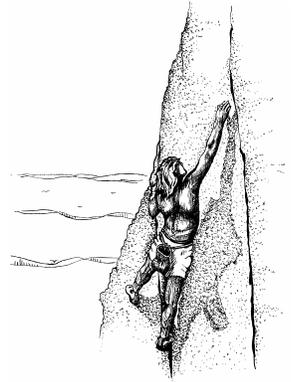


Journey Into Overcoming: Rising Above Life's Toughest Problems



Lesson 1 . . . Why God Allows Us to Have Problems

Everybody has problems. As someone has said, “Everyone has a problem, is a problem, or lives with a problem.” Our problems vary by type and severity. There are financial problems, health problems, and relationship problems, as well as problems of guilt, depression, temptation, failure, stress, burnout, etc. We will look at each of these in detail during this study. We as Christians are not exempt from painful problems and often have more problems than non-Christians because the Evil One tries to derail our spiritual lives. How does Jesus express this fact in John 16:33b?

NOTES

The Greek word translated *trouble* (THLIPSIS, th-lip'-sis), or “tribulation” in the KJV, means “pressing or pressure that burdens our spirits.” It refers to severe affliction or anguish. In other words, Jesus said, “In this world we will have ‘big-time’ problems.”

In Romans 8, Paul writes about all kinds of problems: *trouble . . . hardship . . . persecution . . . famine . . . nakedness . . . danger . . . sword and death* (8:35-36). Then, what does he write concerning these problems in Romans 8:37?

What does it mean to be *more than* a conqueror? Conquerors defeat their enemies. If we are *more than conquerors*, we will make our enemies our friends. Therefore, God can cause even our worst problems to be our friends if we let Him make good come from them (Rom. 8:28). How does He do that? In at least **four** ways. He uses problems **to direct us, inspect us, correct us, and perfect us.**

First, to direct us

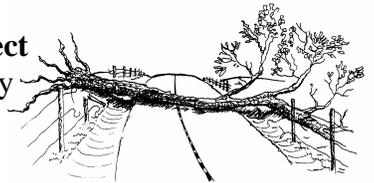
Oxford scholar C. S. Lewis wrote: “God whispers to us in our pleasure but shouts to us in our pain.” God uses problems to get us back on track or to keep us on course. How does Psalm 119:67 express this truth?

God often uses problems **to direct us**—keep us on track spiritually. The apostle Paul writes of God allowing him to have a *thorn* in the flesh to keep him *from becoming conceited* because of his *great revelations* (2 Cor. 12:7). Paul doesn't say what the *thorn* was, but whatever it was, it was chronic and severe. Paul prayed three times for God to take the *thorn* away. Many scholars believe Paul's *thorn* in the flesh was failing eyesight. This is likely because what does Paul write in Galatians 6:11?

Other scholars believe Paul was often weak and sickly because he may have contracted malaria on one of his missionary journeys. Still others believe Paul's *thorn* was severe headaches, perhaps migraines. I think God didn't want Paul to tell us what his problem was, because if we had the same problem, we would be tempted to say, "I'm suffering just like Paul." We don't know what Paul's *thorn* in the flesh was, but we do know how God answered his prayer. What was God's answer to Paul's request (2 Corinthians 12:9)?

Paul says God allowed him to have a *thorn* in the flesh to keep him from becoming arrogant. God knew Paul was going to be the greatest of all the apostles. Through Paul's three missionary journeys and thirteen epistles that make up almost half the books in the NT, he would do more to spread the Gospel than anyone else who will ever live. Therefore, God uses Paul's *thorn* in the flesh **to direct** him away from pride and arrogance.

God often uses problems **to direct us** away from sin. It can be **to direct us** away from someone who may be a temptation or **to direct us** away from a bad decision. On a regular basis, we should pray Psalm 119:35 in regard to our problems. Write it below:



God allows us to have problems **to direct us** and . . .

Second, to inspect us

Someone has said, "Christians are like teabags. You don't know what's in them until they get in some hot water." Problems are really just tests to

reveal what kinds of Christians we really are and to prepare us for heaven. Peter writes we are going to have *all kinds of trials* (1 Pet. 1:6). The word translated *trials* (PEIROSAMOS, pie-ros-mos´) means “a putting to the test.” Then, what does he tell us is the purpose for our problems in 1 Peter 1:7b?

Peter compares the testing of our faith through problems to the refining of gold in his day. As gold is heated, impurities float to the surface and can be skimmed off, leaving only pure gold. In the same way, the heat of problems in our lives causes our impurities and defects to come to the surface. The Bible says *the heart is deceitful above all things* (Jer. 17:9a), so we may not even recognize our own impurities when they surface. Therefore, when we have problems, we need to pray the prayer found in Psalm 139:24. Personalize and write it below:

God is our spiritual Goldsmith who, through *all kinds of trials*, brings our sins and spiritual weaknesses to the surface so we can confess them and let Him skim them out of our lives.

God allows us to have problems **to direct us, to inspect us,** and . . .

Third, to correct us

We all sometimes get off course and act like the prophet Jonah, whom God tells to go to Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian Empire, and preach to the people about their *wickedness* (Jonah 1:2). Nineveh is to the east, but Jonah gets on a ship and sails west—the opposite direction of God’s purpose for his life. During Jonah’s Mediterranean cruise the Lord sends a *violent storm* that threatens to wreck the ship (1:4). Now we are going to see the worst part of Jonah’s sinful condition. What do we read about Him in Jonah 1:5b?

The ship is being tossed to and fro and seems about to break into pieces. The sailors are throwing stuff overboard to lighten the load. They are screaming and shouting as they try to control the ship, but Jonah is in a *deep sleep*. Jonah’s *deep sleep* is an illustration of what happens when we get out of God’s will—we become oblivious to spiritual danger and do foolish things because we are spiritually asleep.



When we as Christians get off-course and are content to stay there, God will send a storm to get us back on track. As long as our sin keeps us awake at night, that's good. But if we can be disobedient to God's Word, as Jonah was, and still go to bed at night and fall *into a deep sleep*, we better look out for the *violent storm* God will lovingly send to correct our course.

God allows us to have problems to **direct, inspect, and correct us**, and . . .

Fourth, to perfect us

James tells us to *consider it pure joy* when we *face trials of many kinds* because *the testing of our faith develops perseverance* or patience (1:2-3). Then, what does he write in verse 4?

The word translated *complete* (TELEIOS, tel'-i-os) or "perfect" in the KJV means "to bring to completion or maturity." Therefore, to make us *complete*, our imperfections are being removed from our character. The phrase *not lacking anything* refers to lacking nothing we need to be used of God. When our blind spots and sins of the past have been removed, we are ready to be used by God. So, God uses our problems to get us ready to be used by Him. The Bible tells us God *comforts us in all our troubles* (2 Cor. 1:4a). Then, what does God want us to do, according to 2 Corinthians 1:4b?

God uses our problems, past and present, to shape and mature us so we can serve Him by helping others. God allows us to have problems **to direct us, inspect us, correct us, and perfect us**. How has this lesson changed your attitude toward your problems and why?

