

1/11/26 - 2 Samuel 2:1-32 - "Strong Enough to Submit"

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[0 : 00] Please turn in your Bibles to 2 Samuel 2. In the Pew Bibles, that's page 255.

! And David brought up his men who were with him, everyone with his household, and they lived in the towns of Hebron.

And the men of Judah came, and there they anointed David king over the house of Judah. When they told David, it was the men of Jabesh-Gilead who buried Saul, David sent messengers to the men of Jabesh-Gilead and said to them, May you be blessed by the Lord, because you showed this loyalty to Saul your Lord and buried him.

Now may the Lord show steadfast love and faithfulness to you, and I will do good to you, because you have done this thing. Now therefore, let your hands be strong and be valiant, for Saul your Lord is dead, and the house of Judah has anointed me king over them.

But Abner, the son of Ner, commander of Saul's armies, took Ish-bosheth, the son of Saul, and brought him over to Mahanaim. And he made him king over Gilead and the Asherites, and Jezreel, and Ephraim, and Benjamin, and all Israel.

[1 : 49] Ish-bosheth, Saul's son, was forty years old when he began to reign over Israel, and he reigned two years. But the house of Judah followed David, and the time that David was king over Hebron, over the house of Judah, was seven years and six months.

Abner, the son of Ner, and the servant of Ish-bosheth, the son of Saul, went out from Mahanaim to Gibeon. And Joab, the son of Zerah, and the servants of David, went out and met them at the pool of Gibeon.

And they sat down, the one on the one side of the pool, and the other on the other side of the pool. And Abner said to Joab, Let the young men arise and compete before us. And Joab said, Let them rise.

Then they arose and passed over by number, twelve for Benjamin and Ish-bosheth, the son of Saul, and twelve of the servants of David. And each caught his opponent by the head and thrust his sword in his opponent's side, so they fell down together.

Therefore that place was called Helcath Hazarim, which is at Gibeon. And the battle was very fierce that day, and Abner and the men of Israel were beaten before the servants of David.

[3 : 00] And the three sons of Zerah were there, Joab, Abishai, and Asahel. Now Asahel was as swift of foot as a wild gazelle, and Asahel pursued Abner as he went.

He turned neither to the right hand nor to the left hand from following Abner. Then Abner looked behind him and said, Is it you, Asahel? And he answered, It is I.

Abner said to him, Turn aside to your right hand or to your left, and seize one of the young men and take his spoil. But Asahel would not turn aside from following him.

And Abner said again to Asahel, Turn aside from following me. Why should I strike you to the ground? How then could I lift up my face to your brother Joab? But he refused to turn aside.

Therefore Abner stuck him in the stomach with the butt of his spear, so that the spear came out at his back. And he fell there and died where he was.

[3 : 58] And all who came to the place where Asahel had fallen and died stood still. But Joab and Abishai pursued Abner. And as the sun was going down, they came to the hill of Amma, which lies before Gia, on the way to the wilderness of Gibeon.

And the people of Benjamin gathered themselves together behind Abner and became one group and took their stand on the top of a hill. Then Abner called to Joab, Shall the sword devour forever?

Do you not know that the end will be bitter? How long will it be before you tell your people to turn from the pursuit of their brothers? And Joab said, As God lives, if you had not spoken, surely the men would not have given up the pursuit of their brothers until the morning.

So Joab blew the trumpet, and all the men stopped and pursued Israel no more, nor did they fight any more. And Abner and his men went all that night through the Ereba.

They crossed the Jordan, and marching the whole morning, they came to Mahaniyam. Joab returned from the pursuit of Abner. And when he had gathered all the people together, there were missing from David's servants 19 men besides Asahel.

[5 : 09] But the servants of David had struck down of Benjamin 360 of Abner's men. And they took up Asahel and buried him in the tomb of his father, which was at Bethlehem.

And Joab and his men marched all night, and the day broke upon them at Hebron. This is the word of God. Thanks be to God. We praise the Lord.

A long chunk of text with a lot of action going on. I promise you we will take these things bit by bit as we go through and make some sense of what is going on, because it is fairly simple, and I want us to see that today.

If you are new with us at Steel Valley Church, most of the chairs have Bibles underneath them. You are more than welcome to open that up.

