

“God’s Purpose for My Problems”

Text: 1 Peter 4:12, 19

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Park Boulevard Presbyterian Church (www.pbpc.org)

Oakland, California

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Story: Margaret’s dad passing away illustration

Last week, we looked at seven specific things that we know for certain to be the will of God. I want us to look at one other that I felt deserved special attention as we look at “God’s Purposes for My Problems”.

Read 1 Peter 4:12, *“Dear friends, Do not be surprised at the painful trials you are suffering as though something strange were happening to you, but rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ so that you may be overflowing when His glory is revealed.”* Vs. 19, *“So then those who suffer according to God’s will should commit themselves to their faithful creator and continue to do good.”*

PRAY!

Peter says that sometimes problems are God’s will.

- Many times when we have problems, suffering, difficulties, we think that God is punishing us, that God is angry, that we must be out of God’s will because nothing is going right.
- The fact is the Bible teaches that God’s will often includes a positive use of problems in our lives.

Let’s look at five ways that God can use problems in your life *for* His will.

1. GOD OFTEN USES PROBLEMS TO DIRECT ME.

A. Proverbs 20:30, *“Sometimes it takes a painful experience to make us change our ways.”*

1. How many of you can agree with that verse? Sometimes it takes a painful experience to make us change our ways.
 - God uses problems to motivate us, to get us going, get us in gear.
2. C.S. Lewis said, “God speaks to us in our pleasures, but God shouts to us in our pain.”
 - God uses our problems to direct us, to say, “I want your attention. You’re going the wrong way.”
3. A clear example of this is the prophet Jonah of the Old Testament.
 - God had told Jonah to go east to Nineveh, the capital of Israel’s enemy the Assyrians to bring them a message from God.

- Jonah refused God's command and went by boat to Tarshish, the opposite direction of Nineveh.
 - God said, "No, wrong way, Jonah." He sent a great fish, swallowed him up and headed him back the other way.
 - Sometimes a problem swallows you up. But when it spits you out you're in the right place.
4. We rarely change until we get desperate. God uses problems to direct us.

2. GOD OFTEN USES PROBLEMS TO INSPECT US.

- A. To check us out, to look into our heart, to do a little examination.
- B. Deuteronomy 8:2, *"The Lord God led you all the way in the desert these forty years to test you in order to know what was in your heart."*
1. The Bible says that God led the children of Israel through the desert towards the Promised Land. He gave them many different tests and every single test they failed. So He'd say, "OK, one more lap around the desert!" They spent 40 years dying in the desert being tested by God and failing over and over.
 2. Problems reveal what is inside of us.
 - Somebody said, "Christians are like tea bags. You don't know what's inside of them until you plop them in hot water."
 - When you get under pressure it really reveals what you are.
 3. The classic example of this is Job from the Old Testament. The Bible says that God allowed Satan to test Job to prove a point.
 - Satan said, *"Job just serves you because he's wealthy."* Job was the wealthiest man in the world.
 - God said, *"No, he serves me because he's faithful. If you want to, test him. Try him out."*
 - Job at the end of his life says, 23:10, *"Though I am tried by fire, though He has tested me, I will come forth as pure gold."*
 4. God may be testing you out with the problem you're facing right now. He's seeing what's really inside.

3. GOD USES PROBLEMS TO CORRECT US.

- A. Life is a school and problems are the curriculum. You're never going to have life without problems because that's part of life. Why is it that some lessons we only learn through failure?
1. You can tell a child "Don't touch the stove, because it's hot." Yet every child in the history of the world has had to get their finger burned at least once.

- B. Problems are a teaching tool.
1. King David says, *"It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your statutes."* He wrote that after he committed adultery with Bathsheba. And as a result of that problem, he brought a lot of grief on his life.
- C. If God wants to use problems as an education, how do you respond?
1. Whenever you have a problem in your life, don't ask Why? Ask What? Don't say, "Lord, why? Why is this happening?" There may be many reasons why it is happening. The question we need to ask God is What? "Lord, what do You want to teach me? What do You want me to learn? What can I learn from this experience?"
 2. God may want to teach you something about Himself or God may want to teach you about you, about a weakness that you don't recognize.
- D. Hebrews 12:7-11, *"Endure hardship as discipline. God is treating you as sons. What son is not disciplined by his father? If you're not disciplined, and everyone undergoes discipline, you're illegitimate children and not true sons."*
1. The Bible says that if you're really a Christian and you're blowing it in some area, God will correct you.

