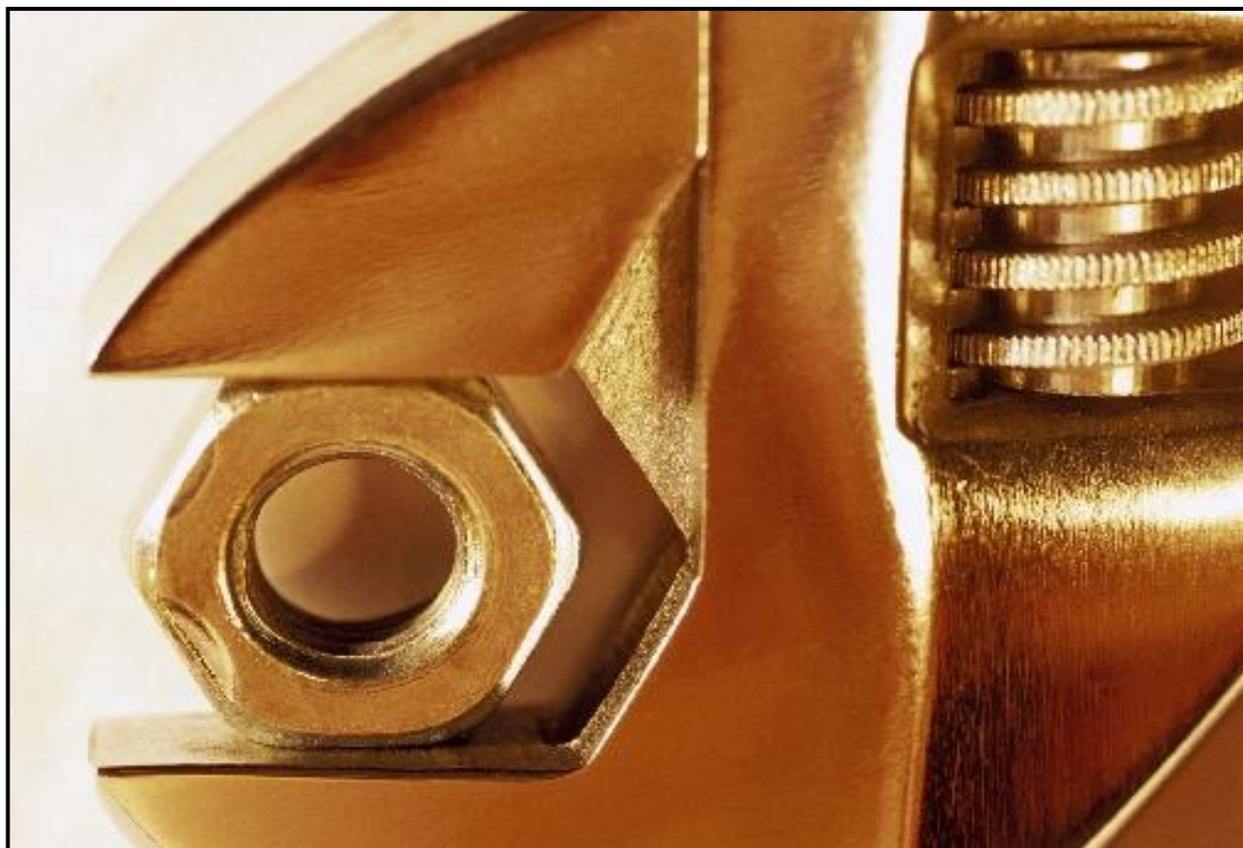


Level 1-Fix

Correcting Ministry Performance



Handbook for Spiritual Leaders

the Institute for
Spiritual Leadership Training

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The Institute for Spiritual Leadership Training
3521 Hollywoods Dr. NE
Olympia, WA 98516
Tel: 360.493.0522 Fax: 360.493.1804

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Handbook for Spiritual Leadership Training

Level 1–Fix

Communicating Excellence: Correcting Ministry Performance



Using **Level 1–Fix** is intended for help in working your way through a performance issue requiring **immediate** attention. When you have time, read the entire article, *Communicating Excellence: Correcting Ministry Performance*, to see the scriptural principles for this process and to gain an understanding of how to engage your team members in a progressive correcting process that is caring, careful and designed to foster discipleship and personal growth in Godly virtues and personal habits.

