

CORRECTABLE TO GOD AND OTHERS

Psalm 141: 1-10 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

John Wesley, once traveled a great distance in a stage coach, and it happened that the only other passenger besides him was a pleasant-tempered, well-informed soldier, an officer. The conversation was entertaining, but frequently mingled with vulgar words, swearing and oaths. At a stage stop, John Wesley took the officer aside and expressed his pleasure in enjoying their company together. Then he said, “Could I ask a special favor of you?” The officer said, I would take pleasure in obliging you and I’m sure you will not make an unreasonable request.” “Then,” said John Wesley, “As we will be traveling together for some time, I beg that, if I should forget myself and swear, that you will kindly reprove me.” The officer saw the motive of John Wesley’s request. With a smile, he said, “None but John Wesley could have conceived a reproof in such a manner.” Beloved, each of us as believers must live with accountability not only with God—but with others.

Psalm 141: 5 might literally be translated, ‘May the righteous strike me in steadfast love and correct me. May those who are truly committed to the LORD show their loyalty to me by pointing out the error of my ways and by redirecting my steps.’ This week I came across words from Pastor Ty Orr of Calvary Chapel in Salmon, Idaho, a city 138 miles straight south of Missoula, Montana. He said, “We each need people in our lives who love us and are courageous enough and willing to brave the scary darkness of our souls to help us avoid the strongman that awaits to mug us around each of life's corners. We need someone who is willing and able to walk with us and wound us for our own good when needed. Trust me, we all need it, someone who has complete access and permission to poke around and see what is not right or maybe things that are starting to slip. If you think it would be uncomfortable, embarrassing and painful to have someone do that for you, you would be correct. Proverbs 27: 6 states, “Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.”

I enjoy reading Navigator author, Jerry Bridges. He asks a probing question, "Have Christians become so preoccupied with "major" sins that we have lost sight of our need to deal with more subtle sins? Why don't we address the “acceptable” sins that we tend to tolerate in ourselves?" Here is a partial list of the subtle sins he includes: Write down the one or ones you need to address. “Ungodliness, anxiety, frustration, discontentment, un-thankfulness, pride, moral self-righteousness, pride of correct doctrine, pride of achievement, an independent spirit, selfishness, lack of self-control, impatience, irritability, anger, resentment, bitterness, enmity, hostility, grudges, judgmental-ism, envy, jealousy, sins of the tongue, and worldliness.” Then he says, “Ugggh, this may hurt!!! I'll try to remember Psalm 141:5!”

Though no one enjoys being corrected, rebuked, reprov'd or strongly called to account, everyone of us can benefit from it when it is given wisely and when we take it humbly. David is giving us some good advice about how to accept correction from God or others. He is saying in a word: Don't refuse it, consider it a kindness, and accept it humbly, keep quiet, and don't fight back. When any of us are obedient to God's voice when we practice being correctable to Him or to others, it helps us, even if the person that is correcting us is using a destructive manner or if they have evil motives. Correction and corrective words to us, rarely come when we're up on top of life. They come usually when we're down and out in some way. Correction can come to us when people knowingly or unknowingly pile on us, even as it happens with penalties in football—as unsportsmanlike conduct. Sometimes people pile judgments on us with ungodly motives, and they pile corrections upon us amidst our sorrows and sufferings. Some people feel they have the gift of opposition, correction or criticism. For them, once they get going, they can't seem to stop. Sometimes, our worst judgments and corrections come when, like Job, we least deserve them. Our judges, correctors and critics may hurt us profoundly, but we mustn't let them deter us. Abraham Lincoln said in the face of intense, cruel criticism, "Even though much provoked, let us do nothing through passion and ill temper...neither let us be slandered from our duty by false accusations against ourselves...Let us have faith, and in that faith, let us to the end, dare to do our duty as we understand it."

