

The Power of a Problem
Pastor Joe Oakley
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We've been in a sermon series entitled The Purpose of Temptation. Today, I was planning on beginning a new series called The Necessity of an Enemy. I started working on that sermon on Monday and then Tuesday morning I woke up early with God downloading a different message to me. So, I'm preaching today on The Power of a Problem.

During last week's sermon I said that between your promise and your Promised land there are conditions to meet and devils to defeat. Between your dream and it's fulfillment there will be a wilderness of problems. Sorry – but no one gets a problem-free life!

- Every person has problems.
- Every family has problems.
- Every business has problems.
- Every church has problems.

No one has a problem-free life. So we should be prepared for problems!
 Proverbs 27:12 in the Living Bible says:

The sensible man watches for problems ahead and prepares to meet them. The simpleton never looks and suffers the consequences.

Could it be that - One of your biggest problems is the way you view problems! Your problem is not that you have problems – your problem is the way you think about your problems! Maybe you think you shouldn't have any problems, so when they come you are caught off guard and don't know what to do.

But one of the keys to you achieving your destiny is learning the power of a problem and how to deal with problems! In fact, if you want to be a success in anything, you must do this.

One of the biggest differences between people who succeed and those who don't is the way they view problems. Successful people don't gripe, complain, moan or groan about problems! Successful people solve problems. Successful understand the power of a problem. They understand this:

1- Solving problems has the power of promotion!

Unsuccessful people try to avoid problems and they certainly don't see any power in them.

I had great success in business before I became a pastor.

I worked my way up to being the manager of the largest Christian store in the world. Then I became a district manager for the largest Christian retailer in the world. Then I became a regional training manager – hiring and training every manager west of the Mississippi.

When I trained managers, it was interesting to note the different attitude my trainees had about which store they would manage first. Some wanted a well running store with few problems. But the ones who really wanted to move up in the company knew they had to get noticed. So they always wanted the problem stores. Why? They knew that if they could turn that store around, they would get noticed and promoted. The ability to solve problems is a springboard to success!

The book of Daniel tells how King Nebuchadnezzar came from Babylon – defeated Israel – and took some of the people back to be his servants. One of those people was Daniel. Later the king had a dream that troubled him. He summoned all his wise counselors and asked them to interpret his dream. And - oh by the way – he forgot what the dream was. So you had to tell him what the dream was before you interpreted it – or he would kill you.

Everyone said this was an impossible problem to solve! But someone remembered Daniel and his reputation which we see in Daniel 5:12 –

Daniel was found to have an excellent spirit, knowledge and understanding, and also the ability to interpret dreams, explain riddles and solve difficult problems.

So he began to pray and God revealed to him the dream and the interpretation. Prayer is a key to solving problems! So is praise! Daniel said in Daniel 2:23

I thank You and praise You, O God of my fathers, Who has given me wisdom... for You have made known to us the solution to the king's problem.

So Daniel gave the answer to the king and Daniel 2:48 says:

Then the king promoted Daniel and gave him many great gifts; and he made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief administrator over all the wise men of Babylon.

In other words, solving a problem had the power of promotion! Daniel went from being a servant to being a ruler by solving a problem! The same thing happened to Joseph and solving problems will do the same thing for you! Problem solvers get the promotions and the bonuses and the raises!

As someone who has been a leader for most of my life – I can assure you that there are two things that will always work to get you noticed at work! Bosses notice when you are either a problem causer or a problem solver!

When I was a store manager – some employees always griped and complained. They constantly resisted change. No one wants to work around negative, pessimistic people with bad attitudes. And bosses hate to spend their time refereeing personal problems between people.

Believe me – if you want to get noticed – be negative and cause problems with everyone at work. That will get you noticed and get you fired. So - if you have a lousy attitude at your work – do yourself and them a favor and either change your attitude or find another job where you can have joy at work.

Listen – anyone can point out problems! Those who succeed offer solutions and solve problems. I learned this when I was a District Manager for Family Christian Stores. I called my regional manager about a problem. I asked him what to do. He said, “That’s what I pay you for. You figure out what to do. If you’re not sure – come up with some potential solutions and then call me and I’ll help you sort them out. But don’t just come to me with problems.”

