

Beyond Forgiveness

by Don Baker

Don Baker's sermon explores the complexities of church discipline through the story of Greg, emphasizing restoration and the balance of love and purity.

Duration: 1:23:43

Scripture: Matthew 18:15, 1 Timothy 5:20

Topics: "Forgiveness"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker recounts a moment when he called a man named Greg to the pulpit in front of the congregation. It is revealed that Greg had fallen in battle and was in need of restoration and accountability. The speaker acknowledges his own failure to maintain constant contact with Greg during his restoration period. However, a group of five men stepped in to provide the support and fellowship that Greg needed. The sermon raises questions about when and how discipline should be applied and emphasizes the importance of offering second chances and support to those who have fallen.

Transcript

This is the story of Greg, a Bible and Sunday school teacher at a church called Hinson, who fell into adulterous sin, and how Greg, according to God's biblical direction, was admonished and eventually restored. The silence of my study was interrupted by the persistent ringing of the telephone. A longtime friend from a distant city was calling and he said, Don, I'm sorry, but I have some bad news for you.

One of your people has been deeply involved in sin for many years. The whole sordid story is just beginning to surface here, and I thought I'd call you so that you could deal with it before it comes to you second hand. I listened as he described a long series of events with all the confirming evidence that was needed.

It was not just one of my people. It was one of my dear friends. It was one of my staff that had fallen.

When he finished, I replaced the phone, sat in stunned disbelief for a few moments, and then laid my head on my desk and cried. Greg had been on our staff for two years, in the ministry for 25. He was unusually gifted, affable, quite successful.

Everyone loved him. His sphere of ministry had captured the support and admiration of the entire church. He was relentless in his determination to succeed, terribly energetic, one of the hardest working men that

I'd ever met.

We've always placed high priority on the marriage relationship of our staff people. Joanna, his wife of more than 28 years, was a beautiful, gifted, supportive woman. She appeared to be completely devoted to Greg.

Her quietness never suggested to any of us that she was withdrawn or unhappy. It was just characteristic of a meek and quiet spirit. Martha and I spent time with Greg and Joanna and sensed no tension whatever.

Our first impression was very positive, with no hint of any reservations. Greg was a handsome and charming man, with a boyish grin, and was oftentimes quite disarming. He was a proud father with three grown children, all of them in Christ and some of them in Christian ministry.

I loved to pray with him. Early every Sunday morning, we'd gather in my office on our knees and commit ourselves and our ministries to our Heavenly Father, and when he prayed, I always sensed depth and sincerity. The ringing telephone and that faraway voice that early morning shattered more than the stillness in my quiet office, much more.

My brother, my friend, my colleague in the ministry was leading a double life and had been for years, but now it was over, and his world and ours was about to come crashing down. What do we do? What do I do? My first impulse was to call Greg into my office immediately and confront him with the information I had just received. I'm so glad I didn't.

I was hurt, I was angry, I was confused, and that certainly is no time to confront anyone, especially one who has fallen so hard and so far. I thought, I prayed, and then I picked up the phone and asked Pastor Dick Wahlstrom, our staff counselor, to come up to my office. I related all that I'd learned to a stunned, disbelieving fellow servant.

The whole story was preposterous, impossible. Dick and I sat there a long time, grieving, pondering our options. We knew some of our alternatives, but perhaps there were others.

We could ignore the problem and hope for it to go away. We could pray and commit it to God and sidestep human responsibility by waiting for God to take action. We could quietly dismiss Greg.

We could publicly dismiss Greg. We could ask him to submit a resignation and leave for personal reasons. We could blow the proverbial whistle on him and make it impossible for him to ever serve another church for the rest of his life.

All of these possibilities and others passed through our minds and they tumbled over our lips as we stumbled blindly through a maze of confused and jumbled thoughts. We finally concluded that some form of biblical disciplinary action seemed inevitable. But first, we needed to confirm the story that we had just heard.

My friend had given me the names and phone numbers to call, and two irate husbands, one of them Greg's close friend, were about to fly to Portland, confront Greg and then visit with me. I called each one. I listened as their deep hurt and anger spilled over the telephone.

I listened as they detailed the incidents. One of them had since divorced his wife. Her affair with Greg was chiefly responsible.

I heard their threats. This man has to be dealt with, they said. This man needs to be disciplined, to be removed from the ministry, from the church, in order to protect the very people to whom he ministers.

Well, it was at this moment in time, as I was taking concise notes of everything that was being said, that I coined a little phrase. It was new to me, and I remember scribbling that little phrase on my notepad. The words read, the primary purpose of discipline is restoration, not retribution.

Retribution. Well, now what do we do? Sufficient evidence to substantiate the charges had already been acquired, evidence that pointed again to the realization that some sort of church disciplinary action needed to be taken. I've always felt terribly clumsy walking through any experience of discipline, whether it be at home or in the church.

My tendency has either been to overreact, oftentimes in anger, or to hesitate until any form of action has completely lost its meaning. The biblical motive for discipline has always seemed somewhat unclear to me. Was discipline to be punitive, protective, corrective, or restorative? Or was it to be all of these, or none of these? Or was it to be one more than the others? It's been extremely awkward for me to find the sensitive balance between the biblical demands for purity and the equally powerful biblical commands to love.

To display the love of God and the purity of God simultaneously is extremely difficult. The late Francis Schaeffer has said, if we show either of these without the other, we exhibit not the character, but a caricature of God. If we stress the love of God without the holiness of God, it turns out only to be compromised.

But if we stress the holiness of God without the love of God, we practice something that is hard and lacks beauty. Jesus displayed a beautiful blend of purity and love in his sensitive dealings with the woman caught in the act of adultery. Without compromising the need for purity, he respected her personhood.

The result was that her accuser's hypocrisy was substantially rebuked. The woman repented, sin was forgiven, and a sinner was restored to a place of dignity and wholeness with both her Lord and her community. But then what do we do? Dick and I asked probing questions of each other.

Is there any way that we can avoid public exposure of this sin? Is it possible to keep this information from Greg's wife, from his family? Can he be restored completely without a resignation or without any public censure? How can we publicly discipline a staff man without hurting the image of the entire church? How can we begin lifting this man back onto his feet without crippling him further? How can we protect him from his own weakness? How can we preserve the integrity of the church and at the same time protect our members from any further act of immorality? How can we be true to our Lord and at the same time sensitive to the needs of our brother? Well, both Dick and I were convinced that whatever was done had to be done right. There was no room for error. Hinson's high level of visibility, Greg's popularity among the people, and our intense desire to see successful church discipline in action demanded that we proceed slowly and carefully.

