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# **Messages from Murmurers**

**# 918-A**

**Series: Living Lessons From Proverbs**

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Scene 1 goes something like this:

You're dining at a fashionable restaurant, and the waiter brings you your first course. It is an elegant cup of chowder, made from imported cheeses mixed with Norwegian rabbit's feet or something. The mere thought of it takes your breath away. You sip your soup with all the poise of a Society Success Story (little finger pointed east, etc.) and a pasted grin covers your face. Then, with all the finesse of a rattled rhinoceros, you turn to the waiter and exclaim in disgust, "That's the worst stuff I ever tasted." That's what's known as "complaining." (And at this point your testimony stands at "0".)

Scene 2 - Let's reconstruct the scene, now, only this time you smile at the waiter, and as soon as he's gone, you mutter under your breath to your dinner partner, "That's the worst stuff I ever ate. Is yours as bad as mine?" That's no longer complaining! Now you're murmuring.

Scene 3- Suppose the waiter returns with your salad, and you exclaim, "Hey, man, the soup was salty. I suppose the salad dressing is, too. Don't you guys do anything right?" Now, you're nagging.

Of course, you wouldn't do that. But each of us has at least one friend who does those kinds of things don't we?

Three slightly different forms of behavior ensued in our illustration, but it is the same discontented spirit that evoked all three responses.

Your rights had been violated.

Your right to good value.

Your right to good service.

Your right to good taste.

And you "deserved" something better.

So you reacted to the situation with a complaining spirit and

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you used your tongue to retaliate. Those three forms of verbal retaliation—complaining, murmuring, and nagging—form the three-cornered triangle of trouble that mark off the boundaries of the next phase of our study and the tongue-lashing (if you will) that this study involves. Our title for this lesson and the next is: “Messages from Murmurers.” Our outline for both lessons is as follows:

- I- Murmuring, Complaining, & Nagging: A Three-fold attack on the Sovereignty of God
- II- Murmuring Midgets in a Land of Giants: God’s Picture Book of Complainers
- III- The Marks of a Murmurer
- IV- A Murmurer from God’s Perspective: How He sees them and how He deals with them.
- V- The Messages Murmurers Send

We have been, you may recall, doing a bit of Scriptural examination, with the accompanying Scriptural surgery, on the unbelievably painful subject of the tongue, the tongue being, according to James, “a fire that no man can tame.” Our primary source of subject matter is the book of Proverbs, though as is the case in this lesson, some of our somewhat sensitive sources of conviction spring spontaneously from the pages of the rest of Scripture.

Thus far, we have looked longingly to the Lord for answers to the problems of arguing and the giving of a bad report. Now we move on to examine the trio of tongue twisters we mentioned earlier. We will find that while they are kissin’ cousins of a bad report, they take the negative nature that visualizes that bad report and in three progressive stages of insensitivity, manufacture from the posture of man’s perspective, a trinity of trouble for the Christian.

Now just how can we define this dynamic trio of destruction? For starts, let’s take a look at the word, “complain.” The dictionary defines it this way.

To complain:

- to express feelings of pain or dissatisfaction or resentment.
- to describe one’s problems.
- to make an accusation or bring a charge.

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Now obviously, using this definition, all complaining is not wrong. If you break your arm, and the doctor puts the wrong one in a splint, a complaint is in order. Or if you're in line at the football game and the guy in front of you stands on your big toe and stays there, (he thinks the pavement's just lumpy—you think you're crippled for life) I'd say a complaint is in order. The degree of the complaint depends on the size of the man. You can express feelings of pain or dissatisfaction quite sincerely. Or you take the car to be washed, and the lovely little lad who belongs to the mother in the next car begins carving his name with a rock on the hood of your Mercedes. Definitely painful. Definitely dissatisfaction. Definitely resentment.

The problem is obviously in all three cases that “complaining”, as we use the term, is a viable option only under certain conditions and only with certain limitations. Let's see what those conditions are:

Condition 1 is Self-Control. Ask yourself, “Is the mind responding to the Word over the objections of the emotions? Or are you reacting to the situation rather than responding to it?” You react when you are driven to retaliate, or rail, or otherwise exhibit uncontrolled behavior. You respond when you quickly examine the situation, consider the options, and choose deliberately to speak or act in a manner consistent with Christian behavior.

