OVERCOME GRUMBLING
by Andy Manning

For years I was a grumbler. I didn’t even know it was wrong. I complained about people behind their back and I criticized people in their absence without knowing for sure that I was sinning. After all, grumbling and complaining and criticizing are a big part of our culture. Everybody does it; outside the church and in. But over time the Lord worked on me. At first, I noticed this really nasty feeling after I would have a bashing session; this horrible feeling on the inside of me. But I couldn’t put my finger on it right away. Eventually, however, the Lord made it very clear to me that I needed to stop. That saying negative things about people in their absence, whether they be true or not, was wrong.

That was only the beginning. Knowing the right thing to do and actually doing it are completely different animals. At first I decided to reserve these conversations and comments for my inner circle – my parents; my wife; my closest confidents. But the Lord made it very clear that even then the negative comments were off limits.

Then as I tried to put a stop to all complaining and grumbling about other people, I noticed two things. First, it’s not easy. It’s a habit that I’ve been practicing my whole life, and suddenly stopping was just plain tough. The second observation that I made as I began to repent was that the sin of grumbling is rampant in our society. It is prevalent. It is everywhere. Everyone does it; believers and unbelievers; at school; at work; everywhere. Again, this is one of the reasons it is so hard to stop grumbling and complaining. What do you do when someone grumbles to you about another person? How do you avoid joining in without coming across as “holier-than-thou”?

That’s when it dawned on me that this is a forgotten vice. It’s not forgotten in the sense that people no longer struggle with it, but in the sense that people no longer see it as a vice. Over time as our culture has distanced itself more and more from Biblical Christian values and virtues, the sin of grumbling has become acceptable behavior. People don’t recognize it as evil. The problem with grumbling is not that people are disobeying God, but that this has become an extinct teaching. What is grumbling, anyway?

\[\text{\footnotesize \textsuperscript{1}}\] I made this observation years ago about the virtue of faithfulness, as well. People in our culture no longer know what it means and view unfaithfulness as acceptable behavior. Faithfulness is doing what you say you will do. Your word is your bond. No need for promises. If you say you will do something, you will do whatever it takes to follow through. Unfaithfulness is when you say you will do something but do the opposite. Today we call it “changing your mind.” In reality it is going back on your word or more bluntly, “lying.”
That’s what I want to help you with today. I want to answer three questions: What is grumbling? What does the Bible say about grumbling? What motivates me to repent of grumbling?

WHAT IS GRUMBLING?

Let’s begin with a definition that I think will help you clearly understand the sin of grumbling. To grumble is to express discontent, displeasure, or dissatisfaction about another person behind their back.

It is to complain about someone or criticize someone or talk negatively about someone in their absence. The Greek word is gongusmos (gong-goos-mos). It is sometimes translated in the Bible grumbling; sometimes complaining. One source defines it as a secret displeasure not openly avowed. Another source defines it as behind-the-scenes talk. Another source says, “The word was used of those who confer secretly; of those who discontentedly complain.”

To give you a common example, grumbling is what happens in my office all day long at FedEx. Drivers and other employees come in all day long and grumble to me about other drivers, about their superior, about their coworkers, but when they see the person they were just talking about, it’s all smiles; everything appears to be fine. Grumbling is not mere complaining; it is doing it secretly. To grumble is to express discontent, displeasure, or dissatisfaction about another person behind their back.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT GRUMBLING?

Let’s turn to the Bible and see what it has to say about grumbling? Let’s look at Philippians 2:14-15. “14 Do everything without grumbling or arguing, 15 so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation. Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky.”

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2 Strong’s.
3 Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature
First, it says do everything without grumbling (we’ll have to wait for another time to dig in to the meaning of arguing). Do everything. Don’t grumble at home. Don’t grumble at work. Don’t grumble when you’re on vacation. Don’t grumble when you’re on a date. Don’t grumble at church. Don’t grumble at school. Do everything without grumbling about other people.

Why? Because if you avoid grumbling and complaining, you will shine like bright stars in a world full of crooked and perverse people. You will stand out. People will notice a difference in you. And you will have an opportunity to point them to Jesus Christ.

Why will you shine and stand out? Because people have always been the same. They are the same today as they were 2,000 years ago when this was first written by a guy named Paul. The natural inclination when someone hurts you, or frustrates you, or angers you is to grumble about them behind their back. It’s not natural to go to them in person and talk it over face to face; that’s much too difficult. That’s scary; awkward; difficult. Grumbling is easy. Grumbling is America’s first and favorite coping mechanism. People have always used grumbling to cope with hurt, frustration, or anger.

