

Proverbs: Correction

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[0 : 00] Sorry.

If you want one of these, there's a water fountain in the back. If you're dying of heat, please know that I won't be offended if you get up to get a drink of water so that you can stay awake and alert. And if you really need help, downstairs is still a little cooler. So if you need to escape to that, again, please know that we do what you need to do this morning to be able to engage as we look at God's Word together.

Will you pray with me? Lord, this morning we come to you needy.

Lord, we need you to speak to us. Lord, we need you to help us because our minds are unclear. Our wills are stubborn and rebellious.

[1 : 13] Our hearts run after many other things instead of you. And Lord, I pray this morning as we look at your Word, Lord, that you will help us this morning.

Help us to hear what you have to say to us. Lord, I ask for your help that you may speak through me. Lord, I pray that together, Lord, we would learn from you this morning more of the way of wisdom that you have set forth for us and of the great love you've shown us in the gospel.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, his words hit me like a slap in the face.

No, he won't, Matt. I was a 21-year-old senior in college standing outside of Brown Hall, my dormitory. I was in a serious dating relationship and had been processing with my discipler and mentor about this relationship.

He was counseling me to not be foolish because I was being nitpicky and critical of a godly woman who I was dating, someone who was worthy of better than me.

[2 : 29] And I had just told him, well, I guess God will make it clear to me as I was weighing my confusion of, do I keep doing this or not as we often do when we're young?

I guess God will just show me the way. And he looked at me and he said, no. No, he won't, Matt. His words were a loving rebuke to me to not pass the buck of my responsibility to make a mature decision in this situation to God.

They were wise words. They were lovingly given. And they stung. And I wish I could tell you I listened. But in the process, it felt like a slap in the face.

And that's what it feels like when someone challenges us, doesn't it? Whether we call it correction, rebuke, reproof, or even just instruction, all those words are words that the book of Proverbs uses, they still sting at the time.

But as some of my seminary friends would remind me, reality is your friend even when it hurts. And it's better to know the truth about yourself particularly than it is to live in ignorance and delusion.

[3 : 55] We come this morning to the next sermon in our Proverbs series. On the way of wisdom, on how is it that God has designed the world for us to walk rightly before him.

What are the dynamics of his wisdom that shape our lives? And we're into the topical part of our series. Nick explained it last week.

I won't rehash it, but go back and listen to his sermon about why as we're looking at Proverbs 10 through 31, we're doing it topically. And this morning, the topic is correction.

And again, that's the word I'll use, although there are many different words that the book of Proverbs uses for it. Even discipline, we heard it in the passage from Hebrews earlier this morning. And what is this? What is this correction, right? Particularly in this context, it's a subset of words in the book of Proverbs. It's how we use words to come to someone else.

[4 : 59] Words help us. Correction is words that help us by correcting our understanding, our assumptions, and our perspectives, often about ourselves and how we live and relate to others.

In correction, truth is brought to bear to change us by helping us see things as they really are. So they're words that will challenge us in all sorts of areas of our lives.

How do we use our words? How do we live out our relationships? How do we steward our money, our wealth, our sex, our power, our entertainment?

Correction comes in every sphere of life with words to help us see what is really true and right. And so we hear from the book of Proverbs.

And because we're jumping around, I'll try to carefully enunciate what the references are. But if you're trying to take notes, I would recommend writing them down rather than trying to flip through Proverbs to get them.

[6 : 03] But you can also ask me afterwards. I'll send you a list of the Proverbs that I'm using in the sermon if you need that. Proverbs 13.1 says, a wise son hears his father's instruction, but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke.

And Proverbs 12.1, which I think might be my favorite, whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates reproof is stupid. Very blunt, isn't it?

Very straightforward. This is what we're going to see. That the book of Proverbs, in the book of Proverbs, God speaks to us words of wisdom saying that correction is important in our lives.

As we explore it, we're going to answer two simple questions. One, why do we need correction? And two, what does godly correction look like? So those are the two questions.

Hopefully you'll walk away with a little bit more understanding about those things. So to begin with, let's answer the question from Proverbs. Why do we need correction? Well, I have three reasons for you.