A synonym for teachable is coachable. A synonym for correctable is trainable. There is some difference in being teachable and coachable and going on to being correctable and trainable. In this mighty psalm, I see three separate prayers from the lips of David that I want us to examine carefully. He wanted not only to be teachable, but trainable, not just coachable, but correctable. God help you and me, that we can honestly, with integrity, pray these 3 prayers of David for ourselves first, and then for others. The first is, "O Lord, hurry, set a guard and keep watch over my mouth and lips so my prayers are as incense before You." – v. 1-3. 2ndly, "O Lord, incline my heart away from evil and let the righteous be free to correct me and rebuke me when I sin." Thirdly, "O Lord, keep my eyes on You, keep me from traps laid for me; for in You I seek refuge, leave me not defenseless."

O LORD, HURRY, SET A GUARD AND KEEP WATCH OVER MY MOUTH AND LIPS SO MY PRAYERS ARE AS INCENSE BEFORE YOU.

(I.) Psalm 141: 1-3 says, "O Lord, I call upon You; hasten to me! Give ear to my voice when I call to You! Let my prayer be counted as incense before You, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice! Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips!" The setting here is that David is again in one more of his "hiding in a cave" experiences with Saul hunting him

down. I suggest that this psalm very well could have been written when David was in the wilderness of Engedi spoken about in I Samuel 24 when King Saul and three thousand well-chosen soldiers went to that wilderness and Saul's men were at the time, in front of the Wild Goats Rocks. Not knowing where David was, yet the Bible tells us David and his men were sitting in the innermost parts of the cave. Saul paused in his hunt to go inside the cave to relieve himself. David's men told him, "Today is your day to end King Saul's life. God is giving him into your hands." Remember David was a chastened soul; under God's correction. He refused to lift his hand to slay the Lord's anointed. David did do something. He stealthily cut off a corner of Saul's robe as Saul was relieving himself. David forbade his men from killing Saul. Was it that day that David was saying, "Hasten, hurry up, Lord, and set a guard over my mouth and keep watch over my lips." It wasn't only because David needed to keep quiet in the cave. No, it was because everyone of his men were trying to talk David into ending Saul's life. Beloved, our very best veteran defenders may well be telling us to get rid of those out to hurt us. They promise they will do the job for us. We need the chastening, correction and guardianship of the Lord not to seek revenge when we are being slandered, maligned, and hunted down, opposed by those who once claimed to love us.

That day, I Samuel 24: 10, 12 tells us when Saul left the cave, David called after Saul, saying, "My lord, the king!" David bowed with his face to the earth and paid homage to the king. Saul turned to face him. David said, "Why do you listen to the words of men who say, 'Behold, David seeks your harm?' Behold, this day your eyes have seen how the Lord gave you into my hand in the cave. Some told me to kill you, but I spared you, I will not put out my hand against my lord, for he is the Lord's anointed.' See, my father, see the corner of your robe in my hand. For by the fact that I cut off the corner of your robe and did not kill you, you may know and see that there is no wrong or treason in my hands. I have not sinned against you, though you hunt my life to take it. May the Lord judge between me and you, may the lord avenge me against you, but my hand shall not be against you."

Wow! What an opportunity David passed up. Why? He was a corrected man of God! God hurried and helped David when he called. Would David's prayer have been counted as incense before his holy God, if he had followed the counsel of his men to kill his master, the king? Life is built on character and character is built on decisions, often decisions that are formed in the woodshed with God or with one of his righteous servants. David is crying out to the Lord to accept his prayer as a gift of frankincense being offered with the smoke and fragrance of the burnt offering at the evening sacrifice going up to God. This prayer of David came at a severe time of testing. Severe testing times also often become severe temptation times. How do we know the difference? We know the difference when we stop believing God, receiving His correction and we start scheming. We say, "I must help God out."