You, for instance, had a responsibility to complain about your newly engraved Mercedes hood to the Maternal Magistrate who was scrubbing her Beloved Buick while her untended children up-ended your peace of mind.

The question is: HOW?

An uncontrolled scream? Not hardly.

A string of unprintable X-rated phrases? Of course not.

A Karate chop to the neck of her next of kin? No, no, no.

How about a “Hey, madam, why don't you watch what your stupid kids are doing?” No, I don't think we'll vote for that, either.

Let's say you gently restrain little Danny Destruction and take him quietly to his mother, praying for grace as you go, you say, “Ma'am, I'm sorry to trouble you, but while you were washing your car, your little boy was damaging mine. I wonder if I could have the name of your insurance company.”

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It's a complaint. You're in obvious pain, obviously dissatisfied, but you are in control.

God's principles of conduct are allowing you to respond rather than to react. The same thing is true at the doctor's office. The Medicine Man needs to be informed of his error in the arm department, but not in a condemning, uncontrolled rage. Just a quiet statement ought to do it. "I beg your pardon, sir, but I believe you're bandaging the wrong arm," for instance.

So consideration 1- for a complaint, to be Biblically acceptable, it must be done in the spirit of self-control.

Consideration 2- for a complaint to be valid, it must be done only when necessary. We all have many acceptable occasions to complain, but most of the time, complaining will not solve the problem. Therefore, it becomes a vehicle to vent our displeasure, rather than a tool of correction.

If your wife can't make baked beans the way grandma used to, for instance, but she tries and she cries because she wants to, what earthly good will it do you to complain? Wouldn't a little praise for progress be better motivation?

Consideration 3- for complaints to be wise, they must meet the other person's needs. If complaining will only damage that person, then your complaints become merely a tool of self-exaltation, a demanding of your rights at the expense of another's well-being, and there is no scriptural basis for that!

Consideration 4- for complaining to be valid, it must not discredit your testimony as a Christian. What good will it do to get better rabbit's foot chowder at the local eatery if the waiter sees a life that is selfish, inconsistent, inconsiderate, or out of control. That waiter saw you pray before you ate, heard you saying, "The Lord" this and "The Lord" that in your conversation, then witnessed an angry condemning spirit emerge just from "a sip of salty soup." God may have sent you to that restaurant to meet that waiter's needs. Ask him his name. Ask about his family. Treat him as a person. And if you must complain, make it, "Sir, could I have another bowl of soup. I'm afraid they accidentally over-salted this one." Do it with a smile on your face. A genuine smile makes a viable complaint compatible with Christian love. Remember, that waiter's needs outweigh your taste buds in God's order of importance.

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“Let each esteem others (and their needs) more valuable and important than their own,” Paul reminds us in Philippians 2. So complaining has its place, but its place requires:

- 1- A controlled response
- 2- That it really be necessary
- 3- That it be in other’s best interest
- 4- That it be in harmony with the character of Christ

What we will deal with in this lesson, then, is “ungodly complaining,” which might best be defined this way: “An unnecessary or uncontrolled verbal expression in defense of violated rights, the sharing of which might bring harm to others or to the Name of Christ.”

A complaint is direct, and it has a retaliatory motive, but unless it has a redeeming motive it will miss its mark.

Murmuring, however, is more easily defined because in a scriptural sense, it is never acceptable. You see, while complaining is direct, murmuring is indirect. It expresses displeasure, but not to the party involved. The dictionary calls it an indistinct complaint (an indirect complaint is also a valid description). It is a subtle attempt to create undercurrents of discontentment by sharing your unhappiness or your inconvenience with another, either for sympathy or for support. And murmuring is, as we shall see, a key source of division and strife. Example: A church member, Danny Do Good doesn’t like something the pastor says. But instead of complain to the pastor, he calls a friend, Lenny Listenlots.

“I was offended by what Brother Billy said Sunday,” Danny murmurs, “he never should have used that illustration.” His friend hadn’t been offended by the sermon at all, but Danny’s murmuring raises question marks, so he calls another friend, and he murmurs, too. Soon a whole undercurrent of discontentment has spread like wildfire: a flame set by a murmuring tongue.