[7 : 07] The first reason is because we are by nature fools. This is the word Proverbs uses for people who don't know God rightly and don't live according to his ways in the world.

That is, because of our sinful nature, we have an unerring disposition to stray from God. And in doing so, we are fools. And so Proverbs 12, 15 says, The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice.

How true is this? One of the reasons we need correction is because we think we're right all the time. Have you ever thought about that? As you enter into a conversation, as you try to solve a problem, when you're doing it, even if you're uncertain, at the end of the day, you're going to think, Well, this is the best I could do, but this is the right thing to do.

Or I think I'm right about this situation. We rarely think, I don't know anything. I can't do anything. We are right in our own eyes far too often.

The pride that rose up in Adam as he stood in the garden and saw the temptation to doubt God and to think that he could be the one who would know right and wrong, good and evil, is in all of our hearts.

[8 : 31] We foolishly believe that we're doing everything right, and we desperately justify ourselves and our actions over and over again.

In a two-year-old, it looks like this. No, daddy, do it myself. In a teenager, it's the eye roll.

There aren't even words to express it. Yes, dad. I can't even do it. In an adult, it might look like whatever.

But so easily, we dismiss other people because we are so convinced that we're right. And yet, in recognizing that folly, we recognize this is why we need correction.

The second thing is because without correction, folly leads to destruction. So, Proverbs 13, 18.

Poverty and disgrace come to him who ignore instruction, but whoever heeds reproof is honored.

[9 : 40] Poverty and disgrace, the breakdown of our normal provision of our life and of our relationships. When we lack correction in our life, when we want to go at our own and do it our own way, the Bible tells us over and over again, it does not lead to life, but to death.

And this is the foolishness of it. Because we keep pursuing it, thinking it's going to get us what we want. And instead, what we reap is something much worse. So, Proverbs 15, 10.

There is severe discipline for him who forsakes the way. Whoever hates reproof will die. That's a strong word, isn't it?

But Proverbs says this over and over again. The way of wisdom leads to life. The way of foolishness leads to death. And why is that? Go back, listen to my sermon on Proverbs 8.

But it's because foolishness, living apart from God, is against the grain of the very world that he created. And the very way that he created us to be and to live.

[10:50] And so when we live against the grain of God's created order, we live against the grain of the very things that God created to be life-giving. And so we end up in places of death, relational death, spiritual death, financial death, and literal death.

At times. We need correction because we are by nature fools who think highly of ourselves. We need correction because without it, we end up in destruction.

And thirdly, we need correction because it's good for us. Proverbs not only points out the bad thing that we're headed to if we don't have it, but it points out the good. So Proverbs 6, 23 and 24.

For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching a light. And the reproofs of discipline are the way of life. To preserve you from the evil woman and from the smooth tongue of the adulteress.

If you remember back in chapter 6, there were these women crying out. These women who are images of wisdom and foolishness, crying out and calling us to follow them. They were seeking to entice us.

[12:03] He says, correction, instruction. Here, you see the commandments and the reproofs of discipline lead us in the right way. It puts us in along the grain of God's created order and it leads us to life.

And then Proverbs 24, 5 and 6. A wise man is full of strength and a man of knowledge enhances his might. For by wise guidance, you can wage your war and in abundance of counselors, there is victory.

So here the Proverbs remind us that as we live out our lives with the battles that we're facing, the challenges that we're facing, the things we have to overcome, that wisdom gives us what?

Strength. Knowledge that enhances our might. And in an abundance of counselors, there is victory.

The Bible knows very little of the Lone Ranger in American folklore.

The man who will go off, the independent, strong man who can go and do everything himself.

Instead, it says, no, we need other people in our lives.

[13:16] The abundance of counselors brings blessing to us. Think about this in some other contexts in life. If you want to be a ranger, are you going to go like Rambo and go train in the forest or in the jungle by yourself and think you can do it?

Even Rocky had a coach. You know? The ranger goes to training where he has officers and where he has others, and they're telling him, no, if you put your gun together like that, it won't work.

