

Handling Criticism Without Bitterness

No one enjoys being criticized, but it seems to be an inevitable part of any ministry. How we handle and respond to criticism, both in our own hearts and publicly, has a lot to do with how long we stay in ministry. Bitter pastors and ministry leaders bear bad fruit, and apart from God's gracious intervention, will not last long in ministry. Together let's consider four keys to receiving the gift of criticism without becoming bitter.

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I. Introduction

A. A story: My first lesson (of many) in the college of criticism...

II. Biblical Context

A. Psalms 19, 73, 139 – and many others

B. Proverbs 6:16-19; 10:19; 17:27

C. Hebrews 12:12-17

D. Philippians 2:1-11

III. Four Keys

A. Pursue true humility. This is far easier to say than to do, because criticism is nearly always a frontal assault on our character or achievements. Defensiveness is often our first response to a verbal or written attack. **Growth in humility is rarely painless but it is often a grace-filled avenue for some of God's deepest work in a leader.**

- i. Pride is one of your most dangerous enemies as a ministry leader, and depending on your personality, it may be one of your most vulnerable areas.

ii. The same giftedness or godly ambition that drew you into ministry can make you vulnerable to defensiveness and pride.

B. Process criticism with wise counselors (not your Facebook friends). The bigger the criticism, the more you need to slow down and listen, both to God and to the voices of trusted friends.

C. Look for the part of the criticism that is actually true (however small you think that may be). Learn from it and thank God for the opportunity to grow. Ask, “Does the shoe fit?”

D. Respond wisely. Plan your words. Thank the person for their input. Clarify anything that has been clearly misunderstood.

IV. Other Practical Suggestions

A. PLAN: Think ahead now to how you would like to respond to future criticism. Write out a few sentences and memorize them if that would be helpful.

B. TRIAGE: Some criticisms were delivered in the passion of the moment and should be just as quickly forgotten. Learn NOT to respond or even to internalize spur of the moment critical words.

C. AVOID: Do not give “passive aggressive” answers. Do not use “spiritual talk” as a weapon.

D. TOOLS: God’s Word is a tremendous tool to shape your words, knowing that words flow from our hearts. A sample task: read Proverbs and mark every verse that addresses the use or abuse of words.

A Helpful Resource

The Journal of Biblical Counseling (CCEF.org, plus their searchable database on topics)