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Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York

June 17, 2018

Living Beautiful Lives of Glory, Reproofs and Rebukes

1 Peter 2:12

Prayer: *Father God, we do again praise you and thank you for who you are. We thank you that you are a good, good Father. And Lord, among the gifts that you've given us is your word. It's the guide that we have to live our lives. And so we pray this morning as we are again opening up your word that you would give us the presence of your Holy Spirit, accompany us, guide us into your truth and again make it of permanent value, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, we've been spending an awful lot of time these last few weeks looking at Peter's exhortation that we are to lead beautiful lives. It's from 1 Peter 2:12 which says: *Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.* Now if you think about that scripture, I just want to ask you, do you see the reason why we are supposed to live such beautiful lives? It's to glorify God on the day he visits us. You see, this all has to do with the concept of glory. And as a church we have taken pains to make the glory of God our primary focus. It is our highest

priority. It's so because virtually all other priorities for the church flow out of it, I mean, God's glory is more important than evangelism, it's more important than unity or social action, education or politics, all of which identify particular evangelical churches. And the reason why glory is the most important priority is because it defines all the other priorities. If you get the concept of glory right, then all of the other church priorities that we just mentioned will automatically be right as well. Get glory wrong and the enemy will take your church's evangelism or its social action or its politics, whatever its focus, and sooner or later will use that to destroy it.

Let me repeat an example I gave a while back. You see, the god of this world knows exactly what he's doing and his goal is to take our mind off God's glory by using the good to obscure and overwhelm the best, which is the glory of God. I've often used the story of how dangerous any gospel that is not rooted in God's glory truly is and I did so by describing a ministry that started out unwittingly putting evangelism ahead of God's glory by seeking to get the maximum number of people saved regardless of that glory. Again, let me explain. This organization started in the 1850's in the United States by emulating a similar ministry that was started in London by George Williams. And to quote the organization's history, it says the ministry in London started as a: "Refuge of

bible study and prayer for young men seeking escape from the hazards of life on the streets." Now the American version reached out at first to sailors but soon it broadened its appeal to anyone coming into the city from a rural area. Folks coming into the city could go to this place and find bible studies and prayer and a heart for evangelism, all good things, all in fact wonderful things but not centered on a gospel of the glory of God. And over the years the goal became outreach oriented as the numbers grew larger and larger. And as they grew larger, the sharper aspects of the gospel such as God's holiness, God's judgment, they grew less and less popular as they always will when God's glory is not sought first and foremost. And before long the first summer campground was opened in 1885. By 1891 they had the first indoor game of basketball that was invented by this organization. They hung peach baskets and threw a ball into them. And as the organization grew, the goal was to reach more and more people with a good thing, which was the love of God's creation and the love of God. But the heart for the glory of God began to incrementally diminish as it always will, if it's not of primary importance. Great strides were made in helping young men get established in business and in life and one of the things that stood more and more in the way of that goal in subtle ways at first was the gospel itself. It began to be changed to accommodate the goal of reaching the maximum amount of people. The hard edges of who God was and who man was began to be

replaced with good morals, good company, and healthy living. Swimming became a large part of the organization's identity. And over time these identities grew and the gospel continued to diminish. The four gospels eventually got replaced with four core values. Instead of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, the new gospel consisted of caring, honesty, respect, and responsibility. Certainly good things but not the best thing.

I said last week that the enemy is as 1 Peter says: *A roaring lion seeking to devour souls*. Understand, he is infinitely patient. And just like the big cats, he takes tiny little steps and then he squats down to wait sometimes for years and years. He does it so that the victim will not notice what he's doing. Well, it took more than a century, but according to their website, this is where the Y is today. Let me just quote. This is from their website. It says: "Local and National YMCA Associations are strongly rooted in their communities. Depending on the local context and priority issues affecting young people, YMCAs operate in a wide range of program areas including: Sustainable development education and vocational training, gender equality, climate change, health and HIV/AIDS prevention, inter-faith dialogue, food security, leadership development, migration, civic engagement and human rights education, emergency response and peace building."

