

## Developing Problem-Solving Skills

### Scripture

#### Old Testament

Nehemiah 2:17-18



“Then I said to them, ‘You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace.’ I also told them about the gracious hand of my God upon me and what the king had said to me.

“They replied, ‘Let’s start rebuilding.’ So they began this good work.” NIV

#### New Testament

Romans 15:14

“I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another.” NIV

II Timothy 2:2

“And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.”

### Case Study

“Daddy, I don’t know what to do! My roommate and I are not getting along all of a sudden, and I don’t want to be in an apartment with her next year. Lynn and her friends leave me out of stuff and talk about me but we’ve already made plans for the apartment. She and the other girls are always talking about how they’re going to decorate and they don’t include me. What am I going to do?”

“Well, let’s talk about it and see if we can sort this out. What is it that you are at odds with each other about Abby?”

“Lots of stuff. Besides that they are involved in some things I don’t want to be a part of. They think I’m not cool because I won’t do those things.”

John thought carefully about this new development. It sounds as if there may be some self-destructive behaviors developing in Abby’s roommate. He certainly didn’t want her around these activities. The semester was almost over and he didn’t want her living with these girls either.

“Abby, your home, whether it is a dorm room or an apartment should be a safe place that you can be yourself. Living in a hurtful situation like this for next year is not a good idea. It’s okay to make different arrangements.”

“I don’t know how, though. If I tell her with a month left in the semester, what will she do? I can’t stand it! I don’t want to go back.”

“Let’s talk this through and see what we can figure out. You can find another place to live for next year. Let’s just get through this issue first. If you are sure you don’t want to live with Lynn next year, and it sounds to me as if it would be a bad idea, let’s talk about how you can address this with her. Does she realize that you are not comfortable with her behavior lately? Have you had discussions about it?”

“No, it’s been an underlying problem.”

“Well, at some point you need to tell her that you want to make other plans for next year. It will be a tough conversation to have, but it is necessary.”

“But I don’t know what to say.” Abby seemed frantic at the possibility of bringing this topic up with Lynn. John knew it was hard for Abby but he also knows it is a skill she needs to develop more as she matures into adulthood.

“How about this- let’s practice what you want to say to her that will be clear but not offensive and then we can role-play your talking with her? Then you can choose an appropriate time to have the conversation- sometime when neither of you has a test nor paper due right away.”

#### Questions for discussion

1. What is the main issue in this problem?
2. How can it best be solved?
3. How did John deal with his daughter’s reluctance to confront Lynn?
4. What did Abby learn from her dad’s help in dealing with this conflict?

#### **The Facts**

Whether you are a parent or youth leader, it’s easy to find problems to use as case studies. One of the best ways to address problem-solving with your children or your group is to lead them to find a solution. By moving through the problem-solving steps with them, you can help them solve the immediate issue and give them tools to use in the future.

We all need to confront some situations at work and at home. It’s tough if we don’t have some basic understanding of problem solving behavior and it’s the role of the parents to help their children develop these skills. Some conversations are unpleasant and no one wants to have them, but the responsible avenue is to have the conversation anyway, yet in a way that is least likely to cause further hurt. John used the basic steps in problem

solving to help Abby work through her problem. He encouraged her to take responsibility for her problem and to deal with it in a mature way. After he helped her role-play the conversation, he kept in touch with her until she had had the conversation, helping her decide on a time that would be respectful of Lynn's time. Then, of course, Abby still needed a place to live for the next semester. He asked for her input and listened to her as she explored alternatives. John has helped Abby much more by talking through this process than he would have by solving the problem himself. He has helped Abby develop a skill she will use again. The steps he used follow:

Identify the problem

Look at potential causes for the problem

Identify alternatives for approaching the problem

Decide which approach is best for solving the problem

Plan the implementation of the best alternative

Monitor implementation of the plan

This is part of leadership in a family, helping children find solutions to everyday issues. Parents who are actively involved can gauge how much information to teach as the child matures and the problems become more difficult.

Just as Nehemiah finds a way to rebuild a wall and Paul gives advice to his co-laborers for God's kingdom, parents have a role to play in their children's development.

### **The Theological Issue**

Paul exhorts us to "Live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Eph. 5:2) As we help our children discover ways to live in the world as Christ-Followers, working to solve problems in a way that works for good, we care for our precious gifts from above.

### **Suggested Group Study Activities**

Watch all or part of the evening news together. Then, turn off the television and discuss some of the problems reported in the news. Discuss different ways of solving problems.

What were the issues?

What was the cause?

What other avenues could have been taken to solve the problem?

Which approach would be most likely to bring positive results?

How would one implement that approach?

Look around your neighborhood to see who might have a need that you and your child can fill. Talk about the issues with your child. Help him see the value in helping someone else.

Find a project that you could do with a larger group, a Sunday school class or youth group.

Be sure to discuss the steps of problem solving. That's an efficient way to learn - by doing and reflecting.