



# SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

October 12, 2014

"When You Are Criticized & Cursed" (Facing the Giants Series)

The Rev. Dr. Dan Chun

**T**here are times in our lives when we get criticized and cursed. It's no fun when that happens. How are we to respond in a real and practical way? Maybe today's sermon will change our lives, or help us and give us hope.

We continue to study the life of King David through our sermon series called Facing the Giants, and the giants we face today are the evil twins of criticism and cursing. What do you do with them?

Unless we live in a bubble, we are criticized often by a boss, a coach, teacher, friend, client, spouse, or a family member. Sometimes it feels like we have had a bad day and then someone piles on even more. If you think YOU'VE had a bad day, wait till you hear our passage for today. Here's the story.

King David's favorite son Absalom betrays him. Absalom, who is handsome and charismatic, could have made a great king. But he sinned over and over again and never repented. Worse yet, for a long period of time, he courted people to follow him instead of his father King David, until one day he declares his open rebellion and rallies the people of Israel against his father.

When King David heard about the rebellion, he must have been heartbroken for not only has his son been disloyal but he also plans to

send an army against his father to take over Jerusalem and His kingdom.

So King David moves thousands of people out of Jerusalem to literally run for the hills because Absalom's army will be on attacking them soon. Clearly this is the worst day in King David's life. But to make it even worse, this is what happens as he runs from the city.

2Sam. 16:5 When King David came to Bahurim, a man of the family of the house of Saul came out whose name was Shimei son of Gera; he came out cursing.

2Sam. 16:6 He threw stones at David and at all the servants of King David; now all the people and all the warriors were on his right and on his left.

2Sam. 16:7 Shimei shouted while he cursed, "Out! Out! Murderer! Scoundrel!"

2Sam. 16:8 The LORD has avenged on all of you the blood of the house of Saul, in whose place you have reigned; and the LORD has given the kingdom into the hand of your son Absalom. See, disaster has overtaken you; for you are a man of blood."

2Sam. 16:9 Then Abishai son of Zeruiah said to the king, "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over and take off his head."

2Sam. 16:10 But the king said, "What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah? If he is cursing because the

LORD has said to him, 'Curse David,' who then shall say, 'Why have you done so?'"

2Sam. 16:11 David said to Abishai and to all his servants, "My own son seeks my life; how much more now may this Benjaminite! Let him alone, and let him curse; for the LORD has bidden him.

2Sam. 16:12 It may be that the LORD will look on my distress, and the LORD will repay me with good for this cursing of me today."

2Sam. 16:13 So David and his men went on the road, while Shimei went along on the hillside opposite him and cursed as he went, throwing stones and flinging dust at him.

2Sam. 16:14 The king and all the people who were with him arrived weary at the Jordan; and there he refreshed himself.

This is the Word of God.

You bet David needed to refresh himself. What a horrible day! You are already down in the dumps to have to move everyone from the city because your own son is rebelling against you, and then you have someone like Shimei cursing you, and throwing stones and flinging dust at you!

**W**hen people criticize and curse us, what do we do? First of all, I know that our first instinct is usually like Abishai's reaction, Abishai who said, "Let me take off the head of this dead dog!" That's how most of us react when someone unfairly and unkindly criticizes us in the office, in the home, in school or wherever.

But notice David's response. In essence, he says, "Let him be because if he is doing this now to me the Lord has allowed it."

Wow! The first response for the EMT of our souls—the Emergency Medical Team to our psyche is to realize (or accept) the fact that the Lord has allowed it. But why would the Lord allow someone to criticize ME? For three reasons:

**1) There may be a seed of truth in the criticism that we need to face.**

When we are judged or criticized, we need to first not get defensive because there is normally a seed of truth in what has been said. Maybe we didn't listen to them, maybe we weren't sensitive enough, maybe we misread it or miscommunicated, maybe we came across as accusatory, or maybe we were not clear. We need to see that even if we were wrong in only 10% of it, we need to confess the 10% and say we're sorry.

**2) It's a soul-check to see if our identity is really in God.**

In the long run, when we are criticized, we discover what is truly the basis of our self-esteem. Is it what other people say about us? Are we making what other people say be the basis of our worth? For King David, who was so into God, he could take the criticism. He didn't retaliate even though he had the power to do so.

