

How good a student are you in God's

School of Life Training

By Dave Batty

"I've been an expert at running from my problems," stated Maria, a new Christian.

"When I look at the problems I face daily, I feel like I'm being robbed," shared Bill. "I want a life of joy and peace, but these problems keep messing up my day!"

A student struggling to pass trigonometry in high school mournfully asked, "Why do I have to study this?" His younger sister responded, "Your goal is to simply pass this course, because no one uses trigonometry in the real world."

Perhaps you felt the same way—questioning the practical relevance of some of the classes you took in school. So what classes

prepare you for the "real world?"

I believe God has a school for each one of us, and He wants us actively involved in His classes, learning the lessons He wants us to learn. God's School of Life Training is the most practical training we will ever get on how to successfully equip ourselves for the "real world."

Who is the Teacher?

Ever wonder what it would be like to study under the teaching of a world famous teacher? Henry Kissinger on political science, Michael Jordan on basketball, Tiger Woods on golf, Bill Gates on starting a successful business, or Billy Graham on Biblical studies. In God's School of Life Training, God is your teacher!

No one is more qualified than God to teach you how to prepare for life in the "real world." He is described as "the Father of all compassion," and also the "God of all comfort." 2 Corinthians 1:3 NIV The next verse describes God as "the one who comforts us in all our troubles." The significance of this point will come later in this article.

In God's School of Life Training He also uses substitute teachers. Many substitute teachers don't get much respect—even though they are well qualified to teach. God is the expert at using substitute teachers to

help us learn the lessons He wants us to learn.

Several thousand years ago a prophet named Baalam was a slow learner, so God used his donkey to

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teach him a lesson one day. If God can use a donkey, then we should take care to listen to whomever God sends as His substitute teacher.

What is the curriculum?

The curriculum in God's School of Life Training can be described in one word—problems!

Myth #1 Many people believe the myth that if you serve God you won't have problems. The closer you get to God, the more your problems will go away.

Myth #2 Others are caught in an equally false belief that when I have problems flooding into my

- ❖ **How easy is it for you to bring God into your thoughts when facing a new problem?**
- ❖ **What are the lessons God wants to teach you through the problems in your life?**
- ❖ **What is your typical emotional reaction when faced with a problem?**

life—the devil is attacking me! But how do you know the devil is behind this problem? Is it because you believe Myth #1?

It doesn't really matter much if the devil is bringing problems in your life—God is ready to use every problem in your life as His curriculum in His classes to teach you the “real world” life skills He wants you to master.

Joseph in the Old Testament grew up with brothers who hated him, they even planned to murder him. The only thing that kept them from killing him was they figured out a way to make some money by selling him as a slave instead. Joseph was faced with problems of betrayal, hatred, hostility, and ended up living as

a slave in a foreign country.

But it's clear that Joseph was a diligent student in God's School of Life Training because he consistently demonstrates a positive attitude toward his new master and his work as a slave. Even when Potiphar's wife tries to seduce him, he stands firm in his personal commitment to God and refuses to participate in her sin.

He passed God's test of sexual temptation and got rewarded with a prison sentence! Even in prison, he is a diligent student in God's School of Life Training, and serves his master well.

For those of us who know the end of the story, we tend to focus on the wonderful things that came into Joseph's life when he was elevated to top national leadership. But before that—from age 17 to 30 he was faced with major problems—and no clear picture of the future.

But God—who is a great teacher—had not abandoned Joseph. God had Joseph in school to get prepared for the challenge of a lifetime. Because Joseph learned the lessons God wanted him to learn as a slave and in prison, God was able to use him in leadership in Egypt.

Many years later his brothers plead for mercy—and Joseph speaks to the problems they brought into his life—“You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good.” Genesis 50:20 NIV

Why would God use problems to teach us the lessons we need to learn in life? Can't we learn His lessons by reading the Bible and praying? Sure! But it's not enough to *know* God's answers—to memorize Bible verses. God is preparing us for the “real world.” He doesn't just want great theological theory. He is passionate about life

application!

The lessons He wants us to learn need to be put to the “real world” test—that is where problems come in. Every problem is not only an opportunity to learn a new lesson from God—but it is also an

Why does God use problems to teach us the lessons we need to learn in life?

He is passionate about life application!

opportunity to put into practice the lessons we have already learned.

