

Asking for Correction

by Ken Sande, President of Peacemaker Ministries

Would you like to experience significant character growth this year? One way to do this is to ask people you trust to point out your shortcomings. This is risky business, but it is worth the effort.

All of us have areas of weakness and needed growth. These weaknesses are often pointed out to us in the midst of conflict. Unfortunately, at such times we are usually defensive and do not listen well to correction, even when there is truth in it. As a result, we often ignore valid criticism and fail to benefit from it.

One way to get around this roadblock is to ask for correction before conflict arises. Seeking and being open to correction is highly commended in Scripture. The Psalmist declares, "Let a righteous man strike me—it is a kindness; let him rebuke me—it is oil on my head. My head will not refuse it" (Ps. 141:5). And according to Proverbs 27:6, "Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses."

I first discovered the truth of these passages years ago when two friends and I met each week. We agreed to prayerfully point out three characteristics in one another that seemed to offend others or diminish our witness for Christ. To my surprise, my friends came up with two identical criticisms. This was both convicting and embarrassing! But God used their correction to help me face behavior and attitudes that were undermining my friendships, ministry, and even my marriage. I will always be grateful for their loving feedback.

Since character growth is a lifelong challenge, I am going through this process again by asking my family and a few friends and coworkers for their loving correction. Realizing that lasting change comes only as God works in my heart, I am digging deeper this time. I am asking these people to help me identify the desires of my heart that give rise to ungodly behavior, and to pray for me as I seek God's help for change.

I have developed two short letters that ask seven questions. The answers will help me see myself more clearly. One letter is for family and friends, and the other is for co-workers. The questions include the following:

- Please describe three character qualities, behaviors, or attitudes in me that have disappointed, annoyed, or offended you or others, or seemed to undermine my witness for Christ. Give specific examples, if possible.
- What things have you seen me make idols out of? (An idol is any desire—even for good things—that I have elevated to a demand, become excessively preoccupied with, looked to for security, had to have in order to be content, or allowed to control me.)
- If there were just one change God would bring about in me in the next six months, what would you pray it would be?

May God grant all of us the desire to mature in faith and character, the wisdom to deliberately seek correction, and the faith to follow God wholeheartedly as he steadily conforms us to the likeness of his Son.