I’ve had the blessing of being around a lot of successful people and I’ve learned that they succeed because they look at problems differently than other people. They realize that opportunities usually show up as problems.

Thomas Edison was a success because he solved the problem of darkness by inventing the light bulb. Henry Ford was a success because he met the common man’s need for transportation by inventing a way to mass produce cars cheaply. You can go on and on with people who succeeded by solving problems. Successful see problems as opportunities – not as obstacles!

I want to help you today – so I really want you to get this! All jobs have at least one thing in common: their purpose is to solve problems. When a company starts with one guy – he does everything. As his business grows – this presents a problem. There’s too much for him to do alone – so he hires someone to help him. That person solves his problem. Until he grows some more and has to hire more people.

Please get this inside you – the only reason you have a job is because someone else had a problem and you were the solution! The greater and more complex the problems, the greater the demand and the higher the income for the people who solve them.

Yet, amazingly, many people routinely gripe and complain about problems they have to deal with at work. They never stop to think that if such problems did not need to be resolved, they would be out of a job! If everyone kept this in mind, they would appreciate why they were hired in the first place, and the workplace would be a more pleasant environment. If you’re one of those people sitting around with other employees griping about your customers or your boss or the problems you face at work – stop it! Start praising God for those problem customers! It’s because of them you have a job!

I'm calling you to a higher place today! I'm calling you to use the power of problems to become a problem solver! I want you to be:

Teachers who say, "Give me the problem students instead of the honor roll students."

Policemen who say, "Give me the area with the most crime, not the low crime area."

Salesmen who say, "Give me the tough accounts, not the easy sales."

Missionaries who say, "Let me go where the Gospel has never gone before."

Employees who say, "Give me the tough jobs nobody else wants."

You may be in a situation that is full of problems, but don't expect promotion if all you do is complain about problems.

In every area of life – don't BE the problem - be a problem solver.
Don't be a problem causer. Be a problem solver.

Solving problems has the power to promote you!

Here's some other reasons that problems are powerful.

2- A problem has the power to reveal what you know

Sometimes problems are easy and you know what to do. Sometimes they stump you and that shows you a growth opportunity. And by the way – knowing the right answer is not the only requirement to solving a problem.

When I was in elementary school, I made an incredible discovery one day – the answers were in the back of my math book. All I had to do was look in the back, get the answer and write it down. That day I went home and to my parents' surprise, immediately did my homework – and did it quickly, too.

I turned my homework in, and got it back the next day with a big fat zero on it. I got all the answers right, but I got no credit for it. The teacher wrote in red "Show your work." She didn't just want to see an answer; she wanted to know if I knew how to solve the problem.

So it is with many Christians. They want the easy answers from the book, but they don't want to do the hard work of solving problems. They want the answer without the process.

- They want a good grade without having to do the work of studying.
- They want a good marriage without having to do the hard work of communicating and forgiving and compromising.
- They want a good church without ever doing the work of serving.
- They want good health without the hard work of exercise.

When problems arise they just want to pray a prayer and expect everything to change without going through the process of change. They don't understand the power of problems.

3- A problem as the power to reveal where you need to grow

I see this in counseling all the time. Most people go expecting their spouse to do all the changing! Or they expect the counselor to pray a prayer or give a word of wisdom and everything instantly changes. That rarely happens! Yes, we should pray in faith, but faith without works is dead. Problems show where YOU need to grow and change.

4- A problem has the power to reveal when you quit

I want to let you in on a secret. As I said, I've been around a lot of successful people in my lifetime: successful business people, successful pastors, successful leaders. Successful people don't necessarily have the most talent or ability. In fact, if you hang around successful people, you will be surprised by how ordinary they are.

Most of the time, what separates successful people from everyone else is this: they are the ones still going when everyone else has quit.

You see, successful people are not necessarily the smartest people. In fact, Albert Einstein said, "It's not that I'm so smart, it's just that I stay with problems longer."

Successful people don't have less problems than others, they just persevere until they work through their problems. Too many of us give up way too easy and way too soon!