Paul often speaks of the problems he faced in his life. “We were under great pressure,” Paul says, “far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death.” 2 Corinthians 1:8-9 NIV

Yet in all these problems, Paul sees God at work in His life using them to teach him the lessons he needs to learn.

On another occasion, Paul says, “There was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me.” 2 Corinthians 12:7 NIV This was no petty little problem—this was a torment!

He prays three times for God to remove this problem, but God's reply is—NO! God responds, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” 2 Corinthians 12:9 NIV

What is Paul's response to God's “No” answer? Paul's attitude

Are you pure gold?

Our problems are much like fire being used to purify gold or silver. In its natural state, gold is mixed with a lot of impurities. We resemble that!

The expert goldsmith will heat that gold. The hotter it gets, the purer will be the gold. As it heats up, the gold melts and the junk all comes to the top. The goldsmith scrapes off the junk and leaves the pure gold.

Fiery trials in our lives can do the same—they bring a lot of junk to the surface. We can ignore the junk, or we can remove it and leave the pure gold that God is looking for in us.

The heat is a necessary part of the purifying process. The problems in our lives are a required part of the purifying process God wants to do in our lives.

is incredible! He says, "Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong." 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 NIV

Paul says—even though these problems are tormenting me—bring them on! What an attitude to have toward problems! He goes on to say, "I *delight* in weaknesses, insults, and all the other problems!" How can he delight in these problems? Is he crazy?

No—he's a top quality student in God's School of Life Training!

He says, God I want all the classes You have for me! I love Your classes! Yes, they are hard, but the harder they are, the more You help me!

Even though these problems were so overwhelming that Paul sometimes felt "the sentence of death" on him—he kept his focus on his Teacher—"the God of all comfort—who comforts us in all our troubles." 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 NIV

Paul was not satisfied to be in

pre-kindergarten classes in God's school—he wanted the advanced classes—the big problems!

So take time for an attitude check on yourself—what is your attitude toward the problems you are facing today in your life? Are you unhappy with them—wishing they would go away? Do they frustrate you? Anger you?

Perhaps the key to change in your life is to first see each problem as God's curriculum for you in His School of Life Training for you.

*Learning from our
problems is God's path
for us to become
mature.*

When King David was an old man, and fleeing for his life, Shimei was on top of a ridge cursing at him and throwing rocks at him. One of David's generals asks permission to go up and kill him, but David rebukes his general and says, "Leave him

alone; let him curse, for the Lord has told him to. It may be that the Lord will see my distress and repay me with good for the cursing I am receiving today." 2 Samuel 16:11-12 NIV

David was not caught up in a deep discussion of whether this man's cursing was from the devil or not. David starts from the assumption that God is the source. Therefore he is able to look to God for strength, and the positive benefits of this painful event. David passed the exam that day in God's School of Life Training!

Some of the problems in our lives are the direct result of our bad choices or our giving in to temptations. Our stubborn attitude or our sharp tongue may have gotten us into deep trouble. God wants to use each of these problems to teach us lessons we need to learn—lessons on self control, love, kindness, and all the other issues in His curriculum.

Ever heard someone complain—"all my life I have the same problems, over and over! Where is God?"

Maybe the reason you keep having the same problems is that you are failing to learn the lesson God is trying to teach you. You keep

Taking up an offense for someone else's problems

When your loved ones are experiencing a difficult problem, it may be easy for you to become upset toward the one who is causing this trouble. You say, "What he is doing is wrong!" Do you find it easy to become angry or criticize that person for their behavior?

We need to stop assuming we know more than God does. God is

never caught by surprise regarding the problems that come into our lives. No matter how big or how painful the problem is—God's power is more than adequate and He is present and ready to help us through that problem.

But when we take up an offense for someone else's problem, we are really saying, "God, this is wrong! You should not allow my loved one to go through this problem!"

Stop telling God what "classes" in His School of Life Training He should be assigning to your loved one. Instead begin to pray for your loved one that he or she will be open to learn the lessons God wants to teach.

Even if the person causing the problem means it for evil, God will use it for good.

flunking, and God says, OK, one more time! God doesn't pass us on to the next grade just because we lived for one more year—No pass—No graduating to the next class!

