

# **Dealing with Criticism and Competition**

*By Bobby Schuller*

Today I want to talk about how easy it is to hold a grudge. How very often when we hold a grudge it's a bit like chewing on a hamburger: you really take your time. And today I want to just encourage you, life is good. Maybe you're going through challenges and maybe there are hard times, but you're going to get through those times. You're going to get through and life is really, really good. And life is so good that it's not worth wasting one smile, one moment on holding a grudge against somebody.

The scriptures give us such a gift and that is to love our enemies, to pray for those who persecute us because when we do that, we inherit freedom from having to set everything right; to have the last say, to give people a piece of our mind. You can let go of that today and smile and enjoy your life in spite of all the challenges that life has. Today, God's telling you don't hold a grudge, let it go. And you don't. You're not the kind of person that holds a grudge. You're a peacemaker. You're the kind of person that sees the best in others and God is so proud of that. Don't lose that. Always remain the person who sees the best in others and when things don't go your way or when people hurt you, and it really does hurt, to let it go and to enjoy life. Can I get an amen?

That's what we're going to talk about today. Things don't always go your way in life. Very often things never go your way always in life, right?

I mean there's always going to be health issues, and maybe at your job or at work. Maybe you lost your job and maybe you went through a really hard time or you're going through a hard time right now and the people that you thought would be there for you, well maybe they weren't, or they weren't there in the way you thought they would be.

In life, very often, people will let us down and they'll hurt us and the times when we need them most, we'll feel most abandoned and that's when the temptation to get angry, to be embittered, to assume the worst is going to come on. Today I want to encourage you don't do that. That's not you. You're bigger than that. You're learning to let it go and be the kind of person that can walk every day in the easy yoke of Jesus that says life is too good, in spite of all of its challenges, to spend holding a grudge or worrying about this or that, I can love people in spite of their imperfections.

You know we are going to get hurt in life. Enemies are going to hurt us and critics are going to hurt us and competitors are going to hurt us, but when we hold a grudge, we allow them to hurt us even more than they already did. The longer we hold a grudge and feel angry about this or that, the worse the wound gets. It can't heal as we hold a grudge. When you hold onto a grudge, you're also holding onto your wound and you're not allowing God to heal it.

Maybe you're holding onto something today that happened to you even years ago and you still feel so embittered, so angry and its affecting

the way you talk to people. It's affecting the way you think. Let it go. Abandon outcomes to God. Just give it to him. Let it go and just smile today and enjoy life. Life is good. Don't waste a moment being angry at people.

I remember we were talking to April Simons today, I remember years ago when I saw Joel Osteen on an interview and everybody knew who Joel Osteen was. I sort of knew who he was, and I liked him, I thought he was a nice guy, definitely a lot of respect for him but hadn't really followed him or looked into him much. And I think it was 2013 there was some guy that made a fake Facebook account in Joel's name, a fake Twitter account in Joel's name, and a fake website – Joel Osteen with one "e." And did this whole thing on the web (pretending to be Joel Osteen) that he had lost his faith, he had renounced the bible and he was resigning from his church. So Joel says all these people were calling him, people were wondering what's going on and it created a little bit of chaos in the church. And it really, I mean this hoax got around to a lot of people.

And what I loved was they interviewed the guy who did it, and he's like 'well I wanted to teach Joel Osteen a lesson, and I wanted to show him that I respect him as a person, but he's not preaching the way I want him to and he can do it better in this way and that way.' And I thought man, what a jerk. I'm looking at this guy thinking what an idiot,

too, I mean yeah, I can't say that, you're right, Michael. I'm watching this guy and I kind of hate this guy as I'm watching him on TV.

And then Joel Osteen comes on and they're interviewing him, and Joel goes 'oh he doesn't mean any harm. I'm sure its fine. It's no big deal.' And they're like 'are you going to sue him or you can totally sue him for libel.' And he's like 'I'm too blessed to worry about it. Life is good.' And that line 'I'm too blessed to worry about it,' I'm like I need to memorize that. I'm too blessed to worry about it. Feels good, doesn't it.

