

# Complaint Free® Churches

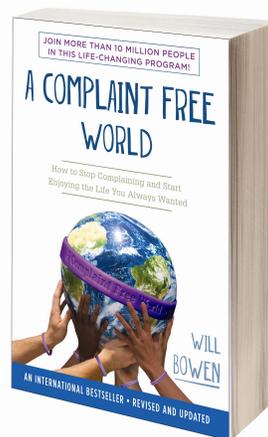
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Message Notes



## A Program for Positive Transformation

Based on



“If you don’t like something, change it; if you can’t change it, change your attitude. Don’t complain.”

Maya Angelo

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## Dear Fellow Spiritual Teacher,

My dream of A Complaint Free World began when I was the minister of a small church. In July of 2006, I was blessed to feel guided to deliver a Sunday message inviting my congregation to give up complaining. As a result of that message, my life changed forever and my ministry has grown bigger than I ever dreamed. But, I have never forgotten what it feels like to lead a spiritual community.

Ministry is rewarding, inspiring and exhilarating. Ministry can also be challenging, draining and frustrating. Day in and day out, you are responsible for everyone's spiritual needs and, more and more these days, their emotional needs as well. If there is a crisis occurring, a blessing needed, a meaning sought or divine guidance needed, all eyes look to you. Plus, you are often the point person on boards, budgets and even the building in which everything takes place. If a volunteer resigns, you're the one who has to find a replacement. On top of it all, you are keenly aware of being a role model. You've got to do good and look good doing it.

One of my greatest frustrations as a minister was how much people griped about anything and everything. This negative soundtrack that most people found to be perfectly normal undermined the teachings I offered every week. "If there is a loving, giving God who seeks the best for all, why are we carping and complaining so much?" I wondered.

Over the last decade I've discovered that there are psychological reasons people complain that have more to do with community and status than they do with what's actually going on in someone's life. When you fully embrace that as a Spiritual Leader, you will cease to take complaints personally. And, which is far more important, you'll help people become more accountable for their own lives. Which, in the end is what we are called to do.

I truly believe that the reason the Complaint Free World movement has reached tens of millions of people around the world is because of churches, like yours, seeking to grow closer to one another and to God by stopping their incessant griping. Churches, mosques, temples, synagogues and religious centers of every type, all over the world, have handed out millions of our Complaint Free bracelets because they work. The Complaint Free Challenge is inspiring to hear, fun to apply and spiritually liberating. When we stop complaining about what's missing in our lives and use our words to praise what is present, we feel the transcendent splendor of oneness with God.

Thank you for helping to share this message with the world. You are blessed and you are a great blessing.



Love,

Rev. Will Bowen  
A Complaint Free World

# Introduction: A Complaint Free® World

*“Complaining is like bad breath. You notice it when it comes out of someone else’s mouth, but not when it comes out of your own.” – Will Bowen*

## Getting Started

**W**e highly recommend you read “A Complaint Free World – How to Stop Complaining and Start enjoying the Life You Always Wanted,” by Will Bowen. This inspiring and easy-to-read book gives you a better grasp of the concepts and provides in-depth understanding of how to help yourself and others quit complaining—for good.

You can also watch speeches Will Bowen has given on the negative effects of complaining and how we can all stop at [www.WillBowenVideo.com](http://www.WillBowenVideo.com).

### How this works:

**Scientists believe it takes 21 days to form a new habit and complaining is a habit.**

- 1. Put the bracelet on either wrist.**
- 2. When you catch yourself complaining, criticizing or gossiping (it’s ok, everyone does) move the bracelet to the other wrist and start your 21 days over again at Day 1. Remember, “There’s no shame in Day 1!”**
- 4. Stay with it. The average person takes 4-8 months to go 21 consecutive days without complaining.**

# Background

A Complaint Free World® began in July of 2006 when Rev. Will Bowen handed 250 purple bracelets out to his congregation at a small church in Kansas City, Missouri. His objective was to encourage them to think more positively. The idea was simple: put a purple, rubber bracelet on either wrist and, when you catch yourself complaining, switch the bracelet to the other wrist.

