

OUR CULTURE IS EATEN UP WITH A SPIRIT OF COMPLAINING.

This must not be true of any independent Baptist church. This special section is meant to help churches rid themselves of such fleshly attitudes and become refreshing places where spiritual fervor trumps personal agendas.

The REPUTATION of the EPHRAIMITE

PASTOR WAYNE HARDY

STORYLINE

The book of Judges records two interesting stories of complaints, one under the rule of Gideon and another under Jephthah's leadership. The same tribe issued both complaints, and the complaints were similar.

Gideon challenged several tribes to fight against the oppressing Midianites. God whittled those down to 300 men who would be used in Israel's deliverance. Gideon called on Ephraim to fight additional battles against Midian, which they successfully executed, even killing two princes. The Ephraimites wanted a greater role, though, and they complained to Gideon that they had not been called in the beginning.

Under a later judge, Israel needed deliverance from the Ammonites. God used Jephthah to bring a great victory. Once again, the Ephraimites expressed their displeasure that they were not called to battle. After a second time, it's obvious the Ephraimites had a complaining spirit about not being selected to fight like they thought they deserved.

1. Even the best of church members can develop a reputation as a complainer.

Ephraim was a respected name among the tribes. Though the second son of Joseph, he received the blessing of the firstborn over his brother, Manasseh. His tribe was the leader over Manasseh and Benjamin as they protected the western side of the tabernacle when they stopped in the wilderness. The tribe of Ephraim was notably represented among the 12 spies by Joshua, who stood with Caleb against the complaints of the other 10. Joshua later succeeded Moses and was responsible for dividing up the land among the tribes.

Though Ephraim began with that reputation, the book of Judges reveals that Ephraim somehow developed a complaining spirit. The tribe became sensitive about being overlooked by others, and maybe they were too accustomed to receiving special recognition in the past.

Great reputations and history can be tainted if a member turns into a complainer. The best of reputations can be reversed if the contributions of the past fade into a critical spirit in the present and future. Before you complain, be absolutely certain that your complaint is important enough to be worth erasing years of being a faithful, supportive church member or leader.

2. Expressing a concern or complaint can sometimes be helpful, but doing so repeatedly becomes detrimental.

The Ephraimites complained the first time, and, while their complaint might have been unfortunate, this could be written off as a one-time temporary struggle. It happened a second time, though, which leaves room for thinking they had a particular tendency or bent toward getting offended at being left out.

The presentation of a complaint, particularly if done with a Christlike spirit and motive, shouldn't classify someone as a complainer. It is fair, though, to wonder if someone is a chronic complainer once complaining becomes a repeated behavior. Church members can appear surprised and offended that someone sees them as complainers, although that might be the primary interaction that others have had with them or heard from them. Apply the gain/loss principle (gain minus loss equals profit) here by weighing whether or not further complaints are worth the risk of a reputation as one of the church complainers.

3. Complainers often become more focused on some personal slight than on the church's benefit.

Gideon asked the Ephraimites to fight a particular battle, which they executed well. Evidently, they thought they deserved more, because Judges 8:1 says they did chide with him sharply about not being called earlier. It didn't matter to them that there had already been great progress toward the overall goal of deliverance from God.

In the second episode, God used Jephthah to conquer the Ammonites. Once again, the Ephraimites complained that they weren't included. In their bitterness, they threatened to burn down Jephthah's house. Jephthah's response implied that he gave them an opportunity, which they evidently rejected. The Ephraimites chose to focus on their feelings of being slighted more than on the victories won. Eventually, they lost more than they had gained.

Complainers can hinder a church when they put their own sense of personal slight over their church's well-being and unity. They overlook victories won and focus on their own treatment. Even if their complaint could benefit the church, their true concern appears to be their agenda and not the church overall. This becomes obvious if their spirit of complaint is much more passionate than their spirit of joy over victories won and successes gained.

4. Leaders facing complainers can struggle between two ditches: pacifying the complainer or dealing harshly with them.

Gideon flattered the complaining Ephraimites, maybe to avoid additional conflict. Jephthah, on the other hand, defended his actions and killed 42,000 Ephraimites. Gideon treated them with kid gloves when he could have helped them with a kind but firm dose of the truth. Jephthah could have considered not overreacting and found a way to respond that didn't cost the lives of 42,000 of God's people.

Church leaders, whether full-time staff or volunteer ministry heads, should seek God's wisdom in handling complaints and complainers. One ditch refuses to tell complainers of the truth of their condition, which does nothing to fix the problem and leaves them with little of hope of changing. The other ditch involves an overreaction, which can ultimately do more damage than the complaint itself. Spirit-led leadership will have a passion to find a biblical balance that gives the best opportunity for God to receive glory and the church to move forward.

As a leader, be aware of your tendency and let God work in your own spirit to transform you into a leader He can use effectively, even in the face of complainers. **BT**

Take the

COMPLAINING

Church Quiz

1. I draw attention to problems just so I can look smart.

Always Often Sometimes Rarely Never
2. I look for truth in every complaint no matter how it was given.

Always Often Sometimes Rarely Never
3. I assume there is more to the “picture” than I can see.

Always Often Sometimes Rarely Never
4. Other church members feel comfortable complaining around me.

Always Often Sometimes Rarely Never
5. Those in leadership take my complaints seriously because they do not view me as a complainer.

Always Often Sometimes Rarely Never

Culture of

COMPLAINING

How much difference is there between the culture and your church?