You are, man. It's hard when we're going through trials to even think of ourselves as blessed, but man you've got not only so much in your life now, or you've got so many good things coming. Don't allow when people hurt you, people are going to do unfair things, people are going to abandon you when you need them the most, people are going to say hurtful things, we can let it go. We can give it to the Lord. We're too blessed to worry about it. God is too good. Life is too good to spend one moment angry. We're just going to smile, enjoy life, and yes there's times when we got to fight, there's times where we got to argue, but most of the time we can let that.. just let it go. Let it go. You don't need to hold a grudge. You can love people just where they are. Nobody's perfect.

So in Luke chapter 6, Jesus gives us this gift when he's preaching, and this is one of the core tenets of Christianity. Jesus says to them in Luke chapter 6:32, "If you love those who love you, what credit is it to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those

who do good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that, too. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners expecting to be repaid in full. But love your enemies. Do good to them and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great and you will be children of the most high.” And I want you to hear this line because this is good news for me: “Because he is kind to the ungrateful and to the wicked.” He’s kind to the ungrateful and to the wicked and so should we because very often we’re unkind or we’re ungrateful or we’re wicked. Jesus is a friend of sinners. “Be merciful just as your Father is merciful. Do not judge and you will not be judged. Do not condemn and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven. Give and it will be given to you a good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over. It’ll be poured into your lap for with the measure you use, it’ll be measured to you.” That’s good news, isn’t it. That’s good news that when we become generous people, not only generous with our gifts, but generous in mercy, generous in understanding, generous in patience, we open up our whole lives to the blessings that come from heaven, and from people. We build in our lives favor, as the scripture says, with God and mankind. God and people will pour out so much favor on your life if you become a peacemaking loving person.

So today I want to encourage you, one of the greatest pieces of wisdom Jesus ever gives us for a fulfilled, blessed and happy life is to

love our enemies, to love our competitors, and to love our critics. Love them. Love them. And if you don't have any, get some. That's right. I believe that. I'm going to talk about that in just a minute.

Look a lot of people think that Jesus, by the way, has this new idea to love your enemies and that it didn't exist in the Old Testament. There for sure are, in the Old Testament, some passages – Joshua, Psalms in particular talks about anger towards your enemies and we can talk about that some other time, but that has a lot to do with the prayer life. The Old Testament though in general doesn't talk about hating your enemies. Like the Old Testament, there's a lot in the Old Testament about loving your enemies, having mercy and compassion on your enemies.

A few examples, again, the Old Testament never says at any point hate your enemies. The Old Testament in Proverbs, for example, multiple times it says things like “if your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he's thirsty, give him something to drink.” Exodus 23 verse 4 and 5, it talks about “if you find the animal of one of your enemies, don't take it and don't leave it. Bring it back to your enemy.” Because back in those days, most wealth was located in the ownership of animals – cattle, horses. The scriptures say multiple times “never rejoice when your enemy faces disaster.” It says it in Proverbs, in Job, and in Obadiah.

And one of my favorite stories in the Old Testament on loving your enemies is in 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings. In this story Syria and Israel, two ancient

enemies are at war. And the king of Syria keeps invading Israel, he keeps coming down and trying to fight the Israeli people, and then all of a sudden God starts to reveal to the prophet Elijah where the enemies armies are going. So Elijah keeps telling the king don't go there, the enemy army is going there. Don't go there, the enemy army is going there.

So what happens is the Syrian army, which is bigger than the Israeli army, wants to face them but God keeps giving a word to Elijah to essentially evade the fight. It's like a classic line – what happens if they threw a war and nobody showed up. That's exactly what was happening, and it was driving the Syrians crazy.