As we learn the lessons God wants us to learn, we may find ourselves facing a different set of problems. Our early problems may have been because of sin in our lives. But as we become more like Jesus, we may find that the problems we face are because we are doing the right thing! Jesus got Himself in lots of problems because He was doing what God wanted Him to do.

The religious leaders hated Him—they lied about Jesus, harassed Him, plotted to kill Him—all because He was doing what God wanted Him to do. The same may be true for you. As you become more Christ-like in your attitudes, your thoughts, and your decisions, you may find more problems coming into your life.

But each new problem is an opportunity to learn what God wants you to learn.

What are the lessons God wants you to learn?

God is your teacher—problems are His curriculum for you—but what are you learning?

We need to stop worrying about who is causing the problem, and why they are doing this. Is this the devil—who cares? God has important lessons for me to learn no matter what is the motive of the person causing the problem in my life.

So what are the lessons I should be learning?

1. God wants to teach me something

Probably the most basic lesson I need to learn from my problems is the simple truth that God wants to use this problem to teach me. Just bringing God into my thoughts regarding this problem is a huge first step.

All too often we simply react to the problem—not even thinking about God's part in this situation.

You may find this to be a difficult step to apply in your thinking, so write down what you want to do, and then at the end of each day, or several times during the day, do a self-evaluation. Did I bring God into my thoughts as I faced each new problem? Did I ask myself what lessons God wants me to learn from

this problem situation?

If you completely forgot to do that at the moment of encountering the problem—then re-live that situation in your mind, and this time bring God into the thought process. You may want to write down the lessons you think God wants you to learn from this situation.

2. Make yourself accountable to someone

Another key step that may help you is to make yourself accountable to a close friend or family member. Ask them to check up with you on how you are responding to problems.

What is your attitude toward your problems?

How do you react when a problem interrupts your life?

Do you respond with anger?

Upset at the person bringing this problem into your life?

Are you accommodating?

Do you tolerate the problem? Do you re-name it—"It's not a problem—that's just my Irish temper." Do you excuse it? Ignore it—and make no real effort to get rid of the problem.

Do you treat yourself as a martyr? "Look at me! I'm being mistreated by others—even by my so-called friends. What a shame that others treat me unfairly! What a tragedy that others are victimizing me!"

Instead of having these attitudes toward our problems, we need to develop Christ-like attitudes.

Instead of being angry at the person causing the problem—we

need to see them as one of God's substitute teachers—sent by God to teach us important lessons for life. We need to thank God for His help.

Instead of accommodating and tolerating our problems—or ignoring them—we need to face the truth. This is a real problem and I need to deal with it—and learn the lessons God wants me to learn so I can become more like Christ in my character, attitudes, and behavior.

Instead of being a martyr and feeling sorry for myself—I need to welcome these problems as God's curriculum for me to teach me to rely more on Him and less on me.

I need to see my martyr complex as a sign of my immaturity and seek to move on to new levels of maturity—realizing that *all* things work together for my good when I respond to each problem the way God wants me to respond. See Romans 8:28.

Remind yourself to use your problems as an “alarm clock” to bring God into your thoughts as you prepare to respond to each problem.

So what are the lessons I should be learning? Paul talked about the lessons he learned from his problems.

1. “This happened so we would not rely on ourselves, but on God.”
2 Corinthians 1:9 NIV
2. “God has delivered us, and He will deliver us.”
2 Corinthians 1:10 NIV

3. “On Him we have set our hope.”
2 Corinthians 1:10 NIV
4. These troubles come into our lives “so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from the Lord.”
2 Corinthians 1:4 NIV
5. They produce “patience endurance” in us to use when facing new problems.
2 Corinthians 1:6
6. Paul has learned the proper place for prayer in all this.
2 Corinthians 1:11
2 Corinthians 12:8-10

No Skipping Classes!

When tough problems come our way, we may wish to get away from them as quickly as possible. In the Bible, Paul felt this way—he describes his problem as “a thorn in the flesh,” a messenger of Satan, that was tormenting him. He pleaded with God three times to take it away—but God said, “No!” God’s grace—God’s power—was sufficient for Paul to go through this problem.
2 Corinthians 12:7-10

But at the very beginning of Paul’s description of this problem he explained the reason why God allowed this problem—the lesson God wanted Paul to learn. Paul said this problem came to keep him from becoming conceited—proud.

