

Russell Kelfer

Wanted: Correctable Christians

(Part 1)

905-B

Series: Living Lessons From Proverbs

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

10602 Mossbank, San Antonio, TX 78230 • (210) 226-0000 / 1-800-375-7778 • www.dtm.org • dtm@dtm.org

Note: Russell wrote each of these lessons in a manner that would enable him to clearly communicate them to his weekly class. The grammar or punctuation you encounter may not be technically perfect, but you will certainly “hear” his unique gift for making the message applicable to the common man in everyday situations.

It’s been said of him that he was really a writer who read his stuff. And that’s a very accurate statement!

May you be richly blessed as you “hear” as you read.

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In the computer age in which we live, “word processing” is a common function. With just a click of a mouse, an array of words is at our fingertips. We can produce charts, figures, paragraphs and pages effortlessly. With one click, a person can delete words, change spelling, correct grammar, or remove whole sections of a document. If you choose, you can correct it a dozen times before it is printed. Mistakes are corrected almost immediately. I don’t think word processing is a relatively new concept; I believe God developed it in eternity past, but He called it “life processing.” “Life processing” is a spiritual miracle whereby He can allow our lives to appear on the screen of the Word of God.

When something that needs correcting appears, He has given us the tools to change that weakness into strength, that problem into progress, and to take the misplaced syllables or character and retype them into the image of Christ. Thus the impression made by our lives on others can be an imprint of His. That, in fact, is the whole thrust of spiritual growth, being available to be changed “into His likeness”. In other words, God is looking for “Correctable Christians”. That is the subject of this, our tenth lesson from the Book of Proverbs. The title is “Wanted: Correctable Christians”. (It is a lesson in learning to respond to rebuke.) Our outline for the next two lessons takes this form:

- I- The Case for Correction (Three steps on the pathway to Godliness)
- II- The Power of God’s Pressure (Four ways God rebukes His children)
- III- Responding to Rebuke (Four choices when rebuke comes)
- IV- Principles and Problems (Who, when, and why to rebuke)
- V- Wanted: Correctable Christians (The three stages of correctability)

The basic difference between word processing and “life processing” is that you and I (unlike the characters on the screen)

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have a choice! We can resist correction! Can you imagine typing a question mark where a period was, and having the computer shake and pout and answer back, "I do not like question marks." The period refuses to erase and the correction is denied. It would be a battle of the wills, and the computer would probably win; but at least we would probably better understand how God feels when He tries to make a simple correction in the margin of our lives. We send back a signal, "Correction denied." We choose to remain unchanged.

We have a choice. God is looking for men and women who want to be changed—who want to be changed so badly they will cooperate with joy when he sends rebuke or admonition or counsel into their lives. How correctable are you? How graciously do you respond to rebuke? That's the question we're asking ourselves. We have been, you may recall, looking at patterns from Proverbs for godliness, and we saw that the book of Proverbs logically divides itself into some 80 or more subjects which divide into four basic categories, each of which form a progressive pattern for Godly living.

1- It all began with humility. Humility is the mind of Christ in its purest form. It is

The PROGRESSIVE RECOGNITION that self is dead.

The PROGRESSIVE REVELATION that Jesus is alive.

The PROGRESSIVE REALIZATION that the battle is not ours, but His!

We discovered to our delight that our job is to humble ourselves and begin to sing and to praise. His job is to fight the enemy. What a relief that ought to be for us! So stage one is to cease being preoccupied with a dead self, and with self dead, we can crawl up into a living God.

2- Stage two is to feed the real you (the Christ life in you) with "soul" food, if you will, and learn God's pattern for becoming transformed by progressively hungering for the Word of God, until every nugget of its truth becomes a treasure beyond compare. Teachable Christians. Treasure-Hunting Christians. That's the second calling of our lives.