And throughout the sermon, just have the Bible open to that passage, 2 Samuel 2. And just have your finger on the text as we go through, and I will make sure that I am faithful with saying what I am talking about and where I am speaking and referring to.

[6 : 20] And if you do not have a Bible, go ahead and take any of those Bibles home, and we would love for you to have a copy of God's Word. But yeah, it has been a great journey through 2 Samuel so far.

And this text is very complex, a lot going on. But like I said, I want us to see something very, very simple and tragically simple in the passage today.

Let me first say that human politics, we start out by just saying human politics was very, very noble. It was a noble arrangement, it was a noble construct to begin with.

But it's always been a struggle, human politics. It's like the very word politics, we're just like, it just hits us and we're just like, oh, that's just a word for maneuvering and getting your way.

And it's all about who has leverage, who has the control, who has the outcome in their favor, who gets the last word.

[7 : 31] And if you are in our church today with social media, this politics stuff is exhausting. Exhausting.

If we're honest, though, what we see in the exhaustion, the source of our exhaustion, actually isn't a Washington, D.C. problem.

We struggle with our own maneuvering, don't we? When life is uncertain, when outcomes feel threatened, that our way actually isn't turning out to occur when people don't do what we want, we have a tendency of reaching for control, don't we?

We reach for strategy, positioning, power, and we reach for strength. But is that really strength?

Is that actually control? Because isn't the Christian life, you know, prove me wrong, isn't the Christian life a life of submission to God?

[8 : 48] Of course. And that's why the Christian life can feel upside down at times. The world calls submission weakness, doesn't it? But God calls it strength.

The world tells you to rise up to occasions. And God says to bow down. The world says to protect your rights.

But God says proclaim the gospel. The church has had to relearn this throughout history.

Thinking back to 1974, evangelical leaders from around the world drafted the Lozane Covenant. And this was a time when gospel clarity was very strained back in the 70s.

And so they made this missional covenant to reorient themselves upon a focused gospel mission. And it included a striking warning. It said the church, quote, must not be identified with any particular social or political system or human ideology.

[10 : 04] Man, we've had to relearn this in history, haven't we? This is a reminder that the kingdom of God cannot be built by the ways of the world.

By the logic of the world. By coalitions. Through campaigns. Through pressure. Or power. And so the question isn't whether politics can accomplish anything.

That they're pointless. No, they can. In fact, the Bible instructs us to honor governing authorities. Because God has placed them.

Whether they be good authorities or wicked authorities. However, the deeper question then is this. When it comes to God's kingdom, what kind of strength do we trust?

Is it Washington, D.C.? Or is it here? In the God of the Bible. That's exactly what 2 Samuel 2 puts under the spotlight.

[11 : 08] Picture the scene. What's going on in this passage today. The chapter before. The chapter's coming after. God has already chosen his king. God has chosen his king.

And this king, David, didn't grab for the throne. But he listens. He asks. And he moves only at God's word.

Only at God's word. Not everyone was willing to yield, were they? See that in the passage. And when God's people aren't willing to submit to God and God's ways, they don't become neutral.

They separate themselves from God. And they become strategic in their own ways, in their own plans. They become reactive. And mind you, they become violent.

Brothers turn on brothers and the perceivably strong make decisions that kings should never have to make. This chapter, if we could put a warning label. I was about to AI generate a warning label for the screen.

[12 : 18] This chapter really reads like a warning label. It says, this is what happens when human strength refuses divine rule.

With the sign blaring, flashing bright. And hanging over this scene in this chapter, in chapter 2.

And over us today as a main point, is going to ask us a question. That question is, are you strong enough to submit to God?

Are you strong enough to submit to God? That's real strength. And I've been pondering that question all week long.

And I hope that you can too. 2 Samuel leaves us on the edge of tension. Will God's people finally yield to God's King?

[13 : 17] Or will they win the kingdom by their strength that isn't submitted? Let's enter into this tension piece by piece. I have three sections today.

And I'm going to break this down a little bit. The sermon title today is Strong Enough to Submit. I want this to be pounded into our head in a very tense cultural moment and time period.

And I'd like us to begin this through prayer. Let's pray. Father, we come to you knowing that it is easy to resist.

It is easy to rebel. It's our nature to rebel. It's hard to submit. And Father, I pray that as we think about this and the problem woven throughout this passage, I pray that we might be able to look upon the magnifying glass of our own lives and see where we are holding out on you.

