**1. Motivate**

What comes to mind when you hear the word “critic”?

* movie critics
* the word “criticize”
* when someone reads your writing or views your work and evaluates your efforts
* people that complain about what you have done
* people who complain

A video introduction to the Bible study is available. View at <https://watch.liberty.edu/media/t/1_qu493d89> If you have no wi-fi where you teach, best to download to your computer from <https://tinyurl.com/4vhypvua>

* usually criticism is negative
* fault finder
* detractor
* someone who disapproves or censures

**2. Transition**

A critical spirit damages our lives.

* Today we look at two Old Testament characters who criticized their leader.
* We see that we must guard our hearts against criticizing others.

**3. Bible Study**

3.1 God Sets the Standard

Listen for who is complaining.

Numbers 12:1-3 (NIV) Miriam and Aaron began to talk against Moses because of his Cushite wife, for he had married a Cushite. 2 "Has the LORD spoken only through Moses?" they asked. "Hasn't he also spoken through us?" And the LORD heard this. 3 (Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.)

We see it was Moses’ brother and sister who were criticizing him. Why would that be surprising?

* Moses had been leading for some time now
* God’s hand upon Moses was obvious
* they also had leadership responsibilities
* why should they all of a sudden become jealous of Moses?

What was the issue of the conflict?

* God had spoken through Moses
* Moses was God’s spokes person
* they also had issue with his marriage to a Cushite/Midianite
* in today’s world they would probably been accused of racism

What kind of man was Moses?

* very humble, described as the most humble person on earth
* humble defined as, “showing a modest or low estimate of one's own importance”
* means that a person may have accomplished a lot, or be a lot but doesn't feel it is necessary to advertise or brag about it.

What do you think caused Miriam to lose focus at this point in the sequence of events?

* jealousy, Moses (their little brother) was getting the attention of the people
* maybe she was upset at Moses getting a new wife (possibly the first wife had died)
* maybe she was also jealous that Moses had a spouse – (no mention of made of her having a husband)
* seems like she was being passed by on multiple levels

What drives us to be critical of others? What kinds of situations can tempt us to criticize others?

* we dislike them
* they have done better than we have, we are jealous
* we try to justify why they have done better … they cheated or acted improperly
* we disagree with their views
* they “rub us the wrong way”
* they are more popular than we are
* sometimes it’s just to make fun of others
* or we make a criticism as a joke, to provoke a laugh at someone else’s expense

Consider what could be the most ominous statement in these verses. “And the Lord heard them.” Why would that be ominous?

* sometimes we make comments of complaint or accusation
* maybe we just think them
* scary to think that God knows even our thoughts of criticism or complaint
* we are held responsible for what we say

We noted Moses’ humility. How would this help him (and us) deal with disappointments and opposition?

* what people say doesn’t matter so much
* my reputation matters less than my character
* I’m going to trust God … no matter what people say, no matter what happens
* God is bigger than these petty issues

3.2 Criticism: Questioning God

Listen for God’s response.

Numbers 12:4-9 (NIV) At once the LORD said to Moses, Aaron and Miriam, "Come out to the Tent of Meeting, all three of you." So the three of them came out. 5 Then the LORD came down in a pillar of cloud; he stood at the entrance to the Tent and summoned Aaron and Miriam. When both of them stepped forward, 6 he said, "Listen to my words: "When a prophet of the LORD is among you, I reveal myself to him in visions, I speak to him in dreams. 7 But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house. 8 With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles; he sees the form of the LORD. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?" 9 The anger of the LORD burned against them, and he left them.

What suggests the Lord was deeply concerned by the comments about Moses?

* God had heard the comments
* called all three of them to the Tent of Meeting
* this was where God’s presence communicated with the people
* not unlike being called to the principal’s office in school
* God wanted to deal with the problem personally

How was Moses different from other prophets?

* other prophets heard from God in visions or dreams
* sometimes the message was in a riddle or based on the events in the dream or vision
* recall dreams interpreted by Joseph
* God declared Moses to be faithful
* when God communicated with Moses it was face to face
* God spoke in plain language, not in riddles

What penetrating, convicting question did God ask Miriam and Aaron?

* why then, did you have the nerve, the audacity to speak against God’s servant?
* it was rude, foolish, cheeky, impudent

How can criticism of God’s leaders impact us and our church?