- How do employees cope with the boss who makes an unpopular decision? They grumble about her.
- How do managers cope with employees who don’t perform to their expectations? They grumble about them.
- How do people cope with God when He allows a natural disaster or an act of terror? They grumble about Him.
- How do students cope with an impossible teacher? They grumble about her.
- How do citizens cope with politicians they don’t like? They grumble about them.
- How do church members cope with other church members who have hurt them? They grumble about them.
- How do pastors cope with difficult church members? They grumble about them.
- How do husbands and wives cope with unsatisfactory spouses? They grumble about them.

This is what people do; what people have always done. And that’s what makes this such a great opportunity for Christ-followers. If you will make a commitment to avoid grumbling about other people, you will shine, because you will be the only person who’s not doing it. You will stick out. You will be weird. You will be an oddball. Everyone else is grumbling and complaining and you’re being silent, or walking away, or even putting a stop to it, and you will shine for Christ. It will give you another opportunity to glorify God; to show the superiority of a life lived in Christ.
So Paul makes it very clear: Do everything without grumbling.

- Be a student without grumbling about your teachers.
- Be a patient without grumbling about your doctor.
- Be a wife without grumbling about your husband.
- Be a husband without grumbling about your wife.
- Be a church member without grumbling about other members.
- Be a citizen without grumbling about politicians.
- Be a child without grumbling about your parents.
- Be a sibling without grumbling about your brothers and sisters.
- Do everything without complaining and arguing.

WHAT MOTIVATES ME TO AVOID GRUMBLING?

As I mentioned earlier, the Lord has really been dealing with me on this issue. He has spoken to me very clearly. And I am very motivated to avoid grumbling. Why? I want to share with you some of the reasons that I think this is such an important and serious issue, and maybe God will use some of my motivations to speak to you.

1. Grumbling intensifies my pain.

I mentioned this earlier. One of the ways that the Lord first got my attention about grumbling was the way that I felt after I complained about someone. I felt awful. I felt dirty. I felt worse than I did before. What I noticed was that grumbling was not helpful, and worse, it intensified my pain. If someone made me angry; grumbling only made me angrier. If someone frustrated me; grumbling only left me feeling more frustrated. If someone hurt my feelings; grumbling made me feel even worse about it. I noticed over time that the less I grumbled about someone’s sin, the quicker I was able to get over the pain of their sin.

2. Grumbling decreases trust.

If I grumble to you about so and so, what makes you think I won’t go and grumble about you to so and so the instant that you get on my nerves? Nothing. That’s the point. When I hear someone grumble, my trust in that person’s friendship and loyalty goes way down. Because if they grumbled about that person, it’s only a matter of time before they grumble about me. Therefore, I’m very wary around grumblers. I’m very careful about what I say. I don’t seek intimate friendships with people like that. They can’t be trusted. They are dangerous.
It’s not uncommon for someone to visit our church and grumble about their former church and their former pastor. What does that tell me? That doesn’t make feel good. That makes me feel very insecure our relationship. Because I know that eventually I am going to disappoint that person in some way. I’m imperfect. And if they could grumble and complain about their former pastor, who was probably better than me in many ways, then it’s only a matter of time before they grumble against me. And so I’m very wary of people like that and careful around them. I love them and will serve and minister to them; but I won’t allow them to get too close.

Well, I want people to be able to trust me. I want people to see me as loyal. And if I refuse to grumble about others to you, you can be sure that I will refuse to grumble about you, to others.

3. Grumbling threatens the unity of the church.

Before our marriage Lydia and I were advised against grumbling and complaining about one another to our parents, siblings, and close friends. Why? Because it would cause division. If Lydia complained about me to her parents, it would likely set them against me. It would influence their opinion of me and impact our relationship. It may cause them to resent me, or to trust me less, or to even advise their daughter to leave me. If Lydia complained about me to her big brother, he would put me in the hospital. Because we’ve wanted to avoid family strife and division and discord, we’ve always painted each other in a positive light.

The same thing is true in the church. Unity is essential in the church. If we can’t get along, we can’t get things done. Division will kill a movement of God quicker than anything. If the devil wants to put a stop to the work of God in our midst, he doesn’t have to tempt us to sin; all he has to do is to get us to fight against one another. That’s why the Bible says in 1 Corinthians 1:10, “Let there be no divisions in the church. Rather be of one mind; united in thought and purpose.” But when we grumble and complain about each other, it sows the seeds of division and disunity.

When I grumble about so and so to you, it influences your opinion about them. It hurts their reputation. It impacts your relationship with that person. It may cause you to lose respect and trust in that person. You may even get angry with that person. And then what if you go and grumble to someone else about my grumblings to you?

