

How to Stop Troubles from Overwhelming You



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HOW TO STOP TROUBLES FROM OVERWHELMING YOU

Scripture: Matthew 18:20; Psalm 46:1

How can we keep troubles from overwhelming us? That is something everyone would like to know. And it's the topic on which I wish to speak to you today.

I think a first thing we ought to realize is that often times we imagine we have troubles when the things perturbing us aren't really troubles at all. There is a human tendency to blow small matters up into big affairs. The ancient Romans had a saying, "The timid see troubles where none exist." We should be watchful not to make our troubles bigger than they are. An old friend of mine, a wise old man who lived in upstate New York, wrote a very interesting little poem. Here it is:

"Better never trouble trouble
Until trouble troubles you,
For you're sure to make your trouble
Double trouble when you do.
And your trouble, like a bubble,
That you're troubling about,
May be nothing but a cipher
With the rim rubbed out."

That is good advice for a person worried by spurious troubles. But the fact remains that we also encounter some very real troubles in life. In any group of people living anywhere on earth there are always a number of persons who are having a grievous time with real troubles.

Some men and women, however, have learned in wonderful ways how to keep their troubles from overwhelming them.

One recent morning in the lobby of a Washington, D. C. hotel I encountered a friend who used to live in New York. Instantly I surmised he was in trouble. Normally this man effervesces with enthusiasm, but that day he seemed to be somewhat less than his usual buoyant self. And I asked, "Something bothering you, Jim?"

"Oh, I'm all right," he answered, trying to minimize it. But it didn't sound convincing.

"Since I'm a friend, why don't you tell me what the trouble is?" I ventured.

"Well," he said, "if you insist. Come up to our room. Mary's here with me. She'll be glad to see you."

So I went with him. And as Jim and his wife and I sat top-ether in their room it struck me that it was a pretty small, unattractive room. I wondered if Jim and Mary had specially asked for the lowest possible rate.

"Well," I said, "out with it! What's the trouble?"

"Frankly, we're very low on money," Jim replied.

I knew that Jim had a business which normally gave him a very comfortable income. His line of work is servicing leather furniture, keeping it in good condition and repair. He has repeating customers among the business concerns in a score of cities. Doubtless there would be slack periods in his work, but I knew that over the years he had earned good money.

However, I also knew something else about him. This man is an inveterate giver. Every ten dollars he earns very likely he'll give away. He's one of the most generous persons I've ever known, loves helping people. And of course he has no difficulty finding people to help.

So when he admitted that he was broke I had a pretty good notion how this might have come about.

Now long experience prohibits me from telling any body that he gives too much. So on that score I restrained myself. I knew that he would be offended. I merely said, "Well, Jim, I have a little money on me. Let me make you a loan to pull you through this situation."

"Thank you just the same," he answered, "but I won't take you up on that. The Lord will provide. He will help me get what I need. You know I'll tell you what you can do, though. Just pray with us. Mary and I have been praying about this. We're in a fix. We're always remembering that the Bible says, 'For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them.' Maybe three of us praying would be better than just two. Maybe the Lord sent you here today to make the three."

So the three of us joined hands and got down on our knees in that hotel room and each of us prayed that Jim might be guided to a solution of his problem. I will never forget the confidence with which Jim and Mary put the matter in God's hands. Then Jim said to me, "Norman, you've done what you could to help us and I know it. Now it's time for you to go on about your business. Just please take a moment now and then today to send up a little prayer for us, will you?"

That evening I decided to get Jim on the telephone to let him know I had not forgotten. Mary answered the phone. She said, "Jim isn't here, but something wonderful has happened." She sounded positively excited. And she told me, "After you left us this morning Jim went out and headed for a place across the city where he was planning to make his first call. Suddenly he had the

thought that maybe he ought to go a few blocks out of his way and stop in to see another man who used to be a good customer, but recently hadn't wanted Jim's services.

"Well, as Jim walked into his office this man said, 'You know, I was just wishing you would come around. I have a job I want done. And I want it done today. I hope you can take it on. I'll pay you extra for it today.'"

So Jim had worked all day at this job. And he continued working far into the evening to get it finished. The proceeds tided him over his financial crisis.

Situations work out in strangely wonderful ways people who face their troubles courageously and with strong faith in God. The Bible tells us, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."

