

“

**SET A GUARD,**  
*O Lord, over my mouth*  
**KEEP WATCH OVER**  
*the door of my lips*

Psalm 141:3

”

VBS

20

16

Day 4

*Thankfulness v. Complaining*



calvary chapel of philadelphia

**CHILDREN'S MINISTRY**

# Thankfulness v. Complaining

The Objective is the key concept for this weeks lesson. It should be the main focus of the study

These are the key verses that you will find helpful in teaching your study this week. The “Main passage” is the basis of the study, where the other verse support the objective of the lesson.

There is a memory verse for the students that relates to every study. If a student can memorize the verse for the following week you may give them a prize from the “reward box” found on your cart.

An introductory activity or question that will settle the class, draw their attention to the study and prepare their hearts for God’s Word

**Objective** The goal of this lesson is to emphasize the importance of thankfulness and the danger of complaining through the story of Israel complaining in the wilderness.

## Key Verses

Exodus 16; Numbers 11—Main Teaching Passages  
(Emphasis will be on Numbers 11)

1 Thessalonians 5:18

Colossians 3:15-17

Philippians 2:14-15

**Memory Verse** - 1 Thessalonians 5:18

“In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”

## Hook

Each class will be provided with a “gift.” Tell the class that you will be giving this gift to one of your helpers for doing such a good job this week. Instruct the helper to open it, and, when he/she sees what it is, complain about it. Point out negatives about it and be as ungrateful as possible. Do not say “thank-you.”

Ask the class if this was an appropriate response. Have them identify the problems with what the teacher did and ask for recommendations as to what he or she should have done.

What does the Bible say? This is where we will read a passage or series of passages that teach on the subject of the day.

# BOOK

Our primary focus today is on Numbers 11, but understanding what happened in Exodus 16 highlights the wickedness of Israel's complaining in Numbers 11. In Exodus 16, we learn that one of the first things the Israelites did after escaping Egypt was complain about food. They despaired to the point of wishing they were back in Egypt, totally ignoring the fact that God had just miraculously delivered them from slavery. Still, God was gracious, and he provided manna, a type of bread that came down from heaven. Every day for forty years while Israel was in the wilderness, God provided for his people. On the sixth day, He even provided double so that the people could rest on the Sabbath. However, we find out that, rather than being thankful for God's provision, the Israelites once again complained about their food. They longed for the provisions they had in Egypt but forgot the great cost of those provisions. They complained that all they had was manna and no meat to eat. Moses was so upset that he told the Lord he would rather die than continue to lead such an ungrateful people. The Lord commanded Moses to gather seventy elders of the people before the tabernacle. God was going to pour His Holy Spirit out on them to help Moses lead the people so that he would not have to carry this burden alone. He also said that He was going to provide meat for his people, so much meat that they would be sick of it. The Lord sent a large group of quail to the camp. The quail was piled up high all over the camp, and the people quickly gathered as much of the meat as they could. However, because the Israelites had grieved the Lord through their unthankful hearts, He sent a plague on the camp while they were eating. The people faced severe consequences for their complaining.

The interpretation/exegesis of the passage. What does this passage mean? How does this passage apply to my life?

# LOOK

Of all the sins we've looked at this week, complaining may seem like the most harmless. Of all the virtues, thankfulness could appear to be the least necessary. However, as we saw on previous days, the amount of time we spend in thankfulness versus complaining has a major impact on our walk with the Lord. As we saw in today's story, a lack of thankfulness can yield devastating consequences both to individuals and to communities.

Complaining is an infectious virus among groups of people. Everyone can be having a perfectly good time when one person points out something they don't like about the situation. It just takes that one voice of discontent and suddenly everyone is complaining about every little thing. Once the focus is on what people don't like, it becomes difficult for people to be grateful for all the good things they do have. Complaining is toxic to a community and spreads quickly.

