

Cross-cultural Perspectives from the General Director



Word Watching!

J. Robert Ashcroft, a theological college president, once said, “Let your emphasis be on the creative and constructive above the critical and corrective.” He counseled a sprouting former student, “There’s nothing wrong with being critical and corrective, just don’t put your emphasis there. Give yourself to being creative and constructive.”

Locating problem areas in any relationship, team, family, ministry, and/or organization is not difficult. Solving the problems takes initiative, innovation, insight, intelligence, inspiration, inventiveness, imagination, and input. Being critical and corrective is the easy, low road. Being creative and constructive is the difficult, high road. The difference is night and day.

One of the challenges of getting older, or being part of any group for an extended period of time, is becoming cynical or critical. We tend to carry too many painful memories and mistakes of the past and allow them to judge or tint the future. The Apostle Paul had every right to be critical and cynical as he sat in a cold, damp dark prison cell. Instead he chose to be creative and constructive, and under the direction of the Spirit penned the words to Timothy and Titus. He wanted to make every effort to encourage tomorrow.

“Encourage” is a fifteenth century word that means we can inspire with courage or confidence. It is an attempt to persuade, to spur on, to help. It is the effort to build confidence.

It is relatively easy to look at the next generation in any movement and criticize, condemn, complain and caution. It would be more appropriate and constructive to confirm (affirm), encourage, charge, consecrate, and comprehend.

More specifically, from a cross-cultural perspective, it is easy to adopt a negative mindset when it comes to working with others on our field. We must always be on guard to ensure we are doing our best to encourage others and to build up the kingdom of God. An “us” versus “them” mentality should never develop. Unfortunately, when they do, lines are drawn, differences are delineated, disunity deepens, and prejudices develop. Our relationships should push us together rather than pull us apart. I once saw a cartoon of two porcupines huddling in the bitter cold. We need each other. Yet, at the same time we needle each other.

Our words can hurt or they can heal. They can help or they can hinder. They can bless or they can blister. They can belittle or they can build. Lord, help my words to heal, help, bless and build!