

BEYOND CONFLICT

August 7 & 8: Critical People

Series Overview

Some people are difficult to live with. They may cross your path every day at work, at school, at home or at church. They may be critical, phony, inconsistent or cruel. Each of us needs to learn how to respond to these people. We need to know when to confront, encourage and forgive, because we are supposed to live at peace with everyone.



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Sermon Highlights *(John 12:1-8)*

We have all been criticized and we've all been critical. Let's notice five principles that can help us to not be so critical and to appropriately respond to the critical.

1. **Be realistic ... criticism happens!**
2. **Be discerning ... understand motives!**
 - They may be *right*.
 - They may be *wounded*.
 - They may be *jealous*.
 - They may be *addicted*.

3. **Be cautious ... don't always answer!**

Before you respond, ask yourself some questions:

- Is the critic *sincere*?
 - Will it *help*?
 - Is this *new*?
 - Is it *reasonable*?
 - Is it *hurtful to others*?
 - Am I responding in *anger*?
4. **Be kind ... don't attack!**
 5. **Be focused ... remember the big picture!**

On being critical and being criticized...

- A man would do nothing if he waited until he could do it so well that no one would find fault. –John Henry Newman
- Some criticism will be honest, some won't. Some praise you will deserve, some you won't. You can't let praise or criticism get to you. It's a weakness to get caught up in either one. –John Wooden
- Since the beginning of recorded history, no one has erected a statue to a critic. –Zig Ziglar
- *Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.* –Ephesians 4:29



Take it home ... Practical Applications

- Make the decision this week to pay back insults with blessings. And, be sure that you're not the one handing out insults so that people have to pay you back with blessings!



Take it to the source ... Bible Study

Introductory question: What is the funniest or most creative insult you have ever seen, read or had used against you?

Opening Thought

People can be creative with words, but those words can often cause lasting damage. Use this rather lighthearted question to get your group thinking about what a critical person can do to others—intentionally or unintentionally.

Read *John 12:1-8*.

1. What are your thoughts when you read that this woman poured nearly a year's wages on Jesus' feet? What do you think your reaction would have been if you had been sitting in the room?
2. Out of everybody in the room, Mary seems to have the best understanding of what Jesus is about to face as He prepares to face the cross. Why do you think those who seem to *get it* ahead of others are often the ones who also get criticized more than others?
3. What role does Judas' own selfish agenda play in his criticism of Mary? Why can self-centeredness quickly lead to criticism of others?
4. What are your thoughts concerning the way Jesus defends Mary?
5. Would you have defended Mary? What would you have said?

Key Point

There are many different reasons why people criticize others or why they get criticized by others. Many times criticism is completely unfounded. Many times it is driven by a person's own selfish agenda. Often it is accurate. This situation in Jesus' own life should help your group to look at the different aspects of criticism and how they can and should respond to people who are critical of them or critical of others.

Read *1 Samuel 16:7, Hebrews 4:12* and *2 Samuel 16:5-14*.

1. When you receive criticism from somebody, what is usually your first reaction?
2. How often do you stop to consider what might be motivating that person's criticism of you? Why could that make a difference in how you react to the criticism?
3. How likely are you to see a critical person as someone who may need love, comfort and help?
4. How might these verses affect the way you examine your own motives when you feel the need to cut somebody else down or slam the way something is being done that you don't quite agree with?
5. What can you learn from David's reaction to the attack he faced from Shimei?

Key Point

Most of us tend to go into survival or attack mode when we are criticized or insulted. We rarely stop to consider what might be driving the other person to say the things they are saying. It is important to realize that people may be hurting, they may be frustrated or they may be fighting jealousy or envy. Help your group to see that taking a step back and considering the big picture in any given situation can be very helpful in determining how to respond to a critical person. David's example in *2 Samuel 16* is very helpful.

Read *Proverbs 25:11, Matthew 5:43-48* and *1 Peter 3:9*.

1. The response that the Bible describes in these verses involves giving with no thought of getting a positive response. How do your responses usually line up with God's response in *Matthew 5:45*?
2. What practical things could you do to ensure that your life is a blessing to all you encounter, regardless of how they may be treating you?
3. Have you ever taken *Matthew 5:44* seriously and prayed for somebody that was persecuting or criticizing you? How did it affect your attitude toward them?
4. How might the attitude in these verses show somebody the love of God in a way that stirs their curiosity about a life of following Jesus?

Key Point

We are called to bless and not curse those who treat us harshly. We are even to pray for those who persecute us. This means even if we get nothing good from them. This attitude and life will be a testimony to unbelievers because it is simply not the way the world works. Have your group talk about practical things they can do to make a difference in the lives of those who may be criticizing them. Decide to help each other actually live this out in the coming weeks.

Notes...



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