

Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People
Chapter 5: Restoration – Restoring a Fallen Brother
Pastor’s Notes/Review

A museum is a peaceful, quiet place. Years ago, a man who was obviously upset rushed through a museum in Amsterdam and ran towards a famous painting by Rembrandt. When he reached the masterpiece he took out a knife and before he could be stopped he slashed at the painting several times, virtually destroying it. In a separate incident, another man slipped into St. Peter’s Cathedral in Rome with a hammer and began to smash one of Michelangelo’s sculptures. Both pieces of art were severely damaged. But they were of such value that instead of throwing them out, the best experts were called in and with the utmost care and precision, they made every effort to restore the masterpieces.

As far as God is concerned, we are a masterpiece. We are fallen, broken, battered, but still a masterpiece. And so He works on us. He chips some things away. He restores other things. The process isn’t easy.

- First we looked at Restitution. Then Grudges. Last week: Overcoming Impure Thoughts.
- In each of these areas God is chipping away our sin, changing us, molding us.
- And just when we think God is getting somewhere in our life, disaster strikes. You fall for some temptation. You find yourself doing or thinking something that you know is wrong.
- When that happens the thing to do is to go to God and seek forgiveness.
- We know what to do with our own sin, but what happens when it is someone else who falls into sin? What are we to do?

There are some who would say that you should do nothing; that you are no better than anyone else, that we are all sinners, and that we need to live and let live”; that we shouldn’t judge anyone; after all, Jesus did say that whoever is without sin should be the first to cast a stone.

There are others who say that if someone is caught in sin that you should shun them; have nothing to do with them; forget they exist, even if they are part of your own family. Any mistake and you’re out!

So what are we to do when someone sins? How are we to deal with it?

- We know from Matthew 18:15 what to do when someone sins against you. In other words, when someone does wrong to you, Jesus says, *“go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over.”*
- But what if the sin isn’t against you. What if someone has messed up his or her own spiritual life? What if they have stumbled or perhaps completely fallen on their face? Then what?

I believe we get a good look at what the church should look like in Paul’s letter to the Galatians. Look at Galatians 6:1 and see what Paul wrote to the church. He said; *“Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.”*

It is clear that there is no place in the Christian faith to “live and let live” or “sin and let sin”. If someone has been caught in a sin, our responsibility is not to turn a blind eye, nor is it to condemn.

- Usually we tend to go to one of the two extremes. We either turn a blind eye (hear no evil, see no evil), or we condemn the person to death. Someone once said that the church is the only place where we shoot the wounded. But there has to be a better way; and there is.
- It’s the way of love. Love seeks to restore. Love sees the value in someone and instead of seeing the shredded life, they see what the person can become once again – a masterpiece.
- When the woman was caught in adultery, Jesus didn’t condemn, but neither did he accept the sin. He wanted to see her changed/restored. He told her to “go and sin no more” (John 8;11).
- When something has little or no value, it is thrown out when it is damaged. But when something or someone has immeasurable worth, every effort it made to restore.

Our primary responsibility, when someone is caught in sin, is to agents of restoration.

It is interesting to note that Paul describes someone who is “caught” in sin.

- This doesn’t mean that Paul was a detective and he caught someone in the act of sin.
- What it means is that someone has been ensnared by sin. Sin is like a trap. Something looks good; it looks appealing; it may even look harmless, but it is deadly. You get caught in it.

- And when someone gets caught in a trap, you don't condemn them, you don't say, "oh how could you be so stupid", you help get them out; you help to restore them.
- The word for "restore" is the same word used for "mending nets" or for a surgeon "setting a dislocated bone." Restoration means becoming my brother's "repairman."
- We are to get involved in helping the Christian to his feet again, putting him back where he belongs.

I want to suggest four key things we need to remember before we go helping someone else.

1. We need to be PERSONAL.

There is a time and place for letters, emails and telephone calls, but there is nothing like a face to face visit with someone when you really care about them. Nothing says you care as much as a personal visit.

- Preparation (with prayer) is important. This is serious business.
- Timing is important. Consider the mood of the person you are talking to.

2. We need to be HUMBLE.

The last thing you want to do is approach someone with a feeling of spiritual superiority. When helping someone who has fallen, we need to come in humility. I think this is partly why we can relate to Paul in the New Testament so much – because he recognizes himself as the “worst of all sinners”. He talks about his own struggles and failings. He knows his weaknesses. And because of his experiences, he is able to help others. The same with us. It's not that we are better than someone else; it's just that we come with a lot of personal experience [in falling] and therefore may be able to help someone with their struggle.

- We need to go with humility – without feeling spiritually superior.
- Don't look down. Assume the best, not the worst. You are there to help.

3. We need to be PATIENT. We want instant results. It doesn't work that way.

When the famous painting in Amsterdam was nearly ruined; the officials took whatever time and investment was necessary to restore the masterpiece. The destruction might have taken all of 5 seconds. The restoration may have taken days and weeks and maybe even months of very careful work.

- Likewise in the lives of those around us; sometimes spiritual collapse takes place in a short period of time; but the restoration takes many days and months of patience and love. You wait it out.
- When something incredibly valuable is damaged, you don't get rid of it quickly; you invest lots of time and energy – and you do it with love.
- Kind of like restoring a car; it doesn't happen overnight.
- Likewise with people; restoration may take a great investment of time and patience.

4. We need to remember that the goal is REPENTANCE & RECOVERY

This isn't about getting a star in our cap or a jewel in our crown. This is about bringing someone back onto the right track in their spiritual life – and that can only happen when there is repentance.

- The objective isn't to make someone “feel good”. The objective is repentance: sorrow, brokenness, and heartache for sin. Without repentance, there can be no recovery.

God wants to restore the fallen one, and he chooses to use us as his helpers/restorers. This is our responsibility. But in order to be successful, we will need to be personally involved, we will need to come with a great deal of humility, and be ready to have a whole lot of patience and we need to remember that the objective is recovery (not rejection).

The good news is that we have a good role model in all this – God Himself. When God looked at the sinful condition of man, what did He do? Did he say, “down with mankind”? Did He say; “I'm not going to have anything to do with these rotten people any more”? Not at all. He got personally involved (sent His Son); he came in humility (Jesus humbled himself); He certainly came with patience (God wants no one to perish); and the objective of it all is that we would be restored in the image of God. God wants to make you and I a masterpiece.

Today we've been looking a lot at how to restore a fallen brother. Let's turn the tables for a moment. What if you are that fallen brother? Good News is that God wants to restore you as well. Won't you let God work in your life today? You see brokenness. He sees a masterpiece in progress.