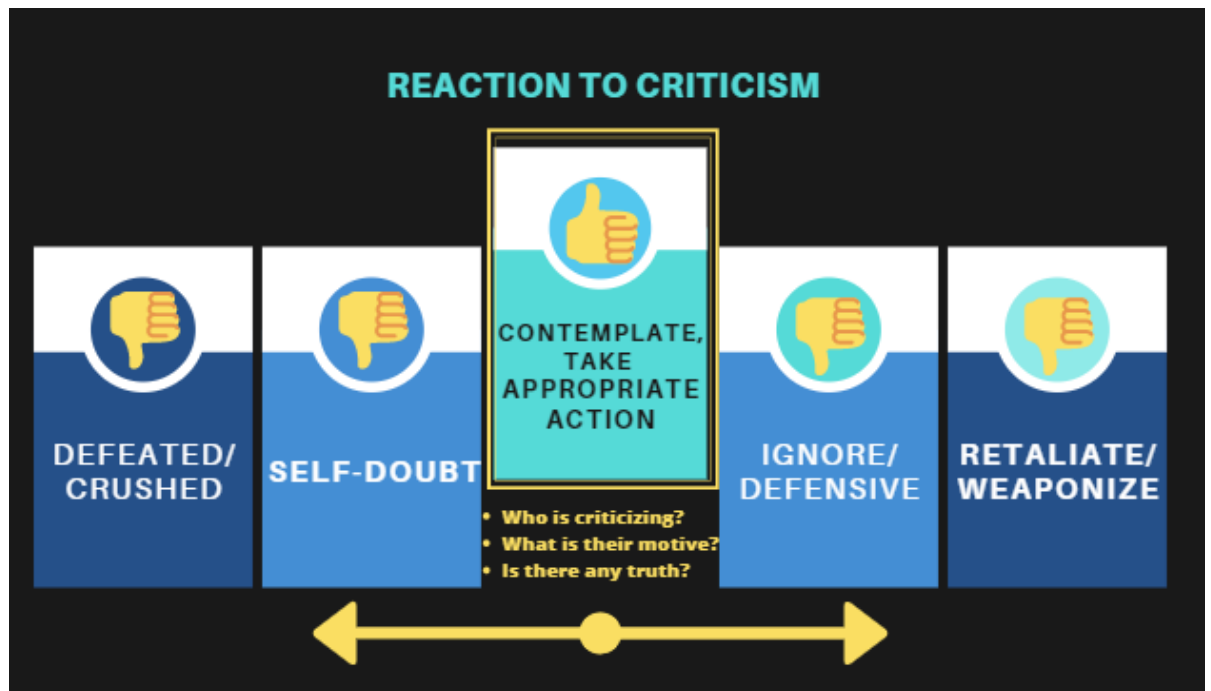


How Can Criticism Help Us Grow?

Proverbs 15:32: (NLT) *If you reject discipline, you only harm yourself; but if you listen to correction, you grow in understanding.*



We are going about our lives doing the best we can when suddenly we are criticized for our talk, dress, actions or beliefs. Now what? Are we immediately defensive? Do we hurl back insults and accusations? Or do we cave internally, feeling bad about ourselves and finding it hard to recover and move forward? Not wanting to change stops our growth process. Defensiveness might come from either pride or insecurity - both of which need to be recognized and managed. We know we can always get better. How do we take the pain of a jarring critique NOT as a roadblock or defeat, but use it as a tool to build our Christian character?



For great ideas on DELIVERING scripturally-appropriate criticism, please search our archives for Episode 1071: [Should Christians Criticize Anyone?](#)

Someone once said the definition of critic is: One who would have you write it, sign it, paint it, play it, conduct it, carve it, do it as he would...if he could.

A common character defect is not being able to accept even well-intentioned criticism. Most times it is countered with a defense and then an attack.



Fight or flight, How to Take Criticism, The Art of Manliness

- Criticism constitutes a threat to our egos and invokes a very visceral fight or flight response. You have to intentionally tell yourself to calm down and listen, and it often isn't easy to do. But do your best to be open and really listen to what your critic has to say.

DO THESE RESPONSES TO CRITICISM SOUND FAMILIAR?



"Too bad. This is the way I am and people need to accept me. Get over it!"

(We are too lazy or unwilling to get better.)

"Coming from you, that seems disingenuous." *(Attack)*

"Well, I've seen YOU do the same thing!" *(Attack)*

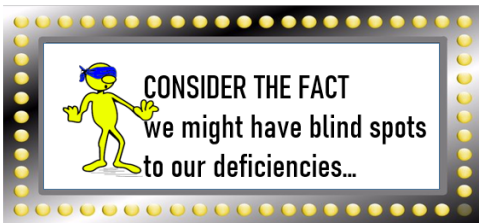
"If YOU would have gotten me the information sooner, I could have done better." *(Deflection)*

"Hey, I was just doing what everyone else was doing." *(Excuses)*

"I always _____!" or "I never _____!" *(Buzz words that are rarely true)*

No one wants to be wrong, as we think it makes us stupid, lazy, uninformed or not an expert in our field. We deny, make long explanations to justify, make excuses to show the person criticizing us that they are way off base and deflect the cause of our wrong ways to take the harsh spotlight off ourselves. Next comes the counterattack! We lash out at our attacker with harsh accusations regarding their motives, knowledge and competence, hoping to put them on the defensive, and at the same time punish them for daring to attack us in the first place.

Criticism stings most to the person who relies on constant praise. – Tonya Leigh



How SHOULD we respond? How about, "You don't know the half of it!" or "Thank you for your concern."

