

I want you to take a moment to think about your prayer life. I constantly tell people that I am blessed to lead a church who believes in the power of prayer. I know that you are people who pray, daily. So I want you to think about that sacred time that you hold with God. Communicating through prayer.

Would you say that more of what you say to God is “thank you God for...” or “God, please....”

Both are absolutely wonderful way to pray. But when we get to far into what we call the prayers of petition, the “God, please....”, even if it is lifting up the needs of ourselves and others, we run the risk of not being to fully acknowledge what God has done.

In other words, do we say “thank you God for...” every single time we see one of those prayer requests we have answered, or do we simply move on to the next request?

As we continue on in the book of Exodus, the Israelites should have a big “thank you, God!” That continually comes forth from their lips. They have been freed from the oppression they experienced under Pharaoh. They had seen God sweep the waters of the Red Sea back to allow them to walk on dry land. And they also saw God sweep those same waters over the Egyptian armies who were trying to bring them back from the path to freedom. They are free! No longer slaves!

But as Moses is leading the people to the promise land, testimonies of God’s goodness and praise for what God has done, is not the primary thing exiting the people’s mouths. Instead its complaints. In fact, the Scripture says, *The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness.*” And what are they complaining about? That things looked a whole lot better back in Egypt. That they had their fill of food, but now they are going to die of hunger.

Now are either of those things true? Absolutely not! I call this Israel’s rose-colored glasses moment. That everything looks rosy when we look through the tint of skewed glasses. They did not have their fill of food back in Egypt. And as they continue to complain throughout Exodus, this belief they hold will get farther and farther from the truth as they named foods they *never* had in Egypt, but they have spun this tale that is not true (factually) but they have made into their truth.

Lie numbers one.

Second lie, that Moses and Aaron had brought them into the wilderness just so they could die of hunger. Also not true. Why would God bring them this far to abandon them now? Yet their human lens says what I really want is food, I don’t have what I want they way I want it, so I am going to make an exaggeration into my truth, saying that God must have brought us into the wilderness to kill us, not to lead us to the promise land.

Here’s the problem with lies like this, my friends. They do not just harm us. They harm our relationship with God because they harm our ability to perceive what God has done and is doing. And when that starts to happen we no longer trust what God will do.

Yet, even in this place of a fractured relationship with God, God is still *so gracious* to the people who are complaining against him. He comes to Moses with this plan. A plan that will show his compassion, power, and might. God is going to rain down a type of bread called manna from heaven, six days a week. And Moses gets it. He gets how this is an act of care and provision. So he tells the people *“In the evening you shall know that it was the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt and in the morning you shall see the glory of the Lord, because he*

has heard your complaining against the Lord.” And it was true! Because God provided not just little bits of bread, but enough bread to have their fill.

Spoiler alert - even this will not be enough for the people to trust in the Lord. They will complain again, and again and again. To the point, where they are not known in the book of Exodus as a people of praise, but as a people of complaint.

I firmly believe that how we pray to God shapes who we are. Have you ever heard the saying that some people will look at a glass of water and see it as half full and others will look at it and see it as half empty? Friends, this isn't just a matter of perception. It's a matter of the heart.

Because often when we see the glass as half empty, we lean more easily into complaining. And when we lean more easily to that place of complaining, the more we complain, the more it becomes how we speak to both others and God.

Now are there are times when complaining is the absolute honest response? Absolutely. Just think about the Psalms where the Psalmist pours their heart out to God in complaint. Where we need to keep our heart in check is to see if our *primary* way of communicating with God is one of complaining, because we have written a different narrative in our head and heart about who God is. Another way to say this is: do we still trust God in our complaining or do our complaints reveal that we are drifting farther and farther from trusting God?

Things were rough for the Israelites in the wilderness. But that doesn't mean that they should say that they would rather go back - as if it wasn't worth God setting them free in the first place. And they certainly shouldn't have turned to the accusation that they were only led this far for God to just give up on them. That is not who our God is. Period.

So think back to your prayers. Are they primarily prayers of praise - thanking God for what God has done and God's faithfulness and provision? Or are they prayers of complaint? Because the heart we approach prayer with, will also lead us to what we say to God.

Example 1: A person of complaint. Lord, things aren't going well. I don't know if you noticed but person 'x' needs your help. When are you going to show up? Or what about this person who needs healing or that person who is hurting? Will you be with them?

Example 2: A person of praise. Lord, you have been so good to bring healing and freedom into my life. I see you all around me every day. And because I trust you Lord, I entrust person 'y' into your care. I know you are already with them, but may their heart be softened so they can feel it and draw closer to you.

Do you notice the difference? How does that sit with your Spirit?

Many times when we read the stories of Exodus we end up saying, "I would never act like the Israelites in the wilderness, full of complaints" and yet, when we are honest with ourselves, sometimes we *do* sound like that as well.

But as God changes our hearts, our perception and prayers can change as well, dear friends. We are not without hope. One of the ways I pray in the evenings is using an app on my phone that invites me to pray a different way. A few weeks ago, the first pray on that app was this "*release my stiff neck so I am loose and aware.*"

And that's what it comes down to is, it not, brothers and sisters? That sometimes we are so stiff necked that we fail to be aware and respond to what God is doing. May that prayer become our prayer in the coming days and let it seep into us, freeing us to be a people of authentic praise and trust in our Lord. Amen.