



COMPLAINING

23rd March 2025

3rd Sunday in Lent



Confronting & Conquering a Complaining Spirit.

Main verse:

¹⁰And do not grumble, as some of them did—and were killed by the destroying angel. These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come. (1 Corinthians 10:10-11)

Main Point:

How easy it is for us to fall into the trap of complaining when things don't go the way we desire them. Yet how quickly we forget that complaining and grumbling is as serious a sin as any other.

The way we eradicate complaining and grumbling from our heart is twofold. Firstly, we must acknowledge that a complaining attitude has taken root in our heart, and confess our sin before God. Secondly, we need to intentionally 'put on' the attitude of gratitude and thanksgiving, which is able to dissolve a whining and whinging attitude.

The other Wednesday evening, as we were watching *The Chosen*, a scene came on the screen which made us all chuckle. It was a scene of one of God's people sharing a family meal with his wife and daughter. The wife was talking about her day's activities and complaining about her need to look after her elderly mother. Meanwhile, her husband continued eating his meal. When she turned to him for a response, it became apparent that he wasn't even listening to what she was saying.

As we were chuckling, someone (a husband I might add) commented, "So ... it's been going on for some time, hasn't it!"

There are some dynamics that happen again and again throughout history, simply because they are behavioural patterns that are common to human nature.

In Paul's letter to the church at Philippi he picked up on another dynamic that is common to all humans, and that is temptation.

Let me start by asking a question that you are **unlikely** to yell out the answer.

The question is, "What would you say is your greatest temptation?"

Now, if I was to guess what popped into your mind, I'm unlikely to hear:

- 'my greatest temptation is not becoming drunk on the weekend' or
- 'my greatest temptation is not stealing a car and taking for a joy ride' or
- 'my greatest temptation is resisting the urge to rob a bank'

I think most of us have reached a place in our lives where these kinds of behaviours are not difficult for us to resist. But that certainly doesn't mean we are not vulnerable to temptation.

It is just that the kinds of temptations to which we are most susceptible are a little more insidious or subversive, than say ... losing your temper and punching someone in the face!

Paul identifies, however, a temptation that remains a serious danger for our spiritual walk. What's that? It is the temptation to grumble and complain when things don't go our way, or something happens that we don't like.

That temptation ... and I'm being honest with you ... is a biggie in the body of Christ.

What makes complaining and grumbling sinister, however, is that we often see it in other people, before we'll admit it's presence in our own life.

What are some of the symptoms of someone with a complaining heart or spirit?

- They criticize and pass judgment on others;
- They seem to walk around with a negative attitude that is always finding fault with something or someone;
- They struggle to see the positive in a person or a situation because their negativity throws a shadow on everything; and finally
- They seem to feel compelled to share their critical thoughts as though the world will stop turning if they don't.

Before you nod inwardly, thinking, 'Oh yes, I know someone just like that', let's admit that the temptation to complain and grumble is one we are all susceptible to.

But what makes a grumbling and complaining spirit so dangerous?

The truth is a critical, complaining spirit is fuelled by the devil himself.

It is caused by an evil spirit whose sole aim is to hurt and destroy, to pull down and discourage.

The evil complaining spirit has a close friend, and that is, the spirit of judgementalism. They are such close friends they seem to go everywhere together.

And because all humans are vulnerable to complaining and grumbling about things, the Bible, God's letter to humans, has much to say about this very topic.

James writes, "*Do not complain, brethren, against one another, so that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door.*" (James 5:9)

And earlier in Paul's letter he wrote, "*Do all things without grumbling or disputing.*" (Philippians 2:14)

So, let's turn our attention to learning how we can overcome this temptation to grumble and complain. At the outset, [I'll be real with you], if the weed of complaining and criticism has begun to grow in the garden of your heart, it is not easily uprooted!

This particular weed has very deep roots – human will, and strength will not be sufficient to pull it out.

So, in many ways, step 1 is to not let the seeds of criticism and complaining to enter into your heart in the first place.

If you see little shoots sprouting up, pull them out straight away. Quickly respond by telling yourself, '*Oh no. I will not let complaining and bitterness about this situation or person stay in my heart. I choose to focus on what is good and pleasing about them.*'

However, if the weed of complaining and criticism has been allowed to grow rampant in your heart, much like lantana it can grow quite massive, simply cutting it back won't eradicate it.

Getting rid of this spiritual weed is a job for the supernatural power of God's Spirit.

So, step 2, is to come before your loving heavenly Father, with a humble and repentant heart.

[Step 3] A repentant heart takes full responsibility for having allowed the seeds of complaining to take root in the first place. Its important we resist any temptation to rationalise or excuse this sin, even though it is a sin seldom recognised in the church today.

Step 4, we need to admit our inability to get rid of this spiritually noxious weed on our own.

The Anglican prayer of confession, reminds us of this,

*We humbly admit that we need your help.
We confess that we have wandered from your way
... and we have failed to do what is right.*

What is the next line? "You alone can save us." Then we ask the Lord to "wipe out our sins and teach us to forgive others." This quality, 'the attitude of forgiving others' is 'the fruit of the Spirit.'

Then, through the power of the indwelling Spirit, we are instructed to make intentional decisions about what we put off and what we put on.

For example, Peter tells us to "off malice, envy and slander" and instead "pursue the pure milk of the word" (1 Peter 2). So, we'll need to be disciplined about giving our attention to God's word.

Peter also tells us that "we are to stop returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but to give a blessing instead" (1 Peter 3:9).

Paul tells us that we are called "to edify others". This is not only in actions, also how we speak about people.

He writes, "Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear." (Ephesians 4:29)

As God's holy people, called to be ambassadors of the name of Jesus Christ, let us not allow any seedlings of a critical spirit that develop into grumbling and complaining be amongst us. Let us be vigilant to not just pull them out but also toss them in the bin to be destroyed.

And let us cultivate a garden in which the fruit of the Spirit flourishes. May our church community be like an orchard, with multiple trees growing the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness and goodness. Then, all the people of the suburbs of Southlakes will be welcome to come and partake of the fruit that grows in our garden, and they'll be able to taste and see the goodness of God amongst us.

A prayer in response,

Heavenly Father, forgive us for the times we have allowed criticism, complaining and grumbling to take root in our heart. We heartily admit that we need your help. Soften our hearts through the power of your Spirit and remove any hardened dirt or stones. Till the soil in our heart until it is nutritious and healthy. Then grow the fruit of the Spirit there, so that all who seem will be able to see Jesus Christ in me and give praise and glory to God. Amen.

Questions for reflection:

1. In what situations are you most tempted to start complaining? What effects does a habit of complaining have upon people around them? What effect does it have on the person themselves?
2. Why does complaining reveal a lack of trust in God? Explain the connection. Read the story in Numbers 21:4-9 and ponder it in your heart.
3. What does it mean to be the light of the world? How would complaining diminish a person's light to the world?
4. Give some examples of difficult situations where you did not complain but put your trust in God? What was the outcome for you and those around you?
5. In what ways is our generation 'warped and crooked'? How can you effect our world by not complaining?
6. What would your life be like if you, with God's help, eliminated complaining from your life?
7. What will you apply from this message to your life?