We prayed. And as we prayed, my own words came back to me, words that I had spoken so often, words from really some unknown source, words to me that had always been profoundly powerful. The church is

the only army in the world that has the reputation for deserting its wounded.

Action had to be taken. Of this we were convinced. But as we ended our prayer time, we were also convinced of one other thing.

We were not going to desert our wounded brother. We did not exactly know how we were going to treat his deep and crippling wounds, but we were sure that we were not going to leave him on the battlefield to die. But the first thing we had to do was to confront Greg.

Dick and I were already seated as Greg came through the door. His usual jovial self, his inquiring eyes flashed back and forth from Dick to me. What's up, he asked.

Greg, I said, we've just had some very disturbing news. Dick and I had been on the phone all morning listening to acquaintances of yours describe you in a way that we've not known you. Two men have been telling us that you have been immoral with their wives.

We have talked to the women. They've confirmed the story. A pastor from the same community called and said that the word is out and the stories are reaching scandalous proportions.

Is any of this true? I watched Greg as the color drained from his face, his eyes lowered and his shoulders sagged. I saw telltale beads of perspiration pop out across his forehead. He heaved one long, agonizing sigh.

He shook his head and said, yes. Yes, pastor, it's true. Ten women in three churches over a period of 13 years? Yes.

Were you a staff member in these churches at the time? Yes. Who were these women? Were they church members? Yes. We purposely avoided any request for details.

Greg, has there been any immorality here at Hinson in the two years you've been here? No. His answer was emphatic. I came here determined that what I had done would never happen again and it hasn't.

We sat in awkward silence for a long time. I really didn't know what to ask him next. I felt restrained from any further questioning.

Sometime later, Greg lifted his eyes slowly to me and said, that's not really true, pastor. I have done it here and I'm so ashamed and I'm so sorry. The last thing in the world that I ever wanted to do was to hurt you or to hurt this church.

I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

I'll never forget the strange combination of deep sorrow and intense anger that I felt as I watched this wonderful man shrink in stature and bow in shame and weep in humiliation. Does Joanna know about this, Greg? No, I'm sure she doesn't. Does she suspect? No.

Does the family know? His eyes were desperate. Do they need to know? That's not really the question right now, is it, Greg? The question is, who will tell them? It's really public information and it's impossible for this sort of thing to be kept quiet. They will know and probably soon.

I think if possible, Greg, you should be the one to tell your wife. All right, he said. We made arrangements, the two of us, to get together that evening to tell Joanna.

Do you want my resignation, pastor? No, I said. I don't want your resignation. Not yet, anyway.

I don't know what I want, Greg. We need some time to think and to pray and to study and to deliberate before we really will be able to make any decision. As I stood up, both Dick and Greg stood.

We moved toward each other. We embraced each other in a desperate hug and we prayed and we wept. And I drove Greg home that night.

It was one of the longest trips I had ever taken. How does a man tell his loving wife that he's been unfaithful to her repeatedly over a period of 13 years? I was about to learn the answer to that question. Joanna was startled to see me at the door at that hour.

Her apprehension noticeably grew as I told her that her husband was in my car and that we needed to talk. She and Greg climbed into the rear seat of my car and they sat in stunned silence. Suddenly he broke into deep and convulsive sobs.

He took his wife in his arms. He buried his head in her shoulder and said, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I've been unfaithful to you.

Unfaithful. I've been living a lie for 13 years with a number of women. I'm so sorry and I'm so ashamed.

Joanna stiffened just momentarily and then without a word, wrapped both arms tightly around her husband, drew him close, cradled him like a baby, and said, I can forgive you. I love you, Greg. I love you.

It was hours before I left. Not much else was said. Not much else was needed.

As I finally pulled away from that house, I felt anger again, but this time a fierce anger directed toward our mortal enemy, Satan, whose wilds and subtleties had again brought chaos out of beauty. But I was relieved. I was surprised by Joanna's response to Greg's confession.

It was far more conciliatory than I'd expected. And if she were able to maintain this love and forgiveness through the dark days that lay ahead, maybe there was hope. Just a glimmer.

A glimmer of hope that through it all, God might receive glory and one of his servants might be restored to a place of effective ministry once again. It did not seem possible, but maybe, just maybe, Greg could serve again. Some form of disciplinary action had to be taken.

Greg's long-term sin was an offense to God, to the church, to his family, and to himself. It was public knowledge. It was a major scandal in at least one of his former churches.

John Calvin more than 300 years ago reminded us, if no society, indeed no house, which has even a small family, can be kept in proper condition without discipline, it is much more necessary in the church whose condition should be as ordered as possible. The discipline was necessary was really not the question. The form, the direction, the course of action, the short-term and long-range objectives, these were the questions that were before us.

For nearly eight years, we had been attempting to build an Ephesians 4 type of ministry at Henson. We sought a ministry built upon lives patterned after our Lord. We sought that visible oneness that makes the body of Christ attractive and irresistible to a world of separated and lonely people.

And Greg had a tremendous following in the church. He was popular, he was effective, he was well-liked. For two years, I had honored him in private as well as in public.

I had carefully and purposefully worked to see Greg accepted and even successful in his staff role. And the sort of love relationship that this man had established with the people was one that could not be easily forsaken. People just do not fall in and out of love easily.

Discipline does have the potential of being terribly divisive. Whatever decision we made had to be right. It had to be biblical, not just for Greg's sake, but for ours and for the sake of the whole church.

In Greg's case, we were dealing with a persistent sin that had obviously not been forsaken, nor had there been any true repentance. Is it possible to help Greg find his way out of this sin without resorting to any public disclosure? One of them asked. To me, this has always been the ideal method of corrective church discipline, discipline behind closed doors, I call it.

That's the sort of discipline Jesus used when he rebuked or corrected his disciples, a discipline done in private, away from the crowds, away from the trauma of embarrassment. Oftentimes, I hear the complaint that the church is not practicing church discipline anymore. That's not true.

We who are pastors, elders, deacons, church members are constantly rebuking, exhorting, encouraging, and warning our people, but most of it is done in private. Adjustments in living habits are being made quietly without attracting public attention. This, to me, is the ideal method of church discipline.

Jesus' loving restoration of Peter after his cowardly denial was hidden from prying eyes and from listening ears. It was just between Jesus and Peter. Within the last few years, one young Christian brother in our body was seen engaging in offensive, unchristian behavior.