## LOOK (Continued)

Being thankful properly honors those who have given us blessings. When we complain, on the other hand, we are incredibly disrespectful to the person who has tried to bless us. An unthankful heart distracts us from God and hurts our relationships with other people. In contrast, when we are thankful, the person who has blessed us will be glad and delight to give future blessings. Also, as much as complaining damages a community, thankfulness improves it and makes it a much better place to be. However, the most important reason we ought to be thankful is because the Bible commands us to be.

The Bible is filled with passages on thankfulness. 1 Thessalonians 5:18 tells us to give thanks in everything. Colossians 3:15-17 shows thankfulness in the context of the Christian community. Philippians 2:14-15 tells us to do everything without grumbling or complaining. These verses do not tell us to “usually” be thankful or not to complain “too much.” We should be thankful in all things. Complaining is always wrong.

If there was ever a group of people who ought to be thankful, it should be us. We live in a country that has been richly blessed to the point that even those who are comparatively poor among us are usually better off than many people in other countries. We have clothes, food, shelter, not to mention so many extra nice things. In addition, we live in a country that does not persecute us for our beliefs. We are free to worship God here. As believers, we have even more to be thankful for because our sins have been forgiven. If we have nothing else to be thankful for, that alone should cause us never to complain and give thanks forever. In addition, we have the gift of God’s Word in our language. There is no shortage of things to be thankful for.

What is my response to this passage of Scripture? How should my life change according to what this passage teaches me? What are the practical things I can do throughout the week to make this true in my life.

## TOOK

As a class, memorize 1 Thessalonians 5:18.

Make a list of things the class can be thankful for. The list should include spiritual and material blessings.

**Pray:** Thank the Lord for all the things on the list you have just made. Ask Him to help the class to be thankful and not complain.

**Parent Question:** Why is it important for us always to be thankful?

# FURTHER STUDY

## Commentary on Numbers 11 by David Guzik

### ***The People Complain***

A. The complaints of Israel and of Moses.

1. (1-3) The complaining heart of Israel.

Now *when* the people complained, it displeased the LORD; for the LORD heard *it*, and His anger was aroused. So the fire of the LORD burned among them, and consumed *some* in the outskirts of the camp. Then the people cried out to Moses, and when Moses prayed to the LORD, the fire was quenched. So he called the name of the place Taberah, because the fire of the LORD had burned among them.

a. **Now when the people complained:** Israel, having been ordered, organized, cleansed, separated, blessed, taught how to give, reminded of God's deliverance, given God's presence, and the tools to advance to the Promised Land, is now on the march to Canaan - and immediately, **the people complained**.

i. How can it be that a nation so blessed can still complain? God had done so much in and for Israel; yet they still murmur against Him. Of course, their circumstances were not easy - but what sin it is for them to complain against God, wiping out the spirit of gratitude in their hearts!

b. **The people complained ... it displeased the LORD:** This was a simple case of cause-and-effect. Our complaining hearts displease God, because it shows so little gratitude for what He has done in the past, and faith for what He can do right now.

i. We aren't even told here exactly what Israel was complaining about. Perhaps here, it is because their complaining is just that generally dissatisfied heart - complaining not for any one great reason, but because that is where their hearts are.

c. **The fire of the LORD burned among them:** Israel had valued the fire of God as the emblem of His presence at night; but now, that fire and the presence of God becomes somewhat of a two-edged sword - the presence of God was there to deal with sin as well as to comfort Israel.

d. **The people cried out to Moses:** Ideally, they would have cried out to God Himself; but with their low walk with God, they feel more comfortable with Moses.

e. **When Moses prayed to the LORD, the fire was quenched:** Moses intercedes for the people, and the fire is quenched - but the place is named **Taberah** ("burning") as a reminder of God's estimation of the complaining heart.

2. (4-9) Israel complains about manna.

