

# Rejection Is Hard

By Kurt Bubna, *Leadership*, October 25, 2013

Every Sunday I am keenly aware that I am being evaluated. Some will like me and what they hear; others will not. Some will leave after a service and think, “How did *that* guy ever end up a pastor?” Others will make a beeline for me after a service and say, “That’s the best message I’ve ever heard! You’re the best pastor I’ve ever had!” And I smile, not in cynicism, but in the knowledge that we humans (and I include *me* in that we) are a capricious clan.

I am always grateful for the encouragement and kind words but also painfully aware of the fickleness of human nature. That very same person who patted me on the back initially sometimes ends up punching me in the gut weeks, months, or years later as they exit our church in a tizzy.

Rejection is hard. Here are some of the things I’ve learned about this along the way:

- **Guard your heart.** Don’t be cynical. Don’t live in fear of rejection. Remember, Jesus too went from awesome to awful in the minds of many. He understands, so take your pain to Him when you are rejected.
- **Grow through it.** Without getting caught in a maze of self-doubt, ask yourself, “Is there something I need to learn through this bite?” Criticism has value if there truly is something I can discover through it. I tell our church on a regular basis, “I’m not perfect.” So what’s the point of pretending like I am? And why then would I immediately and without consideration reject criticism as if I never made a mistake? A wise imperfect person continues to grow when confronted with the opportunity to do so.
- **When it’s all said and done, shake off the dust and move on.** Rejection hurts. Even the most spiritually mature feel at least a twinge of pain when it happens. But getting stuck there is stupid. *Reality 101*: no one is perfect. *Reality 102*: your critics aren’t perfect either. *Reality 103*: the best thing is to grow and go—don’t spend too much time or energy worrying about what you can’t change. Sometimes we get derailed from the bigger picture by proud people who feel they need to smack us around. Don’t go to their level; keep moving forward, and stay focused on the goal.
- **Speak well of the departed.** This one is tough. Again, our human nature demands that we defend ourselves. We feel the need to put others in a bad light so that we look good. I really wrestle at times with a tendency to *react* rather than *respond*. Yes, there is a place for speaking the truth in love. Yes, there are times when we’ve actually done nothing to deserve the wrath we have received. And yes, sometimes we must explain or clarify something about the departed for the

sake of the church. But make sure your heart and your motives are pure rather than polluted by your own pain.

- **Thank God for the blessers *and* the biters.** Of course, I'd rather be blessed than bitten, but the Word challenges me to give thanks *always* (1 Thess. 5:18), even when it hurts. Thanking God for the pain is an act of faith that declares, "I believe You can redeem, restore, and renew any situation and anyone fully surrendered to You."

In one of the longest chapters in the New Testament (John 6), Jesus miraculously feeds five thousand hungry people, and as a result, they want to make Him a king! Later, He walks on water and blows the minds of His disciples. But after a difficult teaching, one that ticked off a bunch of people, many disciples deserted Jesus. The very people who once thought He was AWESOME now rejected Him as awful.

Jesus felt the pain. He was God, but He was also human. He turned to the twelve, and I am certain with angst in His voice, He asked, "Do you want to leave Me too?" Peter replied, "Lord, to whom shall we go?" I'm sure Jesus appreciated Pete's loyalty at the moment, but He knew that one of them was a betrayer (Judas) and that all of them would eventually flee from His side in fear. But you know what amazes me? Jesus loved these guys *anyway*. He never gave up on them. He never lost focus. He never quit.

My prayer is: "God, help me to be much more like Your Son. Help me stay the course even if that course takes me to a cross. Help me to love even when I am not loved, and to forgive as I have been forgiven. Help me to remember, it never has been and never will be about me. Amen."