

The Encouragement Newsletter

From Complaining to Contentment



Every day we are all faced with the option to complain about life or to be content in the place we find ourselves. When I use the word contentment I am in no way speaking of settling for less than the best or giving up in the midst of challenging moments. Nor, am I referring to laying down, just “letting life happen”, and pass you by without being involved in a pursuit for excellence. I am referring to a satisfaction with life and the blessings you have already received without complaining about what has happened, what has not happen, and what you do not have like friends, associates, connections, relationships, money, cars, homes, education etc. To take this further, lets look at some definitions.



WHAT IS COMPLAINING? The dictionary definition for complaining is to express dissatisfaction, resentment, grief, and find fault. Grumble is a synonym for complain, which means to murmur or mutter in discontent, and complain sullenly. Another word I want to define is murmur. To murmur is to mumble or private expression of discontent and to complain in a low tone or in private. The Biblical definition of complainers is complaining of one's lot, querulous and discontented. You will find the word murmur most often in the Old Testament, specifically in relation to the children of Israel, and it means to grumble, complain and to be obstinate.

The Children of Israel - Our Example

The children of Israel were full of complaining as they transitioned from Egypt to journey into the promised land. The transition process included more than crossing the Red Sea. It included transitioning to a new life, mindset, and behavior. He was purposeful in His plan to do life differently. The purpose was to bring them into something new and fresh by taking away the old life full of fleshly satisfaction, that only leads to bondage.

We can take away several life lessons from the behavior of the children of Israel after their exodus from bondage. God heard the cries of Israel and remembered His promises to them and He set deliverance in motion by choosing Moses to deliver them. (Exodus 3:7-10) They had no idea what freedom meant and did not understand the command “Let my people go that they may serve Me or “worship Me”. Worship is always the Lord's goal. They could not see what the Lord was doing or His purpose for brining them out of Egypt. The constant complaining, murmuring and grumbling prohibited a spirit of contentment. Their eyes were blinded and did not understand God's provision. The change in the lifestyle was intentional by God. However, the children of Israel were so steeped in the past they did not change. All they saw was their circumstance, which they did not like and they craved their previous lifestyle. Their complaining was so bad the entire generation that exiled from Egypt, except for two—Joshua and Caleb, died and did not enter into the land promised.

What did the children of Israel complain about? Nothing spiritual. I could not find one scripture that showed any complaints that God did not speak to them and or successfully guide them out of Egypt, though adventuresome. In Jeremiah 2:5, God asks, “What injustice have your fathers found in Me...”. They did not complain that He would not teach them the law for them to live by. They did not complain that He did not fight their enemies, or meet their needs as faithful Jehovah. Because they were conditioned to be carnal, they complained about “natural” things (things of the flesh). Their complaining accused God of misdoing. Look at Deuteronomy 1:27 and note how rebellion and complaining go hand-in-hand.

There was a process Israel had to go through to obtain the promise. We are no different than the children of Israel and the process is where we all can miss it at times. We receive a deliverance and we have hope of receiving the promise of God. We can see the light at the end of the tunnel. But, then we hit that unexpected something, which surprises us and smacks us hard in the face. It feels like God has forgotten us. We truly think, He does not know what He is doing and surely “He has brought me to this place to let me die”. We do not know what is going on because our world has been turned upside down. The way we know life is no longer relevant and frankly we are lost. We have been brought to a new place, but we do not understand His mind for fulfilling His

promise. So we, like the children of Israel begin to complain. I can raise my hands to this because I am guilty. It is like the Lord has forgot to tell me something about this journey or He did not get my permission before carrying out His plan. I feel left out of some important information and then I am upset. What is the response - Complaining.

Is complaining really wrong? Well, let us put it this way, scriptures tell us how Moses, David and Job complained. Job had a complaint in Job 23:2. In Deuteronomy 11:11 Moses complained and in Psalm 142:1-2 David poured out His complaint to God. Now how did they complain? Not with a hard heart. Their complaint was directly to God. Did they stop, get mad, and become unfaithful to His command? Absolutely Not! Did they continue even in the moment of uncertainty and personal confusion. Yes! We know God was not confused. In their complaining they stayed the course. In their complaining they stayed in His will. The definition for complaint in these text means meditation, musing and talk.

Have you ever thought it possible the Lord would complain? In Micah 6:2 (NKJV), the Lord has a complaint against Israel. This verse in some versions is the word "controversy", which means dispute, quarrel, case at law and the root meaning is to make a complaint. The entire chapter reveals the Lord's complaint and case against Israel for their unfaithfulness to Him when he has done nothing to deserve this treatment. In His complaint, He tell them what He requires (verse 8). We are at times guilty of our unfaithfulness toward him and sacrifices will not fulfill His requirements for our life. Rather we need take heed and to do what He requires.

Job, Moses and David complained to God. Am I saying that we can only unload to God. No! Absolutely not! We must examine our heart in the process. Are we truly unloading because we are just in a dry place where things just seem to be going haywire and we are seeking counsel and answers in order to continue in obedience to God? Or, are we totally discontented with a heart full of contention towards God, His people and the life He has given. Is the complaining taking us away from the Lord and His process for us to "becoming". Are we truly resentful with horizontal complaints and a heart full of private murmuring and public grumbling. In other words, this is a matter of the heart.

Complainers are named in the book of Jude among the character of those that had crept into the church unaware. Jude names complainers as apostates that walk according to their own lusts and they are full of "great swelling words" and flattering people in order to take advantage of them. This describes the depth of complaining and its detriment not only to the individual, but to those around them. In I Corinthians 10: 8-11 Paul lets us know that what happened to Israel is written for our learning. Israel's complaining led to their destruction. God had done many miracles and they saw them with their own eyes. God was not pleased with them because they did so much against Him.

