

## CHAPTER 6

# What Can I Do About My Problems?

### (Part 3)

In Chapter 4 we asked the question, WHAT KIND OF PROBLEM DO I HAVE? Real? Imaginary? Physical? Mental? Spiritual? Economic?

In Chapter 5 we asked the question, HOW IS THIS PROBLEM CONNECTED TO ME? Does the problem really belong to me, or does it belong to someone else?

In this chapter we want to answer this important question, HOW CAN I CORRECTLY UNDERSTAND MY PROBLEM? This brings us to our third point.

### 3. I NEED TO UNDERSTAND MY PROBLEMS.

When faced with a problem, I need to think about the problem and try to understand it. Before I can *solve* the problem, I need to *understand* the problem.

To understand my problem rightly, I must answer these four questions:

1. *Where* is the problem coming from?
2. *Why* is it coming from that direction?
3. *What* does it *consist* of?
4. Can I *do* anything about it or not?

Let us look at each of these questions one at a time:

#### 1) Where Is The Problem Coming From?

I need to find out exactly where the problem is coming from. Problems come from different sources. I must ask myself this: Is the problem coming from another person or persons? From myself? From my own past (something that happened today triggered my mind and reminded me of a problem I had in the past)? From some place? From some practice (way of doing something)? From some philosophy? From some situation? From some set of circumstances? WHERE IS THE PROBLEM COMING FROM?

Here are six problems which are given as examples. You can think of some other problems as well. Let us think about each problem, and ask ourselves where each of these problems came from:

##### Problem 1 – The Tire

Your family is on a vacation trip and suddenly you get a flat tire (the right front tire). Where did this problem come from? Not from a person, not from a place, not from a philosophy, but from a tire! The source of this problem is physical. Something went wrong with the physical make-up of that tire to make it go flat. If your family asks why you are stopped along the side of the road, you would have to point to the right front tire. The problem of being delayed in your travels is coming from the right front tire.

**Problem 2 – The Window**

There is a hole in your kitchen window the size of a fist, and cold air is blowing through the hole into the house. It is easy to tell where the problem is coming from. There is something physically wrong with the window, and that is where the problem is. Can you think of other physical problems such as the flat tire, the broken window, or a broken water pipe?

**Problem 3 – The Mouse**

A mouse has entered your home, eaten some food in the cupboard, and left some droppings. This problem finds its source in a MOUSE which entered by a set of circumstances. Certain circumstances made it possible for a mouse to enter. Can you think of other problems that have come about as the result of a certain set of circumstances?

**Problem 4 – The Book**

You read a book which says that Jesus Christ did not really rise again from the dead. The book says that the disciples believed that Jesus really came back from the dead, but they were mistaken. This book troubles your mind and causes doubts to arise concerning your faith.

This problem comes from a philosophy and from false teaching which was carried to your mind by means of a book. Can you think of other problems that come from a philosophy or a teaching which you could pick up from a book or from a teacher?

**Problem 5 – The Horror Movie**

You watched a horror movie on television that made such an awful impression on your mind that you did not even want to turn off the lights that night for fear that something might come out of the darkness and harm you. In this case your problem came from some mental impressions which stimulated your mind. Can you think of other problems that have come because your mind has been stimulated by something you saw or heard?

**Problem 6 – The Dog**

You go to visit a friend who has a dog. This dog is friendly and has never hurt or bitten anyone. As you ring the doorbell, the dog barks. Suddenly you are terrified and feel like running away. One other fact: when you were seven years old, you were bitten badly by a large dog, and you had to go to the hospital for shots and for stitches.

This problem has come from your own past. The real problem is not the dog, and it is not the bark. The problem is that the barking reminded you of a past problem. This friendly dog triggered your mind and made you remember something painful that happened in the past. It was as if the dog triggered the tape recorder of your mind to play back something that had been a problem to you. The same kind of thing could happen to a person who was stung by bees in the past.

The real source of the problem is the person who is thinking the wrong way about *the past* and about the present. Can you think of something that happened to you in the past (or which you saw or heard) that makes you worried or creates a problem in the present (and the present problem is not really a problem at all, but just reminds you of a past problem you have had)? Can you think of times when you have been all upset about things that are not really problems at all?

Thus, the first thing to do is to stop and try to find out where the problem is coming from. If you cannot find where the problem is coming from then...

1. ....Stop and see if it really is a problem. It may be no problem at all.

2. ...If it is a real problem, you may need some help in locating it. Do not be ashamed to get the help you need (from parents, pastor, etc.).

## 2) Why Is It Coming From That Direction?

Why is there a problem? What is the *cause* of this problem? As we answer this second question, let us think through our illustrations again:

### Problem 1 – The Tire

Why do we have a flat tire? What caused this problem? We were driving along and something happened to cause the problem. Did we run over some glass or a nail? Was the tire too old and too worn? Was the tire inflated properly?