So finally the king of the Syrians decides to siege the city of Dothan where the prophet Elijah is and he's like I'm going to kill this prophet. I'm going to kill the man and then I'm going to go after their army. So they're siege-ing the city. Elijah pleads to God, Lord, save us in our time of need. And from heaven the Syrian army is struck blind. So as this whole army now is wallowing in blindness, essentially the city guard goes and arrests a giant army of people, brings them in to the city center of the capital, and there the king sees this whole army that's been chasing him down. And he asks the prophet Elijah, not once, twice – shall I strike them down dead? And both times the prophet Elijah says no. What does he say? Feed them well and send them on their way.

So what the king does instead of slaying them and killing his enemies, he gets the whole army there, just like sitting ducks. He takes them and from the wealth of his land, throws them a humungous feast. And what happens? The Syrians go home friends with the Israelis and the war is over. And that's why great peacemakers of history, like Abraham Lincoln said this adaptation of a quote: "I destroy my enemies by making them my friends." What a gift to be a peacemaker. What a gift to be a peacemaker who wants peace before anything else; to settle quickly with your enemies. Amen? And that's who you are. That is your character. You are a peacemaking person. You are the kind of person who doesn't let things just.. you always go out of your way to love your enemies, to bless those who curse you, to pray for your critics and your competitors and because of that, you're a happier more joyful person. Keep doing that. Don't hold a grudge. You don't have to fix everything. Let it go. Can I get an amen? Yes!

So you are a bigger person than that. You're a bigger person. You're not going to get caught up in the ongoing bickering's and all this stuff. You're bigger than that. So you're letting it go.

I think one of the greatest reasons to love our enemies is the reward. I said this last week, but I was so surprised in studying the sermon on the mount how much Jesus, when he talks about his way of life, doesn't say do it cause it's the right thing, which is what pastors like me say. No, Jesus says do it so you can get a reward. What's the reward?

Well it's many things, but the first reward, I think, from loving your enemies is this: joy. A joyful life. Man nothing ruins a good day than getting some email or hearing something through the grapevine about something somebody said about you. It is so easy when we're criticized or disrespected to not only not be with that person any longer, we're actually with the people we love and it's a great day and things are going fine, but our wheels are spinning in our head because we're so angry about this thing this person said or did three days ago. Me. I do that.

When we let it go, when we give it to God, when we say I'm too blessed to worry about it, then we inherit joy and joy that will last. Joy that's from on high. Even when we have real enemies that are really evil, that really do nasty stuff to us, and we still let it go, we take away the power of our enemies to keep wounding us. By forgiving, by letting it go, by not having to get back, we simply say I'm removing this person's power to keep wounding me, and I'm going to hold this wound before God and he's going to heal it. He'll take care of my competitors and my enemies and my critics, amen?

But an almost bigger reason to bless your enemies, to give to people who are sometimes nasty to you is I think scriptures hint at this but tradition really speaks to the idea that when we curse people, we get a little cursed. When we bless people, we get a lot blessed. It's kind of like you can't paint a house without getting a little paint on yourself. And you can't curse somebody without getting a little bit on yourself. That's why

very often you see some of the most vitriolic, angry, cursing type people seem to have the worst luck. They just don't even realize it. They're like splattering paint everywhere and they're getting it all over themselves.

But people who, when they're persecuted or go through trials, bless others, especially when they bless the enemies, when they bless their competitors, when they bless their critics, they are just splattering themselves with blessing. People don't realize that in a way you're like a conduit from heaven or hell that when you open up your spiritual life to others, that's going to touch you, too. When you bless others, you'll be blessed. It's one of the best reasons to bless your enemies. It brings good luck. Not luck, you're not allowed to say that, but you know what I mean. It blesses you. Things go better in life.

I believe that it's okay and it's even good to do well financially in life. I think it's good to be healthy. I think it's good to enjoy your life. I think God wants those things for you. But I also believe that the most important thing in life that God wants for you, just as we want for our children, is good character. I believe God will not give you more money than your character can handle. Now many of you, you're like I know lots of people God's given more money than their character can handle, right? And what I'm telling you, if you want to pars that, is that well if people have more money than their character can handle, it's not from God. And that money is actually.. can be a curse, not a blessing to them. When we want to do well financially and other aspects of our life, we always want

it to be from on high, from heaven. To have a bigger purpose than itself, right? That we want to inherit all that is from God, and we want to reject anything that is not from God. Because when that happens, your whole life is blessed and is a blessing to others, and that's a good thing.

