

Leadership Kryptonite: Critical Spirit

“Scoffer’ is the name of the arrogant, haughty man who acts with arrogant pride.” Proverbs 21:24 (ESV)

Zero offense intended to all the wonderful Debbys, Nellies, and Carls in our lives. Thankfully, you are not a Negative Nelly, Debby Downer, or Complaining Carl. However, I guarantee you know a few. They go by different names but always seem to work their way into a team. It’s known as a critical spirit, and it is a deadly form of leadership kryptonite.

At a previous church, we had a member of our team who lived with a critical spirit. He saw everything through a negative lens. He challenged every new idea, doubted every decision, and always expected the worst. Unfortunately, he brought the entire team down.

A person with a critical spirit is to a team what water is to a fire. They quench enthusiasm, hinder progress, and create an atmosphere of negativity. To lead effectively, we must recognize and address this destructive attitude.

3 Characteristics of a Critical Spirit:

1. Challenge Change

A critical spirit resists change, fearing the unknown and clinging to the familiar. They prefer tradition over transformation. They criticize the past while clinging to it and fight the future while forecasting failure.

2. Excuse Error

Individuals with a critical spirit often justify their own shortcomings by highlighting others’ faults. They are quick to judge but slow to self-reflect. They always have a reason why they failed to meet expectations where others succeed.

3. Destructive Criticism

Their critiques are seldom constructive. They tear down without building up. They point to problems without offering solutions.

The Root Causes of a Critical Spirit

A critical spirit doesn’t appear overnight; it’s often the fruit of deeper issues:

- **Bad Company**

“Do not be deceived: ‘Bad company ruins good morals.’” (1 Corinthians 15:33, ESV). Negative influences can shape our attitudes and behaviors. It’s been observed that people become the average of their five closest friends. If you sit with scoffers, it’s hard to be anything else.

- **Immaturity**

Spiritual and emotional immaturity often manifests as a critical spirit.

- **Insecurity**

Insecurity breeds criticism as a defense mechanism. It is an attempt to elevate ourselves by tearing others down.

- **Negativity**

A habit of negative thinking, when left unchecked, can develop into a critical spirit. We are called to think on whatever is true, honorable, and commendable, etc (Philippians 4:8, ESV).

- **Lack of Grace**

Showing little grace to others often indicates we haven’t fully grasped the grace given to us.

- **Selfish Ambition**

James 3:16 (ESV) warns that where selfish ambition exists, there will be disorder and every vile practice. A critical spirit often stems from self-centered motives.

- **Unresolved Bitterness**

Holding on to past hurts can foster a critical heart. Offense is often the primary root. As Solomon points out, “An offended brother is like a walled city” (Proverbs 18:19, ESV).

- **Jealousy**

Jealousy will lead to resentment and criticism. Rather than be offended by others’ success, rejoice in it!

- **Ungratefulness**

An ungrateful heart fails to see God’s blessings, leading to a critical outlook. Cultivating thankfulness helps combat this.

Whether it is yourself or a member of your team dealing with a critical spirit, it is important that it is not ignored. It must be addressed. Have the conversation one-on-one, be honest about what you’ve observed, and then ask what is going on.

Healing a Critical Spirit

Healing begins with intentional steps toward transformation:

1. Seek To Make Amends

Acknowledge and repent of the critical spirit. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9, ESV).

A good framework is:

- Pray for those you’ve criticized.
- Go to them and apologize.
- Look for a way to bless them.

2. Tune Out Negative Voices

Distance yourself from negative influences. Surround yourself with those who uplift and encourage (Proverbs 13:20, ESV).

Make a list of the negative voices you’re listening to:

- Friends who dump on you.
- Social Media.
- News Media.
- Entertainment.

Go on a negativity fast. Remove these voices from your life!

3. Tune In Positive Voices

Fill your mind with God’s Word and positive influences. Meditate on scripture and seek godly counsel (Psalm 1:2, ESV).

While it’s a good first step to tune out the negative, you need to go further and tune in the positive.

What voices can you add to your life that will uplift you and build your faith?

- Podcasts.
- Books.
- Music.
- Friends.

4. Invite Accountability

Invite trusted individuals to hold you accountable. “Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another” (Proverbs 27:17, ESV). Ask a member of your team to hold you accountable. Give them permission after a meeting or discussion to come to you privately and tell you where the critical

voice crept in. Prayerfully, this accountability will help you become more self-aware of where you are bringing down rather than building up.

A critical spirit can be destructive, but through Christ, we can find healing and restoration. Preach Jesus, keep the Gospel clear, and change the world by embodying His love and grace. Let us strive to be leaders who build up rather than tear down, leading others toward the fullness of life in Christ.

Questions:

1. Take a look at the list of 3 characteristics of a critical spirit. Where have you observed these in your own life or on your team? Now, examine the root cause and see if you can identify any places where the root of criticism has set in. Are there any areas you need to address?
2. Where are negative voices poisoning your life? What needs to be tuned out, and what needs to be tuned in?
3. Where can opening yourself to accountability be effective in dealing with a critical spirit? How will you implement this?