When this was reported to me, another staff person and I took him aside and lovingly confronted him. I told him what I'd heard, and then I asked him if it were true. He answered me that the charges were true.

I then put my arm around his shoulder and asked, how can we be of help to you? With that, his defenses sagged and he began to weep. He accepted our offer to help, and his life was changed. Now, this was an act of corrective discipline, but it was done in private, and it was designed to correct improper behavior, and it was effective.

In 1 Corinthians 5, verse 11, the Apostle Paul lists six sins deserving of corrective discipline, sins which, if practiced, actually deserve the combined public action that causes the sinner to be excluded from the Church. He said, actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he should be an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler, not even to eat with such in one. The sins listed here are certainly out of character for a Christian, and they need to be brought into judgment.

That judgment can be personal, and it can be private, but when we refuse to judge our sins, as is the case of the arrogant sinner described in 1 Corinthians chapter 5, verses 1 and 2, then public action is required. We're constantly taking private corrective action to deal with those who carry bad habits from the old life

into the new, or when an experienced believer falls into one of Satan's snares. I prefer this method to all others, and I would like to have been able to deal quietly with Greg's sin in such a fashion, but Greg's sin was public.

It was against the whole body. It was scandalous and destructive. Everyone knew about it, and it required some sort of open and public rebuke.

Slowly, painfully, reluctantly, we all began to realize that we were on the brink of an extremely difficult public experience. We had no alternative but to protect the church and to correct a brother, but there was a need to be fully aware of our biblical authority for whatever action we took, and we still had to determine that precise direction that we would follow. As a shaken and grieving church staff, we felt thrown back upon the Word of God.

We really needed a collective refresher course in the biblical teachings on church discipline, and we needed it immediately. The first thing we reminded ourselves is that discipline in the church is not optional, but it's mandatory. It's an absolute necessity if we're going to be obedient to the scriptures.

Matthew 18, 15 to 20 teaches that a sinning brother is to be confronted, reprovved, and excluded from the church if he refuses to repent. Acts 5, 1 to 11 illustrates the seriousness of sin within the church, the sensitivity of the Holy Spirit to sin, and the quick judgment of God upon sin. First Corinthians 5, 1 to 5 teaches that in the event of persistent unrepentant sin, the church is to grieve, deliberate, judge, and exclude the unrepentant member.

First Thessalonians 5, 14 commands us to warn the disobedient and the disorderly. Second Thessalonians 3, 6 to 15 teaches us to warn the undisciplined brother and to withdraw from him. First Timothy 5, 20 tells us to rebuke persistent sin publicly.

Titus 1, 13 says to severely reprove those who teach untruth. Titus 3, 10 commands us to withdraw from one who causes divisions but only after adequate warning. Revelation 2 and 3, two chapters, call the churches to repentance and warn of impending discipline if they refuse.

In these passages, God makes it clear that he intends the church to take corrective measures in the event its members persist in the practice of sin. Whatever reluctance we as a staff felt regarding our responsibility to Greg, to Henson, or to ourselves was cast aside in the light of these biblical admonitions. We learn that discipline in the church has many purposes.

The first of which, of course, is to honor Christ. The practice of discipline is simply an act of obedience and that honors Christ. Discipline is to restore sinners.

Matthew 18, 15 states that the first consideration in discipline is that of winning or restoring the offending brother. First Corinthians 5, 5 teaches that even exclusion from the body and deliverance over to Satan is designed to preserve the spirit. Second Corinthians 2, 8 commands restoration to the repentant sinner.

Galatians 6, 1 urges the whole church to be actively engaged in the process of restoring a sinning believer. Any form of discipline, whether it be a simple warning or the ultimate act of exclusion from membership, should always be understood as a part of the total process of restoration. The goal of discipline is not exclusion but restoration.

Discipline is practiced to maintain purity. First Corinthians 5, verses 6 to 8 states that sin adversely affects the entire church. Sin's presence permeates the whole body.

Purity is indispensable to power. The account of Achan's sin and the subsequent defeat of Joshua's army at Ai, you remember, teaches the weakening influence of sin whenever its presence is allowed. But discipline is also for the purpose of discouraging others from sinning.

First Timothy 5, 20 calls for a public rebuke of the elder who refuses to repent in order that others may fear the consequences of sin. We notice that discipline in the church is to be undertaken in a spirit of love and fear. Galatians 6, 1 makes it clear as it exhorts us to be gentle and aware of our own humanness whenever we attempt to correct a sinning brother.

Second Thessalonians 3, 15 warns us to keep in mind the relationship we have with the offender. He's not our enemy. He's our brother.

Matthew 18, 15 to 20 tells us how to perform the act of discipline. The passage is the first and most complete instruction in New Testament scripture on the subject of discipline. It's profound for its brevity and its thoroughness.

Let me read it for you. It says, And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private. If he listens to you, you have won your brother.

But if he does not listen to you, take one or more, one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, tell him, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax gatherer.

Truly I say to you, whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven. Whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by my Father who is in heaven.

For where two or three have gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst. You notice what this passage assumes. First of all, it assumes relationship.

It begins with the words, If your brother. Church discipline is a family affair. First Corinthians 5, 10, and 11 makes it clear that discipline is confined to those in Christ and does not reach out beyond the boundaries of the church to the world.

It's a family affair. Now we have an established relationship with Greg. Therefore we had a biblical responsibility.

Greg was not only a brother, not only a fellow member, but he was a fellow servant. There was no question regarding relationship. He was a member of the family.

The same passage implies imperfection. It says, If your brother sins. Now sin is both a reality and a possibility in the believer's life.

We all wish it were not, but it is. Our brother had broken the moral law of God, had jeopardized his marital relationship, had offended the Holy Spirit of God. He'd compromised the whole body of Christ.

Greg had sinned repeatedly, and the impact of that sin had been felt in every public service since his arrival. The passage goes further. The passage commands confrontation.

Listen to it again. If your brother sinned, go. Now it's right here that most corrective relationships often break down.

Confrontation to many is extremely difficult. To speak the truth in love to an offending brother requires more than just an insensitive accusation, more than just a perfunctory rebuke, more than an unsubstantiated assumption. Confrontation, or the act of addressing the problem of sin in a brother's life, must be pre-prayed, pre-thought, and pre-planned.

It must not be done impulsively or in anger. Since it's the first crucial and cautious step toward the restoration of a Christian brother, since the instinctive human response to any suggestion of sin is denial, the first step in confrontation is critical. The passage in Matthew also commands reproof.

