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**Wanted:
Correctable
Christians**

(Part 2)

906-A

Series: Living Lessons From Proverbs

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Note: Russell wrote each of these lessons in a manner that would enable him to clearly communicate them to his weekly class. The grammar or punctuation you encounter may not be technically perfect, but you will certainly “hear” his unique gift for making the message applicable to the common man in everyday situations.

It’s been said of him that he was really a writer who read his stuff. And that’s a very accurate statement!

May you be richly blessed as you “hear” as you read.

Responding to Rebuke

Use your imagination and pretend you have a problem being content! Just imagine you're one of those who's always wishing you had just a little more money, a little better job, a little more acceptance, and a little better lot in life. Somehow it seems that the more you get, the more you want. Your frame of reference is always someone who has more or did better or seems more successful.

Just imagine that you have that problem! Now that attitude is not the mind of Christ, and you want the mind of Christ. You don't want to live your life with an ungrateful spirit or with a spirit of discontentment hovering over you like an ominous cloud, but it seems almost a natural part of your personality. It seems as though you've always been that way.

How does God go about getting your attention so that He, in you, can change that attitude as you consciously choose to let Him? The answer is He will rebuke you! He will exert pressure on your life to cause you to make corrective choices. Just how He does that, how we may respond, and what that response will prove is the subject of part two of our study entitled, "Wanted: Correctable Christians!"

Now, back to our imaginary problem. We learned in our last lesson the order in which God normally approaches rebuke. First, He uses the Word of God. Let's imagine you have this problem we talked about, and you join a Bible study group. Lo and behold, the first lesson is on contentment. As you do your study, you read such passages as this:

Godliness with contentment is great gain.

For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.

And having food and raiment let us be therewith content.

(I Timothy 6:6-8)

You immediately gain understanding. That's you! God is

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speaking to you. God is rebuking you. You're not satisfied with your car or your house or your husband or your wife or your job or your looks or your education. God is rebuking you! He's using His velvet glove, His softest touch: the Word of God. A right response to that rebuke could set in motion the supernatural activity of God that literally changes your character, but it involves a choice, a response to rebuke.

If you stop, fall to your knees, and acknowledge the need to be changed, the machinery is set in motion. You humble yourself before God and say, "Lord, here's a list of things I'm not content with. Lord, forgive me. I want to be changed." That's step one (and many of us are willing to do that).

Step two is to take the Word of God regarding the positive quality we want to see developed, in this case a grateful spirit, and begin to memorize and meditate on those passages of Scripture. We are not to do it occasionally, but continually, day and night, until they become as frontlets before our eyes, on the doorposts of our houses, until the mind of Christ where contentment is concerned is engraved on the tablets of our hearts.

Then step three comes in. A thought comes into your mind, "I wish I had a newer car like he has." (The kind of thought that so triggers the problem.) At that instant you have two choices. You can:

1) listen to the voice of the stranger and feed your old spirit of discontentment, or

2) you can immediately respond to the new you, the mind of Christ, which now engraved on your heart flashes into your mind and says, "Be content with such things as you have, for Jesus said, I will never leave you or forsake you."

Immediately, instantly, you can choose the mind of Christ. You say, "Thank you, Lord, for Jesus. He's all I need. Thank you, Lord, for my old car. It's more than I deserve." You begin to sing and to praise, and the Lord sets ambushments against the enemy. In this case, it is the enemy of discontentment. The Lord defeats him, and you live in victory. The new you is emerging, and the new you is content because you properly responded to the rebuke of the Word. You are a correctable Christian.

But let's suppose, strictly hypothetical, again, let's suppose you don't respond with that level of correctability. Maybe,

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a) You're blinded to the problem, and you realize your neighbor needs that verse, and you hope she's listening, or

b) You know you need that, too, but gosh, nobody's perfect. (And you kind of enjoy being discontent.) or

c) You fall to your knees and ask God to change you, but when those old thoughts return, you just assume either God didn't hear, or you're too weak.

So now, although you are more accountable, you are no more content than you were before. You may even do a personal Bible study on contentment and become more convicted than ever but not follow God's final steps to wisdom, so no real change takes place.

Now what? Well, a loving God who wants you to have His best will likely send rebuke through authority. Your husband may sit you down one night and say, "Dear, I'm doing the best I can to provide for you, but I know you're not content. Let's talk about it."

— Or your boss calls you in and says, "Joe, I know that you want that promotion, but you don't seem satisfied to do your best where you are."