In the last lesson we looked at Proverbs, chapter 2, verses 1-6 and saw unfold before us the stair-step development of a teachable man or woman. First, he or she RECEIVES the Word

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with all readiness of mind. Then he or she HIDES it in his or her heart, memorizes it and stores it up for further reference. Sitting on the edge of his chair, tuning out all other thoughts that compete with the Word, (After all, what other thoughts could compete with the Word?) He eagerly asks, "What is God saying to me?" Then the heart softens and WEEPS for the Word. It becomes progressively desperate. It CRIES for the Word. It's eyes become searchlights pouring through the Word, as one searching for silver or gold.

Then it happens! The treasures of eternity are spotted. And God's man and God's woman digs through the Word as one would dig for hidden treasure, not missing a speck of it's wisdom, not leaving a spade of its soil unturned. Treasure-Hunting Christians! They are so teachable they crave the Word of God, so desperate they cry for its truth, dig for its treasures, thrive on its gems of spiritual life. They are humble, treasure-hunting Christians beginning to experience the mind of Christ in all its fullness. They are men and women who are becoming WISE.

Now, the next stage of progression in developing the mind of Christ may well be one of the most critical. It is at this point that many a Christian finds his or her spiritual engine begins to miss a beat. It is a higher form of humility as all of these first stages are, but I believe it takes a deeper level of yieldedness to respond to it. The issue, of course, is correctability, "One's Openness to Rebuke."

The Christian may humble himself and develop an insatiable hunger for the Word; but in his quest for the mind of Christ, various roadblocks will surface that appear to be "blind spots," character weaknesses or behavioral weaknesses that seem to inhibit spiritual growth and quench the Spirit and thus limit His work. It may be a spirit of disloyalty, or ingratitude, or an impure spirit; a loud, insensitive spirit, or a habit of misusing the emotions. It may be a problem of gluttony or fear or faithlessness or greed or stewardship. For some reason, Carl and Connie Christian, humbled and in the Word, always seem to skate around this problem; or they recognize it but fail to conquer it. So they believe the devil's lie, "That's just me! I'm supposed to be greedy. (God made me that way.) I'm supposed to be fearful. (It's just a cross I have to bear.)" No! Your fear has been nailed to the cross once. It need never make a return trip! God HATES greed. It may be part of your old self, but self is dead.

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So here we are, “growing” Christians, carefully pre-tending certain areas of our lives don’t really exist. But praise God! He has designed a tool to uncover those hidden pockets of sin, those reminders of “self” and deal with them. It’s called, “REBUKE”. The book of Proverbs seems to be the garden where God has planted his patterns on reactions and responses to rebuke. Let’s begin with a few definitions. For the sake of this study, we’ll define:

1- COUNSEL: Instructions where alternate choices are involved.

You go to your pastor or a friend for counsel because you have a decision to make, and you want God’s perspective; or you have a problem, and you don’t know how to respond. Counsel is God’s wisdom through others which lead to the right choice.

2- REPROOF or REBUKE: Instruction where *corrective* choices are involved.

You may go to your pastor asking for counsel on how to put up with your wife, and he may rebuke you in the process. He may say, “I detect an attitude problem in you that is contributing greatly to your wife’s hostility. Before we can deal with the marriage, we have to deal with your critical spirit.”

You may have come for counsel, but, in the process, you have been rebuked. How you respond to that rebuke will be both a barometer of your openness to correction and an indicator of how tough the road ahead to spiritual growth may be for you. If you cannot take correction, you have almost assured yourself of some time in the wilderness and an ocean of unnecessary pain. Here are two more quick definitions.

3- TO ADMONISH- The dictionary calls this “a mild reproof; a warning.”

This may be a less personal form of rebuke. It is calling attention to principles which may or may not be being violated. It could be a red flag; a yellow light; a caution signal for you to consider.

4- BLIND SPOTS- Areas of character or behavioral weaknesses, the seriousness of which is not evident to the person involved.

Physically, I actually have a blind spot, a spot in my eye that moves around, but blocks the vision in that one spot while it’s there. I can be reading a book and miss an entire word because

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this “blind spot” has obscured it completely. Unfortunately, as many of you know, that’s not the only “blind spot” I have. The others involve areas in my life that need correcting that I don’t even seem to admit are there. Most of you have similar problems.

