

Practical Work

- Help the people develop habits of daily spiritual discipline, of prayer and forgiving others.
- Use the stories in this section to teach how to correct people with love.
- Explain to your people how such correction protects us from spiritual and physical danger.
- Explain why, with God's grace, we forgive, correct and restore—but not punish—those who have sinned.
- Correct with love those who sin. Follow the instructions in Matthew 18:15-17, Galatians 6:1 and 1 Timothy 5:19-20.
- Receive those who repent back into fellowship and assure them of God's grace, cleansing and forgiveness.

Ministry 11

Become Like Christ and Maintain Discipline in the Flock

Jacob comes to Learner's house to tell him, "Brother Learner, I just discovered that one of my employees, Sapphire, is stealing from me. Sapphire is a sister in Christ. I talked to her about it, but she got angry. Should I ignore this sin to avoid tension in the flock?"

Learner answers, "No, we cannot ignore sin in the flock. The Bible tells us to deal with it quickly. Let me get my wife Sara, and we will follow Christ's instructions to go to her directly. Perhaps together we help Sapphire to repent. We will go in love and gentleness, as Galatians 6:1 says."

They arrive at the Sapphire's house and ask to speak to her alone. Jacob tells her. "I hired you to help my wife cook and clean the house. I paid you well. But you stole towels and other things from us."



Sapphire trembles with fear. Sara takes her aside and assures her, “We are not here to shame you. We want you to receive God’s forgiveness and fullest blessing. There is something you need to understand before we talk about what you did. Jesus taught us that God’s blessing comes to those who live like Jesus. Let us read The Sources of Happiness together.”

Exercise

Find in **Matthew 5:1-16** God's promises concerning blessings:

- In what ways did Jesus describe the people that receive happiness from God?
- How should we respond when people persecute us for following Christ?
- How do we bring glory to God through our actions?

Sara explains to Sapphire about discipline. “Now that we belong to Christ, His Spirit gives us the desire and power to be like Christ. We no longer want to do what is wrong, but our old sinful nature still pushes us to do evil. We struggle between what our old nature wants and what our new nature wants. When we fall into sin, the Holy Spirit convinces us of sin and brings us to repentance. He also uses other brothers and sisters to encourage us to do right, to call us to repentance and to assure us of God’s forgiveness.”

“But I'm a bad person. I'm not good like you are.”

“You are God's child and He is transforming you,” Sara assures Sapphire. “God corrects us as a good mother corrects her children in love. Correction keeps us out of danger. Without loving correction, a child may play with fire or poison, or run out in front of a car. God keeps us from danger by correcting us. In the Old Testament, prophets wrote seventeen books to warn Israel to stop sinning. Israel did not listen to God’s correction and fell into terrible physical and spiritual danger. Now we have the Holy Spirit. He helps us live the new life we have in Christ. When Christ

Jacob explains, “In these stories, two leaders were corrected. The Apostle Paul corrected the apostle Peter for rejecting other Gentile believers out of false pride. Peter denied the good news of Jesus with his actions and led other people into the same sin. Although Peter taught that we are saved by faith in Christ, yet he was acting as if he were saved by obeying Jewish laws. Paul had to correct him at once publicly so that the entire congregation would understand the error. The prophet Nathan also corrected King David publicly so that all Israel would take God’s holiness seriously.”

Jacob turns to Mr. Foolish and asks, “Do you have evidence that one of our leaders has committed a sin serious enough for such correction by the congregation?”

Mr. Foolish says, “Oh, forget the whole thing!”

Jacob rebukes him, “You are the one that caused the gossip.”

Deborah confesses, “I am ashamed now that I listened to the gossip, and repeated it. I criticized our shepherd Learner, for only a silly rumour.”

Jacob replies, “I think a savage wolf, a hyena, has tried to divide our flock by spreading criticism against our leader. Learner, please forgive those of us who listened to the rumour and fell into this trap.”

They praise God for the restored unity, and continue joyfully with the Lord’s Supper. Sapphire tells Sara afterwards, “I am surprised at the congregation’s love and acceptance. I have never seen such forgiveness in my family. How great God’s grace is!”

A month later Sapphire reports to the congregation, “Learner’s dear wife has been helping me to form the habit of daily prayer and overcome my old habit of stealing. God has taken that evil desire from my heart. The thought of it is repulsive to me now. It’s a great joy to know that God has cleansed me and given me a pure heart.”



