

SEASONED WITH SALT

A GOSPEL GUIDE TO CRITICISM



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Speaking the Truth in Love

Criticism is something we all give and receive. But how we do it, and why, matters deeply. For Christians, our words are never neutral. They have the power to build up or tear down, to heal or to wound. That's why Scripture calls us to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15), and to let our speech be "always gracious, seasoned with salt" (Colossians 4:6). So what does gospel-shaped, biblical criticism look like?

1. It Must Be Constructive

The goal of criticism is restoration and growth, not just pointing out flaws. Biblical correction is never about tearing down, it's about building others up (Ephesians 4:29). True criticism answers the question: How can I help this person thrive in Christ? Constructive doesn't mean sugar-coating. But it does mean your aim is redemptive, not destructive. "Let all that you do be done in love."

2. It Must Come from Love

Check your motives. Are you criticizing because you're frustrated, offended, or want to feel superior? Or are you moved by love for their good? Philippians 2:3 reminds us, "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves." If it's about you, your reputation, your preferences, your pride, then it's not gospel-shaped. Criticism that flows from love seeks the good of the other, not the relief of your own emotions.

3. Tone Matters: Gentle, Patient, Kind

Biblical correction must reflect the fruit of the Spirit: love, patience, kindness, gentleness (Galatians 5:22-23). The right message in the wrong tone is still wrong. Paul tells Timothy to correct opponents with gentleness, hoping that God may lead them to repentance (2 Timothy 2:24-25). Even when confronting sin, we do so gently, as those who also need grace (Galatians 6:1).

4. Do You Also Encourage?

If you only ever speak when something is wrong, and never when things go well, you're not correcting, you're condemning. Paul often starts his letters by encouraging believers before offering correction (1 Corinthians 1:4-9). That reflects God's heart: He doesn't only discipline His children, He also delights in them. "Encourage one another and build one another up." (1 Thessalonians 5:11) Criticism divorced from encouragement becomes demoralizing. Encouragement without correction becomes shallow. The gospel holds both together.

5. If You Can't Take It, Don't Dish It Out

Jesus warns us about hypocrisy: "Why do you see the speck in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log in your own?" (Matthew 7:3). If you're quick to correct but resistant to receive correction, that's a warning sign. A humble heart is both willing to give and receive godly criticism.

6. Watch the Timing: Criticism Needs Space

Avoid bringing criticism immediately after someone has served, whether they've just preached, led worship, cooked, or helped. At those times, they're often emotionally spent and more vulnerable. Also, you probably haven't had time to reflect either. Don't let your words be reactionary. Proverbs 15:28 says, "The heart of the righteous ponders how to answer." Take a moment. Pray. Wait. Come back later with thoughtfulness, not raw reaction.

7. Start With Care: Check in First

Before correcting someone, ask: How are they doing? Are they going through something painful? Are they already discouraged? Is this the best time? Relational credibility matters. People are more open to correction when they know you genuinely care. If your words aren't preceded by love, they won't land in the heart.

8. Go to Them, Not Others

Jesus gives clear instruction in Matthew 18:15; if your brother sins, go to him. Not to your friends. Not to your group chat. Not to your spouse. Go to them. Talking about people instead of to them is gossip, not godly correction. It breeds distrust and division. It may feel easier, but it's never faithful.

Before you criticise ask yourself:

- Is this loving?
- Is this necessary?
- Is this wise?
- Is this seasoned with grace?

"Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person." - Colossians 4:6

Hearing the Truth in Humility

Receiving well-meant, thoughtful criticism is still hard. But how we respond reveals a lot about our humility, maturity, and understanding of the gospel. Receiving criticism well is a sign of spiritual maturity. It shows you're more committed to Christlikeness. Here's a short, gospel-shaped guide on receiving well-meaning criticism.