Some people say this cannot mean that God is going to bother helping us with our human problems. They argue that things just couldn't be that simple. But I sometimes wonder if it isn't they who are too simple. By their very skepticism they may be cutting themselves off from the one source of help that is always and everywhere "very present."

I think there are certain basic things we can do when we're in trouble, to keep our troubles from overwhelming us. The first is to remember God and have faith in His providence and look to Him for guidance. And from this there follows a second basic thing. Since we are children of God and can look to Him for help, we ought not to quail in the presence of trouble, nor run away from it, nor pretend it isn't there, but face it, stand up to it, take hold of it and deal with it. Actually, the more you try to run away from trouble, or evade it, the more overwhelm-

ing it becomes; while if only you would boldly take hold of it, you would find it that much easier to handle.

One time when I was chatting with a friend in his office he performed a little experiment on me. On his desk, in a little vase, was a thistle. "Norman, I want to see if you're a philosopher. Take hold of that thistle."

"Why do you want me to do that?" I demurred. "The thing stings." It looked very prickly.

"I want to prove something to you," my friend said.

Very gingerly I took hold of it. "Ouch!" said - and withdrew my hand.

"Now that's not the way to take hold of a thistle," he said. And he grabbed it and crushed it in his hand. "It doesn't hurt me a bit," he assured me. "Now you try it." I did and there was no sting. Let that be a lesson to you," my friend admonished me. "If you take hold of a problem timidly, if you're afraid and you don't believe you can handle it, it will sting you and hurt you. But if you walk up to it and grasp it firmly, you'll find that - you can handle it."

People who have real faith and who believe that God will help them learn to meet trouble head on. I was much impressed by a certain woman I met who conducted a radio program on matters of interest to women. She was a small, fragile-looking person, but had a tremendous personality. In talking with her I discovered that she had been, as she herself put it, through a "sea of troubles" (to quote Shakespeare). "But I came out on top," she said. "I was able to surmount all those troubles."

"How did you do it?" I asked. And I'll never forget her answer.

She held out her hands. They were very small hands. "I just took those troubles in my two hands and put them

in the big hands of God and together we handled them."

I looked at her in admiration, for she knew the practical meaning of those great words: God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."

We do not halfway realize the enormous capacity we have for overcoming difficulties and limitations. To be sure, some of the experiences in human life are very, very tragic. Some problems seem absolutely inscrutable; you can't see through them to a solution. Sometimes everything seems to get in your way and you're frustrated and defeated. Then maybe you think, "I just haven't got what it takes to cope with this." But you mustn't appraise yourself so lowly. You must remember who you are: You are a child of God. God created you and He breathed the breath of life into you and He made you a living spirit. And He said He'd given you dominion. Have you taken dominion? Or have you let yourself be pushed around by everything? We need to remind ourselves once in a while who and what we are.

There is more power in a human being than he ordinarily realizes. Sure, our bodies are flesh and blood. Physically we are very frail, the victims of disease or accidents. But man himself is also mighty strong. He is the most resistant force in this world, for there was built into him an upthrust of spiritual power that is astonishing even to himself if he will but use it.

The great Shakespearean actor Walter Hampden was once asked what, in his opinion, was the greatest sentence in the English language. And do you know what he quoted in reply to that question? It was from an old Negro spiritual: "Nobody knows the troubles I've seen. Glory Hallelujah!" The two elements in that declaration may seem inconsistent, the one with the other. But what

the old spiritual is saying is, "I've seen them all more than you've any idea, but Glory Hallelujah! because by the power of God I've been able to overcome them all."

Some troubles seem so utterly devastating that you wonder how you ever can get through them. You feel they will completely crush you. Well, once there was a man laying an asphalt pavement for a parking lot on the premises of our Foundation for Christian Living in Pawling, N. Y. We'd previously had only gravel surface, which was rather unsightly because of the grass that was always growing up through it. So we'd decided to have asphalt. I happened to come by as the man was laying asphalt and rolling it down with a big roller. He was laying it four or five inches deep. I remarked, "Well, that will be the last of the grass."

"Don't be too sure of that," he said. "You know, I've been laying these asphalt pavements for years so I know there is one thing that can penetrate through five or six inches of asphalt."

"What's that?" I asked.

"Grass - I have been astonished at the power in growing grass." And he was somewhat of a philosopher, for he added, "Life is stronger than anything which tries to keep it down. If it has a mind to, life will push up through."