Where we are replacing you with action you have never authorized. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[14 : 44] All right. Three points today. The first point is that submission listens before it moves. Submission listens before it moves.

We see that. If you look in your Bible, we see this from verse 1 all the way down to verse 11. After the death of Saul, the question facing Israel that we've been left on since chapter 1, and even if we want to go even further back to 1 Samuel chapter 30, the question is looming, is not whether Israel has a king.

Because Israel has a king, but will they submit? Will they surrender to that king? And what kind of strength is going to guide their future? Are they going to get this right?

Well, the text begins by showing us what true submission actually looks like. Verse 1, I mean, this is an honest inquiry, isn't it?

Like, what do you want me to do, Lord? I can stay here. It's comfy. Now, many commentators note that the repeated phrase, go up, and this attention to going up isn't just merely geographical, but it's actually theological.

[16 : 25] Because at this point, David isn't necessarily well known. But he's entering in. He's rising up into his reign as king.

And so going up was the very beginning. And this rise is not powered by his ambition, right? He's not saying, well, first order of business, now that I'm king, I'm going to get this place straightened out a little bit.

I'm going to go up to Hebron. No, he bows down before the Lord and says, Lord, what do you want me to do? Isn't that striking? His rise as king began by listening.

This is a stark contrast from King Saul, right? King who kind of did what he thought was right. It's like the problem of judges doing what's right in his own eyes.

David's reign began with submission. We have to notice this destination, Hebron. This city is very special.

[17 : 33] This place is a place of promise. It's saturated in God's promises. It's where Abraham built his altar in Genesis 12.

It's where Sarah was buried in Genesis 23. And even later, it was the first piece of the promised land that was secured.

We should see here, by sending David to Hebron, the Lord's theologically anchoring his kingship into covenant promises made generations prior.

And so this isn't a new story. God's been working the narrative, and He's continuing to work the narrative through David as He's rising to His throne.

What does David do? Well, he goes up. Right? The test comes when David's heart was received, the intelligence that something's happened to Saul.

[18 : 37] Somebody stole the body of Saul. And it's those people at Jabesh Gilead. In verse 4, we see a test comes. David hears that the men of Jabesh Gilead buried Saul.

I mean, Jabesh Gilead, these were Saul's guys. This was his short list, the redial folks. They once stood against David, violently against David.

And what does David do to his enemies? He sends a message of hesed, of steadfast love in verse 6.

Mercy, blessing, encouragement for them to stand valiant because Saul is dead.

He almost guides them how to mourn and navigate the situation. What a king David is. You see, this is strength.

[19 : 43] This is strength under restraint. This is submission-shaping character. He doesn't punish his enemies.

He extends grace to them. But as we read this morning, not everyone is strong enough to submit. Not everyone.

There's a contrast that's made five years after David's anointing in Judah. We get that time placement towards the end in verse 11, where he reigned in Judah for seven and a half years, but Abner was in charge for just the last two.

So five years into David's anointing in Judah, we see in verse 8, But Abner, the son of Ner, commander of Saul's army, took Ish-bosheth, the son of Saul, and brought him over to Mahanaim.

And he made him king over Gilead and the Asherites and Jezreel and Ephraim and Benjamin and all Israel. Anyone in between.

[20 : 56] This was the guy over all of this. While David has little Judah down there. Abner.

This isn't faith. This is resistance. We'll see next week that Abner knew that David was God's anointed.

We'll see that in chapter 3 next week. But he knows that. He knows who the king is. But we see something theologically tragic.

Knowledge doesn't always mean submission. You can know the right answers in Bible school and still be living a life in rebellion. But because of sin, Abner anointed his own king.

Saul's son. Who he felt was the rightful heir of the throne. We've got to ask, as we're looking at this contrast, we have to ask ourselves the question, are we strong enough to listen before we move?

[22 : 10] Are we strong enough to listen before we move? Or do you move first and then sort of along the way? You ask God to bless what you've already decided.

I can't be the only one here. You see, this is where submission gets painfully practical. Personal as well.

Some of us haven't paused to ask God what he thinks about a situation for a long time. And you might be feeling that way.

Because you've already decided. You've already decided what you're going to do without considering what God wants in your life. Now, it could be directly related to maybe a relationship that you're pursuing.

