

Defining Moments
**Volume 70—Beyond Conflict Resolution:
The Ministry of Mutual Admonition**

CONFRONTATION IS A PRECIOUS GIFT. When it is withheld, teams deteriorate, performances fail, families break apart, and companies go bankrupt. The lack of appropriate, effective confrontation is fatal to communities, and it can be lethal to individual men and women.

How does Scripture instruct us to handle ourselves when we observe a fellow believer acting in a way that is inconsistent with bearing the name of Christ? Matthew 18 describes what to do when someone offends us, but what if the person's conduct does not directly involve us?

The biblical practice of mutual admonishment—as defined and explored in the following paragraphs—provides a way we can humbly and appropriately engage in a conversations that will strengthen our resolve to follow Jesus.

WHY DO WE ADMONISH?

When the Holy Spirit urges us to go to those who are walking in a manner less than worthy of their calling, Titus 1:13 says that we are to *“rebuke them sharply, so that they will be sound in the faith.”* We are to confront them because there is hope for them; they are not beyond the power of God.

However, admonishment demands all of the skills required in conflict management...and then some. It is like holding a mirror before someone that you love, and doing so in a very careful, prayerful, discerning manner.

WHEN DO WE ADMONISH?

“Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore that person gently” (Galatians 6:1).

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Admonishment is not nit-picking or fault-finding. It is not required when someone commits a sin, and then becomes aware of it, confesses, and repents. It is only needed if someone is *caught* in a sin—when someone engages in a sinful pattern of behavior without any apparent recognition or acknowledgment of wrongdoing.

Anyone seeking to admonish a fellow believer must proceed prayerfully, humbly, lovingly, and with great discernment. Some important questions to ask include: “Is this something worth discussing? Is my timing right? Is my spirit right? Am I truly seeking the best interests of the person involved?”

HOW CAN WE CREATE A CULTURE IN WHICH BELIEVERS ADMONISH ONE ANOTHER?

Teach & Model

If admonition is to become a normal practice within the congregation, first it must be taught with clarity and urgency, so that people understand that mature Christians engage in the ministry of admonition.

Next, the senior leaders must practice what they teach. The more established you are in leadership, the fewer people there are who will risk telling you the truth. Therefore, it is especially important that senior pastors invite those around them who are so led by the Holy Spirit to prayerfully and appropriately admonish them.

Guidelines to Follow

When a fellow believer that we know and love is clearly stuck—caught in a sin—and the ministry of admonition is needed, what should we do? Go to the person in love. Go and restore them...

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Admonish with gentleness. Spiritual surgery requires precision. Use a scalpel, not a machete. Cut just enough to do constructive work, not so much that it becomes destructive.

Ask questions. Begin by saying, “I have a concern for you. Can I tell you about it?”

Generally people respond more openly to admonishment if they have given their permission before receiving it. Do it gently, with a careful spirit.

Admonish with truth. *The whole truth.* In the moment when you confront someone, you may be tempted to tell *part* of the truth—but shrink back from telling the whole truth. That “last ten percent” may be the hardest to say, but the effectiveness of the confrontation may well rest on whether you have the courage to speak the whole truth.

When you tell someone the whole truth, there will be tension. Do not relieve that tension prematurely. Dissonance and tension can be a very powerful way to motivate people to engage in self-examination and change.

Admonish with humility. “*Watch yourself, or you also may be tempted*” (Galatians 6:1). Be mindful of your own depravity. Before you reprove someone, you must be able to sincerely say, “Given the right circumstances, I’d be capable of this...and worse.”

Any spirit of self-righteousness or superiority will damage the person you approach. Be open to the possibility that you may have perceived the situation incorrectly. Ask genuine questions rather than make judgmental statements.

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Admonish with tremendous patience. How patient is God with you? The deeper a problem goes (and those are the ones that people generally get caught or stuck in), the longer it takes to see the problem, acknowledge it, and begin to change. Remember how patient God is with you, and likewise bear with others during the healing process.



Leviticus 19:17 commands, “*Do not hate your brother in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so that you will not share in his guilt.*” When you truly believe that someone you know and love is stuck in sin and you don’t carefully offer rebuke...it is a form of hatred and you share in their guilt. But when rebuke is offered in the right spirit, at the right time, in the right way, it is a powerful expression of love.

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