If your brother sins, go and reprove him. To expose and convince one of his sin is the meaning here of the word reprove. Reproof is the gentle, loving word of warning that tells the offender that someone knows about the sin in his life and someone cares.

The passage also demands privacy. If your brother sins, go and reprove him. And notice it says in private.

Christians oftentimes act scandalously here, whether it's pride or lack of self-restraint. Oftentimes we tell everyone but the sinner himself. Sin scandalizes all of heaven.

The fewer earth people who know about it, the better. Notice again the passage seeks restoration. If your brother sins, go and reprove him in private.

If he listens to you, you have won your brother. The goal of any kind of confrontive discipline is restoration. There is a potential for great joy when a Christian obeys the command of Jesus Christ.

And to love the individual back into a vital, satisfying relationship with his Lord is the goal of all corrective and all confrontive discipline. You see, if he listens to you, you have won your brother. And that, to me, is the goal of discipline.

There are alternatives. But the ultimate and initial goal of discipline is restoration. As we continued studying Matthew chapter 18, verses 15 to 18, we realized that Jesus was very explicit in teaching us how to discipline a member of the body who had fallen into sin.

We realized, first of all, that the passage taught us that the primary goal was restoration. That if our brother sins, we're to go to him to reprove him, and if he listens to us, we have won him. That's restoration.

We also noticed that the passage teaches alternatives. But if he does not listen, there's always the possibility of rejection, rationalization, attempts at justification, even outright denial. When any or all of these take place, then it's time to expand the sphere of information.

The Bible says two or more witnesses are always required in Scripture before any accusation can be honored. One witness is never enough. Every time I talked with Greg, Dick was with me, not only for the sake of the biblical command for multiple witnesses, but also because my recall is not really as dependable as Dick's.

We would often ask permission to take brief notes or conversations. We never recorded anything on tape. Two or three witnesses are not only needed to confirm the rejection of a reproof, but they're often needed to confirm the validity of an accusation.

If the brother has sinned, and if he persists in his sin, if he refuses to repent and seek forgiveness, then the added witness can confirm this to the larger body. They can also confirm that appropriate steps were taken and multiple warnings were given before the more drastic measures are taken. Verse 16 states that every fact or every word needs confirmation.

That's so important. Every fact, every word needs confirmation. You notice Matthew 15, or Matthew 18, verses 15 to 18, expands the alternatives.

It says, if he even refuses to listen to them, then tell it to the church. To the believer, the church is always the supreme court here on earth, the final court of appeals. The church has access to greater wisdom than any human institution, and the church always has a member of the Godhead present.

The church, with its combined spiritual gifts, its limitless wisdom, its God, is capable of bringing combined pressure to bear on Satan that can limit his power on a believer's life. It's so important that the church be ultimately brought into the discussion, if necessary, so that the power of the church can be brought to bear on the enemy himself. Notice the passage suggests the ultimate alternative.

If he refuses to listen to the church, let him be as a Gentile and a tax gatherer. Now, the painfully decisive step to exclude a brother or a sister from the fellowship of the church is sometimes a necessity. He is then to be regarded as an outsider.

Gentiles were regarded as heathen. The Jew had no fellowship with them. The tax gatherer was considered to be a person of low character who was obstinate, self-willed, totally unlike a child of God.

In other words, the sinning Christian is disowned as a brother and he's treated as a non-believer. This means he's excluded from the ministry, from the service, and from fellowship at the Lord's table. It does not mean that he cannot attend the services of the church.

Even non-believers are granted this privilege. It's always well to remember how the church is instructed to treat the heathen. You see, we send missionaries to them.

At the same time, the persistent sinner is put back into the world, which is the domain of Satan. The brother has chosen to serve Satan and is now relinquished from the protective grace of God so that Satan can do with him as he wishes. The final decision is made by a vote of the church or a representative body of the church, and that decision is binding.

It's important that that action not be reversed until sufficient time has elapsed to confirm the genuineness of repentance. But even as we reviewed all of these instructive passages, some questions still remained. How are we to apply these passages to the specific case at hand? When should a person be disciplined? Who is the proper subject for discipline? What discipline needed to be imposed? We still needed to know exactly what to do with Greg.

Corrective church discipline is designed for sins of such a nature that they obscure the truth of God, they bring into question the character of God, or they obstruct the purposes of God. Anything that endangers the purity, the harmony, or the efficiency of the church appears to be worthy of corrective discipline. And

we notice as we study Scripture that the subjects of discipline are clearly outlined in Scripture.

All spiritual leaders are to subject themselves to different forms of discipline. And spiritual leaders are not to be subject to any greater discipline than non-leaders. And yet here in Greg's case, since he was a member of the pastoral staff, could we say that he was above discipline? Is there ever a time when spiritual leaders are free to engage in acts of sin without the fear of discipline? Is there a difference between discipline and punishment? Any church discipline is grounded in the fact that God himself disciplines his children.

All of God's children can expect discipline. For those whom the Lord loves, he disciplines. And he scourges every son whom he received, we're told in Hebrews chapter 12.

God disciplines directly, he disciplines indirectly. God's direct discipline is often described as punishment. The word scourge is used in Hebrews.

The word implies that some form of pain is imposed upon the disobedient. That pain can be physical, psychological, even material. But it's painful.

Now, we couldn't punish Greg. That's God's providence. But what were we to do? Since Greg was a leader in the church, we studied the biblical requirements for church leaders, the methods of discipline recommended when a leader sins, and then we determined our course of action.

Since Greg had disqualified himself for spiritual leadership, he needed to be removed from ministry. He needed to surrender his ordination. He needed to be relieved of responsibility.

And yet, we did not feel we could exclude him from the church, since he had accepted our reproof. In fact, we would strongly recommend that he remain in the church until such time as his restoration was complete. Since both he and Joanna needed help in understanding and overcoming this problem, and since he needed the strong spiritual support of men to whom he could become accountable, we recommended that he stay in the church, that he receive professional counseling, that he surrender his ordination, that he become a part of a supportive fellowship made up of men who would regularly exhort and encourage him.

And since he was a spiritual leader, and his influence was of such marked significance, we would require that he acknowledge his sin publicly to the entire congregation on the following Sunday evening. 1 Timothy 5.20 says, Those who continue in sin rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also may be fearful of me. That following Sunday evening, when Greg confessed his sin to the church, it seemed that the whole city had turned out.