Four Meetings in a correcting process:

- **“Oh, by the way”** First is an “Oh, by the way” informal conversation designed to get clarification of a specific error, omission or discrepancy in expected performance and consists of encouragement in this coaching step.
- **“Come on in we need to talk”** Second meeting is a “Come on in we need to talk” conversation to gather more information and to problem solve and includes encouragement and exhortation/spur as coaching steps.
- **“Come on in we need to talk some more”** Third meeting is another “Come on in we need to talk some more” and can include the coaching steps of exhortation/spur, and correction, as well as the discipling steps of conviction/reproof/refute.
- **“The Last Chance”** Fourth meeting conviction and possibly rebuke are the scriptural discipling tools. If conviction is the goal, then this is “The Last Chance” meeting. If rebuke is the goal, then the team member has run out of options and must be removed from ministry.

What is your role and what is the process? If a team member’s performance needs correcting, you first need to determine your role and what process to use. Examine the chart below to identify your correcting role and the left column will determine the appropriate process. Generally, unless there is a serious event requiring a convicting or rebuking meeting, the best approach is progressive correcting; meaning you begin with encouragement, move to exhortation and so on.

The Process of Correcting Ministry Performance

		Correcting Roles				
Process		Encourager	Mentor	Coach	Supervisor	Pastor
Coaching Tools	Encouragement	X	X	X	X (Appraisal/ Commendation)	X (Intentional)
	Exhortation/Spur	X	X	X	X (Appraisal)	X (Counseling)
	Correction		X	X	X (Reprimand)	X (Counseling)
Disciplining Tools	Conviction/Reproof/ Refute			X	X (Suspension/ demotion, possible dismissal from ministry)	X (Strong warning/ removal from ministry with elders and deacons)
	Rebuke				X (Definite dismissal)	X (Strongest reprimand, potential disfellowship)

Pre-Meeting Preparation

Keep these things in mind when preparing for a correcting meeting with a ministry team/staff member:

- **Correcting is a leadership responsibility.** Failure to correct when it is necessary is an avoidance of responsibility. Matthew 18:15 provides specific standards regarding when and how to address issues with people in the same faith community. We have no choice as leaders but to exercise correction as a tool of restoration. (James 5:19-20).
- **Define the problem and its consequence(s).** Okay, so what's the problem and how is it negatively impacting ministry? Objectify your subjective feelings. Review your documentation. If you think there is a problem and you can't define it in terms of impact on ministry and ministry standards, then you don't have a problem. You just think you do!
- **What's the root issue?** If you've used encouragement and exhortation and there are still unresolved issues, try to identify and define the root issue. (Note: there are usually only four reasons why a person is unable to successfully perform a task.)

- **Seek pastoral insight.** Review the issue with your pastoral leader. There is a delicate balance between being an advocate for the ministry team member and an advocate for the recipients of ministry. You need the covering, wisdom and insight of your spiritual leader.

- **Set goals before the meeting.** Know what you want changed and be able to communicate it in a clear way. What result do you want to come out of this meeting?

- **Allow for privacy.** Choose a private setting and plan a date when there is time to work the issue through.

