

## WHY THINGS GO WRONG AND HOW TO PUT THEM RIGHT - Part nine

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### When the Problem You Face Isn't of Your Own Making

We've been studying the Scriptural approach to solving problems. Most of this series has been dedicated to the study of **problems caused by our own sinful choices**. We looked at **getting out** of trouble, and **staying out** of trouble. Then we looked at the **Scriptural problem solving passages**. The **Ten Commandments** provide guidance for our **actions**. The **Beatitudes** provide much needed guidance for our **attitudes**. And **First Corinthians 13** is full of direction and help for all of the **relationships** in our lives.

Then we studied the importance of **honesty** in applying Scriptural truth to our lives (remember, the lazy man in the book of Proverbs who wouldn't go outside because he said there was a lion in the street?). You have to face the actual truth about your own heart **before** God's Word will do you any good.

Finally, we took three weeks locating the **principles of conduct** given in God's Word to cover contemporary situations that are not specifically mentioned in the Scriptures. God's Word **will** give guidance to the hungry heart. Its revelation is both **helpful** and **timeless**. We need to memorize those principles of conduct and teach them to our families.

So where do we go from here? **Sooner or later, you have to take all of this factual truth and actually apply it to your problem.** Information is useless just held in the mind. True, it must **reach** the mind to be helpful. But it must never **remain** in the mind alone. It must be **put into action in solving the problem at hand**.

That's where we are starting our study today - even if the problem **isn't** of your own making (remember our first lesson - determining the **source** of your problem?). Here are the steps - the **first** steps - to take when you want God's help with a difficult situation. Here's what to do:

#### 1) **MAKE YOUR HEART PURE BEFORE YOU ACTUALLY GO TO WORK ON YOUR CIRCUMSTANCES**

Here's the rule: **Before anything good can happen in your circumstances, something good must happen in your heart.** God will not do a **good** work in a **bad** heart. I must make the conscious effort to approach my problem with a **Christian method**. Not all possible solutions are options for me as a follower of Jesus. I must take the time of **preparation** to put my mind on a **Christian track**. This is the very **first** priority.

Remember, God has committed Himself to the deliverance of the **righteous**:

**Psalm 34:15-17** - "The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous and his ears toward their cry. [16] The face of the LORD is against those who do evil, to cut off the memory of them from the earth. [17] When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears and delivers them out of all their troubles."

**Psalm 34:19** - "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all."

These are clear statements about how God delivers people. Righteous people **do** experience trouble. They experience trouble just like everyone else. The Bible says so. But there is one important difference. **Troubles come to the righteous to manifest God's good hand in their growth and steadfastness.**

As we'll see in a minute, this doesn't mean you have to be perfect in order to somehow **qualify** for God's help. It's perfection of **heart** that's being called for - **intending** to please God in everything, even at the expense of self-justification and the pursuit of my own rights.

The New Testament expression of the same truth is **Romans 8:28** - "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."

God is committed to work on behalf of the righteous. He works on their behalf when they call on Him. But there is no commitment to deliver unrighteous people. And remember, those two words, **righteous** and **unrighteous**, don't just refer to **believers** and **unbelievers**. **Christians can, at times, behave unrighteously.**

In fact, the whole Old Testament history of the Jews - *God's chosen people* - is given to show that *God's people can and do act in unrighteous ways*. And when they do, *they experience bondage rather than deliverance*.

Many times, under the heat of trial and trouble, people can call upon God because they want *relief*, even when they don't really have the kind of *pure hearts that want to follow God in other matters*. That's what the whole book of Judges (which we studied years ago) gives evidence of.

It works like this. If I call upon God for help when someone has wronged me, but I'm *angry* and *resentful* for what they have done, God is not going to bring deliverance into my situation because I'm not calling upon Him with a *righteous heart*.

If I call upon God for guidance, in a time of confusion and panic, but don't *yield* to His will in *other* areas of my life (church attendance, tithing, holy lifestyle, etc.), *God is not going to bring deliverance or direction into my situation*.

If I call upon God for deliverance from trial while I'm *angry* at Him for getting me into that situation in the first place, *God is not going to bring deliverance to my situation*.

In other words, just the act of *calling on the Lord, by itself, is no indication of a righteous heart*. God has committed Himself to hear the cry of the *righteous*. So make sure your heart - your attitude - your motive - is holy and Christlike when you approach God with your problem. This is always the first step.

## 2) STAY OPEN TO THE POWER AND PRESENCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT BY AVOIDING WRONG REACTIONS TO YOUR CIRCUMSTANCES

God, in His mercy, has made His help more available than most people think. The Bible says He is not *far* from any one of us. You don't have to *do* anything great to receive His help. However, you do have to *avoid* doing anything really self-destructive.

What I mean is this. You don't have to *earn* God's help. It is absolutely free and gracious. But you do have to *stay out of the way - keep from hindering God's provision for your present need*. The most common problem Christians face in their time of trouble is *responding to their problem in ways that cut off the flow of God's help when they need it most*. We tend to become our own *worst enemies*.

Here are some of the most common *grace hindering, human responses to problems*:

a) **Anger** - The Bible says more than we're comfortable with on the subject of human anger and temper:

**James 1:20** - "...for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God." Anger always *feels* like a proper response when we've been wronged. Anger always *feels* like the natural reaction to personal injustice and trial. But that's only because we're naturally *unrighteous* in our emotional responses.

James says my anger will never *link my life up with the righteous plan of God for my life*. My anger will never bring the power of God to bear on my situation. My anger may seem to release *my* power, but in the process, I will forfeit the power of *God*. And that's a very bad trade off.

Consider the expression of the voice of our popular culture. Think of the movies, adored by Christian people trying to form Christian minds, with the theme of some wounded warrior bouncing back in justified rage, crushing his enemies. We're *trained* to admire this kind of attitude.

