

Good morning everyone, my name is Mark and I'm one of the pastors on staff at North Shore Alliance Church. A number from our community are away on Spring Break this weekend, but it good for us to be here together...and I'm trusting God to pour out His goodness, love, and mercy among us this morning.

Just before I begin my message this morning, there are three things that I want to chat with you about.

- **First**, we just wrapped up our 40 days of prayer on Thursday night, and I would like to say a big thanks to everyone who has been involved.

Now I know that some of you took these 40 days as an opportunity to begin a new rhythm of prayer in your life, and to you I want to say: *Way to go!* and *Keep on going!* Prayer can become a way of living...as we are driving in the car, walking down the street, working in our office, or hanging out at school, prayer invites God into the middle of every day life.

It's about taking those split second moments to thank Him when we something great happens. It's about turning that anxious thought into a prayer to Jesus. It's about being aware that at every given moment, Jesus is present and He might want to encourage us, direct us, or enable us to see what He is up to.

So let me encourage you to continue living a prayed life, and lets continue to be praying for our friends, neighbours, and nations. I also want to let you know that we have a group that prays every Thursday night, and you are welcome to keep coming.

- **Second**, I wanted to give you a brief update on our staff search. I mentioned in January that we would be putting a Search Committee together to search for candidates to step into the roles that Shane and Linda were leading.

Throughout February our Search Committee received a number of resumes, and in the next few weeks we will be sitting down to interview potential candidates; our first interviews begin this Wednesday and Thursday night.

The reason I am telling you this is because we would like to ask you to join us in praying for God's wisdom and discernment. In order to protect the confidentiality of the applicants and our process, there isn't any more that we can say at this point, but we are depending on your prayers and God's guidance in the days ahead.

- **Third**, some of you haven't yet heard that Lois McCann, a long time member of our church, and one of our elders, passed away early Tuesday morning; we held a memorial service for Lois yesterday at the church.

In February of last year, Lois was diagnosed with advanced Lung Cancer, and like every other challenge Lois faced, she was feisty, joyful, and in the end, at peace with going to see Jesus. A few weeks ago, when she knew her recovery was unlikely, Lois told her daughters "*Either I'm going to leave this hospital and come home to live with you for awhile, or I'm going to leave this hospital and go to be at home with Jesus. Either way...I'm going to be at home.*"

Lois had the outlook we read about in Romans 14:8, "*If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we*

live or die, we belong to the Lord.” Lois lived with such confidence because she knew who she belonged to, Jesus, she knew who she was living for, Jesus, and she knew what awaited her final breath...**life!**

Who do you belong to? Who are you living for? What awaits your final breath? If your answer is “Jesus,” then I can assure you that you’ve chosen well. If you have different answers...well, it’s not too late to change your answers.

As I’ve been saying the last few weeks, as followers of Jesus, we need to feast on a steady diet of hope. Hope is the joyful anticipation of the Lord’s goodness. Heaven is the eternal expression of the Lord’s infinite goodness, mercy, and love. Personally, right now, I’d rather be there than here...no offense.

I think before I continue, I’m going to pause and pray; would you join me? **Pray.**

If you have a Bible with you (paper or electronic), please turn with me to 1 Corinthians 4, starting at verse 14. If you are using the blue bibles right in front of you, you can find our text on page 1775.

Last Sunday, Dave preached on the first 13 verses of chapter 4, and today I’d like to pick up where Dave left off. In the first 13 verses we see Paul on the defensive. The Corinthians had been measuring him with the wrong measuring stick, and they concluded that Paul came up short. And so, Paul defended his message, his ministry, and the way of Jesus. The way of Jesus is not about bigger and better; walking along the way of Jesus involves serving from a place of

weakness, it can involve persevering through suffering, enduring slander, etc.

But if Paul is on the defensive in the first 13 verses, Paul goes on the offensive in the remaining 8. Don’t be surprised by the language Paul uses...this is one of those “difficult” conversations that need to be laced with tough love. Please follow along as I read.

14 I am writing this not to shame you but to warn you as my dear children. 15 Even if you had ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. 16 Therefore I urge you to imitate me. 17 For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church.

18 Some of you have become arrogant, as if I were not coming to you. 19 But I will come to you very soon, if the Lord is willing, and then I will find out not only how these arrogant people are talking, but what power they have. 20 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power. 21 What do you prefer? Shall I come to you with a rod of discipline, or shall I come in love and with a gentle spirit?

I’ve entitled my message this morning, “Embracing Correction,” but I could have entitled it “Open to Discipline”. I suppose it doesn’t really matter what I call this sermon, the bottom line is that Paul’s words are counter to our Western culture. This going to be a bit of a different message this morning, because from where we sit in history and geography, we are predisposed towards suspicion. Predisposed that is, to be suspicious of anyone who claims authority of any kind.