In addition to complaining, they were found in sexual immorality, idolatry and lusting after (vv. 6-10). Again, complaining is very serious.

Contentment Our world is full of the pressure to desire and accumulate more and more stuff. The late Bishop Juanita Turner would often say, "Everything you see has death working in it". We can all attest the truth of this statement because from human life to materialistic things we see nothing lasts forever. Though we can testify to this fact, we are constantly bombarded and pushed to lust for bigger and better things at the expense unwise spending, getting into debt, losing relationships, etc. We are constantly compelled to upgrade and update; change our appearance, dress and live like the latest model or entertainer. With this constant pressure to conform to the culture, the spirit of complaining has its fuel and sets us ablaze with a spirit of ungratefulness because of what we do not have. But, there is a remedy for complaining. That remedy is Contentment.



WHAT IS CONTENTMENT? The definition for Contentment is the state of being contented, satisfaction and ease of mind. Contentment in the Bible is defined as sufficiency, a perfect condition of life in which no aid or support is needed, a mind contented with its lot, and self-satisfaction. The Biblical definition of Content is sufficient for one's self, strong enough to possessing enough to need no aid or support; independent of external circumstances, and contented with one's lot, with ones means, though the slenderest.

In Philippians 4, there is a running theme of joy and rejoicing. Paul exhorts, in verse 6, do not be anxious, but pray and God's peace that passes human understanding will guard not only the heart, but the mind through Jesus Christ. Going further down to verse 11, Paul provides a nugget of truth. He had learned to be content in every situation of life. Situations like hunger and in great need. It didn't matter, He had learned to be content. He had the strength of God through Christ to be content at all times no matter what happened.

Paul definitely had a hard life. I Corinthians 10 details his life of imprisonment, hunger, left alone with no one around, forsaken by companions, with money, without money and more. In this he settled in his heart to be content knowing that the Lord would deliver him out of every situation. He had developed a deep level of trust in One who had called Him to be His bondservant and was confident all circumstances were a part of God's overall purpose and plan.

Here some more truth. In I Timothy 6:8 Paul tells Timothy, "And having food and raiment let us be therewith content". Then turn over to Hebrews 13:5 we read, "Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have; for he hath said, " will never leave thee, nor forsake thee". These are very powerful great exhortations for us to apply to our life. Yes, we are encumbered about with so many cares. Life seems to be moving at 100 miles per hour and it can be difficult to maneuver from day to day. At times, it feels at more is against us than for us. But, we can be like Paul and embrace the scriptures know that the Lord has started a good work in our life, He knows the plans, and we can learn be content.

HOW CAN MOVE FROM COMPLAINING TO CONTENTMENT?

Here's a short checklist —

- ✓ **Look at life's circumstances differently.** Everything that comes in our life has a purpose. Seek the Lord for the purpose and meaning of every circumstance. (Psalm 105:3-4)
- ✓ **Develop a spirit of thanksgiving for the blessings of the Lord has given.** If we take a moment to think on what we already have, we must be thankful. (Psalm 100:4)
- ✓ **Do a heart examine.** When expressing the circumstances of life, examine what is spoken and ask, "Is this complaining?" (Psalm 51)
- ✓ **Be on guard and recognized when complaining is creeping in.** Attitudes easily creep into our minds and hearts if we are not on guarding with all diligence. (Proverbs 4:23)
- ✓ **Make a conscious decision to be content.** We can know to do right and don't do it. Living righteously is a daily decision. Living in contentment rather than complaining is a daily decision. (Philippians 4:11)
- ✓ **Praise and pray without ceasing.** Paul did not come to this place of contentment over night. Submitting to God's process, he "learned", which is why he exhorts us to pray without ceasing and in everything give thanks. (I Thessalonians 5:17-18)

WHAT WILL A SPRITE OF CONTENTMENT DO?

It will keep us from striving with God and with others. At the core, complaining (also defined as discontentment) leaves us feeling as if we deserve more than what we have and should have what others have. So, we can easily get caught up in envy, strife, and competition. Then we will see contention. Just as we saw with the children of Israel. There will be a spirit of dissatisfaction.

Those living in contentment are more settled and at rest. There is a peace that is upon them because there is an unwavering trust in the Lord's ways. This peace exudes from them and they are joy to be around. The opposite is true about one that complains about life. They are truly discontent and instead of brightening up someone's day, they put a damper on it with their words and attitude. There is so much going on in our world and the peace of God is desperately needed. As servants of God, let us rid ourselves of complaining and replace it with a trusted contentment in the Lord who has called us as servants and deliver this same spirit to everyone we meet.

PRAYER

Father God, we want to first of all repent for our complaining and contempt of your ways for our life. I have allowed complaining to take our eyes off of you. In many ways, I have been like the children of Israel and I have grumbled at your way. I've been discontent and wanted things my way. Forgive me Lord. I want to possess Your promises for my life. Today, I ask that you redirect my eyes to You as I renew my trust in Your hand. From today, I set my heart to look at life through your eyes. You are God and you hold my world in your hands. I trust in You with all my heart and I do not lean on my limited understanding.

I fill my heart and mind with a spirit of contentment. I choose to be satisfied with all of the blessing you have provided. Be it my family, friends, employment, church and finances. I choose to be content with Your way for me. I choose to have a heart of thanksgiving and a mouth full of praise. You have and will always supply my need. Therefore, I will be content with your supply.

Father God, I thank you for everything you have done in my life and I am confident that what You have started in my life, You will complete it as I cooperate with You in the process. I trust You and will be like Mount Zion. I will not be moved.

In the Name of Jesus Amen!

Jesus Christ is the Author & Finisher of My Faith
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