

# Complaining

by Jim Cymbala

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*Complaining can lead to a lack of faith and unbelief, and can spread quickly to others, but God is faithful and will provide a way out for us to endure temptation.*

**Duration:** 28:14

**Scripture:** 1 Corinthians 10:1

**Topics:** "Complaining", "Overcoming Complaining", "Gratitude"

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## Description

Jim Cymbala emphasizes the dangers of complaining and grumbling, drawing parallels between the Israelites' discontent in the wilderness and the modern believer's tendency to focus on hardships rather than God's faithfulness. He warns that such attitudes can lead to spiritual stagnation and a loss of joy, reminding the congregation that God is always present and provides a way out of temptation. Cymbala encourages believers to replace complaints with praise, highlighting that gratitude can transform our perspective and strengthen our faith. He concludes by urging the church to be vigilant against negativity and to trust in God's promises.

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## Transcript

This is going to be a scripture reading of some length because it's good to read the Word of God. And I'll give just a little explanation of the context. And there's just one word actually, it just jumped out at me today.

I shared it with our other church that I have at 12 noon here on Tuesdays. That's a growing church. People come from 12 to 1 to pray.

What a nice group. So let's look at it. It's found in 1 Corinthians the 10th chapter.

For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. We'll explain that. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.

They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank, this is a very difficult passage to understand this sentence here, for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them and that rock was Christ. Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them.

Their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. Do not be idolaters as some of them were.

As it is written, the people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry. We should not commit sexual immorality. That would be sexual union between any man and woman who are not married or between a man and a man or a woman and a woman.

Don't commit sexual immorality as some of them did. And in one day, 23,000 of them died. We should not test Christ as some of them did and were killed by snakes.

And do not grumble as some of them did and were killed by the destroying angel. Now these things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us. You see, there are so many promises of security in Christ in the Bible that as we keep our eyes on him, he was able to keep us from falling.

How many say amen? There's all those assurances and yet there's just enough warnings to keep us on our toes. There's warnings. Be careful because as we're going to unravel this, look what happened to God's people in the Old Testament.

This is a warning passage just like there are affirming passages. This is one for us to heed and listen to. These things happen as examples and were written down as warnings for us on whom the culmination of the ages has come.

So if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall. All in favor say amen. Amen.

Now no temptation to sin has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful. He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear.

But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it. May God bless the reading of his word. Amen.

So Paul here is writing to the church at Corinth, which was a cesspool of immorality, that city. In fact, when you wanted to say that someone was a lowlife degenerate, they would use the adjective, he's like a Corinthian. That's what Corinth stood for.

And he says now, remember what happened to our ancestors, our forefathers, the people of Israel, God's covenant people. They were all under the cloud and they all passed through the sea. What does that mean? They were all under that cloud that led them.

At night it was a cloud of fire, a pillar of fire. During the day it was a special cloud. And when it moved, they moved with it.

So if you didn't believe in the supernatural, how could you not if you were an Israelite, when you had a pillar of fire by night to give you light and to tell you when to move or when to stay and a pillar of cloud during the day. So they were all under that cloud and they were all baptized, it says here, and they all passed through the sea. That's the Red Sea.

They saw it opened up for them. And when the Egyptians followed them, the sea closed and destroyed their enemies. They were all baptized into Moses or identified with him as God's servant in the cloud and in the sea.

They followed Moses as Moses represented God to them. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them and that rock was Christ. So we know that when they were being led by God, brought out of Egypt under Moses where they were slaves, they all ate manna every day.

God had food for them. They went to bed at night with nothing to eat and in the morning God's faithfulness was proven all over and over again to them. There would be manna which was like a white wafer, honey-like wafer that was on the ground, that was their food.

And when they ran out of fresh water a couple times, God let water come out of a rock so that they were able to be satisfied. So he showed himself faithful. Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them.

