

Episode 040

Don't Let Your Problems Become A Problem

Have you been struggling with the problems you are facing lately? Perhaps you are feeling overwhelmed by problems. That the problems you are confronted with are going to bury you alive. Perhaps you are crying out to God about why you seem to have so much problems. What can you do? Well, I have a newsflash for you. To do God's will always means facing problems. The bigger the vision God gives us, the bigger the problems we have to face. In fact, the greater the dream, it sometimes seems like the greater the nightmare too. Is there anything we can do about it?

Godly successful leaders realise this. Good leaders are those who have faith that God will somehow lead us through the problems. For they know that no problem is impossible for God to deal with. The real issue is whether we will be the vessels through whom God will solve the problem. That is why the best leaders and staff don't run from problems. They confront it! Why? Because they realise a few things:

- Ignoring a problem usually means the problem festers and becomes a bigger problem.
- When we run away, ignore or neglect problems – it almost always becomes someone else's problems.
- The most valuable staff and leaders are those who solve problems.

Will we be the problem-avoiders or problem-solvers?

WILL THE REAL PROBLEM PLEASE STAND UP?

In order to solve the problems we are confronted with, we must first identify the root of the problems. Pogo, a cartoon character created by Walt Kelly had this insightful observation, "We have met the enemy, and they are us!" You see, the huge problems we may be confronted with is not the biggest problem. The biggest and possibly most stubborn problem lies in our heart. Phil Pringle, founder of the C3 church movement had this observation, "The problem is never the problem. The real problem is our attitude towards it."



When we have the wrong attitude, problems become insurmountable. When we have the right attitude, problems become obstacles to be climbed over. So what kind of a leader do we want to be? The one that is buried by the problems, or the one that climbs on top of the problems?

ATTITUDES NEEDED TO CRACK OUR PROBLEMS.

What attitudes should we have in facing problems?

1. Don't fear problems

We can have a fearful mentality towards problems. Such fears will blind us. It holds our emotions captive and we are unable to see beyond the problem. The problem becomes magnified. Remember the 10 Israelite spies that return from spying the Promised Land? They came back with terrible reports about the giants in the land.

Numbers 13:32–33 (NIV) 32 And they spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored. They said, “The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size. 33 We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim). We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them.”

Their fear magnified the people of Canaan into giants. Their fear caused them to resist the will of God. Their fear resulted in 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. Years later, when they did enter the land, lo and behold, the people were the same stature as the Israelites. On the other hand, to Joshua and Caleb who trusted God fully, the so-called giants became the grasshoppers. It was all an issue of perspective. Sure, there were challenges to conquer the Promised Land, but they were not “giant” problems. Our perspective should be that problems can be solved. Especially by the grace of God. When we are on God's side, who else can win?

Consider David the young shepherd boy. King Saul and his army were paralysed with fear of Goliath the giant. They were so focussed on their fear of the problem, they could not find a way out. But David came along and viewed the problem differently. He had a clearer perception of the problem and found a unique solution, by God's grace. David was able to see by faith, that the giant was simply too big to miss! God was able to use David to secure a victory that He could not with others who were paralysed by fear.

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2. Problems are opportunities in disguise

Sometimes opportunities are so well disguised that they look like problems! If only problems came with little tags that reads, "This is a size 10 problem but can be reconfigured into a size 20 opportunity!"

Many years ago, a big shoe company sent a salesman into a little African nation. On arrival, the man was shocked to discover the natives did not wear shoes. He wrote to the company to inform them it was useless because nobody had need of shoes. So he returned, defeated. Sometime later, another salesman came into this same country. Again, he was confronted with the similar situation. Immediately, he telegraphed back to his company. "Send me every shoe in stock! Everybody here needs shoes!" The first salesman saw only the problem. The second salesman saw the problem as an opportunity!

Consider this. Problems are looking for solvers. These solvers are often rewarded. Why? Because problems create headache for people and those who can solve such problems, will gain the gratefulness of those impacted. If we are good at solving other people's problems, we will gain influence.

In Genesis we find the story of Joseph, a nobody, a slave and prisoner in Egypt. Until Pharaoh had a major problem that nobody else could solve. When Joseph could provide the solution, he was highly promoted to be prime minister. God created a problem in order to create an opportunity for Joseph. Joseph courageously navigated through the problem with God's help to find the solution. This unlocked Joseph from slavery and locked him into Pharaoh's heart.

