

Receiving Difficult Feedback

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How do you respond when someone gives you feedback that's difficult to hear? I've responded to feedback in a myriad of ways: ignore it, become defensive, pout, mock, sulk, get angry or retaliate are just some of the ways I've responded in the past. I've got a long way to go and I'm nowhere near perfect when it comes to receiving difficult feedback, but I think I've grown in my ability to handle and appreciate difficult feedback. Slowly, I've come to accept the wisdom offered in Proverbs 27:6, "Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses." The simple truth is this, there are times in my life when I need friends who are willing to offer feedback that may cause pain or hurt in the immediate moment that will lead to growth for the long haul.

I think it's a temptation for most of us who lead to avoid the pain that comes with honest feedback. I love pats on the back, having my ego stroked, being told "good job" or "we couldn't do this without you" but I'm much less excited about hearing the truth offered in honest feedback from someone who cares about me and has my best interest in mind. Now don't get me wrong, we need

encouragement along the way, but we also need those voices in our lives who love us enough to tell us truth that will wound us. Who can call you out on unconfessed sin in your life, challenge you in situations that you've mishandled, or call you to take notice that you're not leading as well as you need to be in a particular situation? I'd like to offer two or three learnings about receiving difficult feedback that can help us as we pursue Christ and all that he has for us.



1. We need friends in our lives who will tell us difficult things that we'd rather not hear. Too many leaders live in isolation or put up barriers that make it nearly impossible for others to offer difficult feedback. We have to help create an environment where others feel safe in offering us the hard truths we so desperately need to hear if we expect to continue to grow and develop as disciples of Jesus. Who are the trusted friends in your life who you've given permission to speak difficult words into your life? I believe it often needs to be that explicit – don't just assume that people know that they're supposed play that role for you. Who do you need to go to today and invite to speak difficult truth into your life so that you can continue to grow and develop?
2. You need to receive the feedback when it's offered. My tendency is to refute, rebut, defend and attempt to prove that the feedback really isn't accurate. When we do this two things happen: 1) we don't really hear what's being offered and 2) we create an environment where the person offering the feedback will be less likely to take the risk to offer difficult feedback in the future. How we respond when the feedback is offered is vitally important. In my own life I've tried to make a point to invite key people in my life to share difficult feedback with me by giving them permission to say hard things to me without the fear of retaliation. That's the first step – invitation. The second is the more difficult – actually receiving the feedback when it comes. To listen and receive

without become defensive is one of the most difficult things I've had to do. It helps me to ask the question "what is the truth in this feedback that I need to hear?"

3. Finally, you need to offer honest appreciation for the feedback when it comes. It's okay to be honest in moments like this, "although this isn't what I want to hear and it's difficult to hear, I appreciate you taking the time to offer this to me and want to you to continue to do so in the future." Again, we need individuals in our lives who love us deeply and who are willing to share difficult feedback so that we can continue to grow into the people God created us to be. When they take the risk to share difficult feedback, we need to show appreciation for their willingness to invest in us.

When was the last time someone shared something really hard that you needed to hear? If it's been a while, why is that the case? How can you develop the relationships you need in order to continue to grow and develop and become the person that God has created you to be?

I'd love to hear more about how you work to receive good feedback so that you continue to grow and mature? Leave a comment about your own learnings when it comes to receiving difficult feedback.

Christ's Peace,
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