

# The Anatomy of Discontent

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- [ 0 : 0 0 ] Well, good morning again, and welcome to Church at the Advent. My name is also Jeff, a different last name, Jeff Simpson. I'm one of the pastors here. And again, if you're new with us here this morning, I just want to say welcome.
- I'd love to meet you after the service. Thanks for joining us for worship on this very hot summer day. It's good to be with you. It is always surprising when we learn something that is—learn about something that is more dangerous than it appears.
- I was recently on vacation a few weeks ago, and I was watching a TV show. And as I was watching the show and seeing the story unfold, at one point, one of the characters dies by being poisoned with something I didn't expect.
- He's poisoned with cherry pits. Somebody put ground-up cherry pits in their coffee and poisoned him, and he died. It's pretty bizarre, right? And I'm watching the show, and because it was bizarre, I kind of had to find out for myself, like, is this real?
- Like, can this actually happen? And of course, I did a quick internet search, and after reading a few articles, I found out it's true. Ground cherry pits can actually release cyanide, a chemical that's pretty poisonous.
- [ 1 : 1 8 ] And if you eat enough ground-up cherry pits, you could potentially die. And pretty bizarre, but I had no idea that something that I thought was completely harmless was actually pretty dangerous.
- This morning, we see something else that is more dangerous than it appears, maybe on the surface, and that is discontent. Discontent. We're in a sermon series called Music in the Wilderness.
- And we're looking at Psalm 106. And Psalm 106 is this psalm that scholars believe was written in exile, when Israel was in Babylon.
- And this psalm gives us a 30,000-foot view. It gives us a flyby of the story of Israel. And so all the different sections of the psalm are these different stories that happen all throughout the Old Testament.
- And as it gives us this story of Israel, it teaches us how to live and worship as the people of God, especially in those places of life that feel like exile, that feel like wilderness.
- [ 2 : 2 6 ] And these verses here, in verses 13 through 15, in Psalm 106, refer back to a story in the Old Testament in Numbers chapter 11 that was read earlier, where the people of Israel grow discontent in the wilderness.
- They grow discontent about their food menu options. And they start to complain against Moses and against the Lord. And on the surface, you read this story, and this is something that might seem completely harmless.
- But what we'll see is that discontent is actually more spiritually poisonous than it seems on the surface. And if we don't deal with it, it has the capacity to destroy us.
- And so this morning, we're going to look at, through Numbers chapter 11 and Psalm 106, we're going to look at the anatomy of discontent. We're going to look at how discontent starts, where it leads, and how to deal with it.

So how it starts, where it leads, and how to deal with it. So first of all, how it starts. How does discontent start? Well, Psalm 106, verse 13 says, they soon forgot his works.

[ 3 : 33 ] They did not wait for his counsel. And soon is right. So for context, Jacob Rodriguez last week preached on the Exodus and the parting of the Red Sea and God miraculously saving his people from slavery in Egypt.

And in the story of the Old Testament, after the parting of the Red Sea, they then, after about a three-month journey, come to Mount Sinai. And if you have your Bible open to Exodus chapter 19, Israel is actually at Mount Sinai from Exodus 19 all the way through the book of Leviticus, all the way to Numbers chapter 10.

They're at Mount Sinai the whole time. And that period of time is about 10 months. It's about 10 months. And so Numbers chapters 1, 1 through 10, talk about the preparations that Israel has to make in order to enter the promised land, in order to make their journey to Canaan.

And you have to remember that Israel is a group of about 600,000 people. How do you get 600,000 people to move across the desert in an orderly fashion?

How do you do that? Well, that's what the book of Numbers is about. That's what Numbers is about. And so keep in mind that as we read this story in Numbers 11, that it's been less than a year since the Red Sea.

[ 5 : 02 ] It's been about 10 months since they've been at Mount Sinai. And so here in Numbers 11, they start to head out. They start to make their journey towards the promised land. And this is it.

Like, this is the journey that they have been waiting for while they were in Egypt, and while they've been waiting at Mount Sinai. God has miraculously delivered them from slavery.

He's led them into safety beyond the Red Sea. He makes a covenant with them. He reveals his law. He shows them how to live in a relationship with them. He appoints leaders for them. He assures them over and over again of his promises to lead them in the promised land.

He provides manna for them to eat. He has rescued them, and he has provided for their every need. And then we read this in Numbers 11, verse 1.

And the people complained in the hearing of the Lord about their misfortunes. So imagine this scene. Imagine a family of five in a minivan as they are leaving for summer vacation to the beach.

[ 6 : 07 ] This is a scene that I'm sure is familiar to some of you, either recently or maybe in the near future. The family that's leaving for the beach the day before has been spent packing the minivan to the brim.

