

Why Count Your Blessings When You Can Complain?! (Part 2)

by Ron R. Ritchie

Some friends and I went out to dinner on Thursday night last, and my friends decided to count all the times they complained last week. They kept pointing at one another, saying, "You're complaining, you're complaining." They were amazed at how many times they got involved in trying to take over the work of our sovereign God and making it theirs.

The Scriptures have been given to us to set us free from the desire to complain. Last week we saw that complaining was to feel pain, grief or discontent over people, things and events. We discovered that when we complain, what we are doing is telling God that he is not running the world properly. We are saying that we would like to take charge of everything ourselves; we are saying that this world is a mess, and somebody has got to complain or we will never get it back on the right track, so why shouldn't God's people complain day in and day out?

David, the psalmist, says there are a lot of reasons why God's people should not complain, and he gives us the cure for a complaining spirit in Psalm 103. First, David says we are to bless the Lord. We should talk to ourselves and evaluate who we are in light of who God is. We should evaluate the blessings he has brought into our lives, remind ourselves about them, and then bless the Lord because of all his benefits. We need to rejoice over God's wonderful love for us and his incredible patience with us.

Dante's Inferno describes several different levels of hell which get worse as they get deeper. As a boy, I thought that if God would just get me out of hell, if he would save me from that kind of hell, I would be pleased with him. Well, one of God's benefits is that through Jesus Christ he has saved me from hell. But that's not all. He gave me a new life, a new heart, a whole new value system. He gave me the Holy Spirit, he gave me spiritual gifts, he gave me a ministry, an ambassadorship, and a new passport. I have total access to God at all times as a child with his father.

David says that the cure for a complaining spirit is not to forget the benefits of God. One of the best aids to not forgetting his benefits is to write them down. I admire people who carry notebooks so that they can write down all the blessings of God in their lives. That is a marvelous thing to do, because when people start to get depressed, they can open their notebooks and review those blessings, then it's hard to complain. So the first thing David says is, "I want you to bless the Lord O my soul and forget none of his benefits." Then he lists for us three cures for a complaining spirit. First, he reminds us of the Lord's personal blessings (verses 3-5); then he reminds us of the Lord's righteous deeds (verses 6 and 7); and then he reminds us of the Lord's gracious and loving nature (verses 8- 12).

In this section today, David continues his cure for a complaining spirit by reminding us of the Lord's eternal view of man (verses 13 through 18), and then the reminder of the Lord's sovereign rule over all of us (verses 19 through 22).

4.The Reminder Of The Lord's Eternal View Of Man (verses 13-18)

This breaks down into three sections. First, David says God knows that we are dust.

1. He Knows We Are But Dust (verses 13-14):

**Just as a father has compassion on his children,
So the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him.
For He Himself knows our frame;**

He is mindful that we are but dust.

Why does a father have compassion (or mercy) on his own children. As a father, one of the reasons I have compassion on my children is because, as I watch them grow up, I realize that they don't have all the resources I have at this time in my life; they don't have the knowledge, the experience and the wisdom that I have accumulated over the years. I can't ask my 15--year--old to walk alongside me with the maturity of a 48--year--old. There are times when we need to extend mercy, not because what our children did was right, but because they need compassion even though what they did was wrong. David says that this Father has compassion, "as a father has compassion on his children." The psalmist is assuming that any father who has a right relationship with his children will be able to extend compassion toward them from time to time.

About two years ago my older son, Ron, called me during school hours. He said, "Dad, I wonder if you could come down to the school?" I said, "Sure. What's going on?" He said, "I tailgated another student's car and the guy just stopped dead in front of me." Wait a minute, I thought, I helped him get that car; some friends helped too. What about my reputation? What about my insurance rates going up? Doesn't he know better? What happened to that great lecture we had around the table one evening about not driving too close to other cars?

The Lord has more compassion for us than we have for ourselves

As I drove to the school, God said, "On the way I would like to run some old movies for you. Now your son wrecked his car, but at least it was his car. The movie I want to show you is about the car you stole and wrecked." I said, "No, Lord, do we have to bring up that dead rabbit?" (There is nothing worse than digging up a dead rabbit.) The Lord said, "With the attitude you have now, yes, I want to dig up that dead rabbit." (Doesn't God talk to you like that?) So all the way down I'm going over in my mind, "Oh boy, that's right, when I was 16 I stole a car." I went out with a bunch of guys and raced the car down a dirt road. Then a woman pulled out in front of me and I put that car into a tree at 70 miles an hour. All four of us went through the windshield, landing in the middle of a stream. I remembered the tender mercy that was shown to me by a lot of people during those days.

