



Critical Condition: Overcoming A Negative Outlook

The American Hospital Association recommends healthcare providers use the following terminology when describing the condition of a patient. **Undetermined:** The patient hasn't been diagnosed yet. **Stable:** The patient's vital signs are normal, and even though they might be in pain, recovery is favorable. **Serious:** The patient is very ill, and vital signs may be unstable. **Critical:** The patient has unstable vitals that are not normal, and could be unconscious. Indicators for recovery are unfavorable.

No one ever wants to hear that a loved one is in critical condition. Those two words carry an awful amount of weight with them. Weight that sends you to your knees, begging God to intercede--to do something--to miraculously change the condition of the person whose life is on the line.

We live in a day and age where we have been **conditioned to be critical**, and because of this, there are far too many Christians walking around with spiritual condition health charts stamped: critical. Their vitals are not normal. **They aren't showing signs of joy, freedom, peace, and victory like they should be.** Many of them are completely unconscious, painfully unaware that they suck life out of people with their steady stream of negativity. And unless things drastically improve, a full recovery is not looking good.

The old adage, "everyone's a critic," is truer today than it's ever been. With just a few taps here and a few clicks there, we can let everyone know what we think about the new restaurant in town or the movie we saw over the weekend. We no longer need Siskel and Ebert's thumbs; thanks to Facebook we've got millions of thumbs to communicate what we do or don't like. There's a whole entertainment industry built around judges who get paid millions to sit back and criticize performers. Hear me, I am a huge fan of apps like Rotten Tomatoes and Yelp. I'm an avid Facebook user, and I watch reality TV talent shows too, **but if we aren't careful, the judgmental nature of the culture in which we live can affect our view finder, causing us to focus on the worst instead of the best.**

I'll be the first to admit, I struggle with this. Sunday mornings are game day for me. My husband and I pastor a two-year-old church plant. We've put our heart and soul into this thing. It's not just a hobby or something we do for fun, it's our family's mission. Every week we have amazing church services. There are people everywhere, worship is so good it makes you want to literally never stop singing, we have the best volunteers in the world, ministry is happening on every level. But even among all the good, my critical eye can spot something that could be better and sometimes instead of going home praising God for all He did, I find myself consumed with the one thing that wasn't perfectly executed.

If you are like me, I want you to know that being able to spot things that could be better is not a bad thing. **It's actually a really great gift God has placed in you, and if stewarded well can be used to improve your sphere of influence.** But, if the bad is all you seem to focus on, you will lose your ability to enjoy life, and **that doesn't sit well with the One who came so that you might have AND ENJOY life.**

I have known a few professional fault finders in my day. They don't get paid in cash to look for shortcomings in **every** person or situation they have ever encountered, instead, they get paid with the temporary gratification of feeling a little bit better about themselves when they criticize others. They tirelessly read into everyone's every word and endlessly examine everything with intent to find dirt so that it makes them appear a little shinier.

I have also known some people who aren't negative toward others, but they'll be the first and fastest to point out their own flaws. They don't want to give anyone else a chance to criticize them, so in an effort to protect their heart, they criticize themselves.

Neither of those kinds of people could be described as joyful because when we spend our days criticizing ourselves and others, or focusing solely on the negative, we negate the cross. We make null the above-and-beyond life that Jesus wants for us here on earth, as it will be in heaven.

So how do we overcome? How do we condition our hearts to see and celebrate God's goodness instead of being negative?

First, we have to recognize that having a critical spirit is a critical situation. We have to see that it's hurtful to God, ourselves, and others, and we must earnestly desire change.

You are probably familiar with **Luke 6:37**, "*Do not judge others, and you will not be judged.*" But let's look at in *The Message* paraphrase:

Don't pick on people, jump on their failures, criticize their faults—unless, of course, you want the same treatment. Don't condemn those who are down; that hardness can boomerang. Be easy on people; you'll find life a lot easier.

This isn't a suggestion. It's a command from Jesus Himself. Don't criticize people. Don't dig for dirt, dig for gold. **Don't waste your time judging every human's words, actions, or motives, unless you want your every word, action, and motive to be judged.**

In Matthew 14, Mary pours out a very expensive jar of perfume over Jesus' head, and the disciples jumped all over her.

