

# COMPLAINT

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*Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both the desire and the strength to do his good pleasure. Do all things without **grumbling** or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, and hold out the word of life to them...*

*Philippians 2:12-16*

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*"Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling..."*

God is calling us to a deeply personal work of daily working out our salvation, in joyful awe of him. What does this mean?

*"...it is God who works in you,  
both the desire and the strength  
to do his good pleasure..."*

God is working salvation into us. He is working into us the strength and desire to please him in our lives. He is faithfully rescuing us from the grip of sin and selfishness, transforming us more and more into the people he created us to be. What will it look like to work his work out of us?

*"...do all things without grumbling or disputing..."*

Paul points to something deeply practical: a life free from complaining and arguing. A life reflecting a heart that trusts God's goodness. What impact will that have on the world around us?

*...that you may be blameless and innocent,  
children of God without blemish  
in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation,  
among whom you shine as lights in the world,  
and hold out the word of life to them...*

When we complain, we blend in with the brokenness around us. But when we choose gratitude and trust over grumbling and division we are living as God's beloved children, shining brightly in a dark, fractured world. We stand out. Our lives become a beacon of hope and peace, pointing others toward the life-giving Gospel.

That's what's at stake in this topic of complaint.

## COMPLAINING

We live in a world where complaint is the soundtrack of everyday life. At work, online, in our homes, and even in church. Whether it's frustration with leadership, dissatisfaction with circumstances, or disappointment with others, it's easy to fall into a pattern of complaining.

The Bible makes a distinction between complaining and lamenting. Both express distress. But one draws us closer to God, and the other pushes us away from him.

### Biblical Examples of Complaining

Scripture treats complaining (also called grumbling or murmuring) as a serious spiritual issue. Far from being harmless venting, it's often portrayed as rebellion against God.

In **Exodus 15-17**, the Israelites grumble repeatedly in the wilderness. They complain about water, food, and leadership.

*When they came to Marah, they could not drink the water of Marah because it was bitter; therefore it was named Marah. And the people **grumbled** against Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?" - Exodus 15:23-24*

*And the whole congregation of the people of Israel **grumbled** against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, and the people of Israel said to them, "Would that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger." - Exodus 16:2-3*

*The people thirsted there for water, and the people **grumbled** against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?" - Exodus 17:3*

In **Numbers 13-14** the Israelites refuse to trust God's promise, choosing to complain and rebel instead.

*There we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anak, who come from the Nephilim), and we seemed to ourselves like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them." Then...all the people of Israel **grumbled** against Moses and Aaron. The whole congregation said to them, "Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! Why is the LORD bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become a prey. Would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt?" And they said to one another, "Let us choose a leader and go back to Egypt." Numbers 13:33-14:4*

## The Heart of Complaining

Complaining isn't just about expressing pain. It's a posture of the heart. In Numbers 14 God calls complaint 'wicked' (v27). Complaining erodes our trust in God, poisons community, and blinds us to grace. Grumbling, at its core, says: "God isn't good. God can't be trusted." Here's what it typically looks like:

- Directed against God (even if spoken to others).
- Rooted in unbelief, entitlement, and ingratitude.
- Focused on personal comfort, desires, or status.
- Lacking faith in God's plan, character, and promises.
- Contagious, spreading doubt, division, and discontent.

Psalm 106:1-33 is a sad account of the generation of the Israelites who were rescued from Egypt and wandered in the wilderness. It records God's gracious and merciful acts of deliverance and provision. Yet, it also records Israel's constant lack of faith, and their stubborn rebellion.

*"They **grumbled** in their tents and did not obey the voice of the Lord." - Psalm 106:25*

## The Consequences of Complaining

God Responds to the complaining of Israel with judgement.

*The people **complained** in the hearing of the LORD about their misfortunes, and when the LORD heard it, his anger was kindled, and the fire of the LORD burned among them... - Numbers 11:1*

*How long shall this wicked congregation **grumble** against me? I have heard the **grumbings**...which they **grumble** against me. Say to them, 'As I live, declares the LORD, what you have said in my hearing I will do to you: your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness... - Numbers 14:27-29*

When Jude writes about Jesus returning to judge the ungodly, the first expression of their ungodliness is grumbling (1:16). Although our sin has been dealt with by Jesus, and we have escaped the final judgement, there are still consequences:

*Do not **grumble**, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction... - 1 Corinthians 10:10-11*

