

Week 11: Choosing Which Voices to Listen to Around You

“People before points.”

It’s something I say to my kids—a reminder that people are more important than victories. Sometimes the kids remember. Sometimes they don’t. To be honest, sometimes *I* remember and sometimes I don’t.

The sun was slipping behind the trees and our breath was becoming visible in the twilight, when my oldest son forgot. A game of football with the neighborhood kids and one young lady dropped one too many passes and Aidan said one too many critical things and her eyes spilled tears and she sprinted for home. Points before people.

Whoops.

I encouraged Aidan to follow her and offer an apology. I admired his courage as he followed her home and knocked on her door. Her father answered. I watched my son’s lips move and I watched a darkness pass over the father’s face before he closed the door. I don’t really blame the father—if some punk kid makes my daughter cry over a football game, I’m likely to circle the wagons, too. Yet Aidan returned, tears now streaking *his* face, and he said, “Daddy, I apologized and he didn’t say anything. He just looked at me like I was a monster.” And then, choking on the question, “Am I a monster, Daddy?”

Being a kid stinks.

You’re new in the world, life is confusing, and it seems like the big people hold the instruction manual about how to put your life—and your *self*—together. As a vulnerable little one, it’s terrifying to feel like you’re on your own, so children will listen to *any* big voice that gives them definition and direction, even the cruelest ones. And then sometime around the fourth grade, peers join the chorus, too—they start commenting on anything and everything about everyone. In elementary school, opinions multiply like rodents. So we build walls to hide ourselves. But the truth is, they’re usually like cheap motel walls and the voices continue to seep through and every opinion continues to *matter*.

Maybe growing up and growing healthy is as simple as discerning which voices to allow in, and learning how to keep the rest of the voices out.

Recently, I was browsing Amazon for a new iPod speaker dock. I found a dock with 662 ratings, out of which 537 ratings were four or five stars. Yet 44 people had given it a one-star rating. I had already decided to purchase the speaker but, out of curiosity, I began to read some of the one-star reviews. While most people loved the product, these 44 people *hated* it. One reviewer complained angrily that there was a 1/32” inch gap between two of the parts. He admitted it was difficult to see

the gap and it didn't impact the functioning of the speaker but, as an engineer, it offended his sensibilities. As I read his diatribe, it occurred to me: some of the most opinionated reviews revealed far more about the *reviewer* than they did about the product being *reviewed*.

And I wondered: Could that also be true about the people who review *us*?

Imagine: you're walking down the street and you say, "Hello" to the first passerby and they return the greeting. Then you say, "Hello" to the next person who walks by and they growl at you and put their head down. The third passerby responds with a joyous "Good morning!" And the fourth responds by crossing to the other side of the street. What does that series of interactions tell us about who we are? *Absolutely nothing*. At best, it tells us something about the people responding *to us*.

Most of us are like that speaker dock on Amazon. We have a 1/32" inch gap in our character and we'll never project the music of life perfectly. Anyone and everyone can "review" us. We can't stop it from happening. But we can decide how to respond when it does happen. If we constantly listen to the voices in the world and the voice of shame in our head, reminding us of our imperfections, we'll sit on the shelf unopened and all sorts of beautiful potential will get wasted.

Are you ready to play the music you were created to play, regardless of the one-star reviews? If so, hitting the play button on your truest self will probably begin by hitting the mute button on someone else. Then, as the din of voices settles down, you'll begin to notice another voice growing louder within you. A voice of grace, calling you beloved, reminding you that you are not a product to be reviewed, but a soul to be renewed.