*"Let the righteous strike me,
it is a kindness.
Let him rebuke me,
it is oil for my head.
Let my head not refuse it."*

Psalm 141:5

1. Start With Humility

"God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." Assume that you don't see everything clearly. You're a sinner in need of grace, and you have blind spots like everyone else. A humble heart is teachable, not defensive. Ask yourself: What if they're right? Even partly right?

2. Listen First, Don't React

"Let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger." Resist the urge to interrupt, explain, or justify. Just listen. You may feel misunderstood at first, but understanding can come after listening. Your first job is to hear them out completely.

3. Assume Good Intentions

"Love believes all things, hopes all things". If someone is offering thoughtful, loving criticism, assume they mean well, especially if they've proven themselves to care about you. Don't let your insecurities project ill motives onto someone acting in love.

4. Ask Clarifying Questions

"The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice." Don't rush to conclusions. With a humble posture, ask things like:

- "Can you give me an example?"
- "Is there something I could've done differently?"
- "How did that come across?"

5. Thank Them

"Wounds from a friend can be trusted." It takes courage and care for someone to speak up. Honour that. Thank them for taking the time and risking discomfort to speak into your life. That's love.

6. Take Time to Reflect

Not all feedback needs to be responded to instantly. It's okay to say:

"Thank you for sharing that. I need a bit of time to process it and pray."

Give yourself space to sort through what's true, what may be exaggerated, and what's helpful for your growth.

7. Bring It Before the Lord

Ask God:

- "Is there truth here I'm resisting?"
- "What does repentance or change look like for me?"
- "How does this shape me into Christlikeness?"

The gospel allows you to face flaws without fear, because your identity isn't in your performance; it's in Christ.

8. Make Changes Where Needed

If the feedback is accurate and helpful, respond with action, not just words. Real repentance isn't defensive, it's willing to change.

9. Don't Let It Define You

Even fair criticism doesn't define who you are. The cross does. You are loved, forgiven, growing, and being sanctified. Don't let correction turn into condemnation.

Discussion and Reflection Questions

Part 1: Giving Criticism

1. What motivates you when you offer criticism?
 - Is it love for the other person? Frustration? A desire to be seen as right?
 - How can you better discern your heart before speaking?
2. How would someone describe your tone when you correct others?
 - Gentle? Sarcastic? Harsh? Avoidant?
 - Where might your tone be misaligned with gospel love?
3. Do you balance criticism with encouragement?
 - Think of the last few conversations where you corrected someone, did you also affirm what's good?
 - Do you tend to encourage and point out what's good in others?
4. When is the last time you gave feedback too quickly, without prayer or reflection?
 - What could have gone differently if you waited?
5. How can Jesus' way of speaking truth in love shape your next hard conversation?

Heart-Check Questions:

- Do I pray before I give criticism?
- Do I care more about being helpful or being right?
- Am I trying to win a person, or win an argument?
- Is my ultimate goal healing, holiness, or control?
- How can I use my words today to reflect Jesus' gentleness and truth?

Part 2: Receiving Criticism

1. What's your usual response when someone corrects you?
 - Do you shut down, defend, lash out, or genuinely listen?
2. Why is it hard for you to receive criticism, even when it's meant for your good?
 - Is it fear of failure? Shame? A need to be seen as competent?
3. Have you ever received poorly given criticism that was still partially true?
 - How did you respond?
 - How could the gospel have helped you respond better?
4. Who in your life can speak hard truths to you, and how do you show that you welcome it?
5. How does your identity in Christ free you to receive feedback without fear or defensiveness?
 - Reflect on how the gospel speaks into your desire to be approved, affirmed, or justified.

Example Prayers

When You've Given Harsh Criticism

Father, forgive me. I spoke in a way that lacked grace. I was too harsh, too quick, too selfish. I see now that I cared more about being right than being loving. Thank You that Your mercy covers even this. My hope is not in how well I speak, but in how perfectly Christ has spoken for me. Help me go back in humility, to seek forgiveness and make things right. Teach me to speak like Jesus, full of grace and truth. Let my words bring healing, not harm.

