

Be an Encourager—Not a Critic

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. ...

*“Sin is not ended by multiplying words,
but the prudent hold their tongues.”*
(Proverbs 10:19)

What Is a Critical Spirit?

- A critical spirit is an excessively negative attitude with harshness in judging.
- Criticism has two different meanings.
 - Speaking *fairly* with discernment in regard to merit or value
 - Speaking *unfairly* with trivial or harsh judgments

“The tongue has the power of life and death.”
(Proverbs 18:21)

What Is Encouragement?

- Encouragement is the act of inspiring another person with comfort, counsel, and confidence.
- The word *encourage* literally means “to cause another to be confident.”
 - En means “to cause to be.”
 - Courage means “confidence.”

“Encourage one another daily.”
(Hebrews 3:13)

9 Differences between a Critical Spirit and a Caring Spirit

- **A critical spirit condemns** the person as well as the action.
A caring spirit condemns the action, not the person.
(Proverbs 12:18)
- **A critical spirit focuses** on the faults of others.
A caring spirit focuses on self-examination. (Luke 6:41)
- **A critical spirit ridicules** others.
A caring spirit refrains from ridiculing others. (Proverbs 11:12)
- **A critical spirit makes judgments** based on appearances.
A caring spirit makes judgments based on the facts.
(John 7:24)
- **A critical spirit assumes** the worst without first hearing from the accused.
A caring spirit assumes the best while waiting to hear from the accused. (John 7:51)
- **A critical spirit tears others down** without seeing the unmet needs.
A caring spirit builds others up according to their needs.
(Ephesians 4:29)
- **A critical spirit confronts** others publicly.
A caring spirit confronts others privately. (Matthew 18:15)
- **A critical spirit responds** harshly when accused by others.
A caring spirit responds appreciatively without quarreling when others give advice. (Proverbs 13:10)
- **A critical spirit lacks** mercy toward others.
A caring spirit responds with mercy toward others.
(James 2:12–13)

*“The lips of the righteous know what finds favor,
but the mouth of the wicked only what is perverse.”*
(Proverbs 10:32)

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!*

*"I am poor and needy, and my heart
is wounded within me."
(Psalm 109:22)*

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."

Root Cause of a Critical Spirit

- **Wrong Belief:** "My sense of significance is enhanced when I show how others are wrong. The fact that 'I am right' justifies my criticism of others."

Right Belief: "When I am critical of others, I am only judging the sin in myself. Apparently, God thought I was significant enough to create me with His plan and purpose for me. Because Christ lives in me, continually extending His mercy toward me, I will reflect His mercy by encouraging the hearts of others."

*"We urge you, brothers and sisters,
warn those who are idle and disruptive,
encourage the disheartened, help the weak,
be patient with everyone. Make sure that nobody
pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive
to do what is good for each other and for everyone else."
(1 Thessalonians 5:14–15)*

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 understanding heart ... **a heart that learns and draws out the hearts of others.** (Proverbs 20:5)
- An encourager has an accepting heart ... **a heart that offers a sense of security.** (Romans 15:7)
- An encourager has an appreciative heart ... **a heart that sees God-given worth in everyone.** (Luke 12:6–7)
- An encourager has a praising heart ... **a heart that praises the positives.** (Philippians 4:8)
- An encourager has an exhorting heart ... **a heart that doesn't wound with words.** (Ephesians 4:29)
- An encourager has a discerning heart ... **a heart to see the deepest unmet needs of others.** (Philippians 4:19)
- An encourager has a wise heart ... **a heart that relies on the Spirit for truth.** (1 Corinthians 2:13)

*"If you have any encouragement
from being united with Christ,
if any comfort from his love,
if any common sharing in the Spirit,
if any tenderness and compassion,
then make my joy complete
by being like-minded,
having the same love,
being one in spirit and of one mind."
(Philippians 2:1–2)*

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 willing** to consider the criticism. If it is true, this person is God's megaphone to get your attention. (Proverbs 12:15)
- **Be able** to receive criticism without being defensive. (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)

Encouragement Communicates Care

On this day ...

Mend a quarrel.

Search out a forgotten friend.

Dismiss a suspicion and replace it with a trust.

Write a letter to someone who misses you.

Encourage a youth who has lost his faith.

Keep a promise.

Forget an old grudge.

Examine your demands on others.

Fight for a principle.

Express your gratitude.

Overcome an old fear.

Take time to appreciate the beauty of nature.

Give God the praise.

Tell someone you love them.

Tell them again, and again and again.

—Author unknown

- **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)

When you see your significance
as a child of God—
when you learn how dearly loved
you are by the Lord—
instead of tearing others down,
you will be fulfilled in building others up.

—June Hunt

Key Verse to Memorize

*"Let your conversation be always full of grace,
seasoned with salt, so that you may know
how to answer everyone."*

(Colossians 4:6)

Key Passage to Read

James 3:1–12

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