If it isn’t appropriate to call the pastor directly, then there’s no justification to say it indirectly. Murmurers destroy churches, homes, businesses, and friendships. Murmuring is an indirect undercurrent of complaining usually directed at others rather than at the source of the complaint.

The third spark in our trio of flame throwers is nagging. Nagging means to apply pressure through repetitive murmuring

in order to wear down another's resistance.

The nagger has a quiver full of tiny barbs that when thrown just at the proper moment always draw blood. He or she finds subtle joy in the repetitive sarcastic jabs that intimidate, humiliate, or embarrass another. The nagger often finds so much joy in the process that he or she is seldom really happy if they get what they want. One reason is because it's fun to nag. Another is because you never really satisfy a discontented spirit, even when it gets its way. Either it should've been sooner or it should've been better.

A nagger works his barbs into an otherwise harmless dinner conversation and turns a pleasant meal into a battleground.

"Go sit on the gray chair, Jimmy, until I'm ready for you," Mother exclaims. "Just sitting in that chair is punishment enough," she mumbles just loudly enough for Papa to hear. For two years she has wanted to replace the gray chair, but Dad says the money's not there. So Mama's gray chair vendetta goes underground.

The Smiths are invited to dinner for the first time. "Your house looks so nice," Mrs. Smith comments. "What a lovely living room."

"Oh, it would be nice if it weren't for that ugly gray chair," Mother frets. Then her eyes send darts Hubby's way, hoping to establish a guilt trip, or make him either angry enough or embarrassed enough to decide that no gray chair is worth it.

"Oh, yes, Mama," your lovely lady says on the phone (making sure Daddy can hear), "Someday I'll replace the gray chair. But by then, I guess the sofa will be worn out, too. I know the sofa's new, Mama, but the gray chair's light years away from extinction."

It may even seem funny to an observer, but to Dad it's interminable pressure to replace the gray chair, not through confrontation, but through deception and determination. Even direct complaints about the gray chair are timed not to elicit a controlled response, but rather to wear down Dad's resistance. Now the gray chair may be a legitimate need, and maybe dear old Dad's a tightwad, but even so, nagging is never an acceptable form of sandpaper. Nothing breaks another's will to please more quickly than the barbs of a nagging tongue. It is, in addition

to being scripturally unacceptable, a horribly ineffective way of accomplishing your objective, because even if you win the battle, you lose the war.

So there you have our Trinity of Tongue Trouble that issues forth from a discontented spirit: complaining, murmuring, and nagging. Little sparks they are, but behold, what great fires those little sparks can set.

Now as we progress with this subject, let me remind you that complaining, murmuring, and nagging all have two things in common.

First, they all issue as verbal expressions of a discontented spirit. All three have as their base of operations the premise that they have been dealt a bad hand in the game of life, at least for the moment. The complainer, the murmurer, and the nagger are all saying, "I deserve better."

So secondly, then, all three are a reflection of a negative concept of the sovereignty of God. (For that's what discontentment is!) The Chronic Complainer is dissatisfied with life as he sees it. He is discontent. Therefore, he subtly implies with every complaint either that God is not in control or God does not care or God is powerless to improve his lot in life.

As we mentioned in the last lesson, the complainer's problem is perspective. When you view life from God's perspective, you see the spiritual value even in physical setbacks. You see character emerge through circumstances, and you see the steady hand of a sovereign God working all things together for good. So what is there to complain about? Why murmur? Why nag? If God be for us, who can be against us?

We'll be looking in this lesson and in the next at the characteristics of these three tongue twisters, and how to bring a murmuring tongue under control. But may I remind you that if you are constantly plagued with these problems, remember your tongue is only the symptom. The disease is discontentment, and the cure is a healthy dose of the sovereignty of God. For once you learn to praise Him for His perfect control, what is there to murmur about? Unfortunately, some of the world's greatest complainers and murmurers are Christians. It ought not to be so, but it is. I pondered that last night and came to the conclusion that there are at least four reasons Christians seem to be chronic complainers.

