

New Vision

My Big Fat Mouth • Quit Complaining • Exodus 14:10-15; Philippians 2:14-15 •

Main Point

Understanding the hidden and high cost of complaining.

Introduction

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What do you find yourself most often complaining about?

Why is it so easy to slip into the habit of complaining?

Complaining usually stems from some sort of stress in our lives. There is a healthy form of complaining that lets others know there is a problem that needs to be addressed. For instance, we should complain about significant pain that needs medical attention, abuse, or injustice, and then strive to fix whatever is wrong. It's natural to complain when we experience great loss as we process our grief.

But complaining quickly becomes unhealthy when it becomes our default response to anything that is not exactly the way we think it should be. Habitual complaining reveals issues within us that need to be addressed if we are to become all that God wants us to be. In this study, we will look at some of the internal roots of complaining, as well as its consequences in our lives and in our relationship with God.

Understanding

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| Have a volunteer read Exodus 14:10-12.

What is the primary emotion the Israelites experience in this passage?

Why do you think the people cried out to God first and then immediately complained to Moses? Where did the Israelites suddenly wish they were?

Can you think of a time you made excuses or were overly critical of a new opportunity because you were scared to step into something unknown? How does one move past that fear?

Fear can quickly overwhelm our faith if we allow it. Fear is a major cause of stress—stress often reveals itself through complaining, and habitual complaining prevents us from growing because we find something

wrong with every new opportunity God provides. If we find ourselves habitually complaining, it is helpful to confess our fears and sources of stress to God and allow Him to help us work through these. Unlike the Israelites, however, we need to trust His character and trust that He knows what He's doing.

| Have a volunteer read Exodus 14:13-15.

English Bibles use “the LORD” as a substitute for God’s name, Yahweh, meaning “I Am” or “I Will Be” (in the sense of “I Will Be With You”). How aware are you of God’s presence with you in times of trial or fear? Does this knowledge bring peace or frustration when you have to wait on God’s deliverance?

Notice in verse 14 that Moses told the Israelites they should “be silent” while the Lord fights for them, and in verse 15 the Lord told Moses and the people to stop crying out and get moving.

What lessons can we draw from this about God’s relationship to us in hard times and about His expectations?

In the midst of hard times and stressful situations, it is easy to forget that God is good, He is in control, and that He knows what we need before we even ask (or complain!). He wants us to trust Him for our deliverance and guidance, even if His path leads us through the sea (see Psalm 77:19-20).

| Have a volunteer read Exodus 16:8.

What does this verse tell us about unnecessarily complaining about situations in our lives?

When we unnecessarily complain, we show God that we are not grateful for what He has given us. The apostle Paul gave us great ways to combat complaining in our lives when he said, “Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

| Have a volunteer read Philippians 2:14-15.

How does this verse help us "rewire" our complaints to God?

How does the habit of complaining inhibit our witness for Christ?

In these verses, Paul was likely referencing two other passages. The first is Deuteronomy 32, where Moses referred to the Israelites as a “warped and crooked generation.” The second is Daniel 12:3, which depicts “the wise” and “those who lead many to righteousness” as shining like the stars forever. The implication seems to be that grumbling and arguing are part of a “warped and corrupt generation,” but if we rid ourselves of that we will be wise and capable of leading others to righteousness.

Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Pastor Brady mentions 5 things that complaining produces in your life - which one do you struggle with the most?

1. Complaining is hazardous to your health.
2. Complaining can turn a tough stretch into a life sentence.
3. Complaining is a spiritual check engine light.
4. Complaining brings the judgment of God.
5. Complaining puts God on trial.

What are the fears and stressors that war against your faith and lead you to complain? What steps can you take to reduce fear and stress? Where do you need God to help you in these areas?

What are some practical ways we can implement more praise into our lives to combat the tendency to complain? How might this impact our relationships with others?

Rules for Rewire

1. It's okay to complain to God; it's not okay to complain about God.
2. If you can change your circumstances do something about it.
3. If you can't change your circumstances change your perspective.

Which rule to rewire do you need to focus on today?

Pray

Ask the Father to make you more aware of the underlying stressors that cause you to complain, and to help you live a life characterized by thanksgiving in all circumstances.

Commentary

| Exodus 14:10-15

14:10. Seeing the massive Egyptian army coming toward them and looking behind them to see the sea at their backs, the Israelites believed they were trapped. We can understand their terror. Many of us have felt trapped physically or emotionally with no apparent way out. Realizing their perilous situation, the Israelites correctly called to God for help.

14:11. The people also blamed God for their situation. Pharaoh may have intended to kill only Israel's leaders and to bring the rest of the people back into slavery, but the Israelites believed Pharaoh intended to kill them all. Perhaps they believed Pharaoh intended to avenge the deaths of so many Egyptians in the tenth plague.

As God's representative, Moses bore the brunt of the people's anger. They accused him of dragging them out of Egypt against their will. The people, of course, had been delighted to escape Egyptian slavery; but when danger threatened, they promptly excused themselves and blamed Moses. The Israelites reinterpreted God's deliverance as a trap to kill them. Sadly, the Israelites would continue to complain against God and Moses (see Ex. 16:3; Num. 21:5).

14:12. After Pharaoh had increased the Israelite slaves' workload by making them gather their own straw for making bricks, the people had complained to Moses and refused to listen to him (Ex. 5:20–6:9). Here the Israelites wished they had continued to ignore Moses' leadership and had remained in Egyptian slavery. Facing what they believed was certain death made "the good old days" of slavery seem wonderful.

14:13. Unlike the people, Moses believed and trusted God. Rather than defend himself and condemn the people, he calmly comforted them and provided confidence. The phrase Don't be afraid typically was spoken by angels when appearing to humans (see Gen. 15:1; 26:24) and by God to those facing overwhelming odds (see Num. 14:9; Josh. 10:8). Moses' words assured the people they had no reason to fear. The people saw only Pharaoh's army; but God, whom they could not see, was with them and would save them.

14:14. The Old Testament describes God as a warrior who fights for His people (see Ex. 15:3; Isa. 42:13). Since God would fight for His people and win the victory, they needed only to follow Him confidently. Moses declared that this time the Israelites would not even have to pick up weapons in the battle. They needed only to watch calmly and confidently as He defeated their Egyptian enemies.

14:15. God instructed the Israelites to break camp. The people needed to take down and pack their tents, gather and pack belongings, round up the livestock, and prepare to move out at God's command. The process would have taken several hours at least, but they needed to demonstrate their faith by acting with confident obedience and trust.

| Exodus 16:8

16:6-8 The Lord continued to act to give knowledge of Himself and reveal His glory (6:6; 7:17; 8:10,22; 9:14,29; 10:2; 11:7; 14:4,17-18). Who are we is lit “What are we?” Moses’ use of the interrogative pronoun that usually refers to things rather than people presents himself and Aaron as unimportant in the situation. Their grumbling against Moses and Aaron was in fact a complaint against the Lord.

| Philippians 2:14-15

2:14-16. Grumbling and arguing come from selfishness and vainglory (1:15,17; cp. Dt 32:5). Blameless (complete Christian character) and pure (inoffensive living; cp. 1:10) introduce metaphors. First, believers are to be morally faultless in a world crooked and perverted by its failure to understand the word of God. Believers are straight models for distorted lives. Second, they are to shine like stars whose brilliance contrasts with the darkened world.