I had announced in both services that morning that, in addition to our study in Hebrews chapter 6 that evening, we were going to be dealing with a matter of utmost urgency to the entire church family. I encouraged them to come, and they came. And then, following the service, I asked if there were any who wished to leave, to feel free to do so.

No one moved. Finally, I walked up to the pulpit. I called the chairman of the board and some members of the staff to the platform with me, and after a brief prayer, I called Greg from his place in the auditorium to join me behind the pulpit.

I watched him as he reluctantly let go of Joanna's hand and moved slowly, apprehensively up the steps of the platform. I saw his wife's bowed head, and I became very much aware of an awesome expectant stillness that hovered over a disbelieving crowd. As he approached me, I walked toward him, I held out my arms, and I hugged him tightly.

We both wept. I could feel the tension in his body, and I could hear the sobs that stirred somewhere deep within him. Then I turned to the congregation, and I said, There have been things brought to our attention this week that tell us that one of our members, one of our soldiers, has fallen in battle.

One of our warriors is down. He needs tonight to have an opportunity to bear his heart to the family. He needs also to feel the love and forgiveness of his church.

We, the staff and the board, with his and Joanna's consent, have asked him to share what's in his life. With that brief introduction, Greg stepped up and began to speak. His voice was weak and hoarse from crying, his shoulders sagged, and he said simply, I stand before you as an example of what pastor was preaching about tonight.

I stand here to ask your forgiveness for inexcusable behavior. I have resigned. I'm surrendering my ordination because I've been unfaithful to my wife here and in two prior churches, not just once, but many times, and with many different women.

When I came to Hinson, I felt that I had left this sin behind me, but I hadn't. Would to God I could start all over again. But as pastor said, You can't.

Something has been lost. I've lost something. I have hurt innocent people, he said.

I've hurt you. I've hurt pastor. Because I came here under false pretenses, I frankly duped all of you into believing that I was something that I was not.

I beg your forgiveness. I plead for it. And I do pray that if any of you are considering some similar course of action, that you'll see what it's costing and turn away from it and allow God to cleanse you.

My wife has forgiven me. My family has forgiven me. I hope you will forgive me.

The congregation was silent, intently interested, but totally silent. No one moved, no one spoke, no one even coughed. Some heads were bowed, many eyes were moist, but no one seemed to quite know what to do next.

I asked Greg to be seated with Joanna, and then I said I want to speak to the family for just a few minutes from the scriptures. And I told Greg Thursday that no matter what happened, I loved him. I would continue to love him.

I told him too that as surprising as it may seem, I have a hunch this church family is going to continue to love him too. What we have done tonight, I said, I hope only has to be done once for all time. Some of you possibly are wondering why are we doing it so publicly? Shouldn't this be done privately? Why is it necessary to expose this dear brother to such public embarrassment? And I told them about 1 Timothy chapter 5, verses 17 to 22, how it talks about church leaders, how they should be honored, how they should be rebuked.

It says, do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses, but then goes on to say that even if a public servant persists in sin, rebuke him publicly that all may fear. And then I told them the steps we had taken. I said this is the route we're going.

One, we've asked Greg to acknowledge his sin to his wife and family, that he did. Two, that he confess his sin to the church family, that he has just done. Three, that he surrender his ordination until such a time that we feel he might be again qualified for ministry, that he has done.

Four, that he not engage in any public ministry without our permission, to that he has agreed. Five, that he submit to extensive psychological counseling. We recommended a psychologist within the church family and offered to pay counseling fees if necessary.

He agreed to that also. Six, and this was the hardest, that he and his family remain right here in Hinson and allow us the privilege of helping in his restoration. We have asked the family to remain in their places of present ministry.

They can't believe that we would accept them after what's happened, but I'm convinced that the church is a redemptive society, not only for those on the outside, but those on the inside as well. We've encouraged Greg to seek secular employment, and that he will do. And we've asked him to take as long as necessary to experience restoration.

How long will that take? I don't know. A sufficient length of time to prove to himself, to his family, his church family, and to his God that he is truly spiritually mature enough to carry on a ministry where he can honor Christ. So we've asked him to stay right here and be restored.

And then I looked at my congregation and I asked, Do you agree? I was really not prepared for the response that followed. The entire congregation stood to its feet and applauded, a long, sustained, overwhelming applause that caused both me and Greg and Joanna and most everyone else in the building to collapse in tears. Before leaving and after prayer, I said, I want to ask one more thing of the church.

It's all been said. There's no need to say more. All the questions have been answered.

There's no reason to ask any more. Nothing stops the rumor mill faster than when it's all been said. Now let's talk to God.

Let's reclaim our brother and complete the total restoration and then go home. The most difficult and yet the most crucial decision that we had made was to request that Greg and Joanna remain right at Hinson Church. We didn't realize at the time what a big part this was to play in the restoration process.

The threat of discipline usually results in departure. Most disciplined church members leave their church or are asked to leave. When that happens, however, the problem is rarely corrected.

It's simply transplanted. Exclusion or withdrawal does not mean or necessarily imply departure. The rights and privileges that are withdrawn are meant to cause sorrow and shame to the point of repentance and such repentance is meant to lead to requests for forgiveness and restoration to the excluding body.

The large number of churches available today to the average Christian make discipline and restoration almost impossible. It becomes a fairly simple matter for a sinning member to quickly lose himself in

another congregation and then soon forget or cover over the real reason that forced him to change churches. When spiritual leaders fall in sin, the first concern is to remove them quickly and as far away as possible.

But this accomplishes nothing. The sinner is uncorrected. The church is denied the opportunity to learn its vital lessons about sin and it's also denied an opportunity for forgiveness and restoration.

You see, discipline demands accountability and effective accountability is impossible among strangers. One of the many mistakes I made during Greg's 26-month restoration period was that I failed to maintain constant contact with him. Later I would come to realize that Greg was really a cast sheep and as a cast sheep he needed all the support and strength that the staff could give him and I along with others did not give him as much as he needed.

Greg was down, he was dying, he was unable to get up by himself, but the level of concern that he required was not always present. A group of five men invited Greg to join them for a weekly breakfast. This quickly became the supportive fellowship that met most of Greg's needs.

They accepted him completely. They treated him as a human being and as an equal. There was no condemnation, no criticism, no conditions were imposed.

They studied together. They read books like *The Fight* and *How to Say No to a Stubborn Habit* and *Knowing God* and *The Pursuit of Holiness* and others and each week they'd read a prescribed chapter and discuss it together. Greg has repeated time and again that this was one of his major areas of support.

