

CHAPTER FIVE

THE ART OF CARE AND CORRECTION

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As we read in Chapter One of this book, a primary goal of small-group ministry is sanctification. God has called us each to be conformed to the image of Christ. In God's wisdom, he has made us so that we cannot accomplish this without the involvement of others. Wayne Grudem has said, "Sanctification is usually a corporate process in the New Testament. It is something that happens in community."¹ Another has well said, "One can acquire anything in solitude except character."

The primary roadblock to both personal maturity and biblical relationships is sin: sin in our own life; sin in others' lives; a world fallen because of sin. In each of these areas we can find great help and hope in the committed relationships that can grow out of small groups. To assist us in our ongoing quest to become more like Christ, God uses people in three ways—to reveal our sin, to help us to take action against our sin, and to walk with us in our struggle against sin.

First, God uses people to help reveal our sin. As friends observe our life "up close and personal," they can point out areas of sin and weakness and/or simply areas where we might need to grow. Also, interaction with others *reveals* our sins as situations reveal what is in our hearts.

Once sin is exposed, God gives us others who help us deal with our sin through confrontation, counseling, encouragement, accountability, and prayer. Finally, he gives us others to help and support us as we face the effects of living in a sinful world—pain, discouragement, confusion, weakness—while we "wait to be liberated from the bondage of decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God" (Ro 8:21).

Let's take a look at this last aspect first.

“ The Christian approach is to solve all problems, not just solve some problems or solve them part way. Romans 5:20 tells us about the fullness of God’s grace: ‘But where sin abounded, grace far more abounded.’ That assurance means that when Christ meets sin, He more than meets the need. It is not His concern to ‘patch things up’ or even to turn back the clock. He wants to turn a bad thing into a great one! And He will settle for nothing less.²

— Jay Adams

Caring for One Another

There are many ways we can express care for others in our small group. Let me suggest five proven methods.

Comfort. To comfort means to cheer or to ease the grief and troubles of life. Life can be hard. We can face serious trials and tragedy—the death of a family member or close friend, loss of a job, a broken relationship we struggle to reconcile. We also face daily

disappointments and hardships that can trouble and burden us. Sometimes we just have a bad day. How wonderful it is at times like these to have committed friends who will gather around us, bring comfort, and help ease our burdens.

The New Testament instructs us to “mourn with those who mourn” (Ro 12:15) and to “comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God” (2Co 1:4). I regularly meet with a group of men in our church for accountability and support. I can think of many times over the years when we have helped each other through trials at work or at home, through difficult and discouraging struggles with sin, or simply through life’s ups and downs. The comfort received and given in these times has been an invaluable help in our walk with God through a fallen world.

Counsel. By this I don’t mean formal counseling, but sharing with those in need the wisdom, insight, and experience we have gained. Paul told the Romans, “I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another” (Ro 15:14). My wife and her friends excel at this. In an hour of chatting on the phone they can solve all the problems of the world (at least their worlds) in an informal yet extremely biblical, practical, and effective way. They provide a listening ear. They share what God has been teaching them, or what has worked for them in practical and spiritual matters.

Warning to men: Don’t try this! You are not genetically constituted to just chat for an hour. For men, something

**Meditate on
2 Corinthians 1:3-4.**
When God comforts us in our troubles, what does he expect us to do in turn?

resembling chatting is only beneficial when done in the context of an activity such as fishing, eating, or watching football. Here is an actual transcript (well, more or less) of a close male-bonding experience:

Gettin' any bites?

Yep.

(Pause) What bait you usin'?

Uh...minnows.

(Long pause) Do you think I should become a missionary in Tibet?

Nope.

(Medium pause) Think I should switch to artificial lures?

(Reflective pause) Well...Firetigers always work for me this time of year.

Huh.

Yeah...they're good.

Huh.

Among other things, this conversation demonstrates the natural male tendency to focus more on peripheral issues (such as fishing lures) than on far more significant personal matters (such as a possible call to evangelism). So heads up, guys—you probably need to pay especially close attention to this chapter.

Encourage. To encourage means to inspire with courage, spirit, and hope; to hearten; to urge forward. Everyone occasionally gets discouraged. We face times when life seems difficult, progress slow, or challenges insurmountable. How important it is at these times to have someone give us a pep-talk based not on positive thinking or blind optimism but on the manifold promises and hope held out to us in the Scriptures.

