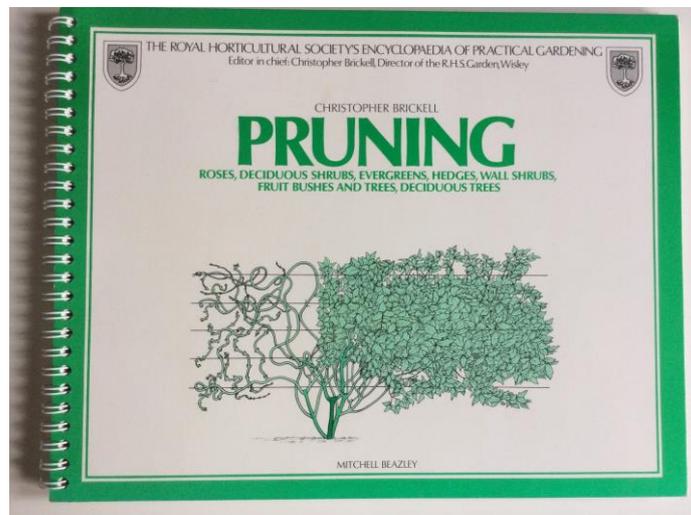


**Lord, as we learn how the early church in Philippi needed help from a distant prisoner, show us how to put Paul's teaching into practice. Amen.**

## **Shining out the Gospel** (Philippians 2.12-18; Mt 5.13-16)

**Who's good at DIY?** Do you follow the DIY manuals or U-tube clips or battle on your own? If it's a computer issue a grandchild might be the best help!

I always remember a colleague being off work after a bookshelf fell onto her in bed. A **botched DIY job**, you will be thinking. Well, it was put up by her over confident partner who was actually a woodwork teacher.

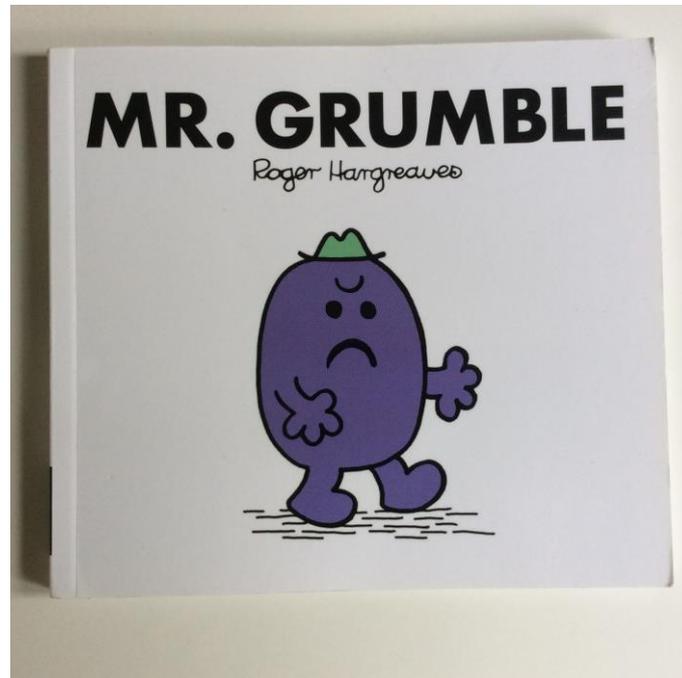


One DIY book we get out each autumn is this **RHS Pruning guide** for our fruit bushes and trees. Pruning is theological as well as a horticultural. God wants us to work with Him in pruning some things out of our lives, or at least cutting them back to keep them in check.

Today's passage in our Philippians series could be interpreted as **spiritual DIY**. The imprisoned Paul tells the early Christians to **work out your salvation with fear and trembling** (v.12). That doesn't mean we can earn our own salvation alone, in our own strength, for Paul assures us *it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfil His good purpose* (v.13). The **only sure way to put faith into practice** is to let God prune and shape our lives in accordance with His will.

**First, the DON'T**, the pruning if you like. The main thrust of Paul's exhortations in this passage is *Do everything without grumbling or arguing* (v.14).

If you were here last week you will remember that Pat talked about **Morph**. I'm sure you are familiar with another 1970s creation, the **Mr Men series**.



Here's **Mr Grumble**. Perhaps I should give it to some **children who were shouting and making a din**. Their Mother asked them what they were quarrelling about. *"We're not quarrelling"* said the oldest, *"we're just playing Mummy and Daddy"*.

**Have many Mr or Mrs Grumbles have we here?** Anyone never grumble, even after this week of all weeks? I'm ashamed of my grumbling when things don't happen my way or stuff doesn't come when expected. **What about you?** Would you like to turn to someone near you for a moment and share your favourite grumbles.

### **SHARING (1)**

If you have a problem with grumbling, then you're obviously not alone. The Old Testament book of Numbers could easily be renamed **The Grumbler Chronicles**. The Children of Israel grumbled full time. Their **response** to God's gracious and miraculous deliverance from Egypt **should have been** praise, worship, and wholehearted trust. Instead, they complained and muttered about their less-than-five-star accommodations in the desert. *"No water, Moses! Where's the beef, Moses? I have blisters on my feet, Moses. Are we there yet, Moses?"* This was faithlessness.