Exercise

Find in the story of Peter's Hypocrisy in Galatians 2:11-21:

- When Peter was leading the believers into sin, how did Paul correct him?
- How did Peter's actions go against the good news of the grace of Jesus Christ?
- Why was Peter acting like a hypocrite?
- How are we saved, by following strict laws or by faith in Jesus Christ?
- Peter accepted the correction. Let us all do the same.

Find in 2 Samuel 11:1 – 12:25, the story of David's Secret Sin:

- In what way did David's desire to hide his sin make him sin more?
- How did the prophet correct the leader's secret sin?
- How did God show David that he was forgiven?

commanded us to repent and be baptized, He was commanding us to continue in this new life. Let me tell you about The Way the Holy Spirit Makes Us Holy.”



Exercise

Find in **Galatians 5:16 through 6:3**:

- What wrong things do we do by habit when we do not know Christ?
- What nine virtues, or fruit, does God develop in us through the power of His Spirit?
- What do we do to our old sinful nature to avoid the sins of this world?
- How do we help restore those who fall into sin?

The men leave Sara to continue talking with Sapphire. She explains, “As disciples of Jesus, we make it our habit daily to obey Him in love. This gives us joy and brings God's blessing. It also protects us from spiritual danger. Every day we pray and apply God's Word to our life. We follow Christ's example in our actions and practice the fruit of the Spirit. We obey those in authority over

us. These are ways we develop discipline to avoid spiritual danger. As we develop these habits, the Holy Spirit gives us strength to overcome sin.”

“In my case that would be a very big miracle.”

“You are not alone. We all have had to crucify our old desires in some way and God always helps us. In the New Testament, the apostle Paul tells us to warn people of spiritual and physical danger when they commit these errors:

- Causing conflict or division,
- Laziness or gossip,
- Immoral actions or drunkenness,
- Greed or stealing,
- Idolatry or doctrinal error.”

Sara gently assures Sapphire, “God will free you from your bad habits. Please ask Him to do so now.”

Sapphire weeps for a while, then asks God to forgive her. She goes to Learner's house with Sara and tells her employer Jacob, “Please forgive me. I will return what I stole from you. I am very sorry.”

During the next meeting Sapphire confesses to the congregation, “I have had sins in my life. I tried to hide them. Even stealing. But I confessed all this and received God's forgiveness. I hope all of you can forgive me.”

The people reply that they will forgive her, but Mr. Foolish comes to Learner afterwards and grumbles, “That is too easy. Stealing is a big sin. She must suffer punishment before we let her back into the congregation. She must wait and prove her repentance.”

Learner disagrees, “No, Mr. Foolish. We do not judge her heart. She needs our help now to follow Christ. She needs God's strength to avoid sin. Sara offered to go pray with her every morning before she goes to work, until she is strong and confident. Jesus taught us not to count how many times we forgive. Instead,

we offer to help each other escape temptation. God has forgiven us so much that we should be eager to forgive each other in gratitude. If we cannot forgive, we shut our hearts off from God's great forgiveness. God saves us only by grace, not by anything we do to prove our goodness.”

Mr. Foolish scoffs, “We might as well sin all we want, because God will forgive us!”

“No!” Learner exclaims, “Such a thought would only show that we are not truly repentant.”

Correcting Leaders in the Congregation

Mr. Foolish visits Jacob and criticizes Learner, “He was too soft hearted with Sapphire because the little thief is a nice looking woman.” Jacob laughs. Mr. Foolish tells several others the same thing. Soon the criticism is spreading like measles among the believers.

At the next week's meeting, Sapphire is seated, joyfully waiting to celebrate the Lord's Supper with the rest of the congregation. Mr. Foolish stands and says, “We must stop these proceedings. This woman is not ready to take communion. She...”

Learner interrupts. “I studied with Mr. Wise what the Bible says about how to deal with believers who err. If we are fighting with one another, we must forgive one another and be reconciled before we take the Lord's Supper.”

Mr. Foolish asks, “But what if it is the church leader who commits the error?”

Jacob answers, “All of our leaders have great responsibility. If they fall into sin, they can hurt many people. God's Word teaches that if there is a criticism against one of them, we must consider it carefully. If this criticism comes from gossip, jealousy or pride, the Bible says to ignore it. If you have proof of a serious error, deal with it. If a leader sins publicly, you must correct him before the