

GRUMBLING AND GRATITUDE

The following three rest stops focus on grumbling and gratitude and the force of our lives that live in the midst of these feelings. At what point is it okay—even healthy—to express real disappointment and frustration? Many of the psalms would lead us to believe this expression is not only okay but also part of our honest worship to God. And if that is true, then where does gratitude fit in? And when do we cross the line into inappropriate whining?

Should we thank God when we don't feel like thanking God?

That is the question.

REST STOP #1: A song for the end of winter

By Michele Hershberger

Christmas is over, really over and spring, at least at my house, seems a long way away. The days are getting longer, but the evening shadows still come far too early for me. The bare tree branches pluck at the gray sky. I know, intellectually, that spring is just around the corner. And maybe spring has already arrived at your front door. But it's the end of winter—still—for me. It's hard not to complain.

What does it mean to be grateful—when you don't feel it?

Are you supposed to fake it?

Or... if I were really right with God, would I be grateful?

OK, so now I feel guilty.

My answer is ... a drum roll please ... if I stall long enough it will come to me ... yes—and yes. Yes, I should sometimes show gratitude even when I don't feel it. I should at least recount my blessings. I should at least take stock of my situation from a different angle. I should at least retell the story—my story, the story of God's rescuing me, time and time again. The story of the cross.

But yes, I should also, sometimes, refuse to put on the happy face. Why? Because that's false religion. Because it's not honest. Because that's not how life is. I should complain to God, because the psalms complain to God and because the world isn't right, and no amount of denial and happy words are going to change that.

Somehow I must be real with God—grumbling, complaining, saying how it really is. But at the very same time, I must realize that I can't see the whole picture. The picture that includes my sin. The picture that includes God's rescue. Sometimes I can't see the grace hiding under the bed and peeking in through the window.

Do I always know when to do what? No. But I'm getting wiser. I'm listening to the Spirit more. Ironically, when my gratitude comes in the midst of deep sorrow, it is the most meaningful. And the very act of praise itself begins to transform the darkness into light. At other times, I catch myself in denial. The healing doesn't come from gratitude but from an honest cry of pain.

We live in the midst of pain and joy.

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REST STOP #2: What do I control?

By Michele Hershberger

Is it possible that some of our grumbling—and anxiety—are tied to events and people and situations that we can't control? Take some time to make the following lists and prayerfully discern whether or not you are grumbling or worrying about the right things.

List #1: What I can't control

Make a list of situations and relationships that you can't control. This list should include things like this:

- All the people you want to "fix"
- Other people's opinions of you
- Physical illness
- Other people's moods
- Other's people choices
- The total success of your projects. You can control some of the success or failure, but you can't control it all.

Now make a list of situations that you can control. This list should include things like this:

- Your mood
- How you care for your body
- How many projects you take on
- Being intentional about play and relaxation
- How clean your office or room is
- How much money you spend
- Your attitudes and moods
- Whether or not you choose to "replay" your bad stories or good stories over and over again.

Compare your two lists. How much do you confuse the two lists? Do you make excuses for the things you really can control, like your bad mood or how you spend your money? Do you catch yourself saying, "I can't help myself. I just _____." If this is true, then you need to take more responsibility for the things you can control.

But it might also be true that you are worrying or complaining about things you can't control. Do you catch yourself fretting over how others will respond to you or the choices your friends are making? You can't—ultimately—control those relationships or events. You can pray, and it's good to pray. All of us should pray both for miracles to happen in specific ways and also for help in letting go of final outcomes. We ask boldly and we ask for patience.

But prayer is different than trying to control things we can't control. And ironically, some people try to control things they can't control and refuse to look at things they can change. Perhaps they neglect situations they can control precisely because they are overwhelmed with anxiety over things they can't control.

Is this you? Can you ask God to help you get your lists straight?

REST STOP #3: Jesus is the Same

By Jessica Couch

Hebrews 13:8 "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday & today & forever."

