

Question: There's a lot of griping and complaining among people I know, even among some Christians. What do you think Jesus would do about this problem?

Although grumbling (griping) and complaining are often synonymous, it is possible to make a distinction between them. When there is a legitimate reason for complaint about what is happening in life, it is appropriate that people of faith would cry out to the Lord. In the midst of his terrible and unexplained suffering, Job cried out: "Therefore I will not keep silent; I will speak out in the anguish of my spirit, I will complain in the bitterness of my soul" (Job 7:11; cf. Job 7:13; 9:27; 21:4; 23:2). Answering Job from out of the storm, God questioned Job's ability to comprehend his ways. But God never rebuked Job for complaining.

In a similar way, David cried out in a moment of loneliness and fear, saying: "I cry aloud to the LORD; I lift up my voice to the LORD for mercy. I pour out my complaint before him; before him I tell my trouble" (Psalm 142:1-2). To complain to the Lord in times of suffering, danger or distress means we trust in him as the one who cares for us and who can actually do something about what is happening.

On the other hand, grumbling indicates a lack of faith in the way God manages our world. For example, when the Israelites grumbled against the Lord while on the way to the Promised Land, God became angry and turned them back into the wilderness for forty years (Numbers 11 & 14). Experiencing God's loving protection and provision of daily manna for bread was not enough for them. Instead, we are told: "The rabble with them began to crave other food, and again the Israelites started wailing and said, 'If only we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost-- also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic'" (Numbers 11:4-5).

Referring to the grumbling of the Israelites, the New Testament warns: "And do not grumble, as some of them did-- and were killed by the destroying angel. These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come" (1 Corinthians 10:10-11). In a letter to another group of Christians, the writer 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” (Philippians 2:14-15).

I believe we can conclude from the above that there can be legitimate reasons to cry out for mercy and help to God or to those in positions of responsibility. To take these complaints to the Lord reflects a degree of faith in him. But to engage in meaningless grumbling, murmuring or griping reflects a lack of faith in God’s sovereign control over the world.

What can you do about grumblers and complainers? Begin by patiently listening to determine if there is a legitimate reason for complaint. If so, then do what you can to help with the problem. At least you can pray with the person and offer encouragement. But be careful that you do not become infected by the spirit of meaningless grumbling. Demonstrate a trust in God’s power and wisdom by your words and life. As opportunities come, speak to the grumblers about the life of faith, hope and joy in Christ Jesus our Lord. Jesus put it this way, “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

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