

Stop Complaining

Fairview Missionary Church | Angola, IN

Scripture: Acts 6:1-7, Philippians 2:14

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Philippians, chapter two, verse 14, is one of those verses in the Bible that you wish you could just take out your black magic marker and just cross it off, right? Just strike it from Scripture because it's so hard. It's a difficult verse for us. Philippians, chapter two, verse 14. The apostles, also Paul says, do everything without complaining or arguing. This is probably one of the most difficult verses in all of Scripture for us to live up, to do everything without complaining or arguing.

This is what makes us human, isn't it? The fact that we are good at complaining, we are good at arguing. And the truth of the matter is really, you can make a lot of money in your life if you are good at complaining and arguing, because they're called lawyers, right? Complaining and arguing. This is what we do. One would think that there would be a lot less complaining and arguing in the church because those of us that have confessed Jesus as our Savior, we now house the Holy Spirit.

So you would think that it's easier for us to overcome that, but it's not. If you've been in the church for any amount of time, you know that the amount of complaining and arguing that takes place in the church is at least equal to what you hear outside of the church, if not even greater. We all struggle with complaining and arguing. I have always said that my favorite part of my job is that I get to work with people.

I've also said that my least favorite part of my job is that I work with people, right? It's hard. Working with people is hard. We're all created different. Every single one of us is created different. We all had a different upbringing, which greatly affects our world view. The way through which the lens through which we view the world around us, where we were raised, affects our worldview and our perspective.

Whether you were raised here in the United States or somebody else, that certainly shapes the way you think when we were raised shapes our perspective. If you're a millennial or you're a baby boomer or whatever else that affects how you view the world. Who raised you shaped your perspective. Who your parents were, and certainly how you were raised shaped your perspective. And as a man of faith, I also certainly believe that all of us were created by God with different passions and gifts and abilities.

So what happens when you throw a bunch of people together who don't think alike and you ask them to get along or accomplish a task? What happens when you put a bunch of different people together and you ask them to accomplish something? You get a lot of chaos, which is obviously good for TV, because I've just described almost every reality TV show that exists, right? Throw a bunch of opposites together and ask them to accomplish something. It's really a great social experiment.

These producers that put on these reality shows intentionally pick people from different walks of life with different views and they throw them into a difficult situation. One of my favorite TV shows back from when I was in college that still airs today is this TV show called Survivor. All right, I love Survivor. I know some of you think I'm a dork for that, but I love it. I watch every episode of My Wife. We've done that ever since we were in college. And this is exactly what the producers of Survivor do.

They put completely opposite people together in a harsh environment where even your basic needs are not met. They force them to work together. But then also throw in the fact that there's some social game going on where you're voting people off and the winner gets a million dollars. It makes for good TV. It's a social experiment. You know what else you get in the show of Survivor? A lot of complaining and arguing. A lot of arguing amongst the people as they're trying to figure out.

It really is a microcosm of our society. You see, as believers who have welcomed the Holy Spirit into our lives, we are called, we are actually commanded to be different, but we don't always get it correct. If we are honest, every single person in here would say we don't always do a good job of not complaining and not arguing. Fortunately, we'll find we're not alone.

As we get back into the book of acts, as we continue our series, you will see that the early church had the same struggles that you and I have. They struggled with complaining, they struggled with arguing, they struggled with getting along. They were no different. There were hurt feelings in the church that was taking place. There were unfair practices in the church that were taking place. And yet the early disciples knew the importance of dealing with these relational struggles, these relational issues, right away.

Because if the enemy could divide them from within, he would cause a lot of damage. You see, up to this point, the enemy has been trying to attack the church from the outside, using the Roman leaders to persecute them, using the Jewish leaders to persecute these early church believers, these people that were proclaiming Jesus was the Messiah. But everything they did only actually caused the church to spread, caused it to grow.

And so the enemy is going to take a new tactic now. He's going to try to fight them from the inside. And this is exactly what he still does today. He still tries to divide us from the inside out. And so because of that, one of our foundational issues or truths that we have here at Fairview Missionary Church is this idea of unity over preference. If you've been here for a while, you know that I bring this up often and we have this analogy that we're like a house and we have certain walls and certain things in place that hold us together.

But the roof that we put on the house is this idea of unity over preference. Now, if you're new today or you're watching online or listening on the radio, you might think that this means that we're wishy washy on our beliefs or on what we would consider our foundational truths. But we are quite the opposite. At fair view, we have a solid foundation. Our solid foundation is biblical truth. We try to stand upon the Bible.

It's what we allow to lead us, to guide us as we make decisions in the church. Here at the very beginning of the church there in Jerusalem, you will see that the enemy is going to try to divide the church and he tries to divide it with issues that maybe are secondary issues or things that aren't as important.