— Or your parents call you in and say, "Son, we sense a greedy spirit developing in your heart. Why can't you be grateful for what you have?"

— Or your teacher at school calls you aside and says, "You seem to have a bitter spirit about your looks. Are you discontent with who you are? Or with who your parents are?"

God is trying to reinforce the rebuke of His Word through those He has placed over you. He is trying to get your attention, to make you content.

But suppose (use your imagination again) you ignore that rebuke, too, or mistakenly deal with the surface issues and miss the point; or perhaps you hear it, but fail to heed it. God has a third way to get our attention.

He uses the rebuke of counsel, the pressure of God through others. You'll be having coffee with a neighbor one morning and she'll say, "Mary, you have such a lovely home, why are you so driven to have a bigger one?" When she does, don't look for ways to defend your position. The house is not the issue. God is

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using your friend to reinforce His Word through Scripture and His voice through authority. The issue is attitude.

Your wife might say, “Bob, why aren’t you satisfied with the talents you have? Why are you always wishing you could sing like Bill? Or play basketball like Jim? Why can’t you like yourself the way God made you?” God is using her to reinforce what He has already said in His Word and through your boss. You are being lovingly rebuked. But just suppose (hypothetically, of course) that instead of graciously responding, you lose your temper and tell her she just doesn’t understand, or you frown and retreat into your own little world of self pity.

Just suppose...if you were God, what would you do NOW? If you were a loving parent trying to teach your child a lesson, and you had tried to instruct him, to rebuke him, to exhort him, and nothing worked, wouldn’t you try a more direct approach by now?

God is the perfect parent, and so, in love, He uses the circumstances of life, maybe the natural results of your own mistakes, maybe the testing of Satan that God urged him to try (as He did Job) to teach you contentment. We call it divine discipline.

Maybe you were always discontented with your job, and through the circumstances of life you lose that job. Now you have no job and now you realize that job was a blessing from God.

— Or you were always complaining about how tough it is to run a business. Your business begins to go sour. Now, no matter what you do, it won’t improve. God is saying, “Why weren’t you grateful for what you had? Why weren’t you content?”

— Or maybe you’re always complaining about having so much responsibility at work. You get demoted, and now you complain that you’re not appreciated. God just gave you what you asked for (less responsibility) because you weren’t content with what you had.

He loves you. Giving you a new job or a better house is no problem for God, but that may not be what you need. You may need to lose something to learn to be content.

Now this lesson isn’t over contentment. That’s just our hypothetical example. This lesson is on REBUKE. You may not

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have a problem with contentment, but could God be speaking to you about anger? Or greed? Or lust? Or the use of your tongue? Could it be a critical spirit that is robbing you of your joy? Stealing your power? Destroying your testimony?

The point is that God has at least four ways to rebuke you, to bring pressure into your life to cause corrective choices to be made. He uses the pressure of the Word, the pressure of authority, the pressure of counsel, and the pressure of circumstances. They are God's progressive process for rebuking His children. Unless we understand the process and cooperate in our responses, we can live out our lives doctrinally intelligent, progressively religious, even increasingly faithful in ministering to others, but unbelievably unchanged in character. We can quote, "We are new creatures in Christ," until our voices fail us, but unless we HEED the REBUKE God sends into our lives the new creatures we are will never be allowed to demonstrate themselves to a world that is desperately looking for the character of God.

So what God wants is CORRECTABLE CHRISTIANS. Men and women who have humbled themselves and recognized that "self" is dead. Men and women who have become teachable, treasure-hunting Christians. Men and women who then begin to realize that God's life in us can only be surfaced as we become "increasingly sensitive to rebuke" and increasingly aware of God's four tools of correction: His Word, authority; counsel; and circumstances.

Well, we've already seen the problem. It isn't that God doesn't know how to get our attention; the problem is that often when He does, we don't know how to respond. Our lesson involves at least four ways men and women respond to God's rebuke in their lives. I believe this lesson is vital to our taking a God's-eye-view of correction. It is intended to be a mirror held up before us reflecting to us how we respond to rebuke.

You do not have to be around long or do much counseling of others before you begin to realize that there are a variety of ways to respond to rebuke, and a variety of ways to approach the task of rebuking or correcting others. Our goal is to look at Proverbs to see at least four of the ways we respond to God's correction, at least three kinds of people those responses reflect, and at least three ways to counsel based on that discernment.

