

“What Do You Do, With The Problems That Happen To You?”
Scriptural Reading: Psalm 34:18-19 (NIV)

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Got a problem? Everyone has some, you know. No life is problem-free. None of us are exempt from having to deal with various problems in life. So, given that fact that we all have problems, the question arises “What Do You Do, With The Problems That Happen To You?” How is it that you seek to cope with the problems you encounter?

Do they make you bitter or do they make you better?

Do they make you fearful or do they make you faith-filled?

Do they make you disillusioned or do they make you determined?

What do YOU do, with the problems that happen to you?

Reggie and Elrene Stowe are an older couple who were in the church family we served prior to our coming to Marion. They have had lots of problems to face in their lives: Elrene having had breast cancer and a mastectomy, their oldest daughter being physically disabled by polio, and their youngest daughter dying from cancer. Yet, Reggie and Elrene were two of the most faithful and upbeat members of our congregation, with Reggie possessing a delightful sense of humor. Even after an aneurysm, that put him in a wheelchair for the rest of his life, he continued coming to church every Sunday and spreading his joyfulness with others. While we were in Kansas recently we went to visit Reggie who we found out had recently been placed in a Nursing Home.

Just the other day we received a letter from his wife, thanking us for our visit, and sharing these thoughts.

“It’s been thirteen years since Reggie’s aneurysm...Since that time he’s had two fractured femurs, internal bleeding, malignancy of the prostate, and recently a massive heart attack. It’s amazing that Reggie survived. We have decided not to put him through possible surgery on his carotid arteries in

his fragile condition. I try to visit twice a day. Believe he has some depression and tires easily HOWEVER the sense of humor and wit still pop up.

That's what Joanie and I discovered when we visited. Reggie is still trying to make the best out of a difficult situation and continues to face his problem nobly and with sparks of joyfulness.

What do YOU do, with the problems that happen to you?

It was Lloyd John Ogilvie (former U.S. Senate chaplain and Presbyterian minister), who observed in his book entitled If God Cares, Why Do I Still Have Problems? that, **“As we honestly reflect on our own experiences, a rather shocking truth emerges. Our greatest discoveries and our most significant progress toward maturity have come during those times in our lives when we have creatively worked through our problems. A problem-free life, we conclude, may not be the best of lives after all. God's blessings really can't be equated with an exemption from problems. No life is problem-free. So, the emphasis becomes focused on what we do with what happens to us.”**

What do you do, with the problems that happen to you?

You Gotta Keep Dancin' is a book written by a Christian author named Tim Hansel. In it he talks about the struggles that we have in life and how we face them. Some years ago he taught a class at Azusa Pacific University. The theme of the course focused on an attempt to discover how people can become more whole, in their approach to life and become more ALIVE in Christ. At the end of the semester he asked the class to list someone they knew was the best example of possessing wholeness in their life. Separately, to his surprise, they each chose the same person: Tre Bernhard.

Tre Bernhard was a young woman in our class that been afflicted by severe congenital problems that had left her with only one leg that could do no more than hold a shoe. She had a

total of six stubby fingers. She definitely is someone who had, and would have to deal with physical problems all of her life ... Tre had been through hardships even worse than her physical handicaps that would devastate most people. So why would the class choose Tre Bernhard as the greatest living example of wholeness that they EVER knew? It was how she dealt with her problems. Tre had a lively sense of humor and an incredible compassion toward others. She chose to transcend her situations and give to the world a tangible sense of love and humor that changed many people's lives.

What do YOU do, with the problems that happen to you?

One author notes, "The greatest sermons I have ever heard were not preached from pulpits but from sickbeds. The deepest truths of God's Word have been taught by those humble souls who have gone through the seminary of affliction. The most cheerful people I have met, with few exceptions, have been those who've had the least sunshine and the most pain and suffering in their lives. The most grateful people, I have ever known, were not those who had traveled a pathway of roses all of their lives, but those who were confined to their homes, some to their beds, and had learned to depend upon God" (M.R. DeHaan *Our Daily Bread – devotional*).

What do YOU do, with what happens to you?

There is a very CHALLENGING Scriptural passage in the book of James, in the New Testament. It says, "**Consider it all joy, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing your faith produces endurance (James 1:2-3)**". Looking at that text in more depth, the word "**consider**" actually means that we have an option, i.e. we can "**consider our choices**". It refers to an intentional attitude of the heart or the mind that allows the trials and circumstances of life to either affect us adversely or beneficially. The implication being that with faith in God's help we can deal with our problems, quite differently!! Or as one

author notes that, **“When I submit a particular troublesome time, dare to thank God for giving ME an opportunity to change and to rejoice that He will use it for my ultimate good, I find my attention is shifted from all the bad eventualities to all of God’s possibilities.”**

What do YOU do, with what’s happened to you?

Remember the words of the Psalmist in today’s Scriptural text? **“The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. Do you believe that? A righteous man may have many troubles but the Lord delivers him from them ALL”** Do you believe that?

One Biblical Commentary notes that, **“The Psalmist is realistic in his portrayal of life. The righteous do not escape trouble. However, they need not be overcome by their troubles, because even when they suffer “many troubles,” they are not alone. For, God is present to help them deal with their problems”** (The Expositor’s Bible Commentary – paraphrased). Do you believe that?

Interesting thing about dealing with our problems, **depending upon how we relate to our problems**, things like pettiness, envy, hatred, jealousy, false-pride can ALL seem so insignificant in the face of major difficulty. And, **depending upon how we relate to our problems** reconciliation, understanding, compassion and forgiveness can be present.

I’ve seen the latter, happen many times, regarding various issues that affect families, as the result of a loved one dying. In fact, in most cases, in my particular vocational focus, people seek to invoke the help of God, in dealing with their situation.

But, surprisingly, my wife Joanie who is a Hospice nurse has not, in her vocational focus, where many people often **do not** seek to invoke the help of God. In fact, it is usually the exception to the rule that families are brought closer together when a family member is dying. So, I decided to interview my wife:

Pastor: What do you see occurring in most family dynamics when someone in the family is facing the process of dying?

Pastor's Wife: **Often times the dying of a family member brings out the very worst in family dynamics. I see siblings who don't talk to each other or communicate, unless doing so in conflicting ways. They argue over who is going to make decisions, they blame or criticize one another for not showing enough care, and they are in conflict over who is going to get what, when the particular family member dies. Sometimes she runs across the attitude in relationship to the person dying that "They weren't there for me, so I'm not going to be there for them." They don't work on saying I'm sorry or I love you, and hurts of the past remain unhealed. In general, people haven't come to completion in their relationship with the person dying, nor other family members, and it creates all kinds of problems!!!**

Pastor: What's one of the best situations that you've seen?

Pastor's Wife: **One of the most beautiful experiences I've had has been at the bedside of a man whose wife and their sibling were gathered around his bed at 3:00 a.m. softly singing hymns, and intermittently praying, with their prayers calling forth REJOICING that their loved one would soon be more fully with the Lord.**

CONCLUSION: Those that have an active faith process and a very supportive community of faith deal with the problem of a family member going through the dying process, quite differently than those who don't!

One author notes, **"I offer no answer to pain. However, I am convinced beyond a shadow of a doubt that our painful moments can be an occasion to reach out in a deep way to the presence of God"** (Rev. Daniel Severson).

What do YOU do, with what happens to you?