

CHAPTER 7

What Can I Do About My Problems?

(Part 4)

Why does God send problems and difficulties my way? One reason is that God wants to test us. He wants to test our faith to see if we will trust Him or not. In the last chapter we learned that we must not leave God out of our problem solving. God has the answer to every problem. He is worthy of our trust in Him. God never promised that we would not have problems, but He does promise to solve each and every problem as we trust Him. This brings us to our fourth point:

4. I Need to Trust God When Problems Come My Way.

In this chapter we will look at 10 problems (seven from the Old Testament and three from the New Testament). With each problem the people had a choice: ***WILL WE BELIEVE GOD, OR WILL WE DOUBT GOD? WILL WE TRUST AND OBEY, OR WILL WE WORRY AND COMPLAIN?*** Let's see what we can learn from these examples:

1. A "No Way Out" Problem (Exodus 14)

The children of Israel were camped before the Red Sea. They could go no further. Who was coming after them (Exodus 14:9-10)? _____ They were trapped! There was no place to go! There was no way out!

Did God want the children of Israel to get into this problem situation (see Exodus 14:1-4)? _____ God planned this route! God was testing His people to see if they would trust Him. Did they pass the test, or did they flunk the test (Exodus 14:11-12)? _____

According to Exodus 13:11, where did God promise to bring the children of Israel? _____ Did they believe God's promise? _____ Did anyone believe God's promise (Exodus 14:13-14)? _____ Did God keep His promise (Exodus 14:29-31)? _____

The children of Israel should have cried out to God and said something like this: "Lord, bringing us out of Egypt seems impossible. We do not see any way out, but You have promised to get us out of Egypt, and we are going to trust You to do it!"

2. Bitter Water Problem (Exodus 15)

After crossing the Red Sea, the children of Israel must have thought that all of their problems were over! They were sadly mistaken. After going three days into the wilderness they found _____ (Exodus 15:22). Later these thirsty people found water, but as they tasted the waters, they found that they could not drink. What was the problem (Exodus 15:23)? _____ What a disappointment!

Why did God allow such a problem? What are the last three words in Exodus 15:25? _____ God was proving or testing them! He was testing their faith. He gave them another problem to see if they would turn to the great Problem Solver!

Did the people pass or flunk the test (Exodus 15:24)? _____ Did they believe that the God who helped them at the Red Sea could help them here? Let's rewrite verse 24 and pretend that the children of Israel really said something like this:

And the people bowed their faces to the ground and said, O LORD, Thou art the God who saved us out of the hand of the Egyptians by Your great and glorious power. Thou art a God who knows all about our problems and that we

are unable to drink this water because it is bitter. We thank You for this opportunity to trust You. Thou art a merciful and loving God who is able to meet the needs of Your people. We are helpless, and we do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon Thee. We will now trust You and see what You will do!

Is this what they said? _____ Is there any reason why they could not have come to God in faith? _____ God was testing them and saying, "Will you trust ME or will you worry and complain?" They worried and complained and flunked this first test. Now the Lord is going to give them a second test and a second opportunity to trust Him:

3. No Food Problem (Exodus 16)

What was the next problem that God sent their way (see the last word in Exodus 16:3)?

_____ If God is able to supply water (Exodus 15:27), is He also able to supply food? Did the children of Israel believe God was able (Exodus 16:2-3,7-8)?

_____ Did they pass or fail the test? _____ In their unbelief they said that they would rather be in Egypt with BREAD (verse 3) than in the wilderness with GOD!

Psalm 78 also speaks of this time in the wilderness when the people failed to trust God for food (starting in verse 18). Notice carefully the question they asked in verse 19: "Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?" What are the first two words of this question? _____ If we turn these two words around, what do we have? G _____ C _____! (see also verse 20—"Can He? Can He...?") Doubting unbelief says, "CAN GOD?" Faith says, "GOD CAN! GOD IS ABLE!"

The next time a problem comes our way, even though we cannot solve it, we need to remember this: GOD CAN! Let's see if the children of Israel remember this answer as God sends the next problem their way:

4. No Water Problem (Exodus 17)

As the children of Israel came to Rephidim, what problem were they faced with (Exodus 17:1)?

_____ Was it an accident that they came to Rephidim, or did God lead them to this place (Exodus 17:1)? _____ God gave them another opportunity to trust Him.

As you think back about this past week, did God give you any opportunities to trust Him? Did He send any problems your way? Did He put you in a difficult place? Did He test your faith? Did you pass or flunk? Did you doubt (CAN GOD?) or believe (GOD CAN!)?

Did the children of Israel pass this no-water test? Did they believe God could and would take care of them (Exodus 17:2-3)? _____ Does verse 7 show their doubting unbelief? _____

The children of Israel had a short memory! They forgot what God had done for them in the past:

1. Did God get them through the Red Sea (Exodus 14:29)? _____
2. Did God provide water for them (Exodus 15:25,27)? _____
3. Did God provide food for them (Exodus 16:12-15)? _____

Is this same God able to provide water for them at Rephidim? _____ Did they believe He could? _____ This problem would be like a math teacher saying repeatedly that the square root of 16 is 4. Again and again, day after day the teacher goes over this math problem. Then finally the foolish student says, "Is the square root of 16 really 4 or not?" (compare Exodus 17:7-8—"Is the LORD really among us or not?"). The teacher would have to say something like this: "DON'T YOU BELIEVE WHAT I HAVE BEEN TELLING YOU AND TEACHING YOU ALL THESE MANY DAYS?" Faith does not forget!

5. Giant Problem (Numbers 13-14)

The children of Israel were about to enter the Promised Land and conquer it. Twelve men were sent to spy out the land. The spies reported back and told the people that they had seen great giants in that land (see Numbers 13:28,29,33). God had given the land to the children of Israel, and He promised them victory over their enemies. Then why did God allow these Goliath-like giants to be in the land? God was testing His people again!