CULTURE

An unsatisfied customer tells an average of 7 people about his or her negative experience, compared to satisfied customers who tell an average of 3.7 people about their positive experiences (“Customer Complaints, and Their Ways of Complaining, Are On the Rise,” Ann-Marie Alcántara in the *Wall Street Journal*, June 14, 2020).

Of the respondents, 79% said they would be “very” or “somewhat likely” to leave a negative review after bad customer service or a negative product experience. Negative word-of-mouth is common in America with 45% having shared a bad experience with others.

CHURCH

With how many members do you share negative complaints? How does this compare with the number to whom you express positive experiences?

What percentage of members are “very” or “somewhat likely” to express the positive aspects of their church as opposed to the negative? Is negative word-of-mouth as common in your church as it is in the culture at large?

In a culture of complaining...

...the temperature in the church sanctuary can be too hot and too cold, all at the same time.

...the music can be simultaneously too loud and not loud enough.

...the preaching can lack relevant application and step on people’s toes.

...on any given Sunday, people are shown too much attention and not enough attention.

...people constantly get offended by being recognized from the pulpit and by not being recognized from the pulpit.

Complaining can get downright silly.

- A teenager sued Subway because his footlong sandwich only measured 11 inches.
- Red Bull suffered a class-action lawsuit because their energy drink failed not only to give people wings, but it also failed to produce an energy boost.
- A Tennessee man sued Popeye’s Chicken for \$5,000 because they ran out of chicken sandwiches.
- A woman won a lawsuit against a weatherman because he forecasted sunshine, but it rained instead, causing her to get sick and miss work because she was unprepared for the rain.

The MICRO View

My prayer requests never get mentioned from the pulpit; I don't think he even remembers my situation.

The **MACRO** View

I know not every prayer request can be mentioned on Wednesday night; and Pastor has a much clearer view of the most urgent needs than I do.



“It is **not the critic** who counts; not the man who points out how the **strong man stumbles**, or where the **doer of deeds** could have done them **better**. The **credit** belongs to the **man who is actually in the arena**, whose face is marred by **dust and sweat and blood**; who strives **valiantly**; who errs, who comes short **again and again**, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually **strive to do the deeds**; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the **triumph of high achievement**, and who at the worst, if he fails, **at least fails while daring greatly**, so that his place shall never be with those **cold and timid souls** who **neither know victory nor defeat**.”

THEODORE ROOSEVELT

Three Mindsets Missing in the COMPLAINING CHURCH

MINDSET 1

Think Macro over Micro.

And say thou unto the people, Sanctify yourselves against to morrow, and ye shall eat flesh: for ye have wept in the ears of the LORD, saying, Who shall give us flesh to eat? for it was well with us in Egypt: therefore the LORD will give you flesh, and ye shall eat. Ye shall not eat one day, nor two days, nor five days, neither ten days, nor twenty days; But even a whole month, until it come out at your nostrils, and it be loathsome unto you: because that ye have despised the LORD which is among you, and have wept before him, saying, Why came we forth out of Egypt? —Numbers 11:18–20

God's people were only looking at the amenities of Egypt and contrasting them to the difficulties they faced in the moment. They complained about manna vs. meat (micro) because they lost sight of freedom vs. slavery (macro). Completely lost from their view was the oppression from which God had delivered them and the Promised Land to which He was bringing them.

Your complaint is often the result of failing to see your micro grievance from a macro perspective. Guard against emotions that would blind you from seeing a momentary irritation or pressure in proportion to the bigger picture.

MINDSET 2

Weigh the Satisfaction of Complaining against the Influence of Contentment.

Do all things without murmurings and disputings: That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world. —Philippians 2:14–15

God says, “No,” to complaining, but remember, He says, “No,” for a reason. The no is there because He wants you to enjoy and accomplish the greater yes made possible by the no. The greater yes behind not complaining is the brightness of your light in a crooked and perverse nation. Against a dark background, a Christian who says, “No,” to complaining illuminates the sufficiency of God, drawing others toward His sufficiency as well. For example, Joseph could have had the daily satisfaction of complaining in prison, but he would have forfeited the influence he gained with the butler, the baker, Pharaoh, and ultimately, all of Egypt. Every decision against complaining is a decision for godly influence.

MINDSET 3

Be Kind but Firm When Responding to a Complaint.

But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ. —Ephesians 4:15

Your response to a complaint can be worse than the complaint itself. Responding with a defensive spirit can blind you to a potentially legitimate issue as well as damage a member who meant well but may not have communicated their concern in the best way. However, responding to every complaint by pacifying the complainer is no better a solution than being needlessly harsh. The precedent of catering to every petty whimper robs disciples of learning to tend to their spirits more than their grievances. Responding with kindness and firmness protects you from being regretfully reactionary by helping you discern whether the real issue is the complaint or the complainer.

3 Questions to Ask

BEFORE I COMPLAIN

1. Do I lack understanding of the situation?

If you complain, will you be embarrassed once someone tells you what actually happened and why it happened that way? Answering a matter before you hear it begins with assuming you have all the information you need to make an accurate judgment. Solomon warns that kind of thinking has left a lot of people feeling ashamed and foolish.

2. Is what I am complaining about worse than the impact of my complaint?

Supportive church members are not without grievances; they simply process their grievances differently than a complaining member does. Do you weigh the negative effect of your complaint against the momentary satisfaction you would get from expressing it? Complainers are both magnetic and dangerous. They are magnetic because it is easier for other members to join in the complaining than to deal with their spirits. They are dangerous because they can rapidly harm unity that took years to build. Before you start complaining or feed a complaint, consider your inability to stop its effects.

