

“Grumble, Grumble”

Pastor and author, Bruce Larsen, flying into Indianapolis one beautiful fall day, took a taxi at the airport. He remarked to the driver, “It’s really a gorgeous day out here in Indiana!” “You should have been here yesterday,” the driver responded, “It was terrible.” They drove a bit further, and Bruce commented, “You know, most of our autumn leaves are gone in Maryland, but your trees are still beautiful. I’m glad I came this week.” The cab driver answered, “These leaves will be gone in 3 or 4 days.” After a while they came alongside the Indianapolis speedway. Bruce asked, “Isn’t that the Indianapolis Speedway?” “Yes”, the driver replied. “I’d sure like to see the race here some Memorial Day, Bruce observed.” The cabbie responded: “I wouldn’t go near it. I’d rather watch the horses run.” “Oh, Bruce replied, “you go to the track?” “No, I never go. It’s too expensive.” As Bruce got out of the cab, he says he couldn’t help but think the cab driver’s motto was, “Behind every silver lining there’s a dark cloud.”

Here’s a man who, in everything, finds reason to grumble and complain! But it’s easy to do, isn’t it? It’s so easy to grumble and complain.

We grumble at home. Kids complain about their bedtime, about chores, about parents’ rules. Wives grumble at their husbands. Husbands grouse about their wives.

We grumble at work. On the work world people complain about their boss, or their employees, or their customers, or low wages, lousy benefits, working too many hours, or working too few hours.

We grumble at school. Students complain about teachers, teachers bellyache about students and the administration, those in administration complains about the school board.

Sometimes we grumble at people who do the most for us. A man getting a package ready at the post office counter was approached by an older man with a postcard in his hand. The old man said, “Sir, could you please address this postcard for me?” The younger man gladly did it. Then the elderly gentleman said, “Do you think you could write a short message and sign the card for me?” “Sure,” the helpful guy said. When he was done, the younger man cheerfully said, “Is there anything else I can do for you?” The older man thought a minute, then replied: “At the end could you just put, “P.S. Please excuse the sloppy handwriting.”

It seems as though grumbling is part of human nature...fortunately, ***there’s no grumbling in the church!*** In every church I’ve been associated with, everybody’s been sweet and nobody has ever complained about anything! *Don’t I wish!*

You may say, “Harry, why are you grumbling about the grumblers today? Certainly there are more weighty and important subjects you could talk about.” But as we look at the Bible, we discover that the Bible does not look on grumbling as a trivial thing!

The text I’m using today is Philippians 2:14 (NIV) “Do everything *without complaining* or arguing.” This verse comes after a section where it says we are to work out our own salvation

with fear and trembling. i.e. Now that we are saved through faith in Christ, work at what it means to live as a follower of Jesus. And one of the qualities of a saved person is: Don't be a complainer! It's interesting to look at the Greek word translated "grumbling" or "complaining." It's the Greek word "*gongusmos*" – a word used especially of the rebellious and faithless murmurings of the children of Israel in their wilderness wanderings.

Let's look at Exodus 15:22-24. "Then Moses ordered Israel to set out from the Red Sea, and they went into the wilderness of Shur. They went three days in the wilderness and found no water. When they came to Marah, they could drink the water of Marah because it was bitter. That is why it was called Marah. And the people complained against Moses, saying, 'What shall we drink?'" God led the Israelites out of Egypt. After three days they had no water. The place where they were had water, but it was bitter and they couldn't drink it. So they grumble against Moses. We read in the next verse (verse 25) that God graciously gives them water.

About a month and a half into the journey, they are grumbling again: "The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. The Israelites said to them, 'If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger'" (Exodus 16:2-3). God is merciful, and hears their complaining: "The Lord spoke to Moses and said, 'I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, 'At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am the Lord your God'" (Exodus 16:11-12).

Later, as they are about to go into the promised land (Canaan), they get a scouting report that says the people occupying the land are like giants. Hearing this, they complain again: "Then all the congregation raised a loud cry, and the people wept that night. And all the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron; the whole congregation said to them, 'Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness!'" (Numbers 14:1-2). But this time, God is not so patient with their complaining! Numbers 14:11-12 tells us: "The Lord said to Moses, 'How long will this people despise me? And how long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the signs that I have done among them? I will strike them with pestilence and disinherit them, and I will make of you a nation greater and mightier than them.'"

