***Complaining: Taking Aim at a One of Our Most Prevalent Sins***

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“Don't complain and talk about all your problems—**80%** of the people around you don't care… the other **20%** think you deserve it.” *Mark Twain*

* The dictionary defines a complainer as “a person who expresses dissatisfaction, pain, uneasiness, censure, resentment, or grief, or one who finds fault in something or someone.”
* Our English Bible translations today typically use the words “complain, grumble, or murmur” to translate the O.T. Hebrew and N.T. Greek words the Bible’s using.

1. **So Why is Complaining a Big Deal?**

Typically when we complain we complain about our **circumstances,** other **people** and **God**!

He promises to do something even better – to give us Himself and the Gospel in the very midst of those trials, and to put on display for this world what it looks like to be living for something greater, and what it looks like to have a hope that’s rooted in something bigger than your year-end financial retirement statements.

1. **Complaining is a Sin that Ruins Your Testimony and God’s**

Every day people are forming an opinion of God based on how we’re talking about Him! They’re drawing conclusions about God!

**Philippians 2:12-16** “12 Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, 13 for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose. 14 Do everything without complaining or arguing, 15 so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe 16 as you hold out the word of life.”

**B. Complainers are at Greater Risk for Slipping into Moral Compromise**

If a person complains loud enough and long enough they’ll start playing fast and loose with God’s Word. They start to pick and choose what they’re going to obey, based on how life’s going for them.

Ultimately, a life-long complainer has a much greater risk of becoming a moral pragmatist who is willing to justify their ungodly behavior because of difficult circumstances!

“Well, I know God’s Word doesn’t allow for divorce in my case, but I’ve been in this marriage long enough. Surely God would understand! Surely God wouldn’t want me to stay in a marriage that’s so hard… and so unfulfilling… and so disappointing.”

It won’t be long before you blatantly step across the line and disobey God’s Word with the symphony of your own feelings supporting you! All the while saying…

“I deserve better”

“God wouldn’t want me to stay in this”  
“I’m so unhappy!”

**Job 19:7 “**Though I cry, ‘I’ve been wronged!’ I get no response; though I call for help, there is no justice.”

Pleasing **God** is no longer on your radar! Getting **relief** is all that matters now.

“Unremitting struggle tends to blur our lines of moral distinctions. Things that are clearly wrong become less offensive to our conscience when they provide our only hope for relief. Again, notice the central problem: It is neither the hurt in our soul (it’s okay to hurt) nor our desire for relief and satisfaction (it’s okay to thirst); it is the *demand*. When we demand relief of our thirst now. we’re in danger of slipping from a biblical ethic into a morality of pragmatism: whatever eases our pain is justified. The result is often blatant moral compromise and a ruined life.” Larry Crabb, ***Inside Out***, p. 142-143

1. **So What’s Really Going on in the Heart of a Complainer?**
2. **Complainers Have Soured and Slipped into the Wrong Kind of Sorrow**

In most cases the sinful complainer is a Christian who’s become carelessand has allowed a broken **sorrowful** heart to turn into a bitter **demanding** heart – and there’s a big difference! God doesn’t see the two the same.

Without the framework of God’s character and promises holding the canvas of our suffering tightly in place it’ll start to sag and crumble under the weight of our bitter sorrow.

* Is complaining always a sin?
* Is there any place for complaining in the life of a Christian?

Yes, there is because the Bible is filled with examples of what Bible scholars call lamentations or cries of lament. Of the 150 Psalms we have in the Bible 53of them would be considered Psalms of lamentation! 1 out of every 3 is a Psalm of lamentation rather than celebration.

**Personal Lament:** Psalms 3, 4, 5, 7, 9-10, 13, 14, 17, 22, 25, 26, 27, 28, 31, 36, 39, 40:12-17, 41, 42-43, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 59, 61, 64, 69, 70, 71, 77, 86, 89, 120, 139, 141, 142

**Corporate Lament**: Psalms 12, 44, 60, 74, 79, 80, 83, 85, 90, 94, 123, 126, 129

Biblical complaining = to complain (1) in **faith** (2) to **God** (3) about the calamities He **sends** into our lives.

Job did it… Jeremiah did it… Habakkuk did it… and the sweet Psalmist of Israel – David himself did it.

**Psalm 13:1-3** “How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide Your face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily? How long will my enemy be exalted over me? Consider and hear me, O LORD my God…”

**Psalm 77:1-4, 7-10**

**Psalm 142:1-7**

With biblically appropriate complaining you don’t accuse God of wrongdoing, you simply cry out and state the facts as you see it and feel it. Then you petition God to move on your behalf and you restate your confession of trust.