Are these good things? Of course these are good things. But what's missing from the original? Bible study, prayer, evangelism. See, the changes this organization undertook were devastating to the gospel. Today the organization has formally changed its name from the YMCA, the Young Men's Christian Association to simply the Y. And again can you guess why? A November 2003 *New York Times* article entitled "Clarifying What YMCA Stands For," says this: "A problem that remains is the YMCA's name, the Young Men's Christian Association is open to all. But many are either confused or put off by the seeming religious connection. The Y was founded on Protestant evangelical values; its mission statement says it intends to 'put Christian principles into practice.' The organization lets it go at that." I think the takeaways from this are obvious.

See, there's a spiritual war going on and our enemy is infinitely patient. You know the Y didn't focus first and foremost on the glory of God, and because of that it has become a spiritual casualty. The best thing that we can say about our local Y is that Steve and Nancy and Nick and Marina are still there to maintain a gospel presence there. One of them was recently taken to task about an oversight that happened in the kitchen. One of the supervisors there happened to spy a coffee mug in the kitchen that had a Bible verse on it. This person was advised that they had to

remove that so as not to offend. I can only imagine what the original founders of the Y must be thinking. They must be spinning in their graves. You know, it only took the devil a little more than a century and he's turned this organization literally upside down. And so it is with churches as well as organizations, when they lose sight of the glory of God, they don't embrace bad things, instead they elevate the good things to the place that only the best thing belongs and that is the glory of God.

Now in order to get the glory right, you have to look at the big picture. You have to see who we are in relation to our creator. And it may come as a shock but God has insisted that we are not the center of the universe and that he is. I mean for the first ten years of my Christian life I more or less had that backwards. I mean I understood John 3:16 that God so loved the world as saying that our intrinsic value and worth made Christ willing to die for us which is of course perfectly backwards. It was Jesus's infinite value and worth and his willingness to die for us that made us of infinite value to him. Our value doesn't come from us. It comes from him valuing us.

I want you to just ask yourself a couple of questions. Number one, why did Jesus become a man? Why did he live a perfect life? Why did he die on a cross? Well, the standard answer to those

questions for many evangelicals is that Jesus became a man, lived a perfect life and died on the cross in order to save man from the penalty of his sin. And that sounds like a right answer and it is a right answer but not to the question we're asking. If you're asking the question how did Jesus save man from the penalty of his sin, well then the answer: by becoming a man, living a perfect life and dying on the cross is exactly how. But the question we ask was not how; it was why. Why did Jesus live and die for us? See, I think we confuse these questions and answers because we have a confused understanding of who we are, and more importantly, why we are here. I've said it before, if the answer to the question why did Jesus become a man is that he came solely to save us, well then Jesus himself was guilty of violating the first commandment which says that we are to value nothing, not even human beings higher than God himself. I mean scripture tells us that Jesus became sin for us so that we might take on the very righteousness of God. Well, if Jesus became sin for us solely because of the value he placed on us, then indeed Jesus would be guilty of valuing us higher than himself. He would be guilty of valuing the creation higher than the creator. He would have violated the first commandment. But then why did Jesus leave heaven? Why did he enter into flesh? Why did he live a perfect life if not for us and our sins? Jesus himself shortly before he was crucified gave us the answer to that question, the question of why. And once again

it is about the glory of God. It was the end of Jesus's three-year public ministry on earth and Jesus is reflecting back on all that he's accomplished and he's offering up one final prayer to his heavenly Father before he goes to the cross. He sums up his reason for living the life that he lived by saying this in *John 17:4*. He says: *"I have glorified you on the earth. I have finished the work which you have given me to do."* This is what the YMCA completely missed. There was something even greater than saving mankind that Jesus came to accomplish and it was glorifying God. You see, we human beings are not the end of Jesus's purpose. We instead are the means to the end. The end of Jesus's purpose is the glory of God. The means to that end is the salvation of God's chosen people. To grasp that is to understand that we human beings are not the center of the universe and that God is. And it's also to understand that the glory of God is the supreme end of our existence. I mean Jesus goes on to say the reason we came into this world was to complete the work that the Father had given him to do and that work was to bring glory to his Father. *"I glorified You on the earth. I finished the work which You have given Me to do."*

Now why do you suppose we came into this world? You and I come into this world to bring glory to God by completing the work that the Father has given each of us to do. There is no task more

important than bringing glory to God and we are the creatures that he created for that very purpose. We have the unique privilege of bearing the *imago dei*, the very image of God, and because we bear that image, the glory of God is now our responsibility.