And so when we talk about the idea of unity over preference, what that does mean is that we do our best to offer grace when it comes to personal preferences or gray areas in the church, things that maybe are important to us. But biblically, there's kind of some room there for interpretation. There's no right or wrong way. This would be things like the types of worship songs that we sing, the color of the carpet, what the church looks like, even what time we choose to have our service.

Believe it or not, all of those things have caused churches to split over the years because they argue about some of these superficial areas. And so the early church is going to deal with this. At the very beginning of the church, we're going to read about this story, how the enemy tries to use something as small as how they handed out food to the widows to tear them apart. There was a lot of complaining taking place, there was hurt feelings, there was arguing taking place.

But the apostles are going to step in and they're going to help everyone refocus their goal on the main issue of Jesus, they're going to agree this is something that needs to be taken care of. This is an issue that we need to address, but we can't allow it to distract us from our main mission and we can't allow it to tear us apart. So if you have your Bibles, you can open with me to Acts, chapter six, verse one. Acts, chapter six, verse one. As we continue reading the story of the early church, let me pray and then we will jump in.

Heavenly Father, there are so many things that can divide us. We're all different. You've made us that way and it can be beautiful. So my prayer is that you would protect us from the attacks of the enemy. And instead of being divided, we would allow our differences to bring us closer together so that we can stay focused on the goal of helping people take their next step towards you.

So we ask this in Jesus name, amen. Acts, chapter six, verse one. Luke starts it this way. In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. Here is what is causing the problem Luke shares with us. The church is growing.

It's expanding. The number of disciples was ever increasing. And when you add more people, it wasn't just more of the same people. You were getting different kinds of people. The church was becoming multicultural. For the very first time in its history, it was becoming multicultural. You see, when you look in the Old Testament and the religion of Judaism, it was highly tied with being Jewish, your race, your nationality.

And so all of the cultures and all of the understanding of what it meant to be Jewish easily tied into Judaism. And so they were intertwined those customs and cultures. The two went together. But now when we jump into Christianity, when Jesus comes, we are seeing that it is open to all people. This meant that different cultures were bringing in their own sets of rules and regulations and understanding of the world. And this caused some dissent in the early believers.

It caused some issues because now you're asking me to do something that culturally I don't understand. And if we aren't careful, as we, the Church, continue to gather together, we can have cultural differences that tear us apart. We can fall into the same trap that these early believers fell into, where you possibly will show favoritism or you will fall into the trap of believing that how you do something is the best way to do it, because it's how you've always done it.

We can fall into the trap of pushing an us versus them mentality. And unfortunately, this is what was taking place here in the early Church. With the distribution of food to the widows, what was taking place was wrong. Now, Luke doesn't clarify. I don't know if it was prejudice or if it was intentional and how they were distributing the food to the widows or if it was even accidental, but it didn't matter because the optics weren't good. It was causing hurt feelings. It was causing division in the church.

So here we get to life truth number one from acts chapter six. When you work with people, problems will occur. When you work with people, problems will occur. The more people there are, the more problems there will be. You guys know that the Church is growing. It was exploding at this time. And so more and more people were coming in. And as more people came in, there were more struggles, there were more issues in the Church.

And so here we need to understand that as people come into the church, as people come into our family of faith, there are going to be struggles, there are going to be difficulties, there are going to be growth pains that take place. But we need to make sure that we don't lose our focus. And so that's what we're going to read takes place next. So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and they said it would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the Word of God in order to wait on tables.

Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom, and we will turn this responsibility over to them, and we will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the Word. Truth number two that I take from this section of Scripture good leaders must delegate certain responsibilities to remain effective in their calling.

Good leaders have to learn to delegate certain responsibilities in order to remain effective in their calling. Now, I am not saying in any way that this means that certain jobs are beneath a leader or that the leader shouldn't do those things, but it's understanding that the leader can't do everything. And you might be thinking, well, that's great, but I'm not the leader here, so why does this really apply to me? It applies to you because every single one of us is a leader in some way.

We have children, we have nieces, we have nephews, we have other people in our workplace or other people in our family that look up to us and look to our leading. And it's important to understand that you cannot do everything. You have to learn to delegate. And for me, this has been one of the most difficult things for me to learn as a leader, to learn what you or do best, and then learn to delegate the rest. Find out what you do best and delegate the rest.

Because as we will look at Scripture in the New Testament, Paul, as he's speaking to these churches, these new churches that are popping up around the known world, he uses this analogy to say, listen, we all have a part to play in the body of Christ. It's as if the church is a body. And as we look at this verse, it would seem that the leaders of the church have a certain role to play. They are to make sure that they dedicate their time to prayer and the ministry of the Word.