Now God is vitally interested in our “blind spots”, so He has designed a series of alternatives or options to get our attention and give us “whole vision”. We will call it “The Pressure of God to Encourage Change.” In fact, we will add that to our definition of reproof or rebuke.

REPROOF- Instructions where corrective choices are involved, the pressure of God to encourage change.

You may have a problem with slothfulness (perish the thought) or anger (and you get angry at the mention of it) or bitterness or a negative spirit. God has at least four ways to bring pressure into your life to encourage you to be changed. Christ in you is not slothful or angry or bitter or negative. So God has a four-fold plan for pressure to remove our spiritual blinders, four tools to make us see our needs. Those four tools are:

Tool 1- THE WORD OF GOD- The pressure of God through Scripture.

Tool 2- AUTHORITY- The pressure of God through the heart of the King.

Tool 3- COUNSEL- The pressure of God through the rebuke of others.

Tool 4- DIVINE DISCIPLINE- The pressure of God through the circumstances of life.

I believe if you examine Scripture carefully and examine your experience, you will find that God usually proceeds in that order. If you fail to respond to the Scriptures, He will send rebuke through those in authority: government, teacher, husband, parent, pastor, employer, disciple-maker. If you fail to respond to authority, He will send along strong counsel, the rebuke of a friend, your wife, your neighbor or someone to whom you have made yourself vulnerable. If you fail to respond to counsel, He will send you divine discipline. The pressures of life will mount up in such a way as to expose your weakness, so He can make you strong. But if you continue to resist the discipline of God, I believe God sees you as a “scorner”. He will simply allow you to live your life with the weight of your blind spot around your neck

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dragging you down like a runner headed for the Olympics with a cast on his leg. You run the race, but you're never a winner. But God doesn't want it that way! That's why He has chosen to use the heavenly pressure of change we know as rebuke! Let's take the book of Proverbs and see the pattern emerge.

God's first and most gentle form of rebuke comes from the Word of God.

Have not I written to thee excellent things in counsel and knowledge,

That I might make thee know the certainty of the Words of truth; that thou mightest answer the Words of truth to them that send unto thee? (Proverbs 22:20,21)

God says, "Haven't I written rebuke into the Word, to change you and to give you answers from those who come to you?"

The ear that heareth the reproof of life abideth among the wise.

He that refuseth (this) instruction despiseth his own soul: but he that heareth reproof getteth understanding. (Proverbs 15:31,32)

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, (It is God-breathed.) and (all Scripture) is profitable for doctrine (it will teach you), for reproof (it will touch you), for correction (it will turn you), for instruction in righteousness (it will train you):

That the man (or woman) of God may be perfect (mature) thoroughly furnished unto all good works, (equipped for whatever God has in mind)." (His blind spots will be revealed and removed) (II Timothy 3:16,17)

The Word of God is the tool of God for the child of God to hear the reproof of life and correct His ways. God's plan is for your spiritual antenna and mine to be so sensitive to His signals that we carefully scan the innermost attitudes of our hearts for blind spots every time we read or hear the Word. If we hear a lesson on jealousy, and we detect a jealous spirit hidden beneath the surface of our lives we will dig and dig for the truth, lay ourselves open before God, and plead for wisdom. If necessary, we should seek counsel and get help until every trace of jealousy is gone. That's a right response to rebuke. The Word of God is God's most *gentle* form of reproof. It's His velvet glove of correction.

So often, we ignore the Word or acknowledge the problem, but

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we don't apply our hearts unto wisdom. So God, in love, turns to plan "B", the reproof of authority. You may have an impatient spirit like I do. You just can't wait for life to run its normal course. The doctor takes too long. The waiter takes too long. The clerk takes too long. Your wife takes too long to get ready. Your fellow employees are too slow. Your children are interminable turtles. You and the world operate on different clocks, and so do you and God. Well, He just never seems to move fast enough to suit you.