At other times, when we let our priorities get out of line, our zest for pressing ahead begins to slip away. We give in to the temptation to settle down and take it easy, and our pursuit of God shifts into neutral. At such times, we need someone to come alongside and exhort us onward. I believe this is what the writer of Hebrews refers to when he says, "Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds" (Heb 10:24).

Lastly, encouragement can come from expressions of appreciation and thanks. "You've done a good job," "I've noticed the way you have persevered in faith and joy through your trial," "Thanks for the way you served," and similar expressions of affirmation are all deeply encouraging to hear. I can't tell you how often I have been buoyed

For Further Study:

Job got high marks from his friends for his ability to encourage (see Job 4:3-4). How would you rate his wife's gift in this area? (See Job 2:7-10)

in spirit and freshly motivated to mature and serve through this kind of encouragement from others.

Help. All of the above are important expressions of care for one another, but not the only expressions. There are many ways we can also physically and materially help those in our small group. James reminds us, “If one of you says... ‘Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?” (Jas 2:16). He said this not to discount the importance of our words but to point out that in many situations words alone can’t meet the need. Meals for families with a newborn, helping someone put a new roof on his house, providing financial help to someone temporarily out of work, giving someone a ride to a meeting—in all these and many more practical ways we are to serve those in our small group.

My family and I are preparing to move, and a week

1 Of the gifts listed in Romans 12:6-8, which ones would apply most directly to helping one another in obvious, practical ways?

before my house was to go on the market I still had several major fix-up projects to complete. I would never have been able to get everything done in time myself, but a dozen friends gave up a Saturday to come help me. In no time at all, the jobs were done. This was not only a huge practical blessing to me and my family, but a great time of building my friendships with these men.

Correct. Most people don’t think of correcting or being corrected as part of our care for one another, but in fact it is one of the most vital ways we serve our friends. Remember, sin is the primary enemy of both personal

maturity and our relationships with others. To correct means literally “to straighten up again”; to intervene and help when someone is going off course. What could be more valuable to a friend than this? The Scriptures counsel us to love correction, going so far as to say that those who hate correction are stupid (Pr 12:1).

Let’s spend the rest of this chapter looking at this vital area of ministry to one another. As we do so, let our heart attitude be one of trying to see how we can be more effective in helping one another both to grow personally and to work through the difficulties our sin causes in our relationships. The main skills of correction can be summarized as conflict resolution, confrontation, and confession.

For Further Study:

Read Hebrews 12:5-8. How does God treat those he loves? Do you think it would be kind for you to treat your friends the same way?

Resolving Conflicts

Conflict and offense are inevitable. When we mix with people who are sinful and selfish (that is, people who are just like us), we expose ourselves to the possibility of conflict and offense. Where might this happen? How about any place on earth! But it's especially likely where we are relating closely to others—at home, at church, in school, at work, in our neighborhood...or in our small group.

Disagreement is inevitable because people are different from one another. Conflict and offense are likely (in any given circumstance) because we are sinful. But disagreement need not always lead to conflict, nor conflict to offense. You can disagree with someone without sinning and you can be sinned against without taking offense. Sometimes, you might *perceive* an offense even when no one has sinned against you—in which case the only thing that was “offended” was your own pride, self-centeredness,

“ The Bible teaches that we should see conflict neither as an inconvenience nor as an occasion for selfish gain, but rather as an opportunity to demonstrate the presence and power of God....it encourages us to look at conflict as an opportunity to glorify God, to serve others, and to grow to be like Christ.³

— Ken Sande

or some other idol in your heart. There are also other possibilities, some of them discussed later in this chapter. Discernment, honest inquiry, and wise application of the Scriptures are critical.

This much is certain. While our goal is to love one another genuinely and fully, we *will* have disagreements. And we *will* have conflicts

during which we sin against others and are sinned against. Jesus himself said, “Temptations to sin are sure to come” (Lk 17:1, RSV). However, just because they are sure to come doesn't mean that, when they do come, we aren't responsible for resolving them in a godly and redemptive manner.