4. GOD USES PROBLEMS TO PROTECT US.

- A. 1 Peter 3:17, *"It is better if it is God's will to suffer for doing good than to do evil."*
1. It's safer to do what's right and honest and suffer for it than to compromise your integrity, because it protects you.
 2. For instance, let's say you're working in an unethical business and your boss says, "I want you to do something you know is dishonest." You know it's wrong and you don't want to do it. So you go to your boss and say, "I can't be a part of this practice. It's unethical." As a result of that you get fired. You're suffering for doing good. But it may be protection. You never know, the person may be digging their own grave. He may cheat a person once too often and all of a sudden he's involved in a lawsuit and everybody's thrown in jail and you were saved because you got out early.
 3. God often uses a problem as a blessing to protect us from something much worse. Maybe you did get fired but maybe it's the best thing that could have happened to you. It kept you out of the real problem.
- B. God can protect us with a problem. Often problems are just preparation for eventual success.

5. MOST OF ALL GOD USES PROBLEMS TO PERFECT US.

- A. God says in Romans 8:28-29, *“All things work together for good for those who love God, for those who are called according to His purpose.”* Vs. 29 says how He uses things for good: to make us like Christ, to mold us into the image of Jesus, to build character in our lives. God uses problems, trials and difficulties in our lives to make us reflect His glory.
- B. What is God’s number one purpose in your life? To make you happy? No! Happiness is the byproduct of His number one purpose. God’s number one purpose in your life is to change your character, to make you like Himself. How does God do that? Two ways:
1. The first way God makes you like Christ is through the Bible, through the Word. John 17:17 says that we are made like Christ through the Word. Through reading the Bible, going to Bible studies, listening to tapes, listening to Christian radio, it changes the way you think and we are transformed by the renewing of our mind.
 2. The other way God changes your life is through circumstances, through problems, through trials, difficulties, situations, heartbreaks. God uses those in your life.
 3. Which way do you think God depends on the most? What do you spend the most time doing? Reading the Bible or solving problems? Let’s say you read the Bible an hour a day. That leaves 23 hours a day for you to have circumstances. So God depends on the second way more than the does on the first way.
 - Hebrews 2:10, *“Jesus was made perfect through suffering.”* Perfect means mature. How do you think you’re made perfect? God uses problems to mature us.

Let’s get practical, personal. Some of you are going through some problems right now that are really tough. You’re struggling. You’re not sure if you’re going to make it this week. What do you do when a problem is about to pull you under? Four things you ought to remember:

1. God sees everything I’m going through. We have a tendency to forget that. “God, I don’t think you know that the house payment is due in three days.” He does.
2. Regardless of the cause of your problem, God can use it in your life. He can use it for good.
3. God can change the situation. He can heal an illness. He can turn a marriage around. He can reverse a bankruptcy. He can do anything. God can change the situation. Why doesn’t he change every situation?
4. God wants to change me first. God is more interested in you than He is in making it easy for you. God is much more interested in your character than He is in making everything cool. God wants to change you first.

What should our attitude be in facing our problems? Cooperate with God. It's a whole lot easier and a whole lot more beneficial and you'll learn a whole lot faster and save yourself a whole lot of heartache and problems when you cooperate with God. If you don't learn the first time, God give us another chance.

PRAYER

Think of a problem in your life right now. The first thing you do is pray. In your heart would you say to God, **“Jesus Christ, I want You to be number one in my life. I don't like this problem. Would you use it though for good in my life: Would you use it to direct me? Maybe a new direction? Maybe a new way of working at work or a new way of relating to your wife or husband or children. Lord, would You use this in my life to inspect me. Help me to see my blind spots, the things You want to change in me before You change the situation. Lord, would you use this problem to correct me? Lord, would you use this problem to protect me from things I probably couldn't handle if they were to happen to me. But mostly, Lord, would You use this to perfect me? Would you put in my life the qualities that You want to be there so that I will be a complete, mature person, the kind of person I want to be and the kind of person You want me to be?”** In Jesus' name. Amen.