

Chapter One

The Grasshopper Complex

(Read Numbers 13:25-33)

Personality disorders have become a fact of life. Everyone, Christian and non-Christian alike, seems to have one complex or another. Some of us are introverts; some extroverts. Others may suffer from paranoia or schizophrenia.

But there is one complex that might be the most prevalent of all: *the Grasshopper Complex*. And no other disorder can so paralyze our spiritual walk with God.

Twelve spies had gone into the land of Canaan to determine the military strategy needed to conquer this Promised Land. Ten were intimidated by the project, believing that the inhabitants were too well fortified to be uprooted.

Specifically, the majority said, “We are not able to go up against the people, for they are too strong for us” (Nm 13:31). They gave a bad report, causing thousands who heard their story to tremble in fear.

Two of the men, Joshua and Caleb, quieted the people and begged to differ with their peers. They said, “We should by all means go up and take possession of it, for we shall surely overcome it” (13:30).

But the majority report prevailed (see Nm 14:1-4) as the ten spies convincingly exaggerated the difficulty of obeying God.

“The land through which we have gone, in spying it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants; and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great size. There also we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anak are part of the Nephilim); and we became like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight” (13:32-33).

Notice: the ten spies saw the Canaanites as *giants* and themselves as *grasshoppers*. How easily a giant can crush a grasshopper!

There are several powerful reasons why the whole nation of Israel adopted the Grasshopper Complex:

First, the Canaanites were better armed. Whereas Israel had but a few staves, the pagans they were supposed to conquer had horses and chariots and had mastered the use of iron. Militarily, there was great disparity between the two antagonists. The Canaanite armies were well trained and practiced in war. For centuries they had fought among themselves and had mastered the art of cruelty. Their strong organization and superior weapons made them formidable.

Second, the Canaanites lived in walled cities, while the Israelites lived in tents. In war there is a vast difference between defending a fortification and wresting it from the enemy. Only a few soldiers are needed to defend a walled city; but it usually takes a hundred times that number to actually capture it.

Quite literally, the Israelites had no place to hide. No fox-holes; no fortifications. They were hard-pressed to think of a single advantage they would have in an all-out war.

Third, the Canaanites were bigger physically. Yes, there were giants in the land. Why the Canaanites were taller we don't know, but they had in fact developed into a physically

superior race and the Israelites paled in comparison.

Looked at in one way, it made sense for the people to choose the majority report. Everything was stacked against them. Why risk almost certain death when you have the option of staying in the wilderness to be fed by God?

The one factor that could have significantly changed the equation was that God was on the side of the Israelites. More than that, the Almighty had given a specific promise that if they would believe Him for victory, they would achieve it. Simple faith in God would shift the military balance of power. For who can stand against the armies of the Almighty?

But *it is always easier to see giants than to see God*. In the presence of powerful enemies, we tend to revise downward our estimate of God's faithfulness and power.

We adopt the Grasshopper Complex whenever we *turn away from a God-given challenge for fear that we lack the resources to tackle it*, or when we try to avoid facing a problem that is hindering our spiritual progress.

Recently I spoke to a woman who could not complete a résumé for a job without hearing a voice that told her she would be a failure. A man I know was reared in a home where nothing was ever good enough for his father. The son is now haunted with the feeling that he is a disappointment to everyone, including God. He is, he says, "doomed to fail." The Grasshopper Complex.

The ten spies caught a bad case of the Grasshopper Complex, and the virus spread to the whole multitude. Moses wanted a simple report of the good land that was to be conquered. What he got was the fruit of fear—the destructive influence of a bad example.

What are some characteristics of the Grasshopper Complex?

A Doubting Heart

The vocal majority of the Israelite spies could think only of the many reasons why they would lose in battle; they could think of no reasons why they might win. Though God had given them a promise, it seemed unrealistic so they did not believe it. “We are not able to go up against the people, for they are too strong for us” (Nm 13:31).

Why all this negativism? Perhaps they thought God had failed them in the past. They remembered the bitter waters of Marah more clearly than the sweet waters that eventually flowed from that oasis. They recalled that God had let them go thirsty until Moses was asked to smite the rock in Horeb. Then there was the war with Amalek, and later the terrifying day in which three thousand Israelites were killed by the Levites because of the golden calf.

Even more vivid in their memories may have been the recent dispute over their “menu” in the desert. They had grown weary of manna and complained because they did not have meat. God punished them by granting their request but combining it with judgment (see Nm 11:33).

How could they trust a God who had dealt with them so severely? What if He were to turn against them in the middle of their battle against the Canaanites? To trust an invisible God to fight a very visible army was asking a bit much. Furthermore, they were in no mood to fight.

