

Norman C. Schwab
Yacolt EV Free
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How to Take Criticism Proverbs 12:1

A young woman's car stalled at a stoplight. She tried to get it started, but nothing would happen. The light turned green, and there she sat, angry and embarrassed, holding up the traffic. The man in car behind her could have simply gone around her, but instead the driver chose to add to her pain by laying on his horn. After another desperate attempt to get the car started, she got out and walked back to the honker. The man rolled down his window in surprise. "Tell you what" she said. "You go start my car, and I'll sit back here and honk the horn for you."

Ever wish you could get your critics to come sit in your seat for a while? To exchange places with you just to see how it feels to be honked at? Haven't you wished to just pop off and say, "Well if you think you can do so much better, why don't you just come on over here and do it!" We tend to get our hackles raised quickly when someone tells us we are doing something wrong, or they don't like the way we are doing things, or it's not the way they would do things, or they see something in us that needs to change. Unless you are a masochist and love pain, If you are like most people, you loathe being confronted with criticism. Its just not much fun. But, all of us at one time or another will be criticized. If you are a leader it is a guarantee. You will be criticized. The higher up the further ahead...the more the shots. Why? Because leaders are always tested. People will put the heat on a leader just to see what they are made of, just to see if they can be trusted when the heat is on.

Our three postal workers here will probably appreciate this. A man at the post office desk was approached by an older fellow with a postcard in his hand. The old man said, Sir could you please address this postcard for me? He gladly did so, and then additionally agreed to write a short message and even sign the card. Finally the postal worker asked, "Is there anything else I can do for you? The fellow looked at the card for a moment and said "Yes, at the end could put. p.s. Please excuse the

sloppy handwriting." Ever wondered why it is we often complain against those who do the most for us? Look at our homes..who is the one that takes the lion share of complaints. Mom...you didn't wash my shirt. Mom, this food is terrible. Mom...you forgot to pick me up. Mom...There are plenty of critics out there aren't there. Plenty of people willing to share their opinions of your work. If you excel, If you have vision there will always be jealous people who will react with criticism. Why? Because there are people that hate change. Change is extremely threatening. People do not like the status quo upset. You will find this especially true in the church. Some may criticize because they see the change as an erosion or weakening to their own power and influence, so they fight back and attack more vigorously. Some criticize because they feel inferior or jealous, out of spite and vengeance; like Shimei against King David. Others criticize because they have been hurt and overlooked. Judges 8:1 tells about the men of Ephraim who were hurt because the other tribes of Israel didn't call them when they went to fight against Midian..so they contended vigorously it says. Some will criticize simply because they have different opinions about the way things should be done. And there are also those, whom we talked about last time, who are confronting us, speaking the truth in love...they criticize constructively thinking of the other persons best interest, opening up an opportunity for transformation. Last message we talked about the best way to confront another person...this Sunday we are going to the other end. How can we best respond when we are on the receiving end of criticism?

Turn with me in your Bibles to the book of Proverbs. As you have been reading through this book, you probably noticed there are many passages that deal with receiving instruction well. Those who are wise can do it. Those who are fools, rebels and scoffers have a real tough time digesting the hard words of truth. Look with me at Proverbs 12:1 "Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates reproof is stupid." That's a word in our family we do not call anyone, but the Bible hear labels that refusal to learn from discipline as stupid. Prov. 15:5 "A fool rejects discipline, A prudent or sensible man regards reproof. 15:32 "He who neglects discipline despises himself, but he who listens gains understanding." If you refuse to listen to the critics who want to teach

you something about yourself..then your refusal to listen is a refusal to learn and improve...you are doing yourself no favors.