3. Will I be part of the problem or part of the solution?

Some mentions of issues are legitimate, but not all mentions of the matter are equally helpful. One member points out a real issue and is content if he looks knowledgeable. Another member mentions the same issue, but with a desire to improve “x.” Mature disciples offer deliberate solutions that involve their participation. They are not forceful in their proposal but willing to help. Perhaps valid complaints should be left to members willing to do something about it.

How To Handle

COMPLAINTS

Prevent complaints through deliberateness (I Corinthians 14:12).

Many complaints come simply because a ministry or decision wasn't well planned with deliberate thoughtfulness. Do things well enough, and the majority of complaints can be avoided. Being deliberate about every ministry and decision means each one is thought through and done deliberately. Guests and members should come into any independent Baptist church and find a passion for excellence that excels that of any local business making coffee or chicken sandwiches. You may have fewer resources, but you can have greater passion.

Be honest before uttering a complaint (Matthew 7:1-5).

- **Look for the beam.** Look for your own beam before you point out someone else's mote. It is always easier to point out someone else's problem than to address your own. Jesus said it is hypocritical to ignore your own fault and highlight someone else's. Complaints are more readily accepted if you are clearly more concerned about your own faults than about those of others.
- **Put yourself in the leader's place.** It is easier to complain when you don't lead the ministry. Decisions can seem obvious if you're not the one having to make them. While church members are supposed to be disciples, most see themselves as volunteers. If you haven't successfully led volunteers over a period of time, don't act like you automatically know better than the leader.
- **Know your Bible.** Multiple times, the Bible declares the need for single-mindedness in a church. Does it declare the need for your complaint as many times—or as clearly—as the need for church unity? Are you elevating your own concerns for your church over the Bible's stated concerns for your church? Your complaint may be important to you, but how important is it to God, based upon what He has said—not based simply upon how you feel?

Articulate your complaint as the "greater yes" in the situation.

What is the most constructive way to express your complaint? If you are passionate about wrapping your complaint in a great spirit, how could you articulate your concern? If you truly want your complaint to be addressed, you can help your cause immensely by emphasizing the benefits, not just the problem. You could gain additional traction by suggesting solutions, not just problems. As mentioned in the point above, be conscious of the fact that you don't know all the factors that leadership has to consider along with your complaint or proposed solution. They may see your concern as clearly as you do but may not be able to address it due to factors of which you aren't aware.

Let it go.

Once you have communicated your complaint, if it is not addressed to your satisfaction, there comes a time when you need to turn it loose. Even if it is something that should truly be addressed, that doesn't mean it will be or could be. Are there enough other things going well or being done correctly that you can focus upon those instead, and let your complaint go?

Even though you let it go with man, you can always keep it before the Lord, if you feel that strongly about it. The worst possible outcome is your spirit turning bitter or your attitude turning sour. The member who takes on a disgruntled spirit, instead of letting something go, will almost always do more damage (based on a biblical definition) than whatever their complaint addressed.



How To Identify a Modern-Day Ephraimite

BY THEIR WORDS...

...IN A YOUTH GROUP:

- Why do we have to participate if we don't want to?
- Why can't I sit in the back during church services?
- I can't stand being around that person, and yet my youth pastor still expects me to get along with them and include them, too!
- I never get picked for any of the games we play because the youth pastor plays favorites.
- We never have any activities (from the person who never comes to any of the activities).
- At my old youth group, we...
- Why do we always have to have preaching?
- I don't like the songs we sing; they are just so old-sounding.
- Why is there a dress code for camp, activities, youth conference, and everything?
- My youth pastor just expects too much out of me.

...IN A BIBLE COLLEGE:

- Why do I have to live on campus?
- Why can't I choose which room I am in or who my roommates will be?
- Why do I have to sign out and back in?
- Why do I have to have a bedtime like a child?
- Why is there not enough parking close to the dorm?
- Why did I get disciplinary hours when I've only received one warning?
- Why do I have to pay for cafeteria food if I'm not going to eat it?
- Why do I have to have an invitation from my friend's parents if I'm going to stay at their house?
- I don't understand why you care what I watch, play, or listen to (music, movies, sports, TV, video games, YouTube) on my own time.
- The school shouldn't force me to be involved in ministry.

...IN A CHURCH:

- The preaching is always way too long, and it's not my favorite style of preaching, either—so I never get anything out of it.
- Why can't we use more technology in the services?
- We sing the same songs and hymns over and over again.
- The sanctuary is just never the right temperature!
- I should get more personal time with Pastor; he's too busy if he can't spend more time pastoring me.
- The children's ministry here isn't doing enough to keep my child interested.
- I don't like this Sunday school class; I'll decide which Sunday school class I'm going to.
- I just don't think that is what the church should be spending my tithes on.
- I never get asked to be involved in ministries.
- Why don't those church members help with this ministry?

These are real-world examples from current or previous pastors, youth pastors, and Bible college professors and deans.

PASTOR AARON DENSON

ALL THINGS

WITHOUT MURMURINGS AND DISPUTINGS

PHILIPPIANS 2:14 says, *Do all things without murmurings and disputings.*

That's a tall order! Just before this commandment we find so difficult to live out, we find a verse that clarifies why we should do all things without murmurings and disputings. It's God Who is working in us. Therein lies the core issue.