If you try to kill a man like that, he's going to kill you instead. He needs that correction so that he can be trained that in the moment of battle, he is now instinctively doing what is going to be right and good for him to do what he needs to do.

Or think about a gymnast. A gymnast jumps onto the balance beam. He or she doesn't know. She doesn't, I guess he doesn't do balance beam.

So she doesn't know how to do that herself. She needs a coach to show her. No, the line goes like this. This is how you keep your balance.

[14:28] Do these over and over and over again with constant input. Because then, at the Olympics, when they get up on the balance beam with all the pressure, this instinctive, learned behavior that's been corrected and refined over time by the constant input of a coach produces the beauty and elegance desired.

Maybe some of you are pianists. My kids have been taking piano lessons and it's been fun to watch them do it. But one of the things that's amazing is, right, basic piano skills have to do with things like sitting up straight, positioning your body right, putting your hands.

You know, this is not a piano player. This is a piano player for those of you who, right, they're very basic things. But if you don't do them, as you learn, as you grow, you might get away with it for a while.

But as you try and continue to progress, you find out you can't become a good piano player when your form is terrible. Without those basic skills that are drilled into you by practice and with a coach who's reminding you, a teacher who's saying, do this and this, and here's the next step, and here's the next step.

All sorts of areas in our lives, we require training because it produces what we desire and what we long for. And this is what the Proverbs are saying that God is doing for us.

[16:01] Counsel and correction are necessary for us and they lead to good things. Not only do they lead to good things in terms of the pattern of our lives, but also they, lead to something better.

We experience love, God's love, and the love of others in correction. And so, Proverbs 3, 11, and 12, my son, do not despise the Lord's discipline or be weary of his reproof.

For the Lord reproves him whom he loves as a father, the son, in whom he delights. Friends, do you hear this?

When God disciplines us, it is a sign that we are his daughter, we are his son. It means we belong and it means that he has set his love on us.

This is an amazing truth. And when God uses the instruments of people around us, the friends who are better than a brother, who speak hard words at time for us, it is then we know that they really love us.

[17:21] We don't always respond to it well, do we? There are times when just playing in our pride, we don't like it when our faults are pointed out, when our shortcomings are exposed.

We often feel attacked or threatened. We resist it because we feel like our identity or our reputation is at stake in what the other person is saying.

I do want to recognize, too, that some of us struggle with correction because you've grown up in a place where it wasn't really correction at all. What you experienced were harsh and demanding, condemning words, words not to build up but to tear down and to destroy, words of anger and frustration and of hatred.

And you may have a hard time hearing words of correction because that's been the pattern that you've heard all your life. But I want you to hear this morning, those things are not biblical correction and that is not love.

That is hatred when we use our words to attack and to belittle and to destroy others. But godly correction is actually a sign of God's love for us.

[18:47] And so, for all of these reasons, we need correction. For all of these reasons, we need this in our lives. leads us to the question, do you think that's true?

Do you believe that when your friend comes to you and says, hey Nick, you were kind of harsh in staff meeting, something going on?

Did you mean to say it that way? Is that really what you wanted to do? This is hypothetical, by the way, not real. Didn't happen this week, so, want to dispel any rumors that might be forming in your mind.

But do you love it when someone comes to you and says something like that? Do you welcome it? Do you see it as God's gift to us and a treasure?

Listen to Proverbs 25, 12. Like a gold ring or an ornament of gold is a wise reprover to a listening ear.

[20:00] Correction is a gift, my friends. It is a good thing. So what then does it look like? What does godly correction look like? There are two aspects to it. There has to be a heart and there has to be a pattern.

So we're going to talk a little bit about the heart and then about the pattern. starting with the heart then Proverbs 27, 5 and 6. Better is open rebuke than hidden love.

Faithful are the wounds of a friend. Profuse are the kisses of an enemy. So this is now putting yourself not on the receiving but on the giving end of it.

What is the heart of correction? It is the heart of love. It is I love you too much to see you continue in this destructive pattern. I love you too much to let you continue in your ignorance that those words or those actions were good or right or productive in your life.