Matthew 14:8-9 *But when His disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, "Why this waste? For this fragrant oil might have been sold for much and given to the poor."*

I love Jesus' response in verse 10, "**Why criticize this woman for doing such a good thing to me?**"

Maybe the disciples criticized Mary because they were jealous. I'm sure the fact that she was able to bless Jesus with such an extravagant gift and they couldn't made them feel like they were in competition with her. **If you find yourself criticizing others, there may be some jealousy issues that need dealt with.** Or maybe they genuinely thought she was being wasteful. So what if they did. It was not their place to judge her intentions, and Jesus wasn't about to let them slide. **This is a serious issue to Him, and it should be to us as well.**

Secondly, we have to repent.

Repenting is more than saying you're sorry or asking God to forgive you. True repentance is when you realize that what you are doing is sin, and then you turn away from it. It's proving that you've had a change of heart.

Matthew 3:8 *So produce fruit that is consistent with repentance [demonstrating new behavior that proves a change of heart, and a conscious decision to turn away from sin].*

How are you going to demonstrate that your critical condition has changed? **What's your plan for producing fruit that is consistent with a repentant heart?** If we don't have a plan in place, I'm afraid we'll fall right back into our negative ways. Your plan may look different from the plan of the person sitting next to you, but here's one thing both plans must have in place: allow your Creator to create again.

Luke 6:45 *A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.*

If your heart is full of negative thoughts toward yourself, others, or just life in general, then it's going to be difficult keeping criticism from coming out of your mouth every time you open it.

So how do you change what's in your heart? There are several typical Christian devotional answers that apply here. Read your Bible more, pray more, fast more, go to church more, serve more, give more, more, more, more and while more of these things are always a great idea, **I believe in order to overcome a critical spirit, we need more than more, we need new.**

Psalms 51:10 *Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right and steadfast spirit within me.*

Create and Renew. We need to ask God, like David did, to create in us a new heart that would be, "firm in the purposes of virtue; that would not yield to temptation; that would carry out holy resolutions; that would be steadfast in the service of God" (Barnes 88). We need to ask God to renew a right spirit in us, because even though we are new creations in Christ, wrong spirits still like to hang around.

You can't change on your own. You can't, in your own strength, go from a glass-half-empty person to a glass-half-full person. You can't go from always seeing flaws to always noticing God's goodness. You can't create a new heart for yourself. **But thankfully, you have a connection.** The Connection! You can walk boldly into the throne room and ask Him to create in you a clean heart and to renew a right spirit inside you, and what you thought might take weeks, months, or even a lifetime to overcome, He will change in a moment. Instead of reading

and praying to try to run off negativity, you'll be reading and praying because your clean heart desires to be full of His Word and your right Spirit desires constant communion with Him.

Let's not be okay with a chart that reads critical. Instead, let God take the places of our hearts that have been tarnished by negativity and allow Him to make them new again. **Let's get our joy, peace, freedom, and victory levels steady again so we can be living testimonies of his goodness.**

Sources:

Barnes, Albert. *Notes, Critical, Explanatory, and Practical, on the Book of Psalms*. Vol. 2, Harper, 1869



1. Would your friends describe you as a glass-half-empty person or a glass-half-full person? The Bible is clear that believers are called to rejoice always, so we should desire to be not just half-full people, but overflowing people. How can we help each other be overflowing?
2. How do you think the expectations that we have of ourselves, people, and life experiences factor into having a critical spirit. How do we keep our expectations in check?
3. We read in Matthew 3 about how our lives should bear the fruit of repentance, meaning our lives should be producing fruit that proves we have had a heart change. How is this different than asking for forgiveness?
4. What is the Holy Spirit saying to you about your repentance plan? Are there certain relationships from which you need to pull away? Is there someone you need to ask to keep you accountable in this area?



HIS HEART WORK

Study: Look up verses on joy, rejoicing, gladness, and any other positive word that the Holy Spirit lays on your heart.

Act: Message your group one amazing thing that happened to you every day until you meet again! It could be something like a raise or getting a close parking spot on a rainy day. Let's be on the lookout for God's goodness in our everyday lives.



PRAYER NEEDS

Write down the prayer requests of your group members, and pray fervently for them! Let your group members know when you are praying for them, if you have any scriptures or encouraging words for them, etc.