

The Counseling Trap

by Derek Taylor

A wise man once said, “*Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward*” (Job 5:7). We have to admit he was right. As long as we are in the flesh, there’s no escaping problems. They seem to be the warp and woof of the fabric of life.

But we have moved into the era of the professional problem solver. Whether your problem is financial, marital, psychological, or whatever, somewhere there is an expert to tell you how to solve it.

The problem-solving experts have also invaded the church. Many ministries today have professional or semi-professional problem solvers. If you have a spiritual problem, you only have to pick up the phone and a counselor is waiting at the other end with just the right thing to say. In all likelihood he’s been trained in; handling the typical problems faced by believers, and as an experienced counselor he’s undoubtedly dealt with your type of problem before.

For years I accepted that this is God’s method of “*building up*” the body of Christ. But when I came to see my union with Christ, I was compelled to re-evaluate the whole notion of the expert who counsels on Christian problems, and to particularly question the whole concept of the “shepherding” system.

Pastoring and counseling is an intrinsic part of modern church life. If the church abandoned its counseling system; many leaders would find themselves with much time on their hands. Besides, how could the flock survive without it? How would they ever be able to handle their lives?

Behind all counseling and shepherding there is a basic assumption. It is taken for granted that the counseling that takes place is aimed at *strengthening* God’s people. But I am going to suggest that much of it frequently *weakens* the spiritual strength of believers!

Can I be serious? How could it possibly weaken them, you ask? Let us consider. Aren’t most counseling systems designed to solve problems? Indeed they are. “*Get at the cause of the problem and solve it*” is their watchword. Now, with all of these problems that are apparently being solved every day, one would think that the church would be gloriously triumphant and hardly troubled by problems any more. But in my experience, those who subscribe to this system *always* seem to abound in problems. They continually need counseling; they need a shepherd to keep after them, rarely coming to the place that they no longer have to be counseled.

Urging people to solve their problems through counseling as to the cause of the problems tends to produce individuals who focus on outer situations, and who therefore always find lots of problems to seek more counsel about. In many churches you can observe the same people going for ministry week after week. The system actually generates *problem-centered people!* In fact, countless believers are so hypnotized with the outer situations of life, continually viewing life as a series of problems that desperately need solving, that they would hardly know what to do in life if they suddenly found themselves free of this condition.

What makes us so sure that God wants all of our problems solved? Have you ever thought that He might *mean* problems to be? Is it possible that He doesn’t intend us to fuss about our problems, but rather to see *Him* in them?

Christians have for too long been intimidated by the idea that their spiritual problems are sent by the devil, and that they are meant to build godly character by overcoming them. A radical shift of emphasis is needed. Spiritual problems are God's gift to us! They move us from being individuals who live according to outer situations to those who live by inner union with Christ. They are intended to make us inner, supply-centered people.

Think about your conversion. You became aware at some point of the greatest spiritual problem you could ever face in life, the fact that you were a sinner under the wrath of God. If you were like me, you cried out to God to *do* something — you wanted a solution to your plight. Of course, relief and freedom from the problem came in the form of forgiveness when you accepted Jesus Christ into your life. But eventually you made a quite extraordinary discovery, the fact that before the foundation of the world God had provided the solution to your problem. The entrance of sin into the world didn't catch Him napping. He didn't wait for you to become a sinner before He acted to solve your problem; He dealt with it before it happened! So the outer problem was actually a vital negative to bring God's supreme positive solution of inner grace to your attention.

And the way God handled our greatest spiritual problem at the time of our "first love" is the way He handles all of our problems. Just as God knew that freedom of choice would lead to the sin-problem and *meant it to be*, so too all of the problems we face in life are meant to be. This "first love" principle works throughout the whole of our experience of God.

Whatever your problems may be, they haven't come upon you so that *you* can solve them. Solving problems is not your problem! To become spiritually mature means you recognize that "before" you call for the solution to your problem, God has answered. The fact that a problem has arisen in your life means that God already has the solution worked out. It is the negative prelude to the positive reality. Problem and solution are both complete in spirit-reality before they come to you in experience.