You see, we don't have an unbearable employer issue. We don't have an unfair physical condition. We don't have an unjust world problem. In reality, our employer may be difficult; we may deal with serious physical issues, and we no doubt experience unjustness in our world. However, these are not huge problems if we believe in a sovereign God Who orders the affairs of our lives.

We complain about so much—sometimes about everything—every day. Complaining simply declares that we do not like the way something has turned out or is being dealt with. Complaining declares that we could have done a better job at orchestrating the outcome of the situation. Complaining says, “If I were God...”

That's the problem—we're not God. We don't know better; we couldn't have brought about a better outcome. When we complain, we are challenging not only the sovereignty of God, but we are also challenging His wisdom, His knowledge, His power, and, ultimately, His heart.

Turn those statements around. Is God sovereign? Is God omni-sapient? Is God omniscient? Is God omnipotent? Is God love? Aren't we grateful He is all

of these and so much more?

Complaining says we don't trust what He is. We would be awfully arrogant to declare to the world we think we know better than the God we say we love and believe in—the God Who took care of our salvation. Remember the place in which we found ourselves—the place we couldn't do anything about? We couldn't get out of the pit. We couldn't pay our debt. We couldn't escape our punishment. We couldn't break free from the chains that bound us in sin. He sought us out and revealed Himself to us. He drew us to Himself. He saved us, freed us, and gave us His life—eternal life.

Now we want to question His motives, His work, His ability. Stop complaining, Philippians says, because ultimately it's God Who is working in us. Stop complaining—we can trust Him, His work, His heart. Stop complaining because, according to the next verse, we are supposed to be blameless among all the perverseness of the world. We are supposed to be a light. We are supposed to be different.

Those whose father is the Devil truly have something to complain about because wisdom is not being exercised on their behalf, and love is nowhere to be found. We are different because our Father is very, very different from theirs.

Stop complaining. God is working, and God is in control. God is going to finish what He started. God is working for our good and for His glory. Seriously, do all things without murmurings and disputings. **BT**

Audio 101

What is a sound system?

SOUND
ADVICE

Audio Buff

Est. 2004

Watch the
Youtube video:
[audiobuffokc.com/
soundadvice](http://audiobuffokc.com/soundadvice)



OUT OF CONTROL

Bro. Dave Hardy

I will never forget hearing the voice of a pilot who was losing control of his plane in bad weather. I listened to a recording shared with me by the airport controller who had been trying to help the pilot. The last words on the recording said, "Help! Help!" Then the recording went silent.

I have personally known pilots who have later died because they lost control of their planes. I have also known people who lost control of their cars and perished.

Deaths on the highways prove that many drivers are out of control. Losing control of a plane or a car may seem more dramatic than some other instances of losing control, but loss of control in any form has consequences. Let's move to the less dramatic but more prevalent situations that we will all face.

Consider Hebrews 12:1, which says, *Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us.*

Sin, for the Christian, in whatever form or degree, diminishes control. A sin which doth so easily beset us is one that a Christian seems to face over and over again. For instance, some people cannot control their appetites; others are constantly in debt and behind on payments. For some, it is bad habits that are harmful to their health.

Maybe we should just agree that such a list of sins could never be exhaustive. Of all the problems we could mention, would one of those be the most "besetting sin?" Is there a sin

that involves everyone? The Bible says there is. It is the sin of a loose tongue.

I could not put a number on the times I have not chosen my words carefully. I have never been accused of being a gossip, but many thoughts would have been better to remain unspoken. Often have been the times, while pastoring, I looked back in regret over my preaching experience. I never used the pulpit as a whipping post, but how many times could I have chosen more fitting words (Ecclesiastes 12:10)? At the next service, I found myself apologizing from the pulpit. I did not apologize for preaching a difficult truth, which was right to do, but rather for not accompanying the truth with grace.

Sometimes I think back about those times of correcting my error when I am asked about my favorite meal, which is fried potatoes, pinto beans, cornbread, long green onions and iced tea. However, if I am asked what food I eat most, I may have to answer, "Crow." That is because of the many corrections I have attempted to make over the years.

Warren Wiersbe reminds us, "One word makes the difference between a lightning bug and a lightning bolt." Just one word.

James 3:1–10 has a great deal to say about our words. In verse one, James cautions those who stand behind the lectern or pulpit. Whether preaching or teaching, those people claim a place of authority, the word used by James being *masters*. Verse one clearly states we will be held to a greater degree of accountability, rendered condemnation or

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“judgment.” James goes on to paint a vivid picture of what the tongue can do. It is described as a little member in the body, but extremely powerful. He says it is like a small bit, weighing less than a pound, which controls a 1,200-pound horse. He also compares it to the helm or rudder of a large ship, controlling the great vessel. James says this small member boasts great things and is like a fire that spreads rapidly and consumes the whole body. In verse eight, he plainly tells us that no man can tame the tongue. It is literally out of control.

The tongue has been guilty of evil since the Garden of Eden. The serpent used it to lie to Adam and Eve, and all through the Old Testament God’s people murmured at Moses and the leadership of the prophets. Murmuring continued in the New Testament, and even the disciples got caught up in it.

Years ago, I heard an axiom that has stayed in my mind: “Words are cheap, but they can’t be bought back.” I suppose all of us would like to buy some back, yet the axiom is true—we can’t.

Words are cheap, but they can’t be bought back.

