DEALING WITH MURMURING

Guarding Your Own Heart and Leading a Complaining People

Pastor Dr. Emmanuel Mukisa, D.D.

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For inquiries, permissions, or bulk orders:

Email: books@wotmi.org

Web: www.wotpublishing.com

Tel: +256 742 302 566 / +256 786 821 888

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Preface

Murmuring is a low sound.
It is rarely shouted. It is muttered. It moves from tent to tent, from mouth to ear, from the back row to the car park. By the time it reaches the leader, it has already reached the people.

I wrote of familiarity, of offence and of envy.
Each of them, in the end, opens its mouth.
Familiarity says, "He is only one of us."
Offence says, "I will not forget what he did."
Envy says, "Why him and not me?"
And when all three have done their work, the heart begins to murmur.

Every shepherd has heard it. Every believer has felt it rise in his own chest.
It was heard in the wilderness, three days after the greatest deliverance the world had seen.
It was heard in Jerusalem, in the first church, while the Holy Ghost was moving in power.
It is heard today.

This book has two parts, because murmuring has two sides.
The first is for the heart that murmurs — yours and mine.
The second is for the one who must lead a people who murmur.

You will not find here a way to silence people.
You will find the way God turns bitter waters sweet.

May these pages find the tent where the low voice was speaking.
May they put a song where the complaint used to be.
May every leader who reads them cry to God before he answers the people.

Give thanks.
Lead with joy.
The waters can be made sweet.

— Emmanuel Mukisa

PART

One

The Murmuring Heart

CHAPTER

1

The Nature of Murmuring

Murmuring is ingratitude given a voice.

It is not the honest cry of a heart before God. David cried to God all through the Psalms, and God called him a man after His own heart. It is not the plain word brought to a brother, face to face. Murmuring is something else. It is the low voice under the breath. It complains, but never at the door. It speaks, but never to the one who can answer.

The New Testament word is *gongysmos*. It is a sound-word — the very sound of it is a mutter, a low grumble. It is the word Peter uses when he says, "Use hospitality one to another without grudging" (1 Peter 4:9). Grudging. That is murmuring: a kindness done with a mutter behind it, a service rendered with a complaint under the breath.

Hear what Moses told Israel in the wilderness. The whole congregation had murmured against him and against Aaron. And Moses said, "And what are we? your murmurings are not against us, but against the LORD" (Exodus 16:8).

This is the first truth about murmuring, and it changes everything.
Murmuring always looks at men.
It is always heard by God.

In the same breath Moses had said: "for that he heareth your murmurings against the LORD: and what are we, that ye

murmur against us?" (Exodus 16:7).
He heareth. Twice in two verses Moses tells them the same thing: the Lord hears.

The people thought they were complaining about Moses. They thought they were complaining about the food, the water, the road, the length of the journey. But God said, "I have heard" (Exodus 16:12).
Every murmuring is a complaint against the One who leads the leaders.
Every grumble about the provision is a grumble about the Provider.

Paul shows us where murmuring begins. Writing of men who knew God and turned from Him, he says: "Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened" (Romans 1:21).

Hear the order.
They knew God.
They did not glorify Him as God.
They were not thankful.
Then their imaginations became vain.
Then their heart was darkened.

The unthankful heart does not stay neutral. It does not remain empty. It fills with imaginations — the provision is not

enough, the leader is against me, God has forgotten me — and the light goes out of it.
Thanksgiving keeps the heart in the light.
Murmuring lets the darkness in.

This is why murmuring is never a small thing. It sounds small. It is only a few words, only a sigh, only a remark to a friend. But it is the voice of a heart that has stopped seeing God as God.

You were not made for that voice.
In Christ, you are a son of God, rooted and built up in Him, "abounding therein with thanksgiving" (Colossians 2:7). Thanksgiving is not a duty laid on you from outside. It is the voice of the new creation. It is the sound your spirit makes when it sees clearly.

Murmuring is ingratitude given a voice.