Proverbs 15:1,2,4-5: (NASB) ¹A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. ²The tongue of the wise makes knowledge acceptable, but the mouth of fools spouts folly. ⁴A soothing tongue is a tree of life, but perversion in it crushes the spirit. ⁵A fool rejects his father's discipline, but he who regards reproof is sensible.

Most of us are not naturally wired to graciously accept criticism without a strong reaction.

Constructive criticism might be one of the tools the Lord uses to hasten our Christian maturity:

Ephesians 4:13: (NASB) *until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.*

This is about being developed into something bigger than ourselves. Handling criticism correctly is part of being the *mature man* God can use.

Chastening can take the form of criticism used by God to correct us and set us on the right course:

Proverbs 3:11-12: (NASB) ¹¹My son, do not reject the discipline of the LORD or loathe His reproof, ¹²for whom the LORD loves He reproveth, even as a father corrects the son in whom he delights.

Revelation 3:19: (NASB) *Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent.*

God could be using a third party to help us - our spouse, family, co-workers, even strangers. A criticism, rebuke or correction - if properly evaluated and found to be justified and applied - can be of great value to our spiritual maturity.

The Lord has promised to give us correction. We are not told exactly how it will come about. We ask, "Is the criticism I am receiving something God wants me to know about and this is the method He is using to tell me? If God is sending a message, we need to at least 'read the mail,' evaluate it and act appropriately."




CRITICISM COUNCIL:

Receive criticism without setting up a defense or launching a counterrattack.

If criticism hurts, it is likely our ego feeling the pain.

Be honest in self-evaluation.

Do not lash out with excuses.



**CRITICISM CAN BE
A GIFT FROM GOD
SENT TO US BY SOMEONE
WHO WRAPPED IT
IN A CRUDE AND
UNSIGHTLY WRAPPING.**



**All criticism is not created equal.
Criticism from a trusted advisor should be easy to accept, right?**

Though we would like to think otherwise, each of us possesses a degree of ego which is tinged with self-pride and conceit. When we feel our ego is offended by criticism, perhaps it is pricked with truth and causes us pain. Criticism is most insulting when we think more highly of ourselves than we ought to.

If criticism always affects us badly, what does that say about us? Sometimes even advice sounds like criticism to us if our egos are not in check or if we are not quite doing what we should be doing. Maybe we are just mad we got caught. Sometimes we know we are going down the wrong path and are upset someone found us out.

 **Who is the critic, How to Take Criticism, Art of Manliness**

- *So, to determine whether or not a piece of criticism is something you should consider, evaluate its source and the motivation behind it. Ask yourself if you respect the person and their opinion. Do they understand and have experience with the subject they are critiquing, or are they just some random spectator in the peanut gallery? Are they a creator themselves or just a consumer? Are they being objective or emotional? Do they have a long view of your work or are they new to who you are and what you do? Also, ask yourself if the source of criticism is genuinely interested in helping you improve or whether the critique is simply designed to make themselves feel better, to impress their friends or simply as a result of them having a bad day.*

“Do they have a long view of your work or are they new to who you are and what you do?” In this case, our work is to follow Jesus. This would go both ways. If my co-worker is criticizing me for not playing in the company softball games on Sunday mornings, this means I have not communicated well enough that my first desire is to be at our church services. This critique is not valid to me, but it tells me I need to work on being a better witness of my time.



When I was first coming up in my career in a formal office setting, my friends and I spent a lot of time shopping for clothes. We had money and the need to look a certain way with clients and co-workers. One Sunday, a minister I very much respect pulled me off to the side and said he noticed I was wearing expensive clothes every Sunday, never repeating an outfit. He said I might be focusing too much on the outward appearance instead of concentrating on the inward. I was completely taken aback and in my immaturity, had it come from nearly any other person, I would have had all of those types of comebacks we talked about in the first segment except, “I’ve seen you do the same thing.” I explained that while the clothes were expensive, I generally shopped at the outlet mall and this particular ensemble, including the shoes, hadn’t cost me more than \$40. He was pleased I wasn’t spending all my money, but the impact is something that still gives me pause 30 years later. I appreciated he took the time to say this.



Ideally we want to evaluate:

- **Who is criticizing?**
- **What is their motive?**
- **Is there any truth to the critique?**

King David made many mistakes. Even before the Bathsheba tragedy, David's judgment cost the lives of 70,000 men. Against the counsel of his army captain and nephew Joab, David ordered a census of fighting men to be taken. It was an act not directed by God because it would draw David to rely upon the strength of his army and not God. This action would result in punishment.

There is a fine line between advice and criticism:

1 Chronicles 21:2-3: (NASB) ²So David said to Joab and to the princes of the people, Go, number Israel from Beersheba even to Dan, and bring me word that I may know their number. ³Joab said, May the LORD add to His people a hundred times as many as they are! But, my lord the king, are they not all my lord's servants? Why does my lord seek this thing? Why should he be a cause of guilt to Israel?

Joab is basically saying, "Bad idea! What are you THINKING? As the king of Israel, you should know better. Stop this!"

King David does know better but goes ahead with his plan anyway:

1 Chronicles 21:4-6: (NLT) ⁴But the king insisted that they take the census, so Joab traveled throughout all Israel to count the people. Then he returned to Jerusalem ⁵and reported the number of people to David. There were 1,100,000 warriors in all Israel who could handle a sword, and 470,000 in Judah. ⁶But Joab did not include the tribes of Levi and Benjamin in the census because he was so distressed at what the king had made him do.

Almost a year went by and they still had not counted everyone.

Why weren't Benjamin and Levi counted?

