

Strength in Times of Criticism: Job 4: 1-21

Criticism is the expression of disapproval of someone or something based on perceived faults or mistakes. Each of us experiences criticism from time to time at what we are not doing right or what desirable qualities we seem to lack. Such a perceived lack of goodness brings about a perceived state of badness. No wonder those criticized over a long period conclude, "I'm worthless. I'm not good. I can't make it. I'll never do any better," etc. They have been fed wrong messages and lost sight of what they are. In some cases, it is part of discipline to teach us how to improve a particular skill, attitude, or behavior. Pervasive criticism, however, can have a wounding and weakening effect. If you have received negative messages like you weren't good for anything, weren't worth anything, and would never amount to anything, etc., you may be weighed down, which affects your life energy.

Job's friends criticize him for a disaster that he did not cause. Job's friends cannot endure the mystery of his suffering, so they jump to conclusions about its source. The first of the three, Eliphaz, acknowledges that Job has been a source of strength to others (Job 4:3-4). But then he turns and blames Job's suffering squarely on Job himself. Job 4:7-8 says, "Stop and think! Do the innocent die? When have the upright been destroyed? My experience shows that those who plant trouble and cultivate evil will harvest the same." Job's second friend, Bildad, in Job 8:20, says much the same. "But look, God will not reject a person of integrity, nor will he lend a hand to the wicked." The third friend, Zophar, repeats the refrain in Job 11:14-15, 17. "If only you would prepare your heart and lift up your hands to him in prayer! Get rid of your sins, and leave all iniquity behind you. Then your face will brighten with innocence. You will be strong and free of fear. ... Your life will be brighter than the noonday. Even darkness will be as bright as morning." The basic premise of Job's three friends is that "Do what is right and life will go well for you; do what is wrong, and God will send pain and punishment." We can learn from how Job handled that criticism. He got the right opinion about himself, Job 6: 14; "One should be kind to a fainting friend, but you accuse me without any fear of the Almighty."

According to God's Word, His opinion about you is in Ephesians 2: 10 "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." First, God says you are His handiwork. You are God's creation, and He is a Master Craftsman who produces only valuable people. Second, God says He removed your sinful nature when you believe in Christ as your Saviour. Once you received Jesus as your Saviour, that sin nature was changed. You are forgiven; live that reality. Third, God says He has created and saved you for a future of good works. God has a purpose in mind, a role for you to fill and a place to live.

Conclusion: Maybe today, you carry emotional baggage associated with intense or pervasive criticism. You are expressing the criticism in various self-demeaning actions or self-deprecating statements. You have been saying, "Nobody cared," "I had never heard a word of praise when I was growing up," and "Nobody ever said I was doing a good job," etc. All these statements and many more will damage us on the inside if we allow them to become part of our life. It will wound us in our emotions. I challenged you today to receive strength in times of criticism by getting the correct opinion about yourself as His handiwork; He has removed your sinful nature and created and saved you for a purpose.