



## Whose Voice Are You Listening To?

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How to keep criticism from derailing us from God's calling

We live in a world that has no shortage of opinions. We post Yelp reviews about restaurants we love or hate, we like things on Facebook and favorite them on Twitter. The world we live in wants to critique, and review, and quantify everything. Every experience is rate-able, up for review, and open for critique. How many stars, how many likes, how many page views?

I'm a mom, and I'm a writer. That means that between those two roles, I live in a high feedback zone. In my experience, being a mom is like constantly wearing a sign that says: "Dear Stranger, please tell me how to parent my kids."

And there are some great things about being a writer. Here are two:

1. You get to wear your pajamas to the office.
2. The office is the couch.

There are also some less than great things about being a writer, namely one: reviews. To me, reading reviews is one of the hardest parts of my job. What one person loves is what another person hates. What one person thinks is amazing another person calls total failure. So we wear ourselves out trying to respond and change ourselves according to everything that anyone says, and we end up so tired and so far from God's calling for us.

Your job might be different from mine—it might not involve being evaluated quite so publicly, but no matter what you do, there are all kinds of voices, metrics, and opinions. Many of us are in danger of chasing after the approval of others, living for the affirmation that comes from likes and good reviews. But letting yourself be defined by anything other than the good God who created you on purpose and for a purpose is as meaningless as chasing the wind.

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When we find ourselves facing criticism—when our heads are swirling with voices—what I've learned to do is stop everything, and go back to the very beginning.

### **1. Start with what God says about you.**

Before we do anything, we must start by being grounded in God's great, unconditional love for us. Read these verses slowly, out loud, and let God's love for you write itself on your heart.

*I have loved you with an everlasting love. I have drawn you with loving kindness. Jeremiah 31:3*  
*See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. 1 John 3:1*

*The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing. Zephaniah 3:17*

So much of the biblical narrative is about God calling his people away from idolatry, over and over. When we allow another person's opinion of us to define us, that person becomes an idol, a

substitute for God. People have been caught in this type of idolatry all through history. John 12:43 says of the Pharisees that "they loved praise from men more than praise from God."

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## **2. Hold on to your calling.**

When the criticism kicks up, hold on tight to your calling. Criticism always comes when you try to make a difference, when you try to do something new, when you try to change a system.

In 1 Samuel 15, Saul is Israel's king, and God has given him very clear instructions about how to keep his people safe. But Saul doesn't obey the instructions. God sends the prophet Samuel to talk to Saul. Again and again, Saul says, "I did what God asked me to do." And Samuel repeatedly says, "No, you didn't. If you had done what he asked, your people would be safe." After going back and forth, back and forth, Saul finally says, "I have sinned. I violated the Lord's command and your instructions. I was afraid of the people so I gave in to them" (verse 24).

Saul lost sight of the calling God had given him. He let the voices of the crowd become louder, and it had terrible consequences for him and for his people.

I don't want to be the kind of person who wanders away from the life that God has called me to because the voices of the crowd win out. I don't think you do either. When you have been called to something, I can almost guarantee that you'll receive criticism. Keep your calling right in the forefront of your vision all the time.

## **3. Be a creator, not a critic.**

One of the best parts of being married to another artist is that Aaron and I have an ongoing conversation about what it means to live well as a creative person. In our home we try to make a practice of not speaking negatively about the things that other people create. Of course, we have strong opinions about music and writing and a thousand other things. But we're trying to be on the side of creators, not on the side of the critics. It takes guts and hard work to make things, and even more guts and hard work to share them, so we want to be people who congratulate the effort instead of nitpicking the result.

You don't have to be an artist in the conventional sense to do this. Whatever your work, you're making something—you're making a life, a family, creating an environment in your classroom or your office. It's better to be a creator than a critic.

Solomon knew all about this. He knew that we can waste our lives tearing down other people because we're too scared to get in the game ourselves. He knew this is as meaningless as chasing after the wind. "Do not pay attention to every word people say" (Ecclesiastes 7:21–22).

When the criticism kicks up—and it always will—remember to start with what God says about you. Always hold tight to your calling. And finally, have the courage to be a creator, not a critic. You have been created with great love by a holy God, who made you on purpose and for a purpose. I don't know you personally, but I don't have to know you in order to know that you matter—your life matters, your voice matters, and the calling God has planted deep inside your heart matters.