

Dealing with the sin of **Complaining and Resentment**

Calvary Baptist Church
Richards Bay



Complaining about people or Resentment towards people is rooted in unforgiveness

Complaining and grumbling are closely linked to unforgiveness, especially when directed towards others. Complaining about people or harbouring resentment stems from an unwillingness to forgive. When we grumble, we reveal a heart that is not fully trusting in God or His sovereignty. Grumbling, biblically speaking, is not just a trivial annoyance; it is considered a serious sin against God.

1. Grumbling: A Serious Sin

Grumbling, also known as murmuring, reflects a deeper heart issue—a refusal to trust in God’s provision or timing. It is often a sign of dissatisfaction not just with our circumstances but with God Himself. Scripture teaches that our complaints against people often mirror our complaints against God, as Moses said to the Israelites, "Your grumbling is not against us but against the Lord" (Exodus 16:8).

Bible Verses on Grumbling and Complaining:

1. **Philippians 2:14-15** – "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."
2. **James 5:9** – "Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door."
3. **1 Corinthians 10:10** – "Nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer."
4. **Exodus 16:8** – "And Moses said, 'When the LORD gives you in the evening meat to eat and in the morning bread to the full, because the LORD has heard your grumbling that you grumble against him—what are we? Your grumbling is not against us but against the LORD.'"
5. **Numbers 14:27** – "How long shall this wicked congregation grumble against me? I have heard the grumbings of the people of Israel, which they grumble against me."
6. **Psalms 106:25** – "They murmured in their tents, and did not obey the voice of the LORD."

Old Testament Examples of God's Judgment on the Israelites for Grumbling:

1. **Grumbling in the Wilderness (Exodus 16:2-12):** Shortly after being delivered from Egypt, the Israelites grumbled about their lack of food. Though God graciously provided manna, their complaints showed a lack of trust in His provision. Ultimately, their grumbling was directed at God Himself, not just at Moses or their circumstances.
2. **Rebellion and the Bronze Serpent (Numbers 21:4-9):** The Israelites grumbled against God and Moses, complaining about the hardships of the journey and the lack of food and water. In response, God sent fiery serpents among them, and many died. This event highlights how God’s judgment follows persistent grumbling and ungratefulness.
3. **Miriam and Aaron’s Complaint (Numbers 12:1-15):** Miriam and Aaron grumbled against Moses due to jealousy over his leadership. God's response was swift—Miriam was struck with leprosy for her grumbling. This event teaches that grumbling against God's chosen leaders is a serious offense.
4. **The Spies' Report and Israel's Rebellion (Numbers 14:1-35):** When the spies returned from Canaan, the Israelites grumbled in fear, refusing to trust in God's promise to give them the land. God’s judgment was severe: the entire generation was condemned to die in the wilderness, except for Joshua and Caleb.

5. **Korah's Rebellion (Numbers 16:1-35):** Korah, Dathan, and Abiram led a rebellion against Moses and Aaron, grumbling about their leadership. God's judgment was dramatic—the earth opened up and swallowed the rebels. This serves as a powerful warning about the consequences of grumbling and rebellion.

These examples serve as sobering reminders that grumbling is not merely a form of complaint but an expression of distrust in God's goodness and sovereignty.

2. The Root of Complaining: Forgetting Forgiveness

We struggle to forgive others because we forget how much we have been forgiven. **Ephesians 4:32** commands us to "be kind to one another, tender-hearted, **forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.**" The ultimate example of forgiveness is found in Christ, who bore the injustice of the world for our sake. **1 Peter 2:23** – "*When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.*" **Philippians 2:5-8** – "*Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus...*"

We are called to forgive others because God forgave us while we were still His enemies (Romans 5:8, "*But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*"). In Matthew 5:44, Jesus commands us to love our enemies. Unforgiveness stands in opposition to this command, and our grumbling against others reveals that we are not fully embracing Christ's example. **Romans 5:10** – "*For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son...*"

3. Love Keeps No Record of Wrongs

The Apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 13:5 that "love keeps no record of wrongs." Complaining and grumbling, however, are clear signs that we are keeping a mental tally of other people's wrongdoings. But consider how God treats us: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). When we grumble, we show a lack of gratitude for God's forgiveness. **Psalms 103:12** – "*As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.*"; **Isaiah 43:25** – "*I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins.*"

When we hold onto unforgiveness, it can negatively affect our relationship with God. Unforgiveness breeds bitterness, leading to a lack of intimacy with God. Jesus teaches in Matthew 6:15, "But if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." **Matthew 6:15 shows us that a defining trademark of a forgiven person is that they forgive.**

4. Unforgiveness Manifests in Complaints and Grumbings

Not forgiving others often shows itself through our complaints and grumbings. Unforgiveness negatively impacts our relationship with God, breaking intimacy with Him.

- **Mark 11:25** – "*And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.*"

Our unwillingness to forgive hinders our prayers and fellowship with God:

- **Matthew 6:14-15** – "*For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*"
- **Isaiah 59:2** – "*But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God...*"

5. Unforgiveness Leads to Bitterness and Hardens the Heart

Harbouring unforgiveness can lead to bitterness, affecting not only ourselves but those around us.

- **Hebrews 12:15** – "*See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no 'root of bitterness' springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled.*"

- **Ephesians 4:31** – *"Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice."*

Bitterness hardens our hearts, making it difficult to obey God and respond to His guidance.

- **Proverbs 28:14** – *"Blessed is the one who fears the LORD always, but whoever hardens his heart will fall into calamity."*

6. Forgiveness Restores Relationships

Our willingness to forgive mirrors God's forgiveness toward us and can restore broken relationships.