It makes sense that the priestly tribe of Levi would not be counted for a military or political census, but why not the tribe of Benjamin? There are at least three thoughts. The first is that Benjamin was the smallest of the tribes and bordered Jerusalem. From a practical standpoint, it could be numbered after Joab returned to David in Jerusalem. The second is that by the time Joab returned 290 days later, David understood his grave error and ordered the counting to stop. **1 Chronicles 27:24:** (KJV) *Joab the son of Zeruiah began to number, but he finished not, because there fell wrath for it against Israel...* The third explanation is provided by **1 Chronicles 21:6:** (RVIC) *But Levi and Benjamin were not counted among them; for the king's word was abominable to Joab. Joab was so against the counting that he simply did not finish the task.*

Ten months later, David realized he did wrong and asked for forgiveness. He was allowed to choose his own punishment from three options:

1. Three years of famine
2. Three months of fleeing from his enemies
3. Three days of pestilence from the Lord



David chose three days of pestilence which resulted in the death of 70,000 men of Israel. As directed by God, David builds an altar on a threshing floor in Jerusalem and makes burnt offerings. This spot would become the Temple Mount, home to the second temple which is the same spot in Jerusalem today where the Dome of the Rock is located.



(Please see Bonus Material for more on this story.)

David was criticized rightfully, justly and mercifully but ignored it.

There are many lessons in the full story, including:

- What are my deepest motivations driven by? Are they pure or hovering in a grey area?
- When shown an error in judgment, what is my immediate response? We need to process and deliver based on a scripturally-wise response.

--Am I inclined to be positively sensitive to criticism from trusted sources?

 **Secret tip, *Criticism Can Be a Gift*, Laurie J.**

- *One way criticism can be a tool for growth is by viewing it not as a way to “cut you down” but as a “secret tip” for your success. If you were running a marathon and someone pulled you aside and said you could come in first if you wore this type of clothing or ate this power bar, wouldn’t you do it? That’s what criticism can be if it’s presented in the right form. It’s a “secret tip” for success. If the other person has your best interest at heart, and you are doing something wrong or thinking about something in the wrong way, change your view so that you see their criticism as a heartfelt gift. First, they are awakening your awareness that you are not on the right track, and second, hopefully giving a suggestion on how to do it better so you can succeed.*

There is humility, trust and godliness in this response. We should listen to those we trust, even when they say things that are difficult to receive. We want to believe they have our best interest at heart.

CRITICISM COUNCIL:

Growth is easily and often limited
by our **refusal to hear** and consider criticism,
even from trusted sources.
STOP and consider if it carries
important revelations for us!



Our first inclination might be to attack. Instead, STOP - PAUSE - CONSIDER if there is any truth to the criticism.

**What about criticism that is veiled but true?
Or criticism that is hateful? How do we handle these?**

Whether a criticism is true or false, necessary or vengeful, we would do well to actively listen and let the person talk without interruption. Clear out your ego by taking a deep breath and saying thank you. Make sure you have clarity on the issue and ask for examples. Seek first to understand and then to be understood.

We have another King David criticism lesson: His sins regarding Bathsheba were many - adultery, lying, murder and cover-up.

The prophet Nathan confronts David with his transgression by veiling it in a story about a rich man and a poor man in David's kingdom:



2 Samuel 12:2-7: (NASB) ²The rich man had a great many flocks and herds. ³But the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb which he bought and nourished; and it grew up together with him and his children. It would eat of his bread and drink of his cup and lie in his bosom, and was like a daughter to him. ⁴Now a traveler came to the rich man, and he was unwilling to take from his own flock or his own herd, to prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him; rather he took the poor man's ewe lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him. ⁵Then David's anger burned greatly against the man, and he said to Nathan, As the LORD lives, surely the man who has done this deserves to die. ⁶He must make restitution for the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing and had no compassion.

David is justifiably angry! Surely that villain must be put to death!

Then a shocking twist:

⁷Nathan then said to David, You are the man!

Criticism was unveiled in all of its power for good! Nathan recounts how God had bountifully blessed David.



He was anointed to be king and delivered from Saul's madness. He was given everything - riches, wives, lands and could have been given more. God loved him and was blessing him. In all of his glory and wealth, he stole Uriah's wife and had him killed to cover it up. Now the "sword" of war would never leave his house. His authority would be challenged, and he would be disgraced. When Nathan put it in words David could understand, David immediately accepted this very harsh criticism as a pivotal correction in his life.

2 Samuel 12:13: (NASB) *Then David said to Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD.*

David's sincerity must have been deep to his very core:

And Nathan said to David, The LORD also has taken away your sin; you shall not die.

Whether we will have a growth experience or not is all in the way we receive criticism. Rejecting criticism now does not mean we cannot receive it later.

Proverbs 12:15: (NASB) *The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man is he who listens to counsel.*



Here is our final King David criticism story:

He was verbally and physically abused by Shimei:

2 Samuel 16:5-13: (NLT) ⁵As King David came to Bahurim, a man came out of the village cursing them. It was Shimei son of Gera, from the same clan as Saul's family. ⁶He threw stones at the king and the king's officers and all the mighty warriors who surrounded him. ⁷Get out of here, you murderer, you scoundrel! He shouted at David. ⁸The LORD is paying you back for all the bloodshed in Saul's clan. You stole his throne, and now the LORD has given it to your son Absalom. At last you will taste some of your own medicine, for you are a murderer!

The critical accusations are for stealing the throne and the downfall of Saul's family. The mockery is about Absalom's rebellion. Would any king allow such an outburst, especially in front of his men?

