



Conducted by
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THERE seems to be an increasing number of personal problems for christians these days. Should the christian be better equipped to deal with them than other people are?

THIS is an interesting question. It is a fact that God has never said that His children would be immune from personal problems; nor has He said that these problems would be less severe than those suffered by other people. What He has said is that His children can call on resources which are denied those who do not have close communion with Him. Whether or not individual christians avail themselves of these resources, or whether or not they are willing to do so, even allowing that they know that they exist is a matter of some conjecture. But if equipment is available to christians for their use, then their failure to use it will be a measure of how well they cope with their personal problems.

The Nature of Personal Problems

For some years now, whether we realise it or not, we have been living our lives under increasing pressures. These pressures have increased because of such things as insecurity of employment, financial downgrading, family relationships, inter-personal relationships other than family. Our young christians are finding it increasingly difficult to live with the social cynicism which they encounter each day, and when we add to this the moral bankruptcy which seems to be afflicting many people, we can understand what sort of pressures they are under if they are to adhere to their christian principles. The problems are being compounded because they are now appearing in the church where the application of the criteria for their resolution are so different from that which the world would apply.

So far as the individual is concerned we must analyse this question, from the relative standpoints of 'output' and 'input', to use a little technical jargon. How many times have we heard people say, "I'm just about drained", or "I've put up with it so long, but I can't put up with it any longer", or, "He blew his top"? These expressions, if they mean anything, mean that the emotional experience of the individual has left him/her exhausted of energy; nervous energy, I think we can call it. It is the sort of feeling that one has when leaving an examination room, or after a particularly harrowing interview; you know, that 'limp' feeling. This extreme out put

of nervous energy will leave the individual in a very vulnerable state, and he will react to various stimuli, some bad, some good. What is clear is that the individual will need some 'input' so that the responses to stimuli can be controlled, because it is becoming apparent that when a person through trying to deal with a pressing problem, feels himself to be 'drained' and 'empty', then that person will be in a state where there is a predisposition to both physical and mental illness. So what sort of problems cause this state, and how are we to get the 'input' that will keep us stable?

The Problem of Readjustment

A man named Professor Holmes listed a number of life events and relative to these devised what he called a Social Readjustment Rating Scale. It is not my intention to list all the life events which he listed, but just to illustrate how much or how little social readjustment is necessary, I will give a few from each end of the scale with their ratings.

At the top end of the scale are, death of spouse (100), divorce (73), marital separation (65), death of close family member (63), personal injury or illness (53). At the other end of the scale are, change in sleeping habits (16), change in number of family get-togethers (15), change in eating habits (15), holidays (13), minor violations of the law (11). It is quite evident that the life events at the top of the scale are the ones that 'drain' a person of nervous energy, thus necessitating an input to compensate for the loss: they are also very difficult from the point of view of readjustment socially. The ones at the bottom are relatively unimportant and do not call for any serious readjustment.

Towards Stability

The person who has to cope alone with the high value readjustment life events is almost inevitably doomed to fail. This is supported by the statistical evidence of the number of people on tranquillisers, and the number who seek help from certain organisations. In my Samaritan experience I have talked with many such, and the problems which a person would normally take in his stride seem almost insurmountable to them. These are people who have lost loved ones and are now left alone to contend with a seemingly hostile world; wives who suffer gross and indecent cruelty from husbands who have long since ceased to care; children who are baffled and bemused by the break-up of the family unit; lonely people (the high-rise flats have made for a low-level community spirit). Most of these are 'drained' of real life; where do they get their input? Obviously they look for something of the moment, something ephemeral, transitory, the accoutrements of our age. The aspirin bottle and the gas tap always seem to beckon to such.

This should not be so with the christian. Many of the problems will be no less severe to him, but he has resources which are denied the person who has never found God. The God whom the christian worships is the infinite, eternal source of power. The bitter anguish of the christian parents who have lost a child is eased a little when they think of God, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son", and they know that they have a Father who shares their deepest anguish. The christian who has lost a wife or husband will still have to endure the dreary, unsolicited hours of loneliness, but they will be able to think of a loving Saviour who suffered alone the excruciating agony of the cross. Christians who have suffered marital separation will still have to claw their way out of the abyss of despair, but surely to realise that Christ was separated from the glories of heaven to tabernacle with and to die for sinful flesh will ease the despair a little. The words of that grand apostle ring down to us through the ages, "Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his suffering, being made conformable unto his death" Philipians 3:8-10).

I sometimes wonder how much we christians have neglected, or down-graded the real value of christian fellowship. It is an extension of that divine fellowship that we have with Christ and God. How many burdens have been eased, and how many more could be eased because of the fellowship of the saints? To the saints with problems, the fellowship can be a

unique means of input. It can supply a pool at which the thirst for sustenance can be quenched; it can supply a valuable source of power; it can give the energy for life. With all its co-called faults and inconsistencies, the christian community is still the body of Christ, a people for God's possession, a loving and a caring community at heart. And why shouldn't it be; Christ died for it. In time of need, isn't it grand if there is someone you can turn to; someone who will care about you because Christ cared for him? If the fellowship can survive, then in spite of the severity of our problems we can survive also. If we try to pull down the fellowship, then God help us. If I read the signs aright we are living in days when we shall need the closeness of the fellowship of saints more than we have ever needed it before. We should pray to God for it to be strengthened; we should add strength to it ourselves, because it can be the life cell to christians who are desperately in need.

Yes, the christian should be able to bear problems better than other people. I am sure that God recognised our need when He gave us CHrist, the church, and the gracious indwelling of the Holy Spirit. With resources like that, we must be able to successfully meet the most severe life events; the only danger to us is if we neglect or forsake that which God has given us at so great a price to Himself.