### Problem 2 – The Window

Why is there a hole in the window? Did a stone go through it? Did someone throw a ball through it? Did someone put their fist through it?

### Problem 3 – The Mouse

Why do we have a mouse problem? What caused the set of circumstances which allowed the mouse to get in? Did someone leave the back door open? Did it come in through the garage? Is there some other hole that it came through?

### Problem 4 – The Book

Why do I have these doubts about the resurrection? Because I opened a certain book and read some new ideas.

### Problem 5 – The Horror Movie

Why am I afraid to turn out the lights at night? Because I turned on the television and watched a movie which left a lasting impression on my mind.

### Problem 6 – The Dog

Why am I afraid of a friendly dog who is barking in my friend's house? Because this dog reminded me of another dog who really hurt me in the past.

### Problems Presented By The Class

Now share together a problem that you talked about in class (when you asked the question, "Where or from what direction did the problem come from?"). Now answer this question: "What caused it to move in your direction?"

## 3) What Does It Consist Of?

I now need to understand what makes up this problem. I need to carefully *define* the problem which I am facing. Is the problem a major problem or a minor problem? Is it big or little? Let us return again to our six illustrations:

**Problem 1 – The Tire**

This problem consists of air which has escaped from one tire. Because the tire is deflated, the car will not function. The problem may be major or minor depending on where you were headed and why.

**Problem 2 – The Window**

This problem consists of an opening in the window the size of a fist allowing cold air to rush in. Also there is broken glass on the floor.

**Problem 3 – The Mouse**

This problem involves a mouse living somewhere in the house. There may be many hundreds of mice living elsewhere in my town, but they are not my problem. My problem is this one mouse that has destroyed some of my food and left his droppings in my cupboard.

**Problem 4 – The Book**

This problem consists of certain words and sentences found on pages 39-43 of a book I was reading. These words and sentences tell me some things that are very different from what I have been taught about the resurrection.

**Problem 5 – The Horror Movie**

This problem consists of certain thoughts and mental pictures that are still in my mind because I watched a horror movie. The ugly and terrifying monsters which I saw keep coming back to my mind.

**Problem 6 – The Dog**

This problem consists of certain fears and wrong thoughts of the past which have been replayed in my mind because of the barking of a dog which I heard in the present. My fears do not really belong with my friend's dog. My fears belong with that dog that once hurt me in the past.

**Problems Presented By The Class**

Define the problem that is before you and determine its importance.

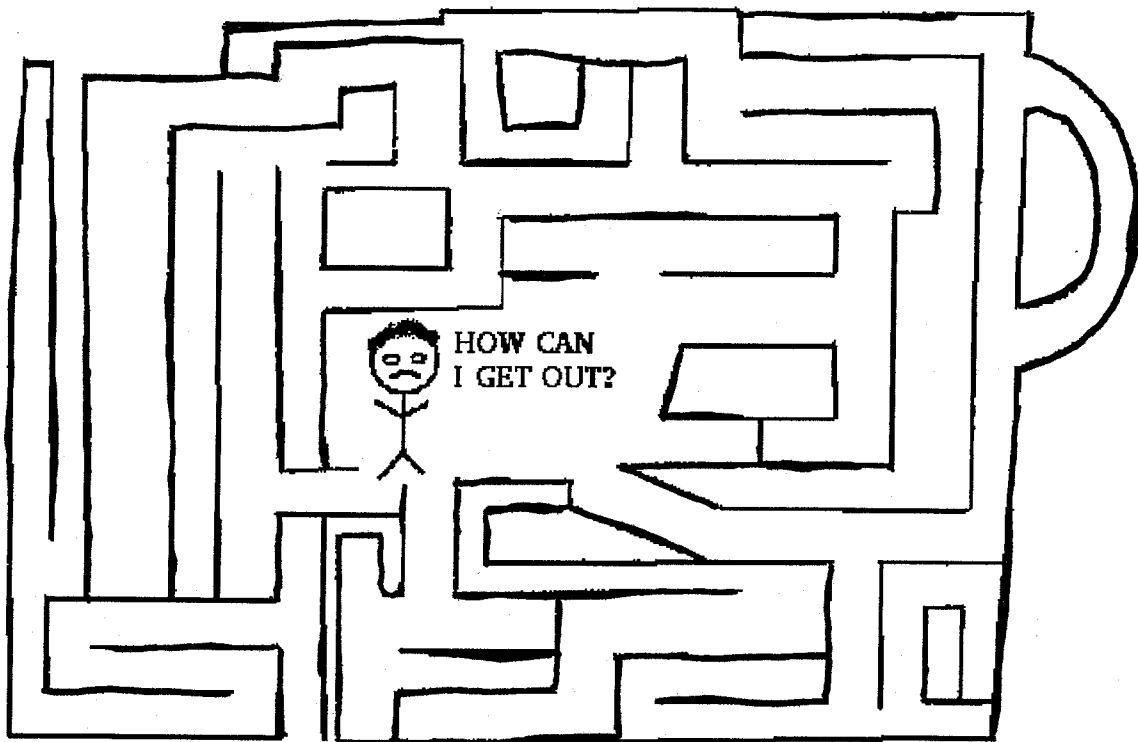
**4) Can I Do Anything About It or Not?**