- **Fasting and prayer.** Fasting is an Old Testament practice of piety and prayer continued by Jesus and the early church Fathers. Focus, prayerful preparation and petition create opportunities for God to show His presence and intention for peace and reconciliation. Ask specifically for insight, wisdom, absence of defensiveness and an uncritical heart. If the ministry team/staff member needs encouragement, ask the Holy Spirit to show you what to provide for motivation. James directs us to go to the source: *“If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him” (James 1:5).*

**FOUR BASIC REASONS WHY PEOPLE
DON'T PERFORM WELL**

<i>Person Responsible for Initiating Corrective Action</i>	Root Performance Issue
LEADER RESPONSIBLE	<p style="text-align: center;">LACK OF SKILLS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Never had them • Needs practice • Can't apply them
LEADER RESPONSIBLE	<p style="text-align: center;">LACK OF INFORMATION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Doesn't know expectations • Doesn't have current data • Can't apply information that was there
JOINTLY RESPONSIBLE	<p style="text-align: center;">MOTIVATIONAL ISSUES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Things and people that make work punishing • Personal attitudes and issues
MINISTRY WORKER RESPONSIBLE	<p style="text-align: center;">PERSONAL ISSUES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Substance abuse • Emotional health • Physical health • Lifestyle

IMPORTANT: Maybe your meeting is intended primarily as an encouragement session with discussion of several areas the ministry team member can improve. How simple in intention and yet sometimes meetings like this end with hard feelings and defensiveness. What goes wrong? It may be something as simple as failing to construct a foundation for discussion. Review and follow Three Steps for Initiating a Performance-Based Discussion and the opportunity for a positive outcome increases.

Three Steps for Initiating a Performance-Based Discussion

- **Step One – State the Facts** Be ready with a clear description of the issues in terms of who, what, why, when, where, and how. Make sure the tone of your voice is not critical or accusatory. Approaching a meeting like this in a problem-solving style sets a constructive tone.

After relating the issue/problem/need, describe how it is impacting ministry. This keeps the discussion about ministry, not about you or them.

- **Step Two – Ask the Question** There are three kinds of questions that could be asked. One is worthless, one has limited value and another is powerful in creating conversation:

Leading questions are useless for promoting discussion. With leading questions you basically get what you ask for, “Don’t you think...? Isn’t it true that...? Wouldn’t you agree...?”

Closed-end questions are of limited value. These questions can be answered with a yes, no or a piece of information. Closed-end questions are helpful and necessary for building a fact base in discussion, but they do not encourage an open and engaging conversation—the goal of the meeting.

Open-ended questions are powerful. Most people do not have good skills in asking open-ended questions; therefore, we have to intentionally work on getting them into our conversational tool kit. Open-ended questions usually begin with, “What are...? How do you feel about...?” Open-ended questions communicate to others that your mind is not set in concrete; you want to mutually problem solve and their input is valued.

- **Step Three – Silence** After stating the facts and their impact on ministry, ask an open-ended question: “Taylor, I know the excellent results your ministry has produced over the past several years. Please tell me from your view what the reasons are for this major change in the way you are doing ministry?” Then wait. No frown, no scowl, just a positive reassuring non-verbal expression, looking at the person eye-to-eye, and waiting for a response. You will be amazed how eager most people are to talk if you communicate you are interested in their response. Your silence gives the message that a response is expected and you will wait for an answer.

Conducting the Correcting Meeting

It’s time to meet with the team member. The conversation will begin with coaching steps using encouragement first. If that fails to sustain expected performance, exhortation and conviction meetings will soon follow as part of the coaching step. If coaching meetings don’t

take care of the issue, then disciplining meetings of reproof and rebuke are necessary. These are the scriptural steps of increasing progressive correcting.

Most people dread having these meetings and delay, postpone or procrastinate until the issue is so serious it may not be recoverable. That's poor leader stewardship. These meetings are often uncomfortable but the spiritual leader needs to look forward to the opportunity. Why? Because this is discipleship at its very core. This is a prime opportunity to help a friend and ministry team member improve and become more effective and consistent as a believer. If you think it's hard, it's because you're thinking of yourself and not the opportunity to affect legacy.

Up to four sessions may be necessary to assure the correcting process is long lasting.