The fact that Shimei would

even curse King David points to Shimei's foolishness that King David had the right, right then, to tell Abishai to take off Shimei's head. Shimei was lucky he lived. But David knew in his heart that vengeance would always be the Lord's and not his to take.

This is really important for us to know and hold onto. We saw David do this with King Saul when Saul was trying to kill him or throw spears at him. When David had the chance in the caves of Engedi to kill Saul he didn't. Why? Because Vengeance is the Lord's not his.

**3) Through criticism, God gives us the chance to forgive and grow in character.**

If you want to live a life of forgiveness then remember that forgiveness is giving up the right to retaliate. If someone has hurt you, you have the right to get back at that person, but God says, "Give up your right and let Me take care of it."

It shows tremendous faith, it demonstrates a strong and real faith if you can believe that God is watching all that happens to you and that, in a just way, He will take care of the people who hurt you.

God tells us that vengeance is His and not ours because in our sinfulness, we don't know what fair retaliation or fair penalty is. If someone hits us once, we want to hit back twice. You use a knife, I will use a gun. You use a gun, I will use a tank. You use a tank, I will use a drone with a missile. We always want to escalate. We don't know what fair penalties would be. Look at Israel and Palestine today. The retaliation never ends. Revenge never ends.

If we retaliate, then we get into a vicious cycle of always bearing hurt, keeping a grudge, and holding resentment, and that is Satan's bait.

Satan wants us to keep that vicious cycle going – "Yeah, hate that person. Bear a grudge at that person. Build up your paranoia so anything that person says sounds like he or she is trying to wreck your life." Forgiveness – giving up the right to retaliate—means you break that vicious cycle.

I have mentioned before, I think often when people have aches or pain, the source of it began with UNforgiveness years ago. A simple illustration is that I once asked a woman (who doesn't go to our church) during a healing service how long has she had a pain in her body. And she said for two years. I asked her "Anything happen two year ago?"

She said, "I went through a divorce." "And have you forgiven your ex-husband?" She said, "No."

So my healing prayer for her that night was not only for the physical pain but also for prayer for her to forgive her ex-husband.

Unforgiveness hurts us every time and wears us down. We think we are better off not forgiving someone, but we are the losers EVERY TIME, and not the person we are mad at. It's like having a ball and chain around our legs when we don't forgive. Do you have unforgiveness in your heart against someone?

In our Scripture passage, King David shows that he moves on, he keeps walking, he doesn't retaliate by literally taking off Shimei's head. David doesn't get into a shouting battle with Shimei either. David just takes it.

How can we take it when people are mad at us? I once shared this with you, but maybe it is time to review for some of you or for some this is the first time you will hear it. There is a certain language we can use when we are criticized or cursed.

It is not, "Let me take off the head of this dead dog."

I call it the Art of Judo using something I call the vowels of reconciliation. Each principle is represented by a vowel. Let's start with the letter "A."

#### **A = Active Listening**

When someone is mad at us, we need first of all to go into active listening. Active listening means that you do all in your power to listen to the person who is mad at you. You say nothing back; you just take it. I know that is counter intuitive but I do believe it is the way of Jesus. This is where the art of judo comes in. And I believe you can ALL learn to do it well, if you are coached well.

I remember my son was on his high school judo team, and his first year they only won one match. The second year, our own church member, Dr. Greg Chow, an orthopedic surgeon and a champion judo competitor in his own right, became the team's coach. It was basically the same players but he showed them the right techniques and so he took them to the state finals. A one-year turn around!

So maybe all of these years you have been a loser at reconciliation, and so be open to my coaching of how you can be a winner in learning a new way to forgive.

In judo, you allow others to thrust their arms or body at you. Unlike in other martial arts, you don't respond by hitting, kicking, or punching down your opponent. Instead, you take your opponents' thrust and use their weight and the force of their attack to throw them down or trip them. In other words, you take their initial attack, you take their force and leverage it to your advantage.

When someone is mad at you, take the full weight and force of their criticism. I know this is counter-intuitive. But I say take it. Listen to what is bothering them. Listen to see if there is a seed of truth to what they are saying. You might have done something wrong. But then comes the next judo move:

#### **E = Empathetic Listening.**

Empathy means you accurately describe back how it must have felt for the other person to feel so mad or betrayed or disappointed in you.

Get this: In judo, when someone makes a move on you, you often take that person's arm, let's say, and then you actually pull it towards you with greater speed. You are making your opponent's thrust come faster at you. And that is what empathetic listening is. You take their feelings and AGREE WITH THEM and in a sense you add even more speed at you.