In fact, trying to avoid the godly resolution of conflicts just builds a dam between ourselves and others, allowing a reservoir of misunderstanding, bitterness, unforgiveness, and/or resentment to form. The dam eventually bursts, producing problems far more serious than any we would have faced by dealing with our differences or concerns in the first place. In the meantime, as we keep shoring up the walls of the dam in a futile attempt to prevent them from bursting, our character becomes increasingly defined by our sinful attitudes. But none of these things need to

Meditate on 1 Peter

4:8. Here's a great strategy for avoiding needless conflicts.

Meditate on Proverbs

1:7. Whether we are correcting, being corrected, or just trying to determine whether correction is appropriate, what is the most important heart attitude we can have?

happen if we will diligently employ God's methods for avoiding and resolving conflict.

Avoiding conflict. I once heard it said, "It is better to build a guard rail at the top of a cliff than to run an ambulance service at the bottom." This is especially true when it comes to our relationships. Our first goal is to be aware of potential pitfalls so we can head off conflicts at the pass.

There are several dangerous but common ways of seeking to avoid conflict. Trying not to talk about potentially volatile subjects or areas of disagreement is a typical but unsuitable strategy. Hoping a problem area will disappear doesn't work either. Neither does switching small groups every six months or living in a cave. These all represent efforts to ignore the fact that we're on a road with lots of cliffs, pretty heavy traffic, some inconsiderate drivers, and no guard rails. But in truth, because the hazards are so prevalent, these attempts do not avoid *conflict* so much as they avoid its resolution!

The far better way is to take steps to prevent conflicts from happening in the first place—to build those spiritual guard rails. We do this by practicing the kind of regular and honest communication that keeps us current with our friends, enables us to know them, and lets them know us. These efforts build a quality of relationship that helps us

handle differences more easily when they arise. As part of our communication, we should also be inviting input and evaluation from our friends on a regular basis. This gives them a convenient context in which to share concerns about us or our relationship.

Having realistic (not low) expectations will also help. No one in your group is perfect, including you. Taking into account our friends' maturity, circumstances, limitations, and humanity will help us extend grace to one another. God "remembers that we are dust" (Ps 103:14). We ought graciously to remember the same about one another. The more clearly we can communicate our expectations to each other, the less likely we will be to find offense.

Finally, we must deal with little things. We don't have to deal with

2 Which of the following methods, commonly in use in homes, schools, and workplaces around the world, resolve conflicts as effectively as the biblical approach?

- Spending the rest of your life ignoring everyone with whom you've had a conflict.
- Being extra nice to the offended party the next time you happen to see him or her.
- If an attempt at reconciliation is made, insisting no offense was taken (even if it was).
- Getting as many people as possible to think badly of the person with whom you had the conflict.
- Acting like it never happened (see "Being extra nice," above), firm in the belief that if the phrase "time heals all wounds" is not actually in the Bible, it ought to be.

everything; but if some little thing is bothering you, deal with it before it becomes a big thing.

Working through conflict. Conflicts may involve mere differences or genuine offense, and understanding the distinction is critical. Whichever it is, the following process will help you begin to find resolution. As you go through this process, keep in mind that your three-fold goal is to solve the problem, grow closer *in* the process, and become more godly *through* the process. Personal victory is *not* the goal, for this will neither bless your friend nor please God.

First, evaluate the conflict. Does it involve sin, or a mere disagreement over some personal preference? Here, there is no better wisdom regarding the *attitude* we are to have than James 1:19: “My dear brothers, take note of this:

“ To listen properly, a servant’s attitude and posture is necessary. It requires us to put our whole inner and outer man at another person’s disposal, saying: ‘Your interests, concerns, problems, successes, or failures are more important than mine. I will listen to whatever you have to say as long as it is biblically proper. I will allow you to express yourself fully. I yield myself to you. Let’s focus on what is most important to you rather than on what is most important to me.’¹⁴

”

— Wayne Mack

Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.” Listening is the first, second, and third step we should take. This includes getting a grasp on the issues from both a material perspective (what happened) and a heart perspective (how it made each of you feel). It also involves trying to get a better understanding of the other person, to gain sympathy and compassion for him or her.

Next, stay on the subject. Cover only one issue at a time. Review what happened, *not* your assessment of the other person’s motives and character (such assessments are often sinful and inaccurate). Also, do not—in an effort to “win points”—bring up incidents from the past that you have already forgiven.

When the time does come to speak, speak only that which will lead to understanding and resolution. Bring an attitude of respectful inquiry. Don’t accuse, vent anger, or give voice to your self-pity (which is sin). Paul’s counsel is sound: “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen” (Eph 4:29). Here, dealing with your own faults first and foremost will help greatly.