Themes of authority and submission may be prevalent in the Bible but they are not popular with most modern readers. And to an extent, we are at a disadvantage from those first Christians, because the world we live in is very different from the world they knew.

The world they knew was a well-ordered hierarchy, a pecking order of authority and submission. In the ancient world, everyone was under someone's authority, everyone belonged to someone. Within families, kids answered to parents, wives' to their husbands, and men to their fathers. In other arenas of life, servants belonged to their masters, masters belonged to their patron, patrons belonged to more powerful patrons, and on things went until you reached almighty Caesar...he was Lord and King...and everyone bowed to him.

Not so today. The Western dream is one of autonomy, independence, and freedom: freedom to do what I want, when I want, apart from the rules or restrictions of others. Now of course there are rules and restrictions today, and there is some authority, but we see authority as a necessary evil. People in the ancient world knew who they belonged to, today, we fancy ourselves as little Caesars...Lord and King/Queen of our own domain.

In some senses, it's sad where we've ended up, suspicious of authority, but it's not surprising. In a secular West, where God is relegated to the realm of fairy tales, there is no one left to belong to, no one with any "real" authority, no one to tell us what is right or wrong, no one who can offer any final word on how to live.

Besides, aren't we better off on our own anyway? Aren't the history books filled with the abuse of authority? "*It's better this way,*" we tell ourselves, "*I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul.*"

Some of us may be very disciplined people, that is, we have voluntarily chosen to embrace discipline in various areas of our life: in our eating, in our spending (of time and money), in our physical exercise, or in what we watch online or on t.v...you could say, we've disciplined, or corrected, our own behaviour. We can also choose to embrace discipline when it comes to our life with Jesus: we can choose to pray, to study the Bible, to fast, to embrace solitude, etc.

But not all discipline comes to us by choice, and when we are not given a choice, most of us resist. Let me ask you teachers in the room, *is there ever a need for correction in your classroom?* Let me ask you parents in the room, *is there ever a need for correction in your home?* I'm asking a leading question I know..."*of course*" there is a need for correction says the teacher and the parent. But then most of us adults feel like there is always need for correction...a need for other people to be corrected.

Let me ask you, is there ever a need for correction, in the church? Are there situations, or individuals, or relationships, or ideas that go "sideways" and need to be corrected?

Proverbs 12:1 doesn't pull any punches; it reads, "*Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but whoever hates correction is stupid.*"

Proverbs 15:32 says, "*Those who disregard discipline despise themselves, but the one who heeds correction gains understanding.*" In other words, you're only hurting yourself when you refuse correction.

Proverbs 19:20 says, "*Listen to advice and accept discipline, and at the end you will be counted among the wise.*"

Embracing correction means accepting that I do not always see clearly. Not only do I not see everything that God sees (hence the need to submit to God's correction), but, I don't even see what others can see. Being a part of a community like this one means accepting that God intends to use others to shape and correct me.

Right from the beginning of Paul's letter, he has been making it plain that **faith** (*what we believe*) and **ethics** (*how we live*) are two sides of the same coin. This is why Paul can go from talking about the theology of the cross, to addressing the way they are treating one another, or him, all in the same breath.

In vs. 20 Paul writes, "*For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power.*" What is Paul getting at? It is not as though the Holy Spirit was "missing" in Corinth; what Paul was referring to was the natural outflow of the Spirit's power: *transformed lives*. Faith (*what we believe*) and **ethics** (*how we live*) are two sides of the same coin; both are vital, and at times, both require correction.

Illus: On Friday night we had a birthday party for Luke; his 9th birthday isn't for a few more days but we wanted to catch his friends before they left for Spring Break. As a part of the festivities, Luke's plan was to play a game of indoor hockey at our house.

Indoor hockey is a regular occurrence in the Peters' household...Luke will play against anyone who will agree to pick up a stick: me, his mom, his sister, grandma, grandpa. When he woke up on Friday, grandma and grandpa gave him two new mini hockey nets and 5 new mini sticks...his eyes were as big as saucers.

Just before Luke left for school, he made a point of talking to me about the big hockey game at his birthday party. He said, *Dad, you're going to be at my birthday party right?* "Of course," I said. "*Can you be the referee, Dad? You can use your whistle and everything.*" "Sure," I said, "I'd love to."

But think about it...why would a 9 year old want a referee for an indoor hockey game at a birthday party? If you've ever played hockey with a pack of 9 year old boys, you wouldn't have to ask. A game without rules or boundaries very quickly morphs from a "game" into a brawl. A referee is an absolute must...

