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Removing Gum Out of Someone's Hair

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Telling someone how to give a rebuke is a bit like telling him how to get gum out of someone's hair. No matter how careful he might be, it's going to hurt. On the other hand, who wants to go through life with a wad of gum stuck on the back of their head?

Strangers might act like the gum isn't there, but a friend would certainly point it out and offer to help. The fact is, I'd expect a friend to do so--even if it hurt. If I got home from a meeting and felt the gum in my hair, I'd wonder if my friend saw it and refused to point it out. I'd probably call him on the phone:

"Hey, Joe. Did you see the gum in my hair?

"Yeah, I saw it."

"Why didn't you tell me about it?

"Sorry, Man," he might say. "I didn't want to offend you."

We're Afraid to Offend

There you go. That's the issue that prevents most of us from rebuking a friend. We're afraid that a sharp criticism or reprimand might offend him.

The Most Loving Thing

Yet, there are times when we have to speak words that hurt. Indeed, the Apostle Paul urged Timothy to not only "correct" and "encourage" but to "rebuke" as well (2 Timothy 4:2). Occasionally a rebuke is the most loving thing a friend can give. But we need to exercise wisdom so that our words build up rather than tear down. In other words, if we've got to pull gum out of a friend's hair, we should do so as carefully as possible.

None of Them Left

It's fascinating that not one of the disciples Jesus rebuked ever left him. Even Peter, to whom Jesus said, "Get behind me, Satan!" (Matt. 16:23) stuck with him. In fact, each disciple Jesus harshly rebuked became a success story.

Invested Enough

Yet, Jesus didn't walk around rebuking just anyone. On the contrary, he first built the kind of relationship with his disciples that would prepare them to profit from a stern rebuke. We must be sure we've invested enough in a relationship so a rebuke will be profitable, even though painful. In fact, it should be obvious that your rebukes are

reserved for those you care most about.