Moses intercedes, and begs God to forgive the people. God does forgive them, but because of their grumbling most of them will be kept from entering the promised land: "And the Lord spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying: 'How long shall this wicked congregation complain against me? I have heard the complaints of the Israelites, which they complain against me. Say to them, "As I live," says the LORD, "I will do to you the very things I heard you say: your dead bodies shall fall in this very wilderness; and of all your number, included in the census, from twenty years old and upward, who have complained against me, not one of you shall come into the land in which I swore to settle you, except Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun (Number 14:26-30).

In the New Testament the Apostle Paul refers to Israel's unfaithfulness and complaining:

“I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea...nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them, and they were struck down in the wilderness. Now these things occurred as examples for us, so that we might not desire evil as they did...and *do not complain*, as some of them did, *and were destroyed* by the destroyer. These things happened to them to serve as an example, and they were written down to instruct us, on whom the ends of the ages have come” (1 Corinthians 10:1, 5-6, 10-11). Paul says we can learn from them!

Think of it. Israel had a lot more to complain about than we do! They were out in the desert, no homes, eating manna day after day, no toilets, no running water, no soft beds, no TV!

To be a follower of Jesus, and to be given to grumbling and complaining, is more serious than just a minor human flaw...it points to a deeper problem.

It shows ingratitude towards God. Moses says to the grumbling Israelites, “You are not grumbling against us, but against *the Lord*” (Exodus 16:8). If I’m always complaining about this or that, it shows that I am ungrateful to God for what I have. A grateful attitude and a grumbling attitude can’t go together!

A complaining spirit also shows my lack of trust in God. In Numbers 14:11 God says, “How long will these people treat me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the miraculous signs I have performed among them?” When I’m constantly complaining about the way things are, it can indicate that I don’t trust that God is working in these situations. If I really trust that God is in control, and can take bad situations and bring good out of them, why should I grumble?

Our Scripture text today says, “Do everything without complaining or arguing” (Philippians 2:14).

How can we overcome this habit of being a complainer? Well, first of all, it is important to acknowledge that complaining and grumbling is a sin. Complaining is usually not high on anybody’s list of “sins” – but it’s a character fault that can make life miserable for people around us! *And it certainly puts a blemish on our witness for Christ.* Think about it, who is drawn to Jesus by a group of complaining, whining Christians?

Philippians 2:14 says “Do everything without complaining”. If you go on to the next verse, it tells us why we should not complain: “So that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation. Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky” (Philippians 2:15). If we’re going to be blameless and pure children of God, people who shine like stars in this dismal world, we have to stop complaining. Someone once preached a sermon on this text and theme and titled the sermon, “Whine or Shine”. I like that!

So, first, acknowledge that complaining is a sin that has to go if we are to be effective for Christ.

A monk entered a monastery in which he agreed to take a vow of silence. He was only permitted to speak 2 words every 10 years. After the first 10 years he was brought before the leader at the monastery. He said his 2 words: “Bed hard.” 10 years later he was brought before the leader again. This time he said: “Food bad.” Another decade went by. Finally he was given 2 more words to say. He said, “I quit.” The leader replied, “Well, it doesn’t surprise me. You haven’t done anything but complain for the last 30 years.” Maybe we’ve been complaining for years. If so, this would be a good time to quit!

Another step we can take to move beyond complaining is this: Practice responding to people and situations with a positive, thankful spirit. We all have a choice in how we respond to things in life that bother us. We can bellyache about what has happened, or we can respond in a positive way with gratitude. We all know of people who have every right to complain, but are positive, upbeat, thankful people. Try to be like *them*! For instance, most children don’t like wearing eyeglasses. But one little boy put a positive spin on it rather than complaining: “I’m thankful for my eyeglasses. They keep the boys from fighting me and the girls from kissing me.”