By a show of hands, how many of you have ever played the game of hockey...on the road, in a rink, or in a gym?

Hockey can be a physical game...and on the ice, it's a game that moves at breakneck speed. On the ice, players make split-second decisions to pass, shoot, or hit that can have massive consequences, and not just on the outcome of the game, but on the well-being of the other players. The best referees are only visible when they need to be...they let the players play, but are quick to blow the whistle when the conduct of the players compromises the integrity of the game, or the safety of other players.

Now, my analogy breaks down in a few places when we try to apply it to the Corinthians or to ourselves. First of all, the Corinthians weren't playing a game, and neither are we. But like a hockey game played on ice, all of us are involved in something that moves at breakneck speed...it's called life in community. And every day we make split-second decisions that can have massive consequences

when it comes to the outcome of our own life and the lives of the people around us.

My analogy breaks down in at least one other area as well: Paul doesn't portray himself as a referee or "rule-keeper". Yes, Paul is claiming to have a measure of authority, but what he claims is the authority of a father, and this makes all the difference in his claim. So let's submit ourselves to this text, and discover what God might want to say to us about matters of authority, submission, and correction.

Paul begins in vs. 14 by saying, "*14 I am writing this **not to shame you but to warn you as my dear children.***"

Now, I want to take few minutes to talk with you about shame, not because this is the major point in the text, but because it leapt out at me as I was praying through this text.

How many of you know that shame can be a powerful weapon? Shame can cripple a person, keeping her (or him) chained to their past, immobilized in the present, and fearful about taking steps forward into the future.

Often shame is illegitimate--when shame is used by someone as a tool to control or manipulate others, when it is used to keep people trapped in patterns of relating or behavior--it is illegitimate. So much of the shame that we experience has nothing to do with God. Our enemy, the devil, is constantly trying to remind us of things God has already forgiven us for. This is a predictable ploy, a common tactic of his; the devil is not creative, but he is subtle. There will always be a

tinge/shade of the truth in the shame...there has to be, or we would never believe it.

Others try to use shame in the same way, subtly, or not so subtly. Let me share one brief example. Have you ever had a friend, family member, boss, or leader bring up the "forgiven" past with you? Maybe you hurt someone last month, last year, or 20 years ago...at the time you asked for forgiveness, made amends, and sought reconciliation, but they still carry this hurt around with them, and bring it up whenever it suits their purposes. It's passive aggressive, it's a form of control, or at the very least, it's an indicator they did not forgive to begin with.

God is not like that, and neither are spiritual leaders when they are leading in alignment with God; they do not use their authority to shame or to control those entrusted to them. What God gives, He gives wholeheartedly.

What God has forgiven, He has forgiven. The punishment, the shame and the guilt for our sin against God, and others, has already fallen upon Jesus, our debt has been paid in full. So why would we lug a burden of shame around any longer? Whenever we feel shame for something in our forgiven past, we need to actively redirect our shame to the shadow of the Cross...that's where it belongs.

But...not all shame is illegitimate; sometimes the shame we feel is an indicator that God is present. When God is present, when his Holiness lights up the room, the dust and cobwebs become evident. When God is present, sin is exposed; the natural human reaction to sin is shame.

This kind of shame functions like an engine light on a car's dashboard. When the engine light comes on, it means that something is broken, something needs to be fixed...sure, we can ignore it, but we do so to our own peril.

Like Adam and Eve in the garden, when we are exposed our natural tendency is to hide. God does not use shame to manipulate or to control; our shame tells us that something is out of alignment with His life, something needs to be confessed, repentance (a change of mind and direction) needs to take place, and freedom is right around the corner.

As Paul begins his correction, he begins by saying, "*I am writing this **not to shame** you **but to warn** you as my dear children.*" Now the question is, what is Paul writing to warn them about?

The Corinthians were chasing after all the wrong things: after worldly wisdom, impressive displays of eloquence, intellect and knowledge, and they were playing the comparison game (who's the most spiritual?). Their behavior revealed that they had left Jesus behind, they had forgotten who they were, and why Jesus called them in the 1st place.

"*I am writing this **not to shame** you **but to warn** you as my dear children;*" Paul's intent is not to disgrace them, but to correct their behaviour.

Let's move on to verses 15-17. As I said earlier, Paul doesn't portray himself as a referee or "rule-keeper," but rather, Paul portrays himself as father who is concerned for his children. There is one primary key to correction, both for the one doing the correcting, and

for the one on the receiving end of the correction. Listen up now, I don't want anyone to miss it...the key is *love*.