The gas tank is full. Mom and dad have their coffee. The kids are in the backseat with their snacks. Frozen 2 on the DVD player has just started playing.

And the minivan backs out of the driveway and starts heading up the road and gets onto the ramp of Interstate 95 South. And the whole family is headed towards the promised land.

They are headed towards the beach on Interstate 95. And then, out of nowhere, there's rebellion in the camp. One of the kids starts crying.

The two of the other ones start fighting each other and exchanging punches. There's tears. There's goldfish flying everywhere. It's absolute chaos. And the parents in the front of the minivan are like, what in the world has just happened?

[ 7 : 11 ] What is going on? This is a small picture of what's happening here. That despite all that God has done for them, despite where they're headed, the people grow discontent and they complain.

Why? The psalmist tells us in verse 13. They forgot the Lord. They forgot his works. Our discontentment about the circumstances of our lives, it starts, it begins with forgetting the Lord.

And this is not some kind of mental amnesia. The forgetting here is a spiritual issue. It's a spiritual problem. It's a failure to trust in what they already knew to be true about God based on how he had revealed himself in his words and in his deeds.

After the parting of the Red Sea, everybody's on a spiritual high. Everybody feels close to Yahweh. They've seen his glory. But eventually, the monotony of the wilderness starts to set in.

The heat of the desert starts to get wearisome. And the diet of manna every day for breakfast, lunch, and dinner starts to become pretty boring.

[ 8 : 26 ] And their discontentment is not something that probably happened overnight or even in a week or even in a month. But over the course of several months, it was likely a slow process of this seed of discontent growing in their hearts.

Can anybody else relate to this? Maybe you can think back to times in your life where you felt closer to God, where you felt more like you were on a spiritual high.

Worship and spiritual disciplines and prayer and reading the Word was easy for you. God felt close to you. But then slowly over time, maybe the monotony of life has started to settle in.

And then you add to that that things don't always turn out the way that you expect. The circumstances and situations of your life don't always turn out as you planned or as you imagined.

Perhaps your life even starts to feel like wilderness or like exile. And there's a temptation in our hearts for the seed of discontentment to start growing.

[ 9 : 34 ] And slowly over time, you start to wonder, where is God in all of this? Where is God when things don't turn out as I expected they would or as I imagined or planned that they should?

Where is God in that? And the answer is that he is just as present in the monotony of the wilderness as he is in the glory of Mount Sinai.

He is still the same covenant-keeping Lord who rescues and provides and who is present with his people. But when we fail to trust in this reality, that is when discontent grows in our hearts.

And unless we deal with it, it can lead us down a spiritually dangerous path. And so that is where discontentment starts. Now let's look at where it leads.

Where it leads. Psalm 106 verse 14 says, And if you have been reading this story, You know that this statement, this complaint, is drenched in foolish irony.

[ 11 : 13 ] It's drenched in foolish irony. Not only does it completely leave out the terrible situation that they were just in. 400 years of slavery. It also completely ignores where God has promised to take them.

To a place that has this exact food. To a place overflowing with abundance. A place overflowing with milk and honey. Now, to be fair, I am not going to judge them for missing good food in the desert.

Like, I think that is only human. But it is the posture of their hearts that shows their glaring lack of trust and gratitude in the Lord who has rescued them and provided for them.

They say, We want something other than what He has for us.

And if given the choice, We would prefer to go back to slavery than move towards freedom. Not only is this incredibly foolish, it's also incredibly prideful.

[ 12 : 47 ] It's incredibly prideful. Now, it's easy for us to read this story this morning and think, How in the world is this possible? How in the world could these people be so foolish?

Right? But how many of us do this in our hearts all the time? I think if we're honest, a lot of us would say that our hearts are prone to do this as well.

My heart certainly is. At some point, when the monotony of life closes in around us and starts to make life feel small, And the circumstances of our lives are not as we imagined or expected, That is a place where discontentment can grow.

And our hearts can start to question the goodness and the character of God. His love, His grace, His sovereignty, His providence. It's possible to let our hearts get to the place where we think, I know better than God.

I, you know, I want something else than what He has for me right now. And if we let that grow over time, If we let it grow, if we water that, We can eventually get to the place where we say, You know what?

[ 14 : 01 ] If given the choice, I really prefer life apart from God, Slavery apart from God, Than freedom with Him. And friends, this is not a place of a harmless complaint.

This is a place of open rebellion against God. And this is exactly what we see happening in this story. Psalm 106, 14 interprets this story for us, And it tells us that they put God to the test.

They were openly defiant against Him. You can imagine a child telling their mom or dad, You know, you are a terrible parent. Everything you've done for me is meaningless to me.

And I would rather live in an orphanage. Parents, how would you feel if your child said that to you? Well, Numbers chapter 11, verse 10 tells us how the Lord felt.

