

Growing in Gratitude

“How to resist negativity”

Part 1

Intro: Negativity is everywhere these days. Social media is overwhelmingly negative. The negative posts simply outnumber the positive ones. Everyone seems to be complaining about something. The news is primarily negative. You watch 25 minutes of crime, violence, political drama and tragedy and then they throw in a 3 minute feel good story at the end. (As if that makes it all better?) Work can tend to be negative. People complain about their jobs / supervisors / their co-workers and their commute. It just seems impossible to get away from this overwhelming wave of negativity. How do we resist it? How can we be different as followers of Jesus in this ocean of negativity?

- I find myself struggling with it. The constant barrage at times impacts my emotions and thinking. Pretty soon I find my self with an ungrateful, complaining spirit inside me.
- Then the Holy Spirit reminds me of His word

Phil. 2:14-15 “Do everything without complaining and arguing, ¹⁵ so that no one can criticize you. Live clean, innocent lives as children of God, shining like bright lights in a world full of crooked and perverse people.” (NLT)

This is easier said than done. How do we live like this? Today we are going to answer this question. BUT, before the HOW we are going to first answer the WHY? Why should we resist a negative, complaining attitude? I have met some people who have told me; “This is just the way I am.” Jesus did not die on the cross to leave us the way we are. We all need to grow in our ability to resist negativity.

Why Resist Negativity?

Why is complaining and negativity not a good way to live your life? What’s the big deal? Today I am going to focus on the most common manifestation of negativity. Complaining.

- Complaining is expressing our emotional and intellectual dissatisfaction without any personal responsibility.
- **For example:** Illustrate with food on Sunday morning. One person complains all we have are high carb, surgery pastries and not everyone can eat that stuff. Another person sees the very same issue yet asks if they can bring in a weekly veggie tray from Safeway. See the difference? Let’s answer why...

1. Complaining destroys your testimony for Jesus

“Do everything without complaining and arguing, ¹⁵ so that no one can criticize you. Live clean, innocent lives as children of God, shining like bright lights in a world full of crooked and perverse people.” (NLT)

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- When we have a complaining attitude, we are acting just like the world. We are no longer shining like lights in the darkness. We are now behaving just like the darkness.
- How can complaining make Jesus attractive to people who don't know Him? How can complaining at work cause your co-workers to see Jesus in you? How can complaining about your spouse make an unchurched person want to come to church with you?
- The word of God exhorts us to do everything without complaining. WHY? For the sake of who we represent. Our attitudes are part of our witness not simply our behavior. Gratitude is a witness.

2. Complaining is a faithless response to circumstances

*Num. 11:1 "Soon the people began to **complain** about their hardship, and the Lord heard everything they said..." (NLT)*

- The OT and the nation of Israel is an example of this principal. They had a nasty habit of complaining. The best example of this was during the time they spent 40 years wandering in the wilderness (explain context of this)
- God used adverse circumstances to teach Israel they could trust Him. When things went south, all they had to do was turn to God in faith and He would provide. He promised them He would every time.
- BUT, instead of turning to God, they would complain. They refused to believe in God's goodness, His faithfulness, His past good deeds towards them.
- We can be guilty of the same thing when we face hardship. We complain instead of trust. We fail to see that God uses circumstances as a way to show us He is our Provider.
- It never went well for Israel when they complained. It doesn't go well for us either. Remember, Heb. 11:6 says it is impossible to please God without faith. Complaining never pleases God because it is faithless.

3. Complaining is a fleshly response to adversity

Gal. 5:19-20 "Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions..." (ESV)

- There is always this struggle going on inside us between the flesh and the Spirit. When we allow ourselves to go down the path of complaining and negativity, we are responding to circumstances from the flesh.
- One of the indicators of spiritual maturity is over time we allow the Spirit of God in us to have more influence than the flesh. The flesh is seen less and less and the Spirit of God is seen more and more.

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- If you are always complaining and negative, it is an indicator you need to grow spiritually. Your flesh is out in front instead of the Spirit.

4. Complaining results in God withholding blessing

Num. 14:29 "Because you complained against me, every one of you who is twenty years old or older and was included in the registration will die. ³⁰ You will not enter and occupy the land I swore to give you. The only exceptions will be Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun."
(NLT) Explain the context

- Complaining results in an unwillingness to follow God in the midst of the circumstances. Since complaining refuses to follow, the blessing of God is often withheld.
- WHY? Because it is obedience that results in blessing. Complaining leads us down the path of disobedience. Complaining is putting more faith in the circumstances than God.
- God simply will not bless this type of attitude in His followers. If you are complaining about the circumstances while you're asking God to bless you you're not going to see that blessing.

