

PROBLEMS

USEFUL PROBLEMS

What good can come out of problems?

BIBLE READING: [Genesis 12:10-20](#)

KEY BIBLE VERSE: *At that time there was a severe famine in the land, so Abram went down to Egypt to wait it out. ([Genesis 12:10](#))*

Problems test our faith. When famine struck, Abram went to Egypt where there was food. Why would there be a famine in the land where God had just called Abram? This was a test of Abram's faith, and Abram passed. He didn't question God's leading when facing this difficulty. Many believers find that when they determine to follow God, they immediately encounter great obstacles. The next time you face such a test, don't try to second-guess what God is doing. Use the intelligence God gave you, as Abram did when he temporarily moved to Egypt, and wait for new opportunities.

BIBLE READING: [Phil. 1:12-30](#)

KEY BIBLE VERSE: *I want you to know, dear brothers and sisters, that everything that has happened to me here has helped to spread the Good News. ([Phil. 1:12](#))*

Problems open up opportunities for service. Being imprisoned would cause many people to become bitter or to give up, but Paul saw it as one more opportunity to spread the Good News of Christ. Paul realized that his current circumstances weren't as important as what he did with them. Turning a bad situation into a good one, he reached out to the Roman soldiers who made up the palace guard and encouraged those Christians who were afraid of persecution. We may not be in prison, but we still have plenty of opportunities to be discouraged—times of indecision, financial burdens, family conflict, church conflict, or the loss of our jobs. How we act in such situations will reflect what we believe. Like Paul, look for ways to demonstrate your faith even in bad situations. Whether or not the situation improves, your faith will grow stronger.

BIBLE READING: [2 Thes. 1:1-12](#)

KEY BIBLE VERSE: *God will use this persecution to show his justice. For he will make you worthy of his Kingdom, for which you are suffering. ([2 Thes. 1:5](#))*

Problems may be confirmation that we are living for Christ. As we live for Christ, we will experience troubles because we are trying to be God's people in a perverse world. Some people say that troubles are the result of sin or lack of faith, but Paul teaches that they may be a part of God's plan for believers. Our problems can help us look upward and forward, instead of inward ([Mark 13:35-36](#); [Phil. 3:13-14](#)); they can build strong character ([Romans 5:3-4](#)); and they can provide us with opportunities to comfort others who also are struggling ([2 Cor. 1:3-5](#)). Your troubles may be an indication that you are taking a stand for Christ.

USELESS PROBLEMS

What kinds of mistakes do we commonly make in handling problems?

BIBLE READING: [Genesis 16:1-16](#)

KEY BIBLE VERSE: *Sarai, Abram's wife, had no children. So Sarai took her servant, an Egyptian woman named Hagar, and gave her to Abram so she could bear his children. "The LORD has kept me from having any children," Sarai said to Abram. "Go and sleep with my servant. Perhaps I can have children through her." And Abram agreed. So Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian servant and gave her to Abram as a wife. (This happened ten years after Abram first arrived in the land of Canaan.)* ([Genesis 16:1-3](#))

We fail to wait patiently for God's solution. Sarai took matters into her own hands by giving Hagar to Abram. Like Abram, she had trouble believing God's promise that was directed specifically toward Abram and Sarai. Out of this lack of faith came a series of problems. This invariably happens when we take over for God, trying to make his promise come true through efforts that are not in line with his specific directions. In this case, time was the greatest test of Abram and Sarai's willingness to let God work in their lives. Sometimes we too must simply wait. When we ask God for something and have to wait, it is a temptation to take matters into our own hands and interfere with God's plans.

We blame others when our solutions fail. Although Sarai arranged for Hagar to have a child by Abram, she later blamed Abram for the results. It is often easier to strike out in frustration and accuse someone else rather than admit an error and ask forgiveness. (Adam and Eve did the same thing in [Genesis 3:12-13](#).)

