

Understanding Correction: A Type of Resurrection

*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*

Artem was a student of mine that taught me much. He understood his role as a student like few students I have taught in my 20-year tenure. In short, he allowed himself to be corrected. He welcomed correction. In fact, he wanted to be corrected.

I think the collective human experience would agree that people, as a rule, do not like to be corrected. We recoil at the thought of being told “no”, or being told “you have it wrong”, or “you are mistaken.” I suppose our pride takes “a hit” when we are corrected. Correction strikes at our tender places of ego. Correction points out our blind spots, highlights our insecurities, and maybe even sheds light on our “shadows.” The “shadows of life” where we are not as we should be. For those of us who desperately want to be “good”, want to be “right”, or want to be “finished,” correction is a rude reminder that we are not yet these things.

When I would ask the class a question over the statistics content I was teaching, Artem’s hand would go up eager to assert his answer. Often, he was wrong. “Artem, that is the best wrong answer I’ve heard in a while,” I would remark. “The whole class will learn three important concepts from your mistake.” Time and time again, this would happen. While the rest of the class stared expressionless at the questions I posed, Artem embraced the moment with a smile and a hand. “No, Artem, that is not right but I’m so glad you answered incorrectly.” Pretty soon, the class, on my cue, would thank Artem for his wrong answer because they were the recipients of his courage. It does take courage to risk being wrong in front of your peers. But I don’t think Artem saw it as courage. Rather, he understood who he was in the classroom. Artem was a student – a student needing to be corrected.

Unlike Artem who understood his role as a student, we too often do not live out our roles wisely. For example, when I am a patient under the inspection of my doctor, do I over approximate my exercise practices? Or when the dentist asks me if I floss, do I say “sometimes” when really, I should be admitting that it is hardly “seldom?” Here again, I am entrusting these professionals with my health. It is in my best interest if they know the facts. The students in my Stats class do not want to answer my questions because they do not want to be wrong and look ignorant. They would rather overapproximate their intelligence when they are in the very place where ignorance is not only expected but remedied. We fear the exposure of our “shadows” to the very people who can shine light upon them. The doctor with our physical health. The dentist with our oral health. The teacher with our mental knowledge. The therapist with our problems. The pastor with our sin. No, unlike Artem, we tend to despise chastening and are weary of correction.

Artem understood and embraced three truths that made him the type of person who received correction well in the classroom.

1. He owned his shadow.

He saw himself as a person who was ignorant. Correction was not off-putting to him because he expected the correction. After all, he was a student.

2. He saw himself in progress.

Correction was not shaming because he didn’t identify himself as an accomplished statistician. Rebuke was not an

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insulting referendum on his self-image. Rather, correction was a steppingstone in becoming the statistician he envisioned.

3. He placed himself under authority.

Artem trusted his ignorance to me, the teacher. He humbled himself under my instruction.

If I am going to be the type of person who does not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be weary of his correction, then I need to learn from Artem.

1. I need to understand that I have a shadow.

I have blind spots. I have “gaps” between who I am and who I need to be.

2. I need to see myself in progress.

I am not finished. Rather, my life is in a continual state of growth. I see myself as the future person Christ is working in me to be.

3. I need to see myself under the authority of God and the leadership he has established for me.

I need to trust my shadow to God’s sanctifying work. I place myself under the discipline of my believing community.

What I will miss, not having Artem as a student, is the connection he and I made over his mistakes. Moments of correction always led to moments of earnest back and forth and moments of honest sharpening and guidance. As a teacher I felt meaningful, used, and needed. In fact, the joy of teaching and learning was alive and present in this place of correcting the wrong. For this reason, I always met Artem’s wrong answers with a smile and not a scowl. I think that helped.

Artem’s example has helped me bring my mistakes to God. Seeing his smile. *“For whom the Lord loveth he correcteth.”* (Proverbs 3:12) And I, like Artem, have found that they have given me places of joy. Joy involving intimate connections with God where wrongs are carefully understood and confessed. At these times, wrongs are exposed, mistakes are corrected, and failings are righted. They serve as a welcome pivot, hinge point, and moment of grace. They are moments where hope of right springs to life from the lostness of wrong. As resurrection brings life from death, these moments of correction are, in fact, moments of resurrection in our lives.