

3

Miriam

A Critical Spirit

Numbers 12

Who hasn't been critical of someone else and said, either aloud or inwardly, "Who does she think she is?" Often we don't understand the details of someone's actions or have all the facts. Our anxiety comes out of our mouths, and we not only hurt ourselves but also sometimes damage the loyalty and well-being of others.

GROUP DISCUSSION. Think about times when you have been critical of another person. As nearly as you can understand yourself, what underlying attitude caused the criticism?

What is the difference between discernment and criticism?

PERSONAL REFLECTION. How do you feel when you are unjustly criticized?

When the children of Israel left Egypt, they had little sense of national identity and were not used to following a leader. Moses' job was not easy. He needed all the support he could get, and the people needed continual reassurance that he was chosen by God to take them to the Promised Land. Sometimes that seemed doubtful in the face of privation and difficulty. Imagine what could have happened to Moses' confidence and to the people when the members of Moses' own family began to criticize his leadership. *Read Numbers 12.*

1. What two criticisms do Miriam and Aaron have about Moses (vv. 1-2)?

2. What do these criticisms imply about Moses' attitude?

How does Miriam and Aaron's view differ from God's evaluation of Moses?

3. How important was Miriam's role in the exodus of the children of Israel from Egypt (see Exodus 2:1-8; 15:20-21 and Micah 6:4)?

4. Miriam and Aaron's attack on their brother may have been provoked by his appointing seventy elders over Israel (Numbers 11:16-17). How might the appointment of elders affect their status and feelings?

5. Explain how you feel when your status or position is threatened. What is your instinctive reaction?

6. How does the Lord respond to the criticisms of Miriam and Aaron (vv. 4-10)?

7. Why do you think God summons all three of them before him?

8. What do we learn about Aaron and Moses from their response to this traumatic event (vv. 10-13)?

9. Why do you think God carried out a seven-day punishment for Miriam (vv. 14-15)?

Why didn't he punish Aaron in the same way?

10. Why is the criticism of spiritual leaders especially dangerous?

11. What is your response to knowing that the Lord hears (v. 2) the criticisms you make against others?

12. After reading this passage, how do you differentiate between offering valid insights into relational situations with a loving spirit and being openly critical?

Ask God to teach you to be more loving.

Now or Later

Check out your personal critical faculties. Do they inspire you to pray or to be negative toward others? What can you do to heighten your awareness of your motives in speaking against others?