

The Way Out of Complaining

Welcome/Prayer

Foreword

By looking studying the circumstances of the Israelites from their time in Egypt to their journey toward Canaan, we have learned that our God can and will provide a “way out” from anything and everything that holds us captive. Further study of the scriptures has shown us that, despite God’s provisions, His people complained about their circumstances. Like the Israelites, we, too, can oftentimes become enslaved by negativity, and so we need a way out of complaining in order to enjoy life and all that God has to offer.

Introduction

Recall from the previous lesson in this series that God provided the Israelites the way out of impossible circumstances by parting the waters of the Red Sea and allowing His people to escape the Egyptian armies who were pursuing them. With their enemies no longer a threat, the Israelites continued their journey toward the Promised Land...but not without complaints. Despite all of God’s provisions throughout their journey, the Israelites complained about their circumstances until God finally said, “Enough!”

1. What are some things we complain about, perhaps not even realizing we’re complaining?
2. Why do you think people complain so much?
3. How do you think God felt about the Israelites’ complaining?

Preparation

Read the following text related to today’s message:

Exodus 15:22-25a (NLT)

²² Then Moses led the people of Israel away from the Red Sea, and they moved out into the desert of Shur. They traveled in this desert for three days without finding any water. ²³ When they came to the oasis of Marah, the water was too bitter to drink. So they called the place Marah (which means “bitter”). ²⁴ Then the people complained and turned against Moses. “What are we going to drink?” they demanded. ²⁵ So Moses cried out to the Lord for help, and the Lord showed him a piece of wood. Moses threw it into the water, and this made the water good to drink.

Exodus 16:1-3 (NLT)

Then the whole community of Israel set out from Elim and journeyed into the wilderness of Sin, between Elim and Mount Sinai. They arrived there on the fifteenth day of the second month, one month after leaving the land of Egypt. ² There, too, the whole community of Israel complained about Moses and Aaron. ³ “If only the Lord had killed us back in Egypt,” they moaned. “There we sat around pots filled with meat and ate all the bread we wanted. But now you have brought us into this wilderness to starve us all to death.”

Numbers 14:26-30 (NLT)

²⁶ Then the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, ²⁷ “How long must I put up with this wicked community and its complaints about me? Yes, I have heard the complaints the Israelites are making against me. ²⁸ Now tell them this: ‘As surely as I live, declares the Lord, I will do to you the very things I heard you say. ²⁹ You will all drop dead in this wilderness! Because you complained against me, every one of you who is twenty years old or older and was included in the registration will die. ³⁰ You will not enter and occupy the land I swore to give you. The only exceptions will be Caleb...and Joshua....”

Break it Down

Caleb and Joshua had “a different attitude than the others,” so they were exempted from God’s wrath and judgment; specifically, they didn’t complain. Considering the punishment the Israelites received, it would behoove us to find a way out of our own complaining. The Apostle Paul affirms this idea in two of his New Testament letters: “Do everything without complaining or arguing...” (Philippians 2:14 NLT), and “Don’t complain as some of [the Israelites] did. The angel of death destroyed them.” (1 Corinthians 10:10 GW)

What is complaining?

Complaining is an expression of displeasure or dissatisfaction with the way things are; it simply focuses on fault-finding versus solution-finding. Whenever the word is used in Scripture, it is commonly linked to the preposition, *against*. Since God is sovereign, He is the One who is responsible for the state of the universe. Accordingly, all of our complaints are ultimately against God.

1. What are some labels we use to deny or downplay our complaining? (e.g., “opinionated”)
2. What is the difference between a complaint and a suggestion?
3. Share your opinion(s) about the statement, “All complaints are ultimately against God.”

Why is God opposed to complaining?

Besides the fact that complaining is not fun to be around, it also demonstrates a lack of gratitude; it focuses on what we don’t have, rather than on what we do have. Complaining begins to hold us captive when it keeps us from moving forward and experiencing what God has in store for us. While many of us resist change and complain about it, we’re demonstrating that our focus is on temporary things, not the everlasting. Most importantly, complaining is a sign of disbelief in God and in His promises; it shows that we’re not really sure the Lord is worthy of our trust and confidence.

1. What are some things we complain about that suggest a lack of gratitude for what we have?
2. How do you feel about change?
3. Consider the things you’ve griped about most recently. Which ones were eternal or spiritual in nature (vs. temporal or physical)?
4. How does complaining demonstrate a lack of faith in God?

How do we find the “way out” of complaining?

Since it is sin and not simply a harmless way to occupy our time, we need to begin with repentance for any grumbling/complaining that we’ve done (or, are doing!). Once we have turned away from the habit, the next thing is to train ourselves NOT to do it (recall the words of Paul in the above NT verses). We should talk to God about our struggle; after all, He already knows what we’re thinking. Yet, in so doing, we should seek to be 1 Thessalonians 5:18 Christians: “Be thankful in all circumstances....” The more mindful we become about our complaining, the more we will see what God is doing in our lives and how He provides us the way out of those things (e.g., complaining) that enslave us.

1. How do you feel about complaining to the Lord? Share about a complaint you’ve taken to Him.
2. Describe a time when a complaint was expressed in a way that led to a solution.
3. Thinking about your recent complaints, how can you give thanks in those circumstances?

Conclusion

The message for this discussion guide concluded with a challenge to break the habit of complaining by wearing one of our 2020 Vision bracelets. The exercise is based on Pastor Will Bowen’s “complaint-free world” campaign. Whether you’ve accepted the challenge, God will provide you the way out of complaining when you take the necessary steps we learned in this lesson.

1. Will you take the challenge? Bracelets are available at the Transmitter Road campus.
2. Ask God to forgive you for any grumbling or complaining you’ve done in the past.

Close in Prayer