- **Begin the meeting with prayer.** This seems obvious, but is often overlooked. Prayer is a time to confess the surrender of personal needs and agendas to God and to invite the Holy Spirit into your conversation and thoughts.
- **Display established trust.** The more our team member trusts us and knows we have his best interests at heart, the more he will be open to share needs and mutually participate in solutions. We need to show we trust our team member's heart for ministry and their teachable spirit if it is present. Of course trust on both sides does not begin in the meeting. It needs to be built in small increments over time. This meeting simply allows it to be displayed. Without trust there is little vulnerability. Without vulnerability, trust does not have a foothold to grow.
- **Make gentleness your demeanor.** Remind yourself of Proverbs 15:1: "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger."
- **Check your "buts" at the door.** Don't use "but" statements; make them "and" statements. You want your team member not to feel he is in trouble. He does need to make some corrections in leadership and team player style. "But" statements feel like anything affirming said before a correcting observation is insincere.
- **Separate personal issues and avoid "you" statements.** Focus on behaviors and how they impact ministry. Describe the issue/circumstance/concern in objective terms and the impact the behavior will have on people and ministry if not corrected.
- **Be attentive and show patience.** Remember, the meeting isn't about you. This is first, a ministry and second, a discipleship opportunity. As a leader, you are responsible to see behaviors or attitudes change so that overall ministry is more effective. So, in reality, this meeting really isn't about your team member either. It's about ministry. *"And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone"* (1 Thess. 5:14).
- **Watch non-verbals.** Studies attribute as much as 65 percent of the meaning in communication to nonverbal messages. You will want to be mindful of gestures with which he may be communicating:
 - Crossed arms, clenched fists – Can indicate cautiousness to defensiveness.

- Steepling fingers – Can indicate superiority.
- Eye contact – None suggests insecurity; constant, assertiveness. It is not good to be face to face, eye ball-to-eye ball in the first meeting. This tends to set up the conversation around personality and power. Sitting at a 90° angle or on the same side of the table helps keep focus on issues and not personalities.
- Smile – Half a smile indicates insincerity; full smile, comfortableness and friendliness.
- Distance i.e. leaning back – Suggests defensiveness or not wanting to engage.
- Leaning forward – Invites engagement.

Keep in mind, however, that not all gestures have meaning behind them. Some are simply attributed to posture habits.

A calm voice communicates confidence and a safe, positive environment. Be mindful of what is known as your paralinguistics—voice characteristics of:

- ✓ Inflection
- ✓ Tone
- ✓ Volume

Pleasant speech is important as well. Harsh words, oversimplification, and use of absolute terms i.e. “you always, you never” create defensiveness.

- **Distinguish between excuses and explanations.** The ministry team/staff member will probably share the reasons he thinks or wants you to think are behind the ministry performance issue. If you accept the reason as an excuse, that’s it. It’s done with and there is no more discussion. A reason perceived as an excuse is highly subjective and demands forgiveness. If, however, you receive the reason as an explanation—as an objective description of the issue—it demands resolution.

To make sure you regard it as an explanation, after hearing the reason, your response should be something like this, *“Brad, I now have a better understanding why you failed to follow through on the assigned task and why the issue came up. So what do you plan to do to make sure it doesn’t happen again?”* Remember, an excuse or an explanation is not in how it’s delivered; it’s in how it is received.

- **Always, always speak the truth.** If in doubt, use tentative statements or questions. This meeting is more about trust than performance issues. “The tongue that brings healing is a tree of life, but a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit” (Prov.15:4).
- **Ask open-ended questions.** Open ended questions demand conversation. They keep the dialogue doors open and demonstrate your interest in hearing and understanding their view.

- **Ask the ministry team member for a solution.** During the meeting, ask your team member what needs to be done to get his ministry back into a team process. If your team member has emotional and skill maturity, he will own the problem and solution.
- **Restate, summarize and make an oral or written contract.** Feed back to your team member what he said, what he heard and how the issue will be resolved. It is important to get a commitment for the solution.
- **Always schedule a follow-up meeting** for specific affirmation for corrected issues or for further problem solving.
- **Do not gossip** about the meeting.

