

Get a Grip
On Dissatisfaction
November 22, 2020

Hey everyone, whether you're onsite or online today, I'm glad you're with us for this final message in our series *Get a Grip: taking control of your emotions so they don't take control of you*.

And I'm especially glad that this *is* the final message because, in almost every week of this series, something has happened in my life that has caused me to experience the emotion that I'm going to be talking about on the upcoming Sunday.

And since all of these emotions and attitudes are pretty much what we *don't* want to rule our lives ...

- Stress

- Fear
- Anger
- Judgmentalism
- Fatigue
- Apathy

... after last Sunday, I was ready to be done with this.

But this particular week has actually been different. It's been stressful at times especially with ...

- Trying to discern how God wants us, as a church, to respond to Mayor Lucas' recent coronavirus orders ...
- ... as well as having to accommodate all the changes that are taking place in our facility right now.

It's been stressful but, in spite of the

circumstances, I have felt a renewed sense of joy in my life.

And I am very happy about that and very excited to talk to you today about getting a grip on *dissatisfaction*.

A Definition

What is dissatisfaction?

Dissatisfaction is being irritated, negative, or depressed because things just aren't "good enough."

Let me say that again: Dissatisfaction is being irritated, negative, or depressed because things just aren't "good enough." Things just aren't like they should be.

And if you're wondering where I got that definition, I just made it up.

But I made it up out of *my own experience* because, for the past six months, I have struggled with this.

Far too often, I have been irritated, negative and even depressed because so many things just aren't "good enough" as I would define it.

And if we had the time, I could give you a long, long list of what's hasn't been good enough for me, but I'll share just one example.

Even though I had *the 'rona* (as Shannon so affectionately calls it), all the way back in early September, my sense of smell and taste hasn't fully recovered. I can taste the first few bites of whatever I'm eating and then it just kind of goes flat. It just kind of stops.

Unfortunately, *I* don't stop. I keep eating anyway.

And I'm irritated, negative, and even a little depressed as I do. I'm dissatisfied because, in my opinion, it's just not good enough.

But it's not just me who is struggling with dissatisfaction these days. You are, too.

Now, I don't say that to be critical because I think that dissatisfaction is a natural response to all that's gone on in our world since last April.

I mean ...

- With all the changes forced on us by the pandemic (masks, distancing, working from home, travel restrictions this holiday season)
- And with all the cultural and political unrest we've witnessed and are still seeing ...

... everything just feels so weird and abnormal. It's not what we're used to.

And by comparison, it's just not good enough.

So, again, for you to be dissatisfied at this point and for me to be dissatisfied certainly is understandable. It's a natural reaction.

But I want to be *more* than just "natural." I don't want to be irritated, negative and depressed. I don't want dissatisfaction to control me.

And, as a Christian – as someone who believes in Jesus; someone who knows and tries to follow Jesus ...

As a Christian, I'm *made* for more than that. I'm *made* for something *better* than that.

And, if you're a Christian, you are too.

As we've seen several times in this series – and by the way, if you're missed any of it check it out online ...

As we've seen several times in this series, God intends for us, regardless of our circumstances, to be characterized by "the fruit of the Spirit."

... which is ...

*... is love, joy, peace,
patience, kindness, goodness,
faithfulness, gentleness, and
self-control. Galatians
5:22 (NET)*

And *that's* what I want to experience. *That's* how I want to live. *That's* who I want to be.

And, even if you're *not* a Christian, I think you

do, too.

Typical Response

Now, having said all of that, I should also say that *being dissatisfied isn't always a bad thing*.

In fact, sometimes it's actually a good thing. For instance ...

- It's good to be dissatisfied with evil and injustice.

We ought to be depressed when we see people suffering from illness. *We ought* to be irritated when people are mistreated.

- And it's good to be moved by a "holy discontent" – a dissatisfaction that causes us to take action so that "Thy will

be done on Earth as it is in Heaven” becomes more of a reality.

However, for most of us, the dissatisfaction we experience on a day-to-day basis doesn't come from that and doesn't lead to that. It's not about holy discontent.

Instead, for me – and probably for you – I am most dissatisfied when I focus on ...

- Immediate circumstances that are not as *I* wish them to be.
- The failure of others to live up to *my* expectations.
- How *my life* is “harder” than it has to be because others don't measure up and things aren't as I wish them to be.

The dissatisfaction that I most often experience, simply put, *is all about me*.

And if you took some time to write down all of the things you are dissatisfied with – especially over the past six or seven months – I suspect that almost everything on your list would fall into one of those categories, too.