Jesus said in Matthew 12:36, *But I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.* The word *idle* has a number of synonyms: empty, useless, rambling, fruitless, irrelevant, unnecessary, vain, pointless, or trivial, to mention a few. Idle words serve no worthwhile purpose. Asking people to forgive my poor use of words is not enjoyable, but it is beneficial. The benefit is at least threefold: First, it is right to do; second, it strengthens relationships; and third, because it is difficult, we are motivated not to repeat it. Proverbs 25:11 says, *A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver.* People desperately need that encouragement, but it won’t come from people whose tongues are out of control. BT



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Help Me Trust in You, Jesus, Even When

ADAPTED FROM HER BLOG, ABIDING WITH JOY IN CHRIST

MISS ABIGAIL BROWN

I don't like admitting it, but there are times when I can be bratty and—dare I say it?—self-centered.

“Surely not you!” one may say. “You seem so content.”

Excuse me as I chuckle to myself.

Here's the thing: I can dive into self-pity and become discontented at a snap of a finger. I can be so blinded to the blessings the Lord has given to me, focusing on what I don't yet have or haven't yet accomplished.

For example, in June, I bought new bedroom furniture. I was very excited when it arrived. Then, only a month later, I walked into my room, sat in my comfy swivel chair and looked at myself in my new vanity mirror. I glanced at my new bed, with the adjustable mattress I've always wanted, complete with the new bedding and comforter I purchased before I got my furniture. Plus, I had gotten my shower remodeled! How blessed am I!?

Alarm bells should have been blaring. As I glanced at myself in the mirror, I thought to myself, *I'm still living with my parents.*

This thought, that I'm still living with my parents, was on replay in my mind all week long. Later that week, I was sulking around, grumbling to myself about how confined and limited I am, living with this stupid disability that's not going away! As I continued to rant in my mind, I asked myself this question: “What am I making independent mean? How am I defining it to myself?”

I started writing in my journal, “Independence means doing things on my own.” Then I made a list of what I can do and a list of what I can't do. Guess which list was longer? The list of what I can do!

At this point, I was overcome with emotion as I wrote, “Abigail Brown, you are independent! It just looks different, which is perfectly okay. Different can be good! Remember how much the Lord has blessed you. Rejoice in the Lord, Abigail. Yes, right now you're living with your parents who love you and want the best for you. While dystonia may be difficult to live with, at times, remember—you are living!”

I've been reading through the book of Exodus for a month. Do you know how many times the Lord continues to reassure Moses that He will deliver the children of Israel from bondage? Several times! Read how many times God says, “I am,” “I have,” and “I will,” in Exodus 6:1–8.

Then the LORD said unto Moses, Now shalt thou see what I will do to Pharaoh: for with a strong hand shall he let them go, and with a strong hand shall he drive them out of his land.

And God spake unto Moses, and said unto him, I am the LORD: And I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by the name of God Almighty, but by my name JEHOVAH was I not known to them.

And I have also established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land of their pilgrimage, wherein they were strangers.

And I have also heard the groaning of the children of Israel, whom the Egyptians keep in bondage; and I have remembered my covenant.

Wherefore say unto the children of Israel, I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will rid you out of their bondage, and I will redeem you with a stretched out arm, and with great judgments:

And I will take you to me for a people, and I will be to you a God: and ye shall know that I am the LORD your God, which bringeth you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.

And I will bring you in unto the land, concerning the which I did swear to give it to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; and I will give it you for an heritage: I am the LORD.

Isn't that an encouraging message? Of course, but read what verse 9 says: *And Moses spake so unto the children of Israel: but they hearkened not unto Moses for anguish of spirit, and for cruel bondage.*

They had been in bondage for many, many years and had lost all hope of ever being free. They were too focused upon their situation and not upon what the Lord said He was going to do. The Lord has shown me through this passage how I can be just like the children of Israel and forget that God really does have a plan and He is in control. While I may not understand the outcome of situations in my life, I can still trust in His way and timing.

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I wrote this poem a couple of months ago. It's really personal and honest.

Why Do We Even Pray?

Praying for healing, praying for strength.

Praying for endurance through the night.

Praying for breath, praying with hope.

Praying for peace and comfort.

Praying, does it even work?

Why pray if He already knows what's going to happen?

Praying seems like a toss of a coin at times.

It works for some people and others it lets down.

Yet in the end I cling to Him in prayer with stretched-out arms

Even when I don't understand the outcome.

"Will ye also go?" He asks.

"Lord, to whom shall I go? For You do all things well.

God, You always answer prayers how You see fit. You know what's ahead.

You know our grief, pain, and sorrow. You are Sovereign over all.

Help me to trust You when life continues to not make sense."

Ever since I have written that, the Lord has shown me—even when I doubt His love and goodness—He is still faithful and good. He can't and won't ever fail. Nothing takes Him by surprise. His love is unending, even when this life continues to make no sense. Romans 8:38–39 say, *For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

I encourage you to consider these questions in your own life.

Are you grumbling instead of grateful?

Are you focusing too much upon your present circumstances or what might happen in the future instead of relying upon His unfailing promises?

Have you lost sight of how much the Lord has been faithful in your life? **BT**

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A COMPLAINING CHURCH VOTES AGAINST GOD

HBBC President Jason Gaddis

NUMBERS 13 AND 14 should be known for thanksgiving. Instead, these chapters are etched in the pages of Israel's history as the time when they voted against God. The nation was no stranger to complaining. Instead of making the Lord the object of their praise, they frequently made Him directly or indirectly the object of their complaint.