Now the mixed multitude who were among them yielded to intense craving; so the children of Israel also wept again and said: "Who will give us meat to eat? "We remember the fish which we ate freely in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; but now our whole being *is* dried up; *there is* nothing at all except this manna *before* our eyes!" Now the manna *was* like coriander seed, and its color like

the color of bdellium. The people went about and gathered *it*, ground *it* on millstones or beat *it* in the mortar, cooked *it* in pans, and made cakes of it; and its taste was like the taste of pastry prepared with oil. And when the dew fell on the camp in the night, the manna fell on it.

a. **Now the mixed multitude who were among them:** [Exodus 12:38](#) says that *a mixed multitude* went out of Egypt. This means that not all of those who came out of Egypt with Moses were ethnically Israelites; many Egyptians (and perhaps other foreigners) went with them, because they were fellow slaves in Egypt, and because the God of Israel has shown Himself more powerful than the gods of the Egyptians.

i. There is a sense also in which Israel was a **mixed multitude** spiritually - not all had a genuine, real relationship with God. This is true of the visible church as well, which Jesus said would contain good and bad until the final harvest ([Matthew 13:24-30](#), [36-43](#)).

b. **Yielded to intense craving:** The Hebrew word here is *ta'avah*; it is also used in passages like [Genesis 3:6](#), [1 Samuel 2:16](#), [Job 33:20](#), [Psalm 10:3](#) for the strong desire for something pleasant, but perhaps sinful (though not always).

i. Israel had to *yield* to this intense craving; it would not be fulfilled unless they cooperated with it. [James 1:14](#) says *But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed*; the attraction to sin is present within us, yet we must still *yield* to it in choosing to sin.

c. **Who will give us meat to eat?** This was a strange question to ask, considering they had a God in heaven that met their every need. It seems that Israel looked for *another* provider because they are not satisfied with what comes to them from the hand of God - and are so distraught over this they *wept*!

i. Tears of repentance or sorrow over sin or joy in the LORD can be beautiful before God; but many tears shed, even by believers, are shed over childish disappointments.

ii. Israel *could* have provided meat for themselves. God did not prohibit them to hunt whatever animals they could in the wilderness; and they had their flocks, which could be slaughtered for meat. They don't want to do anything about their desire for meat, except cry about it.

d. **We remember:** In describing life in Egypt, one would think their slavery there was heaven on earth for Israel! One would think that their plates were always crammed with wonderful foods. Israel here is engaging in "creative memory," choosing to remember certain things about Egypt, and exaggerating those things, while at the same time choosing to forget other things.

i. We often think of our memory as a mechanical "photographing" process, which impartially records the facts and then impartially retrieves those records. It isn't like that at all! Memory, both in recording and retrieving, is a creative process - and "memories" can be created of events that never happened. This is much to the pain of families that have been wounded by "False Memory Syndrome," where childhood memories of abuse and such are created.

ii. Memory often romanticizes the past; one may long for a return to the spiritual environment of one's youth, when everyone seemed more right with God and more on fire. Yet, this is often confused with a simple longing for our youth - when things seemed so much more simple, our responsibilities were fewer, and everything was newer.

iii. Israel fell in love with an illusion from the past (how great Egypt was), instead of looking for what God had for them in the future - the Promised Land, which was truly a land of milk and honey - all the great food they could ever want! God's best for us is always ahead, never behind us.



e. **Nothing at all except this manna:** Essentially, their complaint against the manna was, "It's not exciting enough. It's boring." This appalling lack of gratitude was nothing less than to have *despised the LORD* ([Numbers 11:20](#)). God is our provider; to despise what He provides is to despise Him. It is not God's job to entertain us, and we should be more than children who demand to be entertained and excited.

f. **Now our whole being is dried up:** The complaining heart romanticizes the past but it also exaggerates the problems of the present. **Our whole being is dried up** was a gross exaggeration. God would not allow them away in the wilderness. In fact, God provided their every need - though not every desire.

g. **Its taste was like the taste of pastry prepared with oil:** In fact, manna was excellent provision. Seemingly, it could taste like donuts, yet provided all necessary nutrition for a long journey through the wilderness.