Their bodies were scattered over the desert. What does that refer to? God wasn't pleased with them because at Kadesh Barnea, when they were just out a ways from Egypt, God had settled, got a form of worship, explained the tabernacle, gave the law and now they came to this place and God said send 12 spies into the land that I'm going to give you and they did. And 10 spies came back out of the 12 and said we can't do this.

Now Canaan, the promised land, is not a picture of heaven because when they got there they had to fight enemies. How many are happy when we get to heaven? We don't have to fight any more anybody. Don't have to march around the walls of Jericho, nothing.

But it is a picture of God's perfect will and plan for his people. But 10 spies came back and said we can't do it. There's always we can't people among God's people.

There's always people who have no faith and say we can't. The walls are so high. We saw this place called Jericho.

It's ridiculous. We were just slaves for hundreds of years. We have no weapons.

We have no expertise in making war. We're nobodies. A bunch of vagabonds in the desert.

How could we possibly go in and take that land? And we saw giant people, the Anakim, they all play in the NBA. We can't fight them. And the crowd began to grumble and complain and actually said God brought us out here to kill us.

So God said when he saw that, even though Joshua and Caleb were the two spies that said we can do it. We saw everything they saw. But look those walls are high but God is higher.

The giants are strong. God is stronger. And if God favors us, we're going to do this.

They didn't listen to them. So then God said none of the people who didn't believe my promise and believe those negative spies, not one of them is going to go in the promised land. I'm going to let you wander around now about 40 years until you all die off except Joshua and Caleb.

And your children who you were so worried about, they're going to grow up and they'll go into the promised land. But not you because of your unbelief. Now how could you not believe God if you saw the walls come down? How could you not believe God if you saw manna coming every morning? But it goes to show that unbelief is so strong that no matter what God does for you, if you don't keep your eyes on the Lord, you can get unbelieving real quick.

You can get hard. You can get cynical. You can get negative.

Even though you have a track record of God's faithfulness. Have I not seen that in my life? I just said to a precious young lady who was here on Sunday whose mother was delivered in the most miraculous way and her life saved. And this young lady needs the Lord and I know she knows it.

She's precious. And I said to her, if you don't believe in the Lord, I don't know who will believe in the Lord. Because you know what God did for your mother.

Good grief. How could you not believe in God? And she began to weep because she knew I was speaking the truth. So this is what happened to those people and God is now saying through Paul, remember what happened to those people.

They got out but they never got in. They were no longer slaves but they never went in and saw God do for them what he had promised to do because of their unbelief. Now these things, Paul says, were written as examples to us.

We live thousands of years later and now we're in the new covenant. We follow Jesus. We're born again.

We're part of the family of God. But notice these warnings about things that just devastate our spiritual life and will rob us of everything as God has planned for us. If these things take root, they just wipe out everything.

Let that come as an example that we should not set our hearts on evil things as they did. Don't be idolaters as some of them were as it is written. They sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in pagan revelry.

So idolatry is when you love something more than God. It can be a person. It can be money.

It can be your culture. It can be your race. It could be whatever.

You love that thing, person, entity more than God. That's idolatry. And notice what happens when you become an idolater and you love something more than God.

Notice what they did. They sat down to eat and drink. They fed their bellies.

And then they got up to party. Idolaters are always party or try to. And they're very good with food and drink.

But those who serve God realize there's something better than food and drink. You can enjoy God. He's better than any steak in the world or any meal in the world.

How many say amen? And for entertainment and joy, we don't have to have pagan revelry. We have the joy unspeakable and full of glory that God puts in our heart. We don't need a baseball game, football game.

We don't need anything. We're just happy in Jesus. He'll put us on an island and we'll have fun, right? Just praising God.

So God warns us, don't be an idolater. Don't love someone more than me. Don't commit sexual immorality as they did and were punished.

Don't test the Lord as some of them did and were killed by snakes. And he later goes on to say, these things happen as an example. So walk in humility and hold on to Jesus every day.

