

Zip It! Msg 2 – Criticizing
 Sermon preached by Dr. Rick Mandl
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How many of you right now or in the past have dealt with someone who was very critical?
 Would you raise your hands up now?
 You've dealt with critical people.
 If you're sitting back thinking, "I hate that he asks those stupid questions every week!"
 I just want you to know we're talking about you!
 We're talking about critical people.

This is an issue that can be very painful for us on the receiving end, but it has been an issue that as you know that has been around since the beginning of time.

If you're being criticized, you're in good company

There are many examples in Scripture of those who were criticized.

Let me give you three examples . . .

If you're here and you're married, and your family didn't like the person you married, then you and **Moses** have something in common.

Numbers 12:1 tells us while Moses was leading the children of Israel, when they were at a place called . . .

"While they were at Hazeroth,

Both his sister Miriam and his brother Aaron

criticized Moses because he had married a Cushite woman." Numbers 12:1

Why were they upset that Moses had married this woman?

We're not told.

We're just told that they criticized him because he did.

So if you've got family members who are critical of you because of the person you married, just know that you are in good company.

Another example, from the New Testament can be found in the

Apostle Paul

As you read through his writings it seems like he may be a little bit defensive or sensitive, when it came to his own abilities as a speaker.

He says things like . . . ***"I came to you in weakness—timid and trembling. And my message and my preaching were very plain." (1 Cor 2:3)***

We don't know for sure if he was a **good** or **bad** speaker, **we do know he was not concise.**

He **wasn't known for his brevity.**

He was **somewhat long-winded.**

You get one example of that in **Acts, Chapter 20,**

One evening Paul was preaching and the Bible just says, ***'He went on and on preaching until midnight.***

He just kept on preaching so long, this poor kid named **Eutychus** was sitting on a windowsill listening to Paul preach.

He tried to listen, but Paul kept talking and talking and talking, and Eutychus got drowsy and he fell asleep,

Eutychus fell out the window, he was sitting in, and onto the ground below.

The problem is that the window he was sitting in was on the third floor, and so when he hit the ground he died!

That's how long Paul preached!

When that happened Paul went downstairs and he raised him from the dead and then

And then what did he do?

He went back upstairs to the room where he had been preaching and he continued to preach on and on and on until dawn.

So Paul had his critics.

By the way, some of the preaches that we've had on staff here have pointed to this story as justification for their occasionally somewhat long-winded messages.

I heard one say, "Hey Paul preached so long that someone dropped dead, while he was speaking."

I said, "Yes, and then he raised him from the dead."

When you've perfected that skill you can preach as long as you want."

Maybe the best example, when it comes to criticism, of the fact that you can't please everybody would come from . . .

Jesus,

He was perfect in every way,

He was without sin,

And yet was criticized all of the time.

The Pharisees, the religious leaders, they picked Him apart.

They criticized him for eating with sinners,

They criticized him for healing on the Sabbath,

And the list goes on and on.

The reality is . . .

YOU WILL BE CRITICIZED

Count on it.

It's not an issue of IF you're criticized

It's WHEN . . .

There is a quote, that has been attributed to Aristotle and it goes like this . . .

There is only one way to avoid criticism: do nothing, say nothing, and be nothing." -

Aristotle

I don't want to criticize that quote. . .

Except to say that if you do nothing, say nothing, and be nothing. . .

You won't avoid criticism because someone will criticize you for being a lazy bum.

In other words, if you are alive you are gonna deal with criticism and especially if you're a follower of Jesus.

You're gonna be different from this world.

Your values are gonna be different and you will be criticized.

If you're a follower of Jesus you need to learn, how to deal with criticism?

What do you do when you're criticized?

How do you respond?

In one sense, among all the topics in this ZIP IT series

Criticism is the most difficult one to deal with

If I asked you, "**When is it okay to GOSSIP?**" the answer is NEVER!

If I asked you "**When is it okay to CURSE?**" the answer is NEVER!

But if I asked you "**When is it okay to CRITICIZE?**"

You might not be so quick to answer, and the reason is that there are different types of criticism.

There's **CONSTRUCTIVE criticism**, and the motive of the critic in that case is to help you to get better.

There's **DESTRUCTIVE criticism**, and the motive there is to tear down.

There is value in constructive criticism

And so I want to lay out the challenge. . .

