

The Value of Your Wife's Criticism

Dr. David B. Hawkins

*Editor's Note: Do you need sound, Biblically-based advice on an issue in your marriage or family? Dr. David Hawkins, director of the **Marriage Recovery Center**, will address questions from Crosswalk readers in his weekly column. Submit your question to [**TheRelationshipDoctor@gmail.com**](mailto:TheRelationshipDoctor@gmail.com).*

I hate criticism. My wife, Christie, is the first one who can accurately attest to this. As hard as I try, it never feels good to come up short as a husband in my wife's eyes. Yet, without exception, when she criticizes me, there is at least a kernel (and often a mountain) of truth in her words.

Thankfully Christie has always been fair in her appraisal of my actions. She is not easily offended and offers criticism sparingly. She overlooks the trifles of life such as the dirty gym clothes lying on the bedroom floor, sharp words spoken when I'm tired and even my occasional forgetfulness.

When criticism comes, I deserve it.

As I attempt to mature as a man and husband, I'm forever looking for ways to handle criticism more effectively. I want to be seen as a man who can listen to Christie's concerns without undue defensiveness. I value an open and honest relationship. To that end, I've discovered an even more powerful strategy.

I've discovered a way of looking at criticism that has become even more helpful, helping to dispel a potential overreaction to Christie's concerns. *God expects me to meet her needs, sacrificially loving her as Christ loved the church.* "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her." (Ephesians 5: 25)

Wow! All along I've been protecting my ego from her criticisms when all along God expects even more out of me. He expects me to put my ego aside and love her unconditionally. When I fail to meet God's standards, I can expect my wife to become dissatisfied. I should expect her to become dissatisfied.

Consider, men, the importance of this Scripture and the value it can have in your marriage.

First, we can embrace criticism as a message from God. If our mate complains about our behavior or attitudes, nearly always it has some measure of truth to it. Consider the truth latent in her concern and see if there is some legitimate message from God. Receive it with the knowledge that God is the Ultimate Messenger, not simply your wife.

Second, consider the message to be learned. Have you failed to love her and make her feel secure? Have you created an environment where she might feel unloved? Is it

possible that your actions have caused her undue stress and consternation? If the answer is "yes," consider yourself having not met God's standards.

Third, thank her for the message. Rather than having an attitude of resistance and defensiveness, receive it with an open heart. Endeavor to not think of yourself as being above any criticism, but rather someone who needs to hear from your wife. You need not expect yourself to be perfect, but you do need to have an open attitude toward her concerns. Criticism is a unique opportunity to mature and improve your character. You owe her this as your wife, and as an emissary for God.

Fourth, honor your wife for having the courage to tell you information you need to hear. While her criticism may not feel good at the moment, she must be honored for bringing the issue to your attention. Scripture tells us that, "No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it." (Hebrews 12: 11)

Finally, determine to improve on her concerns. As surely as you would never ignore a letter from God, (the Bible) you should never ignore a message from your wife. Treat her message as a standard set by God. Treat the message with the sobriety it deserves, validating it and vowing to improve upon her concerns. This honors both your wife and God.