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Perhaps the foremost reason is that so often they apply spiritual promises to physical situations. Having been set up with unbiblical expectations, they become murmurers when life doesn't turn out all peaches and cream, and there is a degree to which perhaps well-meaning preachers promote this theory with such one liners as:

God never meant for a Christian to be poor. (Oh, really? Then what about Jesus?)

God never meant for a Christian to be sick or to die young. (Oh, really? What about Paul? What about Stephen? or Jesus)

God never meant for a Christian to be rejected or persecuted. Oh, my, scratch Jesus and Peter and Paul and John.

My friend, none of those statements is true. But the flesh clings to promises like those, and when sickness, or poverty, or rejection strikes, instead of rejoicing from God's perspective, dissatisfied saints begin to murmur.

A second reason so many Christians murmur is that we're double minded. We want the best of both worlds. And my friend, you can't have that. When you sell out and make real discipleship your goal, some other things will have to go. If we're double minded when the heat gets on, we murmur.

A third reason is that Satan will do anything to destroy the fellowship of the saints and murmuring does that. So he applies the heat where the heart is tender because if we begin to complain, not only does he cripple us, he sets fire to the forests of believers who surround us.

A fourth reason is that many Christians never learn to be thankful. We learn all about sound doctrine—all about eschatology, all about Biblical customs and history—but my friend, until we learn to experience the joy of a heart that's learned to praise God in all things, we're ripe to become murmurers.

For those four reasons Christian complainers are all too prevalent in today's society, and a world seeking spiritual satisfaction is confused because it is surrounded by dissatisfied Christians. God tried to see that it wouldn't happen. He painted in colorful detail on the canvas of His Word a perfect portrait of the cause and effects of murmuring among His children. He might well have labeled the portrait "Israel: Murmuring Midgets in a Land of Giants." He told us to pay close attention to what

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made them murmur, so we would never fall victim to the same disease. The caption to the portrait is found in I Corinthians 10.

Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea;

And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea;

And did all eat the same spiritual meat;

And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ.

But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness.

Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted.

Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.

Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed and fell in one day three and twenty thousand.

Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents.

Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer.

Now all these things happened unto them for examples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.

Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. (I Corinthians 10:1-12)

Paul said God recorded Israel's behavior in graphic detail, not just to make us experts on Hebrew history, but as examples that we shouldn't lust as they lusted, that we shouldn't be unholy as they were, that we shouldn't put God to the test as they did, that we shouldn't murmur like them.

They were written as examples for us who live in this last age that we might take heed and not fall. God's given us a picture book to show us in living color what makes us murmur, how God feels about it, and what messages murmurers really transmit to a world that's unredeemed. We will be scanning that book for

pictures that we might take heed indeed.

Let's begin by looking at the marks of a murmurer. All I did was to take a concordance, cross-reference all the passages on murmuring, then on complaining, and finally on nagging, just to see what Scriptural portraits emerge, portraits that look strangely like a mirror, reflecting my own discontented spirit. I trust that the results will be helpful to all of us. We'll only have time for three in this lesson, and then we'll take up there in the next.

Let's simply ask ourselves, "What makes us murmur?" And let Scriptures answer us. Why do we murmur?

Reason 1- We murmur that the past was better.

Part of the plague of a discontented spirit is a short memory. We remember the past through rose-colored glasses, glasses fogged with unreality. Here is a good memory verse:

Say not thou, what is the cause that the former days were better than these? for thou dost not inquire out of wisdom concerning this. (Ecclesiastes 7:10)

Another translation words it like this:

Do not ask why earlier days were better than these, for this is not a question prompted by wisdom.

One of Satan's greatest tools to destroy God's children is to get them looking at scrapbooks of the "Good Old Days" when you were the life of the party (but you were a party with no life.)

Those weren't the days, my friend; be glad they had to end. God didn't promise you more of the world's pleasure; He promised you more of the Word's treasures. And the cost to make the transfer is high. You're not to look back in excitement; you're to look forward in expectation. The best is yet to come.

