

Giving and Receiving Criticism

Air Dates: September 6 – September 10, 2021

Day One

One thing that is tough for me to handle is criticism. How about you? But it is a necessary part of life if we're to grow and learn. I'm going to talk about criticism and how to handle it—whether you're giving it or receiving it.

As I was putting the finishing touches on one of my Bible studies, I asked several people to critique it for me. I knew that I needed input from others if I really wanted that Bible study to be as good as it could be. But frankly, I didn't want to hear the criticisms I had solicited. And I had to fight with everything in me to keep from being defensive, as suggestions were made to improve the study.

Now, if I feel that way about solicited criticisms, you can imagine how I react to unsolicited criticisms. I can relate with Job who said, as found in the sixth chapter: "Teach me, and I will be quiet; show me where I have been wrong. How painful are honest words" (6:24).

Criticism can be either true or false, but even when we receive a true criticism, given in the right spirit, the words are honest but they are still painful. Let's face it, our first reaction to a criticism is usually a negative reaction, right? It feels negative regardless of how it is intended. So, our first challenge is to teach ourselves how to react to criticism.

Have you been on the receiving end of some criticism lately? Maybe there's a certain person in your life who continually criticizes you—your boss, your mother, a friend. I have to believe that your first reaction is a great deal like mine: you get defensive. It's a normal human instinct. But when we become defensive, we usually respond in the most ineffective way.

I'll give you some very practical ways to help you react appropriately to a criticism that comes your way, whether it was given in the right spirit or not. I have a gift I'd like to give you. We have put together a small booklet entitled "Giving and Receiving Criticism," and it could be very helpful in learning how to understand and deal with criticism, as well as how to give it appropriately. To get your copy of this booklet, contact us through our website, or print it out from our website – or call us.

Day Two

How do you answer a criticism without sounding defensive? I'm talking about how to handle criticism, both on the receiving and the giving end.

I want to enumerate four practical steps to take to help you deal effectively in the right spirit when someone criticizes you, even if it's not a fair criticism.

Number one, begin to pray regularly that God will give you the patience and wisdom to handle incoming criticisms appropriately. Just make that a daily prayer, and if there are specific people or situations who cause you to become defensive, pray specifically about those. This is preparing yourself in advance; it is putting on the armor of God, so that when those flaming arrows of criticism come your way, you're not doomed to handle them in the wrong way.

Number two, don't go into automatic defensive mode when you are criticized, even if it's unfair. Listen to it and bite your tongue if you have to, in order to avoid saying something defensive. Watch your body language and facial expressions, also. Don't allow them to send a defensive response. Just listen. Proverbs 18:13 says, "*To answer before listening—that is folly and shame.*" A defensive reaction is something you will regret later on.

Number three, give yourself time before you respond. I have learned that if I react right away, it is usually the wrong reaction. But if I wait, then I can respond properly. Even a one minute delay can help you regain control, send up an emergency prayer, and respond in a much better way. So, buy yourself some time.

Number four, begin your response with positive words. This is effective whether the criticism is fair or not, whether it's given in the right way or not. It shows self-control and maturity on your part. You might say something like, "You know, I really appreciate you sharing that with me. That gives me something to think about."

I have a gift I want to give you, a booklet we've prepared entitled "Giving and Receiving Criticism." It's packed full of good information, so contact us on our website for this free booklet.

Day Three

Handling criticism well is a sign of spiritual and emotional maturity. How would you rate yourself when it comes to handling criticism from other people?

It's very important that we do not let criticism send us on a guilt trip. Criticisms are either valid or invalid. When they're valid, we simply need to make the necessary changes and use them for good in our lives. When they're invalid, we need to get it out of our head and forget about it.

I find that it's very easy to dwell on a criticism for days and days, and that can cause me to exaggerate its importance and its significance. We can allow the most insignificant criticism to throw us into a tailspin for days, can't we?

It has taken me far too long to understand that criticism will come my way; that's life and whether fair or not, my responsibility is to handle it in a Christ-like manner. I need to be open to honest, fair criticism and let it spur me to make needed changes in my life. And I need to recognize unfair criticism for what it is, and let it go.

When you are confident of your value to God, the more you understand your position as a believer in Jesus Christ—accepted in Christ, seated in heavenly places in Christ, secure in your relationship with God through Jesus—then you are less susceptible to the slings and arrows that others may throw at you. I'm not talking about being arrogant, but rather having a quiet confidence because you know that no person can destroy your worth, no matter what they say or do. No one can condemn you but Jesus, and he doesn't! Romans 8:1 reminds us that "*there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*"

You can truly come to the place where legitimate words of criticism are received as important insight for you, and the unfair words of criticism simply bounce off. You don't take them into your mind and heart and you don't allow them to contaminate your spirit.

Day Four

Have you ever asked someone to give you an honest criticism?

A very positive action on your part is to solicit criticism when appropriate. Ask for it, if you please. A sign of maturity is recognizing you don't know it all and you're open to learn more and to change, and you want to improve. Have you ever asked your boss for some honest feedback? Have you ever said, "I realize I need to improve in this area. Can you give me some good pointers on how to do that?"

Soliciting appropriate criticism says a lot about you, and the response you receive is generally given in a positive way, much more palatable than unsolicited criticism. Instead of a criticism, it becomes a "critique." There's a perceived difference in a criticism and a critique. Criticisms have the feeling of finding fault, pointing fingers, condemnation. Critiques have a much more positive feeling; they are like a review or analysis for the purpose of helping.

I encourage you, when appropriate, to ask your boss or someone you respect for a critique of your work. Ask your mate for a critique of your relationship. Ask your children for a critique of your parenting skills! That may appear a little scary, but it could produce some very encouraging and enlightening conversations.

Remember that some people just don't know how to give criticism well. They may be well-intentioned, but the form it comes in can be difficult to handle. Don't let that keep you from accepting valid criticism. Separate the form from the content. Look behind poor delivery for good motives, and you may discover some very meaningful information to help you.

Proverbs 19:20 says "*Listen to advice and accept instructions, and in the end you will be counted among wise.*" We are the winners when we learn to solicit and accept the right kind of criticism, while at the same time refusing to dwell on the unfair and condemning ones.

Day Five

Let's look at some important principles to remember when you are the person giving the criticism.

First, approach it with the attitude that you are doing this to help the other person. If your motive is not for the good of the other person, you need to deal with that before you do anything else. So, begin with prayer. Ask the Lord to reveal any wrong motives to you. Make certain your concern is truly to help this person.

Second, always choose the right time and the right place. Jesus told us if we had something against someone, we should go to that person privately, one-on-one. And you need to keep in mind that to call someone into a private office and shut the door can send a very alarming and negative message to that person and others. So, maybe over lunch or in a more neutral place would be better.

Third, begin with a positive approach. Give the other person the benefit of the doubt. For example, if someone is habitually late to work, a good way to begin might be, "I've noticed that you're having difficulty getting to work on time. Is there some personal problem that I need to know about?" Or in another situation you might begin, "I have heard a report of something you said, but it didn't sound like you to me. Did you really say this?"

Then fourth, be very specific about the problem. Beating around the bush won't do any good. I know it's tempting for me, when I'm critiquing someone, to start to hem-haw and water it down. But if you're doing it for the right reason, you need to be very clear about what it is and what needs to be done.

Giving and receiving criticism is a part of life. Knowing how to respond to criticism and how to give it in the right way are signs of professionalism, maturity, and most importantly, of a Christ-like spirit.