The key is love. 1 Corinthians 13:1 says that without love, we are little more than a resounding gong or a clanging symbol...in other words, loud and annoying. We've all heard the saying, "*People don't care how much you know, until they know how much you care.*" It's true isn't it? If I know you are for me, that you have my best interests in mind, I will be more inclined to listen to, and embrace, the correction you offer to me.

Every parent, every pastor, every person needs to heed this word: make every effort to make regular deposits on the love side of the ledger, because when we do speak a word of correction, people will be more apt to listen and even embrace the words we speak.

Eugene Peterson, summarizes the words of Colossians 3:12-14 in the following way, "*So, chosen by God for this new life of love, dress in the wardrobe God picked out for you: compassion, kindness, humility, quiet strength, discipline. Be even-tempered, content with second place, quick to forgive an offense. Forgive as quickly and completely as the Master forgave you. And regardless of what else you put on, wear love. It's your basic, all-purpose garment. Never be without it.*"

Some of us are still not convinced, I can tell. Parents, teachers, bosses, pastors...people who have some measure of authority regularly say that they have our best interests in mind. *Trust me, I know what's best for you, so please do as I say.*

But that's not what Paul says here, is it? Look at verse 16. This isn't one of those "*do as I say, not as I do*" kind of moments. Paul says, "*you are my dearly loved spiritual children, I am your spiritual father; so imitate me. What I ask of you, I am committed to living out. And if you need another live example of what the Jesus-life looks like, let me send you Timothy...because he looks, sounds, and lives like Jesus.*"

Friends, the life of Jesus isn't to be admired so much as it is to be embodied. All of us need real, live, examples; all of us need spiritual fathers and mothers. Not just someone to love us, feed us, and give us \$20 bucks when we're running low...but fathers and mothers who will speak the truth, in love...those who will come along side and model the Jesus-life right before our eyes, those who will speak a word of correction because they love us too much to see us go sideways and make a mess of things.

The question is, are we willing to be mothered or fathered? Are we willing to accept that love includes correction? And, are we willing to align our life with the life of Jesus so that we can be a mother or father to others?

Paul's final words in verses 18-20 sound heavy, because they are. Paul knows where the Corinthian behaviour is taking them...they are destroying one another, destroying God's dwelling place. And so, Paul says, "*you've become arrogant and puffed up...and while you may be determined to continue in this behaviour, you need to know that I am not going to let that happen...I'll show up and knock some sense into you if I have to.*"

Friends, I want you to hear what lies behind the intensity of Paul's words...it's not anger, it's love, a tough love that is unwilling to give up without a fight. Paul is fighting for their transformation, but there's something else he's fighting for...he's fighting for the rest of Corinth that does not yet know Jesus.

Paul knows what's at stake: the gospel of the kingdom is at stake. Jesus came announcing the kingdom of God, that is, the good news that through His own life, God was going to implement His reign and rule upon the earth. Where God is ruling, brokenness is being healed, forgiveness is being received, health and wholeness begin to spring into being, relationships are being reconciled, sin is being destroyed, and restoration begins to pick up momentum.

The church, the people of God, we are simultaneously participants in this kingdom, and bearers of this good news. And our life together is an important part of our witness. We were called to be a radical alternative to the kingdoms of the world. This is what Paul is fighting for...for the credibility of the gospel message.

I think Paul was right to fight for this...I think we are meant to fight for it as well. But we are going to have to tear down walls of pride in order to do it...we're going to have to stop thinking that we are better, or more "spiritual" than the person next to us, we're going to have to keep short accounts with one another, forgive one another...we're going to have to submit our life and behaviour to one another, and embrace correction where needed.

Are you willing? Are we willing?

Pray

Communion

This morning I want to welcome you to the Lord's Table. Every time we eat this bread and drink this cup we remember that Jesus' body was broken on the cross so that we might be whole; His blood was shed on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins.

Jesus went to the cross bearing the weight of our sin, guilt, and shame...and praise God, what Jesus has put to death, we no longer have to carry! As I said before, so much of the shame that we experience has nothing to do with God. Our enemy, the devil, is constantly trying to remind us of things God has already forgiven us for. Do you remember what Jesus said? "*If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.*"¹

If you are a follower of Jesus Christ, than this holy meal is for you. As you come forward this morning to receive, come in the knowledge that Jesus has set you free from sin, guilt, and shame. But if God is bringing something to mind this morning, something you need to confess to Him, then by all means, repent, turn, and then come and celebrate the depth of His love for you.

At this time I'd like to invite our servers to come forward, and the band to join me on stage. As you come, you can tear off a piece of bread, dip it in the cup, and then eat rejoicing in God's mercy.

¹ John 8:36.