

Stop Complaining

Complaining seems to be an American way of life. Almost all people complain about something. We complain about the weather, the traffic, and the weeds in our yard. We complain about our clothing, misplaced keys, late airplanes, and the price of gasoline. We complain about our jobs or our lack of jobs, and lazy people. We complain about our neighbors, ungrateful teenagers, and our parents. We have become a society that is quick to complain.

In the church, we hear complaints about the preachers, the leaders, our Christian brothers and sisters, congregational activities or lack of activities, the worship service, and Bible classes. The sermon is too long or too short, too general or too personal. Or people complain about the congregation being too large or too small or planning too much to do or not enough activities.

A song by the Kingsmen Quartet is a perfect introduction to this sermon. Just substitute the word complaints every time you hear the word excuses in this song.

"Excuses" by the Kingsmen Quartet

Excuses, excuses, you'll hear them every day.
And the Devil he'll supply them, if the church you stay away.
When people come to know the Lord, the Devil always loses
So to keep them folks away from church, he offers them excuses.

In the summer it's too hot. And, in the winter, it's too cold.
In the spring time when the weather's just right, you find some place else to go.
Well, it's up to the mountains or down to the beach or to visit some old friend.
Or, to just stay home and kinda relax and hope that some of the kin folks will start dropping in.

Well, the church benches are too hard. And, that choir sings way too loud.
Boy, you know how nervous you get when you're sitting in a great big crowd.
The doctor told you, "Now, you better watch them crowds. They'll set you back."
But, you go to that old ball game because you say "it helps you to relax."

Well, a headache Sunday morning and a backache Sunday night.
But by work time Monday morning, you're feeling quite alright.
While one of the children has a cold, "Pneumonia, do you suppose?"
Why the whole family had to stay home, just to blow that poor kid's nose.

Well, the preacher he's too young. And, maybe he's too old.
The sermons they're not hard enough. And, maybe they're too bold.
His voice is much too quiet-like. Sometimes he gets too loud.
He needs to have more dignity. Or, else he's way too proud.

Well, the sermons they're too long. And, maybe they're too short.
He ought to preach the word with dignity instead of "stomp and snort."
Well, that preacher we've got must be "the world's most stuck up man."
Well, one of the lady's told me the other day, "Well, he didn't even shake my hand."

Excuses, excuses, you'll hear them every day.
And the Devil he'll supply them if the church you stay away.
When people come to know the Lord, the Devil always loses

So to keep them folks away from church, he offers them excuses.
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Philippians 2:14 commands us to "Do all things without complaining and disputing,"

The topic of this lesson is Stop Complaining.

"Complaining" has been translated as murmurings, grumbling, and faultfinding.

"Disputing" has been translated as questionings, bickering, doubting, arguing, and making trouble. Disputing seems to be just another form of murmuring.

2 Timothy 2:23 commands us to "avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife."

Proverb 15:1-2 says "¹ A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. ² The tongue of the wise uses knowledge rightly, but the mouth of fools pours forth foolishness."

Jesus gave this warning in **Matthew 12:36-37** "³⁶ But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. ³⁷ For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."

Jesus also warned in **Matthew 15:11** that "Not what goes into the mouth defiles a man; but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man."

The Bible clearly condemns the sins of complaining and disputing.

We are to avoid these sins if we would have the mind of Christ that is described in **verse 5**.

The Greek word translated "complainer" means literally "one who is discontented with his lot in life." It is similar to the word grumbler. Complaining is certainly not a fruit of the Spirit - **Galatians 5:22-23**. In fact, it is harmful to the love, joy, peace, and patience that come from the Spirit. Complaining is destructive personally and only serves to weaken our example to the world. For example, who would be attracted to a religion whose members are dissatisfied with life and who continually grumble and complain?

"Without complaining" means to do your duty cheerfully not resenting the task that you are doing.

2 Corinthians 9:7 teaches that God wants us to serve Him willingly, "not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver."

Do you know who was the first complainer?

The first complainer was Adam who, after he and Eve disobeyed, complained to God in **Genesis 3:12** - "Then the man said, "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate."

The Israelites had a history of complaining about God.

Psalm 106 tells the history of God's people, from the Exodus to the days of the exile.

The Psalm related four of the times that the people of Israel grumbled and complained against God after they left Egypt.