Coaching Meetings – Encouragement, Exhortation & Conviction/Spur

Coaching meetings are appropriate when the primary intent is helping the team member learn a new behavior or to self-discipline an unproductive attitude or behavior.

- **Encouragement – Specific Actions to Take in an “Oh, by the Way” Meeting** When you become aware of errors, omissions or discrepancies in performance that require discussion and you assume the ministry team member has high emotional and skill maturity in self-correction, simply pointing out the problem and asking for an explanation is all that is required. Ask how you can be supportive in helping them improve, stay on track, and grow in spiritual maturity. Relate an example of a time or an event when the ministry team member demonstrated excellence in the ministry now needing correcting, and encourage a return to excellence.

Many times a positive word, a teachable moment or a performance review are all that’s required for a ministry team/staff member to get back on track.

When ministry performance issues do develop, encouragement is still an option. I call this meeting the **“Oh, By the Way” Meeting**.

- **Exhortation – Specific Actions to Take in “Come On In, We Need to Talk”** If encouragement does not create long-term correction or if new situations keep arising, then a more formalized meeting is in order. When there are repeated errors, omissions and discrepancies in spite of guidance, be mindful of the following in this necessary meeting:
 - ✓ **Documentation.** Don’t even begin the meeting without objective documentation. The worker deserves to know objectively what the issues are and how those issues have impacted ministry so they can be corrected. If the worker becomes defensive and you have no documentation, you also have no basis for further discussion other than to inappropriately pull out your power card and tell them they just need to do better.
 - ✓ **Look for an External Cause.** Is there something happening beyond the ministry team member’s control that is preventing him from performing his task? Do you have the power to remove the obstacle?

- ✓ **Able to Self-Correct?** Go into the meeting assuming the ministry member is capable of self-correction.
 - ✓ **What's the Answer?** Ask the ministry team member for a solution. In doing this, it says you still trust her. A basic axiom is this: Ministry team members will not correct performance issues unless they first own the problem and then own the solution.
 - ✓ **Move a Notch Back in the Situational Leadership Model.** Review the Situational Leadership model in Vol. I, Unit 4, Navigating Transactional to Empowering Relationships, Part 3 – Building Teams That Last. If the team member is functioning at “Delegate,” move your style back to “Participate” or “Sell.”
 - ✓ **Critical Question.** Ask what is interfering with the team member’s past excellent ministry performance. Wait for an answer.
 - ✓ **Develop a Plan.** Summarize the issue and restate the combined solution to the issue or problem. Express appreciation for the mutual processing of the issue and express confidence in the ministry worker being able to follow through and be successful. Follow up the meeting with a confirming memo restating your summary and solution, again expressing confidence in the person.
- **Correction/Spur – Specific Actions to Take in “Come On In, We Need to Talk Some More”**
When continued difficulty in performing ministry tasks begins to point to a (probably not yet discovered) root problem—one that is causing the symptomatic reasons for the second meeting—this is time for a **“Come on In, We Need to Talk Some More” Meeting**.
When there is a pattern of repeated errors, omissions and discrepancies in spite of previous meetings, you can reliably assume there is a root issue causing the performance concerns. The root cause is not your concern unless and until the ministry team member chooses to discuss it, but the impact on ministry certainly is.
- ✓ **Review.** Review performance/ministry issues with a current update of status. Ask why there has not been a long-term change in performance/behavior.
 - ✓ **Negative Impact.** Emphasize how the ministry team member’s performance/behavior is negatively impacting ministry goals.
 - ✓ **Focus on Discipleship.** Express a desire to help the ministry team member gain excellence in the areas of concern. This requires an interest and commitment from him for the change to occur through a process of discipleship.
 - ✓ **Member/Minister Care.** Remind the ministry team member of the opportunity for assistance if there is a personal issue causing the deterioration in performance.
 - ✓ **Contract for Change.** Mutually develop a contract for change. The contract should have a timeline/deadline, a list of behaviors/attitudes needing change, and should tie back to the established vision, mission/purpose, values and guiding principles of the ministry.
 - ✓ **Confidence and Change.** Express confidence in the ministry team member’s ability to change, but emphasize the necessity for change to take place.