In standardized math tests, Japanese children consistently score higher than American children. While some assume that the Japanese are just naturally better at math, researchers discovered that it has more to do with *effort* than *ability*.

Researchers gave some students a difficult problem to solve. They weren't interested in whether or not the children could solve the puzzle; they simply wanted to see *how long they would try before giving up*. The American children lasted, on average, 9.47 minutes. The Japanese children lasted 13.93 minutes. In other words, the Japanese children tried 47 percent longer. Is it any wonder why they score higher on math exams?

Researchers concluded that the difference in math scores has less to do with *intelligence quotient* and more to do with *persistence quotient*. The Japanese students simply tried harder and stayed at it longer. That study not only explains the difference in standardized math scores, but the difference in whether or not

people succeed! It doesn't matter whether it's athletics or academics, music or math. There are no shortcuts. There are no substitutes.

Persistence is the key to mastering anything, including prayer! What's your persistence quotient? How many times did you not get to the answer because the problem was too hard or you gave up too soon? Matthew 13:20-21 says:

The seed on the rocky soil represents those who hear the message and immediately receive it with joy. But since they don't have deep roots, they don't last long. They fall away as soon as they have problems or are persecuted for believing God's word.

Way too many people give up and fall away when they face hard problems. Instead, we need to do what it says in Galatians 6:9

Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

5- A problem has the power to reveal whom you trust

Major needs or impossible situations show us who we trust. Many people just turn to themselves and other people. It's good to get counsel from wise people. But here's an advantage we have as Christians. Our God has the answer to every problem. What if we started tapping into God's creative problem-solving ability?

How do we do that? We tap into God's wisdom by searching His word and prayer. We also develop hearing ears to hear Him and then do what He tells us. But it starts with believing that He has the creative answers we need. Colossians 2:6 in the Living Bible says:

And now just as you trusted Christ to save you, trust Him, too, for each day's problems...

Every day will have problems of its own. And every day we can trust God with those problems.

We may be like the wedding celebration in the Bible that ran out of wine. What did Mary do? She went to Jesus and asked Him to solve the problem. Then she told the servants in John 2:5 – *Whatever He says to you, do it.* She totally trusted Jesus to fix the problem.

And there comes a time in every life when we come to the end of our own resources and ability at home or at work. We have major needs impossible for us to meet. But we serve a God who is able to say, "Pour some water into some pots and I'll create the answer to your problem."

We may be like the disciples who were out fishing all night with no results.

We may be doing everything within our ability and it looks like nothing's happening. But we serve a God who is able to say, "Cast your net on the right side of the boat" and you haul in the biggest catch ever. The point is, we've got problems and God's got answers!

Empty nets are a problem to us. But to the one who created all the fish in the world: no problem!

Running out of wine at a wedding is a problem to us. But to the one who can create more wine out of water, no problem.

Having no food for 5,000 hungry people is a problem for us. But to the one who can feed 5,000 with 5 loaves and 2 fish, no problem.

Being in a marriage that is loveless is a problem to us. But to the one who sheds abroad His love by the Holy Spirit, that is no problem.

Having a checkbook that is empty is a problem to us. But to the one who made a biblical family's last meal stretch out for months, no problem!

Problems are an opportunity for the Creator to get creative. You may think there's nothing left to work with, but did you know that God created everything "ex nihilo" which means "out of nothing." God is the only one who creates out of absolutely nothing.

So – give Him your nothing and watch Him make something of it!

You might feel there's nothing left of your marriage – give it to God and watch Him make something of it!

There might be nothing left in your bank account – give it to God and watch Him make something of it!

Problems have the power to show us we need someone greater than ourselves!
We need the power of the Lord God Most High!

And consider this: God is in the promotion business and He may have strategically positioned you in a problem-filled situation to give you the opportunity to shine. Handle it correctly – solve the problem - and it may result in promotion!

God wants you to see problems as possibilities!

God wants you to see complications as a challenge!

God wants you to see adversity as an advantage!

God wants you to see opposition as an opportunity!

God wants you to see trouble as a time to shine – not a time to whine!

God wants you to see crisis as an opportunity to overcome!

God wants you to understand that with His help – problems have the power to promote you, change you and help you grow in your faith!