We run from problems we should face. Hagar was running away from her mistress and her problem. The angel of the Lord gave her this advice: (1) to return and face Sarai, the cause of her problem, and (2) to submit to her. Hagar needed to work on her attitude toward Sarai, no matter how justified it may have been. Running away from our problems rarely solves them. It is wise to return to our problems, face them squarely, accept God's promise of help, correct our attitudes, and act as we should.

BIBLE READING: [Job 2:1-10](#)

KEY BIBLE VERSE: *Job replied, "You talk like a godless woman. Should we accept only good things from the hand of God and never anything bad?" So in all this, Job said nothing wrong.* ([Job 2:10](#))

We question God's purposes in our life. Many people think that believing in God protects them from trouble, so when calamity comes, they question God's goodness and justice. But the message of Job is that you should not give up on God because he allows you to have bad experiences. Faith in God does not guarantee personal prosperity, and lack of faith does not guarantee troubles in this life. If this were so, people would believe in God simply to get rich. God is capable of rescuing us from suffering, but he may also allow suffering to come for reasons we cannot understand. It is Satan's strategy to get us to doubt God at exactly this moment. Here Job shows a perspective broader than seeking his own personal comfort. If we always knew why we were suffering, our faith would have no room to grow.

PROBLEM SOLVING

How does God want us to respond to problems?

BIBLE READING: [James 1:1-18](#)

KEY BIBLE VERSE: *Dear brothers and sisters, whenever trouble comes your way, let it be an opportunity for joy. For when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be strong in character and ready for anything.* ([James 1:2-4](#))

Realize that problems are inevitable. James doesn't say *if* you face trials, but *whenever* you face them. He assumes that we will have trials and that it is possible to profit from them. The point is not to pretend to be happy when we face pain, but to have a positive outlook ("let it be an opportunity for joy") because of what trials can produce in our life. James tells us to turn our hardships into times of learning. Tough times can teach us perseverance. For other passages dealing with perseverance (also called patience and steadfastness), see [Romans 2:7](#); [Romans 5:3-5](#); [Romans 8:24-25](#); [2 Cor. 6:3-7](#); and [2 Peter 1:3-9](#).

Expect to grow as a result of problems. We can't really know the depth of our character until we see how we react under pressure. It is easy to be kind to others when everything is going well, but can we still be kind when others are treating us unfairly? God wants to make us mature and complete, not to keep us from all pain. Instead of complaining about our struggles, we should see them as opportunities for growth. Thank God for promising to be with you in rough times. Ask him to help you solve your problems or to give you the strength to endure them. Then be patient. God will not leave you alone with your problems; he will stay close and help you grow.

BIBLE READING: [John 6:1-15](#)

KEY BIBLE VERSE: *Jesus soon saw a great crowd of people climbing the hill, looking for him. Turning to Philip, he asked, "Philip, where can we buy bread to feed all these people?"* ([John 6:5](#))

Trust God for the means to solve the problem. When Jesus asked Philip where they could buy a great amount of bread, Philip started assessing the probable cost. Jesus wanted to teach him that financial resources are not the most important ones. We can limit what God does in us by assuming what is and is not possible. Is there some impossible task that you believe God wants you to do? Don't let your estimate of what can't be done keep you from taking on the task. God can do the miraculous; trust him to provide the resources.

BIBLE READING: [Romans 8:28-39](#)

KEY BIBLE VERSE: *We know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.* ([Romans 8:28](#))

Trust in God's sovereign purposes for our life. God works in "everything"—not just isolated incidents—for our good. This does not mean that all that happens to us is good. Evil is prevalent in our fallen world, but God is able to turn every circumstance around for our long-range good. Note that God is not working to make us happy, but to fulfill his purpose. Note also that this promise is not for everybody. It can be claimed only by "those who love God and are called according to his purpose." Those who are "called" are those the Holy Spirit convinces and enables to receive Christ. Such people have a new perspective, a new mind-set on life. They trust

in God, not life's treasures; they look for their security in heaven, not on earth; they learn to accept, not resent, pain and persecution—because God is with them.