Scientists believe that it takes 21 consecutive days of a new behavior for it to become habitual. So, by switching the bracelet from wrist to wrist with each complaint until one has gone 21 consecutive days without complaining, a person can establish the habit of being Complaint Free.

Inspired with their experience and results, the first participants began describing it to their friends, families and co-workers. A reporter at the *Kansas City Star* wrote about a story about the phenomenon. The news spread and Bowen began getting calls and doing interviews around the world. In 2007, he wrote, “A Complaint Free World -- How to Stop Complaining and Start Enjoying the Life you Always Wanted,” which has become a #1 international best-seller.

A Complaint Free World has been featured on the Oprah Winfrey Show, NBC's Today Show, ABC Evening News, CBS Sunday Morning, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, and in People, Newsweek and a myriad of worldwide, magazines, newspapers and broadcasts. Thousands of schools, businesses and other organizations have used the purple bracelets to positively transform attitudes and life experiences.

More than 11 million Complaint Free bracelets have been distributed to people in 106 countries.

For more information visit [www.AComplaintFreeWorld.org](http://www.AComplaintFreeWorld.org) or send us an email at [Contact@AComplaintFreeWorld.org](mailto:Contact@AComplaintFreeWorld.org).

# Synopsis

According to the Judeo Christian Bible, with every stage of creation God reviewed his handiwork and claimed it to be “good.” (Genesis 1:4, 1:10, 1:12, 1:18, 1:21, 1:25). In fact, in Genesis 1:25, God reviews all of creation and declares it to be “very good.” Therefore, when we complain about our lives or anything in God’s world, we are denying the truth that God’s creation is inherently good.

Further, when we complain we may miss potential solutions by focusing solely on the problem itself. In so doing, we may inadvertently do so to absolve ourselves from responsibility to resolve problems and create positive solutions for ourselves and others.

The Merriam Webster dictionary defines “complain” as “to express pain, grief or discontent.” It makes sense to express each of these sentiments on occasion but most people complain dozens of times each day and this “ear pollution” negatively impacts their health and relationships.

## Health

Complaining about our health diminishes our role in recovering from illness and can actually make a person sicker. Doctors have found that people who complain about their illnesses actually worsen the symptoms of their disease. Our minds play a significant role in the health of our bodies. “Doctors estimate that as much as two thirds of their time is spent treating individuals whose underlying problem is psychological.”<sup>1</sup> A negative attitude as evidenced by a complaining nature increases the likelihood that a person will be sick.

## Relationships

- Complainers lose friends: “People who complain too frequently are labeled as whiners and may risk being excluded from valued social groups or relationships.”<sup>2</sup>
- Complainers are braggarts. “People may complain about the characteristics of objects or people to convey they are discriminating in their tastes and choices.” For example, people may complain about the food at a restaurant to show that they have discriminating culinary standards.”<sup>3</sup> And, “People may complain about the behavior of another as a means of making themselves look superior or intimidating.”<sup>4</sup> Complaints, therefore, are often a type of bragging and no one likes a braggart.

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<sup>1</sup> (Source: Kowalski, R. M. (1996). Complaints and complaining: Functions, antecedents, and consequences. *Psychological Bulletin*, 119, 179-196.)

<sup>2</sup>IBID

<sup>3</sup> IBID

<sup>4</sup> IBID

- Complainers drag down conversations. “Complaining is often contagious. After one person has complained, the incidence of others also complaining seems to increase, resulting in a domino effect of complaining.”<sup>5</sup>
- Complaining hurts others and feeds on itself. “The complainer influences the behavior of the listener, and the listener’s response to the complaint subsequently affects the behavior of the complainer.”<sup>6</sup> This creates a complaining loop whereby people feed off one another’s negativity which drains each of them emotionally.