How can I get myself out of this jam?” What is your bottom line with God? Must He be your Healer, Deliverer and Protection now, or you will turn on Him? Will you take matters into your own hands? God doesn’t always heal, deliver or protect any of us right now? God’s bottom line is—He is always right and just. If He calls us to receive His correction by His hand or through others, is God always right? Yes, God is always right and just. Abraham said, “Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (Genesis 18: 25) Only God can resolve the tension between His justice and our misunderstanding of it when we chafe at His rod. Secondly,

O LORD, INCLINE MY HEART AWAY FROM EVIL AND LET THE RIGHTEOUS BE FREE TO CORRECT AND REBUKE ME WHEN I SIN.

(II.) Psalm 141: 4-5 says, “Do not let my heart incline to any evil, to busy myself with wicked deeds in company with men who work iniquity, and let me not eat of their delicacies! Let a righteous man strike me—it is a kindness; let him rebuke me—it is oil for my head; let my head not refuse it. Yet my prayer is continually against their evil deeds.” There’s a lot here. Ellicott’s commentary says, “The difficulties of the psalm thicken here.” If Saul was going to slander David, why shouldn’t David slander Saul? The problem was not just a lip problem, but a heart problem. That’s why David said, “Lord, hurry, don’t let my heart incline to any evil—to busy myself with wicked deeds.” David is saying? “Stop me, Lord!”

The Hebrew word for incline is **natah**. It means bend towards, cause to yield, or to turn towards. David goes farther and says, “Don’t even let me keep company with those who want me to turn towards evil. Don’t let me go eat in their house. The Jewish routine was to anoint a guest’s head with oil.” David was saying, “Stop me, stop me, stop me, Lord.” David showed his true colors and his heart not to do evil here. He goes on to say, “Lord, let a righteous man strike me—it is a kindness, let him rebuke me—it is the oil I need for my head, let my head not refuse it.” This is a prayer of a teachable, coachable, trainable, correctable spirit. David could abide all corrections that came from a loving heart. The word rendered “strike” is used of Jael’s “hammer strokes of a tent peg into the head of Sisera, the commander of the Canaanite Army, killing him. (Judges 5:26). This Hebrew word translated "strike" - חלם **châlam** – means to beat down, to smite, to strike down, to hammer, or to stamp.. It means beating, smiting with the fist, with a hammer, with a weapon of war, it means to hammer hard with words of reproof or rebuke, or discipline.

What is David asking for? Let me help us listen as some of the greatest commentators weigh in. John Calvin says, “David declares he would rather be awakened to his duty by the severe rod of reproof, than be seduced through pleasing falsehoods of evil men.” John Trapp said, “In case I do offend in word or deed, let me never want for a faithful “re-prover,” who may smite me as with a

hammer, reprove me sharply.” Joseph Benson said, “If I should be inclined to yield to temptation, let me find some righteous faithful person, with kind severity, who will check and reprove me. It shall be a kindness. I shall not be offended with it. I shall esteem it an act and mark of true friendship.” Matthew Henry said, “It shall not break my head, if it may but help to break my heart.” John Gill said, “Such smitings and corrections should be taken and received as fatherly chastisements.” John Wesley said, “Smite me by reproofs. Break me. It will not hurt, but heal and greatly refresh me.” David didn’t want godly men remaining silent when he is about to sin against the Lord. People who say, “No one is going to tell me what to do” become extremely ugly inside. The poison inside us leaks out in our words that God wants to correct and censure. Are you teachable and coachable? Someone who is teachable and coachable is: approachable, attentive, receptive, curious, wanting to learn, trusting, and shapeable. It means we listen with the intent to learn rather than trying to show what we know.

