

N U R T U R E  
**FAITH**  
with  
Dr. W. Douglas Hood, Jr.

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Don't Complain!

**READ:** Exodus 16:2, 8b (Common English Bible)

*“The whole Israelite community complained against Moses and Aaron in the desert. ‘Who are we? Your complaints aren’t against us but against the Lord.’”*

**MEDITATE:**

Lowell Russell, formerly Executive Secretary and Director of the National Presbyterian Church and Center, Washington, D.C., once shared a lesson he learned from an attorney – a series of propositions that the attorney had written down on paper and kept with him at all times. There were three: “Never tell anyone how much you have to do. Never speak of your problems, your difficulties. Never talk about your disappointments.” In other words, he was saying to himself, “Don’t complain!”<sup>1</sup>

My friend and mentor, Arthur Caliandro, who followed Norman Vincent Peale as the senior pastor of Marble Collegiate Church in New York City, once shared with me his conviction that every pastor would be wise to preach on forgiveness at least three times a year. Caliandro believed that the single greatest obstacle to obtaining full Christian maturity was our difficulty with forgiveness. Any failure to forgive results in a weight that must be carried – by both the injured and the one who caused the injury. For Caliandro, the greatest burden was carried by the one who failed to forgive. Over time, the accumulation of “transgressions” that remain unforgiven results in stagnation of our spiritual growth. Christian growth isn’t possible without the extravagant practice of forgiveness as Christ forgives us.

Perhaps my friend is correct. Yet, I contend that another hindrance to our growth as Christians is our propensity to complain. Here, in the Book of Exodus, the whole Israelite community complained against Moses and Aaron in the desert. Food was scarce, the days in the desert were hot and the journey through the desert seemed as though it would never end. Life back in Egypt as slaves seemed to present a better quality of life than a trek through the desert! So, the whole Israelite community complained.

Moses and Aaron’s response seems to suggest the uselessness of negative thinking and speaking. Yes, the days in the desert were difficult. Discouragement is to be expected. But time and energy “moaning and groaning” provided no relief. So Moses and Aaron deflected the complaints; redirected the complaints made against them to God. It was the exercise of extraordinary leadership. That is because it forced upon the Israelite people the absolute necessity to pay attention to God, to “make their complaint” before God and then “to listen” for how God would respond. It is then that Moses and Aaron fulfilled their primary call to spiritual leadership – beginning the conversation between God’s people and God. That is where spiritual growth occurs.

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<sup>1</sup>Lowell Russell, “The Hard Rut of Complaining,” **Best Sermons, Volume X**. (New York: Trident Press, 1968), 79.

