
Spiritual Formation Part 13

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James 5: 7-12

Do not Grumble!

Do you like to complain? How does God feel about that? He clearly asks us to do not, as in *do not be complaining*. Don't criticize, find fault, be irritable or argumentative, or whine to fellow believers—and definitely not to unbelievers. All that does is bring stress and misery. Yet, when we look to Him, our trust becomes complete. Our hope is fulfilled, and, ultimately, there is nothing about which to complain. Yet, James still makes the case that we can and are called on to speak against what is wrong, such as oppression. It is our hostile orations that are in question (James 5:1-6)!

- *Grumble* refers back to James 4:11-12. This means we are called to patience toward other Christians as well as to non-Christians.
- *The Judge* means “imminence” and “last days,” and is a reference to Christ's second coming and the judgment (Rom. 13:12; Heb. 10:25; 1 Pet. 4:7; Rev. 22:20). This can also convey the idea that our life is short and our time to judgment even shorter, so we need to “wise up” in Him.
- *Standing at the door*. Christ's return is imminent, not necessarily in timing but in His actual presence amongst us. Whatever we face, it is only for a season and then it will be over! Our hope is our relationship in Him and in His return to come, not in what is going on around us.

We are called to speak out against injustice. You may wish to vent your discontent, but make sure you do not blow it out of proportion or just wallow in it for self-pity's sake. Complaining serves only to stir the discords of strife, increase stress, irritate others, and place the focus where it is not to be. There are times to get things off your chest, but it must be to actually get it off, not to keep poking at it so the stress sticks around and consumes you, drawing you away from Christ as Lord. When overwhelmed, seek a pastor or counselor to help you through it, but don't turn it into a problem that has no resolution. He is our resolution, our hope, our promise fulfilled. He is at the door; let Him in (Rev. 3:8, 20)

James points us to the prophets of the OT as examples of faith in the midst of extreme adversity. Job was a great comfort to those who were in captivity. These examples help us to see the hope we have in Him, and give us perseverance and patience.

- *The prophets* refers to Isaiah and Jeremiah as the main prophets, and the others as “minor.” Most faced serious persecution from their own people who refused to

heed God's call and warnings, focusing on their desires and transgressions instead. The point is that we can have endurance! When we preach or model Christ, we, too, may face great persecution; if so, we are in good company!

- *Perseverance of Job* means endurance, as Job went through great sufferings, and he persevered. James uses this to communicate encouragement for our *staying power*, as in “you can do it too!” When God seems far away and no one seems to care about injustice or your concerns, God is still there caring! He will vindicate you and care for you!

We can honor people who have been triumphant in suffering because it is encouraging and equipping to us. If they can do it, then so can we—so can you! Whatever may be seeking to derail your faith or seeking to take you off God's path, be it spiritual warfare, toxic family members, disgruntled work situations, or a debilitating illness, we can carry on because He appropriates us for a purpose; He carries us through!

Do not swear! That is, as James said before, to keep our tongue under control. This time, the focus is on swearing, as in coarse language and paying homage to what is irreverent or irrelevant. When we swear to an oath that is not in Him, it is displeasing to Him. It is distracting from our call, and blatant sin! How we use our tongue will show how we have cultivated our heart! James speaks more on how to do this in verse 13, *to pray!*

- *Above all* is an emphatic expression meaning “this is priority;” God calls us to godliness, especially with our behaviors and words!
- *Swear...oaths*. In the Greek, *swear* means to grasp something hard for support. Here, it refers to a verbal agreement witnessed by divine intervention or an object that represents God. An example would be swearing by the temple that manipulates God as a witness to our position, promises, and dealings (Gen. 24: 1-9; Ezra 10:5; Neh. 5:12; Acts 23:12; Heb. 6:13-17). They would go through these long, elaborate oaths, then not live up to them. The OT Law forbids irreverent oaths, especially the misuse of God's name. It beaks the third commandment (Ex. 20:7; Lev. 19:12; Num. 30:2; Duet. 5:11; 6:3; 22:21-33)!
- *Yes be yes*. As Christians, with Christ living in us, we need not make any oaths as our word should indicate our faith. Our word is our bond; it must be trusted. So, do not be a deceiver or a manipulator! James and Jesus are not prohibiting all oaths; rather, it is for us to make very sure that whatever we do, we go by our word, rooted in His foremost precepts, so our behaviors are foremost and honest, especially since God is our witness. *Let your yes be yes*, not saying “let God strike with lightning if I do not”... (Matt. 5: 33-37).

Do you sow the right seeds—the seeds of faith and devotion to our Lord, with absolute trust and obedience in Him? If not, why not? Because, if our purpose in life is

not lined up to His, we will only have broken circumstances and directionless pursuits that lead to emptiness and despair! When we do sow the right seed, we are prepared to weather the storms of life, because our roots are deep in our Lord Jesus Christ; our identity is in Him, and our hope looks to Him. The storm-tossed seas will massage us and not break us; our anchor in Him will keep us steady. The mooring ropes to tie us to His anchor are in our hands. He gives us the boat, the rope, and the anchor; we still have to tie them to one another, which we do as we grow in Him.

Questions

1. Do you like to complain? How does God feel about that?
2. How is it that when we do sow the right seed, we are prepared to weather the storms of life, because our roots are deep in our Lord Jesus Christ and our identity is in Him?
3. What would you look like if this attitude of not complaining permeated your life?
4. The call is clear; so, why do we still like to complain? What can we do about it?
5. How can being totally dependent on God assist you in your spiritual growth?
6. What can you do to help your trust and obedience in Christ grow?
7. When God seems far away and no one seems to care about injustice or of your concerns, how are you helped through it, knowing that God is still there—caring, and will vindicate and care for you?
8. Why, as Christians, do we not need to make any oaths?
9. How is your word an indicator of your faith? What happens when a Christian's word is not trusted?
10. Do not grumble—as in, do not be complaining, so what can you do about this? What can your church do to inspire and teach this precept?