When I got to the school I couldn't wait to see, first, if my son was alive. I was so grateful to see that he was. I was grateful too to see that his attitude was one of, "I don't know what happened, Dad. He just stopped." I was so thankful to see his humility that all I could do was show compassion. On the way back home I said to him, "Do you want to see an old movie the Lord just showed me? I've already seen it but I don't mind watching it with you. "

"As a father has compassion on his children, so our Lord has compassion on those who fear him." I'm convinced the Lord has way more compassion for us than we have for ourselves. We are our own worst enemy. We beat ourselves to death with how we have failed God, how we have failed ourselves and how we fail everybody else. We have no compassion for ourselves; we don't allow mercy to flow. We have no sense of where we are in the process of growing up in Christ.

God does not want us to be a bunch of cloned robots who pass out tracts, robots without any feeling or any history of failure. God works with men and women who show mercy because God has shown mercy to them. David is saying to, the Israelites, "Our God has compassion on those who fear him. He is not like the foreign gods of old who wiped you out when you messed up or demanded you sacrifice your child in the fire Our God shows mercy because he is our Father.

In Deuteronomy 32, Moses wrote a song to the children of Israel. It is a song of praise to their faithful heavenly Father, but it is also a warning not to forsake his ways. Deuteronomy 32:

**The Rock! His work is perfect,
For all His ways are just;
A God of faithfulness and without injustice,
Righteous and upright is He . . .
Is not He your Father who has bought you?**

**He has made you and established you . . .
He found you in a desert land,
And in the howling waste of a wilderness;
He encircled him, He cared for him,
He guarded him as the pupil of His eye.
Like an eagle that stirs up its nest,
That hovers over its young He spread His wings and caught them [You]
He carried them [you] on His pinions [feathers].**

Our God is like a good father. Isaiah describes him this, way,

**Thou, O Lord, art our Father,
Our Redeemer from of old is Thy name. (Isaiah 63: 16)**

You and I have the incredible privilege of knowing the God of the universe, the one who cried out, "Let there be light," and there was light, the one who said, "Let us make man in our own image and likeness," and man came into being, the one who said, "Let us make a helpmate for him," and it was so. Because we have a relationship with Jesus Christ we can call that God Father, Daddy, Abba.

David says that the Heavenly Father has compassion on those who fear him. The children of God are those who acknowledge and accept Yahweh as God. (David will give more detail in verse 18.) Those who understand God's love and graciousness, those who have come to him, who have honored him, given thanks to him and accepted him by faith, they are the ones who "fear" God. Malachi 3 says that the people who fear God desire to serve him.

David says that God shows compassion to those who fear him because, "He Himself knows our frame; He is mindful that we are but dust." I have a desk in my home which seems to attract a lot of dust. Sometimes I wonder if that dust is part of some of my friends who have passed on. I always look on it as if it were somebody. Just think, with all our ego and our arrogance, all our taking care of ourselves, combing our hair, etc. that what we are actually doing is grooming dust! That's not very exciting, is it? But that's who we are until God puts within us his Spirit and we become alive. He is mindful that we are dust so he shows us compassion even when we do not show compassion for ourselves.

This is how Isaiah describes us:

But now, O Lord, Thou art our Father, We are the clay, and Thou our potter; And all of us are the work of Thy hand. (Isa. 64:8)

We are to remember that God is our Father; he is the potter and we are the clay. We are the work of his hand, and part of his work is to make us his children so that he can express his life through the pile of dust of which we are made.

While visiting Jerusalem last year, I saw a little three--year--old Jewish boy crying, "Abbe, Abba." He was lost and he was crying out for his daddy. Then, out of the forest of legs and sandals which was all the little boy could see, his father called to him. The boy ran and jumped up into his father's arms, crying, "Abbe, Abba." You could read, "That's my boy," in the father's eyes. Now that is what our Heavenly Father wants from us. He wants us to cry, "Abba`" because compassion is part of his character.

David now switches from talking about those who fear God to those who do not know God.

2. He Knows That Man's Days Are Like Grass (verses 15-16)

As for man, his days are like grass; As a flower of the field, so he flourishes. When the wind has passed over it, it is no more; And its place acknowledges it no longer.

This is man in all of his sin, rebellion, and arrogance. This is man who does not thank God or acknowledge him, but exchanges the truth for a lie. (Rom. 1:18-32) David says this man is like grass that appears,

flourishes like a flower, and then is no more. We all know people who came into our lives like flowers. The perfume from their lives was sweet to us. But, David says, man without God is like the grass which dies when the hot desert winds blow over it, so that even its own place no longer acknowledges it.