* it can be similarly rude, foolish, cheeky, impudent
* it can distract and discourage a spiritual leader
* it destroys the unity of the Body of Christ, the Church
* it can weaken the church in its ministry and outreach

What price do we pay for having a critical spirit?

* we live with a grumpy spirit
* we are repeatedly dissatisfied, upset with everything
* can affect our outlook
* distracts us from our relationship with God – trusting Him, obeying Him
* we end up elbowing Christ off the throne of our lives and act in ways that do not please Him

What can we do to change the behavior of being critical and instead be encouraging to others?

* confess your attitude to God,
* ask Him to change your heart
* when someone starts complaining or criticizing another in your presence, indicate you’d rather not have such a conversation
* when you do hear criticism, don’t pass it on
* practice looking for good qualities to praise instead of things to criticize

3.3 Confess and Return

Listen for judgment and restoration.

Numbers 12:10-15 (NIV) When the cloud lifted from above the Tent, there stood Miriam--leprous, like snow. Aaron turned toward her and saw that she had leprosy; 11 and he said to Moses, "Please, my lord, do not hold against us the sin we have so foolishly committed. 12 Do not let her be like a stillborn infant coming from its mother's womb with its flesh half eaten away." 13 So Moses cried out to the LORD, "O God, please heal her!" 14 The LORD replied to Moses, "If her father had spit in her face, would she not have been in disgrace for seven days? Confine her outside the camp for seven days; after that she can be brought back."

What judgment came upon Miriam?

* stricken with leprosy
* suddenly had a terrible skin disease
* described by Aaron as something similar to the “flesh eating bacteria” we hear of today
* Leprosy in Scripture may not always have been what we know today as “Hansen’s Disease”
* it was any rash that could be dangerous to health and dangerously contagious

What was Aaron’s confession?

* what we did and said was sinful
* we were foolish to say those things, have that attitude
* please don’t hold it against us

How does Miriam’s sentence suggest the restorative grace of God exercised in His discipline on those who sin?

* there *was* discipline – behaviorist psychology calls this “negative reinforcement”
* at the same time, it was not permeant
* God would restore Miriam to the fellowship of the camp and family
* God’s goal is not to wipe out sinners, rather to restore them to fellowship with Him
* truth be told, we all have offended God in various ways … He does not strike us down, He works to restore us

Consider our responsibility when we criticize hurtfully or get criticized in a hurtful manner.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| When you criticize | When others criticize you |
| * Be quick to confess (agree with God that it is sin)
* Repent – resolve to cease and desist
* Pursue forgiveness – from the injured party and from God
 | * Don’t hold it against them
* Be willing to forgive
* Pray for them
* Act in ways that will restore relationships
 |

Use the last page as a handout so your learners can take home the application points of this week’s lesson.

Application

Be honest with yourself.

* Evaluate your own heart for complaints against others.
* Ask God to reveal where you might be comparing yourself to others.
* The first step is to see yourself as God sees you.

Encourage someone else.

* When your heart is prone to criticize, choose instead to find someone to encourage.
* Intentionally let that person know how he or she blesses you.

Confess your criticism to another.

* Have you been critical of someone in unhealthy ways?
* The Lord may be convicting you to ask that person for forgiveness and seek to walk in steps of reconciliation.

Word Search Puzzle

Humph! It’s been a while. You’ve had plenty of time to do those book reports. But I don’t want to have a critical spirit, so I’ll just suggest you find as many of the words as you can. As always, they go right, left, up, down, and diagonal. You might note they all come from your Bible passage in Numbers 12. Have fun … if you can!
Humph! I suppose you’ll need help. Go to <https://tinyurl.com903/4vhypvua>. Your precious crossword is also along with some other Family type activities.

MEETING
OUTSIDE
PILLAR
PROPHET
REVEAL
RIDDLES
SERVANT
SEVEN
SNOW
SOMMONED
SPEAK
SPOKEN
STILLBORN
TALK
TENT
THREE
VISIONS
WIFE
WORDS

AFRAID
AGAINST
AMONG
ANGER
BURNED
CAMP
CLOUD
CONFINED
DISGRACE
DREAMS
ENTRANCE
FACE
FAITHFUL
FOOLISHLY
HEAL
HUMBLE
INFANT
LEPROSY
LISTEN
MARRIED