It would be all about you.

But even that isn't always a bad thing. Sometimes you *should* be dissatisfied with what's happening to you. Sometimes what's happening to you *is* evil or unjust.

But regardless of whether your dissatisfaction is warranted or not, the *real problem* is what you typically do – and what I typically do – in those situations.

What you typically do – and what I typically do
...

... is to *complain*, which is an undisciplined negative commentary that rarely accomplishes anything positive.

In fact, what complaining almost always accomplishes is negative.

For instance, I doubt you have ever heard anybody say ...

- “Man, I just love hanging out with that guy; he complains so much.”
- “I’m so glad she’s my friend because I get to listen to her whining all the time.”

What happens is just the opposite.

1. Complainers lose friends.

People who complain too much – people who engage in an undisciplined negative commentary about life – are labeled as

whiners.

And nobody wants to be around a whiner for very long.

Another negative outcome of complaining is that ...

2. You actually *increase* your dissatisfaction.

That's because of the way your brain works.

We talked about this a couple of years ago in a series called *State of Mind*. Your brain and mine have a very interesting quality called *neuroplasticity*, which is illustrated in this short video.

Check it out.

(B) Voice: "Not so long ago ..."

(E) Voice: "It becomes easier for our brains to

travel this pathway.”

Now, if that’s too scientific for you, here’s what it means in everyday life.

If you want to increase your misery ... if you want to hate your life ... just keep complaining ... about *everything*.

And I mean *everything*.

- Complain about the weather, complain about the economy, complain about the prices of gas, and complain about your physical features, how you used to be hot and now you’re not.
- Complain about the misplacement of your hair: how it’s no longer on your head, now there’s more on your back or coming out of your ears.

- Complain about the way people drive. If you're married, complain about the way your spouse drives.

In fact, just go ahead and nitpick your spouse to death.

- The way they chew their gum, the way they leave a little piece of food on their plate. The way they're always late or always early.
- The way their hair falls out and clogs up the shower drain, the way they leave their underwear laying around on the floor.

Complain about your spouse over and over, and I guarantee you, you'll be more and more dissatisfied with them.

How about your job? You want to hate your job for the rest of your life?

Then complain about it every single day.

- Complain about the commute, complain about the people that you work with, complain about your idiot boss.
- Complain about how you're overworked, undervalued, and underpaid.
- Complain about your job over and over and over, and I guarantee you, you will dislike your job more than you do now.¹

Bottom line, thanks to the way your brain works, if you'll just keep complaining and finding fault with everything and everyone, you'll be even more miserable than you already are!

So, first of all complainers lose friends.

And secondly, complaining *increases* your dissatisfaction.

But there's a third outcome. And this one probably isn't important to you if you're not a Christian.

But if you *are* a Christian – if you believe in and follow Jesus ... this is really important for you to know and understand.

3. Complaining dishonors God.

The Old Testament book of Numbers tells the story Israel's wandering in the desert after being delivered from 400 years of terrible oppression and slavery in Egypt.

And the gist of the story is that, after the

journey doesn't turn out to be as quick or as easy as they had expected ...

The people start complaining and saying things like:

- "Oh, we had it so much better in Egypt than out here.
- "Moses, why didn't you just let us die back there instead of bringing us out here to die? At least there was food"

This went on for some time – it happened again and again – until finally "God's anger was aroused."

So much so that ...

Fire from the LORD burned among them and consumed some of the outskirts of the camp. Numbers 11:1 (NIV)

Now, it doesn't sound like anyone was hurt in this incident. It sounds more like a "warning shot" so to speak.

And you would expect that the people would realize "oh, wait – we're on the way to the Promised Land and this is just part of the journey. We're not going to *live* here. This is just temporary."

But they didn't.

In fact, the complaining grew and grew until, finally, God said, "that's it. None of you are going into the Promised Land except for Joshua and Caleb."

"Instead, you're going to spend the rest of your life wandering in this desert. And it will be your children who enter into the land. Not you."

And that's exactly what happened.

This is why, many centuries later ...

The Apostle Paul, referring to this situation, wrote to followers of Jesus:

Do not grumble, as some of them did and were killed by the destroying angel. These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us.

1 Corinthians 10:11 (NIV)

Now, I don't think Paul was saying "look out or the destroying angel is going to kill you, too!"

His point was that because the Israelites dishonored God with their complaining, God did not honor *them*. And they missed out on the blessing that could have been theirs and

should have been theirs.