Isn't it amazing that to this God, this loving Heavenly Father who desires to give us his love, his compassion and his forgiveness, this God who is willing to heal all our diseases, who wants to crown us with lovingkindness, who wants to give us our youth back, who wants to fill our lives with satisfaction, our response is, "Get out of here"? What we are saying is, "I want to flourish like the grass; I want to bloom like the flower. I can make it on my own; I can live my life myself." But God says, "No, there are two kinds of wind: one produces death and one produces life. The wind of the Sinai desert produces death, while the wind of the Spirit will produce life. Accept the wind of the Holy Spirit or you will die in your sins." (John 3:1-8) How many people around you are like the grass, like the flowers? They are beautiful, but they are not going to last unless they feel the wind of the Spirit, "For that which is born of flesh is flesh, but that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." Unless their dust acknowledges that it must receive the Spirit of God for life, it will be like the grass and the flowers; it will pass away.

"And its place acknowledges it no longer" (verse 16), is an interesting phrase. Recently I have been reading "Monty," a biography of the great Field--Marshal of World War 1. Writing about some of the battles of World War 1, he says that in the Battle of Somme alone, the British alone had between 105,000 and 120,000 casualties. But today, the writer says, those battlefields are covered in clover. Its own place does not even acknowledge the battle.

When my father died in 1954, his body was cremated. We went down to the Delaware River in Pennsylvania and they shook his ashes across the river. Now, its place acknowledges it no more." He is gone, having lived his whole life telling God, "Leave me alone." There is some indication that at the very last moment he may have become a Christian, but I do not know. He really did go back to dust.

God, in his grace, is saying to some of you right now, "Are you going to be children of God who fear God, who want to serve him, who want a life that is filled with richness, or do you want to be like the grass and the flowers? They are beautiful for a season, but the season is so short. Look at the season of the Hollywood stars. Their books tell us of how they have come and gone. God in his grace is offering us much more.

David now goes on to draw a contrast between the everlasting Yahweh and mere man.

3. He Desires To Bless All Who Fear Him (verses 17-18)

But the lovingkindness of the Lord is from ever. lasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, And His righteousness to children's children, To those who keep His covenant, And who remember His precepts to do them.

I love the word, "but." Underline that word. "But" in this passage marks the difference between heaven and hell, between now and later. "But" offers sinful man hope beyond the grave, hope after the wind passes over him. Man does not have to settle for his hopeless condition because "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whosoever believeth on him would not perish but have everlasting life." Those who believe on him will not perish like the flower. "But God," who was rich in his mercy, while we were yet sinners extended his love toward us and made us alive in Christ Jesus. What hope God offers to all of us! We can experience eternal love right now because we have eternal life right now, and our physical death will not interrupt that eternal love. "But the lovingkindness of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him."

Then, David says, "His righteousness to children's children." God offers his wholeness and his acceptance and his richness to all who accept him by faith, all who see him as he really is, all who want him to be Lord and Savior of their lives. And God offers his righteousness to every one of our children, generation after generation after generation. Now while everyone who accepts Jesus Christ by faith receives the righteousness, the richness of life, the wholeness, the sense of worth, the joy and the peace that only God can give, yet God has no spiritual grandchildren. Every generation must make their own decision. As much as you hope and pray

that somehow your righteousness will rub off on your children, it won't. What will rub *off* is the model of righteousness of what Christ has done for you. Each child must face that decision himself. That is hard for parents to accept. We think, "After all, I was good in my generation; I received Jesus. Why aren't my kids Christians?" But they have to make that decision for themselves. God loves your children as much as you do--in fact, he loves them much more, and he has much more compassion for them than you do--and he is willing to save them if they will come to a knowledge of him by faith.

When my boy was about five years old he and his mother and I used to pray every night, "Dear Jesus, one day will you come into my heart, please?" We prayed that prayer for about a year. One night we went into the room and prayed, "Dear Jesus would you please come into my heart soon," and my son said, "Daddy, we don't have to pray that any more. He's come into my heart." Well, I didn't believe him. About a month went by, and I thought I would sneak that one in again. So I said, "Dear Jesus, please come into Roddy's heart." He said, "Daddy, I told you. He's in." We need to keep believing that when God hears our voice he will come in. I do not care how small the voice, he will come in. He only needs the voice of a child and he will come into your life and give you blessings beyond anything you could ask or think.

