You Can Make a Difference through Encouraging Words

# Scripture Proverbs 10:11-21; 16:24; Eph. 4:29

# Key Thought: You can make a difference in someone's life through encouraging words.

# Introduction

Example: 2nd Helping of Chicken Soup p. 211 -- Purple

The power of criticism versus that power of encouragement! In this series of messages on relationships, it is appropriate that we spend one message talking about criticism versus encouragement, the power in the words we use in relating to one another.

# An over-developed habit of criticism can be hurtful.

## Language matters. The fact is that some language is kind and loving, encouraging and uplifting and other choices of words can wound and deeply discourage.

What are the results of put-downs and criticism?

* + 1. In H Norman Wright's book The Family That Listens p. 65
       1. A critical attitude and critical words hinders communication between parents and children.
    2. Some other results of faultfinding by Sven Wahlroos quoted by H. Norman Wright in The Pillars of Marriage pp 30,31 (wording altered slightly)
       1. Fault-finding expresses a lack of acceptance of people.
       2. A constant barrage of criticisms increases feelings of hostility.
       3. Fault-finding backfires because the victim either turns you off, counterattacks or stores up resentment against you.
       4. Fault-finding is ineffective in changing the behavior of others.
       5. When you have a truly significant and necessary criticism to make- you are powerless, because people around you have quit listening.
       6. Fault-finding tends to teach unreasonableness and intolerance.

## How do we distinguish genuine helpful evaluation and critique from unhealthy fault-finding and disparagement?

* + - 1. Distinguishing between legitimate analysis and attempts to review performance with a goal to help versus habitual fault-finding is essential.

“Criticism must be discriminate and take into account the fact that no human being is perfect and that there are many matters which are so unimportant that they should be ignored… When criticism becomes indiscriminate it is faultfinding and it leads to most destructive consequences.” (H. Norman Wright quotes Sven Wahlroos p. 82 The Family That Listens)

* + - 1. Wholesome criticism has the purpose of building up rather than tearing down.
      2. Analysis is specific; fault-finding is frequently broad using words like “always” and “never.”
      3. Helpful criticism his well-seasoned with grace. H. Norman Wright suggests that the ratio of praise to criticism should be 80-90 percent to 10-20 percent. The Family That Listens P. 84

## The habit of fault-finding or over-criticism has many roots

* + - 1. Perhaps the most common is misdirecting or inappropriately expressed anger. Family That Listens p. 83
         1. Example: Your elderly mother calls for the fourth time today and this time she wants you to take her to town again. She forgot something. You reluctantly agree but are fuming inside. Your kids come home from school just as you are about to leave. Suddenly, they can’t do anything right! Why?
         2. Taking out our anger verbally on others is not only unkind, it is dishonest. Beware of what your anger will do.

Ex. One day while at my previous church, I took a letter to post office in the morning. I wanted to make the 9 AM postal truck. But I was informed that the truck time had been changed to 7:15 AM. I was angry inside but wore a smile as I said, "I didn't think there was anyone here at that hour." Later that morning in prayer the Lord reminded me of those critical words. I called and apologized for my not-so-veiled frustration.

Bible says, "Man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires." James 1:20

* + - * 1. We need a better way to cope with our anger

Strive to recognize our anger and admit it to ourselves. Then evaluate whether the source is worth being angry about or not.

Confess our anger to God, and ask his help in dealing with it.

If the anger is appropriate, choose a healthy expression.

* + - 1. A second reason we are overly critical is because we are projecting our own shortcomings onto the other person. We have inner feelings of inadequacy. We lash out verbally at others, giving them the criticism we have internalized. Family That Listens p. 83

Ex. At work, you have just come from a meeting where you felt quite unprepared and inadequate. Now you are in a meeting with one of your direct reports. You find yourself being much more critical than usual! Afterwards, you have the presence of mind to ask yourself how much your attitude in that second meeting was affected by what happened in the previous one!

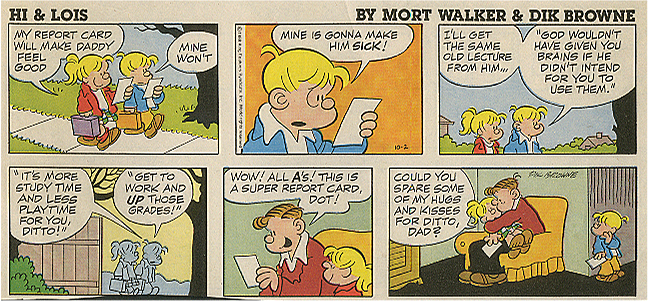
* + - * 1. Perhaps this was part of what Jesus was talking about when he said, "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye, when all the time there is a plank in your own eye." (Matt. 7:3)

A better way is to acknowledge our own shortcomings, accept responsibility for them and work on them.

* + - 1. Untempered perfectionist expectations provide another source of a critical attitude.
         1. This is often an error of parents who expect too much from their kids.

While it's true that you get what you expect, if expectations are not tempered with grace and encouragement, they will backfire.

* + - 1. Jealousy
         1. Ex. Someone else's Sunday school class or small group is growing, yours is not - you criticize the other teacher for bringing in cookies every week. Are you just jealous of her success?
         2. Will Durant: "To speak ill of others is a dishonest way of praising ourselves."
         3. Hi and Lois Cartoon from my sermon “The Power of Encouraging Words”



* + 1. Scriptures admonishing against
       1. Rom 14:13 Phillips "Let us therefore stop turning critical eyes on one another. If we must be critical, let us be critical of our own conduct and see that we do nothing to make a brother stumble or fall."

# Encouraging words make a positive difference.

## Let's change our critical words to encouraging words as the Scripture admonishes us.

**The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life.” Proverbs 10:11**

**“The lips of the righteous nourish many.” Proverbs 10:21**

**“Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.” Proverbs 12:18**

**“ A wise man's heart guides his mouth, and his lips promote instruction.” Proverbs 16:23**

**Prov. 16:24 "Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones."**

**Ephesians 4:29 “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.”**

* + 1. Encouraging words are simply obedience to the command to take every opportunity to do good.
       1. ill. p 32 of Chicken Soup vol. 1 -man who told cab driver he was doing a good job.
  1. Results of an encouraging word
     1. Relationships are sweetened. Prov. 16:24 – people appreciate encouragement.
     2. We can strengthen someone else’s spirit. (Prov. 10:21) -- they will be able to stand straighter and face their day with more courage because you spoke a good word.
     3. You contribute to inner healing for two – you, and the person you spoke to (Prov. 16:24)
        1. Poem "Children Learn What They Live" p. 85,86 Chicken Soup vol 1
     4. Encouraging words are contagious
        1. ill. p. 19 Chicken Soup vol 1 - Who You are makes a difference. Boy who started a chain of honoring.

1. Conclusion
   1. Take sheet or card and write an encouraging word to someone.