i. "They could never be satisfied; even God himself could not please them, because they were ever preferring their own wisdom to his. God will save us in his own way, or not at all; because that way, being the plan of infinite wisdom, it is impossible that we can be saved in any other." (Clarke)

### 3. (10-15) The complaint of Moses.

Then Moses heard the people weeping throughout their families, everyone at the door of his tent; and the anger of the LORD was greatly aroused; Moses also was displeased. So Moses said to the LORD, "Why have You afflicted Your servant? And why have I not found favor in Your sight, that You have laid the burden of all these people on me? Did I conceive all these people? Did I beget them, that You should say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom, as a guardian carries a nursing child,' to the land which You swore to their fathers? Where am I to get meat to give to all these people? For they weep all over me, saying, 'Give us meat, that we may eat.' I am not able to bear all these people alone, because the burden *is* too heavy for me. If You treat me like this, please kill me here and now; if I have found favor in Your sight; and do not let me see my wretchedness!"

a. **And the anger of the LORD was greatly aroused; Moses also was displeased:** The childish weeping of the people not only angered the LORD; it displeased Moses as well. This frustration drove him in frustration to God.

i. Moses certainly had a *better* reason to complain to God; it wasn't as if he **yielded to intense craving** as the children of Israel did. Yet, even his complaining is not good, and shows a lapse in his trust in God.

ii. Moses seems caught off-guard; surprised that the people would be so rebellious so quickly after such a strong warning at Taberah; leaders are apt to do the wrong thing when they are caught off-guard!

b. **Why have You afflicted Your servant?** Moses responded to God the way many of us do in a time of trial. He essentially said, "God, here I am serving You. Why did You bring this upon me?" It's easy to say God did not bring this upon Moses - a carnal and ungrateful people did. Yet, though God did not directly afflict Moses with this, He ultimately allowed it.

i. God allowed this for the same reason God allows any affliction in our lives - to compel us to trust in Him all the more, to partner with Him in overcoming obstacles, and to love and praise Him all the more through our increased dependence on Him and the greater deliverance He brings.

ii. *That no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this* ([1 Thessalonians 3:3](#)).

iii. Of course, it is very hard to see this in the midst of the affliction; we feel like Moses did: **Why have I not found favor in Your sight?** "If You really loved me LORD, why would You bring all this upon me?" God's response is ever the same: "It's because I do love you that I am training you, building you up in faith."

c. **Did I conceive all these people? Did I beget them:** When Moses likened himself to a mother and the children of Israel as his children, he used a fitting figure of speech - because Israel was in fact acting like a bunch of babies. When Moses said, "**For they weep all over me**" it showed that Israel cried childish tears from a temper-tantrum.

d. **I am not able to bear all these people alone:** Now Moses has a correct understanding, though not a correct attitude yet. He cannot bear all these people alone; God will do it in him and through him.

e. **If You treat me like this, please kill me here and now:** Moses was extremely frustrated. He poured out and emotional, pained, fed-up, "I'm sick and tired of this" heart to the LORD. "If You really love me LORD, kill me right now" is not a correct prayer from the head, but it is a honest prayer from the heart.

i. God will not answer Moses' request; but He will answer the prayer of his heart. When we are overwhelmed with such feelings, it is good for us to take them to the LORD, and let go of them, rather than brooding on them ourselves.

ii. **And do not let me see my wretchedness!** This was a prayer God would not answer. God wanted Moses to see his wretchedness - his inability to fix this problem - apart from the mighty hand of God. When Moses sees his wretchedness - his weakness, then he can be strong in God's strength. As Paul learned: God's strength is made perfect in weakness ([2 Corinthians 12:9](#)).

B. God answers the complaints of Israel and of Moses.

1. (16-17) God helps Moses by sending elders to assist him.

