

Stop: The Series *Stop Complaining*

This morning I want to give you a challenge. I hope everyone will take me up on it. Here it is; I want to challenge you to see if you can go through one week without complaining. I'll even give you a break in case you've already complained about something this morning. We'll just forget about that. That one doesn't count. But now till next Sunday morning see if you can go through the week with out complaining. You say, "No problem."

I'll guarantee you; it's harder than you think.

I've never done a scientific study on the subject, but here's the way it seems to me. It seems like the wealthier the nation in which people live, the more likely they are to complain.

I know complaining is part of human nature. Everybody, everywhere has complaints. But at least on the surface it appears that the people who live in cultures of material abundance are the most demanding.

Why is that? Why is it so hard for us to avoid complaining? What does God want us to see and understand about complaining?

This is week two of a series we're calling *Stop*. What we're doing in this series is taking a look at things that we're all prone to do but that God says should never be a part of our lives. In fact, the Bible says...

I. Complaining Is A Sin With Spiritual Consequences

I find it interesting that we're prone to condemn some sins and quick to excuse others. Certain things make our list and other things we just let slide.

Complaining is one of those things we don't consider to be that big a deal. But now listen to what God says...

Turn to Philippians chapter 2 page 1152 Read verses 14, 15

Do all things without complaining and disputing. That's a very clear, straightforward command from God. That means if I complain, in the sense of grumbling and disputing, I'm disobeying the God who created me in the first place.

Why is that a problem? Why is God so concerned about my attitude?

We'll look what leads up to the statement, *Do all things without complaining.*

Read Philippians 2:5-8

We're supposed to have the attitude and thinking process of Jesus. How did He approach life? He was God, the Second Person of the trinity. He had all authority. He enjoyed the amazing splendors of the heavenly realms.

He deserved all worship and honor. He deserved to be served as King of kings but look what He did.

He humbled Himself. He took on the frailty of human flesh. The Creator became one of His creation. And He did that for the express purpose of going to the cross.

At the cross Jesus stood in our place. At the cross He bore our sins in His own body. The Bible says He made peace through the blood of His cross.

The insurmountable obstacle between us and a perfect God is our sins. All the religion and good works in the world couldn't atone for sin. It took a perfect sacrifice and that perfect sacrifice was Jesus Christ.

The Bible says, *By Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses.* (Acts 13:39)

He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him. (John 3:36)

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit. (Titus 3:5)

The cross brings glory to God because He did all the work of salvation. We can't glory in ourselves.

The cross brings forgiveness and eternal life to all who believe.

And the cross happened because God took the initiative. Because Jesus *humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.*

So we trust Christ as savior and then we look to His attitude as our example.

Therefore.. **Read verses 12**

Notice it doesn't say, "work for your salvation." It says work it out. Live it out. How do we live like we really belong to God? By letting *this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.*

Be humble. Stop putting yourself first. You say, "That's too hard. I can't do it."

Read verse 13

Here's how we can live with humility because it's God at work in us. That's what enables us to be like Christ.

The only way we are going to be able to have the mind of Christ and work at serving one another is if we depend upon God's power to enable us to get the job done.

So it's not all us, and it is not all God. It is God working in us and through us.

So what does it look like when we start living like children of God? That brings us back to verses 14 and 15.

When we're thinking like Jesus, when we're living like true children of God, when God is empowering us through His Holy Spirit, we're going to stop complaining.

I. Complaining Is A Sin With Spiritual Consequences

II. Complaining Shows We're Not Satisfied With God

Turn to Exodus chapter 15 page 68

The Old Testament Book of Exodus is the striking account of God's faithfulness. The book opens with the Jewish people enslaved in Egypt. They cry out to God and God sends Moses as a deliverer.

The king of Egypt wasn't about to let his free labor pool just pack up and leave so he has to be convinced.

God, through Moses, brings a series of 10 plagues on Egypt. The last plague is the basis for what is celebrated in Passover each year. God brought death to the firstborn of every household that wasn't marked by the blood of a lamb.

The Jews marked their doorposts, the Egyptians didn't. When death came to the firstborn of every household, even Pharaoh's, the king finally let the Jewish people go.

The Jews saw the mighty hand of God displayed through the plagues. But if that weren't enough, Pharaoh changed his mind and persecuted the Jews to the Red Sea.

Even though the people had seen the 10 miracles that allowed them to get this far, they just flipped out when they saw the Egyptians bearing down on them.

Then they said to Moses, "Because there were no graves in Egypt, have you taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you so dealt with us, to bring us up out of Egypt?" (Exodus 12:11)

But Moses lifted his staff, the Red Sea parted, they went across on dry land, and the waters returned and drowned Pharaoh and his army.

