We all complain at times... it's part of the human experience. Our neighbor's dog poops on our lawn, the local stores raised their prices again, and our laptop just broke down and the repair technician is charging us way too much. So we’re frustrated and we begin to complain to others about it. I mean life can be so hard at times that we find ourselves in the habit of complaining, over and over and over again, and it becomes part of our daily life. And yet nobody wants to be ‘that person’ that one that’s always complaining. Last week we started a 5-week series called I Quit… as we start a new year and think about New Years Resolutions, what are some things in our life that we need to let go of… some things we need to stop doing? Last week we talked about Quitting Cynicism and today we are going to talk about why it’s important to Quit Complaining. You know life can be stressful and so we often think complaining is just a normal extension of life. And yet guys complaining affects our brains as well as our physical health in a negative way. A 2016 study by Stanford researchers found that complaining shrinks our hippocampus, which is the part of our brain critical to problem solving. It's also one of the central areas in our brain that Alzheimer’s destroys. Complaining also releases cortisol, the stress hormone, which raises our blood pressure and blood sugar. Frequent complaining can lead to heart disease and diabetes. People who complain a lot are inclined to have poor health and they don’t do as well in their jobs, and as you might imagine complaining can certainly destroy healthy relationships. Gwendolyn Seidman, associate professor of psychology at Albright College said, “Complaining can be annoying to the person who is listening to the complaints, especially when the complainer seems unwilling to do anything to resolve the issues about which they're complaining and rejects help and advice about how to solve the problem." Complaining can also be contagious, if one partner tends to complain more than the other there is a significant risk that he or she will bring the other person down to that level of negativity. I certainly see it happen in our house. When I am complaining it’s easy for Sandy to add her frustration as well or vice versa. And yet let me say that some honest venting to your partner can be a constructive and healing act that can foster a deeper connection between the two of you. For instance, when you get home from work it can be helpful to vent about your boss if there’s a problem. It’s the idea of trust, that you can trust your partner to be there for you. However… if the two of you cannot bring it around to the solution side or to how God is using this in your life then it will end up having a negative effect on your relationship. You know in my life, I think most people would tell you that I’m a very positive person. And as a believer that’s intentional because I want to model Christ so I want to be positive. And yet there are times I just need to vent… to get something off my chest and it’s good to know that I can do that with my wife. And if she senses it’s over the top or there’s no resolve then she will gently encourage me on how God might be trying to use this in my life. I would also tell you that complaining gets bad for me when I’m hurting emotionally or physically. In other words, complaining becomes an outward manifestation of what’s really going on inside my heart. It’s actually demonstrating that I need an attitude adjustment. And when I ignore the problem in my life complaining begins to escalate. Complaining also keeps people from taking action. It gives excuses to procrastinate and keeps them from achieving goals. Listen It’s always much easier to complain than it is to find a solution. Friends we all complain at times and complaining doesn’t make you a bad person. It just puts a horrible damper on the possibility of living and exceptional life. It’s a denial of responsibility, and blame is just another way of excusing your-self from being responsible. But how can we tell if it’s become a problem for us or not? Well there are several things to watch for. #1 You always see the glass as half empty. Listen when you begin running in the negative fast lane, you will find the flaw in everything. #2 People point out your complaint levels. Guys when a friend tells you that if you won the lottery you could still find something to complain about… they are trying to be real with you about your complaining. #3 People are avoiding you. If friends stop inviting you to parties or stop spending time with you it might just be all of your complaining. #4 Your friends are competing with you for the complaint title. In other words, do all the people you hang with complain? When your friends talk more negatively than positively that should concern you. Maybe you need some different friends. #5 Barriers are all you see. I apply for a job, but I don’t think I will get it, I want to meet someone great, but I don’t see that ever happening. When I look into the future I only see a brick wall. Listen guys do you see your life as one challenge after another or do you see it as one adventure after another? Those are all barriers. Listen guys complaining didn’t start with us, it actually goes all the way back to the beginning of time. In fact, right out of the gate in Genesis we see Adam and Eve sin by eating of the forbidden fruit. God then confronts them in Gen. 3:12NLT. Later in the book of Job 10:1NLT. Job is ticked at God and says, “I’m not going to hold back… I’m going to tell you exactly what I think.” But if there is one group that’s known for their complaining… it would be the Israelites in the Old Testament. Over 3 million Jews have been in slavery for over 400 years. God raises up a leader, Moses to lead them to freedom. He uses a series of plagues until Pharaoh decides to let them all go. But then Pharaoh changes his mind and sends an army to retrieve them. What does God do… he miraculously puts an interstate HI way right through the middle of the Red Sea and as the soldiers try to cross God closes the Sea and destroys them. We then see God supernaturally gives them food to eat and water to drink, and he preserves their cloths, so they never wear out. Now you would think they would be excited about following a miracle working God… but instead all they do is complain. Look at it. Exodus 16:2-3NLT. Guys if you want to be divisive, if you want to hurt the heart of God, if you want to drive other people away just keep on complaining. But on the other hand, if you want your life to honor God in a significant way… then you’ve got to stop complaining! Let me show you why complaining is such a problem for us… why it’s such a grievous sin in the eyes of God. Let me show you 2 principals from the OT under what I would call the cost of complaining. First, we