*Don't **grumble** against one another, or you will be judged. - James 5:9*

## **Examples of Complaint Today**

Let's bring this into everyday UK life. Here are modern examples of what complaining might sound like:

*"This job is pointless. My manager is clueless. Nothing ever changes around here."*

*"The worship is boring. The sermons are dry. No one ever talks to me. What's the point of even coming?"*

*"God clearly doesn't care. I try to live rightly, and I still can't afford basic things. What's the point?"*

*"My spouse never listens. I do everything for this family and no one appreciates me. Why should I even bother anymore?"*

*"The government's useless. Nothing ever gets better. They're all corrupt. There's no hope."*

*"Other people have it so easy. Why is my life such a mess? God must have forgotten about me."*

## LAMENTING

God hasn't left us without a way to express our sorrow, confusion, fear and anger. God has given us the gift of lament. The Bible is full of lament, and God welcomes it. Lament is the language of the faithful in pain.

While complaint distances us from God and others through bitterness and distrust, lament draws us closer to God by bringing our pain to him in faith. While complaint says: "God, you're not good, and I don't trust you", lament says: "God, I'm hurting, but I'm coming to you because I know you're good, even when I can't see it."

### What Lament Looks Like

The Psalms are full of laments. Even Jesus spoke to the Father in lament. We are not just allowed to lament; we are invited to lament. Lament:

- Is directed to God.
- Honestly names grief, injustice, confusion, or fear.
- Is anchored in relationship with him.
- Remembers who God is, trusts him and pleads for him to act.
- Seeks God's presence, answers, deliverance, strength, restoration etc.

### Examples

What might the above everyday UK life complaints look like if they were laments?

*"God, I feel overlooked and frustrated at work. I don't see the purpose right now. Help me be faithful and trust you with where you've placed me."*

*"Lord, I feel lonely and disconnected at church. I long to meet you there and be known by others. Please revive my heart and our community."*

*"God, this season feels impossible. I'm tired of worrying about money. Provide what I need and give me peace to trust you again."*

*"Father, I'm weary and feel taken for granted at home. Teach me how to love well and show me that you see me even when others don't."*

*"Lord, the state of our country grieves me. There's so much injustice and mistrust. Raise up leaders of wisdom and integrity. Show us mercy."*

*"God, I don't understand why life feels so hard. I feel unseen and forgotten. But I choose to bring this pain to you, don't let go of me."*

## HOW TO STOP COMPLAINING

Hopefully we're convinced that our complaining is a serious sin against God that has significant impact on others around us. So, how do we stop complaining? If this is such a deep part of our fallen nature, how do we put an end to it?

### Work out Your Salvation

Grumbling is not a personality quirk, it's a spiritual issue. It's vital to remember, therefore, that we cannot stop complaining by ourselves. We have neither the desire, deep down, to stop, nor the strength to. God is not calling us to muster our resources and suddenly cease from all complaining in our own efforts.

Rather, God is saving us from ourselves. He is working salvation into us. God is daily giving us the desire and strength to stop complaining. We have been given everything we need, in Jesus, by the Spirit living in us, to live a life that is pleasing to God and stop living in complaint.

Below are two ways, lived out by God's grace in us, to stop complaining.

#### 1. Lament

When you're frustrated, or in pain, or disappointed, or upset, bring it to God with honesty and faith. Use the structure of biblical lament. We wrote a booklet called *Lament: Finding God in the Dark*. It will help equip you to lament. For now, here are the basic steps of lament:

##### 1. Turn

*"God, I come to You. I don't want to carry this alone."*

##### 2. Speak Honestly

*"I feel \_\_\_\_."*

*"I don't understand why \_\_\_\_."*

*"It hurts that \_\_\_\_."*

##### 3. Ask Boldly

*"Please help me with \_\_\_\_."*

*"Give me peace in \_\_\_\_."*

*"Show me Your love today."*

##### 4. Choose to Trust

*"I believe You are still good."*

*"You are with me, even now"*

*"I will wait for you".*



## 2. Thankfulness

In Romans 1, as Paul describes the downfall of humanity into rebellion and wilful blindness against God, the second step in that awful ruin was a lack of gratitude:

*For although they knew God, they did not honour him as God or **give thanks** to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. - Romans 1:21*

Grumbling grows where gratitude is absent. Thankfulness realigns our hearts. It doesn't deny what's hard, or painful, but it shifts our focus from what's missing to who God is and what God has done, is doing and will do.