The Promised Land was in sight, but there was only one problem. The inhabitants of the land seemed to be invincible. When put to a vote, 10 of the 12 spies voted an emphatic "No!" to the prospect of possessing the land. Only two brave, grateful statesmen named Joshua and Caleb voted in favor of following God's will in taking the land. Caleb voiced their decision with a resounding *Let us go up at once* (Numbers 13:30).

Sadly, the fate of the nation was determined by a committee of 10. Someone has said that a committee is a "group of people who individually can do nothing and collectively decide nothing can be done." This was certainly the case in this committee of 10 dissenters.

The congregation echoed the complaint as it murmured against Moses and Aaron (Numbers 14:2). The word "murmur" is used five times in this chapter (vs. 2, 27, 29, 36). Their murmuring was more than an

expression of dissatisfaction with their leaders. According to the Biblical Studies Foundation, it was "like a parliamentary vote of no confidence." They were ready to remove Moses, elect their own leader, and head back to Egypt (14:4). Their complaining is parallel in the text with rebelling against the Lord (14:9). Ultimately, their complaint was not against Moses and Aaron. The complaint of the *evil congregation* was against the Lord (14:27). They did not approve of the way He was leading them.

It is plain to see that complaining is rooted in unbelief and distrust (14:11). When you complain against God's will, you are questioning His love for you. You deny His wisdom and ignore His authority. You also set the conditions under which you will trust the Lord. Basically, complaining casts a vote of no confidence in God's ability. God does not take kindly to a complaining congregation.

Complaining led the Israelites to a future much different from the one

(continued on page 23)

...COMPLAINING
CASTS A
VOTE OF NO
CONFIDENCE
IN GOD'S
ABILITY.

(continued from page 22)

God had planned for them. Instead of fighting for His people, the Lord took a position against them. Since they would not do what God wanted them to do, He did what they wanted Him to do. On several occasions, they had mentioned their desire to die in the wilderness. He would grant their request. They would spend the next 40 years in a state of gradual decline. Those 20 years old and older would die in the wilderness due to their murmuring. Complaining resulted in more deaths than any other sin in the Bible! Complaining also left them going in circles and wasting away in the wilderness (14:33). They discovered the danger of getting what you want when they complained against God’s will. When they heard this pronouncement of judgment, they presumptuously tried to possess the land on their own terms and in their own power (14:40). This proved to be a fatal decision (14:45). Delayed obedience only made matters worse. When the nation of Israel complained, it led them into gradual decline and increased self-reliance.

That which was true of the complaining congregation of Israel is also true of today’s complaining church. A church should be known for gratitude, not complaining and murmuring. The Lord should be praised and obeyed as the One who delivered us from the bondage of sin and death. His loving direction should not be resisted; it should be followed. His ability to lead should not be questioned; it should be trusted. The command to

go into all the world with the Gospel should not be met with resistance and neglect; it should be embraced with enthusiasm and diligence. Spiritual leaders who are endeavoring to lead the church to obey God’s Word should be supported. They should not be the recipients of harsh comments that hit harder than stones. Godly hymns and songs that glorify the Lord should not be voted out in favor of music that sounds like it came out of Egypt. Preaching that is true to the text and faithfully applied should receive strong “Amens,” not rolled eyes and crossed arms. God still doesn’t take kindly to a complaining congregation.

When a church turns to complaining, it immediately goes into a state of decline. The results may not be immediately noticed. It may be a 40-year gradual decline until the generation of complainers goes off the scene. Complaining churches experience a decline in joy, peace, and spiritual growth. Complaining leaves the church going in circles, wasting its potential rather than making the progress God desired. The effort to make up for the effects of a complaining spirit with presumptuous human strategy and effort will prove futile. There is no substitute for obedience and reliance upon the power of God. Instead of complaining churches led by committees of dissenters, may the Lord raise up churches with members like Caleb and Joshua who give God their vote of confidence. **BT**



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DoRight GANG



Camp Complaining

Hey, Kids! For the girls at Faith Baptist Church, one of the best activities of the year is the fall camp-out at Mrs. Stacy Wright's pony ranch. Even though the camp-out is a month later than normal this year, Sarah, Audrey, Kaylee, and the other girls are super excited now that the time has finally come. Hiking, swimming, s'mores, and ponies—it's a recipe for the best camp-out ever! The only problem is that it's easy to start complaining when things don't go the way you wanted them to go.

The camp-out activity was off to a great start. The sun was warm, the breeze was cool, and the big tent even got set up early (with the help of Mrs. Stacy and Mrs. Susan, the fourth and fifth grade teachers). In the afternoon, the girls went on an adventure hike. They hiked through a forest where they played hide-and-seek, climbed to the top of some big rocks, took a not-so-shortcut through a washed-out gully, and (of course) spent quite a while petting the ponies.

After the hike, Kaylee, Audrey, and Sarah (and two other girls, Rachel and Amber) were excited to go swimming in the rock pool. The water was cool and clear, and there was even a little waterfall at one end. When they asked Mrs. Stacy about it, though, she shook her head.

"I'm sorry, girls. I'm afraid the water's too cold for swimming this late in the year."

"Aww, can we *please* go swimming?" begged Kaylee. "I like it when the water's cold—really!"

"Yeah!" chimed in Audrey. "I've gone swimming in cold water before. I don't mind."

Mrs. Stacy wavered. "I don't know, girls. I don't think you'll have very much fun..."

Sensing weakness, Sarah put on her best sad eyes and grabbed Mrs. Stacy's hand.

