

Finding Freedom From Judgment and Criticism

Years ago, I was truly one of the most critical and judgmental people I knew. It was my default setting.

If I was at the mall or even at church, I could look at someone and immediately make three or four judgments about their clothes, hair, behavior or family. Or if I walked into someone's home, everything could be absolutely perfect, but somehow I would notice the one corner of wallpaper that was ripped slightly.

I'll admit, judging and criticizing others was something I rather enjoyed doing before God began to change me. However, little by little, He used His Word to show me truth about myself.

I'll never forget one day in particular. I had just finished judging someone and nitpicking them about something in my thoughts, when the Holy Spirit so clearly spoke to my heart and said, "Joyce, you look at everyone else with a magnifying glass, but you look at yourself through rose-colored glasses."

I got the point! The truth is, we can be pretty quick to recognize what's wrong with other people and see all of their issues. However, even though we may have some of the same problems ourselves, we usually have good excuses to justify them.

Look at what Jesus says in Matthew 7:5 (NIV): "You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."

I love this—it's so practical. Jesus is basically saying, "You love to point out everyone else's faults, but you should really begin with yourself. Until you get yourself

straightened out, you can't even help anyone else!"

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We need to forget about what everyone else is or isn't doing, present ourselves before God and let Him do a work in *us*. The truth is, the more we allow God to change us, the less we are bothered by the faults of others.

Our circumstances may never be perfect, and the things we don't like about our family, friends or co-workers may not change, but God can do something even better: He can change *us*.

These days, if there's something about my husband, Dave, that I think needs to change, I will pray and ask God for help. But even then, my attitude is completely different than it used to be.

Now, I'll pray something like, "Lord, if it's Your will, I ask You to help Dave change in this area. But first, if the problem is really me and not Dave, please show me. Show me if there's anything I need to change."

Sure, there are times when we may need to sit down and talk with a friend or family member about their weaknesses or faults for the health of the relationship, but even then, it should be done with humility and love. Our motive should always be to help them.

Psalm 51:6 (AMPC) says, "Behold, You desire truth in the inner being; make me therefore to know wisdom in my inmost heart."

And Ephesians 4:15a says, "Let our lives lovingly express truth [in all things, speaking truly, dealing truly, living truly]."

God wants to reveal the truth to us. He desires for us to face anything that is coming between us and Him, things that are

holding us back from His good plan and purpose for our lives.

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I've learned to ask God on a regular basis, "Show me truth. And help me to face the truth You show me—especially what You show me about myself."

Can I tell you something? All of those days when I was constantly judging and criticizing others, I wasn't happy. First, I wasn't walking in love with people, and I was also sowing seed for others to judge and criticize me.

But even beyond that, there is such freedom when we can learn to "live and let live"—when we can focus on our own growth and change, and leave the spiritual progress of other people up to God.

When I look back at all of the years I pestered Dave and pressured him to change, it's almost comical! And now that I have allowed God to change me, I can truly say that I love and enjoy my husband for who he is—and there's freedom in that.

Let God begin with you. I encourage you to pray, *"Lord, please show me the truth about myself. Please change me so I can better help the people around me."*

As you do, the Holy Spirit—the "Spirit of truth"—will start to show you things about yourself—and help you walk in new levels of freedom.

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