So very often, when we hold a grudge and stay angry and embittered towards others, or unforgiving or unmerciful or wrathful, we are actually cutting off God's blessing from our life because it's a character issue. But when we bless others in spite of being hurt and harmed, we invite blessing into our own life: new friendships, new opportunities, new open doors in the best way possible. I believe this to the core of my being. I've seen it my whole life. I've seen it and I believe it.

You bless others, you'll be blessed. Curse others, you could be cursed. Bless others. Bless others and watch heaven open up and pour out so much blessing on your life there's not enough room to contain it. Trust God with your enemies and your critics. Let it go! The outcome is not yours. You know that. The outcome's not yours. You don't have to make things perfect. You don't have to make sure things go exactly the way they're supposed to go. You don't have to give people a piece of your mind. You don't have to say it like it is. You don't have to set people straight. You can let it go and just bless people, and that's what you do and I'm so proud of you. I am so proud of the ways in which you've been the bigger person and you've moved on. God's going to increase in your

life because of that, God's going to bless you because of that, and I'm proud of you.

So walk today in the relaxed easy yoke of Jesus. Amen? Let's walk in the easy yoke of Jesus. You know Jesus took naps, did you know that? Every time I'm taking a nap and I feel guilty, I go you know what, I'm going to be more Christ-like and I go back to sleep. Jesus was relaxed. Jesus isn't worrying about stuff and neither should you. He trusted the very capable hands of the Father. We don't need to worry about the outcome. Abandon it to God. Abandon outcomes to God. Abandon it. Trust him. You know God cares more about your circumstance than you do. God cares more about your body than you do. God cares more about all the things you're worried about. He cares more about you than you do. God wants you to go to heaven more than you want to go to heaven. Really. So don't worry about your life, don't worry about your body, what you will wear, what you will own, let it go and don't worry about your enemies. God will take care of them.

Sometimes you'll find that in life your greatest enemies can sometimes turn into your very best friends. That actually happened to me once. My first fight. My first fight ever, the guy became my best friend. His name was Jeff. So walk in the easy relaxed yoke of Jesus.

There are a few things you can do to do this better. You're already doing great, but you can do it better. And the first thing is to see your enemies, your competitors and your critics as a blessing. See your

enemies, your competitors and your critics as a blessing. Man they are a blessing, can I tell you. There was a great story of Bishop Nikolai, who was an Eastern Orthodox Bishop in the concentration camps, and he wrote this amazing prayer: “Lord, bless my enemies and do not curse them, even as I bless them.” And this amazing poetic prayer talks about how my friends didn’t drive me into your arms, my enemies did. And it was my friends that held me to earth, but my enemies drove me to heaven. When I was too weak to confess my sins, my enemies confessed them for me. And he goes on like this – Lord, bless my enemies and do not curse them for my enemies have driven me to you.

See very often our critics, our enemies and our competitors will say the true things about us that our friends won’t say. And they’ll say it in very mean, vitriolic ways, but unfortunately very often they’re true. Our enemies, our competitors and our critics are a gift. In fact, the more enemies, competitors and critics you have, the bigger difference you’re making.

This was something that really helped me a lot. When I first started at this church, I went very quickly from a very small church of about a hundred people, to this big church, and TV and everything. And it was like almost overnight. And really the biggest shock about that was how much criticism I got from everywhere, and I just wasn’t used to it. And I would be up at night, I couldn’t sleep, I couldn’t work on my sermons cause I felt like I had to fix what this person said, and that person said,

and I was seeing stuff online and on websites and it really was tormenting me. And then I saw a kid in LA with a shirt that said “if you ain’t got haters, you ain’t doing” and then expletive. And somehow the Lord used that vulgar shirt to speak to me. Yes, Lord! Look, the more critics and competitors you have, the more you’re doing.