- ✓ **Move a Notch Back in the Situational Leadership Model.** If the team member is functioning at “Participate,” move your style back to “Sell” or “Tell.”
- ✓ **Bottom Line.** Explain to the ministry team member the consequences for failure to correct behaviors and why the action is necessary. It is important he understand that any inability to adequately perform in a ministry role is separate from his acceptance as a believer within the body. This can be difficult because the ministry team member can interpret a severe correction as personal rejection. It is critical for ministry team members (paid or volunteer) to see your personal concern for them include a willingness on your part to invest in their lives whether they continue in ministry or not.
- ✓ **Prepare a Performance Contract.** If there has been unsatisfactory progress to this point, you should consider preparing a correcting memo outlining the specific issues regarding unsatisfactory ministry performance and the impact of that behavior or attitude on ministry. The worker needs to know the consequences if the ministry performance is not corrected.
- **Schedule a Follow-Up Meeting.** If the issue is successfully resolved you need to find out how the team member worked it through, celebrate success, and gain closure over the issue. If there is not satisfactory progress, then it’s time to go to Correction – “Come On In, We Need to Talk” Meeting Number 2.

Step 2: Disciplining Meetings – Reproof/Refute & Rebuke

Reproof/Refute – Specific Actions to Take in the “Last Chance” Meeting If uncorrected behaviors and performance unacceptable for ministry standards continues, the ministry team/staff member should be removed from ministry leadership until the issues are corrected. The goal is two-fold: restoration to proper behavior and restoration of relationship; however, leadership should be equally concerned with the negative impact on the recipients of ministry provided by the team/staff member. Vocational and ministry termination looms as an option at this point if there is no progress. This is the **“Last Chance” Meeting**.

- When the ministry team member can’t or won’t conform to ministry standards, there is the possibility of one or more of the following root causes preventing progress:
 - Some underlying resistance to spiritual and/or employment authority. It could be anger, a misunderstanding of facts, resentment or unforgiveness. Or, it could be the team member is correct on the issues and is suffering under poor leadership.
 - A personal crisis. It could be an emotional crisis, a life-controlling behavior(s) or a chaotic lifestyle caused by lack of discipline and unwise choices.
 - A lack of understanding or the absence of skills.
 - There may be “dark side of leadership” behaviors such as self-gratification, self-preservation and control occurring.

Actions to take in this meeting:

- ✓ **Warn.** Let the ministry team member know his continued contribution to the ministry is in jeopardy.
 - ✓ **Inform.** Inform the member in unambiguous terms the specific scriptural violations of conduct at issue.
 - ✓ **Establish a Final Deadline for Change.** Set a short date for noticeable change, naming what the change looks like and specific consequences for no change.
 - ✓ **Time Out.** Remove the ministry team member from any leadership or supervisory role until there is noticeable change.
 - ✓ **Probe Regarding Root Cause/Issue.** Continue to let the ministry team member know how concerned you are for him and yet the necessity for him to deal with underlying issues of unsatisfactory ministry performance. If you have had to come this far in the process, be assured the problem is probably not due to a lack of experience or knowledge on his part. There may, very likely, be an underlying personal issue.
- ***Rebuke – Specific Actions to Take in the Rebuke Meeting***

In a church community a person can have dual identity—adherent/attender/member and ministry team member. It is important to find the proper balance between continuing to minister to a believer in the context of Christian community while simultaneously dealing with the rebuking process for unchanging ministry behaviors.