"Oh, please, Mrs. Stacy, can we try swimming? Just for a little bit? We all want to try it—right, girls?"

All the girls nodded.



Mrs. Stacy sighed. "Fine. Grab your swimming stuff; we'll go up to the house so you all can change."

Nice job with the sad eyes!



It turned out that Mrs. Stacy was right—the water was freezing cold! Kaylee, Rachel, and Amber had the good sense to admit defeat early on. They sat around watching as Sarah and Audrey stubbornly tried to act as if they were having a good time.

Mrs. Susan eventually had to order them out of the water when

Audrey's lips turned blue. By the time the girls had changed back into dry clothes and returned to

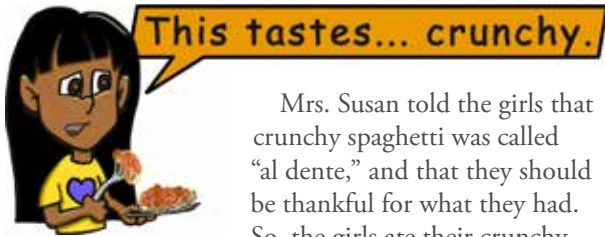


the campsite for a big dinner of campfire spaghetti, thick dark clouds were gathering on the horizon. Soon the wind turned cold and gusty. The storm came in so quickly that the spaghetti hadn't quite finished cooking when the rain began to fall. The girls squealed and dove for cover as the teachers strained the spaghetti noodles and took them into the tent.

"Well, girls," said Mrs. Stacy, "I think the noodles were pretty much done anyway. Let's put the sauce on top and eat what we have."

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Mrs. Susan told the girls that crunchy spaghetti was called “al dente,” and that they should be thankful for what they had. So, the girls ate their crunchy spaghetti as darkness fell. The

rain meant that they couldn’t make any s’mores at the campfire, so everybody just huddled in sleeping bags, waiting for the storm to pass. Unfortunately, though, the storm parked right over the campsite and dumped rain and sleet by the bucketful. Then Sarah noticed that her sleeping bag was cold and wet. The tent had sprung a leak, and a big puddle of water was spreading across the floor!

“That does it!” exclaimed Mrs. Stacy. “We should have camped in the barn like last year. Grab your stuff, girls—we’re going to make a run for the house!”

The girls packed up their things, and everybody sprinted through the rain up the path to the house.



By the time they got inside, they were soaked! The girls stood around the wood stove and shivered as Mrs. Stacy tried to get a fire going.

“I’m not having very much fun,” complained Amber to nobody in particular. And once the complaining started, there was no stopping it.

“I still wish we could have done more swimming,” muttered Sarah.

“Swimming?” said Kaylee. “I’m soaked and freezing enough already, thank you!”

“Well, I’m soaked, freezing, and I scratched my legs when I ran through the thorn bushes playing hide-and-seek,” said Audrey.

“That’s nothing; look what happened to my leg while we were climbing the rocks!” said Amber, showing off a big cut on her knee.

“We all know about that; you were screaming bloody murder for, like, five minutes,” Sarah rolled her eyes.

“Besides, a pony stood on my foot!”

Rachel pointed outside. “Hey, look—the tent’s flying away!” Mrs. Stacy gave a big sigh. “Whatever. I’ll take care of it in the morning.”

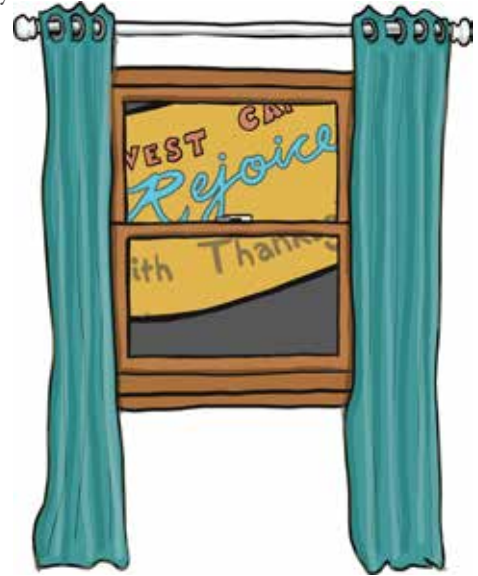
“This has kind of been the worst,” summarized Audrey. “No offense, Mrs. Stacy.”

Mrs. Stacy crossed her arms. “No, I totally agree—this may be the worst camp-out I’ve ever had.”

Suddenly, something big smacked into the window.

“Hey, look, it’s the banner! It says, ‘Rejoice!’” Kaylee giggled. “That’s called irony.”

“Well, the Bible says to rejoice evermore,” said Mrs. Susan from the kitchen. She was busy making hot cocoa. “Maybe God wants you to stop complaining and try rejoicing instead. The second half of Philippians 4:11 says,



“...i have learned, in whatsoever state i am, therewith to be content.”

“I’ve found one of the best ways to be content is to stop complaining and start rejoicing instead,” Mrs. Susan continued.

“Let’s try it!” said Mrs. Stacy. “I’ll go first.” She cleared her throat. “Rejoice! Though ye are wet and cold, and thy tent bloweth across the yard. Rejoice in thy crunchy spaghetti, and in thy foot, though it be bruised by a pony!” The girls began to laugh. Mrs. Stacy grinned and continued, “Rejoice that thou hast fallen off the couch and hast hurt thy elbow!” Now everybody was laughing. Sarah laughed so hard she fell off the couch again.

