

My Experiment With Fault-Finding

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I learned long ago that my day gets off to a poor start unless I can begin with at least a brief period of worship and prayer. Often during this time, I ask, "Lord, do You have any special word for me today?"

One morning a few months ago, He gave me, in thought, an answer especially clear and, to say the least, startling. He reminded me of a Scripture passage I had not thought of in a long time: "So don't criticize each other anymore." (Romans 14:13, LB). My assignment: For one day I was to go on a "fast"—not from food, but from faultfinding. I was to accept people as they were and simply drop my judgment.

A confession is in order here. I am inclined to be a perfectionist. This had made me highly critical, first, of myself, then, of others—a habit that tends toward judgment.

Into my mind crowded all the usual objections... But then, what happens to value judgments? You, Yourself, Lord, spoke of judging not according to appearance, but of "righteous judgment." (John 7:24). What does that mean? How can society operate without using the intelligence You gave us for analysis and thoughtful evaluations?

All such protest was brushed aside. "Just obey Me without questioning: an absolute fast on any fault-finding for this day."

For the first half of the day, I felt nothing so much as a void, almost as if I had become a cipher of a person. This was especially true at luncheon with my husband Len, my mother and my secretary Jeanne.

A variety of topics came up—national news and church issues, local, and neighborhood happenings. Dog training and leash laws were discussed in connection with a friend who had been attacked by a German shepherd. I listened and kept quiet as the others voiced their thoughts.

Following that, I choked back strong feelings about death-dealing motorcycles as Len spoke of a young relative who had just bought one. I continued my silence when talk shifted to the older teenager who helps herself to fruit off our trees, then gives it to her Sunday-school teacher.

Bemused, I observed that my comments were not missed. But still I did not begin to see what this fast on criticism was accomplishing—until mid-afternoon.

Ideas then began to flow in a way I had not experienced in many months. Now it was apparent what the Lord wanted me to see. My critical nature had been stifling creativity—perhaps even the ideas that He wanted to give me.

For several years, I had been praying for a talented young man whose life had got sidetracked. Perhaps my prayers for him had been too negative. That afternoon, a specific, positive vision for his life was dropped into my mind, with God's unmistakable hallmark on it—joy. I was

told to share this dream with him.

With absolute clarity I was given the outline of a letter I should write to an old friend not heard from in years. It was to be a message simply of love and appreciation.

Next, I was to ask forgiveness of one of our children for a flare-up of anger at him. I was also to release him from my opinion on a decision he was trying to make; he should have the freedom to get his own guidance from God. "As a parent you must not seek to control him," came the message.

"And no manipulation."

It was now evening and the lesson for that amazing day was complete: My critical spirit had stifled creativity, blocked a creative vision for another's life, prevented an expression of love, hurt a close family relationship through seeking to control.

After pondering this experience and sharing it with a Bible study group, I've begun to think that families, churches and our society generally need to consider the destructive power of the fault-finding, critical spirit—and to discover what happens when we turn it off.

I've continued to experiment with days of fasting from criticism, and what I've learned so far can be summed up as follows:

1. Whatever we see wrong in another, rather than criticizing him directly, or talking to someone else about it, try praying about it. Ask the Spirit of God to do the correcting Himself directly with the individual.
2. A carping, judgmental spirit focuses us in on ourselves and makes us unhappy, even has an ill-effect on us physically. We lose perspective and human.
3. Such a fault-finding spirit blocks the positive, creative thoughts God longs to give us in the direction of solutions to our problems.
4. A critical spirit can prevent good relationship between individuals and often produces retaliatory criticism, as Jesus warns in Matthew 7:1-5.

This Scripture seems to wrap it up for me: "So do not criticize at all; the hour of reckoning has still to come, when the Lord will come to bring dark secrets to the light and to reveal life's inner aims and motives. Then each of us will get his meed of praise from God." (1 Corinthians 4:5, Moffatt.)

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