- **v.7** – Israel “rebelled” by the Red Sea. This was when they complained to Moses that God had only brought them out from Egypt into the wilderness to die - **Exodus 14:11-12**.
Let us remember the power of words. When we say something enough times, we tend to start believing it. Let’s be very careful with our words.
The Israelites kept complaining that they were going to die in the wilderness.
Numbers 14:2-3 says “² And all the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron, and the whole congregation said to them, “If only we had died in the land of Egypt! Or if only we had died in this wilderness! ³ Why has the Lord brought us to this land to fall by the sword, that our wives and children should become victims? Would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?”
Eventually, God got so tired of their whining and complaining that he allowed the horrible things they predicted to become their reality. **Numbers 14:29-30** says “²⁹ The carcasses of you who have complained against Me shall fall in this wilderness, all of you who were numbered, according to your entire number, from twenty years old and above. ³⁰ Except for Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun, you shall by no means enter the land which I swore I would make you dwell in.”
- **v.13-15** – Israel complained in the wilderness about not having meat, so God sent them quail. They were so greedy for the meat, they didn’t properly prepare it, and many of them died of a plague - **Numbers 11:1-34**.
- **v.24-27** – Israel “complained in their tents” when it was time to enter the Promised Land. Instead of trusting God’s promise, they complained and disobeyed God’s voice. That generation did not enter the Promised Land - **Numbers 13-14**.
- **v.32-33** – Israel again angered God at Meribah because of their grumbling and complaining about a lack of water - **Numbers 20:1-13**.

Numbers 11:1 tells how angry God was at their complaining. "Now when the people complained, it displeased the Lord; for the Lord heard it, and His anger was aroused. So the fire of the Lord burned among them, and consumed some in the outskirts of the camp."

Numbers 14:27 tells how God felt about the complaining of the Israelites when He told Moses, "How long shall I bear with this evil generation who complain against me?"

What about us?

1 Corinthians 10:10-11 also condemns our practice of complaining - "¹⁰ nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer. ¹¹ Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition,"

In **John 6:43** "Jesus therefore answered and said to them, “Do not murmur among yourselves." Jesus made it clear that He is not happy when we criticize Him or grumble among ourselves about His teachings.

Jude 1:16 describes grumblers and complainers in this way - "These are grumblers, complainers, walking according to their own lusts; and they mouth great swelling words, flattering people to gain advantage."

We need to realize how dangerous complaining is and how much it displeases and angers God. Grumbling and complaining are sins that can lead to further disobedience by giving the devil a place in our lives. In the Bible, complaining is considered an act of unbelief toward God.

Complaining does not change situations, or even make anything better. Complaining just increases our frustration.

Complaining is also very contagious and spreads discontent and dissatisfaction to others.

We need to pray to God about our concerns instead of complaining about them.

This lesson also applies to our relationships with one another as well as with God.

James 5:9 tells us "Do not grumble against one another, brethren,"

1 Peter 4:9 says "Be hospitable to one another without grumbling." Remember in **Luke 10:40** how Martha complained about her sister Mary not helping with the serving when providing hospitality to Jesus in her home.

Acts 6:1 offers several lessons regarding complaining or murmuring. "Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution."

One lesson is that complaining presents a serious threat to the unity of the church. Complaining opens the door to conflict. This complaint resulted from the allegations of neglect of a certain group of widows receiving assistance.

Both groups of these Jews were Christians, but there was a language barrier. The Jewish Christians of Palestine spoke Aramaic, and those from other areas spoke Greek. Many of the Greek speaking Christians were living in Jerusalem at that time but were natives of other Roman provinces. In the Jewish world there was often tension even after they became Christians.

Some people believe that there was justification for this complaint based upon the assumption that the Grecian widows were actually neglected. Luke does not go into detail, however the original word translated here as "complaint or murmuring" almost always carries with it the blame of guilt in the persons doing the complaining or murmuring. In the Bible, guilt is usually attached to the practice of complaining or murmuring. It seldom implies any guilt in those murmured against.

This incident in **Acts 6:1** does not suggest any justification for the murmuring that took place regarding the daily distribution of food to the needy. In the very nature of such distributions, it was inevitable that some should receive less, others more, and that almost any person desiring to find fault could easily have discovered some basis for alleging neglect. It is always easier to find fault than to help solve the problem.

Let's notice a leadership lesson from the Apostles. They did not speak a word of blame regarding either those who complained or those who had done the distributing. They simply changed the method of helping those in need with a view to eliminating all further excuses for any complaining.

We need to understand the difference between helpful criticism and complaining. There are times when it is good to point out things that need to be corrected. This can be helpful and should never be discouraged. In the local church, if you have a valid complaint about worship, the temperature of the building, the singing, the song leaders, the leaders, the preachers, Bible classes, etc., a comment and suggestion is helpful. But if it is not corrected your way, do not murmur. Such murmuring is wrong. Anyone can criticize, condemn, and complain but it takes character and self control to be understanding, forgiving, and longsuffering.

The tendency of human nature is to murmur, complain, and find fault. It is a very easy thing to do. It is easier than doing something to solve the problem we are complaining about. The very word "murmur" is made of two childish sounds - "mur mur." There is no sense in it and no thought to it. It is simply a double moan and groan.

How can we stop complaining?

It is necessary to deal with the root causes of why people murmur and complain.

1. Learn to be content.

Discontent causes murmuring and complaining.

1 Timothy 6:6-8 says that we should be content with the necessities of life. ⁶Now godliness with contentment is great gain. ⁷For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. ⁸And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content."

Hebrews 13:5 also says to "be content with such things as you have."

Paul said in **Philippians 4:11** that "I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content:"

It is hard to complain when you are content.

2. Develop the attitude of gratitude.

Complaining is a sign of being ungrateful.