“I think God sent that banner up here to fix our bad attitudes,” said Kaylee.

“I think you’re right,” said Mrs. Stacy. “And even though I was being silly, the fact that God takes an interest in us is something to rejoice about.”

For a while, the girls sat around the wood stove. They took turns listing things they were thankful for while they drank Mrs. Susan’s hot cocoa. Soon everybody was warm and dry, and Mrs. Stacy brought out spare blankets and pillows for the girls to sleep on. It felt good to finally dry off out of the storm, but it was the change in their attitudes that felt the best of all. **BT**

BRO. DANIEL HARDY

THE DANGER OF OPTIONS

TWO HUNDRED.

That is the number of streaming services available to us in the US market. Some believe that it's skyrocketing to well over 300. That's many, many television shows and movies available at the click of a button. Now, just think of the number of shows and movies that are available on those streaming platforms! On Amazon Prime and Netflix alone, there are over 1,800 movies and 4,000 shows to watch. Gone are the days when six-year-old Daniel Hardy would so anxiously wait for Arthur the Armadillo (the old version, not the new liberal one) to appear on PBS at 3:30 p.m. every day. Only one episode a day! How did a six-year-old survive without binge-watching Arthur?

TWENTY-ONE.

That is the number of pages in the Cheesecake Factory menu. Over 250 items to choose from! From fried macaroni and cheese to crispy crab wontons, the thought put into what you will order from the Cheesecake Factory chapter book may just be the biggest decision you make that day! It's quite different from the original nine-item menu from McDonald's.

1.96 MILLION.

That is the number of apps available for download in the Apple App Store. From games to time management to social media, there is an app for everything. Whatever your "niche" is, chances are there is an app that will be finely tuned for you.

All of these illustrations say that we live in a culture that has no issue parading the billions of options from which to choose. This parade happens right in front of our faces. Why blame them? Americans love the multitude of options because they can easily find the ones that make them happy. Our young people are growing up in a country that is driven to make them happy, and it's not solely intended for the purpose of making people happy. No, it's because "happiness" sells, and we buy into it.

Young people especially buy into the concept of choice

being of supreme importance. Multitudes of different dress styles allow them to "express" themselves. Millions of songs and artists are available, and teens think these "represent" their feelings so well. A plethora of social media apps allow teens to have a platform to give any opinion they want. They go to school, work, and home and are given all manner of options. It's a way of life.

However, a problem arises when all of these options to choose from are taken away from them.

It leads to complaining. When they no longer have the freedom to make the decisions they want to make, they no longer get what they want. I have found that the more options you have, the more complaining there is.

In comes the church. Thank the Lord that there are churches that aren't trying to buy the happiness of members and guests. Unfortunately, it can become easy for a youth ministry to turn in that direction. A teenager can come to Sunday school, a youth activity, or a youth conference and begin to figure out pretty quickly that he or she no longer has the option to do whatever he or she wants, which leads to a complaining spirit. Here is a short list of a few things a teenager may complain about in a youth group:

- Not being able to bring a cell phone
- Not being able to use AirPods
- Not being able to sit by a girlfriend/boyfriend
- Lesson too long
- Served Little Caesars instead of Pizza Hut
- Not the youth activity they wanted
- Not able to wear what they wanted

And the list goes on and on!

(continued on page 27)

||
**WHEN THEY
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MAKE THE
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(continued from page 26)

Because our culture continually feeds teenagers the idea that they can be free to do whatever they want, we ought to take every opportunity to teach them that the youth group doesn't exist to make them happy. Rather, it's there to help them spiritually. These following points have been a help when dealing with a complaining teenager:

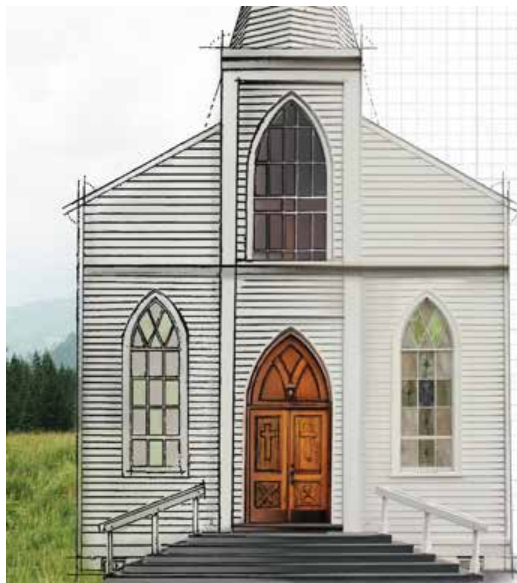
1. HAVE SEASONS OF NO OPTIONS

Teenagers already live in a world that gives them too many options. Sure, it can be okay—at times—to allow them to pick the restaurant for your Sunday night activity. However, going through a “season” when you don't allow them the option of bringing their phone on an activity or picking which friend's room they want to be in at an overnight youth event—these can help in simply teaching them to be content.

2. REMIND THEM OF SACRIFICES MADE

If your church is like mine, then you are part of a giving church, one that goes above and beyond in giving to teens and to the youth ministry. Thousands of dollars are given in work auctions and bake auctions to help teenagers get to camp and youth conferences. Constantly reminding your teenagers of church members' sacrificial and generous giving can cut down on a complaining spirit.

A youth ministry that reminds its teens it exists to help their spiritual needs rather than their physical needs can lead a young person from a life of complaining to a life of contentment. **BT**



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