

Planning and Achieving Restoration

By Marvin Wengerd

Restoration is one of the most beautiful words I can think of. It carries a message of hope, healing, and love. In Galatians 6:1, Paul writes, “Restore such an one in the spirit of meekness.” When working with people, restoration must always be the focus.

Let’s start this article by looking at the four stages of moving into—and then back out of—people’s lives. As you move from one level to the next, your goal is to work yourself out of a job. Early in the process, envision what it would look like to have these individuals continue without you. The steps you take should reflect that vision.

Levels of Involvement

Availability. At this stage there is no real involvement. Someone has initiated a conversation and you have indicated that you are available for advice. The comfort level is high and the sense of need is low.

Support. At this stage you become very involved. A support group has been formed and decisions are made together. Surface issues are addressed, but heart issues simmer under the surface. You are aware there is more to do, but are waiting for the sense of need to increase and for the person to become willing to go further.

Active. Now you have taken the position of a manager. Finances and decisions are controlled by the committee and the treasurer handles the income and pays all of the bills. Relationship problems are dealt with as they rise to the surface, but heart issues are still a secondary focus.

Intimate. Everything is now on the table—hearts and

minds, dreams and disappointments, fears and pains. Relational issues and heart issues are primary. This level is not achieved by a three-man team, because most people don’t talk freely about these things in a group.

As you begin to help someone, it is important to move in gradually. To move in too suddenly can create injuries that will make them resist further help. Backing away suddenly can also cause damage. Even people who have resisted you all along tend to interpret your sudden departure as something suspicious. A beautiful part of restoration is when people discover their need for each other and learn to value *interdependence* over *independence*.

Levels of Involvement

- Availability
- Support
- Active
- Intimate

Defeats and Victories

Recently I was very disappointed in a couple with whom I had spent a lot of time. I had walked with them and tried to direct them out of their victim worldview. As I began backing away, I warned that they would meet difficulty soon (we always do) that would test their resolve to approach life without a victim worldview. But

when the test came, they resorted to their old ways of coping. I begged them to reconsider, but they chose to go back to victimhood. They are over sixty years old, and I can already picture how their lives will look in the next five years.

On the other hand, another couple turned out very differently. They fought a hard battle to climb out of the hole of the victim worldview. Within two weeks of being back on their own, they faced a severe temptation. The wife came back and asked, “How can I keep my husband from sliding back into that hole?” She had been the one who had brought the victim worldview into the marriage in the first place, but now she was working to maintain the restoration they had found.

When order has been made out of chaos, the debt elimination plan is in progress, oneness is being restored to relationships, and their hearts seem fixed on God, two questions need to be answered: Do they have a stable foundation? How do you know if restoration is complete?

In Galatians, the apostle Paul expressed surprise at how quickly people fell back after seeming to have been restored. Let’s look at some of the questions Paul addressed and apply them to our work.

Restoration Can Be Fragile

“I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel” (Galatians 1:6).

I learned that restoration is fragile from a couple who failed only two or three weeks after restoring their desire to take responsibility for their sins. Perhaps this should not have come as a surprise to me, since the apostle Paul wrote that he himself is concerned about the danger of relapsing.¹ After a relapse, we wonder, “What went wrong? Did I do all of this in vain?” We need to admit we may have made mistakes and learn from them if we can.

Relapses have taught me the value of continued accountability. After working with couples, I know their weaknesses fairly well. We make an agreement where

we define their top two weaknesses, and then I periodically ask them to tell me how they are doing in those areas. We agree ahead of time what question I will ask, and they understand the meaning behind it. This helps to keep their weaknesses in check during the first several temptations and severe tests.

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Use Your Faith to Build Their Confidence

“I have confidence in you through the Lord” (Galatians 5:10).

If you had a father who told you all of your life that you couldn’t do anything right, you know what it means to have no one believe in you. Notice the confidence that Paul inspires in this verse! Through his own faith, he has confidence in his readers.