We prayed for him but we seldom prayed for him publicly which is something we should have done. One friend suggested that Greg and Joanna develop a promise book. She told them to write down every meaningful promise they encountered as they read the scriptures.

Then in their low times they wouldn't be forced to search their Bibles for help but they'd already have quick access to some meaningful verse. What helpful counsel that proved to be. At times Greg would come home after a terribly frustrating day at work too defeated to continue.

He'd pick up the promise book and he said he would gain immediate strength. They would also record specific prayer requests along with the answers to prayer. This God would often use to bolster their faith when they were tempted to feel that he deserted them.

Some of Joanna's Sunday school class took her to an occasional lunch. Many of them wrote to her with words of encouragement. When we recommended a period of discipline for the purpose of restoration we failed to place any time limits.

In fact we were reluctant to even suggest that complete restoration to gospel ministry was even a remote possibility. And Greg yet did need some hope. The possibility that he might never be allowed to return was devastating to him.

We should have been more responsive to his need for hope. None of us felt truly comfortable with Greg and Joanna. They didn't feel comfortable with us.

None of us really knew what to talk about in their presence. Only a few of us ever addressed the great heartache that persisted to cause deep and unbearable pain. But Greg and Joanna suffered the most.

Greg developed a severe case of colitis and every time he'd get up to prepare to come to church he'd get sick. As they approached the building the apprehension grew. They felt overwhelmed by their shame and their dread.

Some would greet them warmly, some would greet them coldly, others would simply turn away. In his terribly sensitive state Greg felt rejection from almost everyone. It wasn't too long before he developed a hunger for the Bible that caused him to hang on every word.

He couldn't get enough. We were studying the book of Hebrews and he claimed that it was tremendously helpful to him. He also listened to cassette tapes and sermons.

The radio ministry of Chuck Swindoll and others were a great source of help. But still the deep emotional responses to exposure and humiliation prevailed and they kept all of us uncomfortable for months. This was a heavy price to pay for the restoration of one brother.

But it was worth it. I never will forget the Sunday six months after the humiliation when Greg sat in a new Sunday morning seat halfway down toward the front, head erect, eyes glowing with a look of expectancy on his face. At some point in the sermon I said something that touched him.

I saw his head bob up and down and I heard a hearty amen and I thought to myself, Greg's back. I think one of the most crucial things that happened during the whole experience was Joanna's response to Greg on that fateful Thursday when his whole world came crashing down. During the hours and days that followed Joanna's emotional anesthetic wore off and she experienced great anger and bitterness and self-pity and various incidents would come to mind that had always been remembered as wonderful and happy times with many of her close friends and as she recalled them carefully she would realize that those happy occasions had often been used by her husband and her friends as opportunities for infidelity.

As her struggles increased so did Greg's. He was constantly depressed. Joanna found herself torn between trying to fight the immense battle going on within her and at the same time to encourage her husband in his struggles.

She never seriously considered leaving him. She realized quickly that the only real biblical option that she had was to forgive him. From childhood she'd been taught forgiveness and forgiveness was her option and she genuinely and totally forgave him.

Joanna had the same problem most of us in the church had. Forgiveness really didn't guarantee her ability to forget. Our memories were all too sharply tuned in to the recollections of that horrible confession.

Counseling was a necessity. Joanna carried deep feelings of guilt because her seeming forgiveness did not eliminate periodic bouts with anger and temporary desires to withdraw even to recoil from her husband. As I look back on all the crucial steps taken that ultimately resulted in Greg's restoration two facts stand out.

The fact that Greg and Joanna were urged to remain at Henson to experience the love and forgiveness of the body and the fact of Joanna's willingness to forgive her husband. Without her strong determination to obey God there would have been no restoration. Of this I'm convinced.

Those two things, one to stay in the body and to be restored in and by the body and then the wife's total forgiveness of her husband. Not only did the church and Joanna play important roles in Greg's restoration,

Greg himself played a significant part in his own recovery. He willingly made himself subject to his church and its leadership.

I've always been acutely aware of the presence of Hebrews 13:17 in scripture which says obey your leaders and submit to them for they keep watch over your souls as those who would give an account. Let them do this with joy not with grief for this would be unprofitable for you. It seems that there are a few scriptures people heed less than this one.

Accountability is rare. So is submission to authority. Those of us who lead find it extremely difficult to require it, request it, or demand it.

And yet Jesus began his relationship with his disciples with two words. These were a command, a command to be obeyed, a command that placed each of those 12 men in a submissive dependent accountable role. The words follow me.

Now they meant nothing more, nothing less than just do what you're told. Now any organization that plans any degree of success in fulfilling its role in this world must have both leaders and followers. Leaders must lead and followers must follow.

Any leader who plans to lead must give commands and that's the response of those of us and the responsibility of those of us in leadership. When we entered into a relationship with Greg, we asked him if he was willing to be completely submissive to the church in general and to the staff and the board in particular. We asked him if on certain occasions he would submit to me.

This placed me in the position of that leader described in Hebrews 13:17. To this Greg agreed. He never accepted any invitation to minister in any form or to any degree without first consulting with me.

Nearly every week there was a request and nearly every week during that first year I was forced to say no. Greg, you need time to feel the enormity of your sin, you need time to feel the reality of forgiveness, you need time to recover your own self-confidence. Yet saying no to him when I knew he was slowly dying on the inside for some opportunity to minister was one of the most difficult things I've ever done.

I guess I'm really an old softy who finds it difficult to deprive anyone of anything and to deprive Greg was terribly hard. He would come to me, describe an invitation, make his appeal and I would say no, not yet Greg. I would then hear his beautifully obedient, all right, whatever you say and watch the expectancy in his face drain away into disappointment.

He'd never argue but it was obvious that he wished I would throw just one yes in his direction. I would then take that request, I'd tuck it away in my consciousness and mull it over and over again. Did I make the right decision? Am I causing Greg too much sorrow? How do we know when he's had enough? It was often necessary for me to run these requests by the staff and board, to gain their perspective and to make sure that I was doing right.

I got to the place where I almost shunned him. There were times I didn't want to talk to him. I would delay returning his phone calls or requests from others simply because I wanted to be spared having to speak that inevitable no.

I wanted to avoid that carefully masked disappointment but Greg obeyed always. He submitted himself to us completely. He didn't always appreciate our decisions but he obeyed them.

He obeyed when we told him that we felt he should remain at Hinson until he was restored. This was the most difficult command that was placed upon him but he stayed. Gradually, one by one, we began lifting restrictions.