need to understand that complaining offends the heart of God. I think if you are a parent you can certainly relate to this. When you do a lot for your kids but all they do is whine and talk about how unfair you are or how bad they have it, it’s hard. Sometimes you just want to lovingly say… “you ungrateful little brat!” Well I can’t help but wonder if that’s how God feels at times when all we do is complain. Numbers 11:1-2NLT. The people complained to the Lord and He was so angry about it that He sends fire to burn the outskirts of the camp. So guys if you ever come home and the outside of your yard is burned… you’ve probably been complaining way too much! Another time Moses was whining to God about the people complaining to him all the time and God said actually while they may be complaining to you they are complaining about me. Guys I’m just trying to get you to see that complaining offends the heart of God. The next thing I want you to see is that complaining carries significant consequences. I mean think about it, if you want to drive people away then complain all the time. I once heard someone say that complainers have spiritual bad breath! When you are talking to someone with bad breath what do you do? You take a step back don’t you? Well the same thing happens when you complain all the time… people want to take a step back. Numbers 14:27NLT. God says how long do I put up with all of your complaining? Guys do we understand that complaining is a lack of faith, it’s a sign of unbelief. You gripe and complain because you do not believe that God will come through for you. The Israelites showed such a lack of faith through their complaining that God finally says enough… except for Joshua and Caleb none of you will live long enough to enter the promised land. Guys listen to me please… the unbelief or lack of faith that’s being demonstrated through your complaining will keep you from God’s best in your life… it will short-circuit His promises from being fulfilled. So knowing that all of that is true… why do we do it?  First of all, most people don’t realize how often they complain because it has become a habit, and, like all habits, it tends to be so familiar that it becomes invisible.  Secondly, most people feel that it’s a good conversation starter because it’s easier to find common ground by complaining. And lastly, people complain because they want validation for their beliefs. Some might think that by complaining you are merely observing what’s going on, but complaining, like all thought patterns, is not mere observation, it’s a creative act.  When you complain, you are simply reinforcing negative thoughts and, the more you complain, the more you summon your creative energies to attract the very thing you complain about. It has been said that when you complain, you are really placing your order for more of the same, does that make sense?  At the very least when you complain you’re dwelling on the negative and definitely reinforcing what you don’t want. Okay guys so how do we break this terrible habit of complaining? Well here is a couple things you can do. #1 Be Aware. The first thing we all need to do is learn to be self-aware. Commit to observing yourself for the next 24 hours and try to catch yourself complaining and when you do just stop it on the spot. Listen to what Paul said about it in Phil. 2:14-18NLT. Did you hear that… Do everything without complaining or arguing. Man not only is that a great verse for us to learn but it’s a great verse for our kids to memorize. Then #2 Take Responsibility. Ephesians 4:29NLT. In other words, take responsibility for your thoughts and for what you say. Now taking responsibility does not mean that you feel guilty and beat yourself up. It just means that you recognize the negative thoughts that are going through your mind and realize those thoughts will not improve you and will certainly not honor God. Once you accept that you can control what you think about it, will lead you to the next step. # 3. Focus on what you really want. Do you want the fruit or in other words the results that come from constantly complaining… or do you want the fruit or results that come from being positive? Phil. 4:8-9NLT. Listen your words will either be a tombstone or a stepping stone in your life. Which will they be for you? And then #4 Replace your negative thoughts. Jesus said in Luke 6:45NLT. Listen guys if your heart is not right with God then honestly, it’s hard to stop the complaining. So, if you are serious about breaking this habit of complaining it starts with getting your heart right with God. And listen guys a right relationship with God has nothing to do with our circumstances. In other words, you can be going through a tough time, but you refuse to complain about it because all is well with your soul. Let me give you an example of what I mean. Paul writes the book of Phil. from prison. I’m sure in his mind this was the end of the road, he was probably going to die here, but let’s look again at what he said in Phil. 2:17NIV. So what do you think he means that I’m being poured out as a drink offering? I think he is saying even if I die for this… even if I give my life for the cause of Christ it’s okay! I mean most of us would be complaining… “I don’t like being in prison, I didn’t do anything wrong, this isn’t fair, I’ve been falsely accused.” No… he says, even if I die I’m going to rejoice with all of you. Which is why you should all rejoice with me! How can a guy in a prison cell say all of that?? I can tell you how… this is the same guy that said in Gal. 2:20NIV. How he can say that? Because he knew that he had been forgiven and transformed into the image of Christ. You could almost hear Paul say, “if you would have only known where I came from, if you would know what I have been forgiven of, you would know why I trust Him completely… you would know why I’m not worried about my circumstances… you would know why I have no reason to complain… God has a plan for my life and I trust Him. Romans 8:28NIV. It certainly doesn’t say that everything is good… it says that God is going to take the difficult circumstances of our life and he is going to work them out for our good if we will only trust Him. So Guys I hope in 2019 you will decide to Quit Complaining. Instead of complaining about your circumstances… decide to trust God.

Bow your heads: How many of you would say I have a problem with complaining just raise your hand? Well if you God to help you Quit Complaining I’m going to ask you to silently repeat this short prayer to yourself. “Dear God, I acknowledge that I’m a complainer, and I ask you to forgive me for that sin, I ask you to align my heart with you, and help me to trust your plan for my life, that I might continue to see your spirit at work in my life, thank you God for your goodness and for your grace, in Jesus Name!