It is not fixing a problem. What you did bugged me and I didn't like it so I'm going to correct you. No, that's not godly correction.

[21:14] Faithful are the wounds of a friend. Someone who is committed to you. Someone who is not your enemy but your friend. Do you see what your enemies do?

Your enemies don't say anything. Your enemies flatter you and say you're the best. You never do anything wrong. We think you're the most wonderful person in the whole world.

You could never do anything bad. And as much as our ego would love to have people in our lives who say that to us that's not love. In fact Proverbs calls that what an enemy does to us.

They butter us up so that we'll continue to like them. Real love is willing to expose truth for the sake of that person and for their good.

I remember once when I was on staff I was challenged to move positions and to leave one team and go to the next one and I was deeply conflicted about it.

[22 : 19] I had committed to this team. We were building something that was exciting and I we had talked a lot about doing it together for a long time and about the value of working together with other people.

But then leadership came along and they said there's a whole campus there are 100 students there's lots of opportunity we think you can do this you'll be the you'll get to call your own shots there are all sorts of different things that rose up in my mind.

So I made the decision to go and my friend called me and believe me it was not convenient it was the night before I was leaving on an overseas missions trip he was far away so I was having this literally a conversation in a phone booth alright they don't even exist anymore I was in a phone booth and he lovingly said Matt I don't think this is the right decision I don't think your motives are good I understand why it's compelling but I'm really concerned for you this doesn't seem good and not because we're losing you but because it doesn't seem like a good thing will you will you reconsider and I listened to him that time at least for a little while I still made the decision to go and you know what my friend did he loved me anyway I came back from the mission trip having made the decision and we sat down and we talked about it and years later he married me and today he's still the person that I pick up the phone when I have a major life decision to call because he loved me as a friend enough to challenge me and I was so thankful for that so part of the heart dynamic is this real love seeking someone else's good not just trying to fix a problem not just trying to remove an annoyance but for their good

Proverbs 29 1 exposes another heart dynamic we need to recognize he who is often reprovved yet stiffens his neck will suddenly be broken beyond healing stiff necked is a great phrase in the Bible isn't it being stiff necked means that you are unteachable and un unbeatable I think it actually is an agricultural image that has to do with a horse that you can't turn the neck one way or the other he will just go the way he's going to go no matter what I'm not positive about that but I think that's where it comes from but being stiff necked is pride it's a great picture of what pride is I'm going to do my own thing in my own way and Proverbs warns us that in the dynamics of correction pride will ruin the dynamics on both sides pride of the reprover the one who's bringing correction will bring condemnation arrogance all sorts of negative content pride on the one who's receiving it will make us fools who refuse to accept it but when there's humility when there's humility correction works beautifully when our hearts are right we humbly give correction that will invite someone to respond to process and to change and when our hearts are right we can humbly receive correction receive it and seek to for it to do good in our lives so humility is a critical part love and humility together when they are working in this process of correction is a beautiful thing so that's the heart issue now what about the practice well here we go alright if you're taking notes here's where the rubber meets the road these are pastoral thoughts for you

Proverbs even at this level doesn't lay out so much of a paradigm but this is what happens this is what happens when we practice it well in the giving of correction okay it is spoken humbly that is acknowledge you are not perfect acknowledge that you don't know everything be careful to check your own heart so that you're not doing it for selfish motives we don't want any church ladies going around going tsk tsk don't do that tsk tsk don't do that that's not helpful and it's not humble so it needs to be spoken humbly it also needs to be spoken clearly you did these things you said these words you acted in these ways that seemed to me to not be right or good maybe I didn't understand maybe I miss saw maybe there's a sense of

[27 : 35] I'm going to bring you what I saw I'm going to acknowledge I might have gotten it wrong but I'm going to bring it as clearly as I can and in that clarity one of the things I'm going to do is avoid the you always and you never this is marriage counseling 101 friends if you didn't you always and you never are poison in any relationship and particularly in correction you always do it this way you never do that it's not helpful correction when we talk in generalities it is helpful to talk in specifics thirdly I've already referred to this but it should be spoken without assumption of motive or intent I don't know what you meant but when you did this or when you said this it communicated this to me is that what you meant is that what you wanted that's a helpful way of correcting it's a helpful way of rebuking or reprovving it invites a relationship and a conversation spoken humbly clearly without assumption it is spoken aptly this is