He was allowed at first to minister in Sunday school classes and at social gatherings then to larger groups. Eventually he was permitted to teach one of the largest Sunday school classes in the church. The first time he was allowed back on the platform to minister in the church auditorium he played Oh Love That Will Not Let Me Go and then I Am Loved, I Am Loved, I Can Risk Loving You For The One Who Knows Me Best Loves Me Most.

The restoration of the sinner was due in part to the obedience of the sinner. Without Greg's submission restoration would have been impossible and yet during all this time Greg suffered deeply for his sin. For 13 years he'd been looking over his shoulder expecting discovery at any time.

13 years of emotional chaos, of spiritual deadness, 13 years of of abject fear. One would think that this in itself would be sufficient suffering for sin. There was the feeling of guilt and under such feelings some die.

Others wish they could die. David oft times spoke of guilt in Psalm 32 as being a near-death experience and in Greg's life there was physical suffering. There was emotional suffering.

There was material suffering. In fact, Greg and his family lost almost everything they had ever owned. A large equity in a home, not only the respect of so many but almost all material possessions were gone.

He felt heavily the chastisement of God in his life. Not punishment, not judgment, but chastisement. And as we read very carefully in Hebrews chapter 12 chastisement is a very real part of the corrective procedure for sin.

Chastisement can be both corrective and it can be preventative. Job's chastisement, you remember, was for the purpose of revealing Jehovah, God, to the world. Abraham was chastised.

Paul was chastised. David was chastised. Chastening is designed for perfecting and Greg's whole process of restoration was a chastising experience that was perfecting him.

Greg's chastening began with the whispered warnings that pled with him before he fell and they continued to grow in intensity as he persisted. Chastening came in full force with his exposure. It continued through his humiliation and still in effect today as he battles with a tortured memory and a smeared reputation.

After he was removed from the church he prayed for a job. He asked for an income and he got a job but he said later that his first month on the job brought him the sum total of 38 dollars in earnings. Some fellow church members brought him into their insurance agency but he hated the insurance business.

He faced each day with dread and he entered it only by sheer determination. He forced himself to make appointments and to call on prospects. The first month was a good one, even a promising one.

He surprised himself and his associates but after that it was all downhill until he finally quit 25 months later when his average income was only \$100 a week. Greg and Joanna struggled vainly to keep their home, maintain their payments, but they couldn't. They lost their house, they lost more than \$30,000 in equity.

When Greg's restoration was complete and they finally left Hinson they had less than \$700 of their own money and \$850 given them as a love offering from the members of their Sunday school class. Greg

looked constantly for other jobs but each time it seemed to him that God had closed the door. Greg continually asked permission to accept places of ministry but to these he was refused.

There were times when he became angry but then eventually he submitted and Greg however was convinced that through it all this was not judgment, this was chastening and chastening is the normal experience of a child of God. One of the happy truths of chastening that sustained Greg through the whole experience was simply that that says, whom the Lord loveth he chastened and he grabbed hold of Hebrews 12:11 and he held on tightly for the promise there was that all discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful but sorrowful yet to those who've been trained by it afterwards it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness. Afterwards, after it's all over it yields righteousness and peace and that was the hope to which he clung.

Greg's reordination was really a celebration. It came just 55 weeks following the advent of his discipline. We had not acknowledged any specific plan to take steps toward restoration at the end of the year but we had determined to thoroughly review the discipline process and at least consider some positive recommendations and the first encouragement came in the form of a letter from his counselor, the psychologist within our own body who suggested that it's time to reconsider allowing Greg to return to ministry.

He said at the close of his letter, I would strongly urge you to consider this brother for full restoration and placement in the ministry again. But this encouraging recommendation was in sharp contrast to the rather pessimistic outlook we'd been given months before. The counseling sessions had been very productive.

Greg had been helped to see how he had been viewing women as objects rather than persons and he was given insights into the mechanics of seduction and how these immoral relationships develop. In a meeting with Greg and Joanna following the receipt of the counselor's letter, we listened carefully to the reports of progress. It was obvious that the feelings of guilt had begun to diminish.

The heaviness had been lifted. The oppressive shame was no longer evident. As the staff met with Greg and Joanna, we asked some probing questions.

To Joanna, we asked, what's happening in Greg's life that seems to assure you that you'll never be forced to go through this shameful experience again? She was radiant. My husband is a changed man, she said. He has become the spiritual leader I had always hoped he would be.

He prays for me and with me. His prayers are prayers of depth and meaning. He leads us in family devotions each morning at the breakfast table.

He's displaying a love for God and an appreciation for me that I've craved for more than 28 years. Since most of the immoral relationships had developed in counseling sessions, we were quite concerned that he'd carefully be guarded in this area. Greg and Joanna had already made some significant decisions.

Greg would never counsel a woman alone more than once. He would then either refer her to another, or he would enter into a team counseling relationship. We asked Greg, how are you going to keep these memories fresh so that you'll not fall back into sin? With that, he showed me a plaque and a key ring, both bearing the name of the insurance company for which he worked.

He said, one will hang on my wall and the other I'll keep in my pocket to remind me of the most miserable months of my life, he said. We recommended that his ordination be restored to him. The service was much

like any other ordination service, except that the spirit of that meeting was vastly different.

I felt deeply grateful to God as I prayed. Many of the men gathered in that expanded circle around Greg wept openly as they placed their hands on his head. We were fully aware that something unique and something wonderful was happening.

As communion was served, the staff took the elements first to Greg and then to Joanna. We counted it a high honor to serve them. Following the reordination service, Greg wrote to me and he said, dear pastor, we often wanted to thank you for the way in which you've borne the grief and pain my sin caused you and the Hinson family.

The extra pressures this brought on you and the staff are part of the ache in my heart that memory calls forth again and again. And then he went on to say, thank you again for being willing to be used of God in my discipline and in my healing. Any future ministry God may allow us will be due to your courage and the backing of the staff and the board and the Hinson family.

In reordaining Greg, we had commended him to God for whatever ministry God would feel appropriate. We had commended him to the ministry, but not a ministry. He was still without a job.

Many were disappointed that we had not invited him to rejoin the Hinson staff. There were, however, a number of reasons for this. We already had a very capable replacement.

There were those in the church that felt strongly against asking Greg to rejoin. His counselor, too, had recommended that he start afresh somewhere else. As the weeks and the months dragged on, I became anxious and perplexed.

