

# INTRODUCTION

It snows a lot in February.

It wasn't always this way. Not for me, anyway.

Up until five years ago, I lived in Southern California, which is far more sunny than it is snowy. As you might imagine, it's been an adjustment. In Southern California, things never really slow down. People are able to do all the things they want to do all year round because the weather never prevents them from doing so.

Ohio is different, of course. We have these things called seasons; these beautiful canopies of weather that descend upon us to create a rich and challenging diversity for us to live our lives under during the year. In this way, the seasons tend to mirror the lives God has given us, lives that include light and darkness, warmth and coldness, brightness and starkness.

As I write, the landscape is covered in a blanket of snow. Every couple of days it seems like another snowfall emerges, delaying spring yet another hour, another day. The trees are slender and bare. The temperature is frosty, usually below ten degrees. Some days, it feels claustrophobic and many of us start feeling isolated. There are times when some of us can't remember the last time we saw the sun. Some people can become despondent.

"I'm so tired of this snow."

"I hate the winter."

"It depresses me."

## STOP YOUR COMPLAINING

“I told my wife that I don’t know if I can take another year of the cold.”

It seems like I hear these same complaints every year. At which point I always think, it’s not like we didn’t know this was coming, right? It’s not like Ohio used to be next to Texas and God decided to pack it up one year and relocate it to the Northeast. No, every year at approximately the same time, this white powdery stuff called snow falls from the heavens onto the ground of Ohio. Yet, all sarcasm aside, we complain about it just like the Israelites complained about the manna that came from heaven every morning to feed their families. We don’t see snow as this beautiful thing that God created and lets fall in certain regions of the world where it gets cold enough to come down. Instead, we complain.

But a funny thing happens every year when March and April arrive. It stops snowing. The sun emerges. The temperatures start rising. And all around, the hills and trees turn the most vibrant, beautiful shades of green you’ve ever seen. But it didn’t just happen. There’s a reason why the colors are so deep and the landscape so rich. It’s the snow. That’s what we forget.

And isn’t that the very definition of complaining? It’s forgetfulness. It’s forgetting who God is. That He’s good, that He’s jealous for His glory and that because of who He is, everything He does will always be for our good and His glory. This is a book to warn us about a not-often-talked-about sin that can have deep and dramatic consequences in the life of the Christian. It’s a sin that stifles our communication with God, chips away at the joy of our salvation in Christ and tempts others to sin and doubt the grace of God who has graciously given us all things (see Rom. 8:32). Let us continue to remember this great grace as we seek to have hearts that overflow with gratefulness rather than grumbling.

# PART 1

---

## LOCATING COMPLAINING



# 1

## THE ART OF COMPLAINING

*“For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.”*

Romans 1:21

*“YOU’RE going to write a book on complaining?  
I’d like to read THAT.”*

—Melissa Martin, a.k.a my wife

**B**y way of introduction, let me be as straight as possible with you by admitting something that anyone who’s known me for even a short amount of time would know: I’m a complainer. What I mean is, I grumble and whine about things that don’t go my way. If you talk to my wife Melissa, she’ll tell you I have a reputation (hopefully a diminishing one, by God’s grace) for ranting and raving about things that annoy me and get easily under my skin. There have been countless moments when I roll my eyes widely and sigh loudly when situations don’t pan out the way I want them to pan out, which seems to happen a lot, by the way. Depending on the day, I can be a glass-half-empty-not-super-fun-to-be-around kind of a guy. And believe me when I tell you that it wasn’t super fun writing that last sentence.

## STOP YOUR COMPLAINING

Complaining is more than just a cute adjective to describe us on our bad days. In all of its various forms and functions it's become a lifestyle, a way of existence and a daily routine that is as natural to us as breathing, walking and eating. It's built into the foundation of our communication, bridging cultures together as one of the few ways we know how to relate to one another. Comedians build careers on it, car salesmen sell wheels with it, while the rest of us hone our skill at it like a veritable art form. It informs casual conversations with friends and intimate exchanges with loved ones. Complaining is not something we do, it's who we are on almost every micro and macro level imaginable. It's settled itself into the framework of our subconscious thoughts and saturates the sentences of our conscious talk. I'll go so far to say that without complaining, we'd probably lack the engine we have to drive the number of status updates on Facebook and Twitter into the stratosphere.

It can even be hereditary, in a sense.

I was born into a family of complainers. It was part of our dialogue, our humor and our way of relating to one another. When there was nothing to talk about and we were trying to avoid confrontation, complaining kept us from being too transparent and vulnerable, while still fooling us into thinking that we were actually sharing our hearts and pleading for a little empathy from the other person. My dad was known as the patriarch complainer of the Family Martin. Anytime something didn't go his way—the Dodgers lost the game, the Angels won the game, the food was cold, it rained after he washed his vehicle, he lost the Monopoly tournament, got stuck behind a slow driver or didn't get the good parking spot—he let the world, or in our case, the family, know that he was the one who always got the bad breaks. Interestingly

enough, people who knew my dad well kind of loved this about him, and they sort of had to, because it was who he was.

One of the other inherent dangers of complaining is that we don't even realize we do it. It's become such a normal part of the directional flow and tonal shape of our conversations that nobody even notices.

And you know the worst part about it? Whether we realize we're doing it or not, we actually love it. It's addictive. It feeds upon itself, always wanting more and never getting enough. Complaining fuels an insatiable machine of moving parts inside our hearts that seeks to verbally capitalize on our endless state of discontentment.

Ever had a casual conversation that went something like this?

"Nice weather we're having, huh?"

"Yeah, it's beautiful."

"Well, it should be after the winter we had this year."

"No kidding."

"I'm sure there's a thunderstorm on the horizon to remind us it won't be this nice forever."

"Nothing lasts forever, that's for sure."

"This weather sure won't."

You see what happened there? A light conversation about the loveliness of the weather turned cynical and unlovely within seconds.

Here's another conversation I had at Best Buy as I made my way up to the counter to make a purchase.

"How's it going?" I asked the girl at the register while I fumbled for my wallet.

"Oh, you know, just living the dream," she replied, practically rolling her eyes at what was apparently a grossly insulting question.

## STOP YOUR COMPLAINING

Am I making a too big of a deal over a couple of seemingly irrelevant conversations? I'd say yes if these were simply a couple of rare, isolated exchanges that occasionally dropped into an ocean of fruitful discussions, but they're not.

### **What Is It Really?**

"So what's the problem here?" you're thinking. "I get it, we're a nation of ingrates, a generation of grumblers, a massive collection of malcontents. Tell me something I don't know," you say. The problem, of course, is that this is a problem with deep roots that travel deep into the soil of our hearts. Complaining is sneaky and subtle, which is what makes it so poisonous for the Christian.

So if it truly is a slow poison in the spiritual veins of believers, how do we extract it and make sure it has no place in our lives? That is the heart of the question we want to ask, and for which we want to find biblical answers and practical solutions.

First things first though. Although complaining is subtle and may not sound serious enough to deserve an entire (though thankfully short) book written about it, the reality is that God calls complaining a sin. And all of our sins were serious enough for God to send His Son to die a costly death in order to pay for them all.

Looking back at the Old Testament, there were some serious repercussions for the children of Israel when they complained against the Lord.

In the book of Numbers, the Lord says to Moses, "How long will this people despise me? How long will they not believe in me in spite of all the signs I have done among them? I will strike them with the pestilence and disinherit them, and I will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they" (14:11-12).

Later in the chapter, the Lord again asks the question, "How long shall this wicked congregation grumble against me?" (14:27).