DEALING WITH CRITICISM

Weighing Every Word Without Losing Your Heart

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Preface

Every one of us has been spoken about.
A word reached you that you did not ask for. Someone weighed your work, your manner, your ministry, your life, and found it wanting. Sometimes the word came to your face. More often it came back to you from behind.

I wrote of familiarity, of offence, of envy, of murmuring and of bitterness.
Those books dealt with what grows inside the heart.
This one deals with what comes to the heart from outside.
It deals with the word spoken about you.

In *Don't Mind Them* I wrote to the forerunner: the one who sees before others see, who builds while they laugh, who must not be ruled by the noise. That word stands. But there is a second word every servant of God must learn.
Not every voice is noise.
Some criticism is the noise of men. Some is the correction of God, carried to you in the mouth of a man.
And the heart that cannot tell them apart will be crushed by the first and deaf to the second.

So this book is about weighing.
Not swallowing every word.
Not throwing every word away.
Weighing it.

Every leader has been spoken against. Moses was. Paul was. Our Lord Himself was. If you lead anything — a home, a department, a fellowship, a church, a nation — you will be. And every believer, leader or not, will hear a word about himself and have to decide what to do with it.

This book has two parts.
The first is for the heart that hears the word: yours and mine.
The second is for the one who must lead a house through it, and keep his own tongue clean while he does.

You will not find here a way to make criticism stop. It will not stop.
You will find the way to weigh it, and keep your heart.

May these pages teach you to keep the gold and release the dross.
May they free you from every voice that was never sent.
May they open your ear to every word that God has sent.
And may every leader who reads them keep the door open and the tongue clean.

Weigh every word.
Keep your heart.
Let the Lord have the last word.

— Emmanuel Mukisa

PART

One

When the Word Is Spoken About You

CHAPTER

1

The Nature of Criticism

A word spoken about you is not yet a word spoken over you.

Before we see what to do with criticism, hear what it is.

The English dictionary defines criticism as "the act of expressing disapproval of somebody/something and opinions about their faults or bad qualities" (*Oxford Learner's Dictionaries*).

Hear the heart of it: *disapproval*, and *opinions*.

Criticism is an opinion about your faults, spoken by someone who disapproves. It may be true. It may be false. It may be half of each. But until it is weighed, it is an opinion.

The same dictionary gives a second sense: the careful work of judging the good and the bad in a thing, as a critic judges a book or a piece of music. So the word carries two faces. One is the fault-finder. The other is the judge who weighs.

The English word has a history, and the history tells us what to do with it. It comes to us through the Latin *criticus* from the Greek *kritikos*, "able to make judgments", and that from the verb *krinein*, "to separate, to decide". Beneath that verb is an old root that meant to sieve.

At the root of the word, a critic is one who sieves.

Hear it: the word that wounds you was first a word for sifting. And that is what you must do with it. Sift it. Separate the

grain from the chaff. Keep what is true. Let the rest fall through.

The New Testament gives us the word Paul used when Corinth sat in judgment over him: "But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self. For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord" (1 Corinthians 4:3–4).

The word is *anakrinō*. It belongs to the family of *krinō*, and it means to examine, to question, to sift a matter closely. It was the word for an examination before a judge.

Corinth had put Paul on trial. They examined his speech, his presence, his letters, his manner. And Paul answered by naming three judges: you, myself, and the Lord. Two of them he set aside. One he kept.

The Old Testament gives us two words, because there are two kinds of criticism.

The first is *dibbah*: slander, an evil report, a defaming word. "He that hideth hatred with lying lips, and he that uttereth a slander, is a fool" (Proverbs 10:18). David knew it: "For I have heard the slander of many: fear was on every side" (Psalm 31:13). *Dibbah* is the word that goes about behind a man's back to bring him down.

The second is *tokachat*: reproof, correction. "The ear that