Nick's word from last week but specifically that is timing and setting are important generally correction should be done in private not in public this is why moms you should take your child out of the grocery store to discipline them even if it means you leave the cart full of ice cream you just do it

because it's better because public correction brings shame very quickly and shame can destroy the ability for someone to receive it well it also needs to be said in as timely a manner as possible do you remember three years ago last Thursday when you said this no well it was really not good can you fix that I don't even remember what I did timeliness is part of it being an apt word so don't let it fester maybe you need a little bit of time to process it to evaluate whether this something needs to be said or not but if you're bringing it do it in a timely manner needs to be spoken in person maybe in a letter if you have a fear that it's going to be so explosive or so difficult that you need to write it down but even if you're writing it down in a letter you want to invite then a face to face conversation as a follow up to it friends maybe this doesn't need to be said but

Twitter is a really bad way to do this social media is not the right forum to bring correction to one another's lives it just isn't it's not made for that don't let it become your main means of communication with people because it will disallow healthy correction in your life in person allows us to see the facial expressions to hear the tone to feel the impulse and maybe even the hug that needs to go along with the word of correction so do it in person and finally correction means speaking courageously because you know what this is hard it's out of practice in our culture we don't live in a culture that does this well and so it's hard and we're afraid of rejection we're afraid of conflict and often in our fear we don't do it well either we speak either too strongly or too weakly in the moment because of fear so we need to ask the

Lord to help us be courageous be courageous enough to be calm and to be loving and to invite relationship while speaking hard truths of correction all right that's how that's how it could look like that's my advice to you on how it could look when you say it well how about receiving it well what does this look like well you know it's fascinating because when you look through the Proverbs they have a lot more to say about how to receive it but it's almost all negative what does that say about us right this is the problem that Proverbs exposes more than anything else so we'll look at some of the ways that Proverbs exposes our negative reception then we'll end with something positive right how do we do it badly well as we've read we stiffen our necks we become defensive I didn't do that what are you talking about

I didn't say that no I didn't my six year old is very good at this did you leave the refrigerator open no did anyone else touch the refrigerator besides you no the refrigerator door is open I don't know we're so prone to just say no we become defensive stiffen our necks say no I don't I'm not going to receive that I'm not going to allow that to be true second thing we do is we lash out at the person who brings us Proverbs is very it says this a number of times Proverbs 9 7 through 8 says whoever corrects a scoffer gets himself abuse and he who reproveth a wicked man incurs injury do not reprove a scoffer or he will hate you reprove a wise man and he will love you put the other shoe on that proverb what does it mean and we know we've done this well who are you to correct me [33 : 59] I know you're not perfect you want me to go down your fault can I point out all the ways you're not doing things right we shift into attack mode so quickly when someone brings correction into our life don't we and we often try to shift the attention in order to hide our shame we attack often in a desire that the person who came with correction will run away in fear and think I can't do that anymore I have nothing else to say so we stiffen our necks we lash out the third thing this is fascinating Hebrews are not Proverbs 18 2 a fool takes no pleasure in understanding but only in expressing his opinion so what happens when someone brings correction we start talking wow yeah but let me explain let me try to get you know and 15 minutes later the person who's brought the correction is saying did you even hear me at all because it's been so confounded and so clouded by many words that are not receiving the word of correction but are trying to actually evade it by talking about our own opinion yeah but let me explain and fourthly some of the ways we don't receive it well we avoid proverbs 15 12 a scoffer does not like to be reproveth he will not go to the wise so one of our best tactics is simply to avoid them that person spoke to me once and they tried to correct me well

I'm not going to talk to them again I'm going to only be in group settings I'm only talk about superficial things I'm going to run as fast as I can that friends our hearts so resist this dynamic and yet when it's done well when it's received well it can be such a beautiful thing so the flip side of those what does it look like it looks like a soft heart brother sister I'm so glad you said something I didn't realize or you're right or I don't even know what I was doing but I know I need to think about it and here's the thing even if 50% no even if 80% no even if 90% of it is communicated poorly to you and the content isn't even true a humble heart says if 10% of that is true