So the LORD said to Moses: "Gather to Me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them; bring them to the tabernacle of meeting, that they may stand there with you. Then I will come down and talk with you there. I will take of the Spirit that *is* upon you and will put *the same* upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, that you may not bear *it* yourself alone."

a. **Whom you know to be the elders of the people:** Moses was not to pick men whom he thought might *become* elders; he was to pick men who were already known as elders because of their wisdom, conduct, and ministry to others. Elders are made by God, but recognized by men.

b. **That they may stand there with you:** The first call of the elders was simply to be there with Moses, before the LORD. They were a support and strength to Moses just by their presence.

c. **I will take of the Spirit that is upon you and will put the same upon them:** The elders must have the same heart, the same vision, and same Spirit that was on Moses. If not, there would be no agreement among the leadership of the nation and disaster could result.

d. **They shall bear the burden of the people with you:** The elders were there to help Moses carry the spiritual load - to help him care for and minister to the people, and to be a support for him in the ministry. God's help was going to come to Moses through the support of godly men. This is a customary way for God to meet our needs.

2. (18-20) God promises to provide meat for Israel.

"Then you shall say to the people, 'Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow, and you shall eat meat; for you have wept in the hearing of the LORD, saying, "Who will give us meat to eat? For *it was* well with us in Egypt." Therefore the LORD will give you meat, and you shall eat. You shall eat, not one day, nor two days, nor five



days, nor ten days, nor twenty days, but *for* a whole month, until it comes out of your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you, because you have despised the LORD who is among you, and have wept before Him, saying, "Why did we ever come up out of Egypt?" " "

a. **Therefore the LORD will give you meat, and you shall eat:** This was not a blessing. God promised to answer the desire of Israel's heart; but not in a way that would be a blessing to Israel. Sometimes the LORD chastises us by giving us what we ask for - what our *intense craving* cries out for.

b. **Until it comes out of your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you:** God promised to give them so much meat they would become sickened by it. This was because they denied and doubted the goodness of God's deliverance.

i. It is dangerous for a Christian to entertain the thought, "I wish I had never decided to follow Jesus. I had it better in the world." Such thoughts, if they come, must be put away immediately. We can never deny or doubt the goodness of God's deliverance.

3. (21-23) Moses reacts to God's promise to provide meat for Israel.

And Moses said, "The people whom I *am* among *are* six hundred thousand men on foot; yet You have said, 'I will give them meat, that they may eat *for* a whole month.' Shall flocks and herds be slaughtered for them, to provide enough for them? Or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them, to provide enough for them?" And the LORD said to Moses, "Has the Lord's arm been shortened? Now you shall see whether what I say will happen to you or not."

a. **The people whom I am among are six hundred thousand men on foot:** Moses reacted as we often do - trying to figure out how God would perform a particular promise. Moses couldn't figure it out; but God never asked him to. God will provide, because His arm has not been shortened, nor has He lost any strength.

b. **Has the Lord's arm been shortened?** God had not suddenly become weak or limited. God has resources that Moses knew nothing about. We might say that God likes to meet our needs in completely unexpected ways.

4. (24-30) The Spirit comes upon the seventy elders.

So Moses went out and told the people the words of the LORD, and he gathered the seventy men of the elders of the people and placed them around the tabernacle. Then the LORD came down in the cloud, and spoke to him, and took of the Spirit that *was* upon him, and placed *the same* upon the seventy elders; and it happened, when the Spirit rested upon them, that they prophesied, although they never did *so* again. But two men had remained in the camp: the name of one *was* Eldad, and the name of the other Medad. And the Spirit rested upon them. Now they *were* among those listed, but who had not gone out to the tabernacle; yet they prophesied in the camp. And a young man ran and told Moses, and said, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp." So Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' assistant, *one* of his choice men, answered and said, "Moses my lord, forbid them!" Then Moses said to him, "Are you zealous for my sake? Oh, that all the Lord's people were prophets *and* that the LORD would put His Spirit upon them!" And Moses returned to the camp, *both* he and the elders of Israel.