When you being empathetic you are taking the person's thrust and bring it at you with greater power by saying statements like: "Wow, I get it. I really let you down. I really hurt you. That made it a horrible day. That was frustrating to you that I didn't follow through. I made you feel so small. I hear you. That was bad. If I were treated that way, I would feel pretty mad too."

By saying statements like those, you are empathizing with their pain and frustration with you. Now you might say, "But Dan, that is like admitting you were completely wrong and sometimes you are not. You are like punching yourself by allowing that guy to hit you with greater speed."

No, you are listening and agreeing with them on how THEY FEEL and articulating their pain. Whether it

happened that way, the truth is how they FEEL. You are not agreeing with their accusation; you are agreeing with how they feel.

You are not yet giving them your view on the issue, which is coming up right now. The third vowel is the letter "I" and that stands for

#### **I = I now want to give my perspective.**

Only after a long period of A and E do I then move to "I." Do you know why most people don't reconcile? When people have a complaint against them, they move directly to "I" without first active listening or empathetic listening. And that leads to defensiveness and more fighting. There needs to be a lot of time doing A and E. Maybe the majority of the time.

In many cases people would not be so mad if they just felt heard, if they just felt you understand their pain. They get it that they can't always get their way. They get it that you think differently than they, but if they don't feel heard, you will never solve the issue. Let me say it again. If they don't feel heard, you will never solve the issue.

In a future sermon I am going to talk about how to better listen, but let me move to the letter "I" for now.

At this point I tell you my perspective on the matter. And often times it is at the 30-thousand foot level. Sometimes people are disappointed we can't do a certain thing here at the church and they are frustrated.

And after actively and empathetically listening to their frustration, I move into the "I" stage to tell them what I think. I then try to give them the perspective that I'm sorry we don't have the budget for that now, or I don't have the staffing.

**O**r, “We don’t have the room for that to happen, but I always go back to how I hear you how that is frustrating that the ministry you want can’t happen and that you feel unappreciated, and I wish I could do that but can’t right now.

In an interpersonal issue with your spouse or friend or colleague or classmate it might be “I am sorry (using the “I” word). That was not my intention. I am sorry that I wasn’t listening, but when you said what you said, I was watching TV, and I just didn’t hear you.”

Or: “I’m sorry that I didn’t get the report done in time, but may I say, you never told me the deadline. You said to finish it when I can.”

So you see, it’s after active and empathetic listening I try to add more information that might give a bigger picture of what happened but always in the context that I am sorry I can’t do it, didn’t do it, was listening whatever. My “I” is never accusatory.

### **O = Options**

“O” is where we list options to solve the problem. At this point I say, “Okay, I can’t do that, but here are some option of what I can do.” Or it might be, “Okay I blew it by not listening to you, but next time how about I quickly hit the mute button on TV when you talk to me, or pause the Netflix movie.

Or, if it is a severe break, it might be something like, “How about we see a counselor together or talk to our friend to get a third party view on it? I am obviously making you mad about this, and we need to get at the systemic issue or it will go on over and over again.”

### **U = Underline everything with prayer**

When you are talking to someone who is in conflict with you,

right at the time you are going through the A-E-I-O, please be praying. Have one ear on them and one ear to the Lord. That way you’re able to see where you may have gone wrong and also find out if the Lord has ideas for you of what can be done to reconcile. Be praying, “Come Holy Spirit, help me hear and not get defensive and help me have patience and wisdom of what to say.”

When I counsel people I always try to have one ear on God like, “What can I say, Lord? Help me know what is happening.” Now the answer from the Lord may not come until 30 minutes into the appointment.

And we need the Holy Spirit to be present in ALL of our conversations but especially if something is going wrong between you and someone else. We need to be praying so that our pride our defensiveness doesn’t get in the way.

How can we not get into revenge and keep our mouth shut sometimes and take it? It is because we always want redemption and reconciliation.

If we were to jump ahead three chapters, King David has defeated Absalom and Shimei comes to meet him. Now the tables have turned. David is in power, and Shimei was backing the wrong horse in Absalom. Shimei goes to King David and falls down before him and says:

2Sam. 19:19 “May my lord not hold me guilty or remember how your servant did wrong on the day my lord the king left Jerusalem; may the king not bear it in mind.