In Ephesians 1-3 Paul presents the rich truths of the gospel to us. He tells us who we are and what we have, because of the grace of God. In Ephesians 4-6 he calls us to live like that's true:

*Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be **thanksgiving**... - Ephesians 5:4*

*...**giving thanks** always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. - Ephesians 5:20*

As Paul writes his letters to the Thessalonians, he calls them to gratitude in all of their circumstances, and encourages them to give thanks for each other:

***Give thanks** in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. - 1 Thessalonians 5:18*

*We ought always to **give thanks** to God for you, brothers, as is right... - 2 Thessalonians 1:13*

Lament and gratitude are also part of how God rescues us from worry, as well as complaining:

*Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with **thanksgiving** let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. - Philippians 4:6-7*

Even when life is hard, confusing, or painful, there will always still be reason to give thanks. Giving thanks in all circumstances doesn't mean pretending everything is okay. It means choosing to anchor your soul in something deeper than your circumstances.

## The "Though... Yet" Principle

This is a powerful biblical pattern of faith. It holds pain and praise together. We can lament hard things, while also trusting and giving thanks. It anchors lament in worship, allowing sorrow and trust to exist side by side. We see a beautiful, rich example of this in Habakkuk 3:17-19:

*Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will take joy in the God of my salvation. GOD, the Lord, is my strength...*

Though...yet... doesn't deny hardship, but chooses to rejoice anyway, not in the situation, but in who God is: the world may be falling apart, but God is still our foundation.

## Examples

Here are the everyday UK life complaints as 'though...yet' prayers:

*Though my job feels meaningless, and I feel unvalued, yet I will trust that you are shaping me through this and will rejoice that my worth comes from you.*

*Though I feel lonely and disconnected in my church community, yet I will worship you with hope, and will ask You to renew love in this place.*

*Though I can't see how we'll make ends meet, yet I will trust in your provision, and will thank you for daily bread and past faithfulness.*

*Though I feel invisible in my own home, yet I will believe you see me, and will praise you that my service matters to you.*

*Though I'm grieved by injustice in our government, yet I will rejoice in your sovereignty, and will trust that your kingdom is unshakable.*

*Though I feel confused, weary, and forgotten, yet I will say you are my strength, and will cling to you when I can't see the way.*

## Asking for Help

It's important to understand that not complaining doesn't mean we can't talk to others about what's hard. We need encouragement, support and prayer. God has given us to one another to bear each other's burdens.

## REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### Understanding Complaint

- *Read Philippians 2:14-16. Why do you think Paul connects grumbling with our witness to the world?*
- *In your own words, how would you define complaint and lament?*

### Recognising Complaint

- *Which of the everyday complaint examples felt familiar or uncomfortably close to home? What areas do you find it hardest to avoid complaining?*
- *What do your complaints reveal about what you believe about God in those moments?*

### Examining the Heart

- *What might be the root causes behind your complaints: disappointment, fear, control, entitlement, or something else?*
- *How have your words (or attitude) of complaint affected others around you?*

### Practicing Lament and Thankfulness

- *Is there a current struggle in your life that you could try turning into a lament? What would that look like?*
- *Can you think of a time when thanksgiving shifted your perspective, even before your situation changed?*
- *How can you start building thanksgiving into your daily life?*

### Moving Forward

- *What area of life do you most need to shift from grumbling to lament?*
- *What's one practical step you can take this week to replace complaint with lament and thanksgiving?*

## **EXAMPLE PRAYERS**

### **After You Have Complained**

*Father, I've complained instead of trusting You. Forgive me for my unbelief. Thank You that Jesus bore even this sin. Help me bring my frustrations to you in faith, and fill my mouth with praise instead of grumbling.*

### **When You Realise the Impact of Your Complaint on Others**

Lord, I've let my words spread discouragement and doubt. Forgive me for pulling others away from trust in you. Thank you that Jesus restores what I've damaged. Help me make it right, speak life, and point others back to you.

### **When You're Tempted to Complain**

Father, I'm feeling the pull to grumble. Help me pause, trust you, and choose gratitude. Guard my heart and my words. Let me speak life, not complaint.

### **A Short Prayer of Lament Instead of Complaint**

God, this is hard and I don't understand. I feel frustrated, tired, and overwhelmed. But I bring it to you, not away from you. Help me trust that you're good, even here.

### **A Short Prayer of Thanks Instead of Complaint**

Father, this situation is not what I hoped for, but thank you that you are still with me. Thank you for your daily mercy, and for being faithful even when life is hard.





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