If complaining is destructive, then why do we complain? Primarily, people complain to get attention. Complaining is often a means for a person to draw attention themselves. Additionally, people complain to avoid doing things which they know they should do. “People may also save face by using complaints as self-handicapping strategies. Some complaints that are voiced as excuses after undesirable behavior may serve as self-handicapping strategies if expressed beforehand...If a student complains of illness the night before a test, he or she has set up an excuse in the event of poor performance on the test.”<sup>7</sup>

## Scripture References

- *Do everything without complaining or arguing.* — Philippians 2:14
- *Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.* — Proverbs 16:24
- *This is the day the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.* — Psalm 118:24
- *Not that I complain of want; for I have learned, in whatever state I am, to be content.* — Philippians 4:11
- *Therefore do not associate with one who speaks foolishly.* — Proverbs 20:19

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<sup>5</sup> IBID

<sup>6</sup> IBID

<sup>7</sup> IBID

People Complain for one of five reasons as remembered by the acronym

**G.R.I.P.E.**

**Get Attention**

Connecting to other people is a basic human need. A person may complain to a stranger about the weather or a local sports team as a means of just starting a conversation.

“Is it hot enough for you? That’s four darn days in a row when the temperature’s been over 95!”

[TRANSLATION: *Hello, Please talk to me!*]

“The traffic was lousy this morning.”

[TRANSLATION: *Now, please complain to me about your commute so we’ll have something to talk about.*]

**Silence the Complaints:** When someone complains to **Get attention**, ask them, “What’s going well with (whatever they’re complaining about). For example, if they’re griping about their job, keep asking, “What’s going well with your job?” Or, “What do you like about where you work?”

**Remove Responsibility**

When given a task, people complain about the conditions surrounding the task as a way of not completing the job satisfactorily.

“I don’t think I can fit that into my calendar. I’m so busy with all this extra work the boss keeps dumping on me. I’m overwhelmed as it is. It’s not fair.”

[TRANSLATION: *I’m not going to do what you’re asking. And, I’m using my boss as an excuse.*]

“Mom, Ashley just texted me. She says that our teacher Mr. Jones said the project has to be on yellow poster board and not blue! Mr. Jones is always changing his mind and he’s never clear. It’s not my fault—it’s his!”

[TRANSLATION: *Mom, I wasn’t paying attention when the teacher gave out instructions. Don’t expect me to receive a good grade on this school project.*]

**Silence the Complaints:** When someone complains to **Remove Responsibility** they are building a case to prove that what is being asked of them is impossible. They are complaining to be let off the hook. With every complaint about the assigned task, keep asking, “If it were possible, how might you do it?”

<p><b>I</b>nspire Envy [Brag]</p> <p>We complain about people who are not like us as a way of making ourselves look superior by comparison. And, we complain about things and events as a way of impressing people with our high standards.</p>	<p>“Yeah, Cheryl’s team did a good job on the project—well, more of an okay job—actually. They were two weeks behind on delivery and I can’t believe they let that computer bug slip through!”  [TRANSLATION: <i>My team would have done things on time and better. Why? Because I’m a better manager than Cheryl.</i>]</p> <p>“You thought that was a good movie? You’ve got to be kidding. The acting was stiff, the story was weak and the music did nothing to move the plot along.”  [TRANSLATION: <i>I know a lot about movies. You should admire me and let me tell you more.</i>]</p>
<p><b>Silence the Complaints:</b> Someone complaining to Inspire Envy is actually wanting to be complimented and reassured. Therefore, compliment them for their underlying need. In the two examples, above, you might say, “You’re a great leader and your team produces what they promise on time, every time.” And, “You seem to know a lot about movies, what’s the coolest trend you’ve seen in films recently?”</p>	
<p><b>P</b>ower</p> <p>People believe that there is strength in numbers. We complain to build alliances with others to increase power.</p>	<p>“Jim is a good guy but he’s not supervisor material. Half the time he’s late and I really don’t think he’s that smart.”  [TRANSLATION: <i>I want that supervisor job! So, help me spread negativity about Jim because he’s my competition.</i>]</p> <p>“Dad, Scott and Megan are playing and they won’t let me play. And, they’re using your hammer and you told us not to play your tools”  [TRANSLATION: <i>Dad, I feel left out. You’re bigger than all of us. Please make my brother and sister play with me.</i>]</p>
<p><b>Silence the Complaints:</b> There is an old saying, “When two gorillas are fighting in the jungle, stay out of the jungle.” When someone complains to you to get you on their side so as will have power over someone else, refuse to get involved. Keep telling the complainer, “It sounds like you and he (or she) have a lot to talk about.” You might even offer to set up a meeting between the two. This will clearly show them that you choose not to get involved with their complaint power struggle.</p>	
<p><b>E</b>xcuse Poor Performance</p> <p>Excuse Poor Performance is the past tense version of <b>R</b>emove</p>	<p>“I know I said I’d bring home salad stuff but I got caught up at work in some of Jim’s last minute nonsense and it just made me forget.”</p>