So we have a logical question, okay, what is the glory of God?

Well, two words come to mind. The two words are: cosmic rightness. Cosmic rightness. Just tuck that away in your mind.

The glory of God according to *Vine's Expository Dictionary* is:

"The revelation and manifestation of all that God has and is." In other words the glory of God is who God is and what he does and who he is and what he does is by definition cosmically right. To live a life that glorifies God is to live a life that attests to his cosmic rightness in every aspect of what it means to be human. Our lives either attest to God's cosmic rightness or they deny it.

Jesus perfectly attested to the cosmic rightness of his Father so much so that he perfectly mirrored it. If you remember the classic scene in John 14 where Philip after being with Jesus day in and day out for three full years, he asked Jesus to show him the Father.

This is *John 14:8*, says: *Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say 'Show us the Father'?"* Jesus' response shows how frustrating it had to be that

after all of these years Philip still didn't understand that so perfectly Jesus mirrored the cosmic rightness of his Father that he could say to Philip when anyone looks at me, they will see the Father. Now here's the part where we come in. See, Jesus is now in heaven with his Father. We are 2,000 or more years down the road of repeating a vital aspect of what Jesus did. Jesus represented the cosmic rightness of the Father. We represent the cosmic rightness of the Son. It's God's expectation that when anyone looks at you and me, they will see Jesus.

Romans 8:29: For whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son. Practically speaking this is what living for the glory of God is all about. When the world looks at you, what or whom do they see? Do they see the cosmic rightness of God's glory reflected in you? And understand this rightness is not just on display for our friends and our neighbors and our co-workers but it's also on display for the entire spirit world, the world of powers and principalities and authorities in the heavenly realms. You see, how we look in public is a tiny little part of the big picture. How we behave outside the public's eyes is far more important in determining the quantity and quality of the glory that we're giving to God. I mean, it's easy to adopt this incredibly myopic view that somehow or other we control the extent to which our lives are on display. If you believe that,

you're really kidding yourself. I mean if you knew that there was a hidden camera that could follow you into every single area of your private life, would that change how you live that life? The fact is there's something far more powerful than any camera, and it is constantly examining every single part of our lives for evidence of God's glory. It's the eyes of God. *Hebrews 4:13* says: *There is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.* See the big picture here is that the universe is indeed watching, watching intently and what they are watching for in the lives of those who love Jesus Christ is the fruit of the Spirit. *John 15:8*: *"This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples."* Or talking about Peter calling us to live beautiful lives. He tells us to live beautiful lives, that is lives filled with this fruit of the Spirit so that *"they may see your good deeds,"* and what? *"glorify God on the day he visits us."* You see the fruit of the Spirit is not some kind of addition or addendum to the Christian life; it is the very heart of it. We are to mirror the Son in the same way that Jesus the Son mirrored the Father, and the fruit of the Spirit is simply a description of Christ's life, perfect love, joy, peace, perfect love, patience, kindness, goodness, perfect faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. To the extent that we bear that fruit in ourselves, we attest to the cosmic rightness of God's transforming power to

produce that fruit in our lives. To the extent that that fruit brings glory to God, then the lack of that fruit is the denial of that same power. So God is determined to take whatever steps are necessary to grow fruitfulness in his children. He even says so. In *John 15:1*, he says: *"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit."* God is committed to pruning every one of the branches that are grafted into Christ. And guess what, that pruning is very painful. God wants to prune away all the dead, shrunken, shriveled and blighted areas in our lives literally so that we would become even more fruitful.

Last week we looked at reproofs and reference points and responsibility as some of the tools that God uses to prune away this dead fruit. And we said last week that one of the keys to producing fruit is taking responsibility for our sin. Again we looked at *1 John 1:9*: *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* You remember what the key that we said the key to that cleansing, finding the cleansing power of God was? It was the ability to same speak, to confess, to agree with God that sin is sin. If you really want to produce fruit in your life, you must learn the art of agreeing with God particularly when you hear the

sound of pruning sheers being sharpened. Now there are three different ways to undergo pruning. We can resist it, we can accept it, or we can seek it out. I mean the fact is we cannot stop, if you're a believer, you cannot stop the pruning but you can slow it down or speed it up. And today I want to address one way to speed it up, which is a good thing. And it has to do with expanding on what I spoke about last week about rebukes and reproofs. This week I want to discuss reproofs, how to give them, how to receive them, and I want to discuss it as a means of growing fruitfulness.

