ADULTS SAVING KIDS
Founded by Alvin Erickson

Lesson 5

Problems as Opportunities for Growth

Helping Children Develop Wisdom, Confidence, and Resilience

SCRIPTURE

James 1:2–4

"Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."

James 1:2–4 (NIV)

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Seeing Problems Differently

Every child encounters problems. A young child struggles to tie a shoe, an older child has difficulty with schoolwork, loses a friendship, or faces disappointment, and a teenager may experience rejection, peer pressure, or the consequences of a poor decision. As parents, our natural instinct is often to step in and fix the problem immediately.

Sometimes that is exactly what our children need, but other times, stepping back and helping them work through a difficulty offers something far more valuable than an immediate solution. A problem can become an opportunity to develop wisdom, perseverance, responsibility, and confidence. James reminds us that trials can produce perseverance and maturity, not because suffering itself is pleasant, but because growth can come through difficult experiences. This gives parents a different way to approach some of the everyday challenges their children face.

Learning to Solve Problems

Imagine a young child trying to build a tower with blocks, but the tower keeps falling over and the child becomes frustrated, asking a parent to build it instead. The parent could quickly

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construct a beautiful tower so the problem would be solved instantly, but the child would miss a vital opportunity to learn.

Instead, the parent might sit beside the child and ask, *"Why do you think it keeps falling? What could we try differently?"* Perhaps they experiment with putting the larger blocks on the bottom, and perhaps the tower falls several more times before they discover a solution. When the child finally succeeds, the accomplishment belongs to the child, and the parent has provided encouragement and guidance without taking over.

> *Sometimes the greatest gift we can give a child is not the answer, but the confidence that they can learn to find an answer.*

Problems Can Become Teaching Opportunities

As children grow, their problems become more complicated. A disagreement with a friend may provide an opportunity to learn communication and forgiveness, forgetting an assignment may teach responsibility and planning, a disappointing performance may help a child learn perseverance and realistic expectations, and a poor decision may become an opportunity to consider consequences and make amends.

Rather than immediately telling children what to do, parents can ask questions that help them think:

- What happened?
- What do you think contributed to the problem?
- What choices do you have now?
- What might happen if you choose each option?
- What could you do differently next time?

These conversations help children develop the ability to think through difficulties rather than simply react to them, and when children discover they can work through manageable problems, they become more confident about facing new challenges.

Knowing When to Help

Not every problem should be left for a child to solve alone, because children need protection, guidance, and support depending on their age, maturity, abilities, and the seriousness of the situation. A child who is frightened, overwhelmed, or in danger needs an adult who will respond appropriately. Some experiences, such as abuse, exploitation, serious bullying, or traumatic

events, require adults to intervene and protect the child, as these are never situations where children should be expected to become stronger by handling them independently.

Even with ordinary problems, children may need comfort before they are ready to consider solutions. The goal is not to make children face difficulties alone, but to help them gradually develop the skills to face appropriate challenges with confidence, allowing parents to provide support while giving increasing responsibility as children mature.

Growing Through Difficulty

There is an important connection between this lesson and our earlier discussion of identity. A child who believes that mistakes make them worthless may become afraid to try anything difficult, but a child who understands that their worth is secure can begin to see mistakes as part of learning.

They can say:

> - *"I didn't succeed this time, but I can try another approach."*
> - *"This is difficult, but I can ask for help."*
> - *"I made a poor choice, but I can take responsibility and learn from it."*

Their confidence is not based on always succeeding, but grows from learning that difficulties and setbacks do not determine their worth.

Looking for Another Perspective

In Christian teaching, perseverance is also part of our ongoing spiritual growth, as God can work through difficulties to develop patience, wisdom, and maturity. Sometimes, when facing a difficult situation, it helps to pause and ask, *"Is there another way of looking at this? Is there something I haven't considered?"* A change in perspective may help us recognize possibilities we couldn't see before.

At other times, a problem may be far beyond our ability to solve, and we may not understand why something has happened or how anything good could come from it. These are times when prayer and faith become especially important, allowing us to bring our concerns to God and trust that He is able to work even through circumstances that seem hopeless. Faith does not mean knowing how everything will turn out; it means trusting God even when we cannot see the way forward.

Sometimes the most important thing we can do is recognize when we have done all we can and turn the problem over to God in prayer. Letting go of our need to control the outcome can bring a wonderful sense of peace. We can stop going over the problem repeatedly in our minds and rest in the knowledge that we do not have to carry every burden alone. As parents, we can model

this for our children—not only teaching them to pray about their difficulties, but also showing them what it means to release a worry rather than continually carrying it.

Questions for Reflection

1. When my child encounters a problem, do I tend to solve it for them, or do I help them develop the skills to work through it?
2. How can I recognize when my child needs encouragement to persevere and when they need me to step in and provide protection or support?

THIS WEEK

Put It Into Practice

Choose one manageable problem your child encounters and use it as an opportunity to practice problem-solving together. Instead of immediately offering a solution:

- Listen to your child's understanding of the problem.
- Ask what they think might help.
- Explore possible choices and consequences together.
- Offer guidance appropriate to their age and abilities.
- Encourage their effort, not just the final outcome.

At the end of the week, consider: *Did I help my child gain confidence in their ability to think through a problem?*

LOOKING AHEAD

A Thought to Carry Forward

We cannot remove every obstacle from our children's lives, nor would doing so prepare them well for adulthood. But we can help them develop the wisdom to make decisions, the perseverance to face challenges, and the confidence to seek help when they need it. A child who knows they are loved and valuable does not have to interpret every difficulty as a personal failure. Problems can become opportunities for growth, especially when children know they do not have to face them alone.

In our next lesson, we will explore how to build a relationship of trust so that when children face problems they cannot manage, they know they can come to us.