Paul's message recalls Moses' last speech to Israel, at the end of that journey. **God can be trusted**, even when times are hard and leaders are far away, *for the Lord your God goes before you & will be with you; He will never leave you nor forsake you* (Dt. 31.6,8).

Grumbling can be a **"rebellion against authority"** (plenty of that at Westminster this week): *Even today my heart is bitter, His hand is heavy in spite of my groaning* (Job

23:2). Or complaining may be a failure to remember Who is in control. An attitude that wonders, "*Does God really know what's best for me?*"

I think we're all grumblers, in one way or another. But **how do we go about finding a solution?** I can't find a "*Teach Yourself NOT to Grumble*" book but if you are someone who gives things up for Lent, perhaps you could **try to give up grumbling**. Here are four suggestions:

### 1. Realize that complaining is dangerous.

We know that **Satan** doesn't want us to fulfil God's intended purpose for our lives. If he can't derail us because of shortcomings in our private lives, then the **Devil will seek a different way to trap us**. For many of us, that snare is the temptation to gripe, grumble (1 Cor. 10.10), and complain against God. And **that's dangerous**.

### 2. Remember, God knows what He is doing.

Think of **Joseph** in Genesis. He was thrown into a pit by his brothers, sold into slavery, unjustly accused of fooling around with Potiphar's wife, thrown into prison, forgotten by a friend he had helped—and yet Scripture doesn't record a single complaint.

Joseph **could've become bitter** against his brothers, or complained that being in prison was unjust. But he didn't.

What was **the secret of his complaint-free life?** The answer is in Genesis 45:5-8 where we find Joseph, now Governor of Egypt, addressing his starving brothers, "*Do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you*". Three times in four verses Joseph said "**God sent me here.**" Joseph grasped **the truth of God in control, knowing what He is doing**.

### 3. Put away past complaints that may morph into bitterness.

The longer we keep grumbling about someone else, the greater the probability it will become a **grudge too heavy to handle**. Complaining can lead to resentment.

In a **woodland created in almost treeless Shetland** in memory of a young man "gone too soon", I came across a quotation which was just what I needed at a time of feeling bitter: ***Hanging on to resentment is like letting someone you despise live rent-free in your head*** (Ann Landers).

#### 4. Keep on "giving thanks in all things" (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

We've had the DON'T, now for the DO.

Two years ago, a **Christian magazine** asked its grumble-prone readers to pinch themselves every time they felt a grumble coming on and to recite a Bible verse instead.

This verse from another Pauline letter would be a **good start**: *Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Jesus Christ* (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

In theory, it's hard to grumble when you're **joyful, praying and giving thanks!** The **Israelites had a visual aid** to help to keep them on track. God commanded Moses to take an omer of manna (about two quarts) and keep it in a jar as a reminder of God's faithfulness (Exodus 16:32–33) to those ungrateful people He kept alive for forty years.

God is saying the same thing to us. Since we're inclined to grumble, to be thankless, and to complain about our circumstances, we too need to **remember his gracious provision, and the miracle** that as sinners we are now beloved children of God.

**Yet somehow we go on complaining**, just like the people of Israel. *"I know you've forgiven all my sins at the cross, and given me everlasting joy in your presence, but we've run out of milk, Lord, and the road to the supermarket is flooded."*

Our grumbling, whining, and thanklessness reflect our heart's attitude to God. Our **spiritual forgetfulness is sinful**. We need to make a real effort to be thankful to God.

So **what have we got to be thankful for?** I can thank God that Patricia's mother persuaded her not to cancel a walking holiday after her father died, because if she had **we would never have met**. More recently, when pruning a tree I ignored all the stuff in the Teach Yourself Safety book and stupidly didn't put the stepladder on firm level ground. As the stepladder slipped sideways, it threw me off backwards and I can truly praise God that **all I did was bruise a foot**.

**What about you?** I don't want you to go home today saying you sat next to Mr or Mrs Grumble. So would you like to turn to that same person near you and briefly share something you can thank God for.

#### **SHARING (2)**

Please share your thankfulness with others over coffee – but **don't grumble** about the sermon!

So **DON'T GRUMBLE, DO GIVE THANKS. And the AIM?**

Paul's partners are to **aim for blameless, Christ-reflecting lives**, *without fault in a warped and crooked generation* (v.15). Then, whether life or death befall them, they should **be glad and rejoice with him** (v.18).

Paul's urges Christians to *shine like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life* (vv.15f). They will be **beacons to lead others** into right habits, even in a murky, corrupt world.

Few of us live in "dark sky" areas where we can fully appreciate the beauty of the skies, as Paul's readers could. The weather doesn't often cooperate either. So I chose for our second reading a well-known Gospel passage with a similar point: *You are the light of the world ... let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven* (Mt. 5.14,16).

There are **two ways of spreading light**; to be a candle or the mirror that reflects it (Edith Wharton)



**This bulb** has a special purpose. It can activate a solar panel, and then things happen! It doesn't even need electricity when it gets light from the SUN. As Christians, we have a special purpose too. Do we grumble in darkness, are we just lights, or do we use the light of the SON OF GOD to make things happen?

***Loving Father, help us not to grumble, but instead to have joyful, thankful hearts as we encourage one another and let our light shine before others (Mt. 5.16) to make things happen. Amen.***