For Further Study:

Have you ever said something that you immediately regretted? Before you invest in a muzzle, try memorizing Proverbs 10:19.

Confronting Sin in Others

Whether we have been sinned against on a given occasion, or become aware that a fellow believer has a pattern of sin in his life, confrontation may be in order. To confront is “to bring face to face.” Here, confrontation is the process of getting face to face with someone to help him see a particular sin in his life or to work through conflict and offense and bring forgiveness and reconciliation. There is a right and a wrong way to do this.

For Further Study:

Read James 5:19-20. As you can see, the benefits of correcting a friend far outweigh the tension it may cause at first.

In the case of a personal offense, the wrong way might go something like this. In the middle of your small-group meeting Joe interrupts while you are speaking. You go ballistic! “I’m sick and tired of you interrupting me all the time. You are the most insensitive, inconsiderate jerk I have ever met! You are so proud that you think what you have to say is more important than what anyone else is saying. I’ve been teasing you about this for months but you have never gotten the hint, so now let me tell you right to your face in front of everybody. You owe me an apology and I demand it right now!...I’m waiting!” This approach probably won’t be fruitful.

What is the right way? The Scriptures lay out several principles to follow when confronting someone about sin.

First, determine if it is necessary to confront. You will need different standards for different situations.

Proverbs 19:11 says, “A man’s wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense.” It is not necessary to go to someone every time you are offended. If you are able, you can forgive and go on with a person without any negative effect on the relationship. But you may not simply chicken out. The incident must be resolved in your heart and mind. (If you have an open conflict it *must* be addressed—you can’t just let these pass without

resolution and reconciliation.)

In the final analysis, you must confront if you find that 1) you are unable to get the incident out of your mind, 2) you are unable to have a normal relationship with the person who has

offended or sinned against you, or 3) you believe someone has something against you but is not coming to you—you don’t have to know what it is, just that the person seems to be acting differently toward you.

“ Confrontation can be very difficult, and many avoid it. But what wasted time could be redeemed in our lives if faithful friends started telling us some truths about ourselves.⁵

”

— Terry Virgo

When a friend is sinning and you believe you need to speak to him, you should ask yourself: Is this sin a pattern? Is it so serious that it needs immediate attention? Is this God's timing for me to confront? Am I the one to confront in this case? (These last two are not loophole questions for avoiding what you know you need to do.)

In general, you ought to confront when you believe the sin is ongoing and serious and when, in prayer, you do not sense that your attitudes and motives are wrong. Always remember that God is working on things in the other person's life as well. When you are called to confront you are called to come alongside the work the Holy Spirit is already doing in his life—not to *be* the Holy Spirit.

Second, define the problem. What are you confronting him about? What did he do or say? What sin is involved?

“ Terms not only describe; they interpret. When we use a word such as gossip, many biblical images and exhortations come to mind—as well they should. When we try to describe the same activity in a more ‘neutral’ fashion, what we really do is describe it in an unbiblical way. God’s descriptive categories are not neutral.... ‘Neutrality’ is really a surrender to unbelief. It is a refusal to speak and think from God’s perspective.⁶

— E. Bradley Beavers

What is the impact? How does he need to change? Defining the problem will help you be clear and concise when you go to confront him. Make sure you define things biblically, for it is Scripture alone—not our own thoughts and feelings—that is “God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2Ti 3:16-17).

Third, get the log out of your own eye. If you are confronting someone who has sinned against you, you will often find your own sin has contributed. If you are confronting another about a particular sin, Scripture warns you to be aware of your own sins and temptations in this same area (see Galatians 6:1). This isn't to say you ought not to confront, only that you are not to confront until you first examine your own heart and clear your own conscience. This will enable you to confront in humility and the fear of the Lord, increasing your effectiveness in bringing reconciliation, repentance, and resolution.

Self-examination can also help in another way. You might have become offended without there having been an offense—rather, someone may merely have done something to expose your selfishness or pride (you may think you are just “overly sensitive”). Likewise, you have to take

For Further Study: To see what Jesus said about removing logs from our eyes, turn to Matthew 7:1-5.