2Sam. 19:20 For your servant knows that I have sinned; therefore, see, I have come this day, the first of all the house of Joseph to come down to meet my lord the king.”

2Sam. 19:21 Abishai son of Zeruiah answered, “Shall not Shimei be put to death for this, because he cursed the LORD’S anointed?”

2Sam. 19:22 But David said, “What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah, that you should today become an adversary to me? Shall anyone be put to death in Israel this day? For do I not know that I am this day king over Israel?”

2Sam. 19:23 The king said to Shimei, “You shall not die.” And the king gave him his oath.

David’s identity was not in Shimei or in anyone who criticized him but in God who David knew put him on the throne.

Now to be fair to the whole counsel of Scripture, we learn much later in 2 Kings chapter 8, that David is not always the perfect guy. He has his moments of goodness and badness like what happened in his adultery to Bathsheba.

And just before he dies, in his old age, and maybe his spiritual faculties weren’t the best, he tells his son Solomon that when he becomes king to go ahead and kill Shimei for what he did to David. But the story gets more interesting.

When King David dies and Solomon becomes the new king, Solomon calls Shimei into his throne room and actually shows grace to Shimei and says, “I will let you live, but here’s the deal you can live in Jerusalem as long as you want, but if you ever go outside Jerusalem as far as the Wadi Kidron, then you will die.”

And Shimei was so happy to hear that. And so he lived in Jerusalem for a long time as a free man.

**B**ut one day, he disobeyed Solomon and went outside Jerusalem, and when Solomon heard that, he justly killed Shimei for disobeying a direct order from the king, and not for cursing his father.

I see Solomon as the Christ figure in this passage. David in essence says, it is not right for me to have vengeance upon Shimei, so I give that right to the next King. That is what we should do in this life. We should give all revenge to Jesus, the King of Kings, for Scripture says: "Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.'" (Romans 12:19)

We don't need to pay back people. We can take people's criticism because Jesus will act on our behalf. It is in His hands we should put our concerns.

Our greatest model of forgiveness and restraint is Jesus. When people came after Him with swords to hurt him, which are more deadly than just criticism, He said to one of the apostles:

Matt. 26:52 Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword.

Matt. 26:53 Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?

When Jesus was before Pontius Pilate, He let the untruths fly at Him. He just let them lie and was quiet, knowing that one day God would make it good.

Jesus is our model. He is the one who sees and hears all unfair criticism at you, so let us put them all in His hands. Forgive people because

vengeance is not ours. Reconciliation should always be our goal, but we won't really reconcile right unless we know one more thing.

Here's the surprise ending. Some of you might think this sermon is for about the people whom you need to forgive because we are noble and they are jerks who slime us unfairly. But the truth is we are the Shimei and Absalom in the story. Yeah, us! We are in constant rebellion against God our true King, and we often conspire to overthrow him and do our own thing, and we sin by doing that. We are the ones who need forgiveness. And when we realize that, then the grace of Jesus is the power that gives us forgiveness but also the power to forgive others.

Don't try to forgive without accepting the grace of Jesus. If you try to remain reasonable and take criticism from a point of pragmatism on your own human power, it will never take you far enough. It won't sustain you. You're just trying to be a good guy.

No, the only way to be able to bear criticism and cursing is through a firm belief that Jesus extended forgiveness and grace to you, the real Shimei and Absalom in the story. Because taking blame or verbal abuse always stirs up anger and a thirst for justice in our hearts. If the critic is speaking fairly then we may be able to accept it. But what about those times of undeserved curse or rebuke? Or simply someone who wants to drag you down with ill intention and slander?

You can only survive such a thing by the recognition that you yourself live by grace and not by justice. You choose to live by the grace that God has forgiven you. The only one who could possibly remain perfectly silent to false accusations and critics was Jesus going to the cross (see Isaiah 53), he who deserved

all glory, not a shred of blame, and didn't deserve to suffer whatsoever.

The only way he could do that was through love—a love for his father and a love for us. Nothing else. Not a love for Himself or a love for His ministry career or a love for praise and respect from others. Nothing else could have sustained Him and nothing else aside from Jesus will sustain you.

Until you recognize you are Absalom or Shimei who was saved by grace, and that you are not David, you will always think that you have the right to swing the sword and chop off Shimei's head. But it is God's grace that will prevent us from doing that and sustain us and empower us to forgive and receive forgiveness.

Amen? Amen.