The longer Greg went without a place to minister, the greater the pressure on me to invite him to work at Hinson. Many people suggested that the restoration would be incomplete until we did. I often struggled with that possibility.

For Greg, the hope of returning to ministry gave way to fear. As the months passed, he was becoming increasingly convinced that God was through with him, that he would never again return to full-time ministry. He was failing as an insurance salesman.

They had lost their home. They were being faced with the question of how and where to restore their furniture. Ministry was no longer merely an urgent desire.

It was now survival. Where can they go? I watched him day by day by day, and I listened to him. He was wondering, what is it that God is waiting for? Why doesn't God allow us back in ministry? Well, again, early one morning, the silence of my study was interrupted by the persistent ring of the telephone.

A longtime friend from a distant city was calling. I'm sorry, Don, to interrupt your morning, but I'm interested in one of your people. We desperately need a staff man here, and it seems that from what I've heard, your man Greg meets the qualifications for the job.

I listened as he described the church and their needs, and then I asked the question that had to be asked, the last question in the world that I wanted to ask. Do you know that Greg has been under discipline here at Hinson for the past twenty-six months? Yes, he answered. Do you know why? I'm not sure I know the whole story, but I understand there was some moral problem in the past.

I then proceeded to tell him the entire story, all that I knew in confidence. I've always been a firm believer in the necessity for correct information to be passed from church to church regarding prospective staff people. When I finished, there was a long pause, and then the question for which I had waited so long.

Do you think he is ready to go back to work? Absolutely, I answered. He has undergone his discipline admirably. He has completed nine months of psychological counseling.

He has proven his repentance. He has completely forsaken his sin. He has assumed the spiritual leadership of his home and family.

His and Joanna's relationship is stronger than it's ever been. He's displaying himself as a man of God. In fact, I think Greg is probably better equipped to serve Christ today than most of us who've never been through the terribly painful process of discipline and restoration.

Well, it wasn't long before Greg received his call back to the ministry, and he accepted it with great enthusiasm. The church was smaller than any it had ever served. The salary was barely adequate, but those things were incidental to the fact that Greg was being offered a second chance, and he could hardly wait to accept it.

The night of their farewell came 26 months and two weeks from the night of their humiliation. The church family crowded back into the same auditorium to face the same two people, this time not with shame, but with great joy. I invited Greg and Joanna to the platform and said, I think everybody knows without having to review past experiences what's been happening with Greg and Joanna.

For 26 months we've undergone a very painful discipline experience with Greg. When Greg fell in battle, we regarded him as a wounded soldier. We rushed to his aid.

We attempted to help him up. He responded beautifully. He let us help him.

We loved him, and we watched him as he responded to the grace of God and the love of the church family in a way that I've never seen demonstrated before. For two years and two months we have watched the Spirit of God at work, in him and through him, and in us and through us, restoring a man to active ministry. We asked ourselves when it all began, is it possible? We asked Greg, are you willing to stay right here in the body and let us love you back into the ministry? The hardest and most crucial decision that Greg and Joanna made was that one, yes, he answered, I will.

And I watched Greg week after week as he came into this building. It was painful for him to walk among his friends. We were all fully aware of the pain that was in his heart, but it was here in his obedience and in our presence that his healing took place.

Greg and Joanna are different people. They were great people when they came. Today they're among the greatest.

I want to thank them publicly for the way they have submitted themselves to God and to the church. And I looked at my church family and I said, I don't know that I've ever experienced such willing submission and such painful as I have seen in them. I remember that night I then drew them to me, arms around them both, and said, Greg and Joanna, I want to thank you for the way you've allowed God to work in your lives.

I want to thank you for being responsive to the Holy Spirit. God has possibly made you better qualified to minister today than anybody I know. That was what I told the pastor of the church.

That was what I told the pastor of the church that called you. And I really believe it. I turned to Greg and said, is there anything you'd like to say to this church family? Greg's appearance and his demeanor in the pulpit was vastly different from the night he acknowledged his sin.

He stood erect, his shoulders thrown back, his head raised, eyes scanning every upturned face. And he said, what pastor and staff and what the board did, said Greg, took guts. I don't know of any church that has behaved in this manner toward one who has fallen.

At least, I've never heard of it being done. It took courage to be the first, and I think God has honored that. He has certainly honored in our lives, because we're not the same people we were, he said.

We're quite different, thanked the Lord. And we know from some of you that it's had an effect on your lives as well. Greg went on to say, you have shared with us that you've been praying for us, and for that we're grateful.

Pastor, he said, thank you. Thank you for having the courage to invite us to stay, because that's the only reason we did. It would have been much easier to walk out and never see you again, believe me.

And there were others who helped. There was a man who counseled me for nine months, Greg said. And there were five guys that I met with every Thursday morning for two years.

And there was a Sunday school class that was very supportive. And I want to thank you all. I want to thank my family, he said.

Because therein lies the real nitty-gritty of this whole experience. With that, he drew Joanna to himself, and he said, if you have ever wanted to know a godly woman, here's one. The entire church responded with spontaneous applause to that.

Our children were behind us 100 percent. They were supportive the whole time, and God has just really blessed us as a family. In fact, all of our relatives supported us without any reservation, whatever, Greg told the church.

I'll tell you, he said, it's really rich when you're obedient. I want to say again to any of you who are messing around in sin, let it go. Give it up.

Ask God's forgiveness. And come back to the fold, because therein lies true blessing and joy and peace. And Greg went on to tell my church, then above all, I would thank God for his restorative power to make a new man of me and allow me again the privilege of being a minister.

What a glorious God we had. With that, Greg sat down. And with those words, we concluded 26 of the most difficult and yet the most instructive months in the life of our church family, 26 months of pain and perfecting, months devoted to salvaging a worthy servant and restoring him to productive ministry.

As Martha and I went home that night, the weariness was good. The need for approval was only slight. We didn't ask whether or not we'd done the right thing or said the right thing.

We simply relaxed. We relaxed with the realization that maybe, just maybe, we had finally done it right. We had forgiven a fallen brother, but we didn't stop there.

Cooperating with God, we moved beyond forgiveness, restoring a sinning saint to a life of meaning and a life of ministry. A ministry that he's performing to this very day effectively, productively, and in the power of the Holy Spirit. Discipline is designed to be restorative, not punitive.

It's designed to lift up the fallen, stand him on his or her own feet, and enable them to walk afresh in the Spirit and experience the fullness of God in their lives. Oh we want to see us oh and say that we love him

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