Meditate on
1 Thessalonians 2:11-12. Paul spoke some pretty strong words to the churches...but what was the attitude of his heart?

care not to confront people about what you think is sin just because you don't appreciate some aspect of their personality. In such cases, you can start out confronting someone and end up in confession and repentance.

Fourth, prepare your heart. This involves three things. Make sure your *motives* are right—to glorify God, turn your brother or sister from sin, and be reconciled. (In other words, not to win your case, straighten them out, put them in their place, or relieve your irritation.) Make sure your *attitudes* are right—gentleness, patience, humility, and genuine concern for the welfare of others. Finally, *pray*—for effectiveness in communicating your concerns; for the person's heart to be prepared to receive; and for God's grace for repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

Fifth, confront. Ultimately, God's grace will determine the effectiveness of any confrontation. However, there are several things you can do to make times of confrontation more effective.

3 Proverbs 18:13 and 18:17 help explain why it is that, when we think a brother or sister has sinned against us, we need to approach him or her with a humble and teachable heart. Read these passages, then write a sentence in the space below that expresses the essence of what these two verses say about us.

Speak to the person privately.

Plan for an atmosphere where distractions will be minimal so you can fully concentrate on the issues at hand.

Affirm your genuine affection for the person before you begin confronting. This isn't to somehow soften him up for the kill but to set a proper tone for your meeting. You *are* there to speak the truth...but in love (Eph 4:15). Many times I have seen the entire atmosphere of a meeting change when I began to communicate my love for the person even while confronting his sin.

Share your perceptions as honestly and clearly as possible. Use biblical language when explaining behaviors or sins (for example, say "pride" instead of "self-esteem"). Don't try to build an airtight case with mountains of evidence—you aren't a prosecutor seeking a conviction.

Maintain a spirit of inquiry. Don't assume your observations and conclusions are infallible and you know all the facts and motives involved. Recently, I had to confront a friend based on some concerns about his behavior. I communicated my concerns and asked for his perspective. Getting "the rest of the story" revealed the concerns were unfounded. He then told me how, the night before, someone had confronted him about the same issues but

STEPPING OUTSIDE

A Testimony

Through a mutual friend, I discovered that Tony, a member of my small group, had a habit of going to a neighborhood bar every payday to have drinks with his buddies from work. Before he was saved, Tony took hard drugs and drank excessively. He'd waked away from the drugs, but I was concerned that he not become trapped by this lingering habit of "having a drink with the guys."

Tony's a weight-lifter, a pretty intimidating guy. I felt I had to talk to him that afternoon. I wasn't sure how he'd react.

I found Tony at the bar with one of his friends. I greeted them both and then asked Tony if I could talk to him outside for a minute. He said, "Sure," in a surprised way.

Standing on the sidewalk, I told him that I was coming to him as his small-group leader and biblical friend. I explained how a Christian friend had to confront me about my drug habit even after I became a Christian. It changed my life. I let him know I cared about him enough to do the same thing.

He took it pretty well. He admitted it was embarrassing to have me stop by, but that he felt the conviction of the Holy Spirit. He went back inside, and I left feeling I had done what God wanted me to do, trusting him for the results in Tony's life.

That incident was a turning point for both of us. Now Tony is an integral part of a weekly men's group devoted to "confessing our sins and praying for one another that we may be healed." He doesn't shrink back from confronting me or anyone in the group. I've heard him say that this memorable incident helped him see the critical need for confrontation to battle sin and resolve conflicts in our lives! I've also gained confidence to lead the group and challenge people if I see stumbling blocks to spiritual growth.

— **Glenn Umek (Garfield Heights, OH)**

with guns blazing, accusations flying, and assumptions ruling. My friend obviously appreciated the difference. Your friends will appreciate it, too.

Offer biblical counsel and solutions. Be prepared to present an appropriate course of action. Try to help the person formulate a plan to resist temptation or be accountable. If you don't feel capable of doing this yourself, refer him to your small-group leader or a pastor in your church.

Provide sufficient time, if necessary, for him to think through what you have presented—don't demand an immediate response.

Pray with and for the person.

Finally, *follow up*. Too often we confront but fail to make sure our confrontation was effective and the results lasting. If things went well, follow up within a couple of days to express affection and appreciation for your friend's response and to find out how things have been going in the process of change. This is also a good time to see if he has any questions or further thoughts on the things you shared. He may even request that you serve him by holding him accountable as he seeks to change.

