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Exodus 15

“Stop Complaining. Be Thankful”

Pastor Gary Hamrick

God miraculously delivered the Israelites out of Egypt, first with a series of ten plagues that eventually broke Pharaoh, and then with the parting of the Red Sea. God’s rescue gave them their freedom after 400 years of slavery. Miraculously, the Israelites walked through on dry ground, with a wall of water on their left and a wall of water on their right. ¹ And when the Egyptian army pursued them (because Pharaoh changed his mind and wanted his slaves back), God folded the water back and drowned the entire Egyptian army. It’s no wonder they sang and danced in celebration of all that God had done for them. ² Unfortunately, their singing didn’t last very long, because in just three short days, their celebration turned into complaining.

We read in [Exodus 15:22-24](#) and [Exodus 17:1-7](#) how they complained about having nothing to drink, and in [Exodus 16:8](#) they complained because they had nothing to eat. They’re on their way to being first-class complainers, and the evidence is clear when we see that in [Exodus 15-17](#) the word “*grumbling*” appears nine times, “*quarreling*” appears three times, and “*testing*” appears twice. This issue will be an on-going theme along the desert route God is going to lead them on. They grumbled, murmured, complained, griped, whined, and quarreled all along the way.

They were just two months into their journey when we read that Moses “*cried out to the Lord, [and said,] ‘What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me.’*” That’s the way it is with complainers. If you’ve ever been around someone who constantly complains, you know by personal experience that when they don’t get their way, they become nasty, fast!

¹ Pastor Gary made a comment in an earlier message from Exodus, that there would need to be at least a three-mile wide area to allow 5,000 people to walk abreast. At this width and number of people, the crossing would take all night.

² The first time the words “*song*” and “*sing*” appear in the Bible is [Genesis 15:1](#).

In this study we're going to learn what the Bible has to say about the way Christians are supposed to handle the temptation to be a complainer.

Complaining Is Often The Fruit Of Bitterness

1. **Exodus 15:22-24** - *"Then Moses led Israel from the Red Sea and they went into the Desert of Shur. For three days they traveled in the desert without finding water. When they came to Marah, they could not drink its water because it was bitter. (That is why the place is called Marah.) So the people grumbled against Moses, saying, 'What are we to drink?' "*
2. It's not a coincidence that the place where the Israelites first grumbled was called Marah, which means, "bitter."
3. It's easy to believe that the Lord used this place to illustrate the correlation between complaining and bitterness.
4. The root of some kind of dissatisfaction, resentment or anger over something shows itself through complaining.
5. The only way to eliminate complaining is to identify what has created bitterness and dissatisfaction, and allow the Lord to bring healing.³

Complaining Dishonors God

6. **Exodus 16:8** - *"Moses also said, 'You will know that it was the Lord when he gives you meat to eat in the evening and all the bread you want in the morning, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we? You are not grumbling against us, but against the Lord.' "*
7. Complaining dishonors God because it indicates a disbelief in what God can do or dissatisfaction with what he has done.
8. If you believe that God is the author of life and the source of all good things, then whenever there is complaining about things, people, situations, etc., the complaint is indirectly a complaint against God.
9. When gripe about our job/food/clothes/etc., there needs to be a mechanism in our thinking that causes us to remember who it was who gave us those things.

³ **Exodus 15:22b** - *"For I am the Lord [Jehovah-Rapha] who heals you."*

10. **Deuteronomy 8:17-18** - *“You may say to yourself, ‘My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.’ But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth...”*

Complaining Can Cause Us To Miss The Goodness Of God And His Plan For Our Lives

11. **Numbers 14:1-4, 11-12** - *“That night all the people of the community raised their voices and wept aloud. All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, ‘If only we had died in Egypt! Or in this desert! Why is the Lord bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be taken as plunder. Wouldn’t it be better for us to go back to Egypt?’ And they said to each other, ‘We should choose a leader and go back to Egypt.’ The Lord said to Moses, ‘How long will these people treat me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the miraculous signs I have performed among them? I will strike them down with a plague and destroy them, but I will make you into a nation greater and stronger than they.’ ”*
12. Moses interceded and prayed for the Israelites, and God relented and forgave them, but his judgment on their sin was made clear when he declared that not a single person who treated him with contempt would ever see the Promised Land, and that each one would die in the desert.
13. The complaining and bitterness of the Israelites prohibited them from getting to the place where God wanted them.
14. Each one would be personally responsible for their disbelief in what God had promised to do, and the judgment against them was that they would never experience all that he had planned for them.

Discussion Questions

1. Review the introduction to the study guide with your group to provide the appropriate background.
2. Read **Exodus 15:1-5, 11-13, and 19-21**, and **Numbers 14:1-4, 11-12** to provide an overview for this study.
3. Spend time talking about Mark Twain’s quote concerning complainers.
 - a. “Don’t complain and talk about your problems, [because] 80 percent of people don’t care; the other 20 percent will think you deserve them.”

4. Read and discuss [Philippians 2:14-15](#), which says: *“Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe.”*
5. Is it possible to *“do everything without complaining or arguing”*?
6. Allow the people in your group to share experiences they’ve had with others who fall into the category of being a chronic complainer.
 - a. What are some of the characteristics of complainers?
7. How has the Lord helped you overcome the temptation to complain?
8. How do you react when someone expresses an ungrateful, “woe is me, God’s not fair” attitude?
9. Do you think people who behave this way have an infectious and crippling effect on others?
10. Are there examples you can share about Christians who have dishonored God because they do not demonstrate self-control in this area?
11. Do you think this is a bigger problem for non-Christians or Christians?
12. Without mentioning names, are the Christians you know guilty of being a complainer?
13. Is it the case that Christians are never to complain about anything?
 - a. How do you find the balance in expressing appropriate dissatisfaction with your job/boss/etc., and unproductive and unnecessary complaining?
 - b. Do you know Christians who believe the Lord wants them to mask their problems with a “plastic Jesus smile”?
14. Have you or someone you know missed out on God’s blessing because of this issue?
15. Read and discuss these Scriptures.
 - a. [Ephesians 5:19-20](#) – *“Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

- b. [1 Thessalonians 5:16-18](#) - *“Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.”*
- c. If you have experienced real life-change because you now follow the Lord's counsel found in these Scriptures, share examples about how your perspective on life/situations/etc. has changed.

16. Close your time in prayer by asking the Holy Spirit to help each person: seek the Lord's healing (Jehovah-Rapha) concerning the root of complaining, so they will not be miserable nor will they make others miserable, and in the process dishonor God; allow the Holy Spirit to deliver them from a complaining, whining, and an ungrateful heart; (have someone prepared to read [Ephesians 5:19-20](#) and [1 Thessalonians 5:16-18](#) so you can pray these Scriptures).

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New International Version (NIV 1984).