Read Numbers 13:30-31. Which verse tells about a man who passed the test and who believed "GOD CAN!?" _____ Which verse tells about other men who flunked this test?

Read Numbers 14:1-8. Which verses show the people's unbelief? _____ Which verses show real faith in a great God who is stronger than any GIANTS?

Many times God lets us have problems that are too big for us to handle. Are these problems too big for God to handle? Are some problems too hard for you to solve? _____ "Is anything too hard for the LORD?" (Genesis 18:14) _____ If God is so faithful to help us, why are we so unfaithful to trust Him? If God never fails His people, why do His people fail to look to Him and lean on Him?

6. No Water Problem (Numbers 20)

What was the problem this time (Numbers 20-2)? _____ Is this what the people said (compare verse 3)? *"Lord, thank You for another opportunity to trust You. In the past when our people came to the bitter waters, You made them sweet. When we had no water, You brought water out of the rock. Now again we have no water, but we are confident that our God will take care of us and meet our needs!"*

People are so slow to learn! God was very patient with His people, and He gave them water again (verse 11) even though they did not deserve one drop! Was Moses patient with the people, or did He get angry (verse 10)? _____

Can you think of times when you had a difficult problem and God helped you with it, even though you worried and complained and failed to trust Him?

7. Detour Problem (Numbers 21)

Have you ever driven down the highway with your family and suddenly seen a sign which said "DETOUR"? The road you wanted to travel on was blocked off and you were forced to go many miles out of your way. This is what happened to the children of Israel in Numbers 21:4. They were marching to the Promised Land but they could not go through the land of Edom (see Numbers: 20:14-20), so they had to go around it. Thus they were forced to head south in the opposite direction that they wanted to go. They were forced to go miles out of their way. The people were quite discouraged!

Why did God allow this problem? Why didn't God give them an easy journey? Once again God was testing His people. Did they pass or flunk the test (Numbers 21:5)? _____ Instead of complaining and speaking against Moses and against God, what should they have said?

8. Not Enough Food Problem (Mark 6)

Once Jesus was with a crowd of 5000 men (not including the women and children that were there). The crowd was hungry, and the disciples wanted to send them away (Mark 6:36). Jesus could have said, "That is a good idea. Let's send them away so that they can buy bread for themselves." Instead of saying that, Jesus said something that caused a big problem for the disciples. What did He say (Mark 6:37)?

How could they give all these people food to eat? That seemed to be impossible. The only food which was available was _____ loaves and _____ fish (Mark 6:38). Why did Jesus make such a

big problem for them? He was testing their faith! The disciples could have said, "*Lord, You have asked us to do an impossible thing. If You want us to give food to all these people, then You will have to do a miracle. With men, feeding all these people is impossible, but with God all things are possible!*" Did Jesus do the impossible (Mark 6:41-44)? _____

9. Not Enough Food Problem (Mark 8)

Later the Lord and His disciples were with another large hungry crowd. Were there more or less people this time (Mark 8:9)? _____ Were there more or less loaves this time (Mark 8:5)? _____ Were there more fish or less (Mark 8:7 – a "few" means more than two)? _____ So this time, even though the situation was similar, there were less people and more food!

Jesus told the disciples that He did not want to send the people away, but He wanted to give them food to eat (see verses 1-3). Here was another test! Did the disciples pass the test or flunk (Mark 8:4)? _____ What was wrong with these disciples? Were they foolish? Did they have very short memories? We would expect them to say something like this: "*Lord, if you could feed the 5000, then certainly you can feed the 4000 also! Just do the same thing You did before!*" Faith does not forget, but lack of faith forgets! The disciples forgot!

How could anyone be as foolish and as forgetful as those disciples? Well, let's think about ourselves for a moment. Can you think of a time that the Lord did something wonderful for you (helped you through a problem), but when the same situation came along again you failed to trust Him?

Here's an example: You were studying for a very difficult test in school. Instead of trusting God for His help, you began to worry and get upset. Finally you took the test and the Lord graciously helped you through it and you got a passing grade. Then a month later when you had another difficult test did you remember what He had done for you on the last test? Did you say, "*Lord, You helped me with the last hard test that I had, and now I am going to trust You for this one,*" or did you worry and get upset all over again? Isn't this acting just like the disciples?

10. A Problem with Demons and Doubt (Mark 9)

There was once a father who had a very serious problem. His son was possessed by a demon (Mark 9:17-21). This man had already been disappointed by the disciples because they could not cast the demon out (verse 18). In verse 22 this father cried out for help: "If Thou canst do anything...." These words are filled with doubt! It was as if he were saying, "The disciples could not, CAN YOU?" He did not say, "Lord, I know You can!" Instead he said, "Lord, if you can..."

In verse 23, Jesus said the same thing to him! "If you can...." The problem is not whether God can do something; the real problem is whether man will believe! GOD CAN, but the real question is whether man *believes* that God can! *God is able* to solve our problems, but *are we willing* to trust Him? How many times do we doubt and say, "God, can You?"

Notice the father's answer: "Lord, I _____, help Thou my _____." It is true that his son needed help, but this man finally realized that he was the one who needed help! The same is true for us. The problems God sends our way are real problems, but the biggest problem of all is OUR SELF (our foolish and unbelieving heart).

You can be sure God will send problems your way!

You can be sure God can take care of these problems and solve them!

You can be sure that God will never fail you if you trust Him!

Will you pass or flunk the tests of faith that will be coming your way?

Will you DOUBT and QUESTION GOD: Or, will you TRUST God:

CAN GOD?

GOD CAN !