When you complain in faith to God about God you’re OK, but when you complain to other people about God and slander Him you’ve crossed the line.

He started off well, but as time drug on Job’s tears of sorrow soured into demanding tears of self-righteousness, and the tone of his complaints shifted dramatically and got way out of line.

**Job 23:2-7** “Even today my complaint is bitter… I would state my case before Him and Fill my mouth with argu­ments. I would find out what He would answer me, and consider what He would say. Would He oppose me with great power? No, He would not press charges against me. There an upright man could present His case before Him, and I would be delivered forever from my Judge.”

*The Message* “I’m not letting up—I’m standing my ground. My complaint is legitimate. God has no right to treat me like this— it isn’t fair! I’d find out exactly what he’s thinking, discover what’s going on in his head… my Judge would acquit me for good of all charges.”

But watch out! Job chap­ter 38-42 gives us little snapshot of how God responds to a bitter, demanding spirit!

**Job 38:1** “Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind…”

**Job 38:2–3** God says, “Who is this who darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer Me.”

God launches into Round 1 of 2 rounds with Job!

**Round 1** is Job 38:1-40:5.

**Round 2** is Job 40:6-42:6.

1. **Complainers Almost Always Have a Proud Heart Dressed Up in**

**Self-Pity!**

**Prov. 6:16** “…six things the lord hates, yes, seven are an abomination to Him: a proud look…”

Pride heads up the list of what God hates most!

You might not recognize it as first but a complaining Christian is almost always a proud Christian who refuses to submit to God’s will, and thinks they know better and deserve better.

Before God showed up in the whirlwind Job had gone from a sorrowful heart to a proud demanding heart, and basically thought he knew better than God!

**Job 10:1** “I will give free course to my complaint, I will speak in the bitterness of my soul.”

**Job 13:3**  “I desire to speak to the Almighty and to argue my case with God”

**Job 13:15** “… I will surely defend my ways to His face”

**Job 23:4** “I would state my case before him and fill my mouth with argu­ments”

Even in the worst of suffering, that looks so unjustified, the goal still has to be ‘Pleasing God’ and the spirit still has to be submissive and humble.

**Job 41:34** “He beholds every high thing; He is king over all the children of pride.”

Desire all you want… pray all you want… sorrow and lament all you want… but demand nothing. And Job got the message loud and clear.

**Job 42:3, 5-6**  “Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonder­ful for me to know.... My ears had heard of You but now my eyes have seen You. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes”

1. **Complainers Have an Accusing Heart that Doubts God’s Love**

Many Christians doubt God’s love because they’re looking for **evidence** of it in all the wrongplaces!

We tend to base whether or not God loves us on right here right now – ‘What have you done for me lately,’ God???? Most of us tend to measure somebody else’s love for us by their degree of cooperation with our plans.

God rarely cooperates with our plans, but that doesn’t mean He doesn’t love us.

**I John 4:10, 19** “In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins… We love Him because He first loved us.”

**Romans 5:8** “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

1. **So How Does a Person Repent of Complaining?**

**Step #1 Help Them to Submit to Authority – Starting with God**

Wedged tightly up against our complaining spirit is a rebellious spirit that doesn’t like following orders, thinks we know better, and thinks we deserve a full explanation for what’s going on before we do it.

**Numbers ch. 9** gives us God’s explanation for how things were going to work while they lived in the wilderness for 40 years. God said He would lead them with a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. It wasn’t that complicated. Basically, when the cloud moves, you move. When the cloud stops, you stop. So it might surprise you to see how much ink God gives to these instructions in Numbers ch. 9.

**Numbers 9:15–23**

* Do you see a pattern? Do you see a phrase that gets repeated over and over?

“At the command of the Lord”

“The beginning of a proper response to frustrating circumstances is a clear recognition of who's in charge. To handle frustration by reminding you how much God loves us is a good second step, but not the first one. We must take our place as a creature before our Creator and then explore the wonder of our Creator's loving character. An awareness of God's love casts out our fear, but subjection to His authority deals with our demandingness… I wonder if God is saying something like this: ‘I know My ways will seem to ignore your concerns at times. I want you to trust Me when you feel unusually tired and I call on you to get up. I want you to trust Me when you’re eager to serve and I put you on hold. But you will never learn to trust Me until you come to terms with My authority. Trust will never emerge from a demanding spirit.’” Larry Crabb, ***Inside Out***, p. 136

**Note:** Complaining is never far from a demanding spirit! The two go hand in hand because a demanding, unsubmissive spirit is most often what’s fueling a complaining mouth!

As you go through the book of Numbers you won’t just see a lot of complaining; you’ll see a lot of resisting authority! If you want to help your counselee to get free from complaining you’ll have to deal with this authority issue.

