

Lesson Six: Why do Christians have so many problems? (Why doesn't God help his children avoid troubles and heartache?)

We are moving right along with these questions.

We have talked about:

- How can we be sure we are saved?
- How can we overcome temptation?
- How can I get off the worry wheel?
- How can I find forgiveness?
- Is Jesus really the only way to God?

Now then, we will look at the question above. How is it that God's children still have problems? You know I have been asked that question a lot. Hey Pastor Phil, I don't get it. I came to Jesus with loads of trouble and problems from my past but it seems that the consequences didn't disappear and now I have whole new set of problems. Yep, that is about the size of it.

Yet there is more to it than that. Christians seem to have a category of problems that the population at large doesn't have. We seem to dedicate ourselves to faith and obedience and then find more opposition and difficulty than ever. John 16.33

The example of Joseph. He went from his father's pasture, to the pit, from the pit to Potiphar's service, from Potiphar's service to prison, and from prison to the palace. Why would God allow such hardship to come into our lives? John Maxwell has some interesting things to say about what problems are in our lives:

- Predictors – They will mold our future
- Reminders – We are not self-sufficient. We need God and others to help us.
- Opportunities – They pull us out of our rut and cause us to think creatively.
- Blessing – They open up doors that we usually do not go through.
- Lessons – Each new challenge will be our teacher.
- Everywhere – No place or person is excluded from them.
- Messages – They warn us about potential disaster.

- Solvable – No problem is without a solution.<sup>1</sup>

If anyone ever had the right attitude about his circumstances it was Joseph. He had his moments of discouragement but he always rested in God's Sovereignty. How discouraging to suffer when you have not done anything wrong. But Joseph will learn that all of his problems and circumstances are in God's control. God's hand was on him (Gen 39.2, 3,21,23). God was going to make it all work together for God. You know the rest of the Story.

### 1. Problems Provide Greater **Opportunities**

- a. Prisons can be **pulpits**. Paul ministered as much in prison as he did when he was free. He wrote his prison epistles and won key people of the Roman empire to the Lord while incarcerated. John Bunyan wrote his timeless allegory "The Pilgrim's Progress while in prison.
- b. Charles Colson was guilty in the Watergate break in while he was Richard Nixon's lawyer. He went to jail. "My lowest days as a Christian (in prison) have been far more fulfilling and rewarding than all the "days of glory," in the White House. I'd rather be a Christian with problems than a non-Christian with no problems.
- c. William Secker from the 17<sup>th</sup> century said, "If Joseph had not been Egypt's prisoner, he had never been Egypt's prime minister. The iron chains about his feet ushered in the **golden chains** about his neck."<sup>2</sup>

### 2. Problems Promote **Spiritual Maturity**

- a. Let's read a passage in Ps 105. *Ps 105:17 He sent a man before them— Joseph—who was sold as a slave. 18 They hurt his feet with fetters, He was laid in irons. 19 Until the time that his word came to pass, The word of the LORD tested him. 20 The king sent and released him, The ruler of the people let him go free. 21 He made him lord of his house, And ruler of all his possessions,*
- b. Problems can **toughen us up**. The imagery in the New Testament is that of enduring hardships like a soldier. We have lost the wartime mentality in the Christian faith. Paul said, *2 Ti 2:3 You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. 4 No one*

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<sup>1</sup> John Maxwell, *Your Attitude: A Key to success* (San Bernardino, CA: Here's Life Publishers, 1984), 99

<sup>2</sup> William Secker, *The Nosuch Professor* (Chicago: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1989), 77

*engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier.*

- c. When Joseph came out of prison he was a man of great faith (he spoke up to Pharaoh), great wisdom, great administrative capabilities and an **iron will**. He was ready! He was ready for the hardships of famine because he had experienced the **hardship** of prison. Listen to these passages: *Ro 5:3 -5; Heb 12:11; James 1:2-3; 1 Pe 1:6 -7*
  - d. We all like to rescue people from the hardships of life. We have to be careful not to develop a hard heart here but think about this: Problems are **providential**. Problems promote **maturity**.
3. Problems Prove **Integrity**
- a. Problems and circumstances do not **make us**; they only **reveal** us – what we already are.
  - b. The more Joseph was pressured the most his character was revealed. Our circumstances (pressures, troubles, trials, pain and problems) reveal our character.
    - i. Character is not the same thing as **reputation**.
    - ii. Reputation is what others think we are: Character is what we **really are**.
    - iii. Reputation is what other are saying about us; our character is what God **knows** about us.
    - iv. Your reputation might be chiseled on your tombstone; your character is what the angels are **reporting before** God's throne.
4. Problems produce a Sense of **Dependency**
- a. Jesus said it this way "...for without Me you can do nothing," Jn 15:5. Joseph's faith was stronger by the minute. By the time he got in front of Pharaoh and interpreted the dream he was fearless. *Ge 50:20*. It was in life prisons, confinements and problems that Joseph was convinced of God's love.
  - b. Tim Keller wrote: One of the main ways we move from abstract knowledge about God to a personal encounter with Him as a living reality is through the **furnace** of **affliction**...Believers understand many doctrinal truths in their minds, but those truths seldom make

the journey into the heart except through disappointment, failure, and loss... A person really never knows Jesus is all you need until Jesus is **all you have**.<sup>3</sup>

5. Problems Prepare Our Hearts for **Ministry**

- a. **Pain** may be the only way we are ever truly prepared for leadership. When we have suffered a certain problem or pain we are especially sensitive to others in that same problem (2 Cor 1.4).
- b. Problems, though painful, are **profitable**.
- c. Brokenness precedes **usefulness**; it just does.
- d. Most of us want a crown but not a **cross**; Easter without **Good Friday** and gain without **pain**. Sorry it doesn't happen. We are capable of working out of our suffering not in spite of our suffering if... and it is a big if we cooperate with God and trust Him.

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<sup>3</sup> Tim Keller, *walking With God Through Pain And Suffering* (NY: Penguin Group, 2013), 5