⁹Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Abishai (David's nephew) son of Zeruah demanded. Let me go over and cut off his head! ¹⁰No! the king said...If the LORD has told him to curse me, who are you to stop him? ¹¹Then David said to Abishai and to all his servants, My own son is trying to kill me. Doesn't this relative of Saul have even more reason to do so? Leave him alone and let him curse, for the LORD has told him to do it. ¹²And perhaps the LORD will see that I am being wronged and will bless me because of these curses today. ¹³So David and his men continued down the road, and Shimei kept pace with them on a nearby hillside, cursing and throwing stones and dirt at David.

David accepted criticism from an irate accuser as God's providence. He cast aside the untruths without malice and accepted the truths. David could have chosen to have Shimei killed if he would have viewed the criticism as an attack on his integrity and competence.

Proverbs 15:10: (NASB) *Grievous punishment is for him who forsakes the way; he who hates reproof will die.*

CRITICISM COUNCIL:

Viewing harsh and ugly criticism that is allowed by God opens the door for our own potential growth.

WARNING:

Such criticism may contain elements of truth.

This may just be the **corrective glasses** we need to aid us in seeing our shortcomings.



- 🔨 Wait at least a minute before responding to criticism to avoid immediate hostility.
- 🔨 Write down the exact conversation, so you do not add extra negative words when recalling the feedback.
- 🔨 Ask someone you trust if the feedback is accurate.
- 🔨 Focus on the positive aspects of the conversation.
- 🔨 Actively listen and let the person talk without interruption.
- 🔨 Take a deep breath and say thank you.
- 🔨 Make sure you are clear on the issue and ask for examples to help you understand.

Proverbs 27:17: (NASB) *Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.*

(Source: A sermon by Elmer Weeks, "Criticism, an Aid to Our Crystallization") Criticism is more commonly viewed as a weapon of attack than a tool of chiseling that can be effective to remove unshapely aspects and flaws of our characters. Our "old self" wants to set up a defense and will be quick to counterattack upon the offending enemy... Chipping away of the imperfections often can be done by only such methods. We might term these as growing pains, causing us to take on more and more of the characteristics of the fruit of the spirit, especially humility. If we refuse to accept the pain that accompanies criticism because it hurts the "old self" too much, we refuse the opportunity for spiritual growth. It is important we try to take on the attitude we have seen by David.



If we truly are disciples of Jesus, it is our responsibility to honestly evaluate criticism that comes our way.



Using criticism to make ourselves better is wise, but how do we handle social media hatred?

Social media has given society permission to become the “wild west” when it comes to empowering people to make virtually anonymous, unfounded, unkind or unnecessary commentary on just about everything. Handling these kinds of false accusations or harsh and undue criticism is NOT easy!

Merriam Webster: online trolling: [seeking] to antagonize (others) online by deliberately posting inflammatory, irrelevant, or offensive comments or other disruptive content.

Trolls have no goal other than to incite a response. Think of online trolls as emotional hackers. Destructive criticism is an attack, character assassination or total put down.

Jesus was a constant victim of unjustified criticism and “ancient trolling.” He was criticized by the scribes and Pharisees. He cast out evil spirits and was accused of doing so by means of satanic power. When he and disciples plucked heads of wheat on the Sabbath because they were hungry, he was accused of not keeping the Law. Even healing on the Sabbath brought constant accusations.

No good deed would go unpunished, but he kept going:

Luke 7:33-34: (NASB) ³³For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say, He has a demon! ³⁴The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, Behold, a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!

A woman anointed Jesus with ointment:

Matthew 26:6-11: (NASB) ⁶Now when Jesus was in Bethany, at the home of Simon the leper, ⁷a woman came to him with an alabaster vial of very costly perfume, and she poured it on his head as he reclined at the table. ⁸But the disciples were indignant when they saw this, and said, Why this waste? ⁹For this perfume might have been sold for a high price and the money given to the poor. ¹⁰But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, Why do you bother the woman? For she has done a good deed to me. ¹¹For you always have the poor with you; but you do not always have me.

The disciples’ criticism was directed towards the woman but meant for Jesus because he allowed her to do it. Jesus was grounded in the FACT he was doing God’s will.

Here is a summing up of Jesus’ responses:

1 Peter 2:23: (NASB) and while being reviled, he did not revile in return; while suffering, he uttered no threats, but kept entrusting himself to Him who judges righteously;

What others thought of him was of little consequence as long as he knew he was doing the will of his Father. Jesus was never offended when he was unjustly criticized.



Jesus is the ultimate model, Julius, a frequent caller to the CQ radio program

- Truly one of life’s greatest challenges is how we accept criticism. Our Lord Jesus is the ultimate model as described by the prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 53:7. Quoting in part: He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, yet he opened not his mouth. He is my model inspiring me to meditate on this favorite quotation: “Blessed are they that expect nothing, for they shall never be offended or disappointed.”



How do we overcome when a criticism plagues us for a long time? We cannot seem to let it go. We respond to it in our minds over and over, thinking about what we should have said and how we should have reacted. In this type of case, we think we can look to Jesus' life. Our issue is temporary and tiny in the scheme of life and the barrage of hatred Jesus had to endure.