Right? Could be your response to somebody. We live in a toxic social media environment right now. It could be a post on social media. I can't be the only one who wrote that email that you're just like, oh, shouldn't have done that.

[23 : 20] Right? We're human. And we know that this is a common, common problem. Of all the tone, of all the assumptions that come with it.

We don't ask, Lord, shall I go up? We just say, Lord, here's where I'm going. Please bless it. It makes me feel good. I feel good.

Isn't this tragically sad? It's tragically sad. That isn't faith, church. It isn't faith to move without God and assume that he's going to work.

There's a reason we're doing a fast right now. There's a reason for it. If that's faith moving and assuming God is going to work, that's asking God to sanctify our momentum.

And it's selfishness concealed in a shell of worship. It's pitiful. When submission to God is refused, strength just doesn't disappear.

[24 : 35] Think about that. Strength doesn't just disappear and all of a sudden we're good. But when submission to God is refused, strength sticks around.

And it intensifies elsewhere. And unfortunately, that's apart from God at that point. And so what happens when submission is absent?

The next section shows us. And it stinks. Let's look in verse 12 through 24. Second point is, unsubmitted strength creates dysfunction.

Unsubmitted strength creates dysfunction. Look in your Bibles. Verse 12. Abner, the son of Ner, and the servants of Ish-bosheth, the son of Saul, went out from Mahanaim to Gibeon.

And Joab, the son of Zariah, and the servants of David, went out and met them at the pool of Gibeon. And they sat down, the one on one side of the pool and the other on the other side of the pool.

[25 : 44] So pause there for a minute. And picture this scene. You got divided loyalties. You got Abner's crew. You got David's crew.

Right? Or we'll say you got Ish-bosheth's crew, king over here. You got David's crew over there. Between them is just still waters between them.

And they meet. It's quiet. Two groups of God's kingdom sitting opposite of one another at the pool of Gibeon.

Do you sense sort of this moment of peace? They're coming together. This is good. But is this true peace?

Because on first reading of this passage, it never dawned on me that I never asked and inquired of the author, where's the kings?

[26 : 51] Where's, who's in charge here? There's no kings. And so we see this is not going to end well. In fact, that's the origin of tension in this passage.

There's no David. There's no Ish-bosheth. These servants. And so leave it to guys to make the right decision. Verse 14 and 15.

Abner initiates a competition. You know, it might be thinking of like, well, let's settle our differences just in a good round of sparring. Let's wrestle a bear. See who wins.

Right? I mean, this is like, like there's no referee. There's nobody in charge. It's just people going wild at each other. It's like the Browns and the Steelers facing off.

They hate each other. They want to defeat each other, but they face off without refs, without officials, and in the backyard of somebody's house. I mean, that's not going to end well. Somebody's going to get very, very hurt.

[27 : 54] Leroy's like, yeah, you better, you better believe it. It wouldn't end well. And we see that it doesn't end well. In verse 16. And each caught his opponent by the head and thrust his sword in his opponent's side.

So they fell down together. Therefore, this place was called Helcath Hazarim, which is at Gibeon.

This is translated as a field of the stone knives. In verse 17. And the battle was fierce that day. And Abner and the men of Israel were beaten before the servants of David.

We see even subtly, the strength of God's king is still at work, even amid poor choices of man. And you see, the fallout of this, too, is what was meant to sort of resolve conflict.

This was a time of coming together and getting along. But unfortunately, it memorialized conflict. The field of the stone knives.

[29 : 09] And it doesn't end there. It could have ended there. It doesn't end there. In verse 18, the scene zooms into David's nephew, a sale.

And I think it's for good reason. I mean, this nephew of David, he's fast. He's determined. He's brave.

He's got strength. It's like Pastor Rick, running his half marathons. However, a sale is completely unwise as he pursues Abner relentlessly, ignoring all the warning signs given by Abner to back away.

Look at me in verse 20. I want you to see this, kind of like two brothers just playfully, just egging each other on. Look, in verse 20, they're running away from each other. Abner's running.

A sale coming up. Then Abner looked behind him and said, is that you, a sale? And he answered, it is I. Abner said to him, turn aside to your right hand or to your left and seize one of the young men and take his spoil.