Now isn't a man a lot stronger than a blade of grass? Take a good look in the mirror today, because - you know something - when you look in the mirror you are going to be looking at somebody who is really somebody. You will see somebody when you look into the mirror: you'll see an indomitable, undefeatable person. That is what is when you are in harmony with God. When you are not in

harmony with God you cannot push up through anything. You'll be defeated. But when you are spiritual, when you have dedicated your life to Jesus Christ and when you live with Him, when you become part of Him, then you become identified with the deathless and creative and victorious forces in the universe. And you are also given wisdom about troubles.

Troubles are part of the constitution of the universe. That is the way God made it. Why did He make the world so that it had troubles in it? Why didn't He make a nice easy world where you would never have any trouble? He didn't because He is God because He is wise and because He wanted to make something great out of us. He knew that the only way He could ever make anything great out of us was by putting us into a world that had trouble in it and helping us to become strong and victorious through developing a philosophy of trouble. Troubles can either crush you or troubles may be used to carry you forward in life. If somebody wanted to write a real good book, he could write a book on "how troubles have helped me" or "how I've gone where I've gone because of troubles."

One time my wife and I had been in Taipei, Formosa, and we were flying from there to Tokyo. This was seven or eight years ago. And we made the trip to Tokyo in a DC 4. You don't see many DC 4's any more, but occasionally in the Far East you'll find them. And they're great airplanes. This line from Taipei to Tokyo was known as CAT: Civil Air Transport. It was started by American servicemen who had fought under General Chenault. The pilots were devil-may-care, debonaire characters out of Chenault's army.

They didn't have the precise rules and regulations of the big airlines where passengers can't ever go up into the cockpit. In this plane en route to Tokyo you could go wherever you pleased, any time you wanted to. The pilot of the plane was a tall, lanky Texan who apparently had read one of my books, for he asked if I would come up to the cockpit for a chat with him, which I was glad to do. He told his co-pilot to go back and sit with the passengers. So I sat in the co-pilot's seat and talked with this Texas pilot.

"Is it hard to run these things?" I asked.

"No," he said. "Any fool can run one. Do you want to try?"

"Sure, I'd like to try it," I replied.

So he explained, "When you want the plane to go down you press that way and when you want to come up you press this way. And when you want to go that way you do this and when you want to go the other way you do this. It's very simple."

So I took the controls. I asked, "Am I running it?"

"Yes, you're completely in charge," he said. "But keep it level, because if you don't it will bump the passengers."

Well, apparently I didn't do too well because presently

my wife came forward and when she saw me she said,

"I thought there was something strange about this plane!"

Then I noticed two big clouds sitting out there, cumulus clouds. "How far away are those clouds?"

"Twenty-five miles," the pilot said. "Go right through between them."

So I headed for those clouds and as we came up to them they got bigger and bigger. There was a passage way between them and I swept through it. I was so excited that I said, "How about going around and coming back

through them again? This is wonderful!"

"No," the pilot said, "we've got to move on."

"Have you been flying out here a long time?" I asked.

"Yes, quite a while."

"What about these typhoons?" I asked him. "What do you do when you get into a typhoon?"

"I stay away from them if I can," he replied. "A typhoon is usually about three hundred miles wide. And you don't want to get in the middle of one of them. And you don't want to get going against the wind on the edge of one, either. You know, a typhoon can destroy you or a typhoon can help you. What you want to do if you can't steer clear of it is to find the way the wind's going and then get on the edge and ride the wind in your direction." Then he got off a phrase which I thought was a classic. "The idea is to turn a typhoon into a tailwind. It will take you to your destination with incredible speed."

Life is filled with typhoons - great winds - the personification of trouble. But the individual who has listened to God and looked to Him for wisdom and insight knows how to turn trouble to his advantage. He turns typhoons into tailwinds.

These are the ways in which the wise man, the spiritual man, keeps troubles from overwhelming him.

Prayer: Our Heavenly Father, Thou hast put us into this world and placed us in the midst of troubles. Thou hast also given us assurance that Thou art our refuge and our strength and further assurance that Thou art our very present help in time of trouble. Therefore, by following Thy guidance and by living with Thee we can become experts in the handling of troubles. And for this we give Thee thanks through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.