6 Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2007 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.
One of the most valuable things that you own is your reputation. Your good name. When you grumble about someone, you trample their reputation and rub their name in the mud. And you cause disunity in the church.

4. Grumbling is cowardly.

Another reason that I am motivated to avoid grumbling is because I don’t want to be a coward. I want to be a man of courage. Grumbling is cowardly. It is wimpy. It is weak. Grumbling is whining like baby, but worse because you are too scared to whine to the person who hurt you, so you’re grumbling in secret.

According to the Bible, the way to handle conflict is face to face. If you’ve got a problem with someone, go to them in person and deal with it. If it’s not serious enough for a face to face encounter, then be silent and let it go. That takes guts. That takes courage. That’s the kind of man I want to be.

5. Grumbling is the fruit of pride.

If pride is a tree, grumbling is the fruit. When you grumble and complain about someone, expressing your discontent, dissatisfaction or displeasure about them behind their back, you are actually placing yourself above them. You think you are better than them. You wonder how they could ever behave in such a foolish or selfish way, because you would never.

However, only pride would make such an assumption. Truth be told, you have no idea what you do if you were in their shoes. You don’t know what it’s like to have their brain, and their resources, and their experiences, and their background, and what it’s like to live in their house, and have their job, with their income, with their health, with their upbringing, with their education.

This does not excuse their behavior or make a wrong decision right. However, with a little humility and a lot less pride, you will realize that if you were in their shoes, you might make the same decision. You will realize that frankly, if you were actually in their shoes, you might do worse.

We grumble, complain, and criticize because we assume we would never act like them. But given their situation, given their circumstances, given their background, education and resources, who knows what we would do?
I’ve come to be a lot less critical and a lot more patient with people because I see that I can’t take credit for a lot of the good in my life. I grew up in a home where my parents modeled Christian devotion; they modeled Christian parenthood; they modeled Christian marriage; they modeled Christian virtues. That alone gives me a great advantage over 99% of people for which I can’t take credit. And if I didn’t have that, if I didn’t have that upbringing, who knows what decisions I would make?

6. I’ve been warned.

God has spoken very clearly to me on this matter. He doesn’t like my grumbling. A grumbling and complaining heart is the opposite of God’s heart, which is compassionate, and sympathetic, and patient, and merciful, and gracious, and forgiving, and longsuffering, and kind. And the Lord has warned me in two ways.

First, if I grumble about someone, assuming that I would never make their mistake, He might put me in their shoes to humble me. The Lord is highly concerned with my character. His goal is to make me Christlike so that I can glorify Him and display to the world the superiority of a life lived in Christ. He wants me to be humble and sympathetic and patient with people. Therefore, if I persist in prideful grumbling, the Lord might put me in a similar situation, under similar pressures to better understand their predicament.

For example, a lady I work with gets migraine headaches occasionally. When she does, she has to turn off the lights, close the blinds, and she can’t do much work. It would be easy for someone who has never had a migraine to say, “What’s the big deal? Take an aspirin and get over it. We’ve all got aches and pains. She’s just a wimp.” But the Lord has warned me that attitude will incur God’s hand of discipline, and that I might find myself with migraines, or in a similar predicament, so that I will grow in patience and sympathy.

The second warning that the Lord has given me is that He might remove someone from my life if I continue to grumble about them. It’s really ironic, but a lot of the people that I’ve grumbled and complained about in the past are actually the people who are the biggest blessings in my life. It might be a friend, a family member, a church member, a coworker, a neighbor. They are actually devoted to me, loyal to me, a huge blessing to me in so many ways, and here I am grumbling and complaining and criticizing them behind their back. Essentially this is ungratefulness. This is a case of failing to recognize someone’s worth and value; of taking someone for granted. The Lord has blessed me with a great friend; a great asset; a great supporter; but I going on and on complaining about them. The Lord has told me He will not...
tolerate this. And that if I am not careful to repent, He will not hesitate to remove them from my life so that I will become more grateful and appreciative of the people in my life.

These two warnings are for me. They are the Lord speaking to me. Maybe the Lord is speaking through me to you and telling you that these are for you, too. But maybe not.

Grumbling: To express discontent, displeasure, or dissatisfaction about another person behind their back. It’s a sin I’ve struggled with over the years, but hopefully the Lord is changing me. What about you? Do you ever grumble and complain and criticize others in their absence? Probably not. If so, however, I pray that God would use these words to turn your heart away from grumbling toward a more humble, sympathetic and patient attitude.