This meeting should always be done in the presence of one or more additional elders and/or deacons as a witness, and for the sake of personal safety. The steps outlined in Matthew 18:17 should be followed: *"If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector."* For many spiritual leaders, one of the great pains of leadership is to discipline a ministry worker who is unwilling to accept the discipline and change for the better. The assertion of spiritual authority is not a power trip. It is loving discipline to the worker and a courageous protective action for everyone else affected by this person. Following Matthew 18 steps demonstrates:

- Influence of the spiritual leader as a role model.
- Influence of the spiritual leader on other believers' attitudes and behaviors.
- Actions taken are an example of how order works in a spiritual community.
- Recognition of the great responsibility each spiritual leader has within the community.
- An example of how love of the person and leadership responsibility can find harmony.

The agenda for a rebuke meeting is very short:

- ✓ ***Review*** the circumstances and pattern of unacceptable behavior and/or performance.
- ✓ ***Show*** the scriptural foundation for the issue and the recourse.

- ✓ **Affirm** leadership's desire to come along side a process of restoration of behavior, attitude and fellowship.
 - ✓ **Remind** the person that it has been her choice not to accept the opportunity for corrected attitudes and behavior.
 - ✓ **Explain** the action to be taken—the consequences for not following the requirements and the steps to take for restoration.
 - ✓ **Do not argue** about issues or go through repeated explanations of how and why you got to this point. This is not the meeting for that. That has already taken place.
 - ✓ **Disallow** the person to participate in the fellowship if his conduct continues to threaten the healthiness (physical, social, spiritual) of the Body.
 - ✓ **Conclude** the meeting with a letter detailing your specific instructions, always leaving the door open for restoration if the standards set forth are followed.
- **Discretion is Essential** Discretion in personnel matters is important. Giving personal details, particularly when the person is an employee, to the entire church may not be a wise interpretation of Matthew 18:17. But when a ministry team member's behavior is contrary to scripture and they are unwilling to change, it is appropriate to discuss the scriptural issues with "the church" and, if necessary, in the extreme case, to terminate fellowship relationship. For members who are not elders, scripture does not mandate how to accomplish resolution, whether it be before church leadership or before the entire congregation. I've seen it done both ways. I remember being in Thessaloniki, Greece, at the English Language International Church for a Sunday morning service. After a passionate message on purity and Christian community responsibilities, the pastor publicly rebuked two members who had been in an adulterous relationship. There was the appeal for repentance and reconciliation, but unfortunately there was no expression of humility from the individuals.

Step 3 - Severe Disciplining

- **Rebuke** You know something is seriously wrong with the ministry team/staff member, but don't know the root cause. It could be attitude, lifestyle, emotional health, personal/family issues or some unresolved sin. They have resisted spiritual authority and this is serious. Protecting the Christian community is now most important, and removing the ministry team/staff member may be the only remedy. This will provide a time for solitude, enabling the team member to reflect and focus on the issues and to gain understanding provoking her to change her attitudes and behavior, the ultimate goal being restoration.

This is NOT the same as shunning. If a member of the spiritual community is denied fellowship, spiritual leadership should always make an effort to provide discipleship with the goal of restoration. This was Paul's goal in his second letter to the believers at Corinth (2 Cor. 2:5-11). Remember that spiritual authority is for the purpose of building up, not tearing down.

The purpose of denying fellowship is to protect other members of the community, not to punish the rebuked. Although Paul was speaking about elders in 1 Timothy—“Those who sin are to be rebuked publicly, so that the others may take warning” (5:20)— the standard is similar in Matthew 18. Paul concludes his second letter to the church at Thessalonica with this warning: “If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed. Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother” (2 Thess. 3:14-15).

While people in spiritual leadership positions may not be commissioned or ordained elders, I believe they are extensions of spiritual authority and may be regarded as leaders responsible to meet the same standards as elders.