Don't get cocksure of yourself and say, I don't need to go to church. I don't need to read the Bible to keep strong. I don't need to keep my eyes on Jesus.

I've come to a place where I can just take my eyes off of God. No, everybody be alert. Watch out.

Those who are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall. No, I can't fall. Oh, then why would God say, be careful that you don't fall? Obviously we could fall.

How many know that if you take your eyes off the Lord, he doesn't help you. You could be in trouble. Lift your hand high, right? Oh, you're not lifting your hand.

Okay. Then I'm going to ask it again. How many know without a shadow of a doubt that if you don't keep your eyes on the Lord and trust him every day, you could get in trouble.

Just lift up your hand. Amen. All of us.

That's not lack of faith. That's reality. The Bible's telling us that we need them every day, every hour.

And he says, no temptation has ever come your way. That's not common to people. And that temptation, which comes to sin, which the enemy tries to grab our mind and our emotions by some bait, some lure, some thought of bitterness, some thought of unforgiveness, some thought of hate, some thought of uncleanness sexually, some thought of stealing, lying, whatever the thing might be.

Satan approaches in the mind and God says, no, I'll give you the power. You can divert away from that. Like we said on Sunday, we can say, if we have to do it 50 times a day, when we feel that old man being appealed to the old woman, we can say, Lord Jesus, I belong to you.

You are my life. You're my victory over this whatever, feeling sorry for yourself, getting depressed and all this other stuff. So no temptation comes unless God permits it.

No temptation can come to me unless God says you can tempt him that way. But he's always going to leave a way out for all of us. No one has to give in.

God can help us weather every storm. That should make us say amen even louder, don't you think? Let's thank God that he can help us weather every storm, every attack. Now notice the reality.

I love the Bible because it's so real. Preachers can get unreal. Religious, depending on the denomination, can get very unreal.

It's not faith. It's fantasy. It's crazy.

He's talking real. Temptation is real, but God is more real. The enemy is strong, but God is stronger.

Not walking around, there's no enemy. There's nothing. There's nothing.

I don't receive that. No, it's very practical. We're in spiritual warfare, but God is greater.

Greater is he that's in us than the one that's in the world. But the word that struck me because of its juxtaposition side by side with these other nasty words, right linked with idolatry and right linked with sexual immorality and testing God, Paul says, and don't grumble. Don't complain because that got them in big time trouble.

We look at it like this way. No, you know, I just heard that person just living an immoral life. It's just so terrible.

You're right. That person loves so many other things more than God. They spend all their money on themselves, that's an idol, and or on other things, and they have no time for God, no money for God because money usually shows what you love.

What people spend their money on always is what they love. But linked with all of that, which we would all say that's not good, is and don't grumble. There's a verse in Philippians somewhere that says, do everything without grumbling or complaining.

What a powerful verse. It's easy to read, but how many know it's another thing to live that way? What did they grumble about? They grumbled about hardships. They grumbled about situations that were not easy on the flesh.

They grumbled about circumstances that were not to their liking. They grumbled. They grumbled.

And God was listening as they grumbled. But what's strange about it is the circumstances they grumbled about, God was the one who brought them in those circumstances because they followed the cloud. They never could move on their own.

They went with the cloud, am I correct? And sometimes God would lead them to a place like Elam where there were palm trees and plenty of agua, plenty of water. And they were happy. And they're rejoicing.

God is good all the time. Bump. And all of that.

But sometimes God led them where there was no water. God led them there. They wouldn't have been there because he was watching to see what they were going to do.

Were they going to look to him and say, you see the situation we're in? Now we're trusting you. You're going to take, you'll provide water for us because you're a good God. If you brought us out of Egypt and we saw you separate the Red Sea, obviously you can give us a drink today.

But right now it doesn't look good. But you know what? We're going to praise you anyway. We're going to look to you and we're going to worship you.

But they didn't. They grumbled about the very situation God permitted and put them in. Another time they went and the water was brackish or salty.