This means that any need which arises in your life is simply the evidence of supply. The *need* you see by sight, the *supply* you see by faith. Your visible need is the evidence of the invisible supply. Problems, then, are proof that God already has the solution.

So often we rush in where angels fear to tread, taking over the problem and trying to get it solved through counsel from shepherds or "experts." But God's way is to *unveil the gospel* — the revelation of which lifts the needy one to a level in which he finds the solution already prepared. This means that instead of running to others continually, he can help himself; indeed, he has the solution within him.

The moment we descend to the level of the person we are trying to help through counsel, seeking to supply a solution to his problem, we become like one who goes to the bottom of a well to help the person who has fallen in. If you try to help another by descending to his level — focusing on the externals of this material realm instead of on inner spirit-reality — your sympathy is akin to the desperate efforts of a beetle to escape from a slippery bowl.

Actually, to "solve" the problems of another is to get in that individual's way. It is impossible to fill a barrel that has a hole in it, and that is what much of our shepherding and counseling amounts to. As long as the person focuses on his problems — and you also focus on them by trying to sort them out — he will never recognize that God is deeply involved in *the whole* of his life. And when you can't solve his problem, he will trample you under his feet, because he is determined to have an external solution immediately. Then you too will have an attitude problem with him, and rehearse the same old ditty about "ingratitude," sinking to his mundane level.

Every problem we can possibly face in life is simply an adventurous challenge to faith. Will we live by the inner consciousness of total supply, and so enter into our “rest” in each problem — or will we stew around in the outer dimension, desperately trying to get someone to solve this “devil-sent problem”?

Once you see God in your problem, it is solved. Its burden disappears instantly. Certainly the final manifestation of the solution in outer experience is a welcome bonus. But the real thrill lies in seeing God *in* the problem through the single eye of faith, recognizing Him as your full supply before the solution is manifest.

When you can see God in your problems, realizing that He means them to be and is using them for a good purpose, you yourself become a worthy counselor. When someone calls you with a complicated problem, you find no need to rush for the “How to Solve All Problems” manual. You simply reveal the good news to them. All they actually need is a change of mind about the problem — a switch from “solve my problem and I’ll be happy” to “I’m happy *in* (not in spite of) my problem.” We preach *Christ* as our total adequacy in all situations, affirming that He in us will handle every difficulty in His own time and way, using all for a good purpose.

“I’m so unloving,” you say. Or, “I’m so unwise, and never know what to do when problems come.” This is the negative prelude to Christ expressing Himself through you. It’s only as you are aware of the fact that you are not loving or wise that you can recognize Him as the Positive who is your total supply. You were never meant to be loving or wise independent of union with Christ.

“It’s all very well for you to say that I shouldn’t be concerned with the outer solution to my problem,” you reply, “but it’s a painful situation to bear.”

Yes, that’s true. The birth of inner consciousness of union with Christ comes through much travail for most of us. It’s human to want to be rid of problems. It isn’t easy to praise God in the midst of painful situations. To quit struggling with the problem and accept it as from God — realizing that if the devil is involved, he’s fully under God’s control and a mere tool in His hands — takes a giant leap of faith against all appearance. Yet any pain we encounter is but the light yoke and easy burden of Jesus once we realize that He means such things to be; and this means that we can have peace right in the midst of tribulation.

If you want to remain in the problem-solving syndrome, that’s your choice. But as long as you do, you will be dependent on the limited resources of the “experts” for your spiritual strength and; stability. You will forever need shepherds to tell you what to do.

But take a leap into the faith dimension, and you will tap the infinite inner resources of the living Christ, who promises to be in you a well of water flowing out from you in rivers of living water that will never dry up. You will discover that Jesus is *Lord* of all situations, so that nothing comes upon you that He doesn’t intend to use for good. Instead of constantly fighting problems, wishing situations weren’t the way they are, you will find peace right where you are even when the outer troubles of life remain unchanged for the moment. And you will have the assurance that when God has accomplished His purpose through those problems, His answer was there even before you called!