And I mentioned last time that the word -- the root of the word "reproof" has to do with exposure, it has to do with discovery. At its heart a reproof exposes something about us that we would not or could not see. It's one of God's pruning sheers. And again we can resist it, we can accept it or we can seek it out. So again ask yourself these questions: Am I reprovable? Am I easy to approach? How do I respond to criticism? Can I think back to the last time I was reproached? If you can't remember any time anyone other than your spouse ever disagreed with you, you are either perfect or you have some issues with approachability. I mean we look at reproaches and rebukes as being all bad when God sees it as a vital part of our instruction. He says in *Hebrews 12*: *And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when*

reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives." I mean God is telling us flat out discipline is not fun. In fact, he says, it can be wearisome, but that is a sign of God's love. And again because *John 15: "Every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit."*

Now there are two extremes to be avoided when you receive a rebuke. Number one is treating it lightly, and number two is losing heart. And I've seen both reactions, I mean, I've seen folks laugh, mock, and despise rebukes and I've seen others become crushed. And both responses are mistaken including being crushed. I mean, I knew a man whose response to criticism was an overt expression of such abject sorrow and soul crushing pain that you just watched him fall apart at any criticism. It was just as effective as laughter or mocking in telling others if you approach me, I'm going to collapse on you. And the result was the man was completely unapproachable. So how, how do you receive a rebuke? What does Hebrews 12 tell us? It tells us that God loves and disciplines everyone he accepts as a son or daughter. In other words what God is telling us, if you truly are a child of God, you can expect to hear from your Father. The key to handling any rebuke is finding the voice of God within it. It's hearing his voice even if it seems to be coming from the most unlikely places.

Now we spoke last week about the cursing of Shimei against David. Just to recapitulate, David is on the run, he's being pursued by his son Absalom. As he enters into a city he's met by a distant relative of Saul who's embittered by the collapse of Saul's house, and he takes opportunity of David's plight to curse him out. Again I want to go back to David's response to this stinging rebuke of Shimei that we spoke about last week and just give you the abridged version. This is 2 Samuel 16:5: *When King David came to Bahurim, there came out a man of the family of the house of Saul, whose name was Shimei, the son of Gera, and as he came he cursed continually. But the king said, "If he is cursing because the LORD has said to him, 'Curse David,' who then shall say, 'Why have you done so?'" And David said to Abishai and to all his servants, "Behold, my own son seeks my life; how much more now may this Benjaminite! Leave him alone, and let him curse, for the LORD has told him to. It may be that the LORD will look on the wrong done to me, and that the LORD will repay me with good for his cursing today." So David and his men went on the road, while Shimei went along the hillside opposite him and cursed as he went and threw stones at him and flung dust.*

See what David is doing here? David looks for and he finds the voice of God not just in blessing but in cursing as well. He understands that a sovereign God undergirds and directs everything

in his children's lives including reproaches. He understands that all things work together for good including the utterance of Shimei's cursing. But there's something in David's response to Shimei that is emblematic of the pruning that David has undergone. Think about it for a second. It becomes pretty obvious when you think of fruitfulness. In David's response, there is peace, there is patience, there is kindness, there is gentleness, and most of all there's self-control. I mean David at this point is bursting with the fruit of the Spirit and because he has been well pruned, he can handle even vicious reproofs.

I remember years ago receiving a rebuke from a brother about this very scripture that I'm teaching from this morning. I had preached about living beautiful lives and a brother called me and he said he was concerned that I had read as a complete quote a section of scripture that actually contained another thought. I had quoted what I quoted this morning, *1 Peter 2:12* which says: *Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God.* Now the actual quote contains an additional statement. I'll read it. It says: *Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.* Well, I thanked this brother first for having his concern and then for taking the trouble to bring it

