

Bible Studies for Life: May 28

Avoiding a Critical Spirit • Numbers 12:1-15

By Laura Lee Leathers



Leathers

Yo
u
ha
ve
yo
ur
op
in
io
n,
an
d
I
ha
ve
mi
ne
.
Th
at
is
no
rm
al
.
Th
e
pr
ob

le
m
co
me
s
wh
en
yo
u
an
d
I
cr
it
ic
iz
e
ot
he
rs
be
ca
us
e
th
ey
do
n'
t
ha
ve
th
e
sa
me
vi
ew

For Believers, there is also the temptation to criticize others when their approach to ministry differs from our expectations. The point of today's lesson: Guard your heart against criticizing others.

How do we guard our hearts? The answer is always the same – reading and studying the Word of God, praying, and waiting upon God to work through the situation.

We must be aware of the difference between *destructive* and *constructive* criticism as we address others involved in ministry. Today's lesson looks closer into the relationship between Miriam and Aaron and their opposition to Moses, which resulted in destructive criticism.

Comparing yourself to others can lead to a critical spirit (Numbers 12:1-3 NKJV). Zipporah was married to Moses. Was she the Cushite (ESV) woman mentioned in this section? Most commentaries believe she was not. (Cushites were descendants of Ham in Genesis 10:6-7).

Zipporah was from Midian in Arabia (Exodus 2:21-22). Cush, also known as Ethiopia, is located south of Egypt – two different places. If this was Zipporah, why did Miriam and Aaron wait until now to criticize his marriage?

This marriage, late in Moses' life, was the basis of criticism that probably originated from Miriam and then Aaron. What happened? Review Exodus 15:18-21. Miriam is leading the women in rejoicing. God was working through Miriam but in a different way. Had she lost her focus?

Their criticism sounds more like jealousy, "Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us also" (v.2)?

“And the LORD heard it.” Was this a battle for Moses to deal with? No! “Humility is recognition of being ‘under the mighty hand of God’” (1 Peter. 5:5-6, The Woman’s Study Bible). It is also a promise, “Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up” (James 4:10).

Criticism of others can be a form of questioning God’s work (Numbers 12:4-9). Have you ever said or done something without considering who could be watching or listening? Then out of nowhere, a person steps in and addresses what you have done – calls you out.

Miriam, Aaron, and Moses were immediately summoned to the tabernacle of meeting to come before the LORD. Speaking to them from the pillar of cloud, he called out for Miriam and Aaron to come forward while Moses was in the background.

The LORD speaks directly to them and reminds them of His relationship with Moses, not as a prophet to whom God speaks as in a dream but one to whom the LORD speaks to face to face.

Miriam and Aaron should have therefore been afraid to speak anything against “My servant Moses.” They knew he had a special calling from God but because they weren’t afraid, the LORD was angry and departed from their presence.

Confess a critical spirit and return to God (Numbers 12:10-15). Once again the word, “suddenly,” is used, this time to describe how quickly Miriam became leprous (see Leviticus chapters 13 and 14).

Try to imagine the horror Aaron experiences when he turns around and sees what has happened to her, and in the background listening and watching everything is Moses.

Aaron confesses their sin to Moses, “Please do not lay this sin on us, in which we have done foolishly and in which we have sinned” (v.11).

Moses does intercede, asking for healing (v. 13). The Lord replies with a question: "If her father had but spit in her face, would she not be shamed seven days?" To spit in someone's face was a sign of rejection. In this case, God had withdrawn his presence from Miriam and Aaron.

God did answer Moses' request. However, Miriam had to stay outside the camp for seven days of purification. The people waited.

"Miriam was restored and continued to serve God as a leader in the Israelite community. The fact that she was 'brought back in' to the camp after seven days implies more than just physical healing and restoration. Later at her death (Numbers 20:21), but for her role as a leader" (See Micah 6:4. LifeWay).

When presented in a loving and gracious manner, constructive criticism is beneficial. We need to remember, "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, emphasis added).

Constructive criticism should be based on biblical principles. God equips us with different spiritual gifts and works in people's lives in various ways to complete His purposes.

Leathers is a member of First Church, Lexington. She may be contacted at laura.l.leathers@gmail.com.