That is why we should become adept at solving problems! For then we will unlock the opportunity hidden in disguise.



3. Problems grow us

Problems challenge our attitude to be more resilient, more positive. Problems force us to get bigger than the problems. Our creativity, competence, convictions have to grow to face the problems. In tennis, Federer, Djokovic and Nadal continually faced the problem of trying to be better than the best amongst themselves. It forced them to become even better! As a result, they became the greatest tennis players ever in this era.

Would you go in search of more problems? Yes, when you realise that problems also help us gain experience for other problems. If we approach it strategically. I used to work in CSIRO, the largest scientific organisation in Australia and the southern hemisphere. As scientists, we were often called in to solve technological problems in industry. The things we learnt while solving one problem, we often apply to solve other problems. Some brilliant scientists intentionally identified industrial problems that need to be solved. But in such a way that it systematically advanced their knowledge until they built up an immense knowledge that nobody else had. Everybody else naturally went to them. So we searched for more problems!

Have you considered how you might grow through your problems?

4. Problems can give glory to God

When God solves the impossible problem with the impossible solution, He gets all the glory. Remember when Moses and the Israelites were escaping from Pharaoh and the Egyptian army, they were stuck at the shores of the Red Sea. There was no way to escape. Until God parted the Red Sea for them to cross. God saved them and destroyed the Egyptian army in one fell swoop. An impossible solution to solve the impossible situation.

That is why we need to run to God. To find the God-solution.



SOME TIPS TO SOLVING PROBLEMS

- Be humble as arrogance will ensure we will not find the best solutions. For pride tends to focus on solutions that make us look good.
- Get as much of the right people involved, especially the experts. Experts usually understand the factors involved in the problem better than most others. They often are familiar with a much wider range of possible solutions and its effectiveness.
- Get as much of the right information. In computer science, there is a popular saying “Garbage in, garbage out”. Even with experts, if they are given poor or incorrect information, will not produce the right solution. Often it is the experts who can inform us what kinds of information they need and in what manner.
- Get the right people and the information together to find solutions. This can be much harder to achieve than many people think. For often the non-experts are at the coal face. They usually do not appreciate the value of the right information. So often the information is not collected or passed on properly. Different experts may also need different types of information.
- Foster faith, a “can-do” attitude. The team must believe that the problem can be solved, especially with God. The “can-do” attitude fosters greater determination, resilience and creativity.
- Keep cool and discipline our minds to objectively tackle the problem. Things do happen that can stress the team such as disagreements. It is crucial to focus on tackling the problem rather than personalities and preferences.
- Hear all sides of the problem as well as possible solutions before reaching a conclusion. Every solution has a cost and an impact which needs to be weighed up carefully.
- Don't be hasty but prayerfully look to God's help.



CONCLUSION

The problems we may be confronted with are not necessarily the biggest problem. It may well be ourselves. It is crucial to get the right attitude towards problems first. With the right attitudes, we can approach problems without fear, but with faith and creativity. We may be able to discover new opportunities that the problems present.

Let me close with another story. Cotton was once the king of crops in southern parts of USA. But the boll weevil pest migrated from Mexico to USA. It devastated the cotton crops. Farmers in Enterprise, Alabama were forced to diversify to soy, corn, peanuts. Some learnt to raise cattle, pigs and chicken. This diversification caused the farmers to become more prosperous! The people of Enterprise, Alabama were so grateful, they erected a statue to the boll weevil in 1919.



Discussion Questions

These questions could be done personally or as part of a group discussion.

1. Do you agree with the statement “The problem is never the problem. The real problem is our attitude towards it.” Why? Discuss.
2. Which attitude needed to crack the problems is the one you need most at this time? Why? What will do you do about it?
3. Of the tips recommended to solve problems, which ones stood out? What can you learn from them?

Actionable Steps

Following questions are to prompt us on suitable actions. Importantly, come up with steps you will take to make progress. Give them datelines and priority.

1. Which of the attitudes do you need to grow in, that will help you better deal with problems? What are some practical steps you can take to grow in that attitude? List it down and start working on it.
2. From among the suggested tips to help solve problems, which ones can you begin to implement in your problem-solving? Work out specific steps you can take to develop in it.





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