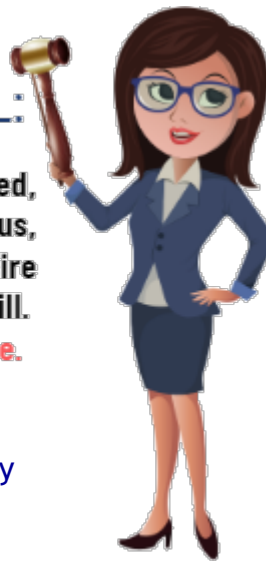
(Source: A sermon by Elmer Weeks, "Criticism, an Aid to Our Crystallization") When we are unjustly accused and criticized, may we be so well established in principles of truth to know we are standing on solid ground in God's work and our conscience is in total accord with God's guidance. As our Lord was able to read the heart, he could use God's words effectively and could do without question. We do not have this ability, but if we can tactfully use the sword - the word of truth - in a way it will not harm or hurt but will in some way show others a better way, then we are helping one another in this narrow way.

For inspiration across social media channels, search for "cqbiblepodcast" on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Pinterest. On all of our channels, we ask people to be respectful so there can be dialogue. We do not mind disagreements done respectfully and based on Scripture.

Isaiah 1:18: (NASB) *Come now, and let us reason together, says the LORD.*

CRITICISM COUNCIL:

**When we are unjustly accused,
there is no better example than Jesus,
who was firm in his desire
to do his Father's will.
Remember, **God alone is our Judge.****



Handling criticism with grace means focusing on the FACT that so many worldly things just do not matter.

**We know we cannot please everyone all the time,
but what if continual criticism gets to be too much?**

Valid criticism which comes from a reliable source with our best interest in mind causes us to pause and consider it as a tool for our benefit.

Weaponizing our words or actions back to any source of irritation is NEVER appropriate. We also need to be careful not to take the criticism so personally that it causes unhealthy self-deprecation, self-doubt, depression or paralysis.





TO: Inspiration@ChristianQuestions.com

“J” asks: Why do even the most popular people on the planet still care about one criticism out of a thousand compliments?

Are we seeking gratification from all of these people giving us the other 1,000 compliments? It is an ego-related issue. If we get bent out of shape from that one criticism, we have to look in the mirror and say, “Wait, something is wrong. What am I supposed to do from a godly perspective?”



This might have something to do with our brain’s “negativity bias.” According to Psychology Today, studies have shown the brain is built with a greater sensitivity to unpleasant news. The brain reacts more strongly to stimuli it deems negative. There is a greater surge in electrical activity. Thus, our attitudes are more heavily influenced by downbeat news rather than good news.

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/articles/200306/our-brains-negative-bias>



1. ACCEPT that we are ALL broken. Allow others’ brokenness to be as you want them to allow yours to be:

Romans 3:10: (NASB): *as it is written, There is none righteous, not even one.*

Sometimes we just miss with our communication with people and cannot get our point across. Different personality types, upbringing, cultural backgrounds and mental weaknesses can cause us to misunderstand others. There are many challenges. When there is a heated discussion or disagreement, we should ask ourselves, “I wonder what the rest of their story is?” Understand we are all imperfect.

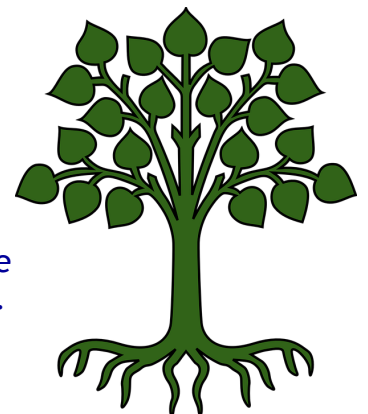
We want everyone to see us perfectly, but this is not going to happen.

2. REALIZE the battle is more than self-doubt versus self-confidence - it is GOD-confidence that matters:

Jeremiah 17:7-8: (NLT) *7But blessed are those who trust in the Lord and have made the LORD their hope and confidence. 8They are like trees planted along a riverbank, with roots that reach deep into the water. Such trees are not bothered by the heat or worried by long months of drought. Their leaves stay green, and they go right on producing delicious fruit.*

When we act with God-confidence, we do not wither under the heat of scrutiny.

We are like trees planted along a riverbank, with roots that reach deep - Jesus was well-rooted in what he was supposed to do and had confidence that God could deliver him in any circumstance. If we have that kind of confidence, it does not matter if it is hot or if there is a drought; our “leaves” will stay green because we are connected to the water of God’s truth deep in our roots.





3. **EMBRACE** the long view that we are being shaped for the glory of God and chiseling hurts:

Hebrews 10:32-36: (NASB) ³²But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, ³³partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated. ³⁴For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one.

Paul is telling them they are well-rounded in faith and have suffered, but they have godliness which no one can take from them.

³⁵Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. ³⁶For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised.

Do not throw away your confidence through God. We can become discouraged with our lack of progress. Even shame and anxiety can help us turn back from the wrong path. Know that being shamed before others does not have to be a way of life, but it can be a tool of glory in God's hand. Just ask Jesus about that!

Experiencing shame does not mean we cannot get back up. Once we become totally defeated, God cannot use us to fight His cause. We need to get back up and find a way back to God the way David did and request forgiveness.

Jesus *despised the shame* (**Hebrews 12:2**) which meant he looked down upon it; he thought poorly of it. It did not stop his mission. He was shamed publicly and crucified as a blasphemer of God. He accepted the shame because God arranged it for him for the sake of all men, even for those who were shaming him.

 **Change your perspective, *How to take Criticism, Art of Manliness***

- *Change your perspective on criticism. Instead of seeing criticism as humiliating or embarrassing, view it as an opportunity to improve yourself. Winston Churchill had this to say about criticism: Criticism may not be agreeable, but it is necessary. It fulfills the same function as pain in the human body. It calls attention to an unhealthy state of things.*

We need to change our perspective. Consider our suggestions of a power bar, corrective glasses and now a medical test. We need to call attention to the unhealthy state of things and be better.

