

Studies show that in an average conversation we complain once a minute. That's a lot of complaining. I wonder how often we complain in our minds without articulating the complaint. That's an incredible amount of complaining, I suspect. The problem with all of this complaining is what it does to our relationship with God. When we see the Israelites complain in the wilderness after receiving a miraculous deliverance from bondage to Egypt, we can't help but wince at the lack of gratitude and faith, but we have received a greater salvation through Christ, and are susceptible to the same temptation to grumble. Let's spend some time this week working on our grumbling.

Day 1

Explore the Emotion

The first step in putting a dent in your complaining and grumbling is to explore the emotions behind the action. Emotions, by definition, put things in motion, but we often don't trace the thread back to the starting point to understand exactly what got the complaining ball rolling. Complaining is a coping mechanism that often comes out of frustration, anger, or fear. We are frustrated because we don't think something will change or be fruitful, we are angry because our plans have been thwarted, but most often our complaining is the result of fear. What fear caused you to complain? Were you afraid you would miss out on some good thing your heart was set on? Were you afraid you would be unsuccessful? Were you afraid the pain or suffering would not end or would not bring about anything good in your life that could make up for it? Many times, the emotion is a fear or anger about ourselves that we project onto other things or people. When I am working on a project that is going poorly, I will often get frustrated and complain about a piece of equipment or a tool, but in reality, I am usually angry at my own lack of skill and afraid that I do not measure up to my own or someone else's standard of glory. It is important to discern the root of the complaint, because without doing so we cannot explore the solution, which is strengthening our faith in God.

Verses: Numbers 14:26-31, John 6:41-44, Philippians 2:14-16

Prayer Topics: Source, Motive, Expectations

Day 2

Strengthen Your Faith

So why is faith in God the solution to our complaints and grumbling? Simply because God is worthy of our praise and enjoyment, and grumbling and complaining is the antithesis of the praise that He is due. At all times and in all circumstances, God is worthy of praise. His glory and goodness is such that He is always able to be enjoyed. When Israel was in the wilderness, God was completely able to take care of them, just as He had during the showdown with the Egyptians that led not only to their freedom, but to their plundering of Egypt. Not only did God free Israel, but He made sure that justice was done for all the labor that had been stolen from them during their servitude. After having witnessed first hand God's glorious righteousness and His magnificent power, they promptly decided that providing food and water for them was too big a task for God. They had no trust in either His goodness, or his power. What was God doing with them in the wilderness, why did they have so many apparent things to fear? He was teaching them to trust Him. You cannot understand God's love for you, His righteousness, His generosity and faithfulness, until you are in a position where there is no other source to meet your needs but Him, because until that happens you will always credit some other source for your blessing. I made some good investments, I worked hard, the economy was good, the president made some shrewd moves politically, all of these statements overlook the role that God plays in our blessing. When you go out into the wilderness, and you must trust God, you become sure of His love, power, and goodness, and your

faith is increased. You will begin to understand that the challenges God allows in your life are meant for your good, and that He can be trusted. Every time we grumble and complain, we are missing an important opportunity to complete the covenant with God through thanksgiving and worship, we are missing faith in Him.

Verses: Hebrews 11:1-40, Romans 10:14-17, Psalm 119:7

Prayer Topics: Wilderness, Reliance, Confidence

Day 3

Learn to Lament

Complaining and grumbling are highly discouraged in the Bible, while lamenting is not. Why is that? Because Lamenting is part of worshiping and giving thanks to God. There is a cycle in scripture where God meets our needs, and we give thanks for the blessing He provides. Many times, however, there is a previous step that is necessary to this cycle. When God meets our needs, but we are unaware that we had the need, we often do not complete the cycle with thanksgiving and worship. When we lament, we are very aware of our need in a deeply emotional way. We do not just take rational stock of our need, but we feel the need deeply, we understand how much we are faced with the need, and what sorrow or suffering will be experienced if the need is not met. Often when we complain, we should really be lamenting. Complaining blames God for a lack. He does not see, or does not care, or actually actively creates the situation, so we complain and impugn His character. Lament, on the other hand, does not blame God for the situation that causes suffering, but recognizes it as the result of specific sin, or the state of the fallen world. Lament reaches out to God for the solution to the need, and draws closer to Him in faith that He will meet the need. And so, lament is often the forerunner of praise, thanksgiving, and worship, because God is faithful in meeting the need that was the source of the lament, even though it often takes time. Are there things in your life that you are complaining about right now that you should be lamenting over? Are you skilled in lamenting? Spend some time today in lament, and see the result in your life.

Verses: Lamentations 1:1, Jeremiah 9:10, Psalm 10:1

Prayer Topics: Sorrow, Brokenness, Repentance

Day 4

Celebrate Prophetically

In scripture, laments are often found very close to praise and worship. In the prophets, in the Psalms, it is not unusual for the tone to shift quite suddenly from despair to celebration. That is usually not because something happened quickly to change the situation, but because the lamenter counted on the faithfulness of God to meet the need and bring blessing. They could see, with the eyes of faith, that the blessing would come with such a certainty that they could live in the emotion of that moment. This is the place I want to get to in my faith, where I can be overcome with the worst possible sorrow and in the next moment break out in praise to God, not because the sorrow has suddenly passed, but because I so strongly believe that God will bring about salvation from it. I am not in that place now, I am afraid. Often, much time is needed between my laments (or, often, my complaints) and my trust in God for salvation. That time is getting shorter as I get older, but it is still longer than I wish it would be. We can, however, make a habit to include a prayer of celebration with our laments, even if we still lack the faith to fully live in the emotion of the thanksgiving we are articulating. It would be a great rule to have, that whenever we lament, we could, along with the lament, describe with the voice of faith, what it will be

like to have the issue we lament over resolved. To not only see clearly how it will resolve, but to describe the emotions of that time so clearly that we begin to live in them would be a great benefit to our spiritual lives. It's worth trying.

Verses: 1 Corinthians 5:8, Romans 14:5-6, 1 Peter 1:8-9

Prayer Topics: Honor, Glory, Provision

Day 5

Remember

When has God brought blessings to you in the past? When has He showed His faithfulness, love, and righteousness in your life? When have your complaints and grumbles been met with love and generosity from Him? Try today to make a list, so that, when the challenges come in the future, you can meet them with faith instead of grumbling. Have a good weekend.

Verses: Deuteronomy 6:12, John 1:16, Psalm 77:11

Prayer Topics: Gratitude, Peace, Experience