

## . . . But What if We Want to be Better than “OK”?

One of the gauges of maturity (as opposed to the predictable, just getting older) is the degree to which a person can receive, evaluate and implement criticism – in Biblical terms, developing the discipline of repenting; learning the art of changing for the better. Many (if not most) old people are simply that – old bodies with child-like minds! Age is no guarantee of maturity. If parents let kids \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank) . . . they will likely become adults who \_\_\_\_\_. If parents want children to develop into adults who are mature in their handling of criticism, they must teach them this discipline! They will make the children learn to listen, rather than sulk every time someone criticizes them.

When people are dating they, generally, hang on each other’s every word. THEN, when married, they quickly (unless they WORK on the discipline of repentance), return to their pre-marriage state of defensiveness, refusing to accept input from the one closest to them! In effect, while married, they are in many respects, alone again – facing life without any objective, outside, contribution from the one(s) who most closely understands them. Often, even, they are driven “into the arms of another” who “understands them better” – who, in the heat of (or for) passion sees no fault. If we stifle the voices closest to us we will probably receive no input for improvement since few (outside a VERY small sphere) care enough about us to make any meaningful observations.

### The Spectrum of the Discipline of Using Criticism to Our Benefit

Close-minded – “Stiff-necked” (in Biblical terms) – Rebellious – often do just the opposite of what someone suggests BECAUSE someone suggested it – “I will show you who the boss is!”

Expects and demands unconditional forgiveness and acceptance.

Confirmation and compliments are what they crave and accept.

Learning and developing the discipline of repentance – learning to: “Test everything. Hold on to the good.”<sup>1</sup>  
Thessalonians 5:21

Listening, considering and evaluating criticism to improve and make life easier!

Understands forgiveness and repentance come hand-in-hand. And knows the benefits of repentance is greater than the sting of criticism.

Wishy-washy – no backbone – no confidence – no foundation on which to evaluate the influence and input of others. Fall for anything.

We should strive to find the proper balance between being open-hearted and open-minded versus being gullible (accepting anything and everything without proper discrimination).

“Oh, but I listen when the criticism is ‘delivered’ the right way, with the right tone . . .” This is not maturity – because mature people understand most criticisms are not articulate and well-delivered – they are often simply passing comments or thoughts, of others, that we will grasp or reject instantaneously; that it why it requires discipline to learn to be open-minded in the face of criticism. But the benefits are great – being able to repent makes it several times easier to learn and it makes life a WHOLE lots easier!

Or someone may say, “I don’t disagree. But I am more sensitive than most people – it is harder for me.” Weaknesses CAN be a blessing if they lead us to work on and improve the area of weakness – just as an initial strength may be a curse if we rest in it. The tortoise CAN beat the hare IF he keeps plodding along.

What advantage is there is being a Christian in learning this discipline? There is no better, purer or more concentrated place to find input for repentance than the Bible – God’s plan is for us to be continually improving through repentance. Even if we seem to have “gotten it” now, changing seasons of life will bring necessities for repentance – what works, and is right, today may not be for tomorrow!

Yes, God accepts us “as we are.” But He IMMEDIATELY begins to change us – through the discipline of repentance. There is no joy without repentance – because the joy that brings improvements comes through repentance. Not only is the “Joy Of Repentance” not an Oxymoron – it is an inevitability.

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O **LORD**, give me a mind and heart to accept the potential long-term benefits of criticism (in short, give me this blessing of humility) rather than being defensive and overly sensitive (being prideful and rejecting all input and criticism) and losing the benefit and development from criticism. Give me the wisdom of evaluating “everything and holding on to that which is good.” Make me hypersensitive to the blessings of grace rather than the relatively minor costs of criticism. Give me the patience and persistence to develop the discipline of repenting – repenting better and better, quicker and quicker.