

## Repent from Your Complaining

### Jeremiah 15:15-21 (NIV)

<sup>15</sup> LORD, you understand; remember me and care for me. Avenge me on my persecutors. You are long-suffering—do not take me away; think of how I suffer reproach for your sake. <sup>16</sup> When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight, for I bear your name, LORD God Almighty. <sup>17</sup> I never sat in the company of revelers, never made merry with them; I sat alone because your hand was on me and you had filled me with indignation. <sup>18</sup> Why is my pain unending and my wound grievous and incurable? You are to me like a deceptive brook, like a spring that fails. <sup>19</sup> Therefore this is what the LORD says: "If you repent, I will restore you that you may serve me; if you utter worthy, not worthless, words, you will be my spokesman. Let this people turn to you, but you must not turn to them. <sup>20</sup> I will make you a wall to this people, a fortified wall of bronze; they will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you to rescue and save you," declares the LORD. <sup>21</sup> "I will save you from the hands of the wicked and deliver you from the grasp of the cruel."

You feel for Jeremiah, right? I mean, this guy is serving the Lord faithfully, bearing his name, being his prophet, and you hear in his own words what it's like for him. He has persecutors. He suffers reproach, disapproval, from his fellow Jews for telling them God's Word. He doesn't join in with revelers or merry-makers — people indulging in sin. He's all alone, alone in his principles, alone in his faith, in feasting on the Lord's words. His feelings culminate in verse 18: "Why is my pain unending and my wound grievous and incurable? You are to me like a deceptive brook, like a spring that fails." You got it bad, Jeremiah.

Do you ever feel like Jeremiah? Do you ever think that your pain is unending, your wound from being faithful to God and his Word is grievous and incurable? Do you think God is like a deceptive brook, a spring that fails, that he promises relief but provides none?

Even those of us with the most optimistic and positive attitudes experience legitimately bad things in life. You put your best effort forward in loving and serving your spouse as God served you only to have your spouse ignore and neglect you or criticize you and selfishly demand that you put more care into them. You put in untold amounts of time working your job because you know that you are working for God more than you are working for a paycheck, yet you're constantly overlooked and other people who don't work as hard or as faithfully as you are getting promoted ahead of you. You toil at taking care of the home, providing for the children, disciplining and correcting them according to God's Word only to find yourself unappreciated, exhausted, and your kids struggling or getting sick or misbehaving. You struggle with an addiction, maybe to alcohol or pornography or lustful thoughts or lying — pick your sin. You fight it every day, but you see the rest of the world indulging and it seems like they're happy, enjoying life. Why don't I just join them, join the company of revelers and merry-makers? Why do I sit all alone in my principles, in my faith, in living as God wants me to live, in consuming his Word? Wouldn't I be happy if I just gave in?

And so we call out like Jeremiah, "God, I can't take it anymore! I'm all alone out here. The wicked are prospering while I suffer, and they look happy. When are you going to care about me? When are you going to give me what I deserve for being faithful? When will it be my day to prosper and triumph and get ahead? I mean, you promised to take care of me. When are you going to do that?" "Why is my pain unending and my wound grievous and incurable? You are to me like a deceptive brook, like a spring that fails." (verse 18)

God responds to the complaint. He said to Jeremiah: "If you repent, I will restore you that you may serve me; if you utter worthy, not worthless, words, you will be my spokesman. Let this people turn to you, but you must not turn to them." (verse 19)

Repent. That word just kind of hangs out there. Jeremiah laid out his heartache, his grievances. He sought the Lord for help, and the Lord tells him repent? He just shuts Jeremiah down in this vulnerable state? Isn't Jeremiah in the right? Why call him to repent?

It was the right response. In bearing his heart, Jeremiah sinned. He called the Lord a deceptive brook, a spring that fails. In other words, he called God a liar, a breaker of promises, someone who tells you things only to get your hopes up and then dashes them all to pieces. He claimed that God doesn't help — either because he doesn't want to or because he can't, that he's nothing to him — like refreshing water that is supposed to be in a brook but isn't. Jeremiah wants his complaining validated, a sympathetic ear that will pat him on the shoulder and acknowledge that his life sucks while he eats and lives on God's Word. Instead, he's told, "Repent. Turn away from your complaining. What you are saying right now is worthless words, not my Words. Repent, Jeremiah."