And Paul is saying “the same thing can happen to you and to me, so beware! Beware of allowing your dissatisfaction to get so out of control that it turns into a constant stream of undisciplined negative commentary.”

And constant complaining *is* a sign that you *are* being controlled by your dissatisfaction.

Gaining Control

So, what can you do when you're irritated, negative, or depressed ...

- Because your immediate circumstances are not as you would like them to be.
- Because other others have failed to live up to your expectations.

- Because your life is “harder” than it has to be *because* others don’t measure up and things aren’t as you would like them to be.

What can you do when things just aren’t “good enough?”

I think there are three things that can go a long way in controlling dissatisfaction instead of being controlled by *it*.

And you can do these things whether you’re a Christian or not, though if you are a Christian, I think you definitely have an advantage.

1. If possible, take action to address your dissatisfaction.

Jesus once told his followers ...

“If your brother sins against

*you, go and tell him his fault,
between you and him alone.”
Matthew 18:15 (ESV)*

If you're in a situation that you're unhappy with, if it can be changed, then try to change it.

For example ...

- If you're unhappy at work, don't waste energy complaining to everyone but the person who can do something about it. Go talk to your boss or their boss.

And if you can't do that, go look for a new job. Stop whining and take responsibility.

- If you're not satisfied with your marriage, don't go complain to your mother or to your friends. Talk to your spouse, directly.

And if you can't do that, or it's not working, go see a counselor. Get someone to help you. I never cease to be amazed at how many people expect their husband or wife to be a mind-reader.

- If you're dissatisfied with being out of shape, don't whine and complain about it. Go join a gym. Go on a diet. Stop buying ice cream. Stop going to Culvers.

The number one way to get some control over your dissatisfaction is to take action if at all possible. And I think we grossly underestimate the power we have to bring about change simply by taking some kind of action.

That said, however, there *are* many things that we're dissatisfied with that *can't* be

changed.

- You can't change the fact that coronavirus has blown a hole in our economy.
- You can't change the fact that your Thanksgiving plans are all jacked up because of it.
- You can't change the fact that your party lost the election or that the current president hasn't conceded.
- You can't change the fact that people are ignorant and foolish because they are sinners and, therefore, will disappoint you and let you down.
- You can't change the fact that someday, you or someone you love is going to die.

What do you do with your dissatisfaction about those things?

Well, if you're a Christian – and you take seriously what Paul said about grumbling and complaining ... and you understand that it's dishonoring to God ...

2. You choose to “groan” instead of grumble.”

Now, that sounds a little odd but it's really not.

Groaning is just another way of describing “lament” which we've talked about on many occasions around here.

Lament is when you take all the junk you feel about your life and the losses you have suffered and then in an act of worship, dump it on God. And groaning is the same.

Groaning is what the Israelites did while they

were slaves in Egypt. And God heard them and sent a deliverer, Moses.

Grumbling is what they did in the desert. And God heard them and gave the blessing to their children instead of them.

Groaning is a complaint directed to God in hopes that He will intervene.

Grumbling is a complaint directed to no one and to everyone who is within earshot in hopes that they will feel sorry for us.

Groaning is an expression of angst followed by a declaration of faith. "God, I don't like this at all. And I don't understand why you're allowing this. But I trust You. I believe that you are for me and not against me."

Grumbling is an expression of angst followed by nothing.

Groaning says, "God, this is really hard for me to live with."

Grumbling says, 'God, You are really hard for me to live with.'

A *groan* says, "Lord, I would like something different than what I am experiencing."

A *grumble* says, "Lord, I wish You were someone different."

Groaning is the expression of a heart that longs for God's Kingdom to be established and for all to be set right.

Grumbling is the expression of a heart that longs for the kingdom of self to be established and for me to get my way.

Groaning is what the Apostle Paul talks about

when he describes how the world is fallen from God's original design and how even the impersonal creation longs to be free of the curse of sin.

Groaning is what we do when we realize once again that this world is not our home; that it can never ever satisfy our deepest longings because we were created for another kind of world – a perfect world.

Groaning is longing for the day when Jesus returns and wipes every tear from our eyes and there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.ⁱⁱⁱ

And if you're a Christian, you can groan instead of grumble when dissatisfaction rises within you.

You can redirect that emotion and let it drive

you back to your ultimate hope in life, which is not ...

- That your circumstances would at last be as you would like them to be.
- And that others would finally live up to your expectations.
- And, therefore, your life would be easier.

... but that God is who He says He is. And He will do what He has promised because Jesus has risen from the dead.