Numbers 11, 10 says that the anger of the Lord blazed hotly. The anger of the Lord blazed hotly. From the Lord's perspective, this wasn't just a harmless complaint.

[ 15 : 10 ] It was an open, defiant, personal rejection of Him. And this is a warning for all of us in the room this morning. That a life, a pattern of life of open rebellion against God will eventually lead to judgment.

It will eventually lead to judgment. In Psalm 106, verse 15, it says, As the story goes on in Numbers 11, the Lord says, Okay, you want some meat?

I'll give you some meat. I'm going to make you eat so much meat that it comes out of your nostrils and you are sick of it. And so He sends them a flock of quail to hunt. And they go out and they hunt the quail.

And they gather it up. And right as they're about to eat it. Verse 33 says, While the meat was yet between their teeth and they had not ingested it, before it was consumed, the anger of the Lord was kindled against the people.

And the Lord struck them down with a plague. The hand of Yahweh comes down.

[ 16 : 25 ] To judge and discipline His people for their rebellion against Him. And friends, if we don't deal with the seed of discontent in our hearts, this is eventually where it leads.

Now, I want to address this briefly because I think when we read stories of judgment in the Old Testament, it can be troubling for a lot of us. It can be troubling for modern people, whether or not you've grown up in the church, whether or not you're religious or not.

We read this and we think, how is this fair? Many of us have trouble with the idea of a God of judgment in the Old Testament. So let me just say a few things and address this briefly.

The first thing I want to say about this is that if you care about justice in the world, the Old Testament is actually your friend. It's actually your friend because much of the law in the Old Testament is centered around social justice.

It's ordered around care for the vulnerable, care for the poor, care for the widow, care for the stranger. The Bible just takes justice one step further than our culture does.

[ 17 : 37 ] Because the Bible says that injustice isn't just something that happens out there in the world. It is also inside each and every single one of us. It is both social and personal.

And it is because God is a God of justice that he takes personal sin seriously. God cares about systemic sin in the world. But he also cares about personal sin.

And he judges both. Judges both. And secondly, so given that God is a God of justice and given what Scripture says about how seriously the Lord takes sin, it's actually not surprising that there's judgment in the Old Testament.

It's actually not surprising given who God has revealed himself to be. It's surprising that there's not more. It's surprising that there's not more instances of judgment.

What we see over and over again is that the Lord relents time and time again from judging his people when they deserved it. He is incredibly patient with them. He is full of compassion and forgiveness and mercy.

[ 18 : 47 ] Even here in the text, we see that God's discipline is limited in scope. God's discipline here is merciful because in verse 34, verse 34 tells us that his judgment was only limited to a certain number of people.

It doesn't tell us how many, but it tells us that it was only limited to a certain number. Third, when it comes to thinking about God's judgment throughout Scripture, Christians hold two truths together.

We believe that in the gospel, all of the judgment in the Old Testament is a shadow of when Jesus would experience all of the judgment of God for sin on the cross.

And because he did that, everyone who trusts in Christ are fully forgiven of their sin. Romans 8.1 says, There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ. Full stop. Full stop.

If you're in Christ, you no longer have to fear the judgment of God. And at the same time, the Lord disciplines those he loves.

[ 19 : 51 ] He disciplines those who are in Christ. Just as parents discipline children that they love, God is a good father who both forgives and disciplines his children out of love. And we see several warnings in this place, several warnings about this in places like 1 Corinthians 10 and Hebrews 12.

All right, so having said all that, let me just suggest this. If passages about divine judgment trouble us, as I'm sure they do for some of us, let me suggest that it may actually be an opportunity to reflect on the ways that we have become cavalier about sin in our own lives.

It may actually be an opportunity to reflect on the ways that we have been indifferent to the cost and to the danger of sin in our lives. Perhaps a sin like discontentment.

A sin that is more dangerous than it might appear on the surface. A sin that ultimately is about a lack of trust in the goodness and the character of God. And that if we let it, it can eventually lead us down the path of pride and foolishness and rebellion.

And even to a place where we experience the hand of the Lord's discipline and judgment. All right, so finally, here's the good news.

[ 21 : 21 ] If that's where discontentment starts, and if that's where it leads us, if that's where it can eventually lead us, how do we deal with it? How do we nip it in the bud?

How do we nip the seed of discontentment in the bud? How do we instead cultivate lives of gratitude and worship? Especially, especially when it feels like we're in, we are in the monotonous wilderness of life.

Especially when our circumstances have not turned out as we expected or planned or imagined. The 17th century Puritan writer Jeremiah Burroughs wrote a book called *The Rare Jewel of Contentment* that I commend to you.

And Jeremiah Burroughs defines contentment this way. He says, It's a state of the heart. It's a place of the heart that says, That's what contentment looks like.