If things did not go well or if he asked for some time to consider what you said, follow up to see what

Meditate on Psalm

141:5. What was David's attitude toward the prospect of being corrected by another believer? Is this how you feel?

progress has been made. He may choose not to respond to your correction. If that happens, don't give up. Proceed to the next level of confrontation Jesus laid out for us: "But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses'" (Mt 18:16). While other passages discussed in this chapter specify the crucial heart attitudes we are to take into each such confrontation, Matthew 18:15-17 provides the practical steps we must follow when facing a difficult confrontation.

Responding to confrontation. Just as there is a biblical way to confront, there is also a biblical way to respond to confrontation. If someone confronts you about a sin or

4 Galatians 6:2 reads: "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." List three or four ways discussed in this chapter by which we can "carry each other's burdens."

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)

Now, put a star by any that you have practiced in the past two weeks.

offense, you can help in several ways to ensure the process has a genuinely redemptive outcome. First, listen humbly and prayerfully. Second, confess and ask forgiveness where possible. If you need some time to process and pray about what has been said, ask for it. (But if you tend to do this every time you are corrected, please hear me: you need to check your heart carefully for pride and unteachableness.) Just make sure you get back to the person. Last, thank and affirm the person for coming. He or she has just served you significantly by pointing out a sin or seeking to reconcile your relationship.

Confessing Our Own Sins

I've spent a lot of time discussing what to do when other people sin. However, it is far more important to regularly examine our hearts to identify instances where *we* may have sinned. We should not have to wait to confess until someone has confronted us with our sins or a breach in our relationship. When we realize we have sinned against someone or offended him, *or even think we have*, we should go to him and make things right. Again, there is a right and a wrong way to do this.

"Well I guess maybe I might have sinned against you a little but only because you did such-and-such first, so I guess maybe I owe you an apology if you were offended." This does not meet the biblical criteria. Then what does?

For starters, thoroughly examine your conscience.

For Further Study:

What's the difference between godly sorrow and worldly sorrow? (See 2 Corinthians 7:9-11)

For Further Study:

Read James 3:18. What (in addition to peace) results from our efforts to be "peacemakers"?

Determine, with the help of the Holy Spirit, where you have sinned. Ask for conviction and godly sorrow for each of those sins.

When you get together with the one you have sinned against (and don't wait for these meetings to "just happen"—*make* them happen), confess your sins honestly, clearly, specifically, and completely. This means you confess not only your words and actions but your motives as well. *Never gloss over your sins, offer excuses for your behavior, or generalize.* ("Sometimes I can tend to be harsh" is pale and ineffective compared to "I was harsh to you when I said such-and-such.") This will not be difficult if you have godly sorrow for your sin. Ken Sande's insight is helpful here: "Specific admissions help to convince others that you are honestly facing up to what you have done, which makes it easier for them to forgive you." Remember, the goal is not just to clear your conscience but to gain reconciliation with the one you have sinned against.

Express sorrow for what you have done and for the consequences of your actions. By this you are letting the person know that you realize your actions have affected him or her by causing pain, anxiety, or difficulty. It also lets the person know you are willing to accept any consequences that may accompany your confession (such as repayment of damages, going to others who may have been drawn in by gossip, etc.). Also, identify the lessons you have learned from the experience and specific ways you are going to change as a result. This will give the person hope and trust for the future and will help him or her to see how seriously you are taking your sin.

Finally, ask for forgiveness. To actually say the words, "Would you forgive me?" is important—for forgiveness is indeed what we need and are seeking.

5 Imagine that you need to confess a serious sin to someone and ask his or her forgiveness. Rank the following approaches in order of which is best.

- Make a telephone call
- Have a personal meeting
- Send an E-mail
- Ask your spouse or a friend to take care of it for you

Responding to a confession. A godly response to a confession includes several elements. First, tell the person you forgive him or her. *Do not say "It's OK" or "Don't worry about it."* (Sins are never OK or not to be worried about. Rather, they are to be forgiven.) Second, thank the one seeking forgiveness for coming and confessing. Affirm your love and respect for the person. It takes courage and humility to confess

sins—to do so is to serve another and to help build a godly relationship. Third, ask if he or she has any offense toward you as a result of the incident, or—if applicable—confess

any sin you may have contributed to the incident. Lastly, declare the episode over—dead and gone—and express your intent to walk fully reconciled to the person.