And this a huge advantage you have if you're a Christian: the groaning of your spirit instead of the grumbling of your flesh.

And, just to be honest with you, as I look back over the past seven months, this is probably the area in which I have failed the most.

So often I have whined and complained about all things that don't measure up to my expectations instead of allowing those things to point me in the direction of Jesus.

And I'm thankful that He paid for that sin on the cross just like all of my other sins. But, as we so often say around here, I want to be more than just forgiven. I want to be different.

Anyway, if you want to get a grip on dissatisfaction, a lot of times you simply have to take action.

And when that's not possible, you should groan instead of grumble, especially if you're a Christian, because you know that this world is not your home.

But there's one more thing that can go a long way to controlling dissatisfaction. And it's so strong that it's almost like an antidote.

In other words, if you do this often enough, it's almost like a cure for the disease of dissatisfaction.

And it's really, really simple.

3. Just be thankful.

Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

*1 Thessalonians 5:18
(NIV)*

Cultivate an "attitude of gratitude" because gratitude produces joy in your life. And while joy doesn't remove dissatisfaction altogether, it *minimizes* it. It keeps it from taking control.

Now, obviously, this is a timely issue with Thanksgiving being upon us this week. It's almost like it was planned that way.

Thankfulness

So, let's talk for a bit about thankfulness.

And there are so many things that could be said but, in the interest of time, I just want to point out two.

1. A thankful person looks for and appreciates what is good about life.

And, friends, in spite of what we see and hear in the news, there is much to see and appreciate that is good.

For example, did you know that ...

- The average American born in 1950

could expect to live to age 68. The average American born in 2010 can expect to live to almost 79.

Think about that: In two generations, the average American gained a decade of life expectancy.

- The average American now retires at age 62. One hundred years ago, the average American *died* at age 51.
- The average work week has declined from 61 hours in 1870, to 48 hours in 1930, to 40 hours in 1950, to 39 hours today.
- And we're using that extra time to have fun. The average American household now spends three times as much of its income on recreation as it did in the 1950.

- In 1950, the average household spent 30% of its budget on food. Today, less than 13% of an average budget has to be devoted to food.
- Traffic deaths per 100,000 people have fallen by half since the 1960s.
- The median new home today is 34% larger today than it was 25 years ago.
- In 1972, 49% of new homes had air conditioning. Today, 89% do.

“Today,” Matt Ridley writes in his book *The Rational Optimist*, “of Americans officially designated as ‘poor,’ ...

- 99 percent have electricity, running water, flush toilets, and a refrigerator;

- 95 percent have a television,
- 88 percent a telephone,
- 71 percent a car
- And 70 percent air conditioning.

Cornelius Vanderbilt – the richest man in the US in the 19th century – had none of these things.^{iv}

Just from a purely physical perspective we have it so much better than those who came before us. We have it so much better than people who live in other parts of the world.

Sometimes, when I'm feeling dissatisfied, I think, "well, it could be worse. You could be living in a place like war-torn Syria where men leave for work in the morning and their wives wonder if they'll return in the evening."

I mean, as divided as our country is these days, it's nothing like so many other places. We have much to be thankful for.

Even with COVID, there are things to be thankful for. A couple weeks ago, I read a FB post from a woman whose entire family had to be quarantined for 24 days.

She wrote:

- I'm thankful that we did not have to be hospitalized and that our kids are still healthy!
- I'm amazed by and thankful for the sacrifices and measures medical workers are taking to protect themselves and their loved ones from possible exposure (I just did it for 10 days ... people have been doing it for MONTHS).

- I'm thankful for my neighbors, friends and church family who have made sure we are taken care of during this time and made us feel so loved! And my MOM (who had Covid earlier in the month and recovered so isn't at risk of catching it from us) who has come from KC to help for several days.
- I'm thankful for the ability to wear a mask (once we get back to normal life), showing love and concern for others in hopes they don't have to have my experience or one worse. While it's very unlikely I will contract it again and/or be contagious, I want to do a better job at supporting mask wearing in the community, not out of necessity, but out of love.

By the way, that woman was my oldest

daughter, Marilyn, who lives in Springfield with her husband, Tim and their four kids.

Point being, a thankful person looks for and appreciates what is good about life, even when life is not good. Do you?

And a thankful *Christian* understands that what is good about life comes from *God*.

Or, as James the half-brother of Jesus once put it:

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father ... James 1:17 (NIV)

And the greatest of all good and perfect gifts is Jesus of Nazareth.