Though we might be tempted to excuse their unbelief, God was not quite so sympathetic. He took their decision as a personal referendum on His credibility. Though He forgave their sin in response to Moses' prayer, He was *very* angry: "How long shall I bear with this evil congregation who are grumbling against Me? I have heard the complaints of the sons of Israel, which they are making against Me.... Your corpses shall fall in this wilderness, even all your numbered men, according to your complete number from twenty years old and upward, who have grumbled against Me" (Nm 14:27, 29).

God attributed the Israelites' fear of failure to their hard hearts. He was angry with that whole generation and swore that they would not enter the land. The author of the Book of Hebrews recites this story and warns, "Take care, brethren, lest there should be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart, in falling away from the living God" (Heb 3:12).

A doubting heart is not just a minor fault that can be overlooked as one failing among many. God calls it an "evil heart of unbelief" and traces it to willful rebellion.

What are some other characteristics of the Grasshopper Complex?

A Distorted Self-Image

Let's reread the report of the ten fearful spies: "There also we saw the Nephilim ... and we became like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight" (Nm 13:33).

Note well that when the spies saw themselves as grasshoppers they immediately assumed that the Canaanites saw them

as grasshoppers too! We all think that people perceive us just as we perceive ourselves.

A child who is told by his parents that he is dumb, doomed to fail, and ugly will think that that's the way everyone else sees him. A person who sees himself as a loser believes others see him that way; worse, he will most likely act like one. Our self-perception is the foundation on which we build our dreams, whether good or evil.

Looked at in one way, the spies' self-evaluation appeared humble: "We are but grasshoppers!" But in point of fact, this was nothing but a confession of their own unbelief; it was an insult to God. Why should anyone who trusts the Almighty see himself as a grasshopper?

Interestingly, the spies were wrong when they said that the Canaanites saw them as grasshoppers. In reality, the Canaanites were frightened out of their wits. Thirty-eight years later when the Israelites finally did make serious plans to enter the land, another generation of spies went to Jericho and made contact with Rahab the harlot. Working in the town brothel, she knew the sentiment of the town toward the Israelites. She reported, "I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land have melted away before you" (Jos 2:9).

Far from seeing the Israelites as grasshoppers, the Canaanites saw them as giants! They were terrified, wondering why it took the Israelites so long to claim their inheritance. Rahab understood the issues even better than the enlightened Israelites, for she went on to say that Jericho had heard of the miracles God had done, "And when we heard it, our hearts melted and no courage remained in any man any longer

because of you; for the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath” (Jos 2:11). She knew who God was, even if God’s own people had their doubts!

If we see Satan as unbeatable, *he is*. But we can never see Satan for what he truly is until we see God for what He is—and ourselves for what we are in Christ. As Christians we must see ourselves in Christ as forgiven, accepted, ascended, and victorious. Then we will see Satan as defeated, and well within the range of our spiritual artillery. Regardless of the walls Satan hides behind, he can be routed and dethroned.

The Grasshopper Complex causes us to feel inferior to situations and even people that we, under God, are well able to confront. Like looking into a bent mirror, we distort ourselves, our enemies, our challenges, and even our God.

And there is more.

A Double Mind

Those who see themselves as grasshoppers constantly shift their focus, looking for some lodestar to follow. At times they do think about the promises of God, but such moments give way to the supposed benefits of unbelief. They keep one eye on the world and one shifting eye on God.

When the people heard the report of the ten spies, they fell into an emotional swamp. They cried all night and grumbled against Moses and Aaron, saying, “Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness” (Nm 14:2).

The next step was to appoint a captain who would lead

them back into Egypt. And when Joshua and Caleb tried to persuade the people to drop those plans and get on with believing the Almighty for victory, the congregation responded by saying that these two optimists should be stoned. So much for the benefits of faith!

Needless to say, the people conveniently forgot that their stay in Egypt had not been entirely pleasant. They could not remember the slavery, the beatings, and the untimely deaths of their relatives and friends. Rather they spoke of the security Egypt had offered them. With one foot in the desert and one foot back in Egypt, they had no feet left to take them into the Promised Land.

James reminds us that when we ask for wisdom we should “ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways” (Jas 1:6-8). Double-mindedness spills over into all of life.

The Israelites were brought out of Egypt so that they might be brought into Canaan. Now they stood poised between these two events, fearful to move ahead and yet unable to go back. With neither option a distinct possibility, they were condemned to wander in no-man’s-land. They were consigned to the desert until all the adults (except Joshua and Caleb) would die.

I’m told that the Greeks had a race in which a man would stand with one foot on one horse and his other foot on a second horse. The man was able to ride in that fashion as long as the horses stayed together, but when they began to separate, he had a decision to make!

Double-mindedness is a leading cause of the Grasshopper Complex. The eye that shifts its focus between God and the world will lack the stability to take confident steps in exploring new horizons for the glory of God.