And they turned on Moses as if they wanted to kill him. And then they said those horrible words. It's better to go back to Egypt because they have garlic, leeks, onions, callaloo, roti, patties.

We got to go back there. And when Moses heard that, he was afraid that God would destroy him on the spot. Imagine that God delivers you out of something.

Have we not all seen God's goodness in our life? Lift your hand if you have seen God's goodness. And now they're in a situation where it's difficult and they grumbled. But when you grumble and you complain about Moses, God was saying, they're not grumbling against you.

They're grumbling against me. After all I've done for them, they're complaining. They're complaining.

Can you believe that? Yeah, I can believe that because we've all done it. We all complain. And yet God has permitted it.

We go, the steps of a man. And then when the steps lead to a place we don't like, what in the world is going on? It's much more serious than we make it out to be. It cuts off the grace of God in our lives.

It cuts off the Spirit's anointing and power. It cuts off the rivers of joy. How are you going to be happy if you're complaining? You lose your peace.

Do we not lose our peace when we complain? Now we're all up and bitter, right? And we've lost our peace and God promises peace. So this grumbling stuff is really a way of us saying, God, I don't like the way you're leading my life. You know, why do you put me next to her in the job? Lady's impossible to deal with.

No, I mean, some of you are laughing, but is this not, you know, or home situation or financial situation or getting laid off? We grumble as if like when you got laid off. I know it was a shock to you and maybe to me, but do you think in heaven they're going, what? They laid them off today. What are we going to do? No, they knew it two weeks before you got laid off.

It's a test so that you can see how faithful God is so that you could have a testimony now of God doing something greater. Can somebody say amen with me to that? It's a test. To be around complaining, negative, grumbling people is like, excuse the expression, hell on earth.

Because all there is in hell is grumbling. To have a husband or a wife who's just always complaining and grumbling takes the grace of God to get through each day. I'm saying serious things.

You're laughing. I don't know. I don't know what's wrong.

To be around people and work with people who are always grumbling, complaining, always a victim, always the world, always, always, always. And God says, and don't be like them. They grumbled.

They complained. They never made it to the promised land. So we have missionaries we support who are in Papua New Guinea.

I just thought of this today as this verse was being made real to me. If there's one thing that mission work in Papua New Guinea, this couple that we support, they're gold. This is gold.

The Boyd family went over there with three children, live out in the jungle somewhere. They're putting the Bible, the New Testament, in the language of the Enga people. And no one's ever put a New Testament in there.

So they got to figure out all the idioms and the words and what it means and all of that. We're honored to be able to even support them. If there's one thing that mission work in Papua New Guinea gives you, it is the opportunity to complain.

I wish that I could say that I have not fallen prey to that temptation, but I have and often. Complaining is a disease. It is like a viral plague that is quickly transmitted from one person to the next.

Isn't that true? Children who grow up in a complaining home, ooh, they complain all the time. They complain all the time. It's like they've been disciplined in grumbling.

How many know people who have a degree, a master's degree in grumbling? They just grumble, grumble, grumble. Before you know it, everyone is infected. In the book of Numbers, we read about how the Israelites complained incessantly to Moses, accusing him of bringing them out into the wilderness to die while longing to go back to the fish, cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic that they ate in Egypt.

It seems like they forgot the whips of their slave masters and the ruthless efforts to kill all their newborn sons. That is so good, isn't it? When we grumble, we forget what God took us out of, right? Like you want to go back? I recently heard a poem about thankfulness that caused me to give serious reconsideration to things I am so apt to complain about in my life. I just read this last week, really no connection to this passage, but then I thought of it and I said, so I decided to write my own poem about thankfulness as it applies to life here in Papua New Guinea.

If you saw a picture of where he lives, I don't care where you live, you are in a great place. So here's my poem. I am thankful when it rains because it means that my water tank will not soon be empty.

Some people go, oh, it's raining. He goes, when it rains, oh, I'm going to get extra water in my tank. Thank you, Jesus.