Never Ignore The Value Of

Constructive Criticism

Look at what Proverbs 15 says. . .

((OUR MEMORY VERSE))

"If you listen to constructive criticism, you will be at home among the wise.

But if you reject this kind of criticism. . .

What do you do to yourself?

If you reject discipline, you only harm yourself." Proverbs 15:31-32

It's important to have people who care enough about you to give you honest feedback, helpful feedback, constructive feedback.

You need that in your life so I want to challenge you to . . .

Crave Constructive Criticism

Proverbs 27:6 says . . .

“Wounds from a sincere friend are better than many kisses from an enemy.” Proverbs 27:6

Have a couple of people around you whose feedback you value, and then ask them for that feedback.

In the rest of our time I want to talk about the other kind of criticism

The kind that is less than helpful

And I want to suggest

Three prayers that you can pray That relate to criticism. . .

“God Help Me. . .

1. To Know When

To Respond To Criticism

This is important because there is a time to respond to criticism.

The wisest man who ever lived, King Solomon, wrote these words in Ecclesiastes 3 . . .

For everything there is a season, a time for every activity under heaven.

A time to be born and a time to die.

A time to plant and a time to harvest.

A time to be quiet and a time to speak.

Wisdom, is knowing the difference . . .

Knowing **WHEN** you need to be quiet and when you need to speak

There’s an example of this in the Old Testament book of Judges, and we see it in one of Israel’s leaders named Gideon.

He was being criticized by a group of people called “the Ephraimites”

The story is found in Judges, Chapter 8:1-2,

This occurs at a time just after Gideon had led his army in an astounding victory over their enemy.

And it’s against that background that some of his people. . .

“Now the Ephraimites asked Gideon, ‘Why have you treated us like this?’

They were upset with him, because when he called the people together to go into battle, he didn’t call this group – the people of Ephraim - - at least he didn’t call them at the beginning of the battle.

So they said to him . . .

Why have you treated us like this? Why didn’t you call us when you went to fight Midian?’

And they challenged him vigorously.

What did Gideon do?

Verse 2 says . . .

But he answered them ...” Judges 8:1-2

And Gideon explains why he had done things the way that he had, and he tells them . . .

Even though you weren’t there from the beginning of the battle, you are going to receive the same rewards as those who were.

So you don’t have any reason to be upset.

And verse 3 tells us . . .

“. . . When the men of Ephraim heard Gideon’s answer, their anger subsided.” Judges 8:3

The way that he responded is an example of the truth of Proverbs 15:1

“A gentle answer deflects anger, but harsh words make tempers flare.” Proverbs 15:1

There’s an old saying that ***“Hurting people, hurt people.”***

And sometimes when someone comes at you with a criticism, ***“It’s not about what it’s about.”***

The issue that they are bringing you isn’t the real issue.

They may be hurting about something altogether different.

And maybe they aren’t looking for an answer, they’re looking for understanding – they’re looking for compassion.

And you need wisdom and discernment to know when to respond to criticism.

Because sometimes the right response can go a long way.

“God help me to know when TO RESPOND to criticism”

**2. God help me to know when
to Ignore criticism**

Again this is where wisdom is so critical to the process, which is why I've included this as a prayer.

The Bible promises . . .

***"If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you."* James 1:6**

If you don't know whether you should respond to criticism or ignore it, ask God for wisdom.

And also seek the counsel - - - seek the advice of trusted friends.

Someone once said . . .

"If one person calls you a DONKEY, ignore them."

"If two people call you a DONKEY, look in the mirror."

"If three people call you a DONKEY, buy a saddle."

Again, ask God for wisdom.

I remember hearing about a pastor who was **known for his lengthy sermons**.

One time while he was preaching he noticed a man get up to leave during the middle of his message.

The pastor wasn't rattled by it, he just went on preaching, and preaching, and preaching.

Finally the man returned just before the conclusion of the sermon.

After the service concluded the pastor asked the man where he had gone.

The man told him "I went to get a haircut."

The pastor asked him "Why didn't you do that before the service?"

The man replied "Because I didn't need one before the service."

Now, let me just say it again, if 12 or 15 people all tell you the same thing, that's going to probably fall under constructive criticism and you should listen.