4. **DECIDE** to always get back up when you fall:

Proverbs 24:16: (NASB) *For a righteous man falls seven times, and rises again, but the wicked stumble in time of calamity.*

We cannot discuss criticism without acknowledging our worst critic...ourselves. When we allow ourselves to get so far down that we can no longer look up, we cannot be in service to God.

For more on the topic of not being defeated in spite of what we have said or done, please search our archives for Episodes 912 and 914: **Will My Regrets Ever Leave Me Alone? (Parts 1 and 2).**





In those two episodes we used an example of Apostle Paul and all he had done as Saul, including the murder of Stephen. The guilt could have crushed him, but he admitted it and used it as a stepping-stone to become the greatest apostle.

I used episodes 912 and 914 as a sermon and later had many people tell me they never saw it that way and it helped them get a new lease on life. Instead of being crushed, they looked at the Apostle Paul and said, "I can do this."

When we get to that defeated and crushed stage, we need to look to those who have gone before us and learn how they were able to overcome and follow in their footsteps.

CRITICISM COUNCIL:
Whether criticism is meant to help or hurt, it can always be **framed within God's providence**, and therefore, it can be a customized tool for our personal Christian growth.



Proverbs 15:31-33: (NASB) *He whose ear listens to the life-giving reproof will dwell among the wise. ³²He who neglects discipline despises himself, but he who listens to reproof acquires understanding. ³³The fear of the LORD is the instruction for wisdom, and before honor comes humility.*

Before honor comes humility - what a powerful message on how to handle the difficulties of our daily lives.

We have important tools for dealing with an everyday problem. We need to apply them as we fall down and get up again. Keeping Jesus in mind, we must use criticism as a tool because it is God's providence.

**So, how can criticism help us grow?
For Jonathan and Rick (and Julie!) and Christian Questions...
Think about it...!**



Join us next week for our podcast on December 9, 2019:
Ep. 1103: Have We Become Too Desensitized to Sin?





Bonus Material:

Criticism is something we can avoid easily by saying nothing, doing nothing and being nothing. — Aristotle

NUMBERING THE PEOPLE

1 Chronicles 21 with parallel account in 2 Samuel 24

herald-magazine.com, September 1, 2015 RVIC translation = Revised Version Improved and Corrected

What was King David's grave sin that caused great pain to many people? Of course what comes to mind first is the story of Bathsheba and his causing her husband, Uriah, to be killed in battle to satisfy David's own lust for Uriah's wife. But do you recall another great sin of David's with the consequence of an angel of the Lord destroying 70,000 men? 70,000! And what does this account have to do with one very special piece of real estate located in Jerusalem?

This very dramatic and gripping story provides us with even greater insight into the true heart of David and teaches us many important lessons, including the need to be fully repentant and watchful when we fall short of God's just standard.

In summary, David ordered that a census of fighting men be taken. This was against the counsel of Joab, the captain of his army, and we quickly learn it was an act not directed by God causing God to become very angry. God sends a death angel throughout the borders of Israel, but the angel stops right at Jerusalem after killing 70,000 men. As directed by God, David builds an altar on a threshing floor, and the burnt offerings he makes stays the hand of the death angel. On this very spot would eventually be built the second Temple, the Temple Mount in Jerusalem today.

2 Samuel 24:1-3: (NASB) ¹*Now again the anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and it incited David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah.* ²*The king said to Joab the commander of the army who was with him, "Go about now through all the tribes of Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, and register the people, that I may know the number of the people.* ³*But Joab said to the king, Now may the LORD your God add to the people a hundred times as many as they are, while the eyes of my lord the king still see; but why does my lord the king delight in this thing?*

1 Chronicles 21:1-3: (NASB) ¹*Then Satan stood up against Israel and moved David to number Israel.* ²*So David said to Joab and to the princes of the people, Go, number Israel from Beersheba even to Dan, and bring me word that I may know their number.* ³*Joab said, "May the LORD add to His people a hundred times as many as they are! But, my lord the king, are they not all my lord's servants? Why does my lord seek this thing? Why should he be a cause of guilt to Israel?*

Did Satan tempt or did God direct?

Obviously God never forces us to sin. Satan knows us well enough to know our weaknesses. It appears that God was angry with Israel and allowed Satan to tempt David through David's concern that Israel was not strong enough militarily or tempted his pride over the strength of his kingdom. Either motivation showed David's lack of complete trust in God.

In the previous chapter, (1 Chronicles 20) Israel had just been through a series of battles with the Ammonites and the Philistines. Then 1 Chronicles 21:1 begins by saying, *Then Satan stood against Israel and provoked David to number the people.* It is possible Satan was responding to Israel's victories in the previous chapter. He couldn't destroy them in battle, so he resorted to another tactic he has used in other instances: When he couldn't directly defeat Israel in battle, he would try to corrupt them. In doing so, God's wrath would be kindled and God Himself would kill them. The instance with Balaam in Numbers 31:16 is an example. In both accounts God responded in a predictable way, by killing Israelites. Satan was using God's standard



of righteousness to accomplish his own purposes. He was now using David's pride to drive a wedge between God and David (and Israel).

Why was counting the people a sin?

It is thought that by counting the people, David was either using the number as a source of pride because of his own kingship and military might or wanted the security of knowing he had enough fighting men to counter invaders. Either way, he was not relying on the Lord's promise to *increase Israel like to the stars of the heavens* - 1 Chronicles 27:23. There was no acceptable purpose for the count or specific command from God, and he did not first ascertain the will of God, so we can conclude that David's motivation was sinful.

