

CRITICISM Looking for a role model on how to handle criticism? It would be worth your while to check out the book of Nehemiah. On several occasions this great-hearted statesman was openly criticized, falsely accused, and grossly misunderstood. Each time he kept his cool . . . he rolled with the punch . . . he considered the source . . . he refused to get discouraged . . . he went to God in prayer . . . he kept building the wall (Nehemiah 2:19-30,4:1-5).

One of the occupational hazards of being a leader is receiving criticism (not all of it constructive, by the way). In the face of that kind of heat, there's a strong temptation to 'go under,' 'throw in the towel,' 'bail out.' Many have faded out of leadership because of intense criticism. I firmly believe that the leader who does anything that is different or worthwhile or visionary can count on criticism.

A sense of humor is of paramount importance to the leader. Many of God's servants are simply too serious! There are at least two tests we face that determine the extent of our sense of humor:

- *the ability to laugh at ourselves and
- *the ability to take criticism.

Believe me, no leader can continue effectively if he fails these tests! Equally important, of course, is the ability to sift from any criticism that which is true, that which is fact. We are foolish if we respond angrily to every criticism. Who knows, God may be using those words to teach us some essential lessons, painful though they may be.

Isn't this what Proverbs 27:5-6 is saying? "Better is open rebuke than hidden love. The kisses of an enemy may be profuse, but faithful are the wounds of a friend."

And let me call to your attention the word friend in these verses. Friendship is not threatened but strengthened by honest criticism. But -- when you are criticized by one who hardly knows you, filter out what is fact . . . and ignore the rest! Nehemiah did that . . . and he got the wall built.