- **2 Corinthians 2:7-8** – *"So you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him... reaffirm your love for him."*
- **Matthew 5:23-24** – *"So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift... First be reconciled to your brother..."*

Forgiveness promotes unity within the body of Christ:

- **Psalms 133:1** – *"Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!"*

7. The Importance of Humility and Trust in Forgiving Others

Forgiveness requires humility and trust in God's justice. **Romans 12:19** reminds us that God will bring about justice: "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." Our role is to obey God and imitate His character, forgiving others just as He forgave us.

We must trust that God will right all wrongs and that He calls us to extend forgiveness, just as Christ forgave us. Christ bore our sin and was treated unjustly, yet He did so willingly for our benefit. This is the mind of Christ we are called to have (Philippians 2:5-8).

APPLICATIONAL THOUGHTS: Cultivating a Forgiving Spirit and Godly Response

When faced with the temptation to complain or harbor resentment, we must recognize that the call to forgive is not simply about avoiding sin, but about actively imitating Christ in how we respond. The Bible offers us clear guidance on the attitudes and behaviors we should cultivate to replace complaining and unforgiveness with godliness, peace, and contentment.

1. What Does Forgiveness Look Like?

Forgiveness, according to Scripture, is not merely the absence of retaliation or anger; it is a positive act of grace and love. Forgiveness means releasing the offender from the debt of sin they owe us. This mirrors how God forgave us in Christ (Ephesians 4:32). When we forgive, we actively choose not to harbor bitterness or keep a record of wrongs (1 Corinthians 13:5).

Jesus' parable of the unmerciful servant (Matthew 18:21-35) illustrates that forgiveness is not optional for the Christian. We forgive because we have been forgiven an unpayable debt by God. Biblical forgiveness is rooted in the Gospel, where Christ bore our sins on the cross and absorbed the cost of our wrongs (1 Peter 2:24). When we forgive, we release others from their offenses, trusting that God will administer justice in His time (Romans 12:19).

2. A Godly Response Instead of Murmuring

Instead of murmuring, Scripture calls us to gratitude and trust. Murmuring reveals a heart of discontent, but gratitude shifts our focus from ourselves to God's sovereignty and provision (Philippians 2:14-15). In times of hardship or offense, we are called to:

- **Entrust ourselves to God:** Jesus provides the ultimate example of not reviling or complaining but entrusting Himself to God's justice (1 Peter 2:23). When we face injustice or offense, we should remember that God sees all things and will deal with every wrong in His perfect timing.
- **Respond with grace:** Colossians 4:6 encourages us to have conversations that are "always full of grace, seasoned with salt." Even when others sin against us, our response should reflect the grace of God. We are called to be kind and compassionate, demonstrating the same forgiveness that we have received in Christ (Ephesians 4:31-32).

3. Attitudes to Cultivate in Place of Complaining

Complaining arises from a heart that is not fully resting in God's goodness and sovereignty. To overcome this, we must cultivate attitudes that align with Christ's example:

- **Humility:** Philippians 2:3-4 teaches us to "do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility, count others more significant than yourselves." Humility recognizes that we are all in need of grace and that none of us is beyond offending others or being offended. Humility drives us to forgive others, knowing that we, too, have sinned and been forgiven.
- **Contentment:** Paul learned the secret of contentment in every situation, whether in plenty or in want (Philippians 4:11-13). Contentment stems from trusting in God's sufficiency. When we complain, we question God's provision and His sovereignty over our circumstances. Cultivating contentment means embracing God's will with a heart of peace, knowing He works all things for our good (Romans 8:28).
- **Thankfulness:** Thanksgiving is the antidote to complaining. In 1 Thessalonians 5:18, Paul commands us to "give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." Gratitude reorients our hearts toward God's faithfulness and helps us to focus on His blessings rather than our hardships.

4. Practical Steps to Forgive and Resist Complaining

To put these attitudes into practice, consider these biblical steps when tempted to complain or hold a grudge:

- **Pray for those who wrong you:** Jesus calls us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (Matthew 5:44). Praying for those who have offended you aligns your heart with God's love and moves you toward forgiveness rather than bitterness.
- **Reconcile with others:** Romans 12:18 instructs us to live at peace with everyone, as far as it depends on us. If someone has wronged you, seek reconciliation through gentle and truthful conversation (Matthew 18:15-17). Forgiveness involves pursuing restored relationships, just as God pursued reconciliation with us through Christ.
- **Practice self-control:** James warns us of the power of the tongue (James 3:5-6), and controlling our words is a key way to avoid grumbling. When tempted to speak out of frustration, pause and ask whether your words will glorify God and build others up (Ephesians 4:29).
- **Reflect on the Gospel:** Remind yourself daily of the forgiveness you have received in Christ. As Colossians 3:13 reminds us, we are to "forgive as the Lord forgave you." The more we dwell on the Gospel, the more we are empowered to forgive others and respond with grace.

5. Forgiveness as a Witness to the World

Finally, when we forgive and avoid complaining, we shine as lights in a world full of grumbling and bitterness (Philippians 2:15). Our forgiveness and refusal to complain serve as a testimony to God's grace, displaying the power of the Gospel to transform hearts.

Conclusion

Complaining and grumbling are not merely petty frustrations; they reveal a heart that is dissatisfied with God's will and provision. Unforgiveness, which often fuels complaints, is a significant hindrance to our spiritual growth and intimacy with God. We must learn to forgive as we have been forgiven and trust God to bring about justice in His time. Contentment and peace come not from external circumstances but from trusting in God's sovereignty and following the example of Christ, who bore all wrongs for our sake.

Let us remember the warnings from Scripture and strive to live lives free of grumbling, marked by forgiveness, trust, and love towards others.