[ 22 : 55 ] That's what trust in the goodness and sovereignty of God amongst every situation looks like. So how do you get there? How do you get there? Well, the answer comes from the first two verses of Psalm 106 that were read earlier.

And it is to remember the steadfast love of the Lord. Verses 1 and 2 say, Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.

Who can utter the mighty deeds of the Lord or fully declare his praise? I wonder what it would have looked like for the people of Israel in the wilderness to instead of complaining, to start to remember the steadfast love of the Lord as the discontent in their hearts started growing.

It may have looked like, in their corporate worship, in their homes, around their campfires, reflecting together on the words that God had spoke to them and what God had done for them in the past year, reflecting on the words that God had spoke to Moses all the way back in Exodus chapter 3, I have surely seen the affliction of my people and I have heard their cry.

I know about their sufferings and I have come down to deliver them and to bring them up out of that land to a land flowing with milk and honey. It could have involved sitting around the campfire and telling stories of all the miraculous scenes of Exodus, the plagues, the Passover, the journey to the sea, the parting of the waters, God's glorious and mighty presence on Mount Sinai.

[ 24 : 28 ] It could have involved remembering and reflecting together on God's words to Moses in Exodus 19. You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.

Now, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all the peoples. And as they reflected on the words of Yahweh that had been spoken to them and as they shared their stories of how they had witnessed God's mighty acts, do you know what they might have been reminded of?

Do you know what they might have been encouraged by? I think what they would have been reminded of and encouraged by is that Yahweh is a God who sees and who hears the suffering of his people and who comes to rescue them and dwell with them and lead them into life and holiness and flourishing.

And even though we're not there yet, even though we're not where we want to be, even though things right now are not as we would have imagined they would be, even though it's taking longer than expected, even though our hearts feel discontent, you know what's true?

What's true is that we can trust this God. He's rescued us. He's revealed his glory. He's kept his promises. He's provided for us every step of the way.

[ 25 : 59 ] And he's present with us right now because he is the God who keeps his covenant. He is the covenant-keeping Lord of steadfast love.

That is who he is. Brothers and sisters, if you are dealing with discontent this morning, if you are in a situation in life where things have not turned out as you planned or hoped or expected or imagined, if life feels more like the wilderness or exile than the promised land, if that's you, let me invite you.

Remember the steadfast love of the Lord. Remember the steadfast love of the Lord. Whatever you're going through, whatever your circumstances, God sees.

He knows. He hears. He cares. The same God who was with you when you felt close to him, when you were on a spiritual high, that same God is with you in the monotony of the wilderness.

And you can trust him. He's with you. He'll provide for you. He's kept his promises and he always will because he is the covenant-keeping Lord of steadfast love.

[ 27 : 26 ] And Israel had all of the resources that they needed to remember this and trust this and act upon this in the wilderness. But they chose not to.

But friends, we have even more resources than they did to remember the steadfast love of the Lord. We have even more things to reflect on and remember because we haven't just experienced the glory of God on Mount Sinai.

We have seen his glory fully revealed in the face of Jesus Christ. We haven't just seen him save his people by the parting of the Red Sea. We've seen him save his people by overcoming sin and death and hell and Satan in his resurrection.

We haven't just experienced his provision through manna in the wilderness. We have Jesus, the bread of life, who offers himself to us at this table this morning.

we haven't just experienced his presence in the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. We have his Holy Spirit dwelling inside us to commune with us even more intimately and to lead us even more closely.

[ 28 : 45 ] Friends, don't miss it. All of the resources that we need to deal with our discontent, all of the resources that we need to remember the steadfast love of the Lord, we already possess in Christ.

We already possess in him. In your life, it may not be right now as you imagined or thought it would. Your life may feel more like the wilderness right now.

You may be starting to feel some discontentment. But discontentment does not have to be the status quo for you or for me. as we look to Jesus and remember his steadfast love in our worship here on Sunday morning, in our homes, around our tables, as we look to him and remember his steadfast love, the discontent in our hearts can slowly, little by little, give way to gratitude and praise and joy.

And it can lead us to a place where we're able to say, the Lord knows how to order things better than I.

The Lord sees further than I do. And how do I know? But that had it not been for this affliction, I should have been undone.

[ 30 : 24 ] And friends, that is a place of contentment. That is a place of freedom. And that is a place of joy. Let's pray.

Father in heaven, thank you for your word. Lord, thank you that you do not leave us without provision for the wilderness and exile of life. Thank you that you have given us your son.

Lord, that we have all the resources in the world to remember your steadfast love for us. Lord, for all those in this room who are experiencing discontent this morning, I pray that we would look to you, that we would remember your steadfast love and that we would see that you are the covenant-keeping Lord who is always with us and who will always keep his promises.

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.