Talk about a spectacular display of the power and faithfulness of Almighty God. These people should have never grumbled or complained again.

The first 20 verses of chapter 15 are a song the people sang to God. No complaints here. They were glad to be alive. Unfortunately, that didn't last too long.

Read 15:22-24

Three days ago they stood on the shore of the Red sea and saw dead Egyptians, chariot parts, and horse bridles floating in the waves. Three days ago!

In three days they went from saying, "Yea God" to complaining saying, "What shall we drink?"

Now here's what happened: For three days they didn't find any water. That didn't necessarily mean they completely ran out of water, but their supplies would have been limited, and they would have had to ration them.

Finally they come to an oasis. They thought "All right. Moses came through for us again. We were getting worried, but Moses led us to water to drink."

What a let down it must have been to discover that the waters were bitter. How could Moses have blown it so badly? There was water there but it wasn't drinkable.

So who did they complain to? The guy in charge.

Was there really an issue for them to be concerned about? Sure. They couldn't live without water. In fact, a million people (which is how many came out of Egypt) and their animals need lots of water.

The problem wasn't that they were making something out of nothing. The problem was they'd quickly forgotten about all that God had done for them.

That tells me something. They could say all the right words. They could sing, "He is my God, and I will praise Him" but they didn't really believe it.

If they were seeing God do stuff for them it was great. But as soon as they had to exhibit some faith in this God they claimed was so important to them they stumbled.

The real test of our confidence in God comes when life gets tough. Life was tough for them and they complained. They weren't really satisfied with God. They were only satisfied when life was working for them and they didn't have to exhibit any real faith.

So God graciously provides water for them.

Chapter 16:1-3

Now we're a month and a half out of Egypt and it starts again. "Moses we're getting hungry. We're running low on food. And we remember how wonderful life was back in Egypt as slaves. We always dined to our heart's content and now were starving."

Why is it that we always seem to idealize the past? Why do we talk about the good old days as if everything was so good, and somehow forget about all the negative parts?

This bunch was oppressed in Egypt. They had cried out to God to deliver them. Obviously they weren't sitting down at a buffet every night.

So here they go again, complaining. So God graciously provides bread for them.

Chapter 17:1-3

Here's the heart of the matter. We complain about the boss, our wife, our parents, our job, our auto mechanic, our health, our diminishing stock portfolio, the government...

These people complained about Moses. It's about water again this time. Moses says, "Why do you tempt the Lord?"

Our real issue is with God. "God, I don't like the way you made me. God, I don't like where you've put me in life. God, it's all your fault."

When we complain, isn't that what we usually mean, we just don't realize it?

We're unhappy about our circumstances (God should have treated us better), we are unhappy with what we have (God hasn't provided well enough), We are unhappy with certain people or situations (God should have made them differently).

How dare we complain against the God who gives us life and breath? How dare we complain to the one who sent His Son to be nailed to a tree so that we could live?

How dare we! Sometimes we're absolutely wicked, and we don't even know it. We think we're justified. "Why shouldn't I complain? I have a right to complain. You'd complain too if you had to put up with what I put up with."

Rather than complaining in the hard times we should be turning to God for the strength to face what He has seen fit to bring into our lives. We would be better served to learn the lesson rather than to reject the teacher.

The New Testament Book of James compares the Bible to a mirror. Have you ever been in some place where they had real bright lights over the bathroom mirror and

you looked at yourself in the mirror and said, “Eh, I don’t like that. That mirror makes me look awful.”

Or you hear people talking about a photograph that they’re in and they say “I can’t stand that picture. It makes me look horrible.”

News flash. It’s not the mirror. It’s not the camera. If you don’t like what you see, don’t blame the mirror or the camera. They’re just reflecting what you’re really like.

And that’s exactly what God intends for the Bible to do to us. He wants us to see ourselves in the lives of these people. We are so much like them.

They refused to be satisfied with God. How about you?

I. Complaining Is A Sin With Spiritual Consequences

II. Complaining Shows We’re Not Satisfied With God

III. The Cure For Complaining Is Rejoicing In Our God

A few years back a church group from North Carolina was on a mission’s trip to the Caribbean. The host missionary took the group to a leper colony on the island of Tobago.

The group from the States had never seen people suffering the ravages of leprosy so it was really an emotional time for them. The pastor of the church was leading singing and he said, “We have time for one more song. Any favorites.”

A woman in the back raised what was left of her hand and as she looked up the pastor was able to see what was left of her face, and it wasn’t much. In her gravely voice she asked, “Could we sing *Count Your Many Blessings*?”