5. Complaining multiplies negativity

- 2 negatives do not = a positive. What do I mean? Negative circumstance + negative response does not = a positive result.
- You will never be able to complain yourself into a better situation or mood. Complaining doesn't make you feel better it only multiplies the negativity in your heart and mind.
- The bible teaches us we reap what we sow. We harvest what we plant. If we plant negativity in our lives, guess what we will harvest?
- In other words, complaining will always make the situation worse.

Just because I gave you 5 reasons why we should not allow a complaining negative attitude reside in us doesn't mean this is easy. I find myself slipping into this all the time. We are emotional beings and sometimes these emotions are hard to manage. I am as guilty as the next person in this struggle. (explain)

Since complaining does not take any responsibility, we who follow Jesus do take responsibility for our actions and attitudes.

How Do We Resist Negativity

Now that we understand why this is such a big deal, maybe our motivation to grow in this area is heightened? How can we resist negativity and grow in gratitude?

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1. Limit exposure to the negative where you can

Prov. 4:23 “Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life.” (NLT)

- It is imperative we all learn to do this better. There are times I simply need to guard my heart better from all the exposure to the negative. We can't get away from all of it but we can make some better choices.
- Limit exposure to social media and news. All the research out there indicates that the more you are exposed to social media the worse it makes you feel. Maybe it's time to limit the exposure.
- For me, the news has the same impact on my heart. I simply have to take it in small doses.
- I also limit my exposure to negative people. I simply cannot be around negative people. Why? They suck the life out of me. They suck the joy out of me. Life is too short and too hard without being around people like this.
- Why do you want to be known as a negative person? Why would you ever want someone to think this way about you because of your negativity? Positive people are relational magnets.

2. Increase exposure to what is good

*II Tim. 2:22 “Run from anything that stimulates youthful lusts. Instead, **pursue** righteous living, faithfulness, love, and peace. Enjoy the companionship of those who call on the Lord with pure hearts.” (NLT)*

- We must be intentional pursuing the right things...pursuing things that help us grow and follow Jesus. We don't just limit exposure to the negative, we increase exposure in the positive. We literally pursue certain things.
- Like what?
 - Pursue positive people who are trying to follow Jesus
 - Pursue ministry that fulfills your SHAPE
 - Pursue meeting tangible needs. (It just makes you feel good.) – explain – Living a self-centered life will make you unhappy and negative.
 - Pursue an understanding on what is good and right that is taking place.
 - Sometimes I just get out of my office and walk through this building reminding myself what is taking place and the journey Jesus has been taking us on.

3. Pray through your difficulties

Phil. 4:6-7 “Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. ⁷ Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.” (NLT)

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- Worry, anxiety and complaining go hand in hand. Prayer is the antidote to this dilemma. We don't complain our way through hardship. We pray our way through it.
- Prayer has been is still is the single greatest influence on my attitude. I cannot control the circumstances but I can control how much I pray and depend on God.
- Prayer is my faith response to all the negative I see and experience in this life. Prayer is how I demonstrate I am trusting and following Jesus.
- One of the reasons for our prayer goal as a church. Our response to the overwhelming need around us is to pray.

4. See circumstances through the eyes of faith

- This is something Jesus desires in every follower. As we follow and grow in our relationship with Jesus, we develop faith lenses that help us see life through. We see hardship / circumstances / difficulty through the eyes of faith.
- Remember that complaining is a faithless response. When we have the eyes of faith, we see life through the good character of God and through the perfect word of God. God's character and God's word becomes our filter. This is why King David could write these words.

Ps. 119:143 "As pressure and stress bear down on me, I find joy in your commands." (NLT)

- This is why the word of God is so vital in helping grow in gratitude. The word of God creates the lens of faith in us. When hardships come, I cling to the promises of God's word. They are my hope. They are my attitude.
- Here is yet another reason to read God's word every day.

5. Choose your attitude every day

I Thess. 5:18 "Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus." (NLT)

- Being thankful is a choice not a result of circumstances. Choosing a thankful attitude is God's will for our lives. Growing in gratitude is what God desires in all of us.
- It's not always an easy choice, yet it is a choice none the less. Please do not let the circumstances or hardship determine your attitude. We grow in gratitude by trusting Jesus with this choice every day asking for His help.
- Here is a handout I want to leave you with. "The Importance of Attitude" – Read

Resisting negativity will never be an easy thing. Because we are surrounded by so much of it, we must be intentional not allowing the negativity to define us. How is Jesus asking you to grow in this? How can you work on this issue this month? With thanksgiving in the month of November, maybe we can make this the month of gratitude?

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