Then one day, you're late (or so you think) to church because your slow wife took too long to dress your slow children. So, being the martyr that you are, you grudgingly ease your big toe halfway through the carburetor to rescue yourself from a fate worse than death—being late. Suddenly you look in your rear view mirror, and this amazing phenomenon from outer space is descending on your bumper. It's a blue and white car and has a spinning red light whirring around on its roof. A big guy in a blue suit emerges with a pad and pencil in hand. Your first thought is, "He wants my autograph!" He quickly dispels that myth. Instead, he so appreciates the way you drive, he would like to share the sheer excitement of it with the judge.

You're enraged! It's her fault. If it just didn't take her a whole hour to dress, clean the house, fix breakfast, get four kids ready, and start lunch, you wouldn't be late. Why, you read the whole paper in that time! You say, I hope she learns her lesson. No, I don't think God's dialing her number. And He's not just dealing with your speeding (though he certainly wants to). God is using the authorities of life (they are, remember, ordained of God) to rebuke you for your impatient spirit. If you listen, humble yourself, and get help, you will be on the way to becoming wise. You may have even prayed for patience. That policeman is your answer.

You're at work. Your boss calls you in and rebukes you for being inattentive to details and for leaving things undone. He says, "I can't promote you until you deal with this habit." That's God saying to you

The hand of the diligent shall bear rule: but the slothful shall be under tribute. (Proverbs 12:24)

He also that is slothful in his work is brother to him that is a great waster. (Proverbs 18:9)

God is speaking to you through authority. You say, "But my

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boss is not a Christian!” No matter,

The king’s heart is in the hands of the Lord, as the rivers of water: He turneth it whithersoever He will. (Proverbs 21:1)

God uses authority to apply pressure. Your husband asks you to stop gossiping with your neighbors. You’re enraged! “He’s no one to talk!” you exclaim. He has a mouth like a runaway locomotive himself! Ah, but His mouth is not your problem. That’s God’s problem. Your problem is to take his counsel to heart. God is saying to you through him (believe it or not),

...tensions disappear when gossip stops.

(Proverbs 26:20b TLB)

God is rebuking you through the authority, not through the PERSON (he may be worse than you). God is speaking through the OFFICE (the position he holds under God). Heed the rebuke and grow! The Scripture uses the parent-child relationship more than any other to demonstrate the power of rebuke through authority.

How does a man become wise? The first step is to trust and reverence the Lord!

Only fools refuse to be taught. Listen to your father and mother.

(Proverbs 1:7,8 TLB)

A wise son heareth his father’s instruction; but a scorner heareth not rebuke.

(Proverbs 13:1)

He who resists and sets himself up against authorities resists what God has arranged—in divine order. And those who resist will bring down judgment on themselves—receiving the penalty due them.

(Romans 13:2 Amplified)

That’s why wives submit to their husbands, employees to their employers, children to their parents, citizens to their authorities. God is trying to use those He places over you as instruments of rebuke, to personalize the Scripture, to help you grow. Cooperate and be blessed or resist and miss the blessing.

If you profit from constructive criticism you will be elected to the wise man’s hall of fame, but to reject criticism is to harm yourself and your own best interests.

(Proverbs 15:31 TLB)

First, God will speak to you through His Word. Then, He will lovingly send you a message through those He has placed over you. He is graciously trying to rebuke you, but He still has other ways.

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Tool 3- REBUKE BY COUNSEL- “The pressure of God applied through others.”

Here is rebuke in its most recognizable form! It is also the most difficult form to accept. It is rebuke from one called alongside to help—a friend, a relative, or someone you may have approached for encouragement or counsel, but by counsel you really meant someone with a pat solution that did not involve spiritual surgery. Seeking counsel, you remember, is a primary vehicle of God to transport His children to higher ground.

Without counsel purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of counsellors they are established.

(Proverbs 15:22)

The problem is most of us who seek counsel are like the guy who says he is going for financial advice, but really just wants a loan. So often we would define counsel as a way out of our difficulties or, better still, the easiest way out of our difficulties. The purpose of counsel in Scripture is always to receive wisdom to be genuinely changed.