The pastor later said, “I could hardly make it through that song. I’ll never sing it the same way again.”

Leave it to a person with so little, to remind us that grateful people are characterized by grateful words, while ungrateful people are given to griping, complaining, murmuring, whining.

Nancy Leigh DeMoss writes, “Some grumble at why God put thorns on roses, while others wisely notice — with awe and gratitude — that God has put roses among

thorns. Hear what people are saying when they talk about the everyday events of their lives, and you'll see in an instant the difference between gratitude and ingratitude."

Some form of the word "rejoice" is used 266 times in the Bible.

Listen to some of these references from the Psalms:

Serve the LORD with fear, And rejoice with trembling. (Psalm 2:11)

That's an interesting verse. Rejoice with trembling.

It comes at the tail end of a Psalm that talks about the nations rebelling against God, and the fearsomeness of God's judgment. And it says "OK kings, listen. God doesn't delight in judging. He delights in blessing so serve Him. Honor Him with all the respect that's due and you'll have something to rejoice about.

I will be glad and rejoice in You; I will sing praise to Your name, O Most High.
(Psalm 9:2)

I'm not going to rejoice exclusively in my job or my family or my health. Any of those things can be brought down in an instant. I'm going to be glad in God because He's immutable. He never changes.

I have trusted in Your mercy; My heart shall rejoice in Your salvation. (Psalm 13:5)

If you have trusted Jesus Christ as Savior you have something that's so precious. You have forgiveness. You have a relationship with the living God. You have a future and a hope.

The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart. (Psalm 19:8)

Statutes are the commandments of God. As much as we all want to buck the rules at times, the truth is that God's rules are designed for our good. God's commandments keep us from calamity.

God's commandments keep us on the right path. God's commandments lead to strong marriages, strong families, and strong churches.

Nobody ever gets down the road of life and says, "My big regret in life was, I wish I would have been more disobedient to God." But there are a whole lot of people who say just the opposite. "If only I had listened to God I wouldn't be in the mess I'm in now."

Let all those who seek You rejoice and be glad in You; And let those who love Your salvation say continually, "Let God be magnified!" (Psalm 70:4)

Glory in His holy name; Let the hearts of those rejoice who seek the LORD! (Psalm 105:3)

When we're caught up with the character and the person of God, we won't be able to complain. All that negative stuff will be displaced by the character of God.

But here's our problem. Too often we're too self-focused to rejoice. We have an entitlement mentality that completely overshadows the spiritual truth of the Bible.

And so we think we're the center of the plot. We think that we should get what we want because we deserve it.

And anytime we don't get what we want, since we are the center of the plot, we have the right, the God-given right to complain.

And ultimately we may even cast our complaints against God. "God, why isn't my life the way I think it should be?" At its root, complaining is an intense spiritual problem. We think we're God and when anything is not the way we want it, we have the God-given right to complain.

The bottom line is, the true and living God is the center of the story. God is the main character, not us. He doesn't exist to serve us. God isn't on the throne going, "Oh, they're upset again, I need to do something to try and make them happy!"

God's not like so many parents these days who elevate their children's happiness to the highest priority.

We exist to serve Him. He's the King of Kings, He's the Lord of Lords. We exist to glorify God. He's the main character, not us. When we complain, it's because we think we're the main character. At the root of complaining is a profoundly deep and serious spiritual problem that must be dealt with. We're not rejoicing in God. We're elevating ourselves to the place of God.

Let's go back to where we started this morning. Here it is, Philippians 2.

Do all things without complaining and disputing, 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. (Philippians 2:14,15)

So, do all things without complaining and disputing. This week, do ALL things without complaining. Anytime you are about to complain, just stop and watch how much less you talk.

God says, *Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. (Ephesians 4:29)* That would get rid of 99% of our complaints right there.

Instead of whining about how you hate your job, start thanking God that you have a job. Instead of grumbling about how your kids give you fits, stop and thank God that you were able to have children. Instead of complaining about your parents, thank God that He's given you parents.

Why? *That you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation.*

Now that doesn't mean that you'll become God's child by having a Christ-like attitude and stopping your complaining, but it means that others will see that your God's child.

It'll be obvious that you share His nature. Like saying "You're a chip off the old block."

Stop complaining so you can represent Jesus to a confused and dark world. That's the goal. It isn't stop complaining so people will like you. Stop complaining because it's annoying. Stop complaining so you'll get that promotion or save your marriage.

It's stop complaining and adopt Jesus' attitude of humility so God will be glorified and so that you'll have the opportunity to introduce others to our awesome God.