Jazz bandleader Louis Armstrong once said, “Some people don’t know, and you can’t teach them.” Being teachable, trainable, and correctable is a choice. We must agree to learn from God and others to change our point of view. Trainable, correctable people have a beginner’s mind-set, open to being told when we are wrong, and open to being trained and disciplined. It means looking in the mirror and realizing that each of us may be the cause of a problem. This leads to trainability—being willing to be corrected without fighting back or defending ourselves. Are you trainable and correctable? I read recently a quick 5-point check on whether we are coachable, teachable and correctable. Which of these sentences are true and to what extent? (1) I usually allow others to complete their sentences before interrupting or responding. (2) When I’m given correction, I usually think about it before responding. (3) When I’m corrected, I rarely defend my position or action immediately. (4) When I’m corrected, I ask questions to better understand where I am wrong. (5) When I’m corrected, I change my position about what is being taught to me. Are we accountable and correctable, beloved? Thirdly,

O LORD, KEEP MY EYES ON YOU, KEEP ME FROM TRAPS LAID FOR ME, FOR IN YOU I SEEK REFUGE, LEAVE ME NOT DEFENSELESS.

(III.) Psalm 141: 6-10 says, “When their judges are thrown over the cliff, then they shall hear my words, for they are pleasant. As when one plows and breaks up the earth, so shall our bones be scattered at the mouth of Sheol.” But my eyes are toward You, O God, my Lord; in You I seek refuge; leave me not defenseless! Keep me from the trap that they have laid for me and from the snares of evil doers! Let the wicked fall into their own nets, while I pass by safely.” Verse 6 essentially means that David is saying, “When your judges, King Saul is thrown over the cliff, killed as he was on Mt. Gilboa, then all of you following him will long to hear pleasant words from me.” It happened. Verse 7 goes on to say, “As surely as plows

break up the earth, all of us are going to die and our bones shall be scattered in the grave.” Why is David reminding everyone who sings his psalm of death? It’s because the thought of death opens us up to being teachable and correctable. With that picture of having our bones scattered at the mouth of a grave, or the picture of our leaders being killed, thrown over a cliff, we are sobered up to listen to God.

So what is the correction David is crying for in verses 8-10? He begins by telling us what is true north for him in his spiritual compass in v. 8—“But my eyes are toward You, O God, my Lord; in You I seek refuge; leave me not defenseless!” Is that our prayer. Is God as our refuge our true north? But now David is back at his coach me, Lord, train me Lord theme in v. 9. He says, “Keep me from the trap that they have laid for me, and from the snares of evil-doers.” The Hebrew word for keep is **shamar**. It means to attend to, to guard, to keep safe, and literally, to hedge about with thorns. The picture is asking God to hedge about him with thorns, so that in every way David tries to go on his own path, or step into a trap, v. 10, there God’s hedge of painful thorns will jolt him like a righteous man striking him—back to the narrow road, back to the right way—back to safety.

Perhaps this final prayer is not only for a miracle, to be saved from the traps of the enemy, and not to be left defenseless, but the picture in the psalm concludes with the five words, “while I pass by safely.” The picture is not only being rescued, but after rescue, to go on by faith. This throwing of leaders off a cliff that David speaks of in verse 6 is what almost happened to our Lord. In Luke 4: 29, 30, when Jesus was teaching and preaching in Nazareth, the people in the synagogue were filled with wrath at this man who was the Son of God, the son of David. We read, “And they rose up and drove Him out of the town and brought Him to the brow of the hill on which they town was built, so that they could throw Him down the cliff. But passing through their midst, He went away.” Jesus must not die being thrown down a cliff. He came to fulfill His call, to die on the cross for you and me. Each of us has a call on our lives. We need to stay accountable to God and others, correctable and coachable and teachable and trainable.

In closing, I after studying this difficult but precious psalm, I close with four practical admonitions. (1) To those of us being called to receive correction, **listen up and toughen up** to receive what God is teaching you in your correction. (2) To those of us being called to correct others, **step up and follow up** and do God’s bidding. (3) To those of us without a call to correct others, but who proudly enjoy correcting others, **wake up and give up** doing what pleases your pride which will come back on your own head. (4) To those of us who are fulfilling God’s call in correcting others, but are running people away with harshness, **lighten up and brighten up** your correction by rebuking and smiting with kindness, with oil on another’s head. God make us as His people correctable for His glory. Amen.