So...This morning I would like to offer some practical tips on how to respond well to criticism. As you can imagine, as pastor, I have had plenty of practice at this. And let me be the first to tell you. It's not very fun and it certainly is not easy. But, let me offer a few tips that may help us keep a godly perspective and focus in the midst of the critics onslaughts. First, and you may want to write some of these down. First tip, Prepare your response. If you can anticipate the onslaught get ready. Begin to clothe yourself in prayer and humility. If you expect the reason a certain individual wants to get together with you is for confrontation. Start praying. You must put on an attitude of humility and bury your pride in the sand, not your head. It does little good to ignore or avoid. Preparation of prayer will help to align your focus on God and eternity values. Remember, God may well be in this...it certainly didn't take Him by surprise. God probably wants to work some character quality into you, so as you prepare and pray expect God to be at work in this situation. This may be God's way of getting your attention. Proverbs 3:12 says, "Whom the Lord loves, He reprove." Just as a loving father will reprove and discipline the son he delights in. But sometimes, just as it is tough for a child being spanked, that the parent is doing this out of love. So also, the one sitting across from you it can be sometimes difficult to see that their arrows could be used by God. In your prayer of preparation affirm that God is in it, is not surprised or alarmed by it and expect God to work. Remember this person who is confronting you may be criticizing out of spite, or evil, but they may well be confronting in a holy way in an act of loving and friendship to you. Proverbs 27:5, 6 "An open rebuke is better than concealed love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but deceitful are the kisses of an enemy." I would much rather have a serious reprimand that opens my eyes to some area where I am hurting myself and others, than a pile of bootlicking flattery than merely encourages my continual bad behavior.

So prepare your heart. Bury your pride. Reproof may be humiliating. It may be crushing to our egos, but to reject criticism will be our undoing. Remember 12:1 "He who despises reproof is stupid." Rejecting criticism outright will result in coddling your own pride and

arrogance. We can't afford that as Proverbs says, "Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall."

Tip number 2. When responding to a critic. #2 Avoid defensiveness. It is so natural to get very defensive when someone tells us they don't like the way we are doing things. But if you get defensive you are not going to learn anything and it will just start a fight. Don't point out the fact that they are doing a poor job of confronting. They may not have listened to the last sermon about holy confrontation. Don't say, "how dare you confront me you haven't built up any trust with me. You don't have the relationship with me to be able to say those things about me. You didn't confront me in kindness and love. You sure didn't choose a very good time to confront me. Hey buddy you are not so great yourself..now that you brought it up, let me shovel a few of your own faults back in your face. Those would all be defensive responses that serve only to start a fight. Resist the urge to counterattack, even if you have plenty of great ammo on them. Don't be tempted to shift the blame, divert attention or complicate the issue. It's very natural to do this, but we are talking about trying to do something supernatural and that is to respond well to criticism. Avoid defensiveness. Deal with it. I often try to write down their comments so I can extract some of my own emotions out of the situation and can see it more clearly and time to think. I try not to react to their comments of "always and never..." These are fighting words that are rarely true. Winston Churchill who took many shots fair and unfair once said, "I do not resent criticism, even when, for the sake of emphasis, it parts with reality." Try to understand their core concern and don't sucker them into a fight with words.

Tip #3 When you are on the receiving end of criticism, Be teachable and approachable...but not passive. If your head is buried in the sand you can't hear or learn very much. The teachable one always listens to criticism. At least criticism that one has taken ownership of. I never read an unsigned letter. It does me little good if I can't interact with the one who has concerns. Toss the anonymous shots in the garbage. These people want to shoot at you without love. But for those willing to love you enough to confront...always listen to them. And while you listen..remember Proverbs 10:19 "He who restrains his lips is wise" Less words means more wisdom. Be teachable and approachable for if you

think you are above criticism then you are probably not worth it being offers. If you continually refuse criticism and notice that people are not saying anything to you. Don't take that as a compliment. They have simply determined you are unteachable and unapproachable. Folks, we cannot afford to miss out on opportunities God may have for us to learn. We must be teachable, just like an athlete listens to his coach on any way possible he can to improve. Even Tiger woods after the first year he had won the Masters by a record number of strokes...his golf swing instructor said, "you need to start all over. They totally broke down and rebuilt his entire swing." Tiger now says its the best thing that he has done for his game, but I'm sure that wasn't the case in the several months after that decision. We must be able to admit where we could do better and join God, our coach, in reworking our life strokes. We must realize that God may well be using the critic...even if we don't like it very much at first. We must remain teachable and approachable giving God the permission to correct any fault that may be exposed, regardless of who may be doing the exposing. And regardless in the way it was done. That is the tough part. Sometimes I react to the poor way in which was done instead of discerning whether there is some truth to their comments that I do need to work on. How well do you welcome criticism?