Now let's go back to our imaginary problem again. This time,

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imagine you have a problem with a critical spirit. You are being disciplined or counseled by a Christian friend and in the process of your time together, he looks at you and says, “Bob, I’ve known you for a long time, and I’ve grown to love you like a brother. You’ve come to me for advice about how to handle your conflicts on the job and about how to look for a new job. Bob, I don’t think the job is the problem. Bob, I believe you have a critical, negative spirit that refuses to see the good in others and keeps you always in an unhappy state. I don’t think you need to change jobs, Bob. I think you need to stay there until you develop a positive, encouraging spirit.”

OUCH! Have you ever had that happen? It’s called rebuke. In this case it is rebuke by counsel, the pressure of God through others. Now, immediately, you may have one of four responses. You may: react or retreat or rebel or rejoice and repent. Let’s examine those four options and see where they lead!

Response 1- Option one is to REACT—to respond emotionally with a smoke screen of hurt or innocence. This response clouds the issue with emotions, either hurt that someone would think such a thing of you or shock that such a thing could be possible. It confuses principle with personality and refuses to deal with the issue head-on. It would have Bob saying to his friend (Weep! Sob!), “Jim, I’m sorry you have such a low opinion of me. I thought you were my friend.” (You see the smoke screen of personal hurt.) The fact is, Jim is a real friend.

A straightforward answer is as good as the kiss of friendship.
(Proverbs 24:26 paraphrase)

It is an honor to receive a frank reply.” (TLB)

Open rebuke is better than secret love...,

Wounds from a friend are better than kisses from an enemy.
(Proverbs 27:5,6 TLB)

Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart: So doth the sweetness of a man’s friend by hearty counsel.
(Proverbs 27:9)

He that rebuketh a man afterwards shall find more favor than he that flattereth with the tongue. (Proverbs 28:23)

Bob had a real friend in Jim, a friend who was willing to become vulnerable by being honest. He was not a meddler; Bob asked for his counsel. He was not a flatterer; he simply told the truth in love, but Bob did not respond properly. Bob was a fool.

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Wisdom is enshrined in the hearts of men of common sense,
but it must shout loudly before fools will hear it.

(Proverbs 14:33 TLB)

Bob turned down his hearing aid and tuned up his feelings. He couldn't accept the correction, so he acted crushed that Jim could say such a thing.

We have a good Scriptural example in Simon Peter. When he was rebuked by Jesus, who knew his weakness and his coming mistake, he responded, "Lord, you've got the wrong guy. These other guys may let you down, I can see that. But not me. I'll die for you." Jesus said, "I'll pray for you, Peter," and He did. Peter was offended that Jesus would make such a statement. He took it personally and missed the point.

The Pharisees were another good example. When Jesus openly rebuked them for their hypocrisy, they simply acted offended, then turned and sought a way to destroy their accuser. That's another way of reacting to rebuke. You think to yourself, who is HE to tell ME what to do? You subconsciously try to find a reason to reject the PERSON. That way you can ignore the person's COUNSEL.

Ask yourself, "Is that how I respond to rebuke?" Is my first response one of hurt or innocence? The clouding of issues with personality? The questioning of the integrity of the rebuker to avoid facing the reality of the rebuke? If so, why go for counsel at all? Are you only looking for someone to confirm your prejudices? Would you rather Band Aid the circumstances than bombard the crux of the matter and be changed? When we react to rebuke, we are fools.

Response 2- The second possible response to rebuke is RETREAT. To retreat is to respond by becoming no longer vulnerable to further rebuke. It is to run from the situation or person causing the reproof.

We might call it the "Jonah syndrome". "Maybe God will leave me alone if I change my location. I'll get a reservation at the Tarshish Holiday Inn till it blows over." I'll join a different Bible study where nobody knows me. I'll find a different counselor, one with the gift of mercy. Or, I'll just be offended and change churches.

Remember, the foot is the bony part of the body, and sometimes when the bony part retreats, it is just running from

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rebuke. (I'll surely be rebuked for that one!)

My friend, if you find a friend who is friend enough to rebuke you in love, pitch your tent at his feet and stay a spell. If you find a church that makes you wholesomely uncomfortable to be changed by the Word, don't shop around for better programs or facilities, station yourself under the reproof of the Word. If you have a boss who loves you enough to tell you you're wrong and to help you grow, don't go looking for greener pastures. You're in the midst of the promised land!

Response 3- The third response to rebuke is to REBEL. To rebel is to respond with open anger, vindictiveness, self-righteousness, or retaliation.

In II Chronicles 16 we read an example of rebellion to rebuke. King Asa had departed from the will of God, so God sent the prophet Hanani to rebuke him.

"Don't you remember what happened before? Once you relied on the Lord," the prophet proclaimed. "For the eyes of the Lord search back and forth across the whole earth looking for people whose hearts are perfect toward Him so He can show Himself strong on their behalf." Asa, you're a fool!

Verse ten says Asa got so angry that he threw the prophet into jail and turned and vented his wrath by oppressing all the people. What a godly response!

In II Chronicles 24, King Joash was guilty of idolatry and rebellion. Zechariah called all the people together and rebuked them for forsaking the Lord. The king responded by executing Zechariah whose last words were, "Lord, pay them back for what they're doing." And of course, God did.

These were men of great power, men of great authority, men of great influence whose kingdoms toppled because they rebelled rather than responding to rebuke.

The rebellious child is another perfect example. He or she is simply not correctable. The one who rebels and openly responds with anger or retaliation is more than a fool, he or she is a scorner. There's not much hope for a scorner.

Response 4- The final response to rebuke is to REJOICE. To rejoice is to respond with humility, openness, repentance, and finally with joy over being corrected, seeing the correction as having come from God. The Scripture says that he is a wise man

or she is a wise woman who responds to rebuke with rejoicing and repentance.

Read David's response to Nathan in II Samuel 12:7 when Nathan confronted David and proclaimed, "Thou art the man!" David replied in verse 13, "I have sinned against the Lord." Or read Ahab's response to the prophet Elijah in I Kings 21:20 when Elijah proclaimed, "You have sold yourself out to the devil, Ahab."

When Ahab heard these prophecies, he tore his clothing, put on rags, fasted, slept in sackcloth, and went about in deep humility.

Then another message came to Elijah:

Do you see how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Because he has done this, I will not do what I promised during his lifetime; it will happen to his sons; I will destroy his descendants. (I Kings 21:27-29 TLB)

There's your right response to rebuke. Humble yourself and acknowledge, "I have sinned against the Lord," and you will become increasingly a "wise man." I have seen some of the most beautiful responses to rebuke in the past few months that I have ever witnessed in my life. Perhaps God was preparing me for this lesson. He certainly was convicting my stubborn spirit by showing me actual rejoicing in the lives of those I was called on to rebuke.

What a joy! What growth is in the lives of those who so take rebuke to heart, but what bitterness is in the lives of those who react or retreat or rebel. My friend, we're dealing with the heartbeat of spiritual growth which is surfacing blind spots (unrecognized weaknesses in character or behavior) and dealing with them until God changes them! You can be humble and teachable, but if you do not become correctable, you will simply grow "around" those malignant weak spots in your life and never see the kind of dramatic, lasting transformation the Gospel was meant to have on human character. But there are still some principles we must look at before we leave the subject of rebuke. They are these:

Principle 1- You can tell the kind of man or woman you are becoming by how you respond to correction.

If you always react or retreat, you are a FOOL.

If you always rebel, you're a SCORNER.

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If you learn to rejoice and repent, you're a WISE MAN.

A fool (by definition) is someone who is so self-satisfied or self-deluded that he or she sees either no hope or no need for change in their life.

A scorner, on the other hand, is a hardened fool, someone who not only sees no need, but belligerently resists or attacks anyone who ever implies that rebuke is needed.

The fool is asleep. The scorner is aggressively hostile. But the fool is a scorner in the making.

In principle number one we see that how you respond to rebuke reveals what kind of person you are. Are you a wise man? A fool? Or a scorner?

Principle 2- Remember, a fool is a scorner in the making. Left uncorrected long enough, his or her resistance to rebuke becomes rebellion to rebuke. It is a natural progression.

Principle 3- This principle is important. How you counsel will be determined by who you are counseling. **DO NOT WASTE YOUR TIME REBUKING A SCORNER.**

He that reproveth a scorner getteth to himself shame: and he that rebuketh a wicked man getteth himself a blot.

Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee: rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee.

Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser: teach a just man, and he will increase in learning.

(Proverbs 9:7-9)

What this passage says is this: If a man or woman comes to you and pretends to want counsel, but is rebellious toward rebuke, **DO NOT REBUKE THEM.** If you do, it will

- a) bring embarrassment to you,
- b) cause them to hate you,
- c) be wasted. They cannot become wise because they are not correctable.

But if a man or woman comes to you and demonstrates a correctable spirit, do not be afraid to rebuke them in love. They will

- a) love you for it;
- b) become even wiser.

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Those are God's written guarantees! How you counsel them and how you discipline them (even your children) ought to be relative to how they respond to rebuke. Let me give you some guidelines in closing: First, three facts from Proverbs about a scorner:

- 1) A scorner hates both the rebuke and the rebuker.
(Proverbs 9:7-12; 15:12)
- 2) A scorner won't even listen to rebuke. (Proverbs 13:1)
- 3) A scorner pretends to want help, but he really doesn't.
(Proverbs 14:6)

So here are our guidelines:

- 1- Do not argue with a scorner. (Proverbs 26:4,5 KJV)
 - 2- Rather, humor him. Just "prick his conceit with silly replies." (TLB)
 - 3- Do not rebuke a scorner. (Proverbs 9:8-9)
 - 4- Rather, punish a scorner when you can. (Proverbs 19:25, 21:11)
- It will serve as an example to the simple, to those still open to instruction.
- 5- Let a scorner be, and pray that divine discipline will move him while there is time. (Proverbs 1:23-33)

So to summarize, you don't rebuke a scorner (one who is in rebellion to correction). You discipline him if you can. You humor him if you can't, and you pray with all your heart that God will soften his heart before it's too late.

On the other hand, if you counsel a "fool, one resistant to reproof, but not yet rebellious to it:

- 1- Do not reprove him.
- 2- Do not directly confront him. He'll hide or react.
- 3- Rather *admonish* him. Share principles of Scripture. Suggest possible violations. Tell him to come back when he is ready to be helped, and pray like crazy. He can go either way. If God softens his heart, he can become wise. If left to himself, Proverbs 3:35 says, "he will end up in shame." He simply is not ready to be changed. The Scripture says so much about fools:

Proverbs 1:7 - they despise instruction.

Proverbs 1:32 - they can't handle success.

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Proverbs 12:23 - they can't keep a secret.

Proverbs 13:20 - they ruin friendships.

Proverbs 14:9 - they make light of sin.

Proverbs 15:2 and 26:7 - they misuse the truth to suit their own desires.

Their lives reflect immaturity, but they have no eyes to see. So you humor or discipline a scorner. You admonish and encourage a fool. But ah!... you invest your life in a wise man. He is a potential disciple. Pour your life into him. Give your life to him. To him, to her, you can personalize the Word, reveal blind spots and counsel with character (rather than circumstances). If you rebuke him in the Spirit and thus in love, the more you correct him, the more he'll love you.

Thus, you see, my friends, correctability is no matter to be taken lightly. It can be the bridge that spans the river of our weakness and leads to the mountain of God's strength. Or it can be the stumbling block that trips up the casual Christian as he skips along the trail of Scriptural growth and sends him tumbling into the valley of mediocrity or even into the abyss of shame. Remember, God has ordained four tools to teach us how to be rebuked:

- The pressure of His precious Word.
- The pressure of His ordained authority.
- The pressure of those called alongside.
- And finally, the pressure of divine discipline, the God allowed circumstances of life.

And there are four ways we can respond:

1- We can react by raising a smoke screen of emotion.

2- We can retreat and not become vulnerable by being unavailable.

3- We can rebel and insist we'd rather fight than switch.

4- We can rejoice and leap for joy at every God-ordained opportunity to be confronted and thus to be changed.

How we respond will tell us if we're wise men or scorners or fools. And we, in turn, must counsel others relative to their response. The wise man whom we rebuke will love us for it. The

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fool we admonish may ignore us. The scorner we do not rebuke; he'll only hate us for it.

I must ask this question: Are you a wise man? A fool? A scorner? When you are rebuked do you react? Do you retreat? Do you rebel? Or do you rejoice and repent? Perhaps the WORD has rebuked you even today about your need for a "correctable spirit." It has me. If so, how will you respond? How will WE respond? Will we be only hearers of the Word? OR doers of the Word? James says:

For if any be a hearer of the Word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass (a mirror):

For he beholdeth (looks at) himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was (what he saw).

But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.

(James 1:23-25)

You and I have looked into the mirror of the Word just now and have seen what it means to be "open to rebuke." We have seen ourselves in the process. We can go forth now and begin to be correctable, to actually, literally seek to be rebuked and to rejoice if and when it comes; or, we can go away and forget what we saw, forget what we heard, forget what we're like. Nothing in our lives is more important if we are to be wise than to become correctable! The calling is clear, but the choice is ours.

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