Sermon Series: The 12 Marks of Christian Maturity
Sermon Title: You Complain Less and Trust More

Text: Philippians 2:14-16 -- Do all things without grumbling or questioning, 15 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, 16 holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.

Introduction: A conscientious wife tried very hard to please her critical husband, but failed regularly. A difficult man to deal with throughout the day, he was the most cantankerous at breakfast. If she prepared scrambled eggs, he wanted poached. If she prepared poached eggs, he wanted them scrambled. One morning, his wife cooked one poached egg and one scrambled egg, thinking that surely her husband would have nothing to complain about. Unfortunately for her, he came into the dining room, peered down at his plate and said, "***Uh, can't you do anything right, woman?***" She replied, "***What could possibly be wrong this time***?" The chronic complainer exclaimed "***You scrambled the wrong one***!"

Have you ever noticed that some people just love to complain? They're never satisfied. No matter what you do for them or what good comes to them, they will always focus on the negative. I guess the old axiom "***misery loves company***" really is true for people like that. **But do believers have a right to complain? It sure doesn't seem so.**

This morning, in the tenth message of our series, **The 12 Marks of Christian Maturity**, we're going to examine **THE SIN OF COMPLAINING**. You may be wondering to yourself, "**So what's so bad about complaining? I mean, come on, everybody does it**." Listen to these words from **Pastor Randy Smith,** who provides us with **three reasons why Christians should never grumble and complain** against God**. (1) It reveals a thankless heart.** How much easier is it to complain about the two things we don't have as compared to being grateful for the thousands of things we do have? How can we follow the commands to rejoice always (**See Philippians 4:4**) and be thankful for all things **(1 Thessalonians 5:18**) if there is a mere morsel of complaining in our hearts? **(2) Complaining reveals greater sins.** Why do we complain? Because we are jealous that someone has what we want. Because we are angry that things are not going our way. Because we are discontent and unsatisfied in Christ's sufficiency. And **(3) Complaining distrusts the sovereignty of God (His rule over all creation)**. Complaining implies that God made a mistake; that He is not ruling the world with perfect justice and wisdom, and quite frankly, we could do a better job; that He's personally unloving and unkind to us. Can we rightly accept the fact that God has a good plan for our lives, or do we complain in believing our plan is better and (in doing so) cast doubt on our sovereign Creator? (**Sermon by Randy Smith, Growing Deeper with the Lord, Philippians 2:14-18 – Part 1, November 20, 2022**.) Wow! WHO WOULD HAVE THOUGHT THAT COMPLAINING IS A WAY OF EXPRESSING OUR INGRATITUDE TO GOD, OUR ANGER, AND OUR LACK OF TRUST IN HIM! As you can see, complaining is a serious sin that we need to work hard to eliminate from our lives.

Now, after having stated how offensive it is to God, I have to say that it is one of those fleshly activities that may be nearly impossible for us to eliminate completely. Why would I say such a thing? **Well, complaining involves the use of the tongue, which, according to James, cannot be completely tamed by man** (**James 3:8-10 -- no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be**).

While it may be that no man can so utterly control his tongue, that ought to be our ambition, according to the Apostle Paul here in **Philippians 2:14-16**. He admonishes us to **do everything without grumbling or questioning**. The word used here means to ***murmur or grumble*** about something, ***usually in a private***

manner. An example of this is found in **John 7:11-13** where Scripture says, **"The Jews were looking for Jesus at the feast, and saying, 'Where is he?'" 12 And there was much muttering** (same word as grumbling) **about him among the people. While some said, "He is a good man," others said, "No, he is leading the people astray." 13 Yet for fear of the Jews no one spoke openly of him**. In other words, their grumbling was a private thing.

What I have noticed is that **COMPLAINING/MURMURING is the EMOTIONAL REACTION of someone to an event that is perceived to be negative**. **QUESTIONING/ARGUING is the INTELLECTUAL REACTION to the same**. ***The idea is that once we allow our emotions to get the best of us so that we complain privately about something, we will then mull it over and seek to justify our negative response*** (**i.e., consider the example of children who complain that it is not their bedtime**). This kind of response can result in harm to our relationship with God and others, so Paul follows his command with **three reasons why we should** not complain and, subsequently, argue.