Next, we can overcome a lot of grumbling if we put our discontent into action. You may wonder, *Isn’t there a time when we are justified in voicing our displeasure over something?* If something is wrong in the neighborhood, or schools, or family, or church, don’t we have a right to voice our complaints? Can’t we speak up? *Yes....but....much more is accomplished if we are willing to **do** something about the situation, and not just be an armchair complainer.*

Here’s a simple example. We are in a restaurant. We order soup, and when the soup arrives, it is not hot. Now we can sit there and complain. Maybe someone else at our table says, “Just tell the server.” But no, we don’t want to do that. So we sit there and eat cold soup, and bellyache with every spoonful. Or, we could choose to call the server and read the riot act – let everyone know what a terrible restaurant it is. Complain to high heaven about it. But another, more helpful, response, would be to just tell the server, “I’m sorry, but my soup is cold. Could I have another bowl please?”

Or, let’s say we don’t like what’s happening at work, or in our neighborhood or our local government, or church. Instead of just grouching about it all, we could get involved. Work for a solution. Put our displeasure into positive action. (We might find, once we get involved, that our complaint was not really justified). *Any idiot can complain. Complaining is a lazy person’s way of dealing with life’s frustrations. Nothing is accomplished.*

Another thing we can do to minimize or eliminate our being a complainer: Take the 21 day challenge.

On July 23rd, 2006, Will Bowen, the pastor of a small Midwestern church, preached a sermon that was part of a series of messages on prosperity. He noted that while his people said they wanted prosperity, many of them were not satisfied with what they had. So he suggested that they try to go 21 days without complaining, and try to break the complaining habit. He gave out purple wrist bands, and said if you voiced a complaint, then switch the wrist band to the other

wrist, and start day 1 of the 21 days all over again.

From that inconspicuous beginning, the 21 Day Challenge has become a worldwide phenomenon. Over 11 million of these wrist bands have been given out in 106 countries. Will Bowen travels all over the world as a motivational speaker. He has appeared on the Oprah Show, Dr. Oz, The Today Show, CBS Sunday Morning, and ABC Evening News. He has written 5 books that have sold over 3 million copies, and been translated into 25 languages. He now heads a non-profit organization, *A Complaint Free World*. This simple idea has literally transformed many lives and relationships!

Why 21 days? Scientists believe that if you can practice a behavior that benefits you in some way for 21 days, it will become a habit, an automatic behavior. Now it isn't easy to break the habit! The average person complains 15-30 times a day. Will Bowen says it generally takes anywhere from 4-8 months to achieve the 21 days of complaint free living.

What is a "complaint"? This point can be debated. Bowen says it is not *thinking* a negative thing. We have about 60,000 thoughts a day, many of them negative! It is *voicing* that criticism or grumbling thought that constitutes a "complaint".

If we give up complaining, does this mean we act like everything is great and rosy? No. We can state *facts*. "I went to the checkout line and the person in front of me delayed everybody in line because she couldn't find her credit card." Fact. "I was in this line at Walmart and the stupid lady in front of me wasted everybody's time because she couldn't find her credit card!" That's a complaint.

Remember, one of the ways to avoid complaining is to go to the person or group we have an issue with and try to resolve the problem (rather than just bellyaching and doing nothing).

Philippians 2:14 says, "Do everything without complaining or arguing." A guide at Blarney Castle in Ireland was explaining to some visitors that his job wasn't always as pleasant as it seemed. He told them about a group of disgruntled tourists he had taken to the castle earlier in the week. "These people were complaining about everything. They didn't like the weather, the food, their hotel accommodations, the prices, everything. Then to top it off, when they arrived at the castle, we found that the area around the Blarney Stone was roped off. Workmen were making some kind of repairs."

One of the ladies who seemed to be one of the biggest faultfinders in the group piped up, "This is the last straw! I've come all this way, and now I can't even kiss the Blarney Stone." "Well you know," the guide said, "according to legend, if you kiss someone who has kissed the stone, it's the same as kissing the stone itself." "And I suppose you've kissed the stone," the exasperated lady said. "Better than that," the guide replied, "I've sat on it."

All of us at times have been like this lady. And probably we all feel like the guide when someone else is the complainer! ***I'm going to try the 21 day challenge again. Will you join me?***

