



CRITICAL SPIRIT

Confronting the Heart of a Critic



June Hunt



HOPE
for the Heart

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JUNE HUNT



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Dear Friend,

I've been around both—those who have one and those who don't. And there is no joy when you have to be around someone with a *critical spirit!*

People with a critical spirit are like porcupines: When they feel threatened, they push out their barb-like quills to protect themselves and can deeply stab your heart.

We don't feel safe with *sharp-quilled people*. We know as surely as they can attack others—often without justification—they can just as easily turn on us without provocation.

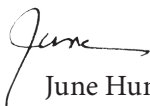
Unfortunately, those who have a critical spirit don't recognize this negative character flaw in themselves. Instead, they defiantly proclaim, "I'm not negative. I'm just *right!*"

If you try to have a close relationship with someone who has a *porcupine-personality*, realize that it's next to impossible to embrace a porcupine without getting hurt. And then, if you are being subjected to the jabs of an unjust critic, be on guard—you could get into the same negative pattern by jabbing back.

If you have been initiating the barbs, the guaranteed solution to stop you from "barbing" is one profound sentence spoken by Jesus: "*Do to others as you would have them do to you*" (Luke 6:31).

Just imagine, if every person with a critical spirit were to apply this passage every moment of every day, the transformation would be life-changing. No more barbs, no more jabs, no more sharp-pointed quills—just the permanent change of a life reflecting the love of Christ.

Yours in the Lord's hope,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "June". The signature is fluid and elegant, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right from the end of the name.

June Hunt

CRITICAL SPIRIT

Confronting the Heart of a Critic

“Curse God and die!” The words spew out of the mouth of an embittered wife who is stunned and stymied by tragedy. Gone ... destroyed ... are *all* their possessions and *all* their children as a result of God’s allowing Satan to test her godly husband in order to prove his faith.

Job mourns their losses but doesn’t malign the goodness of God. Instead he submits himself to the sovereignty of God by declaring, *“The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised”* (Job 1:21).

But *“Curse God and die!”* is her retort, especially after seeing her husband suddenly stricken—afflicted from head to toe with painful sores. She observes this once respected man—so revered in the community—now scorned and reduced to sitting in a pile of ashes and scraping his sores with a jagged piece of pottery. Job’s noble stance before the Lord is absolute nonsense to her. She doesn’t want to hear one more word of devotion from her disease-ridden husband.

A critical spirit consumes the wife of the one whom God calls *“the greatest man among all the people”* (Job 1:3). However, she’s had enough, and she wants Job—and God—to know it! *“Are you still maintaining your integrity?”* she pounds, unleashing her toxic tongue: *“Curse God and die!”* (Job 2:9).



DEFINITIONS

Everything is fine ... until they open their mouths. They are aghast at the sight before them. Their once highly respected friend is now horrifically humbled. Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar—let’s call them Eli, Bill, and Zo for short—have set out from their homes to pour out comforting words upon their troubled friend, but now they find themselves speechless. For seven days and seven nights they sit on the ground and commiserate, and “*No one said a word to him, because they saw how great his suffering was*” (Job 2:13).

But soon their sympathetic presence morphs into a barrage of stinging rebuke that further crushes the spirit of poor Job. He responds in deep emotional pain ...

**“Anyone who withholds kindness from a friend forsakes the fear of the Almighty.”
(Job 6:14)**

Like Job’s friends, has someone in your life assumed the role of your personal *heavenly sandpaper*—a self-appointed expert at finding fault and continually focusing on your faults in an attempt to “refine” you? The abrasive words are not helpful, but hurtful, and qualify as *verbal and emotional abuse*. Such criticism grates against the grain of your soul, wearing you down and stripping you of your worth.

God holds all of us accountable for how we use our words, especially words that wound. Harsh, critical words don't pour out of the hearts of godly people. Jesus said ...

**“For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of. A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him.”
(Matthew 12:34–35)**

WHAT IS a Critical Spirit?

Eli (Eliphaz), most likely the eldest among the friends, speaks first—ever so cautiously. But then his words take on a presumptive tone. By the time Eli finishes, he insinuates that Job is being disciplined by God because of sin and that the wise way for Job to proceed is to submit to the discipline.

