

Complaint Free Sermon Notes

Synopsis

With every stage of creation, God reviewed his handiwork and claimed it to be “good.” (Genesis 1:4, 1:10, 1:12, 1:18, 1:21, 1:25). In fact, in Genesis 1:25, God reviews all of creation and declares it to be “very good.” Therefore, when we complain about our lives or anything in God’s world, we are denying the truth that God’s creation is inherently, good.

Further, when we complain we may miss potential solutions to the problem by focusing solely on the problem itself. In so doing, we may inadvertently do so to absolve ourselves from responsibility to resolve problems and create positive solutions for ourselves and others.

The Merriam Webster dictionary defines complaining as “to express pain, grief or discontent.” It makes sense to express each of these sentiments on occasion but most people complain dozens of times each day and this “ear pollution” negatively impacts their health and relationships.

Health

Complaining about our health diminishes our role in recovering from illness and can actually make a person sicker. Doctors have found that people who complain about their illnesses actually worsen the symptoms of their disease. Our minds play a significant role in the health of our bodies. “Doctors estimate that as much as two thirds of their time is spent treating individuals whose underlying problem is psychological.”¹ A negative attitude as evidence by a complaining nature increases the likelihood that a person will be sick.

Relationships

- Complainers lose friends: “People who complain too frequently are labeled as whiners and may risk being excluded from valued social groups or relationships.”²
- Complainers are braggarts. “People may complain about the characteristics of objects or people to convey they are discriminating in their tastes and choices.” For example, people may complain about the food at a restaurant to show that they have discriminating culinary standards.”³ And, “People may complain about the behavior of another as a means of making themselves look superior or intimidating.”⁴ Complaints, therefore, are often a type of bragging and no one likes a braggart.

¹ (Source: Kowalski, R. M. (1996). Complaints and complaining: Functions, antecedents, and consequences. Psychological Bulletin, 119, 179-196.)

² IBID

³ IBID

⁴ IBID

- Complainers drag down conversations. “Complaining is often contagious. After one person has complained, the incidence of others also complaining seems to increase, resulting in a domino effect of complaining.”⁵
- Complaining hurts others and feeds on itself. “The complainer influences the behavior of the listener, and the listener’s response to the complaint subsequently affects the behavior of the complainer.”⁶ This creates a complaining loop whereby people feed off one another’s negativity which drains each of them emotionally.

If complaining is destructive, then why do we complain? Primarily, people complain to get attention. Complaining is often a means for a person to draw attention themselves. Additionally, people complain to avoid doing things which they know they should do. “People may also save face by using complaints as self-handicapping strategies. Some complaints that are voiced as excuses after undesirable behavior may serve as self-handicapping strategies if expressed beforehand...If a student complains of illness the night before a test, he or she has set up an excuse in the event of poor performance on the test.”⁷

How can we affect positive change without complaining?

(Excerpted from “A Complaint Free World” by Will Bowen, © 2007, Doubleday Publishing)

“Were the great leaders of the United States also great complainers? I’d have to say, “No.” These important men and women allowed dissatisfaction to drive them to great visions and their passion for these visions inspired others to follow them. Their relentless focus on a bright future raced the collective heartbeat of this nation. Their method of transforming our consciousness as a country and, as a result, our future was best summarized by Robert Kennedy, “There are those that look at things the way they are, and ask why? I dream of things that never were, and ask why not?”

On August 28, 1963, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. did not stand on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial and say, “Isn’t it terrible how we’re being treated?” No. He spoke words that struck a chord with our nation and still bring tears to the eyes of those hearing them nearly a half-century later. He did not focus on the problem, he focused beyond the problem. He declared, “I have a dream!” Dr. King created in our minds a vivid picture of a world without racism. He had “been to the mountain top” and his words took us there as well

In the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson did clearly state the challenges the colonies were having under the governance of the British Empire. However, his document signed July 4, 1776 was not a litany of gripes. Had it been, it probably would have never caught the imagination of the world and unified the colonies.

The first paragraph of the U.S. Declaration of Independence reads:

⁵ IBID

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"When in the Course of human events it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them..."

For a moment, imagine you are a colonist of one of the thirteen colonies and you try to take this in, "...*the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them.*" At the time Jefferson wrote this, England was the world's greatest superpower and Jefferson states without hyperbole that these fledgling and diverse colonies were "equal" to this political behemoth. You could have heard the collective gasp this inspired among the colonists followed by the resulting swell of pride and enthusiasm. How could they ever aspire to such a lofty ideal as to be equal to England? Because "*the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God*" entitle[d] them." This was not complaining, this was a compelling vision for a bright future.

Scripture References

- *Do everything without complaining or arguing.* — Philippians 2:14
- *Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.* — Proverbs 16:24
- *This is the day the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.*—Psalm 118:24

About the Complaint Free Movement

In July of 2006, Rev. Will Bowen of Christ Church Unity in Kansas City, MO was teaching a series on Prosperity. Part of this series was helping the congregation form a habit of gratitude by going 21-days without complaining. Studies show it takes 21 days for people to form a new habit. In an effort to make the lesson practical, the church purchased purple bracelets and gave them away encouraging each person to move the bracelet to the other arm when they caught themselves complaining and continue to do so until the bracelet stayed on the same wrist for 21 consecutive days. This allowed them to create a new habit of being a Complaint Free person.

Rev. Bowen has appeared in *People* magazine, the *Oprah Winfrey Show*, NBC's *Today Show* and hundreds of newspapers worldwide. To date, over 6 million requests for purple bracelets have been submitted from people in over 80 countries.

Quotations

- *"Man invented language to satisfy his deep need to complain."*
—Lily Tomlin
- *"If you don't like something change it; if you can't change it, change your attitude. Don't complain."* —Maya Angelou

- *"It is a waste of time to be angry about my disability. One has to get on with life and I haven't done badly. People won't have time for you if you are always angry or complaining."* — Stephen Hawking
- *"Criticism comes easier than craftsmanship."* — Zeuxis
- *"No price is too high to pay for the privilege of owning yourself."* — Friedrich Nietzsche
- *"Complaining is not to be confused with informing someone of a mistake or deficiency so that it can be put right. And to refrain from complaining doesn't necessarily mean putting up with bad quality or behavior. There is no ego in telling the waiter your soup is cold and needs to be heated up—if you stick to the facts, which are always neutral. 'How dare you serve me cold soup...?' That's complaining."* — Eckhart Tolle, "A New Earth"

Complaint Free Wednesday

The opposite of complaining is expressing gratitude. Thanksgiving is a day to focus on being grateful so let's designate the day before Thanksgiving as "Complaint Free Wednesday." Invite everyone to try and go at least one whole day, the day before Thanksgiving, without complaining.