



Spiritual Disciplines Toolbox

05 Complaining

“Do everything without complaining or arguing.”
— Philipians 2:14

What are Spiritual Disciplines?

At some point we all get stale, stuck, or start searching for more. Most often all we need is the right tool to break through in our relationship with God. Spiritual disciplines are the biblical tools Christians have been using for centuries to draw closer to God. We use the disciplines because we need help, not because we are so holy. Experiment with the tools to find out what helps you connect with God the best.

What is Complaining all about?

God hates complaining. Numbers 11:1 says, “And the people complained in the hearing of the LORD about their misfortunes, and when the LORD heard it, His anger was kindled, and the fire of the LORD burned among them and consumed some outlying parts of the camp.” Elsewhere, God rebukes and punishes groups of complainers (see Num. 14 & 17). Because God runs the universe, He takes your complaints about life personally. Complaining to the crowd shows a lack of faith.

God invites complaining. In Psalm 142:2 David says, “I pour out my complaint before Him; I tell my trouble before Him.” David complains to God, and there is no fire, no rebuke, and no punishment. In other places, complaining is common and acceptable (see Ps. 55, Job 7:11). Complaining to the King shows faith.

God punished complaining and worked with others through their complaints. So not all complaining is wrong. What’s the difference between acceptable and unacceptable complaining? God hates when we complain among ourselves like He doesn’t exist and loves it when we trust Him enough to bring our dissatisfaction and discomfort to Him.

Where do I start?

Tell God. Sometimes we hold back from expressing our deepest and truest thoughts and emotions to God. It's silly because God knows our every thought (Ps. 139:1-4). So don't try to sound pretty or tell God what you think He wants to hear. He can handle the truth. Just tell Him what distresses you.

What other ways can I use this tool?

Lament. The Psalms are the gut-honest expressions of God's people. There is one type of Psalm that out-numbers all the others: the lament. Laments are cries of distress to the Lord. There is a right way to voice your complaint to God. Write your own lament by following the pattern found in the Psalms. First, address your lament to God. Second, honestly and specifically name the situation that is distressing you. Third, ask God to do something about your situation. Fourth, express your trust that God will do what is best (based on His character or track record). Note—Psalms 26, 55, 130, and 142 are laments.

Express Gratitude. Complaining erupts from what we are thinking (see Luke 6:45). Reverse the negative soundtrack of your thoughts by capturing what you are most grateful for in a list. It helps to do this throughout an entire day. Keep your eyes peeled for all the blessings you have received. Then turn that list into a praise-filled prayer time. You'll find that thanking God for what you have can change your attitude about what you don't have right now (Ps. 107:1, 1 Tim. 6:6).

Give Compliments. Instead of focusing on what is not going right, focus on what others are getting right. Get outside of your problems by pointing out what you appreciate about the people around you. Let your words bring life instead of draining it away (Eph. 4:29). Try to compliment every person in your family or at your job today.

“Evening and morning and at noon I will utter my complaint and moan,
and He hears my voice.”

— Psalm 55:17