

Speaking to the soul



Criticism

To one who listens, valid criticism is like a gold earring or other gold jewellery.. Proverbs 25:12

Johannes Kepler, the German astronomer, said: “I much prefer the sharpest criticism of a single intelligent man to the thoughtless approval of the masses.” All I can say is, “Good for Johannes Kepler!” I suspect I’m not alone with that response, as we all really enjoy people saying nice things about us. Sharp criticism might be very good for us, but that doesn’t mean that it is easy to hear, even if it is as valuable as a gold earring.

There are two challenges here. Firstly, how can we become better at sharing valid criticism with others? Every time I have received helpful criticism it is because it has been embedded within encouragement. It has been clear that the person offering the criticism was trying to help and only wanted to make me stronger and better able to use my gifts. It has often been said that if you need to offer criticism, 80 per cent of what you say should be encouragement. This isn’t a clever political ploy, but a way of ensuring that the criticism is set securely within a relationship of affirmation. If the criticism occupies 80 per cent or more of what you say, it could easily bring discouragement and leave the hearer wounded and demoralised.

The second question is how can we become better at receiving criticism? People’s ability to receive criticism undoubtedly varies. Past hurts and traumas make some people very wary of anything that is not entirely positive. Others appear to be so secure that they are able to receive even negative criticism with equanimity. The people who are most vulnerable are those who have never reflected deeply on their life and how they come across. This emphasises the importance of us all finding someone with whom we can be completely honest. If we are regularly reflecting with a person who cares for us and knows us well and with whom

we can reveal our vulnerabilities and concerns, we are in a strong position to receive criticism. Indeed, we are likely to find that it is as valuable as a piece of gold jewellery.

QUESTION

In what ways could you give and receive criticism more effectively?

PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ, help me to be more loving in offering criticism to others, and more gracious in receiving it. Amen

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