

600 Words

The Art of Complaining

by

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With practice and some coaching, most of us can improve our game. Whether we consider sports, relationships, careers, or hobbies, a drive to pursue advancement can lead to elevated performance. Who doesn't want to be considered an expert at our chosen activities?

Take the art of complaining. We've all participated, perhaps as amateurs. A professional grade complainer (PGC) grumbles because he has trained himself to respond in such a manner. The torrent of grouching rushes forth naturally.

The Bible records an example of professional grade complaining in Numbers 11. Israel had miraculously escaped from Egypt. Freedom replaced slavery. Autonomy transplanted oppression. The airless days of forced labor dissolved into the oxygen rich hope of a new horizon as the group stepped toward nationhood.

But the grind of the desert march eroded attitudes. Discontented thoughts triggered audible expressions of dissatisfaction. Each day brought a new wave of complaints—too hot, too thirsty, tired of the menu, weary of waiting—and the displeasure spread throughout the camp.

Achieving professional grade status as a complainer requires practice and exercise. Begin

with 3 key behaviors.

I. Compare today with yesterday.

Study the matter deeply and we can convince ourselves the bird in hand is less satisfying than the one which flew. Resenting the changes between yesterday and today often generates discouragement. Paul instructs us to forget the past, reach toward the future, and press on. (See Philippians 3:13-14)

The PGC crowd in the wilderness had no interest in pressing on. They complained because it was in their nature. Their dissatisfaction was birthed in greedy desires as they compared the taste of manna to the bounty they remembered from Egypt. Their conclusion was dire, “We have no meat.” Nothing else mattered.

II. Ignore today’s blessings.

Complaining is often a symptom of a thankless heart. Blessings are easy to miss, if we do not train ourselves to count them. David encourages us in Psalm 103:2 to take care in numbering God’s benefits in our lives. As the complaining grew in intensity, the Israelites missed quite a few in the tally including:

- Freedom
- The privilege of starting a new nation
- Daily manna, as much as was needed
- God’s personal direction through Moses
- God’s presence hovering over the tabernacle
- God’s demonstration of power in the plagues and defeat of Egypt
- God’s law delivered in a spectacular fashion at Mt. Sinai

Ignoring this impressive list, the PGC shared a message of gloom with his neighbor.

Instead of expressing praise and thanksgiving, people wept with despair.

III. Spread negativity copiously.

Complaining requires a target for the flood of discontent. A practicing PGC does not enjoy solitude, but enlists others to join him. The disease spread until Moses was infected. How did he respond to the virus? Numbers 11:10-15 states Moses was discouraged, and asked God to take him out. “Please kill me at once”—not the words we expect from one described as a man the Lord spoke with face-to-face as a friend. (See Exodus 33:11)

Drill down to the root cause behind professional grade complaining and there is an absence of faith in God and His promises. There is surety that God is holding back the good stuff, and His provisions are lacking. His promises are empty. His practices are not up to par. And there is an urgency to share the pessimism with others.

Perhaps it is time to ask, “Do I want to become a PGC? Or is it time to squelch the complaining?”