For example, God required Moses to take a census in Numbers 1, along with charging a corresponding census tax. Back then, Israel was about 603,550 strong - Numbers 1:46. At this point, Israel and Judah probably had about 6 million people including women and children.

Who was Joab?

Joab was the captain of David's army but also his nephew - the son of Zeruah, King David's sister. Joab's example to us is beneficial. We need to speak up when those around us are clearly heading down the wrong path, even if they do not listen to our scriptural advice. We should all be Joab, challenging those around us to depend on God instead of giving in to fear or pride. See Proverbs 27:6.

Since King David insisted the census be taken, Joab traveled throughout Israel to count the people. He returned to Jerusalem and gave David the numbers, omitting the tribes of Benjamin and Levi.

Why weren't Benjamin and Levi counted?

It makes sense that the priestly tribe of Levi would not be counted for a military or political census, but why not the tribe of Benjamin? There are at least three thoughts. The first is that Benjamin was the smallest of the tribes and bordered Jerusalem. From a practical standpoint, it could be numbered after Joab returned to David in Jerusalem. The second is that by the time Joab returned 290 days later, David understood his grave error and ordered the counting to stop. 1 Chronicles 27:24: (KJV) *Joab the son of Zeruah began to number, but he finished not, because there fell wrath for it against Israel...* The third explanation is provided by 1 Chronicles 21:6: (RVIC) *But Levi and Benjamin were not counted among them; for the king's word was abominable to Joab.* Joab was so against the counting that he simply did not finish the task.

1 Chronicles 27:24 ends with: *...neither was the number put in the account of the chronicles of King David.* Because of the tragedy associated with this error, this census must not have been added to the official record making it even more pointless.

David eventually realized he did wrong and in verse 8 (RVIC²⁰⁰⁰) says: *I have sinned greatly, in that I have done this thing: but now, put away, I beseech thee, the iniquity of thy servant; for I have done very foolishly.* Of course, we can't help but notice it took David almost ten months to realize what sin he committed.



Interestingly, God allowed David to choose his own punishment from three options with three different time frames, as delivered by the prophet Gad:

1. Three¹ years of famine
2. Three months of fleeing from his enemies
3. Three days of pestilence from the Lord, *the angel of Jehovah destroying throughout all the borders of Israel.* (RVIC²⁰⁰⁰)

As an indication of his true heart condition, David chose the third option, stating he would rather fall into the hand of the merciful Jehovah than that of man, who would have triumphed in the misfortunes of Israel. It is telling to note that he chose the one option that being in a position of king could not afford any protection.

What lessons can we glean from David's response to his sin and the punishment?

1. He makes a very humble confession of his sin.
2. He prays earnestly for God to pardon him.
3. Even though the punishment did not affect his personal health, he did not stand by quietly and wait for the scourge to end. 2 Samuel 24:17: *Let thy hand be on me and on my father's house.* He asks if he alone could suffer and he has concern for his people, *These sheep, what have they done?*
4. He was willing to take responsibility for his actions.
5. He casts himself on the mercy of God. He did not resist punishment or try to justify his actions. *Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him.*

2 Samuel 24:15-16: (ASV) ¹⁵So Jehovah sent a pestilence upon Israel from the morning even to the time appointed; and there died of the people from Dan even to Beer-sheba seventy thousand men. ¹⁶And when the angel stretched out his hand toward Jerusalem to destroy it, Jehovah repented him of the evil, and said to the angel that destroyed the people, *It is enough; now stay thy hand.* And the angel of Jehovah was by the threshing-floor of Araunah the Jebusite.

But did the punishment last a full three days?

Commentators disagree whether or not the “appointed time” of the pestilence lasted three days or no more than one day - some say as little as three hours. The Septuagint says until dinnertime of the first day. It is comforting to think that God in His mercy saw (1 Chronicles 21:16) David and the elders clothed in sackcloth, falling on their faces in absolute, sincere penance, and He stayed the hand of the death angel. It reminds us that this “present evil world” will not last one minute more than necessary to accomplish the eternal purposes of God.

Why did David's action bring consequence to Israel?

2 Samuel 24:1: (NASB) Now again the anger of the LORD burned against Israel...

At first glance, it might seem unsettling that the nation had to suffer because of one man, reminiscent of mankind's fall because of one man, Adam. Of course God had earlier warned the people of the undesirable effects of being ruled by a king in 1 Samuel 8:10-13.

However, a clue is found in 2 Samuel 24:1 where it describes the anger “again” of God against Israel being the cause of God allowing this experience in the first place. Perhaps “again” is a reference to 2 Samuel 21:1 (NIV) when a three-year famine occurred on account of *Saul and his blood-stained house; it is because he put the Gibeonites to death.* The people were not innocent and constantly lost sight of God's

¹ The Chronicles account says three years but the Samuel version says seven. Some Bible commentators suggests the Hebrew characters for “7” and “3” resemble each other and one must be in error. The Septuagint translation says “three.”



leadings including the rebellion of Absalom ([2 Samuel 15](#)) and the rebellion of Sheba the son of Bichri ([2 Samuel 20](#)). We have to assume that although the specific sins of the people are not expressed, there was no doubt just cause.

Why does the destroying angel stop at a threshing floor?

A threshing floor is a symbol of judgment and testing. For example, Hosea prophesied that God's judgment would scatter the people like chaff from a threshing floor, as they would not turn away from false idols. [Hosea 13:3](#): *Therefore they will be like the morning mist, like the early dew that disappears, like chaff swirling from a threshing floor, like smoke escaping through a window.*

[Jeremiah 51:33](#): *For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: The daughter of Babylon is like a threshing floor at the time when it is trodden; yet a little while and the time of her harvest will come.*

Here Jeremiah predicts the fate of the Babylonians who persecuted Israel.