And so one of the things we're thankful for is Him and what He has done for us and is doing

and will do, which is why we gather together every week to worship and to sing praises to him like we did earlier.

It's logical outgrowth of our thankfulness ...

... which leads to the second thing I want to point out.

2. True thankfulness always expresses itself in some way.

In the Gospel According to Luke (which is most likely the recollections of Peter – one of Jesus' first followers – as told to Luke) ...

There's a story about a time when Jesus miraculously cured ten lepers of their disease.

What's interesting about that is that all 10 of those guys were quarantined for *life*. They weren't waiting for 10 days or 24 days for it to

be over like we many of us have had to do. Their condition was permanent. They weren't getting out.

But Jesus heals all 10 of them.

And Luke tells us that ...

One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan. Luke 17:15-16 (NIV)

Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?" Luke 17:17-18 (NIV)

Now, if you would have stopped any of those

nine other lepers on the street that day and asked them, "are you not thankful for what just happened to you?" ...

... every single one of them would have said, "Are you kidding me? Of course! I feel *totally* thankful!"

But only one of them came back to Jesus and said, "thank you."

You see, there's an enormous difference between "feeling" gratitude and "expressing" gratitude.

Most of us FEEL thankful for all of the blessings we enjoy in life.

But when we don't express it in some way, all the people in our life like our family, our friends, our neighbors, our co-workers all experience that lack of expression as

ingratitude.

Have you ever thought about that?

Unexpressed gratitude is perceived as ingratitude.

That was Jesus' main point about the lepers. Ten were healed and nine *felt* grateful but only one expressed it.^v

And what he did wasn't any huge deal. He just came back and said thanks.

And a lot of times, that's all we need to do. Just say thanks.

But sometimes it takes a little more to express gratefulness.

I mean, how do you express thankfulness for all the things I talked about before like a shorter work week or having a car or a

smartphone or a house or ... how do you express thankfulness for living with so much abundance?

One way to express our thankfulness is by giving back.

As we say all the time around here, "blessed people bless."

And this is one of the most prominent principles not just of Christianity but also of Judaism. This is where the idea of the tithe comes from. When God blesses you it's not just for you.

As Christians, we understand that everything we have comes from God and, as an expression of thankfulness, we give a portion of that back to the people and causes He loves – like the church.

Now, I don't want to talk to you about *that*

today – that’s a discussion for another time.

Instead, I want to talk to you about how you can express your thankfulness by giving to help others in this upcoming holiday season.

And some of us are in a position to do that because, right now, in spite of Covid, we’re more affluent than ever. We still have a job, our 401K is way up. We haven’t been affected at all by the shutdowns and closures

Others have lost a job or we’re facing unpaid debts and it’s hard right now.

Giving Back

So, at this point, Shannon Horn is going to join me to talk for a bit about how those of us who are in a good place financially right now can help those who are not.

HOPE donations will help pay for medical bills, rent/mortgage, utilities, we have dispersed over \$31k so far and will be dispersing much more for the holidays.

Today is the deadline to submit a hopeful blessing nomination (not that we won't take future nominations but these we can guarantee will be processed before the holidays)

1. Giving Tree is up and running (Christmas wishes).

You can grab gift tags at the table across from the Info Center OR visit our Giving Tree online under the sign me up tab.

RICK: Another way we can give back is by inviting others to experience what we are experiencing. And there's no better time to do

that than during the Christmas season.

People who are not church attenders are far more likely to say yes to an invitation to church at this time of year than at any other.

So Shannon, what are we doing this Christmas at NHCC?

Conclusion

RICK: That's some really great stuff and I hope you'll take advantage of it whether you do it in person or virtually.

And, as I wrote on Friday, we're planning to offer in person as long as possible and as long as we can do it in as safe a manner as possible because we believe it's really important to be a light in our community right now.

We believe as much as possible we ought to bless others because we ourselves have been blessed.

That's how we want to end this service. The way we ended the very first service in this series eight weeks ago with a blessing.

But first, would you pray with me?

- We have been dissatisfied
- We have grumbled instead of groaning
- Help us to take action
- Help us to be thankful
- Help us to be a blessing because we have received your blessing

Endnotes

ⁱ From Craig Groschel, *Zip It! Complaining*

ⁱⁱ <https://www.biblicalcounselingaz.org/groaning-versus-grumbling/>

ⁱⁱⁱ Revelation 21:4

^{iv} <http://www.fool.com/investing/general/2013/11/29/everything-is-great-and-nobody-is-happy.aspx>

^v From John Otberg