up and I explained why I left off the last few words. I told him when I looked at it, the commentators were divided on what "the day he visits us" means. Some thought it meant judgment day, others thought that it meant the day of salvation, and seeing that I was developing the text about the glory of God, I didn't consider the time frame to be that important, so I didn't include it. Well, he was singularly unimpressed with that explanation and he repeated his concern that I read the whole portion of scripture. And so I thanked him for his concern, and I absolutely meant it. I mean, I spoke to two other people about it afterwards and they were divided as well. But again, what this comes down to is trying to hear the voice of God in any reproach. Last week I had spoken about the devil's primary weapon in making us fruitless. Do you remember what I said it was? I said it was incrementalism. That he worked in such tiny, imperceptible increments to take us places we would never go in a full leap. Well, putting it all together made it very easy to hear for me a warning God spoke through this brother. Now what he was saying is, Tom, don't get incrementally sloppy with the word of God. And that's a point well taken. And I confess it was easy to take because my caller wasn't cursing, he wasn't throwing stones at me or kicking dirt on my head, but I've had close to those as well. I remember once having to hold the phone about a foot and a half away from my head because the enraged brother on the other line was screaming so loud. Suffice it to say

he disagreed with me on some finer points of theology. God had plenty to tell me through that brother as well. I mean God wants us to hear his voice in cursings as well as in blessings. You know if you could be a fly on the wall at one of our elders meetings, you would know that my brothers care enough about me and my preaching to sometimes be rather critical of it. I've been told I'm too long, I'm not practical enough, there's too many big words, and some folks have no idea what I'm talking about. I can genuinely tell you I have no problem at all listening to a brother's critique because I know they love me. I know they care for me, they want only the best for this church. In fact the only one that I have a routine trouble listening to is the person I believe most people have trouble listening to, and that's the person they're married to. And here's the hard part. Your spouse is oftentimes the primary way that God speaks to you. I mean they're obviously the most logical source for reproof because they're the ones that know us best. They're also the least likely to be listened to because we know them best. What's the key? Well, once again the key to handing any rebuke is finding the voice of God within it. The fact that my spouse is my rebuker doesn't make it any less true and as scripture says: *Rebuke a wise man and he will love you. Rebuke a discerning man, and he will gain knowledge. He who listens to a life-giving rebuke will be at home among the wise.*

So here's the most practical advise I can give you. The next time your spouse reproaches you, instead of instantly trying to defend yourself, think of David responding to Shimei and just say, God, what are you trying to tell me here? Hopefully she or he is not cursing or flinging dirt on you or kicking rocks at you, but who knows. I mean God promises wisdom if we would just ask. If you ask him for his wisdom in digesting a spousal rebuke, he will be happy to give it to you. I mean it's amazing how many of the Proverbs are devoted to giving and receiving rebukes and it may well be that God uses reproofs as one of his primary pruning gifts. *Proverbs 25: Like a gold ring or an ornament of gold is a wise reprover to a listening ear.*

But you know, there's also a flip side to receiving a rebuke and it's one that we almost never talk about. It's having the courage to deliver one. Proverbs also says in *Proverbs 28:23: Whoever rebukes a man will, afterward, find more favor than he who flatters with his tongue.* Now did you get that one single parenthetical word in that statement? It is the word between the two commas. It's that word "afterward." The NIV translates the very same word "in the end." It says: *Whoever rebukes a person will in the end gain favor rather than one who has a flattering tongue.* And what God is saying that when all is said and done, a man or a woman willing to rebuke will gain more than a flatterer. But I think we all know

that there's oftentimes a lot of time spent when all is not said and done. There's often a steep price to pay for giving a reproof. I mean as the Chinese proverb puts it: "It's the nail that sticks up that gets hammered." An honest reproach has basically become a lost art. I mean it's part of the spirit of the age. We all know today everything is relative and the only truly sinful deed our culture recognizes is judgmentalism. I mean it's admittedly a fine line that we need to walk between judgmentalism and exercising the judgment that God expects us to exercise with one another. I want to be very clear here, I mean, this is a tightrope. *Romans 2:1* says: *You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself because you who pass judgment do the same things.* Okay. But Jesus himself says in *Luke 17:3*: *So watch yourselves. "If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them."* Well, in Matthew's gospel Jesus also says in *Matthew 7:1*: *"Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."* But Jesus also says in the very same passage only four verses later in *Matthew 7:6*: *"Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces."*