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COMPLAINING HINDERS YOUR SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT (**Philippians 2:14-15a -- Do all things without grumbling or questioning, 15 that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish**). **Paul warns believers that complaining interrupts us in our walk with God**. We are called to be "***blameless (*without a moral defect or blemish*) and pure (*a term used to describe wine that was not corrupted with water*), children of God without fault (*not able to be rebuked*)"***. All three characteristics point to a person who is growing in spiritual maturity and Christlikeness. **Complaining, on the other hand, leads God's people in a completely different direction**. Consider the example of the Israelites in **Numbers 13 and 14,** and how their grumbling impacted them.

- **They sinned against God by complaining** (**Numbers 13:26-33 -- And they came to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation of the people of Israel in the wilderness of Paran, at Kadesh. They brought back word to them and to all the congregation, and showed them the fruit of the land. 27 And they told him, "We came to the land to which you sent us. It flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. 28 However, the people who dwell in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large. And besides, we saw the descendants of Anak there. 29 The Amalekites dwell in the land of the Negeb. The Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites dwell in the hill country. And the Canaanites dwell by the sea, and along the Jordan." 30 But Caleb quieted the people before Moses and said, "Let us go up at once and occupy it, for we are well able to overcome it." 31 Then the men who had gone up with him said, "We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we are." 32 So they brought to the people of Israel a bad report of the land that they had spied out, saying, "The land, through which we have gone to spy it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people that we saw in it are of great height. 33 And 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**). ***Grumbling amounts to treating God with contempt by declaring that He cannot be trusted***. ***That's how God saw it in*** **Numbers 14:11 -- And the Lord said to Moses, "How long will this people despise me? And how long will they not believe in me, in spite of all the signs that I have done among them?**). Since nothing happens outside of the purpose and plan of God (**See Ephesians 1:11**), all complaints are ultimately leveled at Him. That's why they're sinful. In effect, we're saying to God, "**You don't know what you're doing**!"
- **Their sin of complaining spread to others. How did the nation of Israel respond to the report of the ten unbelieving spies? We're told that they, too, began to complain against God in Numbers 14:1-3 -- Then all the congregation raised a loud cry, and the people wept that night. 2 And 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! 3 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?"**). It began with ten of the twelve spies and quickly spread to all the people so that everyone was grumbling against God. **Unfortunately, that is often the purpose of complaining. It is to get others to agree with you**.

In his book, ***Facing the Giants***, **Max Lucado** writes: I discovered the importance of healthy counsel in a **Half-Ironman Triathlon**. After the 1.2-mile swim and the 56-mile bike ride, I didn't have much energy left for the 13.1-mile run. Neither did the fellow jogging next to me. I asked him how he was doing and soon regretted posing the question. "***This stinks. This race is the dumbest decision I've ever made***." He had more complaints than a taxpayer at the IRS. My response to him? "***Goodbye***." I know if I listened too long, I'd start agreeing with him. I caught up with a 66-year-old grandmother. Her tone was just the opposite. "***You'll finish this***," she encouraged. "***It's hot, but at least it's not raining. One step at a time…don't forget to hydrate…stay in there***." I ran next to her until my heart was lifted and my legs were aching. **I finally had to slow down**. "***No problem***." She waved and kept going. **If you hang around complainers, it will be very difficult for you to run the race God has put before you**.

- **Their sin led them into rebellion** (**Numbers 14:4 -- And they said to one another, "Let us choose a leader and go back to Egypt**). Once the complaining spies, who treated God with contempt and failed to trust Him, infected the people with their sin, together they did the unthinkable. They rejected Moses as their leader and prepared to reenter Egypt and the bondage they had endured for hundreds of years. **This may well have happened had God not struck the unfaithful spies with a plague** (**See Numbers 14:36-37**). **Anyone who thinks he can lead other believers in rebellion against God and assume that God will do nothing in response is wrong**. JUST READ THE REST OF **NUMBERS 14**. (***Review: Complaining HINDERS your spiritual development***.)

COMPLAINING HANDICAPS YOUR SPIRITUAL WITNESS (**Philippians 2:15b-16a -- 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, 16 holding fast to the word of life**). People who have not yet put their trust in Christ as Savior and Lord are described as "***crooked*** and ***twisted***." The word for "***crooked***" is "***skolios***." It means **bent or curved**. We have borrowed from that word to describe a condition involving an abnormal curvature and misalignment of the spine known as "***scoliosis***." **Paul's point is that those who do not trust in Christ have scoliosis of the soul, a moral bent that leads us away from doing what is right**. ***Twisted people are those who have not only become corrupted by sin themselves, but seek to corrupt others with the same thing*** (**Acts 20:30 -- I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; 30 and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them**). In this kind of spiritual condition, people living in this world, which is under the dominion of Satan, cannot find their way to Jesus. They need God's Spirit, God's Word and God's People to do so. ***If, however, CHRISTIANS ARE CROOKED AND TWISTED, their witness for Christ will be compromised***. They will not "**shine as lights in the world holding fast to the word of life**." **Why not? Because their lives will not be any different than those of the unbelievers they're seeking to witness to**? (***Review: Complaining HINDERS your spiritual development. Complaining HANDICAPS your spiritual witness***.)