This should be the priority of leaders in the church. It doesn't mean that we don't do anything else, but these are to be on the top of our list every week. Now, I wish that I could tell you that this is always the case for me, but it isn't. It's something that I'm working on. It's my fault when I allow other things that I think are important to creep to the top of the list and they take over the place of prayer and ministry of the Word. Sometimes I allow other things to do that.

And as you think about your role in the church, the gifts and the talents and the abilities that God has given to you, what should be at the top of your list? How has God created you to play your role in the body of Christ? Think about what you do best. Maybe you don't know. Maybe you should ask your spouse or your kids or your parents and you say, what is it? How has God created me? How has God created me to fit into the body of Christ? What do you see that I am good at?

Maybe you think about what do I enjoy? Understanding that some responsibilities and positions in the church require certain skills. And so some of the skills that God has given you, he has given you specifically to fulfill a function of the church. It should be obvious. But as you think about the church as a whole, we wouldn't want someone who hates kids working with children every week, what are your gifts, what are your passions? Know what you like doing?

We wouldn't want someone who is always grouchy and never has a smile on their face to be a greeter at the front door. We want people that are going to smile and be bubbly and welcoming and friendly. We wouldn't want someone who lacks wisdom to be making all of the important decisions in the church. We want someone that has wisdom, that has experience, that has understanding. And so we fully recognize truth number three. The church is at its best when all positions are filled by those gifted for that position.

Now, you might say, Joel, that's common sense. Of course the church is going to be best when all those positions are filled by people that are gifted in those positions. But if you have been raised in the church like I was, you recognize that there are way too often times when people in the church that are God

loving people, they love God, they see a hole in the church and they feel bad about that hole. And so they say, well, if nobody else is going to do it, then I will do it.

And so you see people filling positions in the church, having responsibilities in the church, that instead of giving life to them because they actually enjoy doing those things, it takes the life away from them. And it's only a matter of time before you begin to feel burnt out. You begin to say, church is no longer I'm not feeling filled from that. But every time I go, I just feel like I'm giving and giving and giving and I'm never filled back up. God has created us in a beautiful way that if you are serving in an area of the church that actually you're passionate about serving won't feel like serving.

So here is the truth. If you are serving somewhere here at Fairview and when you come, you dread it or you don't look forward to it, maybe you're in the wrong spot. Think about that. How has God gifted you? What would you enjoy doing? Because all too often I have watched people serve in positions that actually takes life from them instead of gives life from them to them. What has God gifted you to do? We continue on in Acts, chapter six, verses five and six.

This proposal that the Apostles made pleased the whole group, and so they chose people to help with the distribution of food. They chose Stephen, a man who was full of faith in the Holy Spirit because that was the requirement to do this. They chose also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas from Antioch. A convert to Judaism. They presented these men to the Apostles who prayed and laid their hands on them. These men were chosen because they fit the description.

They were wise and they were full of the Spirit, meaning that they had grace. They were going to show mercy in this situation. One of these men is actually going to be the focus of the story for the next few verses, and I love that. Luke begins chapter six by sharing who Stephen is, where he came from. You see, it's easy for us in the Church to think that some of the parts of the body are more important than other parts.

We would look at these seven men and say, okay, their responsibility is just to make sure that food gets distributed how it's supposed to. So are they the person that's standing behind the table scooping and putting the food on the plate? I mean, what are they actually doing? We would look at that person that is serving and say, anybody can do that. That doesn't take a special person. But that couldn't be further from the truth, because what you're going to see as we continue in the book of Acts next week, that this man Stephen is going to play an important and crucial role in the early Church.

Here is this man that was chosen simply to distribute food, and yet God is saying there was a great purpose for this man. Do not look down on anybody in the Church and think that you're greater than or even think that you're less than them because of the gifts and talents that God has given them. All positions in the Church are important and necessary. So what was the result here in the early Church of being faithful, having wisdom to delegate responsibilities, and everyone doing what they did best?

What was the result of the early Church? Luke tells us in verse seven, the result is that the word of God spread and the number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly. And even a large number of priests became obedient to the faith by their obedience to doing what God had called them to do, focusing on what they should be focusing on. Luke tells us that the word of God spread. They were able to stay focused on the mission.

Remember what Jesus had told them when they left. You will be my witnesses in all Jerusalem. They were being obedient to that command. That was the most important thing. They didn't get lost on secondary issues so much that they forgot what Jesus had commanded them to do. I love that. Luke says the number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly. This was happening fast. Lives were being

changed. Luke has been very clear here in the first six chapters of the Book of Acts that the Church was growing exponentially.

