instinctively they report to mom or dad. Older siblings have no problem pointing out the failures or errors of their younger siblings or they make something up just to get under their skin. Later in life a neat thing sometimes happens as they mature, as they care for one another. They begin to correct each other gently because they want their sibling to live life right, to stay close to Jesus and to the family. That's a good sibling.

The Holy Spirit has brought you together into Christ's family. God wants the same for you. Matthew records Jesus piling up pictures. He told his disciples to watch out lest they cause little ones to sin. God hates sin. God hates one generation corrupting and sinning against the next. Jesus also told his disciples that sheep wander. This is the sad reality. But, oh the joy of the shepherd when he goes after that sheep, finds it and brings it back. In this pile of pictures Jesus commands us to be like that shepherd, like him - our brother's keeper, our sister's keeper. He shows how with the best practice, process, permission, and promise.

True Siblings Want you to Be Saved not Slide Away.

If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector. Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.

What do you do when your sibling in Christ falls into sin – maybe it's the 7th commandment – they steal or are being lazy, or the 8th – they run down someone's name with gossip, the 6th – they misuse God's gift of sex, the 3rd – they neglect God's Word, maybe it is a sin against you? Our natural self-serving and preserving response is to avoid, ignore, even distance ourselves. And when called out, to respond like Cain, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Jesus has a different practice for us, his children.

"If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over." We aren't looking for trouble or trying to identify a speck in someone else's eye while we have a plank in ours. No, we confess our sins to God. It's not that Christians don't sin, but we know where to take sin. We go to Jesus. We apologize to God and to others. We do this together as a congregation each Sunday and in our individual prayers each day and we receive God's forgiveness. But what about a brother or sister's sin? Jesus doesn't want you to ignore them. He wants you to go to them. Address it privately, confidentially - sibling in Christ to sibling in Christ, not spreading it around. They'll realize their sin and repent. You can give them God's forgiveness in Christ, and they will be helped. They won't **slide away** and division will cease. *"you have won them over."* Rejoice, the sheep returns. Forgive them!

But what about when your fellow sheep ignores you and wants you to go away. Maybe they are defensive about their sin and try to justify it, or blame you and say, "Who are you to tell me?" "Who died and made you judge over me?" They dig in. We may be tempted to avoid confrontation and think, "Who cares? Right?" Or maybe in weakness we join in that sin. Or in anger we say, "They'll get what they deserve!" No. Jesus gives the process, *"But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.'* Jesus gives best process because he doesn't want that sheep left behind. Take another brother or sister in Christ, maybe someone they respect or know. Talk to them again, not as a high and mighty person looking down on this 'sinner,' but as a couple of true brothers and sisters who want you to be **Saved, not Slide Away**. He or she will see the seriousness of their sin and repent. Rejoice, the sheep returns. Forgive them!

But what if they blow you both off? Now this isn't just someone who fell once or was just rattled and gave a poor reaction. They want to continue in their sin, don't want your two bits of advice, and maybe even want to shut you out. This hurts. So now what? Jesus says, *"If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church."* Ok, best practice is to care about that brother or sister so much that while you've kept this confidential between you, and now with one or two others they've rejected you, you go to the church (not publish it in the bulletin) but talk to an elder or a minister. Why would you do this? Love. You care about their soul. You want them in heaven. You want them to be

won over. You don't want them to **slide away**. **True Siblings Want you to Be Saved not Slide Away**. If an elder goes and talks to them or a minister goes too, they must see the seriousness of their sin and turn from it. Rejoice, the sheep returns! Forgive them!

But what if they don't? What if they stay stuck in their sin – blind to its seriousness, the offense it causes, and the damage it does to themselves and to those around them and to the next generation? Jesus says, *"and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector."* Excommunication, "Ex = outside" "communion = the body of believers." It's not "kicking them out of church as one person told me." They are already putting themselves outside the family. It's the defibrillators to show them they are dying and shock them back to life. They need prayers and help. It's not being mean to them. Jesus did not shut out tax collectors and sinners treating them poorly, but tried to win them over, even ate with them. Zacchaeus is a good example of a lost sheep returning and joining the family of God.

Are you a good brother or sister? Am I a good brother or sister? Have I thought, "It's somebody else's job," or "It's none of my business," or "we all struggle with things," while a sibling sheep wanders and gets deeper into the thorns. We may not see the wolves waiting, but they are there. Last week's prayer of the church nailed me – we keep our mouths shut avoiding the needed, loving, conflict to try to retain some temporal peace while sin goes unchecked. Sometimes I'll ask someone with whom I'm talking about their sin and its ugliness, but also the Savior's grace and mercy for us, and I'll ask them, "Did anyone tell you that what you were doing was wrong." And if someone did, I'll say, "Thank them. They cared enough about you and your faith to say something." That doesn't mean it's easy. What Jesus asks us to do doesn't come without cost. Sometimes people turn their backs on us. Judge for yourselves whether it is better to follow God's practice and process or our own fearful, non-committal, self-serving and preserving way. If Jesus chose our sinful nature's way, we would all be damned eternally in our sins.

But the Son of God did not avoid, push it off, or stay silent. He took on flesh to become our brother. He took a name that is above all names because it means *"The LORD saves," "Jesus."* He went and sought us out. He chose disciples, calling them from their occupations and often wrong thinking, to follow him. He called tax collectors from their sinful ways, and sinners to turn back to God. He called Pharisees to give up the hypocrisy and repent and see him as their brother and Savior. He was a true brother to all. Then to save us from our selfish sin and prioritizing temporal peace over his soul saving work, he took conflict. On Good Friday God saw only one sinner in the whole world – his Son, because Jesus had taken my sin, your sin, all people's sin upon himself. God cursed him for the Cain sins we committed. The cross shows God's hatred for sin and sinful human beings. It shows his amazing grace and mercy to them as well. Jesus took God's full wrath for you so he could forgive you. Jesus stepped out of that tomb on Easter so he could put you on his shoulders and bring you into his family, his flock. Rejoice. Your sins are forgiven.

Now he sends us out to do his work, gives you permission and the privilege to be true brothers and sisters. If your sibling is drinking too much or when they're not supposed to, help them. If your sibling is speaking words that contradict what a child of God should speak, help them. When your sibling has fallen into breaking God's good commands for them whether the sixth, seventh or eighth, help them to see, help them back to the Shepherd.

God has given you tools that make an eternal impact. *"Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."* He's given you the Words of God to turn a sibling sinner from their sinful ways, to show them the seriousness of sin by shockingly locking them to it, and even better to hear their repentance and unlock the chains, to forgive them, and show them God's forgiveness for that sin in Christ.

Jesus gives you his promise to help, and his presence. *"Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them."* Jesus will help you, bless you, and he promises to be with you. He is your Savior brother. He will help you be a good sibling to each other. **True Siblings Want you to Be Saved not Slide Away**. So God added you to the family. Amen.