COMPLAINING HURTS YOUR SPIRITUAL LEADERS (**Philippians 2:16b -- holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain**). Paul's point is simple. **At the day of Christ's judgment of believers** (**See 2 Corinthians 3:10-15**), **he hoped to glory** (*not in the sense of brag, but rejoice*) **in the maturity manifested by the believers that God had blessed him to shepherd**. ***If this turns out otherwise so that the only thing that will be revealed is their immaturity evidenced in complaining and arguing, he will view it as wasted labor, his investment in their lives having yielded no return***. ***Let me assure you that no pastor wants that.***

If you want to encourage a spiritual leader, then grow. It's that simple. I have often said that the greatest reward I receive in ministry is changed lives. If you are a complainer, then change. Acknowledge that you grumble, not because of what others have done to you, but because you enjoy it. It works for you. Then consider what needs to happen for you to **increasingly complain less**.

Here are three applications from this morning's message.

- **If you WANT TO KNOW if you're a complainer, ASK someone who knows you well and give him permission to be lovingly blunt in response to your inquiry**. Few people see themselves accurately. We really need others to speak into our lives if we're going to change.
- **If you DISCOVER that you are a complainer, ACKNOWLEDGE that to God and APOLOGIZE to those you've victimized**. There's nothing like eating a little crow to help a person acquire some humility. Jesus said, "**Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven—Matthew 5:3**."
- **If you want to STOP being a complainer, First, ACCEPT your circumstances as God's will for your life** (**See Philippians 4:12-13**). I suspect that the leading cause of complaining is a nagging feeling of discontent. This can only be overcome when we learn to receive whatever comes our way as having been filtered through the loving will of God for us. Not only has **He brought us** into our present circumstances, but **He has strengthened us** so that we can find blessing in them as well. **And second, ACQUIRE *a new method for dealing with things that bother you***. I find that talking about it with a person who is in a position to influence the situation is always helpful. This is what we hope you'll do here at River Ridge. If you are troubled by something that's happening, talk to us about it. You can approach one of the staff or the elders. We will listen and weigh what you have to say. Who knows? Perhaps God will use you to help us do ministry even better. But whatever you do, don't complain! ***ALL IT DOES IS HINDER YOUR SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT, HANDICAP YOUR SPIRITUAL WITNESS AND HURT YOUR SPIRITUAL LEADERS***.

Conclusion: ***Author Nancy Ortberg shares how a young teenager unintentionally rebuked her for being a complainer***: I worked as a registered nurse for about ten years before my life took a different direction. One of my earliest patients was a young girl of about 14 who had been in a dirt bike accident. I met this young girl down in the physical therapy department. She was in a whirlpool bath. I had read her chart before I went down to work with her and had learned that as a result of the accident, her leg had been amputated below the knee. **I couldn't imagine what it must be like to be a 14-year-old girl with part of your leg missing**. I introduced myself, and we made some small talk. Through the course of our time together, I learned that she was a follower of Christ, although she really didn't say much about that. I was not prepared for her spirit, however, especially when she lifted her freshly amputated leg up above the bubbling water for me to see and said, "***Look at how much I have left***!" She excitedly told me that since the doctors were able to amputate below the knee, it was much easier to fit a prosthesis. She wondered how long it would take to heal so that she could get started with that. I heard most of what she was saying, but I wasn't really paying much attention. My mind was fixed back on the "***look how much I have left***!" Her gratitude seemed really genuine. It wasn't denial or a Pollyanna mentality. She knew she was missing a good part of her leg, and she wouldn't have chosen that. But she was so very thankful for this bit of good news. Her spirit made my spirit soar that day. And I had two good legs (from ***Looking for God***, Tyndale 2008, p.14-15). **If a young lady can keep from complaining when she has lost a limb, perhaps you can too, whatever the circumstance you might find yourself in. To that end, let's pray together.**