You may be faithful to the Lord while you eat and live on his Word and you may also at the same time have it pretty bad right now. And if you came to me laying it all out there of how hard it is for you to continue living for God, that you think he's just not

answering your prayers, that he isn't there for you, I would probably be a sympathetic ear who says, "That sucks." Maybe I would even say that you don't deserve that, that you need to vent. I don't know if I would be so bold as to tell you to "Repent."

Since my boldness fails, if you think God has abandoned you and doesn't care about you right now and that you have the right to complain about your situation, hear his Word: "Repent." Repent from your complaining. Repent from your doubt, your lack of trust in the Lord. Repent from your accusations against God, thinking that he doesn't care about you or doesn't notice you. Repent from thinking that God doesn't love you.

"How can you say that to me? Here I am, laying out my struggles to you and you tell me to repent? Aren't you supposed to say something to build me up, make me feel better?" That's how I feel reading these words that God spoke to Jeremiah.

But then consider our Gospel reading from Matthew chapter 16: Jesus said, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." (verse 24) Deny yourself. Another phrase that just hangs there with big implications. Can I be so brutally honest with myself that I know I have no right to complain about struggling to live out God's Word and following his commands? Can I be so brutally honest with myself to know that this is exactly the fight that God has called me to – that I would deny myself, my urges, my desires to give in to sin, to separate from enjoying the bad life with the revelers and the merry-makers? Fighting against temptation, against sin, is hard because it is denying our sinful nature, a piece of who we were.

I tell God that my life is miserable because I have to resist temptation, but he doesn't pat me on the back saying, "Poor baby." He says, "I know. It is hard. Repent from your complaining. Turn away from it. Deny yourself. Deny these temptations. Deny the things that you think will make your life sweeter, more enjoyable, more pleasurable, more fulfilling. Take up your cross and follow me. Suffer as you live for me. Keep going. Why? Because I did for you."

Christ denied himself and took up his cross. Day in and day out, he denied temptations from the devil that would have seemingly made his life easier, more enjoyable. As he experienced persecution, enemies who constantly sought to discredit him and actually plotted out his death, he did not retaliate. As his own disciples, people like Peter, rebuked Jesus for saying that he would suffer and die, Christ did not strike him, insult him, or grumble against him. Instead, he continued on the path. Christ chose the cross. He denied himself, denied his temptations, and went on faithfully living according to God's Word and commands.

Why did he do this? He did this so that we would be forgiven for every complaint we have ever uttered in following God. So that we would have our mouths cleansed of any and every time that we grumbled against God, likening him to a deceptive brook or a failed spring, that he somehow lied to us and didn't stay true to his Word. Christ endured hell for us so that we would belong to him, even while walking through this life requires a denial of ourselves in order to live for him.

Christ denied himself and took up his cross because he cares for us. And he cares enough about us to call us out on our sins, to repent of sins that include complaining about having to deny ourselves from giving in to temptation. He cares enough for us not to just leave it at a call to repent, but he also renews our hope and our focus. He renews us in our fight against temptation by making us a fortified wall like he did for Jeremiah. "I will make you a wall to this people, a fortified wall of bronze; they will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you to rescue and save you," declares the LORD. "I will save you from the hands of the wicked and deliver you from the grasp of the cruel." (verses 20-21) God strengthens us in our hard fight against temptation, in denying ourselves and taking up our cross and following him and his Word. He makes us strong.

If you have said or thought that God doesn't care about you, that he has not made good on his promise, then repent. Repent of your complaining. Deny yourself. Take up your cross. Continue to turn to God knowing that he will rescue you and save you. Take away my complaints, Lord, when it comes to living for you. Don't let me fall to the lie that it would be a better life for me if I just gave in to temptation. Make me a fortified wall against all my temptations. Remind me that as you do this for me, nothing can overcome you because you are the LORD God Almighty. Rescue me, even from my complaints. Amen.