

No one is above criticism

A life lesson I've tried to instil in my son was prompted by the adage: "until a word is spoken you are its master. Once spoken, you are its slave".

My dad had a different spin on it. He often reprimanded me as a young lad to make sure that my mind was in gear before I put my tongue in motion. If only I heeded the advice all the time.

A popular expression in the 1960's went something like this; "I like me 'cos God don't make junk!" Admittedly, it is poor grammar but profoundly Biblical. Each one of us bear the image of our creator God and when that is impinged upon in any way, it may prompt us to react in ways we might later regret.

After all, everyone needs to feel good about themselves. Therefore, whenever we are criticised our instinct is to become defensive – at worse, we may even resort to violence in order to defend our personal dignity.

None of us are immunised against receiving criticism. We have the choice as to how we will respond to our critics. Not all criticism is bad, even if it is harsh or in poor taste – or the intention is to hurt rather than help us to improve.

Notwithstanding, there seems to be a mood in our country that regards criticism as akin to disliking someone or even "selling out" if it is against a cause regarded as noble. Nothing can be further from the truth. Jesus was not above criticism, and therefore we are not above it either.

Dealing with criticism from others is easier than dealing with our harshest critic - ourselves. Harder yes, but not impossible, for there is a way to process criticism.

I need to add a word of caution at this juncture: beware, you are potentially your harshest critic. Whilst you can walk away from the criticism of others, walking away from yourself is impossible. Therefore, be mindful of always dealing gently with yourself.

Nonetheless, criticism provides an opportunity to modify our position or behaviour on a particular matter. Provided we understand that not all criticism is harsh or distasteful, it can present an opportunity for us to become a better person.

In most instances one can safely ignore criticism from a single source, or perhaps a few questionable sources.

However, be careful about disregarding criticism from someone who knows you intimately and is likely to point out things that other people will not or dare not because you may have the tendency to lose it with them.

First prize is to hear criticism from other people and walk away smiling.

Listen to this delightful story: A preacher stepped into the pulpit one Sunday morning to deliver his sermon.

As he put his bible on the pulpit there was a paper with the word "fool" written on it.

He lifted the paper for the congregation to see then announced, "Generally I receive letters from people who write and forget to sign their name. This letter is different. The person signed his name but forgot to write the letter."

Do not allow unjustified criticism to settle on you. Let it roll off your back. Do take note of what you hear: if the same criticisms keep coming up from multiple and trusted sources then it may be justified.

In which case you need to accept it, learn from it, and change what is necessary to become a better person. Understand this: criticism is a part of life. How we handle it makes us who we are.

The last word needs to belong to Joshua 1:9, "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go".

Be strong in the faith.

Edward Daniels, Bishop of the Anglican Diocese of Port Elizabeth