

**Week of November 18, 2012**  
***From Failure to Correction***



**Passage Outline:**

1. Acknowledge God's Leadership (Ex. 15:19-21)
2. Avoid a Critical Spirit (Num. 12:1-3)
3. Accept God's Correction (Num. 12:8-13,15)

**What Our Study About?**

Praising God for His work in one area yet questioning His work in another is inconsistent; it calls into question the character of God. Like Miriam, we can learn to trust God's character and be content in the way He works.

**How This Can Impact Your Life?**

This lesson can help you identify ways to avoid a discontented or critical spirit.

**1. Acknowledge God's Leadership - Exodus 15:19-21**

**Exodus 15:19-21**

<sup>19</sup> When Pharaoh's horses, chariots and horsemen went into the sea, the LORD brought the waters of the sea back over them, but the Israelites walked through the sea on dry ground. <sup>20</sup> Then Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women followed her, with tambourines and dancing. <sup>21</sup> Miriam sang: "Sing to the LORD, for he is highly exalted. The horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea."

- A. The Lord delivered the Israelites from Egyptian bondage. But Pharaoh decided he wanted them back and followed them with his army.
- B. The first obstacle that Moses and Children of Israel came to was the Red Sea.
- C. Now trapped between the Red Sea and approaching army of Pharaoh, God's people cried out in fear.
- D. God heard their cry, directed Moses to guide His people across the sea, and parted the water so they would be able to get to the other side safe and sound.
- E. Once the people made their way to safety to the other side, God collapsed the wall of water, drowning the Egyptian army.

**Please read the articles "The Egyptian Army" and "Songs in the Old Testament" contained in your preparation packet you picked up last Sunday. If you missed it, additional copies are on the back table.**

- F. Can you imagine the joy and excitement of the people seeing this deliverance of God?
- G. Miriam leads this joyful celebration and involves the women in singing praise to God for everything He had done to rescue His people.
- H. With her tambourine in hand, she led them as they danced for joy.

**Please read the article "Miriam: All We Know" contained in your preparation packet you picked up last Sunday. If you missed it, additional copies are on the back table.**

- I. Although Miriam's song is brief, it's packed with two expressions of true worship.
  - i. She led the women to sing their praise exclusively to the Lord. She did not lead the women to praise Moses and Aaron, even though they had led God's people to freedom.

- ii. She focused on what God had done. He had delivered them from danger.
  - She pointed out the sea filled with horses and their riders, which gave a wonderful testimony of the Lord’s power and care of His people.
  - God had destroyed the Egyptian army and preserved the people of Israel.
- J. In our worship, we to must concentrate on praising the Lord and avoid the temptation to worship only what He's has done.
- K. Like Miriam, once we see the Lord for who His is and what He has done, praise flows from our hearts freely and sincerely.
  - i. When we praise Him, we take our eyes off ourselves and others, and we place them on Him alone.
  - ii. We have a sense of gratitude for what God has done for us, but all the praise belongs to Him.

### **How Easy Is It to Praise God?**

We are often quick to acknowledge God’s leadership when He does something dramatic— like when He divides the sea and washes away our obstacles.

But what about when life isn’t going like we want, or when it’s going OK, “normal”? Do we acknowledge His leadership at these times as well?

In your private devotions this coming week, take time to seek and acknowledge God's leadership, however dramatic or normal that may be.

## **2. Avoid a Critical Spirit - Numbers 12:1-3**

### **Numbers 12:1-3**

<sup>1</sup> Miriam and Aaron began to talk against Moses because of his Cushite wife, for he had married a Cushite. <sup>2</sup> "Has the LORD spoken only through Moses?" they asked. "Hasn't he also spoken through us?" And the LORD heard this. <sup>3</sup> (Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.)

- A. Miriam's attitude changed over time towards Moses' leadership.
- B. Miriam criticized Moses for marrying a Cushite woman. We don’t know the exact meaning of *Cushite*. It may be some kind of racial slur. Whatever the meaning, Miriam spoke cruelly and critically.
- C. Aaron joined Miriam in criticizing Moses’ wife, even though they were Moses' brother and sister and so their attack appears to be totally out of character.
  - i. Miriam cared for Moses when pharaoh’s daughter found him floating in a basket on the Nile River.
  - ii. Aaron had accompanied Moses without complaint, to confront Egypt’s Pharaoh.
  - iii. This criticism about Moses’ marriage seemed totally unreasonable and exhibited an extremely bad attitude.