This Stuff Works!

Let me finish with a personal testimony to the value of correction. My wife Jane and I meet annually with some other couples to evaluate our marriages. One year, our evaluation was going well and I was feeling smug and safe. (In fact, as I often do, I started thinking ahead to lunch—but we will save discussion of that sin for another day!) Suddenly I heard Jane speak these dreaded words: “Well, there is one thing I would like to bring up.” I knew I was about to experience...The Joy of Correction!

“ Through forgiveness God tears down the walls that our sins have erected, and he opens the way for a renewed relationship with him. This is exactly what we must do if we are to forgive as the Lord forgives us; we must release the person who has wronged us from the penalty of being separated from us. Because we must not hold wrongs against others, not think about them, and not punish others for them, forgiveness may be described as a decision to make four promises:

‘I will no longer dwell on this incident.’

‘I will not bring up this incident again and use it against you.’

‘I will not talk to others about this incident.’

‘I will not allow this incident to stand between us or hinder our relationship.’

By making and keeping these promises, you tear down the walls that stand between you and your offender. You promise not to punish by holding the person at a distance. You clear the way for your relationship to develop unhindered by memories of past wrongs. This is exactly what God does for us, and it is what he commands us to do for others.⁸



— Ken Sande

Jane told how at times I quickly dismiss her desires and opinions, expressing my own opinions in a strong and authoritative way. (Here’s the translation: I was proud and selfish.) She gave several excellent examples. One of the other wives piped up, “Oh yeah, I remember when you did that.” (Did she really have to include a dead-ringer imitation of my arrogantly dismissive hand gesture?) One of the guys said I’ve treated him the same way. By the time we were finished, they had helped me explore the roots of my sins, see the impact of my sins on others, and gain insight on how to change. We ended with confession, forgiveness, and prayer. The whole discussion took only about a half hour, but it was life-changing.

I thank God for a good wife and good friends who are willing to correct and able to do it effectively. This

was true biblical care that helped me, blessed others, and pleased God. Our Father intends each of his children to live in the special blessings that flow from the application of biblical correction. Take this material to heart. Put it to work in your small group. God guarantees that it works. ■

GROUP DISCUSSION

1. This is a fun one: According to most translations of the Bible, Christ told Peter to forgive someone, not seven times, but seventy times seven—or 490 times (Mt 18:22). However, no one has ever found the verse indicating the specific vengeance you can take on those who commit their 491st offense against you. What would the ideal vengeance be? Here are a few ideas to get things rolling:

- Wire their home, car, and workplace for sound and require that they listen to the 24-hour polka station non-stop for six months.
- Make them listen repeatedly to every Academy Awards acceptance speech given since the inception of the ceremony in 1928.
- Make them speak politely and at length with every telephone salesman who calls their home during the next year. In each of these conversations, they must say at least once: “I’m so glad you called,” “Why, of course!”, and “Oh, absolutely.”

2. Do we benefit more from giving care or receiving care in the church?

3. Can you describe an experience in which you had a disagreement that did not grow into a conflict—or one that did when it should not have?

4. What’s the difference between saying “I’m sorry” and “Please forgive me”?

5. In what ways have you personally benefited from giving or receiving biblical correction?

6. Try role-playing two types of confrontation: one which starts with an accusation and another which starts with an inquiry. Why does tone make such a difference?

7. The author says “open conflicts” must be addressed (see page 68). How do you know when one has taken place?

8. Can you think of five *unbiblical* phrases people might use to shift attention away from their sin? (Example: “Yeah, I know I should have called you sooner, but I was really bummed out.”)

RECOMMENDED READING *The Peacemaker* by Ken Sande (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991)

NOTES

1. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), p. 756.
2. Jay Adams, *Solving Marriage Problems*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1983), p. 99.
3. Ken Sande, *The Peacemaker* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991), p. 20.
4. Wayne Mack, *Your Family, God's Way* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1991), p. 170.
5. Terry Virgo, *Restoration in the Church* (Columbia, MO: Cityhill Publishing, 1989), p. 72.
6. E. Bradley Beevers, “Watch Your Language,” *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*, Vol. XII, No. 3, Spring 1994, p. 25.
7. Ken Sande, *The Peacemaker*, p. 97.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 164.