But, **if one or two people** who **don't know you, don't know the whole context of your life**, or you've got **one hypercritical, negative person who hasn't said anything positive since the 70's**; you know, always criticizing you, then **there may be a time to dismiss it**.

In fact, this is what Jesus evidently did.

It's recorded in 1 Peter,

I love Peter's summary of Jesus,

"When they hurled their insults at him . . .

***When the Pharisees, when the Roman soldiers, when they criticized Him over and over again, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly."* 1 Peter 2:23**

If you want to make a difference in this life - people are going to criticize you.

In fact, the more effective you are, the better you are at work, the more of a leader you are at school, the more impactful you are for the Kingdom of God, the more effective your ministry becomes; the more that you should expect critics will take shots at you along the way.

It's just the nature of the beast and you have to learn to dismiss, to shake off, to rise above invalid criticism.

And sometimes you need to search your own heart and ask yourself. . . .

Why do I take this criticism so personally?

You ask yourself that question and often you'll find that the answer is . . .

The reason we take the criticism so personally is because **we're elevating the opinions of people above the opinions of God.**

We elevate the opinions of people. . .

Do they like me?

What do they think about me?

They don't understand me!

I want them to like me!

Listen, everybody is not going to like you and you can't please everyone!

If you are trying to please everyone then **you are trying to do something that Jesus couldn't do.**

But here's the good news, you can please God.

When you get that into your mind it sets you free of being a prisoner of the opinions of people.

And you can rise above it and **instead of living for the crowd that you can't please**, you can **live for an audience of One who you can please.**

Becoming obsessed with what people think about you is the quickest way to forget what God thinks about you.

Let me repeat that. . .

In fact I'll put it up on the screen.

Becoming obsessed with what people think about you is the quickest way to forget what God thinks about you.

True confession time. . .

There was a time, early on in my ministry when I was overly concerned about criticism.

It's still not my favorite thing to receive, but through the years I've received so much of it, that I've kind of gotten used to it.

And now when someone is critical of me, I just remind myself. . .

They don't know the worst about me . . .

Whatever it is that they are criticizing, there are a lot worse things about me that only I know, and only God knows, and if they knew those things, they would have a field day.

But **let me tell you how sensitive I used to be to criticism**.

Way back in the day . . .

When I first became Senior Pastor here, it was at a time when the church was fighting what were then called "**The Worship Wars**."

It was the time when we first began to introduce musical instruments into the worship service other than the organ and the piano.

Every new thing we did was met with criticism.

Guitars in the worship service . . .

Drums in the worship service . . .

Banjos and harmonicas in the worship service . . .

People said, "**We were all going to hell . . .**"

They may have been right, but if we were it wasn't because of the instruments that we used in worship.

People used to write their criticisms, not just musical criticisms, but all their criticisms on our connection cards.

One dear sister wrote . . .

*"I think it's very important that the pastor stand behind the '**sacred desk**' when he speaks.*

My first reaction was, "Man that is going to be a hassle. Trying to find members of my staff who are willing to move my desk out of my office and onto the platform every Friday so I can stand behind it to preach on the weekends, and then move it back to my office on Monday mornings."

Someone explained to me that the **Sacred Desk** they were referring to wasn't the one in my office, it was the big wooden pulpit that we used to have up here.

Another time . . .

When we began to put the words to the songs up on the screens, one person wrote on a connection card . . .

*"**Why do we have the Hymn books in the church if we're going to sing from the screens?**"*

Another, dear senior saint, wrote on her connection card, *"**Thank you so much for putting the words on the screens. Those hymn books are so heavy to try and hold while we sing.**"*

You can't please everyone, and you can kill yourself trying.

Back in those days, **I was so sensitive to criticism**, that I'm confess to you now, something that I have never shared with this church in almost 30 years. . . .

When it came to that very first set of drums that you saw in this church back in the early 90's . . . and I'm not sure, that may be the same set we still have on stage today . . .

Anyway **when it came to that first set of drums**. . .

I bought those myself. . .

With my own money.

Not on ebay, because there was no ebay in those days or craigslist.

I found them in a print publication that we called "**The Recycler**."

I didn't know anything about drums, so I took someone with me who knew about drums, and we found a used set of drums for sale at a good price and I paid for them, with my own money, and gave them to the church.

Do you know why I did that?