**Step #2 Help them to Feed Their Faith by Spending Time with the Right Kind of People!**

* **Start with Biblical Examples**

**Hebrews 11:3, 6** “By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible… But without faith is it impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.”

* **Wake Up to Some of the Great Contemporary Examples We Have**
  + - Dietrich Bonhoeffer – German pastor killed by the Nazis in WWII (Suggested reading: ***Bonheffer~*** *Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy*, Eric Metaxas)
    - Corrie Ten Boom – Dutch woman in WWII who’s family hid Jews from the Nazis and were sent to concentration camp where only she survived (Suggested reading: ***The Hiding Place***, Corrie Ten Boom)
    - Elizabeth Elliott – missionary whose husband was speared to death by the Auca Indians in South America (Suggested reading: ***Through Gates of Splendor***, Elisabeth Elliot)
    - The Heavenly Man – Chinese pastor in the ‘80s who survived multiple imprisonments (Suggested reading: ***The Heavenly Man***, Brother Yun)
    - The Roots of Endurance – book by John Piper on the suffering of John Newton, Charles Simeon, and William Wilberforce (Suggested reading: ***The Roots of Endurance***, John Piper)
    - The Hidden Smile of God – book by John Piper on the suffering of John Bunyan, William Cowper, and David Brainerd (Suggested reading: ***The Hidden Smile of God***, John Piper)
    - Winston Churchill – Prime minister of Great Britain during WWI and II (Suggested reading: ***Never Give In***, Stephen Mansfield)
    - Stonewall Jackson – godly man and general during the Civil War (Suggested reading: ***All Things for Good***, J. Steven Wilkins)
    - The Lone Survivor – story of Navy Seal, Marcus Luttrell, trying to get out of Afghanistan after his entire unit was killed and he was left alone on a remote mountainside, surrounded by a Taliban army (Suggested reading: ***Lone Survivor***, Marcus Lutrell)
* **Zero In On the Example of Christ**

**Hebrews 12:1–3** “Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.”

When you get weary and discouraged in your soul you start complaining. But our Savior didn’t complain even when He was cruelly and unjustly crucified! So look to Christ!

**Isaiah 53:3,7** “He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him… He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth.”

**Step #3** **Help Them to Cultivate an Appetite for the After Life**

If they stay obsessed about right here, right now, with little or no view of eternity, then they will struggle to stop the flow of complaining that’s gushing out of their mouth because right here, right now, doesn’t look that good most of the time, does it? If this is all we have there’s plenty to complain about but it’s not! For believers it’s not!

**2 Corinthians 3:18 – 4:18 –** Serves as a wide angle lens for life and suffering

**Step #4 Hold Them Accountable to Stop Making Excuses!**

* **“I’m not complaining: I’m just stating the facts!”**

1 Timothy 1:12-17 is loaded with facts you should focus on!

**1 Timothy 1:12–17** “12 And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, 13 although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. 14 And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. 15 This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. 16 However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life. 17 Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.”

Too often, when we say we’re just stating facts, we’re really just stating atheistic facts, godless facts, because we leave God out of the picture completely. We talk like a functional atheist because we just give a ‘raw’ version of what’s going on in our life, as if there is no God.

* **“I’m trying not to complain, but I just don’t feel like God is with me!”**

Don’t go by your feelings; go by your faith in God’s promises!

**Isaiah 43:1-3** “But now, thus says the Lord… Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called

you by your name; You are Mine. 2 When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And

through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be

burned, Nor shall the flame scorch you. 3 For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel,

your Savior…”

God is there! But sometimes believers don’t feel it because their complaining spirit has driven away

any sense of God’s presence! God doesn’t stick around for complaining.

**Psalm 22:1–3** “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? Why are You so far from helping Me, and from the words of My groaning? O My God, I cry in the daytime, but You do not hear; and in the night season, and am not silent. But You are holy, who inhabit the praises of Israel.”

* **“But this caught me by surprise! I never expected this.”**

In other words, I should be allowed to complain because I didn’t get advance notice, and didn’t see this coming!

**1 Peter 4:12-13, 19** “Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy… **v. 19** Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator.”

*The Message* v. 12-13 “Friends, when life gets really difficult, don’t jump to the conclusion that God isn’t on the job. Instead, be glad that you are in the very thick of what Christ experienced. This is a spiritual refining process, with glory just around the corner.”

* **“Nobody else has it this bad! My problems are worse than everyone else’s”**

Even if it’s true, and it’s probably not just because you’re in America and not some third world country, it just means that God’s given you a greater opportunity to glorify Him than He’s given to others.

**1 Peter 3:15** “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear”