



By Dr. Richard Youngblood

Question: It's hard to keep going when I face criticism. How would Jesus handle criticism?

Fueled by a competitive spirit, pride and arrogance, we often feel the need to outdo one another and/or criticize one another. Sometimes this means the only way we think we can get ahead is to knock someone else down by our unjust criticism. Unfortunately, this unkind critical spirit has become a fact of life for many people in our world.

To deal with this fact, we need to understand that the problem is not that we are being criticized but how we react to the criticism. While I have no control over what others say about me or do to me, I can control how I react. For example, I might allow the critical words of other people to so discourage me that I give up trying to do anything, even if the criticism is undeserved and I have no reason to be a quitter. The Bible teaches us to “not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up” (Galatians 6:9). On the other hand, I might react in anger and take revenge on my critics with an attitude that says criticize me and I'll criticize you even more severely. But Jesus would have us to “not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:21).

We should also understand that not all criticism is undeserved. We have all sinned and stand in need of correction and discipline (Romans 3:23; Hebrews 12:5-11). Therefore, Jesus would encourage us to take time to hear and weigh the message of our critics before we decide to do anything about it (James 1:19; Proverbs 18:13). If we find the criticism is justified, we must swallow any selfish pride and learn from our critic with thankfulness. Proverbs 27:5 says, “Better is open rebuke than hidden love.”

Neither should we interpret all criticism as malicious in intent. We all need true friends who love us enough to offer constructive criticism. The Psalmist prayed: “Let a righteous man strike me-- it is a kindness; let him rebuke me-- it is oil on my head. My head will not refuse it” (Psalm 141:5). The wise man of Proverbs added: “He who listens to a life-giving rebuke will be at home among the wise. He who ignores discipline despises himself, but whoever heeds correction gains understanding” (Proverbs 15:31-32; cf. Hebrews 12:7-11). We must learn to recognize, value and use constructive criticism even if it makes us uncomfortable at the time.

In light of the above scriptures, I believe Jesus would tell us not to allow criticism to dishearten us but to see it as an opportunity to grow.

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