Jesus gave specific instruction on how His followers should react, especially in the face of *unjust treatment from others*:

**Matthew 5:38-39, 43-45** - "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' [39] But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also....[43] "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' [44] But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, [45] so that you may be sons of your

**Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust."**

Here's another grace-blocking response to problems:

- b) **Retreat** - People frequently retreat from life when they don't want to blow up in anger - **"I'm not going to fight my enemy. I'm just going to leave the whole situation alone."**

But what usually happens is the person retreats from **more than just the problem**. They shrink away from church, the counsel of friends, and the advice of pastors and leadership in the Body of Christ.

Retreat may keep you from blowing up at your enemy, but it also fosters **unbelief**. Sometimes a person will simply **immerse himself in other pursuits** (and when you're retreating from life, immersing yourself in **work** is no more righteous than immersing yourself in **alcohol**).

And the end result of retreat is always the same. Satan's plan is to **starve your soul by simply cutting off the supply lines to faith**. You cannot maintain your spiritual life with nothing but your own **personal devotional life**. There is a **corporate dimension** to spiritual nourishment that cannot be replaced with **personal devotional habit**. That's the way God has designed the maintenance of the Christian life.

If the devil can con you into believing you can stay spiritually sharp simply by reading your Bible at home and keeping your own personal prayer time, he's won a great victory. **You will shrivel up spiritually, but only other people will notice it**. You will become **spiritually anorexic, thinking you still have lots of spiritual meat on your bones**. Only others will see your true condition.

The Christian life requires constant **engagement**. It is the **fight** of faith. Drifting is deadly. Coasting brings disaster.

**Ephesians 6:10-13** - "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. [11] Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. [12] For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. [13] Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm."

So, we've looked at two self-destructive responses - **anger** and **retreat**. Now for a third:

- c) **Unbelief and Despair** - I put those two responses together because the first always leads to the second. The battle is with **unbelief**. The result of **losing** that battle is **despair**.

This all goes back to what we said in the very first point of this message. The key to everything is **approaching whatever problem you face with a Christian perspective**. Everything else hinges on this kind of approach.

Perhaps we can best define the **Christian approach** by defining its opposite. What are the hallmarks of a **worldly approach** to a problem? Right at the core of the worldly mind set is the assumption that **my circumstances are the most important factor in my present battle**.

The Christian approach says **my circumstances are the most externally obvious part of my present battle. But they are not the most important factor, or the most determining factor for success in my present battle**.

**The battle of ordinary daily problems is a battle between belief and unbelief in the goodness and faithfulness of God**. That's what this life is all about. The devil will use the events of my life to cause me to **lose confidence in God**.

Remember, **faith is never the natural response to daily life**. Faith must be fought for every day. You must **win** the battle for faith in God. Unbelief and doubt and despair come **naturally**, by **default**.

So, we've looked at **two steps** toward involving the power of God in solving your problem: **First, make sure your heart is pure before you go to work on your circumstances. Second, make room for the presence and power of the Holy Spirit by**

**avoiding wrong reactions to your circumstances.** This is especially important when you know your problem is the result of the unjust action of someone else. In those kinds of situations ***all your natural reactions will take you in the wrong direction spiritually.***

Now for the third step:

3) **STOP - TAKE ENOUGH TIME TO EVALUATE YOUR PROBLEM IN THE LIGHT OF SCRIPTURE AND REGULATE YOUR APPROACH BY DIVINE REVELATION RATHER THAN HUMAN EMOTION**

**Proverbs 3:5-6** - "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. [6] In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths."

We've already covered this when we looked at the teaching of the Ten Commandments, the Beatitudes, and First Corinthians 13. If you face a situation not covered in the Scriptures by name, go over the list of principles we covered in the three studies of Christian conduct in culturally specific situations.

But here's the important point. ***Take the time to write down the courses of action that you honestly know are already ruled out for you, as a Christian, and determine not to violate God's Word even if you must suffer temporarily for your obedience.***

That's what that phrase, "***lean not on your own understanding,***" means. Following God in faith means ***refusing your own natural instincts.*** That's what the walk of faith is all about. You must believe that, ***in the long run,*** God's way will bring the most success, the most freedom, and the most eternal reward. ***Everything visible around you will scream at you to take matters in your own hands.*** Faith means taking God's Word above human opinion or practice.

4) **MAINTAIN SPIRITUAL STRENGTH BY KEEPING A THANKFUL HEART AT ALL TIMES**

**1 Thessalonians 5:16-18** - "Rejoice always, [17] pray without ceasing, [18] give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."

These verses form a ***prayer sandwich.*** The command to pray is surrounded by the ingredients that make prayer powerful and effective, especially in the face of problems. ***"Rejoice."*** ***"Give thanks."*** Even when life is hard and difficult, and I may not know all of the elements of God's mind and will, I'm clearly told what one important ingredient of His will is all the time - ***a thankful, praise filled heart.***

We vastly underestimate the importance of thankfulness and praise. Usually we link expressions of praise to some kind of ***charismatic, shallow, emotional reflex action.*** This misses the point of praise all together. It is tied to spiritual maturity and growth in faith. It is never tied to the mere release of weak-minded emotionalism. Never let enemies of New Testament Spirit-filled worship intimidate or misrepresent the life of worship and expressive praise in Biblical theology.

Thankful praise is the God given antidote to the ***wrong responses*** we studied earlier. You can't praise God from your heart and maintain human anger and bitterness. You won't drift into spiritual retreat if you keep your heart warm and sensitive to the goodness of God in other areas of your life. And a heart constantly turned toward God in praise and thankfulness will be protected from the ravages of unbelief and despair.

More on this next week.