

Small Groups – Problems – could be a good thing?

By Pastor Richard Braun

Date _____

Week _____

Icebreaker

Have you ever had a significant emotional event in your life? How did it lead to a course correction? Was it a positive or a negative change?

Opening Prayer – **Please read Psalm 8:3-8 and pause for a short silent prayer before beginning**

- 3 When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers,
The moon and the stars, which Thou hast ordained;
4 What is man, that Thou dost take thought of him?
And the son of man, that Thou dost care for him?
5 Yet Thou hast made him a little lower than God,
And dost crown him with glory and majesty!
6 Thou dost make him rule over the works of Thy hands;
Thou hast put all things under his feet,
7 All sheep and oxen, And also the beasts of the field,
8 The birds of the heavens and the fish of the sea,
Whatever passes through the paths of the seas.¹

Open It

1. What, for you, has been one of the most challenging obstacles you have ever faced? What made it so difficult for you?
2. What issues, events, or people influence your thinking today? Describe an event where this happened.
3. What did you learn from the obstacle you described earlier? Did it influence the way you live?
4. If God made everything good, Gen 1:31, why does evil exist today?

Explore It

1. Do you think God causes the problems we deal with in our lives? Can you back up your thinking theologically? Could you share one Bible verse that contributes to your thinking?
2. Why do we experience problems? Do we cause them? Are problems a result of the fall of man?
3. Are all of God's people destined for problems? Why do you think as you do? I Thes 3:1-5
4. The Bible says trials produce perseverance, leading to the maturity of our faith. (James 1:2-4) Is that the main or only reason for problems? Is there another reason? If so, what might that be?

Peter gives us a glimpse of how vital trials are regarding our faith in 1 Peter 1:3-9.

³Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy, he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you, ⁵who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶In this, you greatly rejoice, though now, for a little while, you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. ⁷These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by

¹*The New American Standard Bible*, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation) 1977.

fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.⁸ Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with inexpressible and glorious joy,⁹ for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.²

Get It

1. I Peter 3:3 says we have been given a living hope in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. How do you understand that passage relative to the trials we experience today?
2. We rejoice in verse 6, or maybe a better word is celebrate God's grace in our lives. As we do, we may experience various trials that will test the genuineness of our faith in Christ and the salvation which we long to obtain. How do the trials you experience today test your faith in Christ?
3. We have not seen Jesus firsthand, yet we believe. What strengthens/weakens your faith?
4. So, are problems good for us? Has your opinion changed from what you had initially before the study?

Apply It

Pray for trials, right? If our faith is made stronger through trials, shouldn't we relish trials? Maybe we live too comfortably and don't experience God's great love and mercy in profound ways. If that be the case, I encourage you to risk more and worry less. Move out of your comfort zone and into a more challenging ministry area. Who knows, it could be enriching.

What do you plan to change this next week, based on any new insights you may have come to from this discussion?

Shake It Off And Step Up

A parable of a farmer who owned an old mule. The mule fell into the farmer's well. The farmer heard the mule 'braying' - or – whatever mules do when they fall into wells. After carefully assessing the situation, the farmer sympathized with the mule but decided that neither the mule nor the well was worth the trouble of saving. Instead, he called his neighbors, told them what had happened, and enlisted them to help haul dirt to bury the old mule in the well and put him out of his misery. Initially, the old mule was hysterical! But a thought struck the farmer as they continued shoveling, and the dirt hit his back. It suddenly dawned on him that every time a shovel load of dirt landed on his back - HE SHOULD SHAKE IT OFF AND STEP UP!

Blow after blow, he'd "Shake it off and step up...shake it off and step up...shake it off and step up!" No matter how painful the blows or distressing the situation seemed, the old mule fought "panic" and kept right on shaking it off & stepping up!

It wasn't long before the old mule, battered and exhausted, STEPPED TRIUMPHANT OVER THE WALL OF THAT WELL! What seemed like it would bury him blessed him. How he handled his adversity saved him. THAT'S LIFE! If we face our problems, respond to them positively, and refuse to give in to panic, bitterness, or self-pity, THE ADVERSITIES THAT COME ALONG TO BURY US HAVE WITHIN THEM THE POTENTIAL TO BENEFIT AND BLESS US!

Remember that FORGIVENESS-FAITH-PRAYER-PRAISE, and HOPE are excellent ways to "SHAKE IT OFF AND STEP UP" out of our wells!

Closing prayer – please ask for praise reports or items needing prayer

Problems can kill us or make us stronger. We choose how to respond to the difficulties of life. Help us, oh God, to choose wisely. Amen

2The New International Version, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984.