Numbers chapter eleven is God's perfect illustration. The children of Israel were in rebellion. God had delivered them and led them and fed them, all supernaturally. But their complaint was, "Lord what have you done today?" And, "Lord, these spiritual lessons we're learning from this manna stuff are OK, but we are better before we ever started following you." (Some of you might say the same thing.) They began to murmur, so they took out their travel folders of Egypt and began to discuss "The Good Old Days." They reread the menu from the Cairo Hilton, and drooled with discontentment.

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Verse ten is the key verse. By now the murmuring had spread like cancer, and the whole nation was weeping, dreaming over past meals, while forgetting past miracles. Verse ten says God got angry, and Moses got angry, too.

Beloved, you may be out of work and living on beans and bread, but compared to your pre-Christ days, you never had it so good. You're feasting on the manna that lasts, drinking the living water so that you need never thirst again. My friend, the Egypt of your past was saturated with sin have you forgotten? Plagued with unforgiveness, have you forgotten? Surrounded by guilt, void of hope, empty of joy, have you forgotten?

Don't murmur about the "Good Old Days." Start praising God instead for taking a black, ugly heart and covering it with His precious blood so that now it's white as snow. Praise Him instead that that load of guilt you carried for so long has been lifted, and God has taken it from you forever. Praise Him for His availability in the Egypt of your life. You couldn't call on Him. You couldn't pray. You had no relationship with the living God. Today, though storms may encompass you, all you need do is whisper, "Jesus," and arms of love surround you, hands of grace uplift you, fingers of mercy dry your tears. Oh, dear Christian, praise Him. For lips that echo choruses of praise can scarcely form the words that murmuring lips would say.

A second thing Christians are not to murmur about is their wages, or in particular, about whether or not their wages are fair compared to someone else's. Isn't that really what all these strikes are about? Is it that the strikers can't live on what they make? Or aren't the football players striking for a deal as good as the baseball players have? Aren't the American Chrysler workers longing for whatever the Canadian Chrysler workers get? Don't some auto workers fret for what the other auto workers get? And on and on it goes, murmuring.

Jesus tells a story in Matthew chapter twenty about a group of farm workers, using it as a backdrop to teach spiritual truth about God's kind of spiritual economy. It goes like this. It seems a wealthy farm owner went out early one morning to hire workers to help harvest his crops. He found a group that was willing to work and said, "How would you like to work for \$20 a day in my field?" The workers agreed and began to work. Two hours passed and the owner spotted some more prospective

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laborers, offered to pay them what was right to work what was left of the day, and they agreed. They too went to work. About noon the story repeated itself, and again about three o'clock in the afternoon and again about five. So what he had was a field full of men who were hired at different times to work for the rest of the day. Some worked 12 hours, some worked 10, some three hours, some only one. At the end of the day they all lined up to be paid and much to everyone's surprise, the men who had only worked an hour received \$20. (That's even good pay today!) A ripple of whispers filled the hall, "If they got \$20 for an hour, no telling what we'll get for 12," they imagined. But when their turn came, they too got \$20. And verse eleven says, "When they had received it, they murmured against the owner of the estate. "We worked longer, we deserve more," they complained to one another. But the master of the laborers cautioned them against their murmurings. He said, "Friend, I did thee no wrong. Didn't you agree to work one day for \$20? "Yup." And didn't you work one day? "Yup?" And didn't I pay you \$20? "Yup?" Now go your way. It's my money, and it's my decision how I shall pay and who I shall pay. Now I know the spiritual applications are there, but so are the principles of murmuring saints and salaries. It is clear that in God's economy the believer:

- 1- Ought to be grateful to have a job.
- 2- Ought to work as hard as he is able for as many hours as he's hired.
- 3- Ought to be grateful to receive his pay and expect no more than he's promised.
- 4- Ought not to make comparisons about his salary or his rank and others around him.
- 5- God's man ought not to murmur about what he thinks are inequities. His job (so long as he takes another man's money) is to gratefully labor for the hours he has agreed.

I get so weary of ladder-climbing Christians clawing their way to the top at their fellow employee's expense, quoting Scripture as they go.

I get grieved when God's people are only concerned about what's in it for them, rather than how to make their boss successful.

My heart breaks when I see believers ungrateful to have a

job, coveting a better one instead.

And it's tough to listen to Christians complaining about their salaries and their benefits while still taking their boss's paychecks. I hate it when Christians murmur about their jobs.