Hear counsel, and receive instruction, that thou mayest be wise in the latter end.

(Proverbs 19:20)

Get all the advice you can, and be wise the rest of your life.

(TLB)

Every purpose is established by counsel.

(Proverbs 20:18a)

Don't go ahead with your plans without the advice of others.

(TLB)

You seek counsel with a purpose. You go to draw on another's wisdom, not to reinforce your own prejudices.

Counsel in the heart of man is like deep water, but a man of understanding will draw it out.

(Proverbs 20:5)

Scripturally, when you seek counsel, you do so by making yourself totally vulnerable. You don't place limits on what parts of your life God can touch. You rather pray beforehand, “Lord, if I need surgery, don't let me be satisfied with Band Aids. Use this person to cut to the heart of my deepest needs.” And then, as you seek counsel for your circumstances, humble yourself before the one whose time you are taking and ask, “Would you please share any blind spots you see in my life that God might be using these circumstances to uncover?” And then, having asked, don't come up swinging when they do what you asked.

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Then when they uncover your need, ask for help in solving the problem. Here's where the spiritual gifts are so helpful. Don't be afraid of those who have the gift of discernment or prophecy. They may tell it like it is, but they'll tell it and that's what we need. Then you can find someone with the gift of exhortation for steps of action, or the gift of giving for how to use what resources you have, or the gift of administration for the best use of your time, or the gift of service to help you do something, if that's what's needed, or find someone with the gift of mercy and just cry it out together. Utilize wisely the gifts in the Body of Christ. Don't be afraid to become vulnerable to those closest to you. They know you best of all, and their rebuke is usually motivated by love.

Open rebuke is better than hidden love!

Wounds from a friend are better than kisses from an enemy!
(Proverbs 27:5,6 TLB)

So God has ordained a third level of correction for the Christian. First, the Word of God. Second, authority ordained by God. Then, the rebuke of counsel, "The pressure of God through others to cause you to change."

God does not stop there when we disregard even these three attempts to get our attention. God then begins to quietly work through the circumstances of life. He gets our attention, but often we miss the point. As with the policeman and the speeding ticket a little earlier, we may focus on the experience or the circumstance and never search for the deeper lesson, the real rebuke behind God's divine discipline.

He may get our attention through finances, and we may learn a surface lesson about borrowing money; but God may be wanting to surface a heart that doesn't know how to give.

He may get our attention through a problem on the job, and we may deal with the surface issue of talking back to the boss. We may even apologize to the boss, but God may have been wanting us to finally deal with a rebellious spirit towards authority.

He may have gotten our attention through sickness, and we may confess a need to slow down and care for our bodies. However, God may have a deeper purpose. He may be dealing with an independent spirit, and only a sickness that makes you dependent could draw your attention to the real issue. Remember these facts about divine discipline:

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1) God only reproves those He loves.

My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord; neither be weary of His correction.

For whom the Lord loveth He correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth. (Proverbs 3:11,12)

His punishment is proof of His love. (TLB)

2) God only reproves you to bless you.

Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out My Spirit unto you, I will make known My Words unto you.

(Proverbs 1:23)

That's why God sends reproof. He's looking for a way to bless you; to make His Word come alive.

3) God's reproof is always for our good.

Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept Thy Word. (Psalm 119:67)

It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn Thy statutes. (Psalm 119:71)

I know, Oh Lord, that Thy judgements are right, and that, Thou in faithfulness thou hast afflicted me. (Psalm 119:75)

God always has our ultimate good in mind.

4) If we refuse to respond to rebuke long enough, God will leave us alone and leave us unchanged.

He that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.

(Proverbs 29:1)

Ken Taylor paraphrases it,

The man who is often reprov'd but refuses to accept criticism will suddenly be broken and never have another chance. (TLB)

Listen to Proverbs chapter 1:

Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you.

Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded,

But ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof:

I also will laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear cometh;

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When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you.

Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me:

For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord:

They would have none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof.

Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices.