And many of us, all of us are leaders, right? All of us are leaders, right? Yes, a leader means somebody who influences others. And some people lead a wide audience, and some people lead a deep audience. And both are equally important. So many of you, you’re leading a deep audience: your children, your grandchildren. Maybe you’re mentoring somebody. As you do that, you’re making a big impact, but you can’t do that without some push back. If you’re not getting pushed back, you’re not causing change. So very often the people you’re leading are going to be your biggest critics, right? And that’s a good thing. It’s a blessing. Can I get an amen?

Look, Sam Chand said, “The more you lead, the more you bleed.” Your ability to lead is going to be equal to the amount of leadership pain you can endure. So toughen up. Just toughen up and let it go. Be the big buff turtle that lets stuff roll off your back. Just be tough, let it go, and be happy and enjoy your life! Your enemies, your competitors, and your critics, they’re a blessing to you and they’re going to be there long after your friends are gone. So at least somebody will keep you company. That

was a weird thing to say, but just love your enemies and your life will be better.

The second thing you can do is assume the best about people. Assume the best of others. It's human temptation to fill the blanks with the worst stuff. I learned this from Hannah. When I was dating Hannah, she almost broke up with me because I saw the worst in people. I'd be like he thinks this, and she says that, and they want to do this, and they think that, and she just said, 'you've got to stop this or I'm going to break up with you. This is nasty.' And what I learned from that is filling in the blanks is unfair. And it's a big temptation to think people think the worst, to think people want the worst, but most of the time people are kind of undecided, so let it go. Assume the best and you do, and I'm so proud of you. Thank you for assuming the best in others because there's nothing worse than being misunderstood.

Pray for your competitors. Wish that your competitors can thrive and succeed. We often think that if our competitors succeed, we fail, and that's not true. Remember that as you bless your competitors, you yourself will be blessed. The more people you're blessing, the more blessed your life will be, and as you pray for your competitors, you'll learn to let it go and allow God's outcome to pass. And that's the thing you want, right? You want God's outcome because God's outcome is the best thing for you.

And finally, if you hear anything I say, because so much of this is about what we say and what we hear, let go of having the last word. Yes, right. Let go, man. It's hard. I'm Irish, you know, I'm half Irish and it's all about having the last word, and then having a fistfight. If anybody has a grudge it's we the Irish. And no, you let that go. Let it go. You don't need to have the last word, you don't need to set people right. I remember Dallas Willard, there's a legend that he was in a class and some person was arguing with him, a student in a very arrogant way, and the fact that the student was using was inaccurate. And this professor, Dallas Willard; everyone in the class knew it was false, but he never set him straight. He just thanked everyone and dismissed the class. And someone came up to him and said 'why didn't you fix what he said. Everybody knew he was wrong. You could have destroyed him.' And he said 'I'm practicing the spiritual discipline of not having the last word.'

See for a lot of us, it comes so easy to hold a grudge, to be passive aggressive, to wallow in self pity, to spin our wheels, but that's not you. That's not you. You're so much bigger than that. God has so much more in store than you're limiting your life to by holding a grudge against your enemies. Let go of it and inherit the huge thing that God has in store for you. He's just going to bless you so much, you can't believe it. You're going to rejoice on that day when you see how much God has blessed your life because you've decided to be like Christ, to be a peacemaker, and that's what you are.

The scriptures say “blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called sons and daughters of God.” You want to be like Jesus? Be a peacemaker. See the best in others. Assume the best and let go of your enemies. God can handle them. You’ve got much too much on your plate to worry about that stuff, right? You’re way too blessed to worry about it. Amen? Amen, and I believe it.

So Lord, I just pray in Jesus’ name a blessing over everyone here. Lord, I pray that you’d bring a sense of peace. We don’t ask for vengeance, we ask for blessing. We pray that you’d bless our enemies, our competitors, our critics. We let it go, Father, and we pray that you’d build our joy and our character and help us to simply relax and walk every day in the easy yoke of Jesus. It’s in your name we pray, amen.