Tip number 4. We will respond well to criticism when we listen first to understand their perspective. Proverbs 17:10 says "A rebuke will go deeper into a man of understanding than 100 blows into a fool" One who listens to understand will learn far more about himself and others than the one who sticks his fingers in his ears and fails to understand the other persons perspective. In fact, it seems those who are most in need of correction are those who are most impatient about listening to it. Listen to your critics to understand. Ask them questions in areas that seem unclear. I have found it helps to repeat back to them what you think they have said, and simply ask. "Is this what you are trying to say to me?" That way you know you have received the correct communication from them and they also know that you have listened and correctly heard. At this point, you don't have to make a commentary whether you agree that what they're saying is true, you are simply making sure you got the right message. This seems very basic but I have found this is rarely a given. People in conflict more often misinterpret communication rather than get

it right. And the better you know the other person the more likely you are to misinterpret what they are trying to say to you. In listening press for over communication. You may well discover that the presenting issue is not the core problem after all. It may be an irritant but not what is really driving all the emotion. Tip number four; listen to understand their perspective before you talk.

Tip number 5. Run their concern by people you trust. Proverbs 15:22 "Without consultation, plans are frustrated, But with many counselors they succeed." Surround yourself with people you trust and will give you an godly and honest perspective. After you prepared yourself well in prayer and kept your pride in check as you avoid defensiveness and remain teachable as you listen to understand their perspective...you may find you still don't see what they see. You may want to run it by some other people. I have said something like this; "You have said a lot of things this afternoon. I understand what you are saying but..at the first brush, I don't see your concerns. You have given me plenty to think about. Let me run this by some others folks who know me well. Can we get back together again next week after I've had some time to think and pray about this? That is an approach of a person with integrity and a godly focus. What is not to like about that?"

Proverbs 11:3 says "The integrity of the upright will guide them..while the falseness of treachery will destroy them" If you continue to walk in integrity, living above reproach it will eventually come to the surface. The creme always rises to the top, and the scum sticks to the bottom. If you are walking in treachery, that too will eventually be revealed. If you are unfairly criticized, just keep on walking upright. Truth will be known.

In our world there will be some who criticize not for holy restorative reasons, but for vindictive and hurtful reason. There will be some criticism that you must hear and then simply ignore. In the marines this particular drill sergeant, while taking his platoon on marching drills would pass a certain house. Every day this little yippee dog. You know the type. Little teeth, big mouth. This dog would run out at the sergeant leading the group and run all around the man and yip and bark and try to nip. It would be tempting to grab the dog, to heavily brush the dog aside with your combat boots. But the Sergeant never even looked down

at the dog. He ignored it and kept on doing what he was intent on doing. There will be some criticism you must ignore. This is especially true if you are a leader, for you must learn to live with a certain low level of criticism. But even that criticism thank God, for it will humble us and keep our egos in check.

If you have been confronted, it's important to realize that resolution will probably take some time. It takes time for it to recover from the shock, sink in and begins it's healing effect. Proverbs 28:23 says "He who rebukes a man will afterward find MORE favor. That word afterward tells me it's not going to be a microwave fix. If you are like me you will probably feel some initial tension, anger. But the wise one will see the part of truth that God was trying to teach and later be able to go back and thank that confronter for showing them love and speaking the hard truth to them. But it takes time to sort through all that. It takes time to become assured that your friend is saying these things not out of spite, but because they truly are looking out for your best interests and really said those things out of a love for you.

My final tip for those who wish to respond well in the face of criticism is this. Immediately ask God to keep you from becoming bitter. Vengeance is mine sayeth the Lord, I will repay. Give any feelings of bitterness to God. Its not worth destroying yourself.

Folks taking criticism is not easy, but the wise one will listen to instruction and become wiser still. Be prepared in prayer and humility, bury that pride in the sand as you realize it may well be God who is in this. Expect God to work always. Don't get defensive. Be teachable, approachable..without becoming passive. Listen to understand. Run it by other people whom you trust can give you an honest perspective. It will probably take time..so ask God to keep you from becoming bitter while he continues to make you better.