So how do we decide who are dogs and pigs without judging? How do you rebuke a sinning brother without first judging that that brother or sister has sinned? I mean clearly there has to be a difference in the judgment that Jesus condemns and the judgment that he commands. God clearly expects believers to judge and he clearly condemns judgmentalism. So what gives? Well, there are a number of Greek words that are used for "judgment", and it's important to understand what is being said here. One word "anakrino" means to examine, to investigate, to scrutinize, to discern. It's the word for judgment in *1 Corinthians 2:15* which says: *The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one.* See that's the judgment that you and I are to have with regard to this world that we live in. God is saying there's no virtue in the three monkeys who hear no evil, see no evil, and speak no evil. He said you are to recognize sin and rebuke it, but it's how we do it that makes all the difference in the world.

There's another word for judgment in the Greek, it's the word "krino." It means to try, to condemn, to punish, to pronounce judgment. That's the word used for judgment in *Romans 2* that we just looked at. One word means to investigate, to examine; the other word means to condemn. God insists that we use one word and reject the other, but by and large we reject both of them. And a

refusal to rebuke as the Lord directs is flat out disobedience. I see this in counseling all the time. You know Chuck Swindoll once said that the number one problem that he sees in marital counseling is passive husbands, passive husbands who refuse to exercise any judgment whatsoever, husbands who are terrified to rock the boat. It applies sometimes to wives as well. A rebuke, even if it is a loving rebuke, will almost always be costly to both the giver and the receiver. I mean how many times are we willing to say nothing to someone's face but plenty behind their back? I mean it's the one thing that I enjoy least about this position that I have. If you don't hate giving a rebuke, there's probably something wrong with you. Most of us also know if you're going to give a rebuke, the one you give it to is bound to have something to give you in return. We don't want that. So we don't say a word, I mean at least to their faces. Instead we make up excuses. Have you ever felt God's pressure to share something with someone that he or she actually needed to hear but you decided in your heart of heart, no, I might get hurt if I do this? Well, how do you move forward? Well the answer is a lot simpler to say than to do. It's found in *Ephesians 4:2* which says: *Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.* God's talking about a type of genuine love that requires effort. It's a love that strains and labors and sometimes for a while it loses.

Now have you ever taken that kind of a risk? I mean one thing is for certain, you have to earn the right to reproach someone. And you earn that right by genuinely loving them so much so that they know that this wound from a friend can be trusted. See, practically speaking, a reproach should always be accompanied by an affirmation and I try to point out first the difficulty and the maturity it requires to hear a reproach; secondly, I try to demonstrate the hand of God in the reproach; and third, I try to point out the benefits of accepting a reproach. But I'd be lying if I said it isn't risky. If someone uses the occasion to point out one of your flaws, the same wisdom still applies. What is God saying to me in his or her response? And again, there's a need for balance and wisdom here, I mean, it's very easy to see the specks in other people's eyes while ignoring the logs in our own. I'm addressing those times when we feel seriously convicted by God to risk the relationship for the good of a friend or a spouse. I mean it's important to remember the big picture here. What is our goal? Our goal is fruitfulness. It's seeing the very essence of Jesus Christ's loveliness grow out of the Holy Spirit's presence within us. That happens by grace, but grace is not magic. It's manifested when we agree with God that the sin in our lives is indeed sin and that is by all accounts a painful process but it's one that grows our ability to see spiritually. See, we don't get struck blind by Satan. Instead what we do is we give up our sight

in tiny little increments, in steps so small that we don't sense the blindness until the grace of God makes it painful and that hurts. Sometimes the process involves reproof and rebuke. But understand, that is a message from your Father. He's the master pruner and he's determined to make his children's lives fruitful because that fruit affirms his cosmic rightness. It is that fruit that enables the world to look at us and see Jesus Christ.

So my question for us this morning is are you willing to accept a reproof in order to grow fruit in your life? And are you willing to take the risk of giving one if God is moving you to? You see, God's glory is what we are here for and fruitfulness is how we declare it. *Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.* Let's pray.

Father God, we do thank you and praise you for who you are, that you are a good, good Father and that you give us all things necessary to grow us in the task of producing fruit and that you do indeed prune us and it is indeed painful. I pray, Lord, that if you're speaking to any or all of us about accepting or giving a reproof, that you would just give the grace, the strength, the courage and the will to do it, and I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.