Thank you for the rain. I am thankful for the cold because it means that the threat of malaria is far reduced. How in the world can we grumble? This is real to him.

Less chance of malaria when it's cold. Malaria spreads more rapidly with heat. I'm thankful for the potholes on the roads because it means I have a car to drive.

You see the potholes where Elsie lives. Potholes? You put a whole family in there and just they would disappear. Am I right, Elsie? On the Carrefour road or just off the Carrefour road.

I am thankful when the store is out of meat because it means that I can afford such a luxury. He had the money to buy it. I am thankful for the beehive in my wall because it means that I have a home.

I am thankful for the ant's nest in the power outlet because it means that I have electricity. I am thankful when I have to hang up the laundry on the line outside because it means I have clothes to wear. I am thankful when the internet is really slow because it means that I have a near instant communication with the world around me.

I am thankful when I must walk on slippery paths and steep hills because it means that I'm healthy enough by the grace of God to do so. Let's put our hands together. I want God to save me from complaining.

How many want to be free? Come on, lift up your hand high. I want to be free. And listen, ministers complain, pastors complain, Christians who have been around for 30-40 years, they complain.

New believers can complain and sometimes new believers complain less than veteran Christians. So if you have something that the devil is trying to make you complain about, but you decide tonight, no, I'm not going to complain. I'm going to praise God.

What's the opposite of complaining? Praising God. You cannot complain and praise God at the same time. Try it.

I've never been able to do that. If you're complaining, you can't praise God. But if you're praising God and saying, wonderful counselor, you cannot be complaining.

We're either going to worship and praise him, or we're going to complain about this, that, and the other thing. And as I read that, I'm ashamed because God's dealing with him about his complaining. And he has something that we would say, yo, you can complain about that.

Papua New Guinea. No joke out in the jungle. But I want more praise.

I want less complaining. I want no complaining. I want to do everything without grumbling or complaining.

And I don't mean to get overly forthright, confrontational with anyone here. But I want to say this. I plead with you in the name of Christ.

Let's stop complaining. Does it change anything? Nothing in the situation. Let's stop grumbling.

Does that change anything? Yeah, it changes us. We lose the joy of our salvation. It won't change anything in a situation.

It only changes us and that in a negative way. Let's close our eyes. If you're here today upstairs, downstairs, say, pastor, that's so odd that you would start talking about grumbling and complaining.

Because right now I'm going through a situation that is just out of control. And I'm so tempted to grumble and complain. But now I have heard the word of the Lord.

By the grace of God, I am not going to grumble. I'm going to praise him. In fact, I'm going to lead the singing tonight because I have the most to complain about.

But no, devil, you will not have a victory. I'm going to praise God in the middle of the mess. In the middle of the mess, I'm going to praise God.

Get up out of your seat and just come up here if you want to be part of this final time of not so much prayer, but the form of prayer that's called praise and worship and celebration. Just get out of your seat and come up, stand right here in front of me, facing me right at the edge of the step. Oh, are we going to praise the Lord? Open your mouth and just give him praise.

Come on up in the balcony. You came all this way, give him praise. People downstairs at the altar, give him praise.

We give you praise. We give you honor. We worship you.

Not going to grumble. Not going to complain. You're bigger than every mountain, stronger than every enemy.

How many are happy in Jesus right now? Amen. Let's put our hands together. Happy in the Lord.

Do we have any problems? Do we have any uncomfortable situations? Yes, indeed. But we will not grumble. We will not complain because God is with us.

And if God be for us, who can be against us? He's going to bring us through. Is he not? Lord, get us home safely. Thank you that we could be in your house.

Thank you for these words of encouragement. Yes, some warnings, but oh God, we love the encouragement that we don't have to grumble. We can praise you.

Make everybody's spirit sweet now as we hug and greet one another. We pray in Jesus name. Turn around and hug someone.

Give someone a handshake.

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