a. **He gathered the seventy men of the elders of the people and placed them around the tabernacle:** Before God provided the meat for Israel (which they asked for, but *didn't* really need), He first provided them more leadership and oversight (which they didn't ask for, but really *did* need).

b. **And took of the Spirit that was upon him, and placed the same upon the seventy elders:** For this expanded leadership to do the job, they needed to have an outpouring of the Holy Spirit - and they needed to

have the same spirit that was on Moses. They needed to have his vision, his heart, and his attitude.

i. If a man does not have the Holy Spirit flowing in power in his life, and the same spirit as those the LORD has put in authority over him, he is unequipped to serve as he should - and will end up being a hindrance, not a blessing.

c. **Yet they prophesied in the camp:** The operation of the Holy Spirit was not limited to a particular geography. Even these two men who were not with the rest of the seventy elders were filled with the Holy Spirit.

i. Joshua, when he learned of this, functioned as a good assistant should: His first concern was for Moses' ministry and feared that this might in some way undermine it. Would Eldad and Medad become rivals to Moses? Not if Joshua had anything to say about it!

ii. But Moses knew these men, and understood they had no divisive heart - and longs for *everyone* in Israel to have the same filling of the Holy Spirit. Moses is never afraid of a genuinely Spirit-filled man being a rival or a divisive person!

5. (31-35) God helps Israel by providing meat for them.

Now a wind went out from the LORD, and it brought quail from the sea and left *them* fluttering near the camp, about a day's journey on this side and about a day's journey on the other side, all around the camp, and about two cubits above the surface of the ground. And the people stayed up all that day, all night, and all the next day, and gathered the quail (he who gathered least gathered ten homers); and they spread *them* out for themselves all around the camp. But while the meat *was* still between their teeth, before it was chewed, the wrath of the LORD was aroused against the people, and the LORD struck the people with a very great plague. So he called the name of that place Kibroth Hattaavah, because there they buried the people who had yielded to craving. From Kibroth Hattaavah the people moved to Hazeroth, and camped at Hazeroth.

a. **Now a wind went out from the LORD, and it brought quail:** Miraculously, God directed a huge number of quail to the camp of Israel, where they were killed and could be eaten. Quail make a migration over the Sinai wilderness every year; it has been recorded that Arabs living near this region could catch between one and two million quails during their autumn migration, using nets.

i. The quail came **all around the camp** - that is, on the perimeter. When the Holy Spirit was poured out, it drew men into the center of the camp - right into the middle of the people of God. To get the quail, they had to go outside of the camp - away from the people of God. God's best for us is always toward the center of the camp, not on the outside.

b. **While the meat was still between their teeth, before it was chewed, the wrath of the LORD was aroused against the people:** The people, with great effort and excitement, gathered the quail and prepared it for eating. But when they ate - **while the meat was still between their teeth**, the LORD sent a plague among them and many died.

i. *He also rained meat on them like the dust, feathered fowl like the sand of the seas; and He let them fall in the midst of their camp, all around their dwellings. So they ate and were well filled, for He gave them their own desire. They were not deprived of their craving; but while their food was still in their mouths, the wrath of God came against them, and slew the stoutest of them, and struck down the choice men of Israel. ([Psalm 78:27-31](#))*

ii. *They soon forgot His works; they did not wait for His counsel, but lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tested God in the desert. And He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul. ([Psalm 106:13-15](#))*

iii. When we allow ungodly cravings to rule our lives, God may send what we crave - and *leanness* into our soul

as well. Better to have a "fat" soul and be deprived those cravings!

iv. This was a strict judgment, but it was a *help* to Israel because it taught them to not be ruled by their craving, then it was a huge help to the nation. Promised land people must be ruled by more than their physical or emotional appetites.

c. **So he called the name of that place Kibroth Hattaavah:** They named the place **Kibroth Hattaavah** - which means "Graves of Craving." How many have had their cravings be their grave? How many have lived in spiritual death because they yielded to their cravings, and never found victory over their lusts?