



## Gratitude's Nemesis: The Grumble

**Scripture** - Exodus 16:1-8 & James 1:12-15.

There was a movie from the 1990s that was about two men. Here's some words to describe them – let's see if you can identify the movie.

Complaining, negativity, intolerance, uncompromising, griping, fussing, grumpiness. What movie series has characters known for these "magnetic" characteristics? You guessed it – Grumpy Old Men.

One of the reasons the movie was well received was because they allowed us to witness the main characters, Walter Matthau and Jack Lemmon, get away with exaggerated attitudes and behaviors on the premise of grumpiness. Because these characters were able to express their irritability through comedy, the movie became an audience favourite.

However, if we were to practice their words and actions off the screen, we would be far from anyone's favorite. Because in reality, no one likes to spend time with a complainer – a grumbler - a grumpy old man.

Studies have shown that few things are more detrimental to your health than a bad attitude. Because our attitudes begin with our mindset, if our perspective is stuck in the muck of negativity, our body, behaviors,

mental, emotional, and even physical health will begin to take on this posture – a posture of negativity.

**Ingratitude:** this is defined as "the failure or refusal to acknowledge receipt of something good from another; the forgetfulness of or poor return of kindness."

Ingratitude is the choice not to recognize good or kindness in our life. It is the choice to take on the mindset and the spirit of the Grumpy Old Men. The Bible is full of stories originating from a heart of ingratitude. Many of the most disheartening stories in the Bible begin with a spirit of ingratitude.

In the book of Genesis, we read of the story of the first murder – Cain murdering his brother Abel because God accepted Abel's sacrifice and not Cain's. Cain's sacrifice was given from an ungrateful heart, God rejected his offering. Cain's ungrateful spirit sparked a wave of stewing anger, which convinced Cain that the answer to his wounded pride was not a reflection of his ungrateful sacrifice but the murder of his brother.

What about the story of King David. The Lord gave him a flourishing kingdom, a successful career as king, a wife who loved him, a healthy family, well-being, and provision. However, the moment his gaze shifted from the goodness and mercies in his life and allowed his heart to follow his eyes as he scanned his neighbor's rooftops, David coveted what he didn't have. And in his heart, he became ungrateful.

In turn, his ungrateful spirit led to a great sin - adultery. Even under the umbrella of his grave repentance and God's forgiveness, the remainder

of his reign was stained. His life was scarred by his sin. All because his focus shifted from the Lord's grace (*charis*) in his life, forgetting all for which he had to be grateful.

Ingratitude begins in small ways and is often masked by other emotions, thoughts, and behaviors, making the spirit of ungratefulness a challenge to identify. However, though it may be one of the least apparent sins, it drives a costly price.

Let's examine Israel's attitudes after they escaped from Egypt.

After forty-five days of travel, Israel's resources began to run dry. With dwindling resources, their hunger and exhaustion took a toll on them. The excitement over escaping their enemies and their newfound sense of freedom were quietly squelched out by their physical need. As their bellies began to rumble, their mouths began to grumble.

Exodus 16:2 says, *"And the whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness,"*

Just as we struggle with the gravity of our physical needs, so too did Israel. Overcome by their fear of hunger, Israel's focus shifted from the Lord's provision to what another could provide instead – mainly Egypt. Their complaint surpassed their empty bellies to a belief that Egypt could care for them better than God in their time of need.

They didn't really want to be back in Egypt, they just wanted life to get a little easier.

When pressure comes our way, we should resist the temptation to make a quick escape. Instead we should focus on God's power and wisdom to help deal with the cause of our stress.

The Lord heard their grumbles and graciously provided by sending them quail from the sky and manna from the ground.

Moses takes this moment as a teaching opportunity and addresses their toxic attitudes. Moses warns Israel, saying, "Hey. This attitude, this complaining amongst yourselves, this underlying murmuring, is not against us (Aaron and myself). Your words are against the Lord. *Is this who we are?* Are we a people that would grumble against the Lord's provisions?"

Moses understood what the people did not yet understand: *that we become what we hold onto*. If we hold onto our anger, we become angry people. If we hold onto envy, we become jealous. If we harbor frustration we become a quarrelsome person whose arguments keep us from getting along with others.

Moses knew that if the people held onto their grumbling, they would become a people far from the heart of the Lord.

We read in James that temptation does not come from God, but from evil desires inside us. It begins with an evil thought – that could be judging someone, or criticizing another to doing harm to a person. When we dwell on that thought, wanting our own way, believing that we are in the right, then it becomes like a snowball rolling down a hill, it builds up and up becoming more destructive.