The people we are trying to help are typically aware of their failures, and to have someone express confidence in them has a significant impact. They are hungry for it! This reminds me of the conflicting reports of the twelve men who spied out Canaan. Ten of the spies created a morbid, depressing picture, which was really a false reality. Their pessimistic report generated a sense of hopelessness. The other two spies came back with enthusiasm and confidence. In the end, their faith was contagious, and when the Israelites marched into Canaan they were victorious as long as their faith didn’t waver.

You will be amazed at how this confidence can transform discouraged people who come to you for help. I’ve seen grown men weep when I told them how I envisioned God using them through the lessons they are learning. But remember, your confidence needs to come from your faith in God, not faith in the person you are working with.

¹ See Galatians 2:2

Teach Them Cause and Effect

“Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Galatians 6:7).

As you gradually taper down your involvement, ask yourself whether the people you are helping have learned the principle of cause and effect, of sowing and reaping. Too many people do not understand the basic law of sowing and reaping. Some barely understand that if you continue to take out of the bank account more than what you put in, you will run out. They are even more unaware how this law applies in relationships. Teach husbands to start courting their wives, and they won't believe the different woman they get in return! They thought their work was done once they had caught her! It hadn't occurred to them that you can get good returns from investing in a relationship. Show them the bad fruit they are reaping now from sowing the wrong things. Show them the good fruit they will reap when they confess their critical spirit, lack of trust, and selfishness.

Train Them to Walk in the Spirit

“This I say then, walk in the Spirit and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh” (Galatians 5:16).

Be aware of the tendency to make all the decisions for the people you are helping. Remember, the goal is to restore them, not manage them. You won't always be there to give them advice, so they need to develop their own connection to the Lord. Walk with them through decisions, helping them learn to base their choices on godly values and their personal goals. In your role as teacher, ask them to evaluate whether each choice is based on carnal nature or on the Holy Spirit's leading. Teach them to not make hasty decisions but to seek direction through prayer. Train them to seek advice and to search the Scriptures. Be patient as they struggle to walk away from their carnal nature and walk with the Spirit.

Measure Their Faithfulness

“But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, the just shall live by faith” (Galatians 3:11).

Faithfulness is a sign of restoration. The apostle Paul didn't know whether the Galatians would remain faithful or fall back into bondage. You don't know whether the people you are helping will continue moving forward either, but as they begin to step out on their own, you can evaluate their faithfulness. Do not measure faithfulness by their bank account—your goal isn't to bring them wealth, but to help them be faithful in the things they ought to do. Jesus pointed out, “He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much.”² How faithful are they in small things? This includes being as faithful with five dollars as they think they would be with five hundred. It includes faithfulness in things like personal devotions and helping their spouses.

Has Truth Conquered Unbelief?

“Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?” (Galatians 4:16).

You need to determine whether truth has conquered unbelief in people's lives.

If you are dealing with people who have chronic financial and relational problems, you are dealing with people whose unbelief has conquered the truth. I believe with all my heart that truth is the most powerful disinfectant for sin. Jesus said, “Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”³ You are going to have to grapple with a counseling culture that has a love affair with ideas that skirt around the truth. You need to determine whether truth has conquered unbelief in people's lives. For example, if you point out that their behavior is self-protective, and they respond defensively, then truth hasn't conquered unbelief. If you try to talk

² Luke 16:10

³ John 8:32

about their victim mentality, and they blame so-and-so, then the truth hasn't conquered.

Do They Have the Resources to Do Good?

"As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (Galatians 6:10).

When you begin to notice that the people you are working with have spiritual, relational, emotional, and financial resources to offer to others, your work is drawing to a close. Can you hear God saying, "I want to count on that couple to do something for Me from this day forward"? We have a tremendous privilege and

responsibility to help these people contribute to the kingdom.

Imagine the impact of taking something that was being destroyed by the enemy and turning it around to become part of the force that will fight back the darkness. That is restoration—when the problem becomes part of the solution and when those who were draining the system begin giving back to it. "For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them."⁴ What a privilege we have to help lift up those who have fallen and participate in their restoration!

⁴ Luke 9:56

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