If there's one thing to be said about life, it is that it's changing! The earth never stops. It will forever continue to turn. A rainbow or a cotton candy swirl of an evening sky will grace us with their presence and then vanish. As beautiful as summer is, soon the leaves fall, the first frost sets and the joy of Christmas comes and goes. No matter what we do, what action we take—nothing is guaranteed. Nothing is promised to stay.

If nothing on earth is ever guaranteed to stay, and no friend can promise to be there forever...what do we rely on? "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." THE SAME? Unchanged? Is it even comprehensible? That the same Jesus we read about still exists today?

He's the Jesus who looked over the huge crowds and started to weep because they were all so lost, like a sheep without a shepherd. He's the JESUS who looks down on my life and weeps when I try to find happiness in what the world has to offer without giving a care about him. He's the JESUS who provided food from just fish and a few loaves of bread. He's the same JESUS who will provide in our lives. When we feel so tired—in need of something, anything, to put us on track again—he will provide. He's the JESUS who gave Mary Magdalene a chance when no one else would. And he's the same JESUS who will value us like treasure even after we've sinned for far too long and the only thing to describe our present state would be unworthiness. He's the JESUS who led Peter to walk on water! The same JESUS who's there at the other side of the oceans of our life's problems, begging us to walk to him. And when we do fall, he's right there to catch us.

And may we never ever forget that our JESUS is the same JESUS who died on that old, rugged cross. He's the one who endured the beating—the sting of metal that ripped the flesh of his back. It was his beard that was pulled out, his face that was spit on. His brows that thorns dug into. His eyes—his loving, beautiful eyes—his deep eyes that spoke a thousand "I love you's." It was his eyes that blurred in his own sweat and blood. His feet walked that road to Calvary. His innocent hands that healed so many. Those hands took the nails. They stung with each pound of the hammer.

This same Jesus, the Jesus who hung on that cross—broken, bruised, and lonely, the Jesus who watched as the sky turned dark and thunder rolled when GOD turned his back—this same Jesus was alone and in pain. And all the while he was thinking about each one of us today. Your hurts, your fears, your life without a purpose. And he was thinking about me. His love was overflowing from his heart just as fast as his blood dropped to that dusty ground. You see he knew that you and me ... we would need a SAVIOR and he wasn't afraid to take the job.

Jesus hasn't changed at all. He'll always remain the same. The same Jesus who died on the cross loves us just as much as he did then, no matter the sin in our life—His arms are still open wide.

It's when life has nothing to give—when everything that once brought happiness and fulfillment has disappeared, then you will start looking. When each day is a struggle—the cold seems to last longer and night seems darker. When there's nowhere to belong and loneliness creeps in your heart, when everyone has left and everything disappears, when the

daily routine of life becomes too big of a burden...that's when you'll find him. With just as much love in his heart as when he gave up his life.

REST STOP #4: Grumbling and Grateful

By David Horst

Scripture: Psalm 56:10-11 and Roman 5:3, 8:17

Materials Needed:

Bible

Pen and paper

A place to write and think

Part 1: Grumbling

Take a look at your life and think of the word grumble. What are some things that stick out to you? Now look at life in general. Are you a person who struggles to find the good in the experiences of life? Do you struggle to find the good in other people? Think of the times where you felt that you couldn't make it through the difficult times in life. What was your attitude? Was it positive or negative?

Part 2: Confronting our Grumbling attitude

Now on a piece of paper write some things down that you have complained about in the past week. Write down some words describing your attitude in the situation. Why were you so negative? What made you want to grumble or complain? Now after reflecting on these times, throw the papers away. Forget about them and ask God for forgiveness in the times when you have not been thankful.

Part 3: Gratitude

Now look at the flip side and think about the word gratitude. Gratitude is giving thanks and acknowledgment to another person. Many times that gratitude belongs to God. God created us and knows everything about us and loves us so much. Paul tells us that in our sufferings and in the hardships of life we should praise God. Think of all the times that God has pulled you through the tough times in life. Take some time to thank God and praise him for his faithfulness.