

The Abrasive Effects of Criticism . . .

Periodically, someone in your life assumes the position of “heavenly sandpaper.” This person is an expert at finding fault, no matter how minute—and focusing on it. The result of such abrasion is anything but refining. Instead, hurtful words grate against the grain . . . strip away self-worth . . . and wear you down emotionally.

God holds all of us accountable for how we use words—especially words that wound others. Excessive, critical words do not come from the heart of the wise . . . neither do they reflect the heart of God.

*“When words are many, transgression is not lacking,
but whoever restrains his lips is prudent.”
(Proverbs 10:19)*

Q: “What is a critical spirit?”

At the Wimbledon tennis championships in England, a judge sits on an elevated chair to the side of the tennis net between two competitors. This judge has both earned the right to be a judge and been invited to be a judge based on a reputation of being accurate and fair-minded. When a ball is served outside the boundary line, the judge calls, “Fault!” These judgment calls are appropriate and appreciated.

However, the person with a critical spirit has not earned the reputation of being accurate or fair-minded. This judge sits uninvited and elevated above others, yelling, “Fault . . . fault . . . fault!” The calls are inappropriate and unappreciated. The Bible is not silent about those with a critical spirit . . . those sitting on a judgment seat, looking down on others.

*“Why do you pass judgment on your brother?
Or you, why do you despise your brother?
For we will all stand before
the judgment seat of God.”
(Romans 14:10)*

The Smoke Screens

The following checklist will help you to understand the person who has a critical spirit. Additionally, it can be used as a personal test to see if there are any smoke screens in your own life. Do you ever . . .

Secretly believe you are better than others?

Make assumptions about others without knowing the facts?

Obtain revenge for a personal offense?

Kid with the intent to hurt?

Envoy the success of others?

Shift personal blame to others?

Camouflage personal discontentment?

Rebel against and resist authority?

Employ sarcasm as a source of humor?

Elevate self by putting others down?

Nurture perfectionistic tendencies to make yourself look better?

Childhood Wounding

The children's rhyme "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me!" could not be further from the truth. Critical words can be more catastrophic than a natural disaster. There may be no visible destruction, but damage to the spirit of a child is devastating. Many children who live with messages that wound their self-worth will resort to criticism as a means of self-defense. Painful messages played over and over cause hurt people to hurt people!¹

Harshness says—"You're not worth consideration."

Unconcern says—"You're not valuable."

Rejection says—"You're not acceptable."

Taunting says—"You deserve to be put down."

Key Verse to Memorize

*"Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person."
(Colossians 4:6)*

Key Passage to Read and Reread

James 3:1–12

How to Respond to the Criticism of Others

- Be assured that you can accept others in the same way Christ accepts you. (Romans 15:7)
- Be open to the slightest kernel of truth when you are criticized. (Proverbs 17:10)
- Be able to receive criticism without being defensive.² (Proverbs 15:12)
- Be determined to speak well of your critic. (Romans 12:14)
- Be committed to pray for your critic. (Matthew 5:44)
- Be aware that as a follower of Christ, you will be criticized. (Matthew 5:11)
- Be encouraged that you will be disciplined by God because you are His child. (Hebrews 12:5–6)
- Be dependent on the Lord's perspective to determine your worth and value, not on the opinions of others. (Galatians 1:10)
- Be discerning regarding the accuracy of the critical words of others. (Proverbs 16:21)

*"Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."
(Romans 12:21)*

Enlarge Your Heart to Become an Encourager

- An encourager has a humble heart . . . *a heart that sees its own shortcomings.* (Psalm 139:23–24)
- An encourager has a compassionate heart . . . *a heart that actively cares about the lives of others.* (Colossians 3:12)
- An encourager has an accepting heart . . . *a heart that offers a sense of security.* (Romans 15:7)
- An encourager has an exhorting heart . . . *a heart that doesn't wound with words.* (Ephesians 4:29)
- An encourager has a wise heart . . . *a heart that relies on the Spirit for truth.* (1 Corinthians 2:13)

*“Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths,
but only such as is good for building up,
as fits the occasion, that it may give grace
to those who hear.”
(Ephesians 4:29)*

Related Topics . . .

- Envy & Jealousy:
Taming the Terrible Twins
- Identity: Who Are You?
Do You Know Who You Really Are?
- Lying:
How to Stop Truth Decay
- Manipulation:
Severing the Strings of Control
- Reconciliation:
Restoring Broken Relationships

1. J. Grant Howard, *The Trauma of Transparency: A Biblical Approach to Inter-Personal Communication*, A Critical Concern Book (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1979), 56–59.
2. For this section see William D. Backus, *Telling Each Other the Truth* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 1985), 106–8.

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Critical Spirit:

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