

Speaking to the soul



Criticism

In the end, people appreciate honest criticism far more than flattery. Proverbs 28:23

The first three words are crucial in this verse! At first, probably all of us would rather be overwhelmed by flattery than offered criticism. We all want to be loved and to have people tell us how wonderful we are. However, in the end, honest criticism is far more valuable, and we should be forever grateful for those words of wisdom that give us insight and enable us to live better lives.

When I learned to drive, my driving instructor had a background in training police drivers and was very demanding. At the time, his words were strong and could even sound rather harsh, but I haven't forgotten them and, as I look back now, I am so grateful for the guidance he gave. If he had showered me with unqualified praise, it wouldn't have been any help to me or other road users!

The problem with flattery is that it is like candy floss: it has no substance. Edmund Burke, the 18th-century politician, said: "Flattery corrupts both the receiver and giver." Its power to corrupt lies in the fact that it's a distortion of the truth. It is therefore deeply misleading, and no relationship that is built on it could be secure. The beauty of well-judged and loving criticism is that it fearlessly offers the truth but does so with the single intention of building the other person up.

The apostle Paul sums this up best when he talks about speaking the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). Truth often has sharp edges and it can be difficult both to receive and to share, but when our words have been baptised in love, even the sharpest observations will be a blessing.

QUESTION

What was the last piece of honest criticism that you received, and how did it affect you? When did you last have enough courage and love to share honest criticism with others?

PRAYER

Loving God, teach me to love other people so much that I will be willing to share the truth with them, and help me always to receive criticism from others with patience and grace. Amen