Society doesn't owe us jobs. God gives us opportunities and He is thrilled, not by what we make, but by how diligent we are, by how faithful we are in the little things we're asked to do, by how joyful we are, by how consistent we are, and by how thankful we are to have a job at all. Some of us need to go home and fall on our knees and praise God for the opportunity to work, for the strength to work, and for a country that allows us the freedom to choose how and when we will work.

Murmuring workers grieve God's heart. Thankful workers please God's heart. You and I can choose which one we'll be. And you wives, you be grateful for whatever salary your husband makes. Don't take it for granted; don't take him for granted. When he comes home at night, thank God, and thank Him for the hamburger. God never promised you steak! Beloved, we may come to the day soon when prosperity, as we know it, vanishes; but we can still be content in Christ. And if we're content, what will there be to murmur about?

A third reason Christians murmur is when their privacy or their schedule is interrupted, when the doorbell rings or the telephone interrupts our edifying experience with our favorite TV program or sports show for something like a prayer request or a heart that's hungry for fellowship. If you're like me, you murmur all the way to the door or all the way to the phone. Then with cheerful hypocrisy you beam, "Oh, Hi, Joe, so glad you could drop in." Or, "Susie, how neat that you called."

Scripture says:

Use hospitality one to another without grudging (or murmuring). (I Peter 4:9)

Beck translates it,

Welcome one another as guests without grumbling.

Phillips says it best,

Be hospitable to each other without secretly wishing you hadn't got to be.

God could have said, "Be hospitable to one another," and

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stopped there, but He was after the heart attitude because those who need you (whom you are regarding in your heart as intruders) know they aren't welcome. (And they know they could be welcome in Jesus' home.)

I'm the cardinal example of this. I prove it every day. I waste time, and then when unexpected intrusions come into my time or my privacy to test my response, I murmur. I pray for people with needs, and then when they call, I murmur. I pray for fellowship, but when the doorbell chimes, I murmur. And I'll bet some of you do, too.

And God says, "That's not my way." God says no one was busier than Jesus! But Jesus was never too busy to stop and touch a fevered brow or encourage a broken heart or talk to a little child. The disciples rebuked those who cried out for help who might be disturbing the master's schedule; but Jesus rebuked the disciples instead and stopped to meet each person's needs. God help us to do the same.

We'll take up here in the next lesson and we'll look at:

- Christians who murmur over problems in the church.
- Christians who murmur over the high cost of discipleship.
- Christians who murmur over being sick.
- Christians who murmur over tribulation.
- And Christians who murmur that they're not appreciated.

Lord willing, we'll look at how God deals with murmurers, and lastly, at what murmuring Christians are really saying to an unsaved world.

In the meantime, Beloved, God has a message for each of us. It goes like this:

I said I will take heed to my ways that I sin not with my tongue. I will keep my mouth with a bridle while the wicked is before me. (Psalm 39:1)

Ken Taylor translates that verse this way:

I said to myself, I'm going to quit complaining! I'll keep quiet, especially when the ungodly are around me. (TLB)

Wouldn't that be a neat verse to claim for the next seven days? To be able to say to the Lord, "Lord, I'll quit complaining. I'll quit

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murmuring, and I'll quit nagging. Instead, I'll start listening, and I'll start praising, and I'll start rejoicing. And I'll be doubly careful when I'm around those who know you not as Lord."

Wouldn't it make a pleasant change in our offices, in our homes, in our hearts, if we quit complaining beginning right now?

There's only one sure way to find out, and that's to give God's way a try.

WHAT COULD HAPPEN IN YOUR WORLD

Oh, what could happen in your world,  
And oh, what could happen in mine,  
If you and if I began just to speak  
With all of God's purpose in line?

We'd stop all our foolish complaining  
And claiming with vigor our rights;  
We'd stop all this ungodly murmuring  
That leads so to factions and fights.

We'd stop all our needling and nagging  
To wear down the heart of another.  
Instead, we'd start praising and thanking  
And speak words of hope to our brother.

Oh, what will happen in your world,  
And oh, what will happen in mine,  
Beginning today, as God takes our tongues  
To use as by grace He designed.

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