**How to Keep Biblical Sorrow from Slipping into Sinful Complaining**

*Grace Fellowship Church, Pastor Brad Bigney*

**Approach –**

* What’s the difference between sinful COMPLAINING and LAMENTING or expressing SORROW over suffering?

And even after you discern where they may be guilty of sinful complaining…

* How would you help them… and where would you begin to work?
1. **So What Does the Heart of a Sinful Complainer Look Like?**
2. **Sinful Complainers Have Soured and Slipped into the Wrong Kind of Sorrow**

You see… in most cases the sinful complainer is a Christian who’s become careless… and 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. Not at all.

That’s why you can see two people who both claim to know Christ… in the exact same difficult circumstances but with countenances that look radically different.

1. **Sinful Complainers Need to Guard Where & to Whom They Voice Their Complaints**

The book of Psalms is not just a song book of joyful celebration songs… it’s also got some songs in the minor key… and they’re sprinkled generously throughout all the other Psalms of festive celebration. It’s a mixture back and forth of sweet and sour.

Of the 150 Psalms in the Bible, 53 of them would be considered Psalms of lamentation! That’s 1/3 of the Psalms… 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

* So what does it mean to LAMENT or complain in a biblical way?

To LAMENT is 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**

 “I cried out to God with my voice— To God with my voice;

 And He gave ear to me.

2 In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord;

 My hand was stretched out in the night without ceasing;

 My soul refused to be comforted.

3 I remembered God, and was troubled;

 I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed. Selah

4 You hold my eyelids open;

 I am so troubled that I cannot speak… *(skip to v. 7)*

7 Will the Lord cast off forever?

 And will He be favorable no more?

8 Has His mercy ceased forever?

 Has His promise failed forevermore?

9 Has God forgotten to be gracious?

 Has He in anger shut up His tender mercies? Selah

10 And I said, “This is my anguish;

 But I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High.”

11 I will remember the works of the Lord;

 Surely I will remember Your wonders of old.

12 I will also meditate on all Your work,

 And talk of Your deeds.

13 Your way, O God, is in the sanctuary;

 Who is so great a God as our God?

14 You are the God who does wonders;

 You have declared Your strength among the peoples.

15 You have with Your arm redeemed Your people… Selah”

With this kind of 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.

**Kevin DeYoung** gives us a helpful DISTINCTION when he says…

“Crying out to God is one thing. A very good thing too. But self-pity is not that. Self-pity is crying out in the echo chamber of my own little world. It’s issuing a lament just to take pleasure in hearing the lament over and over.” The Gospel Coalition Blog, “No Whiners,” Kevin DeYoung, June 7, 2013

So, watch out! Humble tears of sorrow can easily slip into bitter demanding tears! It happened to Job… and it can happen to us, if we’re not careful.

1. **Sinful Complainers Often Have a Proud Heart Dressed Up in Self-Pity!**

And that should really get your attention… because pride is one of the sins God hates more than anything else!

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

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.

You see… the complaining Christian really needs to come to grips with one big question:

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”

Desire all you want… pray all you want… sorrow and lament all you want… but demand nothing.

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

Christians doubt God’s love because they’re looking for evidence of it in all the wrong places!

We tend to base whether or not God loves us on right here… right now… ‘What have you done for me lately, God????’

And most of us tend to measure somebody else’s love for us by their degree of cooperation with our plans. We tend to measure His love for us by His degree of cooperation with our plans. But if you haven’t noticed yet, God rarely ever cooperates with our plans!

* Where do we see His love?

**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 Keep from Slipping into Sinful Complaining?**

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

Remember all the complaining that was going on with the Israelites in the wilderness in the book of Numbers? There was an authority issue long before there was an epidemic of complaining!

If you read through **Numbers 9:15-23** it almost sounds like the Holy Spirit needed a good EDITOR that could clean it up and keep it from sounding so REDUNDANT! Over and over it says… “At the command of the Lord”

**Numbers 9:15–23** “15 Now on the day that the tabernacle was raised up, the cloud covered the tabernacle, the tent of the Testimony; from evening until morning it was above the tabernacle like the appearance of fire. 16 So it was always: the cloud covered it by day, and the appearance of fire by night. 17 Whenever the cloud was taken up from above the tabernacle, after that the children of Israel would journey; and in the place where the cloud settled, there the children of Israel would pitch their tents. 18 At the command of the LORD the children of Israel would journey, and at the command of the LORD they would camp; as long as the cloud stayed above the tabernacle they remained encamped. 19 Even when the cloud continued long, many days above the tabernacle, the children of Israel kept the charge of the LORD and did not journey. 20 So it was, when the cloud was above the tabernacle a few days: according to the command of the LORD they would remain encamped, and according to the command of the LORD they would journey. 21 So it was, when the cloud remained only from evening until morning: when the cloud was taken up in the morning, then they would journey; whether by day or by night, whenever the cloud was taken up, they would journey. 22 Whether it was two days, a month, or a year that the cloud remained above the tabernacle, the children of Israel would remain encamped and not journey; but when it was taken up, they would journey. 23 At the command of the LORD they remained encamped, and at the command of the LORD they journeyed; they kept the charge of the LORD, at the command of the LORD by the hand of Moses.”

There’s something God wants to drive home to us here in these 9 verses… and it’s this:

When God moves, you move. When God stops, you stop… even if you don’t understand all the ins and outs of what’s going on and why. Simply obey God. Submit to His authority… and when you do that a lot of the complaining just gets flushed away along with that spirit of resisting and questioning authority.

“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

**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**

Read biographies! There’s no better antidote to complaining than reading biographies. You can go to my website – [www.bradbigney.com](http://www.bradbigney.com) – and click the link of ‘Brad’s Booklist and see some of my favorite biographies… that have impacted me the most.

Reading biographies can serve as a powerful antidote in your life for complaining.

* + - Dietrich Bonhoeffer – German pastor killed by the Nazis in WWII

(Suggested reading: ***Bonhoeffer~*** *Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy*, Eric Metaxas)

* + - Corrie Ten Boom – Dutch woman in WWII whose 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 – the very ones they were trying to reach with the Gospel 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)

* **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.

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

Ask God to do some spiritual Lasik eye surgery on your counselee so that they can see more than right here… right now. They need a wide angle lens view of life– so that they start seeing in terms of eternity and the infinite… rather than just the finite and temporal.

**Romans 8:18-30**

**2 Corinthians 4:16-18**

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

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

There’s no sin in looking at your situation realistically, but if you really want to focus on the facts, focus on the fact that you’re an ‘Object of God’s Mercy’ rather than His wrath! There’s a good fact to focus on – God’s mercy… and how much worse your situation could be. If He hadn’t saved you! If He hadn’t taken away your biggest problem!

**1 Timothy 1:12–17** “12And 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.”

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

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… and when He does, you’re not going to like how He responds.

**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.”

The felt sense of God’s presence is found in praise. If you want to feel close to God be quiet and submissive and choose to praise Him!

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

In other words… I should be allowed to complain because I 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.”