I want to know it and I'm going to receive the 100% and I'm going to process it with the Lord I'm going to process it with other people so I can find the 10% that really is true a humble heart receives it even when it's mixed and even when it's not well done being thankful for it the second thing is receiving it well means giving a gentle response to the messenger I'm so thankful you said something this is really hard for me to hear but I'm glad you did now let me put in one little caveat here and that is that there is a time to consider the source this is where the internet like people are correcting you over the internet you can probably just shut it down like just don't listen right because trolls and everyone else are going to be criticizing it's become an industry of being critical and unhelpful and destructive ways right so consider that it also means that the man walking by walking by your life you know just passing through if he lobs a grenade of correction in your life you want to take that to the

Lord and say Lord is there truth here but if it's your best friend if it's your spouse if it's someone who knows you and loves you and they bring it man treasure it welcome it don't attack them but receive them and be thankful for them so a soft heart a gentle response third a commitment to listening rather than explanation oh I don't know what you're I'm not quite sure what you're saying but explain it to me more can you tell me more about what that looked like what did you see how did that affect you follow up by asking questions and it's the hardest thing to do in the moment isn't it because you all your defense mechanisms are going I'm putting up all my walls and you know the doors are shutting and the guns are getting pulled out and you're like I can't handle this and to turn and say tell me more it's tearing all of those defense mechanisms now it's putting the guns away and saying okay this is really hard but

I don't understand yet can you help me understand so commitment to listening rather than explaining because explaining is putting up those walls and pulling out the guns and fourthly it's a commitment to pursue people who will speak truth to you friends this is I think what the writer of Proverbs wants us to get this correction is so life giving it is so good it is so beautiful for us it brings us from death to life it brings us from against the grain of God's world to with the grain of God's creation this is so good so pursue it find friends who will speak the truth to you because you need it desperately and because it's good for you so we come to

[40 : 29] Proverbs 15 31 through 33 the ear that listens to life giving reproof will dwell among the wise whoever ignores instruction despises himself but he who listens to reproof gains intelligence the fear of the Lord is instruction and wisdom and humility comes before honor friends here's the good news of the gospel correction is embedded it flows from the very fountain of the gospel truth itself because God does not come to us with flattery oh you are such a good person of course I accept you and bring you into heaven because that's not the truth but God comes to us with truth you are a sinner you are fallen and you are willful and you are broken you don't know

God and you don't know his ways and therefore you don't live as you ought to as you were created to as you were redeemed to and he speaks this hard word to us in the gospel of you are a sinner and under God's condemnation and it helps us see well we need help how do we get out where is our rescue and the gospel meets us there in that moment as Tim Keller says the gospel is this we are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we had ever dared believe yet at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dare hope when we know our sin we finally understand how great the love is that God has shown for us by sending his son Jesus to die on the cross for us he takes the penalty and the punishment he walks the path of the fool to the end of death us and therefore redeems us from that foolish way of life from our sinful proud stiff necked rejection of

God and in love he calls us into relationship with him whereby now we have a new life that comes from Jesus rising from the dead and from that life then we have the new power of the Holy Spirit to help us walk in these paths of correction and of growth towards this life that we can have with God with the grain the way of wisdom which is the life that Jesus promised when he said I've come that they may have life and life abundantly but we need the correction of the gospel if we will ever get there and if it will be for the very salvation of our souls don't you think it's worthwhile in all the other areas of our life to embrace this pattern of correction because in it God is doing this redemptive work in us of helping us grow let's pray

Lord we do ask this morning that you would humble us before you Lord help us to embrace the sometimes prickly gift of correction in our lives Lord help us to be those who love one another well enough to speak words of correction help us Lord to be humble enough to give and receive it as

well Lord for our good that we may grow in the way of wisdom in righteousness and being like your son Jesus Lord we know we can't do this apart from you and your help in the gospel so we ask for that we pray these things in Jesus name amen