

Before You Go

A Guide to Loving Reproof

Based on Matthew 18:15 and Leviticus 19:17

Why Write It Down?

Coming to a conversation like this without writing it down first is one of the most common mistakes people make. It feels like it should be natural, like you'll know what to say when you get there. But without clarity on paper, you'll chase rabbit trails. The conversation will drift into emotions and side issues. You'll say things you didn't intend to say.

This guide walks you through the preparation. By the time you finish it, you'll have the clarity you need to have a loving, evidence-based conversation that aims at restoration, not punishment.

This is the elegcho work, "bringing to light with compelling evidence," before you walk in the room.

"If your brother sins against you, go tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have won your brother." — Matthew 18:15 (CSB)

"Do not harbor hatred against your brother in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor directly, and you will not incur guilt because of him." — Leviticus 19:17 (CSB)

PREPARE

Before the conversation, set your posture.

Always begin with this: "I want to keep this conversation dignified and for us to act in a way that we are proud of when we look back at this later."

Establish the Intensity

How difficult do you expect this conversation to be?



Name What's at Stake

Set the tone for the relationship up front.

- "I want you to know, our relationship is not at risk. I'm coming to you because I value it."
- "This is affecting our ability to walk together, and I need us to talk about it."

Know Your Desired Outcome

What are you hoping to walk away with?



Remember: the goal is kerdaino, winning your brother. Not winning the argument. Not being proven right. The person restored.

Where Are You Sitting?

The bench metaphor: what is your posture going in?



Start on their side. You're the search party, not the prosecution.

Estimate the Duration

How long do you think this will take?



Setting this expectation up front removes anxiety for both of you.

CLARIFY

What exactly are you addressing?

Identify the Origin

Where is this coming from?



A gut feeling may not warrant this process. Pray through it first. Observed behavior with specifics aligns with elegcho, bringing evidence, not emotions.

When Did This Happen?

How close is this to when the issue occurred?



Address it as close to when it happened as possible. The Qumran Community Rule instructs: "rebuke him on the very same day." The longer you wait, the more the root grows.

If you've waited too long, own it: "I should have brought this up sooner, and I'm sorry I didn't."

Is This Mine to Bring?

Am I the right person to have this conversation?

- I personally observed this or experienced it directly — YES, this is yours to bring.
- Someone told me about it — VERIFY first. Do not bring hearsay.
- I heard it secondhand or through gossip — STOP. "People are starting to talk" is gossip dressed up as concern.

Elegcho means bringing to light what you actually know. Speak to what you've personally observed.

Define It Concisely

Can you say it simply?

What happened: _____

When it happened: _____

The effect on me / my family: _____

If you can't fill these in clearly in a few sentences, you're not ready just yet. Pray through it. God desires restoration more than you do.

Check Safety

After the conversation, say this:

"If you walk away from this feeling like it was one-sided, unfair, or unloving, please come back and tell me."

This puts accountability on you, the one doing the reproofing. It says: I'm not above correction either. And it keeps the door open for the relationship to grow stronger on the other side.

Following up shows you care about the outcome, not just delivering the message.

REMEMBER

The goal is winning your brother, not winning the argument.

"If he listens to you, you have won your brother." — Matthew 18:15

Reproof is the act of love, not its opposite.

"Rebuke your neighbor directly... love your neighbor as yourself." — Leviticus 19:17–18

You're the search party, not the prosecution.

The lost sheep parable (Matthew 18:12–14) sits directly before the reproof process. You're going after the one who strayed.

Silence is not grace. It's how bitterness takes root.

"See to it that no root of bitterness springs up, causing trouble and defiling many." — Hebrews 12:15

This is not optional. This is His way.

The Hebrew doubled imperative ho-khiach to-khiach — "you shall surely reprove" — marks this as non-negotiable. The guilt clause means if you stay silent, you bear guilt.

Adapted from Brendan Wovchko's "Planning an Uncomfortable Conversation" framework (EntreLeadership Summit, 2021). Reframed for interpersonal and community relationships grounded in Matthew 18:15 and Leviticus 19:17.

Companion to "The Verse Before 'Love Your Neighbor'" at jwk.me