

The Problem With Problems

1. Separating Problems from Conflicts

- a. What is a problem (Ecclesiastes 2:22-23)?

A problem is a situation or event that causes uncertainty, confusion, difficulty, or hardship and that often requires an action, decision, or response.

- b. What is a conflict (James 4:1-4)?

A conflict is a collision of desires, values, or beliefs, often within the context of a problem, that results in sinful responses either within ourselves or toward others.

- i. Conflicts may be evidenced by disordered thinking or emotions that disrupt personal peace and lead to sinful responses.

E.g. Worry, fear, cold anger, self-loathing, withdrawal or escape, etc.

- ii. Conflicts may be evidenced by sinful actions or words that disrupt relational peace and lead to fights and quarrels.

- c. Problems need not result in conflict (James 1:2-4).

- d. Conflicts always result from sin (Matthew 15:18-20).

2. What are the sources of problems (Genesis 3:14-19; Psalm 103:14)?

- a. Broken world

[Disasters, mechanical breakdowns, social unrest, financial disruptions, etc.]

- b. Broken people

[Disability, forgetfulness, weakness, ignorance, incompetence, inadequacy, etc.]

3. What is God doing in and through your problems?

- a. He is giving you opportunities to fulfill the creation mandate of bringing order out of chaos (Genesis 1:26-28 and 2:15).

- b. He is giving you opportunities to practice justice, seek for righteousness, and otherwise display the heart of God to the world (Proverbs 1:1-7).

- c. He is giving you opportunities to address idolatrous desires, disordered values, or false beliefs (James 4:1-4).

- d. He is giving you opportunities to put your faith into practice and to work it out toward maturity (Philippians 2:12; James 2:14).

- e. He is giving you opportunities to glorify God as you depend on Him and as He provides (Romans 8:28-29; 2 Corinthians 4:15).

- f. He is giving you opportunities to remember the cross and the redemption of Christ (Galatians 3:13; Romans 8:23).

4. Some problems with problems.

- a. Problems are pervasive and surface distorted desires, values, and beliefs.

- b. Because problems often result in conflicts, it is difficult to keep the problem separate from the conflict.

- c. Problems often demand immediate action or require life-shaping decisions, and this may intensify conflicts.

- d. Problems sometimes involve core values, strong desires, or deeply held beliefs and this may result in highly emotional responses.

5. The problem with conflicts and corresponding difficulties.

- a. Sin is *the* problem with conflicts (i.e. conflicts are always a result of sin).
- b. Because sin is deceptive and shaming, it's hard to accept that sin is the problem.
- c. Conflicts always reveal deeper matters of the heart, and these can be difficult to identify and work through (Proverbs 20:5).

6. Some preliminary and basic helps when dealing with problems.

- a. Remember and rehearse what God is doing in and through your problems (Romans 5:3-5).
- b. Remember that the purpose of your life and the goal of your conduct is to glorify God in all things.
- c. Remember that the problem with problems is not the problem itself but *your responses* to the problem.
- d. Remember that you do what you do because you want what you want.
 - i. Take time to consider what you are wanting.
 - ii. Seek the Lord to determine if your desire (want) honors and pleases Him.
 - iii. Evaluate your responses: were they Christ-honoring and marked by the fruit of the Spirit?
 - iv. Repent, confess, seek forgiveness where you have responded sinfully.
 - v. Remember God's mercy and forbearance toward you and practice mercy and patience toward others.

Growth Project¹:

- Identify and describe 2 recent problems you have faced. Be sure to keep the problem separate from the conflict. In other words, your description will not include responses but will be fact or circumstance oriented.
- Describe ***your*** response to these problems. What did ***you*** do or say (e.g. I yelled, I withdrew, I criticized, I accused or blamed, etc.).
- Describe ***your*** emotional responses. What did ***you*** feel (e.g. I was angry, I was fearful, I was sad, etc.).
- Read Colossians 3:8-17. From this passage, work to identify ***your sin*** in your responses.
 - Did you express anger or wrath?
 - Did you act or speak with malice?
 - Did you distort, exaggerate, or otherwise twist the truth about the situation, your responses, or other's words or actions?
 - Did you say anything hurtful, spiteful, or mean?
 - Were you displaying compassion and mercy?
 - Were your words kind and gentle?
 - Were you calm and patient, carefully listening to the other?
 - Do you have complaints against others that you are failing to bear with or forgive?
 - Was peace ruling your heart?
 - Was your heart thankful to God for the other person and this growth opportunity?

¹ It might be helpful to share your work with another mature believer who is able to give you good, biblical feedback and who is able to encourage you toward growth.