They were seeing success, lives were being changed. This would be an extremely exciting time for people to be a part of the Church as you watch it growing and new families coming in. But it also would have been a very difficult time in the Church, because quick growth often brings its own set of problems, things that they would have to delegate, issues that they would have to take care of. It was crucial that these early believers in the Church served the Church where they were gifted and where they were passionate.

Not everyone could be the teacher, not everyone should be making the financial decisions, but everyone had a role to play. Luke finishes this section by informing us that even a large number of priests also became obedient to the faith. This was huge in Jerusalem, these priests. And to be a priest in Jerusalem was the highest honor in Judaism at that time. To be a priest there was so important. You were the mediator between God and the people, and so you offered sacrifices on their behalf.

It was your entire life. And yet some of these men were recognizing that Jesus was the Messiah and Jesus actually was the new high priest that would forever be the mediator between God and man. And you can see why the religious leaders were terrified. Even men in their own number of their own group were now proclaiming that Jesus truly is the Messiah. Something big was happening in Jerusalem. Something big was taking place.

Remember, in this story, we haven't left Jerusalem yet. We're all the way to chapter six in the Book of Acts. And the church is right there in Jerusalem. In Israel. They are being obedient to what God said. You will be my witnesses in all Jerusalem. And as we continue in the Book of Acts, we will see it spreads to Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth. We're still just focusing on this small group in Jerusalem. And so we're left with two questions as we finish this section in Acts, chapter six.

Question number one is my complaining and arguing tearing apart the Church? And then a spin on that. What am I doing to actually build up the Church? Is my complaining and arguing tearing apart the Church? Is it possible that you or I are doing something intentionally or unintentionally that is actually hurting the church that the enemy can use to get a foothold in our community. Maybe you find yourself complaining or being frustrated about things in your mind that really don't matter.

They're secondary issues. They're not that important. There are gray areas. Maybe as you come to church on a Sunday morning, as we all can fall trap to this, our comfort has become more important than the goal of actually helping others take their next step toward Jesus. We all have seasons where it is easy to lose focus. And so my prayer as we read about the early church is that we would gain wisdom from them and we would get back on track and remember what it is that we are supposed to do.

The other question is, what am I actually doing to build up the church? Maybe the first question, you think I don't complain, I don't argue. I come in on Sunday morning, I have a smile on my face, I shake hands, I sing, I listen, I don't cause any disruptions, and then I leave. That's great. You're not tearing apart the church. But let's take that question a step further. What are you doing to actually build up the church? What is your passion? What are your gifts? How could God use you to serve the church? Because again, God has created you in a unique way and the church needs you.

I don't know about you, but I want to see the number of disciples grow and increase rapidly. I want to see people come to know the Jesus that I know, and everyone plays a part in this. Those that greet at the doors on Sunday morning are helping the number of disciples to increase. Those that serve in the children's ministry and those that serve in the youth ministry are helping the number of disciples to

increase. Those that serve as ushers and help us come into the sanctuary are helping the number of disciples to increase.

Those that clean the church are helping the number of disciples increase. And our cleaner, Shelley, who keeps the church looking beautiful, I don't know how God created her, but she says, I love cleaning. I love cleaning. She is where God has placed her. And now listen, you might think, oh, how is she helping people become to know Christ and help them take their next step towards Christ? Listen, if you came into this building and it smelled bad and there was trash everywhere and it wasn't kept up, you wouldn't come.

You would find someplace else to go. The fact that the church is nice, that it's clean and it's taken care of, you can go into the restrooms and it's clean. All of that helps people take their next step towards Jesus. Those that teach, help the number of disciples increase. Those that lead a life group help the number of disciples increase. Those that serve on the leadership team help the number of disciples increase. Those that spend time in prayer for the church help the number of disciples increase. Those that share the gospel with their neighbors, with their family, with their friends helps the number of disciples increase.

Those that lead us in worship help the number of disciples increase. Are you getting it? The church needs you and the specific gifts and passions that you have can be used to help the number of disciples increase. You have a purpose. And so my prayer for myself and for our church is that we would do our best to have a lot less complaining and arguing and a lot more giving and serving.

And I believe if we do that we will see the number of disciples increase rapidly. So that's my prayer. Heavenly Father, if it were easy to do this we would already be doing it. But it's hard. It takes work, it takes effort, it takes a commitment, it takes dedication to fight against.

Sometimes our first response, which would be complaining or arguing or trying to get our way, but Lord, we want to give room to your spirit within us so that we can serve others, we can love others, help others take their next step towards you. We ask us in Jesus name, amen.