Responsibility. When someone complains to **Remove Responsibility**, they are telling you why they are going to fail—and it's not their fault. When someone complains to **Excuse Poor Performance**, they have already failed and are complaining to justify what happened—and it's not their fault.

[TRANSLATION: *I'm blaming my forgetfulness on something totally unrelated but if you buy it, I'm off the hook.*]

## How Can We Encourage Positive Change Without Complaining?

(Excerpted from "A Complaint Free World" by Will Bowen, © 2012, Crown Publishing)

"Were the great leaders of the United States also great complainers? I'd have to say, "No." These important men and women allowed dissatisfaction to drive them to great visions and their passion for these visions inspired others to follow them. Their relentless focus on a bright future raced the collective heartbeat of this nation. Their method of transforming our consciousness as a country and, as a result, our future was best summarized by Robert Kennedy, "There are those that look at things the way they are, and ask why? I dream of things that never were, and ask why not?"

On August 28, 1963, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. did not stand on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial and say, "Isn't it terrible how we're being treated?" No. He spoke words that struck a chord with our nation and still bring tears to the eyes of those hearing them nearly a half-century later. He did not focus on the problem, he focused beyond the problem. He declared, "I have a dream!" Dr. King created in our minds a vivid picture of a world without racism. He had "been to the mountain top" and his words took us there as well

In the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson did clearly state the challenges the colonies were having under the governance of the British Empire. However, his document signed July 4, 1776 was not a litany of gripes. Had it been, it probably would have never caught the imagination of the world and unified the colonies.

The first paragraph of the U.S. Declaration of Independence reads:

*"When in the Course of human events it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them..."*

For a moment, imagine you are a colonist of one of the thirteen colonies and you try to take this in, "...*the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them.*" At the time Jefferson wrote this, England was the world's greatest superpower and Jefferson states without hyperbole that these fledgling and diverse colonies were "equal" to this political behemoth. You could have heard the collective gasp this inspired among the colonists followed by the resulting swell of pride and enthusiasm. How could they ever aspire to such a lofty ideal as to be equal to England? Because "*the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God*" entitle[d] them." This was not complaining, this was a compelling vision for a bright future.

## Quotations

- *Man invented language to satisfy his deep need to complain.*  
—Lily Tomlin
- *If you don't like something change it; if you can't change it, change your attitude.*  
*Don't complain.* —Maya Angelou
- *It is a waste of time to be angry about my disability. One has to get on with life and I haven't done badly. People won't have time for you if you are always angry or complaining.* — Stephen Hawking
- *Criticism comes easier than craftsmanship.* — Zeuxis
- *Complaining lets a bully know there is a victim in the neighborhood.* — Maya Angelou
- *No price is too high to pay for the privilege of owning yourself.* — Friedrich Nietzsche
- *Complaining is not to be confused with informing someone of a mistake or deficiency so that it can be put right. And to refrain from complaining doesn't necessarily mean putting up with bad quality or behavior. There is no ego in telling the waiter your soup is cold and needs to be heated up—if you stick to the facts, which are always neutral. 'How dare you serve me cold soup...?' That's complaining.*—Eckhart Tolle



THIS AREA IS HEREBY DESIGNATED AN OFFICIAL

**COMPLAINT FREE ZONE**

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If you wish to *complain, criticize or gossip* please step away.  
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**A Complaint Free World.org**

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# THE 5 REASONS PEOPLE COMPLAIN

**Get Attention**

**Remove Responsibility**

**Inspire Envy**

**Power**

**Excuse Poor Performance**

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