What kind of response should I make to solve this problem? If this is a real problem, then I need to do something about it. If this is an unreal problem, then I still need to do something about it. I need to label it as unreal, and I need to realize that my problem is not really a problem at all.

Is there something I *can* and *should* do about the problem? Is there something I can and should do now? Is there something I can and should do LATER? What do I *need* to do now? What is my present responsibility in solving this problem? Is this something that I cannot do anything about? Is there something that I can do about it? What should I do? How can I do it? How do I go about it?

As we ask ourselves these questions, let us not leave God out of our problem solving! Where does *God* fit into the picture? Is God involved in my problem? Where does *God's Word* fit into the picture? Where does *God's working* fit in? What can *God do* about this problem? The

question is not, "CAN GOD...? CAN HE...?" (see Psalm 78:19-20). The trusting believer says, "GOD CAN! HE CAN! HE IS ABLE! *God can* work out my problem without my worrying if I let Him!" We must keep God in the picture! The biggest problem comes if a believer leaves God out of the problem. Consider this maze:



Is not this maze frustrating? There is no way out! There is no way to solve it! We wish we could erase one of the lines to make a way out. We must not leave God out of our problem solving. We cannot solve our problems correctly without God. If we try to solve problems without Him, we will only get frustrated. Only God can solve the problem and make everything come out right.

Now let us return to our six illustrations as we ask the question, CAN I DO ANYTHING ABOUT IT?

### **Problem 1 – The Tire**

I can jack up the car and put on the spare tire. *Later* I will need to have the tire repaired or purchase a new one.

Does God fit into the picture? As the family waits for the repair work to be done, is there a need for patience?

### **Problem 2 – The Window**

I can sweep up the broken glass and tape a piece of plastic covered cardboard over the hole. These are things that can be done NOW. LATER I will need to buy a new pane of glass.

How does God fit into this problem? Does He know all about the glass and the cold? God normally lets the laws of nature and human action outwork themselves. For example, a hardball thrown at a window will hit and break it.

**Problem 3 – The Mouse**

Right away I can clean out the cupboard by discarding damaged food and cleaning up the mouse droppings. Very soon I must set up a mousetrap and do whatever is necessary to keep mice out of the house in the future. Is God concerned about minor problems like this one? Is any problem really major to God? Is God too great to be interested in the mouse in the house?

**Problem 4 – The Book**

Perhaps I need to close this book and get another book. Perhaps I need to read what the Bible says about the resurrection of Christ. Perhaps I need to talk to my pastor or Sunday School teacher to get some help.

Can God be of any help to me in solving this problem? Does God know all about the book I have read? Does God know all about the resurrection? Can God and God's Word take away the doubts and give assurance? Why?

**Problem 5 – The Horror Movie**

I need to realize that the things I saw and heard were not real. The monsters were not real, and they are certainly not hiding in the darkness of my room. The Lord can help me to think correctly about what I saw and heard. Is God able to help me with these kind of fears (Psalm 23:4; Psalm 27:1)? \_\_\_\_\_

**Problem 6 – The Dog**

I need to understand that the dog that I really fear is a dog of the past and not the dog that is now barking. The Lord can help me to think correctly about my friend's dog, and I can bravely enter the house and pet the dog! God can give victory over our fears. [If a child has been bitten by a dog we would expect that child to have a fear of dogs. It may take some time for the child to learn that most dogs are friendly and not dangerous.]

**Problems Presented by the Class**

Can I do anything about these problems or not?

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Now that we have tried to think through these problems and understand them, let us follow the same steps as we consider a few problems we find in the Bible. For each of the following problems, answer the same four questions:

1. *Where* is the problem coming from?
2. *Why* is it coming from that direction?
3. *What* does it *consist* of?
4. *What* can be *done* about the problem and *how does God fit in*?

Here are the problems for you to work through and try to understand:

1. The problem the children of Israel faced at the Red Sea (Exodus chapter 14)
2. The problem David faced in 1 Samuel chapter 17
3. The problem Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego faced in Daniel chapter 3
4. The problem Daniel faced in Daniel chapter 6
5. The problem Peter faced in Acts chapter 12