But there's a problem with his critical presumption. Job's tortuous troubles have nothing to do with sin. Instead, they're all about a showdown between God and Satan over his testimony. Will Job stand strong or will he fall? The Bible says ...

**“Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.”
(James 1:12)**

At the Wimbledon tennis championship in England, a judge sits on an elevated chair to the side of the net between two competitors. The judge is hired for the prestigious match by earning the reputation for consistent fairness and accuracy. When a ball is served outside the boundary line, the judge yells, “Fault!” These judgment calls are appropriate and appreciated.

The person with a critical spirit, however, hasn’t earned the reputation of being accurate or fair-minded. This judge sits uninvited and elevated above others, yelling “fault ... fault ... fault!” These calls are inappropriate and unappreciated.

The Bible is not silent about those who have a critical spirit—those who sit smugly in the judgment seat looking down arrogantly on others.

**“You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God’s judgment seat.”
(Romans 14:10)**

- ▶ A **critical spirit** is an excessively negative attitude characterized by harshness in judging.
 - Criticizers judge others severely and unfavorably.
 - Hypercritical people judge others with unreasonably strict standards.
 - Faultfinders look for and point out flaws and defects with nagging and unreasonable criticism.

For example, certain circumcised Jewish believers unjustly criticized the apostle Peter for daring to fellowship with the uncircumcised. The issue of circumcision (was it was necessary for salvation or not) created sharp division in the early church. “So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him” (Acts 11:2).

- ▶ **“Criticism”** comes from the Greek word *kritikos*, which means “able to discern or skilled in judging.”¹
- ▶ **Criticism** has two different meanings:²
 - Speaking fairly with discernment in regard to merit or value (A literary *critic* is expected to give a fair critique by accurately analyzing, judging, and reporting.)
 - Speaking unfairly with trivial or harsh judgments (A person with a *critical spirit* gives unfair criticism by faultfinding, nitpicking, and quibbling.)

The Bible stresses the powerful impact of our right and wrong words ...

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

WHAT IS a Caring Spirit?

Job's friends initially demonstrate a caring spirit, reflecting the deep, attentive love of God in the midst of suffering.

But then the misguided pride that accompanies a critical spirit consumes them to the degree that the three men are more concerned with delivering theological points than showing desperately needed compassion.

The Bible has much to say about pride, including God's heart attitude toward it.

**“ ... I hate pride and arrogance,
evil behavior and perverse speech.”
(Proverbs 8:13)**

One of our deepest needs is for someone to care about us—our successes and failures, our strengths and weaknesses, our virtues and vices. We want people to be attentive to our likes and dislikes, our joys and sorrows, our dreams and disappointments. How blessed we are when we have people with caring spirits in our lives!

But how much more secure we feel when we come to know the breadth and the depth of God's love and care for us.

The apostle Paul said ...

**“I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”
(Ephesians 3:17–19)**

► **Caring** involves someone giving watchful or painstaking attention based on desiring what is best for others.³

- To care means to be thoughtfully attentive and protective.
- To care means to be personally interested in or feeling affection toward someone else.
- To care means to be actively involved in doing what is best for another person.

The One who created you gives loving, *watchful* care toward you. This care is expressed in Scripture ...

**“What is mankind that you are mindful of them, a son of man that you care for him? You made them a little lower than the angels; you crowned them with glory and honor.”
(Hebrews 2:6–7)**

▶ **Caring** people are genuinely interested in showing concern for others. In the Bible we read about truly caring people.

- The Good Samaritan, who took care of the savagely beaten traveler

“He [a Samaritan] went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him” (Luke 10:34).

- The apostle Paul, who cared for the new Christians young in their faith

“We were like young children among you. Just as a nursing mother cares for her children ... ” (1 Thessalonians 2:7).

- The Christians in Philippi, who sent a brother to care for the needs of Paul

“But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, coworker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs. ... he almost died for the work of Christ. He risked his life to make up for the help you yourselves could not give me” (Philippians 2:25, 30).