Paul doesn’t speak much about his problem with pride, but God saw it as significant—with the potential to destroy his relationship with God and his effectiveness in ministry. One expression of pride is—I can do this on my own! In 2 Corinthians 1:9 Paul says one of the lessons he has learned from his problems is to not rely on himself, but on God. That’s humility at work!

The tougher the problem that comes our way—the more important is the lesson God wants us to learn from it. Don’t skip God’s most important classes in His School of Life Training for you.

And this is only the beginning of the lessons Paul learned from his problems. Every problem has at least one lesson God wants to teach us, and for many of us, the list of lessons is much longer.

If you have ever been a teacher, then you know what a blessing it is to have a student who is eager to learn the lessons you are trying to teach. God is looking at your attitudes, He is looking at your responses to the classes He wants you to take. God is looking for evidence to show Him that you really are learning His lessons.

We demonstrate how well we are doing in His classes by how we respond to the new challenges that face us each day.

God’s School of

Problem Project

What needs to change in me in how I respond to the problems in my life?

1. **My attitude toward the problem?**
What would Jesus be thinking if He were in my shoes? How does my thinking need to change? Do I believe that every problem is an opportunity for God to teach me important life lessons?
2. **What about my emotional reaction to my problems?**
Am I irritated, frustrated, angry, upset? Or am I peaceful, calm, quiet? How can I be joyful when I have a problem? (Read and reflect on James 1:2-5)
How can I honestly delight in having a problem?
2 Corinthians 12:10
3. **What are my normal behaviors when I have a problem?** What do I need to change about the way I react to problems in my life? What are some of the steps I can take to change the way I respond to problems?
4. **What are the lessons God is wanting me to learn** from the problems I am facing in my life today? Am I willing to see God in every problem?
5. **Make a list of the problems you are facing in your life today**, and begin to write down what lessons you think God wants you to learn from each one.

Life Training is much different than any high school, college, or university. We don't finish His school in 4 years—His school requires us to be a student for the rest of our lives! The last day of school is the day we die!

So are you an eager student in His classes, or are you skipping classes? Are your attitudes like those of Joseph, King David, Paul, and Jesus? Or are you frustrated and upset at these problems? Are you stuck in first grade? Or are you moving on to His more advanced classes—with bigger problems?

Paul said, "He has delivered us, and he will deliver us!" He's a great student! He's getting it! So what about the problems you are facing today? God is ready to use each one in His school. And He may want to use a substitute teacher in your life. It may not be a spiritual giant like Billy Graham. It may be an obnoxious brat, even a non-Christian, someone like Shimei—cursing at you, and more.

If we will learn the lessons God wants us to learn, we can put our head on the pillow at night with His peace in our hearts, and a sense of accomplishment. Learning His lessons can have an impact on eternity—not just for a college degree.

When we learn the lessons God wants us to learn, then we will see that problem from a different perspective. We will be one step closer to the maturity God wants us to develop. We will be wiser. We will be better—not bitter—because of the problem.

You will have personal examples of God delivering you. Your trust in God will grow. And you will be able to encourage others in times of trial with the same encouragement you received from God as you went through that trial.

How good a student are you in God's School of Life Training? Discussion Guide

The following questions can be used for your personal reflection on this topic, or it can be used as a guide for a group discussion. If this is used in a group setting, please understand that you are not required to disclose the specific details of past sins, failures, or personal experiences.

1. Read 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 and reflect on Paul's prayers regarding the problems in his life.
 - A. As you reflect on the problems you have encountered in your life—how has your response been similar or different in asking God to remove the problem?
 - B. Have you ever been mad or frustrated with God when He has not removed problems from your life?
 - C. Read verses 9-10 again and reflect on Paul's attitudes toward his problem after getting his "NO" answer from God. What changes would you have to make before you could have the same attitude Paul had toward his problems?
2. Read 2 Corinthians 1:8-11 and reflect on the lessons Paul sees he can learn from his problems.
 - A. How hard is it for you to see each problem as an opportunity to rely on God and not on yourself?
 - B. How hard is it for you to see your part, versus God's part, in dealing with your problems?
 - C. How hard is it for you to have a positive attitude toward your problems?
3. Read Romans 5:1-5. What are the lessons you have been learning or need to learn from your problems? Which problem do you need to focus on with a new response?



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