David continues (verse 18), "To those who keep His covenant, and to remember his precepts to do them." In the Old Testament, of course, this referred to the covenant God made with Abraham, with Moses and with David. In the New Testament it is the new covenant; it is men and women who, through the power of the Holy Spirit, desire to trust God for everything.

And we must "remember his precepts to do them." It is one thing to know the Word of God, but quite another thing to have a lifestyle of doing the Word of God. It is one thing to see your brother starving; it is another thing to get involved in feeding him. We are to live a lifestyle of dependence upon the Holy Spirit at work in us. That will show us how we are doing in our relationship with God.

5. The Reminder Of The Lord's Sovereign Rule Over All (verses 19-22)

David is excited over what he is discovering about God because he has counted all God's blessings. He has reminded himself that God forgives sins, heals diseases, he is forever taking us out of the pit, he crowns us with lovingkindness, he renews our strength, he is gracious, loving and kind. This is the God who talks to Moses and to Israel. This is our God who takes our sins and throws them as far as the east is from the west. This God has compassion on us like a father has compassion on his children. This God . . . David can't come up with enough praises for this God so he turns to the universe and says, "You angels. join the choir."

**The Lord has established His throne in the heavens;
And His sovereignty rules over all.
Bless the Lord, you His angels,
Mighty in strength, who perform His Word,
Obeying the voice of His word!
Bless the Lord, all you His hosts,
You who serve Him, doing His will.
Bless the Lord, all you works of His,
In all places of His dominion;
Bless the Lord, O my soul!**

David reminds the Israelites of God's sovereign rule over all. He says that God's heavenly kingdom is invisible, but it is so powerful that no power in the universe can defeat it. "Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool." (Isaiah 66:1)

Second, David says that God is in charge of everything that has ever been created--every person, every spiritual being, every situation, every circumstance that has ever come into this world. If we believe that God is in charge, let us give it all back to him and stop complaining. His word is final; he is working out his plan of redemption. I know that messes up our schedule, but that is what God is doing. In his plan of redemption he is calling people out of this world for his eternal honor and glory. If God were fair, everyone in this room, everyone in this world, past, present and future, would go straight to hell. "For all have sinned and come short

of the glory of God." But God in his mercy and his grace has called some of us out. Leave his plan alone. Stop worrying about it. Stop complaining about it. Everything done by this sovereign God is on schedule. It may hurt at times, it may leave you confused, it may from time to time cause you some anxiety, but the point is, God is at work. Please give back the right to rule to the only One who can rule this world. Leave it alone. Let us do only what we are told to do, and one of the things we are told to do is not to complain.

After David establishes who God is, he calls together the entire celestial household to unite with the children of God on earth in praise of Yahweh. "Bless the Lord, you His angels, mighty in strength, who perform His word, obeying the voice of His word!" Angels are spiritual beings, with mind, intellect and will, created before the foundation of the world to be servants of the living God. This room is filled with angels. We have these angels everywhere to guard us and protect us.

Angels have three characteristics. One, they are "mighty in strength." Think, for instance, of the time angels rescued Lot from Sodom and Gomorrah; angels were also used to punish Pharaoh and the Egyptians with plagues. Second, angels "perform his word." The Lord promised Israel he would send an angel to protect and guide them in Canaan. Hebrews 1:14 says, "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation."

Third, angels "obey his voice." Psalm 91 says: "For He will give His angels charge concerning you, to guard you in all your ways." Angels protect us from all kinds of dangers; they keep us from destroying ourselves. David calls on all these angels to sing with the children of God on earth to the honor and glory of God.

Then David calls on the hosts, "And bless the Lord, all you hosts, you who serve him and do his will." The hosts are the armies of countless spiritual beings who inhabit the heavenlies. They have names like, Chief Prince, ruling angels, guardian angels, seraphin and cherubim. David wants them to sing praises to the Lord.

"Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget none of his benefits"

Then, David says, "Everything that God has ever created, I want you to 'Bless the Lord, all you works of His, in all places of His dominion,' " "The Heavens are telling the glory of God and the firmament is declaring the works of his hands," says Psalm 19. The children of God on earth and the children of God in heaven together sing God's praises.

In this psalm, David says that the cure for a complaining spirit is to,

1. remind ourselves of the Lord's personal blessings;
2. remind ourselves of the Lord's righteous deeds;
3. remind ourselves of the Lord's gracious and loving nature;
4. remind ourselves of the Lord's eternal view of man;
5. remind ourselves of the Lord's sovereign rule over all.

"Bless the Lord O my soul and forget none of his benefits. "

Psalm 103:13-22
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