[2 Samuel 6:6](#): Uzzah died near the threshing floor of Nacon. And, of course, the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares in [Matthew 13:36-43](#) provides a picture of judgment as the "wheat" class is separated from the "tares." **For more on this parable, please see Episode 1006: Has the Gospel Been Corrupted? (Part I)**

But the threshing floor is also a place to receive blessing:

[Numbers 18:30](#): *Therefore thou shalt say unto them, When ye have heaved the best thereof from it, then it shall be counted until the Levites as the increase of the threshing floor, and as the increase of the winepress.*

[Joel 2:24](#): *And the floors shall be full of wheat, and the vats shall overflow with wine and oil.*

An offering to the Lord is to be made from the threshing floor in [Numbers 15:20](#) and [18:27](#). The true church is described as a threshing floor in [Isaiah 21:10](#).

This links the threshing floor to worship, which fits in well with this specific property of Ornan - David would now purchase it for a place of sacrifice and worship - the very spot on Mount Moriah where God led Abraham in [Genesis 22:2](#). Very soon the great Temple of Solomon would be built on this very location ([2 Chronicles 3:1](#)) - and where centuries later, Jesus would teach! But let's not get ahead of the story...

In the Samuel version of accounts, the threshing floor owner is named Araunah, which means "song" or "joyful cry." He is identified as a Jebusite, an ethnic group living in Jerusalem at that time whom most scholars believe refers to the Hittites. In the Hittite language, "Araunah" is a title meaning, "the lord." In [2 Samuel 24:23](#) (RVIC²⁰⁰⁰), he is referred to as a king, so the thought is he may have been a former king of the Jebusites. The Chronicles account calls him Ornan, meaning "that rejoices."

David lifts up his eyes and sees the angel of the Lord *standing between earth and heaven, having a drawn sword in his hand stretched out over Jerusalem*. This plague caused David intense anguish ([2 Samuel 24:17](#)). What fear seeing the death angel at work must have caused! Ornan and his four sons also saw the angel and the sons hid. But David and the elders were already in sackcloth, already beginning to make amends and show complete repentance. David pleads with God that only he should be punished for his deed and not the people.

Through the prophet Gad, God directs that David should build an altar on Ornan's threshing floor. David obeys and explains to Ornan that he must buy the threshing floor. When Ornan sees David, he bows with his face to the ground and proceeds to tell David that he can take it all - the threshing floor, the instruments for wood, oxen



for burnt offerings and the wheat for meal offerings. He was ready to give it all to David as the king. But David made a point of stating he had to purchase it for full price. He was not going to offer a burnt offering without cost.

This strongly reminds us that the ransom sacrifice of Jesus was complete, precious and costly. That sacrifice would ultimately end death to the entire world of sinners. Sin always has greater, unintended consequences - a ripple effect. David's decision to number resulted in the death and sorrow of countless families and meant genealogies that might have been were cut off. With such a massive consequence to Israel, it makes sense that atonement and forgiveness would take place at the very spot where the first human picture of the ransom took place with Abraham and Isaac. David builds an altar there and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings, calling upon Jehovah. The LORD answered by fire upon the altar of burnt offering. Scripturally, burnt offerings always refer to the ransom. For example, the morning and evening burnt offerings were sacrificed at 9:00 AM and 3:00 PM. This corresponds to the hours Jesus was on the cross. When a private individual made a burnt offering, it was a picture of someone's recognition and appreciation of the ransom. A burnt offering was always laid directly on wood, a picture of the cross. When someone offered a peace offering, it was always laid on top of the already burning burnt offering. This pictures the fact that people can only have peace with God based on the ransom. This was God's prescribed course for David in order for David to re-establish his relationship with God. God commands the angel to stop the killing. Jerusalem is saved because of the Lord's mercy! But mercy requires a sacrifice, then and now.

At this time, sacrifices were all made in Gibeon, about eight miles northwest of Jerusalem, on the brazen altar Moses had made. David was terrified by the sight of the sword. He goes on to announce in 1 Chronicles 22: *This is the house of the LORD God*, and begins making preparations for the Temple his son Solomon would build. Thus, this amazing account comes to end, providing a history of how the site of the Temple was chosen. This has been a sacred place for many generations, including our own. Perhaps in the kingdom it will be a dedicated place of learning and reflection. It gives us a greater appreciation for David climbing back from his faults and heart-wrenching mistakes that caused severe consequences to those around him. Truly his highs were high but his lows very low. It teaches us that we need to continually be on guard to examine our deep down motivations and be quick to ask sincerely for forgiveness when those motives are questionable or hovering in a gray area. We need our consciences to be sensitive to gentle suggestions from our brethren who might be able to more clearly see a circumstance than we can. We learn that atonement for sin does not avoid the consequence of sin. We saw Jerusalem being saved and look forward to the day when this beloved city will become the center of God's glorious kingdom. Isaiah 2:3: *Out of Zion shall go forth the Law and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.*

We can only assume this experience will help David to be a better servant when resurrected in God's kingdom. He may be counsel to the resurrected leaders of the world throughout all generations and cultures that will need to unlearn blind ambition for power at any cost. They will need to learn how to rely on Jehovah and His highest of standards.

Finally and most of all, this lesson teaches us to put our complete trust in the Lord and not count on anything or anyone else. Let us be able to say in our heart of all hearts, *His grace is sufficient for me.*