For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them.

But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil. (Proverbs 1:23-33)

Do you get the picture?

5) But fifthly and last, if we do respond properly to rebuke, God is waiting to love us and encourage us because we were willing to listen.

Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth: therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty:

For He maketh sore, and (but He) bindeth up: He woundeth, and (but) His hands make whole. (Job 5:17,18)

Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest him out of Thy law;

That Thou mayest give him rest from the days of adversity, (Psalm 94:12,13a)

After you have suffered a little while, our God, who is full of kindness through Christ, will give you His eternal glory. He personally will come and pick you up, and set you firmly in place, and make you stronger than ever. (I Peter 5:10 TLB)

Our God is so gracious! Now not all affliction is divine discipline. However, all affliction can be used by God to purify our lives and to deal with our weaknesses. Always, as with Job, once we cooperate and God's purposes are fulfilled, oh, how our loving God delights in restoring us and refreshing us and reviving us again! He does not delight in our suffering. He tolerates our suffering and allows our suffering to produce change. It is His most powerful tool to correct His children.

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Now, I had fully intended to finish this subject in one chapter, but as you can probably tell by now, that just isn't going to happen. In our next chapter, we'll look at the ways to respond to rebuke. There are four: you can react to it; you can retreat from it; you can refuse it; or you can respond to it. What you do will determine if you are a:

1) wise man; 2) a scorner; 3) or a fool.

We'll look at why accepting rebuke is the key to one-on-one discipleship. We'll look at some principles on rebuking others, and we'll find there are some people you just don't rebuke! We'll look at some Scriptural examples of right and wrong responses to rebuke (David, Paul, Daniel, Stephen). We'll look at the three stages to becoming totally correctable Christians. We need to take some time to ponder personally our response to the four levels of correction God sends our way.

I am devastated as I think of how I bristle at personal rebuke, and at how often I have to have God's hammer of discipline fall on my life before I'll listen to anybody or even to the Word. And I'm amazed at how many people are responsive to counsel only as long as it isn't too personal. At how many want solutions to their problem so long as they aren't the problem.

Can you imagine the transformation that could take place just in our worlds if you and I began to actively seek reproof and eagerly respond to correction? If we each stopped toying with the surface problems in our lives and declared war on our blind spots? If we sought counsel from the Word, from those in authority, from counselors and friends on what areas of our lives were stumbling blocks to those who are looking for Jesus but are blinded by us? If we honestly made ourselves vulnerable to correction? Wow!! What power could be ours. Oh, how clear the Scripture is:

A man who refuses to admit his mistakes can never be successful. But if he confesses and forsakes them, he gets another chance.
(Proverbs 28:13 TLB)

You see, we need not cry as the writer did.

and you say, "Oh, if only I had listened! If only I had not demanded my own way!

Oh, why wouldn't I take advice? Why was I so stupid?
(Proverbs 5:12,13 TLB)

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To learn you must want to be taught. To refuse reproof is stupid. (Proverbs 12:1 TLB)

Yes, God is looking for humble men and women. God is looking for teachable men and women. God is looking for correctable men and women, men and women who do not resist God's life processor as He seeks to make corrections. Men and women who are willing to cry out to God, "Use your Word. Use authority. Use others, Lord. If need be, use divine discipline. Lord, use whatever it takes to rebuke me, and make me usable." God is looking for men and women who are willing to pray,

MAKE ME CORRECTABLE

Oh, God, make me correctable;
Teach me to look for reproof.
Teach me to search out my weaknesses
Under the searchlight of truth.

Oh, God, make me correctable;
Grant me thine eyes, oh, to see
That Thine is the hand of correction
Behind all authority.

Oh, God, make me correctable;
Teach me to listen and learn.
Oh, God as I seek counsel,
Make me for real help to yearn.

Oh, God make me correctable.
Even midst discipline's strife,
Teach me to cry in humility,
Whatever it takes, change my life!

Oh, God make me correctable.
And may I not rest till You're through,
Until You have taken the dross away,
And all that remains is You!

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