[30 : 23] We say it not like that. We say, go pick on somebody your own size. Like, Abner's a vicious warrior. He knows what he's doing. A sale's just relentless and he's just, rage unhinged.

And so in verse 22, Abner said again to a sale, turn aside from following me. Why should I strike you to the ground?

Abner knows he has the upper hand. He says, how could I lift up my face to your brother Joab? Abner clearly didn't want to kill a sale.

But a sale refused to turn aside. And therefore, in dead running, Abner only had to stop dead in his tracks, pull his spear into the back, and let a sale's fate reach himself.

And his spear went through him. And we see that this place was memorialized as well. All who came to this place where a sale had fallen and died stood still.

[31 : 37] This was a moment that even the watching world was like, what in the world is going on? See, a sale's strength, he was determined.

I mean, you could see it. But he had no submission. It was completely unhinged, which ultimately led to his tragic undoing.

And furthermore, he dies, not because Abner was cruel, but because a sale was unwilling to yield, to humble himself and say, you know, this is stupid.

Man, what a sobering truth is exposed. That zeal without submission is not faith. Zeal without submission is dangerous.

It's dangerous. You're probably feeling the weight of this today. And you're not alone. Just this week, our country has been consumed by outrage and division over the tragic death of a woman in Minnesota.

- [32 : 49] Some calling it self-defense, others calling it murder. And before we even know all the facts about it, lines are drawn, accusations are flying, and people who bear the image of God are treating each other as enemies.
- And church, I'm not here to solve every case from the pulpit. I'm certainly not qualified to solve the case from the pulpit, nor is anybody who's seeing anything on social media. But I am here to say this, and directional for us.
- When strength isn't submitted to God, it always turns reactive. It always turns tribal. It always turns destructive.
- This is precisely what happens in the scene with a sale. unsubmitted strength produces. It produces dysfunction, produces division, and it produces death.
- And it's so sad because we can't get the warning time and time again. And most of all, unsubmitted strength costs more than it can ever gain.
- [34 : 06] more than it can ever gain. So I want to ask you, where has strength in your life actually become stubbornness? Just ignoring the warning, running with your feelings, feeling the jollies, and you're just going to do what you're going to do.
- Ask God to bless it later. It makes you feel good. It feels therapeutic. It seems right. But it's actually stubbornness. Where has strength in your life become stubbornness?
- Where has zeal replaced wisdom? Where have you refused to turn aside when God has clearly warned you?
- The pursuit continued for David's nephews, Joab and Abisha. We see in point three, and this is an encouragement for all of us.
- don't miss the next opportunity to submit. We see this from verse 24 to 32. As night fell, the men of Benjamin gathered behind Abner on the top of a hill.
- [35 : 20] Do you see him? Abner standing there, the men behind him. And for the first time, Abner actually speaks wisely. Praise the Lord. There's hope for Abner, Mr. Competition Man.
- Abner speaks wisely to David's nephews. Look at me in 26. Then Abner called to Joab. Abner up on the hill, Joab lower. He says, shall the sword devour forever?
- Do you not know that the end will be bitter? How long will it be before you tell your people to turn from the pursuit of their brothers?
- You want to know a miracle? He's right. This bonehead is right. Unhinged strength, directionless anger cannot continue.
- The end will be bitter. These are brothers of the same nation. And Joab, he responds with blame, of course.
- [36 : 33] We always play the blame game in verse 27. Joab said, as God lives, if you had not spoken, you wouldn't have created the competition. Surely the men would not have given up their pursuit of their brothers until morning.
- I mean, he's right in that too. But then praise the Lord in verse 28. Joab blew the trumpet and all the men stopped and pursued Israel no more, nor did they fight anymore.
- What would appear as peace is actually conflict that's unresolved. It's unresolved here.
- And it might seem as if strength is restraint. It's not submitted. How should that scene go?
- It should have been Abner confessing his wrong and submitting to the king of Judah. It doesn't happen. So we see conflict unresolved.
- [37 : 45] And actually, this is the first reference of the two kingdoms being split. Abner going north and Joab going south.

Unfortunately, they're strong enough to stop fighting, but they're not strong enough to submit to God's chosen king. And that's the tragedy of this passage. And we need to be very clear here that submitting to God is not about becoming a better version of you.

It's not about achieving a certain level of pleasantness towards God to make God happy. Right? It's not trying harder and managing your strength more carefully.