Desires that tempt us to place faith in any place other than the Lord (for Israel, that was Egypt) have the potential to lead us away from the salvation of the Lord. And to be directed away from the Lord's grace (*charis*) is to be led into darkness, (death

One of the great dangers of complaining is that it blinds us to reality. Faith is grateful for what is and believes that the best is yet to come. Complain focuses on what is wrong with the present and glorifies an unreal past.

Two years after their initial grumble. Israel is still spiritual infants, but now under the guidance and instruction of the Law. After nearly 800 days in the desert with the daily provisions of manna and quail, Israel should have moved on from their spirit of grumbling and started living out of a spirit of gratitude. But they continued to grumble even while accepting the provisions God gave them.

To fully understand God's position, we must examine the grumble. The Exodus story tells us there were so many arguments amongst the people that Moses struggled to find the time to lead his people. Therefore, Moses appointed elders to oversee the social and economic issues so he could focus on leading.

We read in the few stories recorded, twice Moses highlights the grumbling nature of the Israelites. This sly grumble, often justified by its beholders, was destroying God's new nation. And Moses understood it had the potential to destroy God's people in the future.

Why? Because an attitude of ingratitude leads to sin that eventually pulls us so far away from the Lord that we no longer trust him.

Why is complaining so detrimental to our faith? Grumbling is the complete opposite of gratitude.

To grumble and complain is to reject the grace of God. Grumbling takes the form of the sins of discontent, fussiness, gossip, negativity, intolerance, impatience, uncompromising, and unyielding mindsets and behaviors. Grumbling has the power to pull the strongest of believers - those who were once in awe of the greatness of their salvation - far-far away from God into the grips of darkness.

Grumbling gives us a free pass to shift our focus from faith in God's provision to the problems in our life. It takes our problem at hand and turns it into a spiritual issue of the heart, which inevitably eats away at our recognition of God's grace in our life.

To live without gratitude and choose to grumble is to live life backwards. Do you wonder how you know you are living your life backwards? Backward thinking is when we get stuck in the question WHY.

Grumbling rejects gratitude and asks *why?*

*Why me or why not me?* If we allow ourselves to reflect on our grumble, an unquenchable emptiness can form within the *why* questions. This *why* comes from a place of discontent, and this discontent comes from a posture of ingratitude. We have chosen to remain in a thought process that says, "This is not enough. This is not what I wanted. This is not how

things are supposed to be. There has got to be something better than what I have. *Why me?*"

Ask yourself: *Is there a sense of discontentment in your soul?* Do you find yourself stuck in the *why?*

Closely examine your thoughts, attitudes, and words. Ask yourself, **WHERE DO I GRUMBLE?**

*Am I complaining a lot?*

Do I look at my life and say: *This is not enough!*

Or am I living in a state of *I want, I wish, I had, I miss...?*

Do I look at others' lives longingly and wish I had their experience, possessions, spouse, children, house, job, friends...?

These grumbles that take the form of questions, murmurs under our breath, thoughts crossing our minds which at times seep out into our conversations, are, in actuality, what the Bible refers to as a spirit of ingratitude.

Thankfully, grumbling does not have the final say. God's grace surpasses the grumble. He is gracious to forgive, and the answer to our ingratitude does not require a movement of mountains. You can begin to push the needle forward and start practicing gratitude right now.

How can you move the needle forward in your life this week? Does it include a gratitude practice?

If you feel stuck in the *why*, is it because you need to release something to the Lord? Do you grumble in your spirit? Have you taken on a posture of ingratitude? How can you replace this mindset with gratitude?

The beauty of the gospel of grace is just that – it is a freedom based on grace. You do not have to earn your way into a spirit and posture of gratitude. You can receive grace at any time and live in it.

Practicing gratitude, accepting and expressing God's grace, can begin right now.

## **PRAYER**

**Father,**

**I repent of a default attitude of whining.**

**I repent of seeing the glass half empty.**

**I repent of catching others doing wrong and missing when they do right.**

**I repent of grumbling about not having what I haven't even had enough faith to receive.**

**I repent of complaining about leadership, as if I could do better.**

**I repent of thinking the grass is greener elsewhere.**

**I am done with being a whiner and complainer.**

**I hereby declare that I will believe Your promises to me!**

**Today I will be grateful to you and to the people in my life! Thank You!**

**Thank You for all you do for me, all you have done, and all you will do when I have faith to receive it!**

**In Jesus' Name, Amen.**