

## Complaining--UUFVB Covenant Groups—April 2018

### Chalice Lighting

May we know once again that we are not isolated beings,  
but connected, in mystery and miracle,  
to the universe, to this community and to each other.

**Check-in:** How is your spirit right now?

**Centering:** Find a stillness, hold a stillness, let this moment of silence ease your soul.

### Opening Reading

“People won't have time for you if you are always angry or complaining,” (*Stephen Hawking*)

“What you're supposed to do when you don't like a thing is change it. If you can't change it, change the way you think about it. Don't complain.” (*Maya Angelou, “Wouldn't Take Nothing for My Journey Now”*)

### Topic Exploration: Some negative effects of complaining

- **It fosters a negative attitude.** Complaining draws our attention to unfavorable circumstance around us and tends to start a thread of multiple complaints. Further, it draws others into the negative web, spreading the misery.
- **It negates the value of discomfort in our lives.** Discomfort—both physical and emotional—can generate important life lessons: patience and perseverance, to mention two.
- **It alienates others.** It is not pleasant to spend time around people who constantly complain.
- **It leaves us in victim-mode.** Complaining is often about blaming people, things, or circumstances, so the complainer assumes the position of victim.

### Topic Exploration: Hints to overcome the habit of complaining

- **Recognize it's an imperfect world.** Life is not always fair or what you expect.
- **Experiment with limiting criticism.** Designate a short period of time—perhaps one day—in which you will be particularly mindful of your language. Monitor your comments. Make notes, look for patterns, and try the experiment another day.
- **Set aside a time for complaining.** You might ask a friend if she'll listen to your complaints for 10 minutes and then you'll do the same for her. You could both end up laughing.
- **Consider “secondary gain,”** which starts with the premise that all behavior is purposive, both yours and that of others. What is the REAL reason for the complaint? If you address that, the negative behavior might be controlled. For example: one person's mother-in-law complained that the mother was not monitoring junior's homework every day. Despite explanations, the complaint was repeated. When the mother recognized that her mother-in-law's “secondary gain” was to show how she values education and loves her grandchild, the mother verbally acknowledged that and remarked, “I only want what's best for him... we both do,” and the complaining stopped. Another example: When you complain, “I have too much to do,” are you seeking validation of your importance, or trying to impress others with your knowledge or expertise? If you recognize the real reason for your complaint, you are more in control of your own behavior.  
\*\*Share examples from your own experience where there could have been “secondary gain.”

### **Topic Exploration: Solution-oriented complaining**

What if you find something that you believe is truly worth complaining about—something over which you might have some influence? Then follow this pattern for “solution-oriented complaining.”

- **Have a clear purpose.** Know what outcome you’re looking for. If you can’t identify a purpose, there’s a good chance you just want to complain for its own sake.
- **Start with something positive.** Start with a positive statement to your listener to help keep the other person/s from getting defensive.
- **Be specific.** Don’t dredge up every minor annoyance from the past five years, just address the current situation and be as specific as possible.
- **End on a positive note.** Restate your purpose and your desired result and express optimism that the issue can be resolved

### **Questions / Sharing**

1. On a scale of 1-10, how would you rate yourself as a complainer? Do you think others would agree with your self-definition?
2. Do you tend to complain only to certain people, or about certain things? Discuss.
3. How would you suggest working with habitual complainers? Are there such people in your life?
4. Share examples of when complaints either given or received actually made a difference in your personal relationships or your circle of friends.
5. Complaints often are offered with the conscious intent to correct errors, improve situations or highlight alternatives, but are still received with hesitation or resentment. Why is that?
6. Is there a chance that complaining has a bad rap, and that more progress or improvement than negativity is the result of complaints?

### **Closing Reading**

“See if you can catch yourself complaining, in either speech or thought, about a situation you find yourself in, what other people do or say, your surroundings, your life situation, even the weather. To complain is always nonacceptance of what is. It invariably carries an unconscious negative charge. When you complain, you make yourself into a victim. When you speak out, you are in your power. So change the situation by taking action or by speaking out if necessary or possible; leave the situation or accept it. All else is madness.” (*Eckhart Tolle, “The Power of Now: A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment”*)

**Check-out and reflection on today’s session:** How were your needs for connection and spiritual growth met by this session? Do you feel your voice was heard?

#### **Extinguish the Chalice**

We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth,  
the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment.  
These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.

### **Housekeeping**