**Please read the article “Aaron’s Role in the Exodus” contained in your preparation packet you picked up last Sunday. If you missed it, additional copies are on the back table.**

- D. Worst of all, their criticism came when Moses needed allies, not critics.
  - i. Earlier, Moses had poured his heart out to the Lord about the burden of leadership that he was carrying for the people.
  - ii. He asked the Lord to kill him and end his misery of leading such a large and obstinate people.
  - iii. Emotionally, Moses was spent. He didn't need criticism from his siblings.
- E. Aaron and Miriam questioned if Moses should be considered the God's spokesperson.
  - i. Notice what set Aaron and Miriam off was Moses' marriage to a foreigner.
  - ii. But what they complained about was God speaking primarily through Moses.
- F. Evidently jealousy was simmering in their hearts. They might have hidden their jealousy from others, but they could not conceal it from the Lord.
- G. Moses behaved as a godly man consumed by a sense of spiritual humility. In fact, the text says, not another person was as humble as Moses.
- H. Consequently, Miriam and Aaron's criticism about Moses' leadership didn't fit the facts of the person who had led them out of Egypt.

### **"If You Have Nothing Good to Say Then Don't Say Anything"**

Praising God leads us on a path of spiritual contentment. Criticizing others leads us on a path of spiritual dissatisfaction. We all know how criticism works in us and make us feel worse. Maybe that's why the saying above is so true.

The more we criticize, the more we grow dissatisfied. As dissatisfaction grows, the less we are energized and willing to serve the Lord. Could that be why St. John Lutheran Church is struggling?

Take time right now to evaluate what you say about your Church, your Pastor and the ministry of St. John. Is it positive or negative? Is it supportive or critical? Over the past week, have you exhibited a critical spirit toward someone? \_\_\_ Yes; \_\_\_ No; If so, what action can you take to express your trust in God rather than discontentment with that person?

### **3. Accept God's Correction - Numbers 12:8-13,15**

#### **Numbers 12:8-13, 15**

<sup>8</sup> [God said] "With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles; he sees the form of the LORD. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?" <sup>9</sup> The anger of the LORD burned against them, and he left them. <sup>10</sup> When the cloud lifted from above the Tent, there stood Miriam--leprous, like snow. Aaron turned toward her and saw that she had leprosy; <sup>11</sup> and he said to Moses, "Please, my lord, do not hold against us the sin we have so foolishly committed. <sup>12</sup> Do not let her be like a stillborn infant coming from its mother's womb with its flesh half eaten away." <sup>13</sup> So Moses cried out to the LORD, "O God, please heal her!" ... <sup>15</sup> So Miriam was confined outside the camp for seven days, and the people did not move on till she was brought back.

- A. The Lord reprimanded Aaron and Miriam by reminding them how He spoke to other prophets, namely through vision and dreams. But with Moses, God spoke face to face.
- B. In fact, God had even shown Himself to Moses.
- C. For that reason, how dare Miriam and Aaron criticize Moses? They should have thought twice about criticizing Moses and his leadership of Israel.
- D. The anger of the Lord burned against them, shown in two separate ways:
  - i. God left them;
  - ii. Miriam came down with leprosy;
- E. The Lord confronted Miriam and Aaron with their sin, but not because He wanted to punish them, but to cause them to address their sin and ultimately change their behavior.
- F. Aaron recognized their spiritual problem and asked Moses to pray for forgiveness.
- G. Moses pleaded with the Lord to heal his sister and the Lord answered Moses' plea and healed Miriam.
- H. Miriam still had to go through the procedure prescribed in Leviticus 13–14 and remain in seclusion outside the camp for seven days. This meant a seven-day delay in moving to the Promised Land.
- I. This seven-day delay reminds us how the sinful behavior of some can have consequences for others.

### **How do you Handle Feelings of Discontentment?**

How we handle discontentment is very important. When we see ourselves heading down that path of complaining and griping, we need to follow the Lord's command and address our critical spirit.

Which of the following best reflects your response to God's correction?

- I don't even recognize when God is disciplining me.
- I grumble about it – after all, others have done a lot worse.
- I endure it, but don't like it.
- I accept it, knowing that it will restore my fellowship with God and I can learn from what I did.

### **Biblical Truths in Focus**

1. As Christians, let us discipline ourselves to nurture hearts of sincere praise and gratitude to God for everything He has done in our lives.
2. Before the Lord, we should take inventory of what's going on in our lives so we don't nurture attitudes of discontentment.
3. When the Lord shows us we're nurturing critical spirits, we can respond by turning to Him with willing hearts ready to repent.
4. Let us constantly seek the Lord's guidance so we can discern the difference between offering constructive criticism and being critical.