The Bible says that we don't drift into submission just, oh, here it is. I'll submit now. No. We resist submission by nature.

The easy way for us is to resist. Why do you think the nations plot in vain and rage? Because they don't know Jesus.

[38 : 57] They love the darkness rather than the light to solve problems their way, not our way. But we as a church are counter to the ways of the world.

We must be counter to the ways of the world. We resist God by nature. It's theological. You see, maybe you're an unbeliever today, and I've got to ensure that you understand that becoming a Christian begins when a person stops justifying themselves.

Not just submitting your vacation plans to the Lord and you're doing the Lord's will. If you're apart from Christ and you haven't submitted yourself, there's a disconnect.

There's a call in this passage passage to not just submit little increments and little things in your life that might be out of touch, but it's saying you have an invitation to submit your entire being to the King of Kings.

Stop ruling your own life and bow to Jesus in repentance and just turning away from your sin and faith.

[40 : 22] Faith that forgiveness is found in Jesus Christ. To submit to God for you is to say that I am not the King. And turn from your sin and trust that Jesus lived, he died, and rose to save sinners like me, like a lot of people in this room right now, or on the live stream.

Release and receive Jesus Christ. Now some of us here today might be here because God has already put a finger on an issue that's going on in your life.

Maybe it's an attitude that you have, that you're struggling with. Maybe it's a habit, maybe it's an issue with porn, or maybe even not even porn, but maybe things that TikTok puts in front of your face, that isn't porn, but it's risky material.

Yeah, that's still sin. Public service announcement. Maybe it's a posture that you have towards other people, maybe bitterness.

It could be bitterness to Steel Valley Church. You'd rather be at the other church with other things and other things that are available and all of that. Right? And we've been managing all of this stuff.

[41 : 55] We've been saying, okay, I'm just going to trust in God's will. I'm going to trust in God's will. I slipped again with porn this week. Oh, just cheated on my wife again. Right?

No big deal. Are you kidding me? We can't manage this. We have to surrender to the Lord, the King of Kings.

Submission, surrender. You can think that we've stopped the outward conflict, but our hearts, for some reason, is untouched by even the slightest bit and the appearance of sin that appears in our life, whether it's an attitude, habit, posture, or bitterness.

But the longer submission is delayed, the more costly things become. We can only pretend, church, for so long.

We will be unable to manage. We will detonate. We will. Don't miss the next opportunity to submit.

[43 : 06] Passage ends. Abner's men went north to Mahanaim with 360 of their men dead in a pointless civil war.

Isn't that dumb? Joab returned south having only lost 20 men and buried a king's body in the very place that David was anointed, a place where generations later there would be a king of kings and lord of lords who would submit perfectly unto death.

And church, if submission feels impossible, if you're like, I know I'm a mess and I can't do it, that's good because you can't do it on your own.

You can't. The gospel tells us that the strength to submit doesn't come from inside of us. Resistance comes inside of us.

The strength to submit comes from the king who submitted for us. And Jesus did what no one, not a single person or confusing Hebrew name or location could do in this chapter.

[44 : 25] He did not grasp for power. He did not retaliate. He did not escalate. But he submitted to the will of the father even when it led him to the cross. And by that submission God established his kingdom.

That should rock our worlds and be a reminder in such a crazy divided culture today. Church, you are not of this world.

Don't fight the world's battles. We can pause conflict. We can manage our appearances.

We can stop the bleeding. But are you strong enough to submit to God? Until we are, whatever peace means, peace will be fragile.

Unity will be temporary. And strength will always be working against us. Don't believe me? watch the world continue to solve their problems their way.

[45 : 34] Let's watch it unfold together. Because we have hope to offer the world an invitation that Christ paid his blood.

The strongest man in this chapter is not Abner or any of David's nephews. the strongest man in this chapter is David.

David. Why? Because he listens. And the strongest king of all is Jesus because he obeyed. Are you strong enough to submit to God?

Where might God be calling you to submit this week? maybe before you speak, before you assume, before you react, before you take matters into your own hands and give him a good dose of sparkle, right?

Don't want that dose. Bow to the king who reigns by grace. Trust the kingdom that comes by obedience and pray, church, not my will, but yours be done.

[46 : 52] Let's pray. Let's pray.