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# THE HERALD

## Newsletter of the Orrville Grace Brethren Church

### The Price We Pay When We Complain

These three steps can help keep  
our complaints constructive

By Joseph Stowell

Talking with a Christian doctor about his family, I learned that all of his children were grown, happily committed to Christ, and serving in their local churches. The doctor was obviously grateful and relieved that his children had grown in the faith. As a father of three, I was intensely interested in knowing what he thought was the secret to the spiritual maturity of his children.

He told me, "My wife and I covenanted that our children would never hear us complain or criticize the church, church leaders, or another brother or sister in Christ."

**In essence, he had made a  
commitment not to murmur.**

Murmuring is a form of complaining that harbors a negative attitude toward a situation or the people involved. It runs the

continuum from griping about the slow driver in front of you to murmuring against the Lord for things He has permitted to come into your life. The common factor in all murmuring is a critical spirit. This kind of grumbling carries the potential for great damage and is a direct violation of God's will.

My doctor friend wisely realized that complaining about God's work or God's people was a direct reflection on the value of God and His plan. What children would want to commit their lives to a church that is the constant object of their parents' complaints? Wise parents teach and model principles of love and prayerful intercession in regard to imperfections around them. Hearing murmuring about the family of God only gives a young child excuses for future rebellion.

Nowhere in Scripture is murmuring more graphically depicted than in the case of the Israelites on their way to the Promised Land. When they arrive on the outskirts, twelve spies were sent to "case out" the territory. Ten spies returned with a negative report about what they had seen: "We are not able to go up against the

people, for they are too strong for us. . . . The land through which we have gone, in spying it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants; and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great size. . . . We became like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight" (Numbers 13:31-33). Joshua and Caleb, the other two spies, had seen the same things. However, they advised moving forward because they had faith that God was able to deliver them.

Several aspects of this story are instructive:

Murmuring ignores God's potential. The report of the ten spies reflected a godless perspective. God had opened the sea to save them, the heavens to feed them, and the rocks to provide water for them. He had defeated mighty armies throughout their wilderness trek. He had freed them from perhaps the most powerful nation on the planet. Certainly He could deal with any problems the new land might present. Murmuring is born in the context of bad report. Sins of the tongue that spread negative reports (beguilement, gossip, slander, false witness) create an environment in which murmuring can thrive. Some people are always eager to hear negative things so they can have something to complain about.

A murmuring spirit is quick to jump to the wrong conclusion. The grumbling Israelites blamed God for their situation and even started planning to return to Egypt (14:3)! Actually, God was as much in control as He had ever been. But once

godless grumbling begins to spread, wrong conclusions are easily reached. Murmuring and beguilement go hand in hand.

Bad judgments are spawned in the atmosphere of murmuring. The murmuring Israelites decided it would have been better to have died in Egypt. In their haste to return, they even attempted to stone the ones urging them to stop grumbling and trust in the Lord (14:10). Murmuring distorts good judgment.

Murmuring leads to self-pity. "Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness!" (v. 2). Murmurers often feel sorry for themselves and focus on how they have been mistreated, misused, and let down.

Murmuring thrives in an atmosphere of fear. Twice Joshua and Caleb exhorted the people not to be afraid (v. 9). But the Israelites' fear of the unknown fanned the sparks of grumbling in their midst. They were in a situation beyond their control, and they felt threatened and insecure. Their faith disappeared as their fear increased.

Murmuring left unchecked usually breeds rebellion. Joshua and Caleb urged the murmuring Israelites not to "rebel against the Lord" (v. 9). But rather than listen to reason, the Israelites were ready to elect new leaders who would oversee their rebellious plans.

The end result of a murmuring spirit is a general atmosphere of dissatisfaction.

Criticism and complaining lead to discontent. By the end of this episode, Israel was dissatisfied with their God-given lot in life. "Majority reports" are not always trustworthy. Just because a lot of people are murmuring doesn't necessarily mean they are right. But we tend to wear fear and insecurity close to the surface, so murmuring has no trouble attracting a crowd.

God's judgment on the Israelites was swift and final. Their murmuring had verbally defamed His presence, power, wisdom, and glory. They would not see the Promised Land, and they would be granted their misguided wish to die in the wilderness.

The New Testament describes other situations that involved murmuring. The Pharisees murmured because of ignorance and lack of information (John 6:41-43). When the early church didn't adequately meet the needs of Greek widows, the Grecians murmured in the congregation (Acts 6:1). After Paul reminds us that "it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13), he then challenges us to, "Do all things without grumbling or disputing" (2:14). The presence of God and His power in us is a sufficient resource to help us cope with problems without murmuring.

Murmuring is always a godless pastime. It's a habit that thwarts our potential in God. It refuses to believe that God can conquer any problem or condition. And it refuses to recognize that God may use negative circumstances to

accomplish His best in our lives and demonstrate His glory.

Is it ever right to express dissatisfaction? Certainly, as long as our attitudes remain grounded in the belief that God is in control and can intervene or not as He so desires. Three steps help to keep our complaints constructive:

#1 - Pray. The psalmist often complained to God about his problems. However, he never lost confidence in God's faithfulness, power, and love. In praying we should commit our problems to God's care and willingly wait for Him to direct us to His solution.

#2 - Take your complaints to someone with the authority to rectify the situation. Sharing problems with those who are not a part of the solution only stimulates murmuring and makes resolution more difficult. Assure the person in authority of your loyalty and desire to help. Open your mind to his or her perspective.

#3 - Direct others to sources of help. When people come to you with problems, encourage them to go to someone in authority before discussing their situations with you any further. While it never hurts to be a good listener, many times others are looking for allies in their murmuring. Don't get caught in the middle of a conflict if you have no opportunity to bring the disagreement to an end.

Adapted from *The Weight of Your Words* by Joseph Stowell. Copyright (c) 1998 by Joseph M. Stowell.

# FUNNIES

Lady: "Doc, I'm thinking about buying this horse, and I want your opinion, before I finalize the deal. Will I be able to race him?"

Vet: "There is no doubt about it that you will be able to race him. And I can almost guarantee that you will win."

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Judge: "You can let me try your case, or be tried by a jury of your peers."

Suspect: "What do you mean 'peers'?"

Judge: "Peers are men of your own kind, your equals."

Suspect: "Well, I sure don't want to be tried by no cattle thieves."

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City Slicker: "This will be the first time I ever got on a horse."

Wrangler: "Do you want an English or Western saddle?"

City Slicker: "What's the difference?"

Wrangler: "Well, the English saddle is flat, while the Western saddle has a horn in the front."

City Slicker: "Better give me the English saddle. I don't expect to be riding in traffic."

John: "Renting this boat was a great idea; the fish are really biting. Let's mark this spot so we can come back tomorrow."

Jim: "I already did. See this 'X' I drew on the side of the boat?"

John: "What were you thinking? Did it not occur to you that we might not get the same boat tomorrow!?"

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Farmer Brown: "My cows are all the forecast I need. If They're lying down, it's going to be clear. If they are on their feet and restless, it's likely to rain."

Hired hand: "How do you figure that when some of your cows are lying down and some are standing up?"

Farmer Brown: "That's easy, lad. That simply means that it may rain, or it may not."

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*"No, you're not out of season, but lucky for you, I've already bagged my limit"*