The Desire for Security

Another motivation of the Israelite multitude was *fear*, the fear that they would fail in warfare. They believed, contrary to God's promises, that they would all be killed. Anything is better than death!

The argument to stay in the desert seemed unassailable: *If they didn't fight, they couldn't lose!* The choice was between living in the familiar wilderness and risking the possibility of being beaten by an unfamiliar foe. The Canaanites would probably not leave their walled cities to harass the Israelites in a barren wilderness. Therefore, if the Israelites simply refused to accept the challenge of battle, they would not have to cope with the fear of failure.

We are often critical of Peter, who began to sink when walking on the water to go to Jesus. We chide him for taking his eyes off Christ. But we ought to commend him for at least being willing to take the risk of hopping out of the boat and trying to walk on the water. Though he wavered in the process, he took the risk of trusting Christ for a miracle. The other men were in no danger of drowning for they played it safe and stayed in the boat.

Some people avoid failing only because they never have a decent chance to fail. They play it safe, taking no risks at all.

To them security is such a high priority that they would prefer to do nothing than try something that might not succeed.

The Despising of Weakness

Perhaps the Israelites thought that they should wait until they were as strong as the Canaanites before going to war with them. But God did not want them to be strong. He was quite willing for them to remain weak so that He could make up for their deficiencies. Strategy and strength would have its place, but faith in His promises was even more important.

We often speak about “God-given strength,” but we must also become acquainted with “God-given weakness.” When God wanted to use Paul in a greater way, He gave him a “thorn in the flesh.” When Paul prayed that it might be taken away, he was told that the grace of God would be sufficient for him. Paul replied, “Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; *for when I am weak, then I am strong*” (2 Cor 12:10, italics mine.)

Jacob was made physically weak by God on the eve of his encounter with his estranged brother, Esau. Twenty years earlier he had wronged his brother, and now he expected hostility, perhaps even a fight. God touched the hollow of the patriarch’s thigh so that he faced his brother limping (see Gn 32:22-32). Nothing could have forced him to trust in God like being made weak at the very point where he needed to be strong. By nature we seldom trust God *unless we have to*.

We must not despise weaknesses, for they are a gift from

God. In their place we must put the promises of God: the Lord loves to use these infirmities to turn our attention toward Him.

Is it any wonder that Moses later told the people that those who were afraid of battle should stay home? The priests, said Moses, should calm the people, reminding them that because the Lord was with them they were not to panic, “For the Lord your God is the one who goes with you, to fight against your enemies, to save you” (Dt 20:4). But to the fearful the officers should say, “Who is the man that is afraid and fainthearted? Let him depart and return to his house, so that he might not make his brothers’ hearts melt like his heart” (Dt 20:8). Better to stay home than to spread fear among those who are preparing to trust God to win a victory. Fear is contagious!

There is a remedy for the Grasshopper Complex. It is to unite with those who have the courage to take their resources and then *add God*. Faced with a clear command from God, we can go forward and claim the territory He has allotted us.

Identifying Our Complex

We have all seen ourselves in these descriptions of the Grasshopper Complex. We have all shrunk from doing the will of God because we were overwhelmed by our insecurities and fears. We have felt that God has given us a burden too heavy to bear.

I’m told that when American troops came to one of the concentration camps in Germany some of the prisoners did not rejoice. They came out of the barracks, heard the good

news, and then walked quietly back to their barren cells. They had been so used to confinement and abuse that they feared freedom!

Failure is addictive. If we have a string of failures in our past, we may cringe from the challenge of spiritual growth and victory. The Grasshopper Complex makes us content with mediocrity and spiritual sterility. Ignoring those barriers that stand between us and spiritual growth initially seems more secure, but it is highly unrewarding.

Think with me about the “territory” God may want you to inherit, and about the “walled city” standing between you and your inheritance:

- the distress of a bad marriage
- bitterness from being wronged
- the fear of establishing friendships because of past abuse
- compulsive hidden addictions that are sapping all of your emotional and spiritual energy
- fractured friendships
- failing health
- a fear of failure that causes instability

The roadblocks that exist between you and your promised land may appear formidable. In your depression you are unable to even think about the possibility of demolishing the strongholds. In short, emotional and spiritual wholeness may appear impossible.

Do not be discouraged. Someone has said that *if you are not called to the impossible you have never been called!*

“God is honored,” said one man, “when we choose a task so large that if God doesn’t undertake we will be taken under!” Everyone who has ever followed God has had to take some

risks, humanly speaking. No one can get to the top of the mountain by following the path of least resistance.

Perhaps you are discouraged because of past disappointments. You remember when you armed yourself with the promises of God but He apparently did not come through for you. You are afraid to trust Him because you think He left you stranded in the moment of need.

That happened to the Israelites too. They did make a rather valiant effort to take the land after all, but they were as easily beaten as grasshoppers!

Let's find out why.