Count your blessings, be thankful, be grateful. Ask God to help you develop an attitude of gratitude.

Ephesians 5:20 says "giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,"

1 Thessalonians 5:18 says "in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."

It is almost impossible to be thankful and complain at the same time.

When we have a grateful heart that is focused on God, we have very little room for complaining.

Try sitting down for a minute and putting things in perspective counting your blessings.

Yes, we'll still have circumstances in life that we are not happy with. Take it to the Lord in prayer!

Continually praise God and thank God *in spite* of your circumstances.

Also, sometimes the best cure for complaining is to put ourselves in a position where we are forced to look at things from a different perspective. If you find that you are complaining all the time, consider spending some time volunteering at a shelter, food bank, hospital, nursing home, church activities, or other service projects. Sometimes we just need to see things from a different point of view to realize that we really don't have that much to complain about.

Instead of complaining that the rosebush is full of thorns, be happy that the thorn bush has roses.

Happiness is not about getting what you want all the time. It's about appreciating what you have and being grateful for it.

Remember the opposite of complaining is thanksgiving which is really an expression of gratitude and trust in God. God loves it when we show gratitude and are thankful. He hates it when we complain.

3. We have to train ourselves to be less judgmental.

We often complain about others because we think they are not up to our standards. Once we stop judging people without knowing their stories, we will most likely complain less about the things people do.

For example, constantly complaining about the service in a restaurant is not helpful. You don't know what kind of a day your waiter or waitress has had or what problems are going on behind the scenes. If you put yourself in their shoes for a minute, you may be more kind and calm about the situation.

A Northern Cheyenne Indian Proverb wisely said "Do not judge your neighbor until you walk two moons in his moccasins."

4. We need to take personal responsibility.

Let's take responsibility for our own lives, instead of blaming others and blaming God for our problems. For instance, instead of accepting responsibility for his actions, Adam blamed Eve for tempting him and indirectly also blamed God for putting Eve in his life. If you want to be happy in life, don't blame God and others for your problems. Accept responsibility for your actions and make the necessary changes when necessary.

5. Be part of the solution, not the problem.

When there is a problem and all we do is complain about it, we become part of the problem. Instead, let's pray about a solution to the problem, and become a part of the solution.

Ask God to open your eyes to see how you can help solve the problem, whether alone or along with others. And if you have the influence or opportunity, speak out constructively, and work towards leading and delegating others to solve the problem. When we stop complaining and change our attitudes, we become much happier and the people around us become happier. And we could potentially become a part of the solution to the problem.

Henry Ford said "Don't find fault. Find a remedy."

Remember, if you have time to whine and complain about something then you have the time to do something about it.

"If you took one-tenth the energy you put into complaining and applied it to solving the problem, you'd be surprised by how well things can work out. Complaining does not work as a strategy. We all have limited time and energy. Any time we spend whining is unlikely to help us achieve our goals. And it won't make us happier." - Randy Pausch, *The Last Lecture*

"I know it's important to do more than just complain when there's something you don't like. You need to try to do something about it, or you're nothing but a whiner." - Jean Ferris, *Twice Upon a Marigold*

You have a choice every morning when you wake up. **Rise and whine or rise and shine.**

The Bible tells us in **Philippians 2:14-16** which choice God wants us to make. ¹⁴ "Do all things without complaining and disputing, ¹⁵ that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world,"

How can we shine as lights in the world, if we are busy whining about everything that doesn't meet your expectations?

If something is bothering you, either fix it or accept that nothing can be done right now, so why complain? Complaining is a passive activity. We need to convert complaining into action to solve the problem or simply accept it and focus on something else. We simply do not have control over some things.

Remember the **Serenity Prayer**. "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference."

How should we deal with complainers?

1. Don't fall into the trap of joining the complaint party and helping a murmuring campaign grow.
2. Respond in love! Even if you have never struggled with the issue of complaining, you have probably made mistakes in other areas. Let's remember to be patient when dealing with everyone, just like others have been patient with us. Remember, God has been very patient with us concerning many things. Resist the temptation to criticize the complainer.
3. Listen to them with compassion, but don't spend too much time in idle talk.
4. Ask them specific questions to see if they can find a solution to the problem. Try to guide them toward taking positive constructive action.
5. As always, pray for God's guidance when dealing with people in all things.

Action steps

- Start with a change of attitude.
- Just like with any other issues we deal with in life, don't forget the power of prayer.
- Then set some goals for yourself. Start small.
 - Go 24 hours without complaining. Not even once. Then watch how your life starts changing for the better and how much happier you are.
 - Take the 7 Days Without Complaining Challenge.
 - Then follow the example of the person who said "I Went 21 Days Without Complaining and It Changed My Life."

We can live this positive life with God's help. **Philippians 4:13** says that "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

If you have been trying to live your life without depending on Christ to help you, you can decide right now to repent and allow Him to be the Master of your life. And if you have not yet made the decision to put on Christ in baptism, I urge you to take that step and begin your new life in Christ.