And the reason I did that was because I knew there would be criticism, and I didn't want anyone who didn't like drums to be able to say, ***"How can you justify spending the church's money on something like drums."***

And I was able to tell them, ***"We didn't spend the church's money."***

"That set of drums was donated by someone."

But **that wasn't the strangest story I've got about how I used to handle criticism.**

I'll share that one with you now.

As I said, people used to submit some of their criticisms on connection cards.

And I didn't mind that, **except when they did that anonymously.**

I was always taught that whenever someone sent you an anonymous criticism, it was because they figured that the **thought that they were submitting was so idiotic** that they didn't want to have their name connected to it - - -

They would be embarrassed to have their name connected to **something so stupid.**

Nevertheless we would sometimes, not often but **occasionally receive an anonymous criticism** on a connection card.

And when those were received they were placed in my inbox in our church office,.

And **do you know what I used to do when I received one of those anonymous criticisms** on a connection card?

I would go get nine connection cards and write an **offsetting anonymous opinion.**

So, if we introduced something new in a worship service, and someone **anonymously wrote** on a connection card, ***"I think that was the worst thing that's ever been done in this church."***

I would take nine cards and write on them, ***"I think that was the best thing that's ever been done in this church."***

And I would put those in my inbox along with the one card that was critical.

That way **if anyone asked me whether we got any feedback regarding the change we had made,** I could honestly tell them, "The only feedback we received was anonymous.

And I really don't think you should put any stock in anonymous feedback. It's not worth the paper it's printed on."

But for what it's worth I can tell you there were ten connection cards in my inbox this week - - there was not a name on any one of them.

One card said ***"This was the worst thing we've ever done"***

The other nine said, ***"This was the best thing we've ever done."***

Just goes to show - - be careful how much weight you give to anonymous criticism.

You don't where it's coming from.

When Jesus was criticized

"He didn't retaliate . . . He trusted his heavenly father to handle it."

God help me to know when to IGNORE criticism

I've saved what may be the most important prayer for last, and it's this one . . .

3. God help me to overcome

my Own Critical Nature

Sometimes when we're talking about CRITICAL PEOPLE, the most critical person that we ought to be talking about is us.

Proverbs 12:18 speaks to this.

It says. . .

"Some people make cutting remarks, but the words of the wise bring healing." **Proverbs 12:18**

Do you want to be a CUTTER or do you want to be a HEALER.

If you want to see a list of the things that God wants to grow in us, you can find it in Galatians chapter 5.

There it says that . . .

"The Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control."

Galatians 5:22-23

You know what you won't find anywhere on that list?

A critical spirit.

We would do well to remind ourselves that when we have a critical spirit we're actually doing the work of someone else who has a critical spirit - -

Someone who is **called the accuser of the brethren.**

He is the one **the Father of Lies.**

He is the critical one who **heaps shame and guilt upon us** and he does a pretty good job of handling that on his own.

He doesn't need any additional help from us.

Christians can be the most critical of people.

It's been said that we are the only army that shoots its wounded.

We can be critical of our brothers and sisters in Christ, and we can be equally or more critical of those who aren't part of the family of God.

1 Corinthians 5 makes it clear that as Christians we're not called to judge those who make no claim to be followers of Jesus Christ.

Yet we'll still do it.

We see two people who make no claim to be Christians, and they're living together.

And we'll say ***"They shouldn't be living together."***

Why not?

Because it's wrong.

"They should be living under the sacred bonds of holy matrimony".

You think about that and you say . . . ***"Do you mean like, under God?"***

If they're not a Christian, why would we expect them to play by the same rule book as we do?

It would be like me going over to London and saying, ***"You people. Y'all are driving on the wrong side of the road."***

Now, of course we know they are – but the point is **they have a whole different set of rules for the road.**

Those of us who are in Christ have a different set of rules of the road than those of us who are outside of Christ.

We have no place in judging them.

Criticism never changes the world.

You will not criticize your way to a better marriage.

You will not criticize your children into being more godly.

You love them up, you don't tear them down.

The reason we criticize other is very often pride, arrogance, insecurity.

The closer I get to God, the more I want to lift others up and love them and encourage them and empower them and say good things about them.

You can find things to criticize all day long or you can cooperate with God's work of changing you into a person who builds up rather than tears down

Let's pray . . .