When You're About to Give Loving Criticism

Father, help me speak with both truth and love. You see this person fully, far better than I do. You know their heart, their burdens, and what they need to hear. Help me not to speak from pride, frustration, or fear, but from love. Let my words be clear, kind, and gracious. Give me the courage to say what is needed, and the humility to say only what is helpful. Guard me from harshness, sarcasm, or self-righteousness. Make me a vessel of Your care, not just a voice of correction. May this conversation serve their good and reflect Your heart.

When You've Received Harsh Criticism

Father, You see my heart. What was said hurt. It was unfair, unkind, poorly timed. I feel defensive, discouraged, angry. But You are my refuge and my righteousness. Help me not to return harshness for harshness. Guard my heart from bitterness. Even in this, help me to be humble. If there's truth, help me receive it. If not, help me let it go in grace. Thank You that Jesus was wrongly judged, yet never sinned in return. Make me more like Him. Heal what stings, soften what's hard, and let my identity rest in You, not in anyone's opinion of me.

When You've Received Healthy, Helpful Criticism

Father, thank You for loving me enough to grow me. I'm grateful for the courage and care it took to speak truth into my life. I know this was for my good, and I want to receive it with humility. But it still stings. Being corrected is never easy. Thank You that my worth isn't in getting it all right, but in being Yours. Help me not to withdraw or get discouraged, but to listen, reflect, and grow. Shape me through this, gently, deeply, and more into the image of Jesus.

Scripture Passages on Giving Criticism Well

Ephesians 4:15 - *"Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ."*

Criticism must combine truth with love. It's about helping others grow toward Christ, not just making a point.

Proverbs 27:6 - *"Faithful are the wounds of a friend"*

Real love includes honest correction, even when it hurts. A true friend is willing to speak hard truths.

Galatians 6:1 - *"Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently."*

Correction should always aim at gentle restoration, not condemnation.

Proverbs 25:11–12 - *"A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver. Like a gold ring or an ornament of gold is a wise reprover to a listening ear."*

Timely, wise words of correction are beautiful and valuable when delivered with skill and grace.

Colossians 4:6 - *"Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person."*

Even correction should be flavoured with grace. Not biting, but thoughtful and wise.

2 Timothy 2:24–25 - *"And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness."*

Criticism should be done with kindness, patience, and gentleness, not quarrelsomeness.

Matthew 18:15 - "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother."

Correction should be personal, not public, with the goal of restoration and reconciliation.

James 1:19-20 - "Let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God."

Criticism must not be driven by impulse or emotion, but by wisdom and restraint.

Proverbs 15:1 - "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger."

The tone of your words matters just as much as the content.

Romans 15:1-2 - "We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbour for his good, to build him up."

Correction should never be self-serving. Its goal is to build up, not tear down.

Scripture Passages on Receiving Criticism Well

Proverbs 9:8–9 - “Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you; reprove a wise man, and he will love you. Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; teach a righteous man, and he will increase in learning.”

The wise welcome correction because they know it helps them grow.

Proverbs 12:1 - “Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates reproof is stupid.”

A teachable spirit is a mark of maturity and wisdom. Rejecting correction is foolishness.

Proverbs 15:31–32 - “The ear that listens to life-giving reproof will dwell among the wise. Whoever ignores instruction despises himself, but he who listens to reproof gains intelligence.”

Wise people invite feedback. They see reproof as life-giving, not threatening.

Psalms 141:5 - “Let a righteous man strike me, it is a kindness; let him rebuke me, it is oil for my head; let my head not refuse it.”

Even painful correction can be a gift from God when given in righteousness.

James 1:19–21 - “Let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.”

Receiving criticism well means slowing down, listening fully, and resisting defensive anger.

Proverbs 17:10 - “A rebuke goes deeper into a man of understanding than a hundred blows into a fool.”

The wise let even one word of correction sink in. The foolish resist even repeated warnings.



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