

## Embracing the Negative

Overview: Part of life and success is facing, dealing with, and resolving “negative reality.” There are problems with anything in life, and that includes anything good. A good idea will have problems. A good marriage will have its difficulties. A good company will have struggles. People, markets, organizations, and ourselves all have issues that must be resolved in order for a good result to take place. People with integrity face these issues and have the character makeup to resolve them. They are free from the character issues that get in the way of getting to the “other side” of negative occurrences and realities.

### 1. Everything we do will have problems.

In the Garden of Eden, things were perfect. We did not have to deal with the “knowledge of good and evil.” We just existed, loved, and worked. But now, things are different. Literally everything we will ever do, touch, be involved in, try, know, or experience will be affected by the negative reality of a fallen, imperfect universe.

Rom. 8:22 ¶ We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.

Eccl. 7:20 There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins.

People with integrated character are at one with this reality. They are not fighting it, and have come to embrace it, accept it, and deal with it. That means that when problems come, they are not surprised. They are not shocked. They do not give up. They are not afraid, and think that the sky is falling. They just see that as one more day in making it all work.

**Illustration:** In this chapter, the Integrity book has a story about a hospital company that I dealt with that had a big banner on its wall that said, “No Problems, No Profit.” That was its way of helping management understand that the way to success is to see problems as normal, and to get busy at solving them. Alternative: think of someone you know who sees solving problems as a challenge and something good, instead of something so bad or out of whack.

### 2. People of integrity will not deny or avoid problems, but face into them actively.

They are not people of denial, avoiding the proverbial “elephant in the living room,” acting as if some big issue does not exist. They *actively* move to face and deal with problems, including people.

This is rooted in our God, who as soon as the universe fell, actively went to Adam and Eve, dealt with the problem, and came up with a redemptive solution.

Gen. 3:8 ¶ Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

Gen. 3:9 But the LORD God called to the man, “Where are you?”

God went proactively and did not wait for the problem to resolve itself. In the same way, he tells us to be proactive about facing and solving problems.

Gal. 6:1 ¶ Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.

Matt. 18:15 ¶ “If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over.

Matt. 18:16 But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’

Matt. 18:17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

Matt. 18:18 ¶ “I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

Prov. 27:23 Be sure you know the condition of your flocks, give careful attention to your herds;

Prov. 6:1 My son, if you have put up security for your neighbor, if you have struck hands in pledge for another,

Prov. 6:2 if you have been trapped by what you said, ensnared by the words of your mouth,

Prov. 6:3 then do this, my son, to free yourself, since you have fallen into your neighbor’s hands: Go and humble yourself; press your plea with your neighbor!

Prov. 6:4 Allow no sleep to your eyes, no slumber to your eyelids.

Prov. 6:5 Free yourself, like a gazelle from the hand of the hunter, like a bird from the snare of the fowler.

It is similar to the wise person who gets a toothache and immediately goes to the dentist. Prompt action will solve it and he will get his life back. Delay may cause him to wake up one night with an abscess, unable to function. People of mature, integrated character know this and are equipped to do it. That equipment is their character, and it has several components.

3. Character with integrity is able to recover from setbacks quickly and get back in the saddle.

People who are mature, or complete, can deal with problems well because they do not go “down for the count” when life hits them hard. This does not mean that they are not affected by bad news, loss, failure or grief. What it does mean is that they have the wherewithal to recover well.

This is rooted in being full of grace, support, wisdom, faith, and a relationship with God. In summary, it is about having built a life that is rooted in the ways of God. As Jesus said, if you have organized life in the ways that he talked about, then the hard times can come and they will not do you in:

Matt. 7:24 ¶ “Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.

Matt. 7:25 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.

Matt. 7:26 But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand.

Matt. 7:27 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

Psa. 112:7 He will have no fear of bad news; his heart is steadfast, trusting in the LORD.

Psa. 112:8 His heart is secure, he will have no fear; in the end he will look in triumph on his foes.

Prov. 24:16 for though a righteous man falls seven times, he rises again, but the wicked are brought down by calamity.

**Insert Illustration:** Someone who had terrible times and overcame them through being grounded in the ways of God, integrity of character, and God himself. Peter is a good one, having failed Christ, and recovering well.

4. People of integrity are able to deal with failure and problems well because they are separate from their results.

They do not identify themselves and who they are by how they are doing. They are not the same as their results. They do not have a “performance identity.” They are not one person if things are going well, and another person if they are not. They can deal with both realities and are just themselves.

Instead, their identities and feelings of security come from being loved by God, loved by others, and their own character integrity. That way, if something fails, they move on because it is not “who they are.” They are not a “failure” because of some bad result. When Tiger Woods hits a ball out of bounds, or loses a tournament, he is not a failure, tied to that result. He is still Tiger and will come back.

Psa. 25:21 May integrity and uprightness protect me, because my hope is in you.

Eccl. 11:6 Sow your seed in the morning, and at evening let not your hands be idle, for you do not know which will succeed, whether this or that, or whether both will do equally well.

Eph. 3:16 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being,

Eph. 3:17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love,  
Eph. 3:18 may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,

Col. 2:6 ¶ So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, Col. 2:7 rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

1John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

5. People of integrity take ownership of the problems so that they can resolve them.

Immature people are not as interested in solving problems as they are avoiding blame, responsibility or work. So, instead of taking ownership, they excuse problems or blame someone else. Mature people are not as concerned about who is at fault as they are about solving the problem. Even if they did not cause a mess, they will take ownership of the result and get busy to fix it.

God did not cause the fall of the earth. But, he put his arms around the problem and fixed it. A CEO might not have caused a bad market, but a good one will take ownership of the poor results of the company and move to fix it. He will not sit there and just blame the market. He will fix the problem.

A parent with a child who is not performing will not just blame the teacher or the school. He or she will care about the problem and take ownership of it and fix it.

And, with problems where one is at fault, the person of integrity owns the fault, confesses it, and works to make it better. He does not shift the blame trying to preserve some “good self” to himself or others. He is not like the person who tries to always make himself look good, and as a result does not solve problems. Here is how the Scripture refers to someone like that:

Psa. 36:2 For in his own eyes he flatters himself too much to detect or hate his sin.

**Insert Illustration:** Someone who took ownership of a problem that was not theirs, but it affected him or her, and moved to resolve it. The woman who started MADD for example. Or on the other side, use someone who blamed their way to destruction. Adam and Eve are good examples of non-ownership as well. Adam blamed Eve and Eve blamed the serpent.

6. The person of integrity confronts problems well, becoming a force for redemption instead of destruction.

This means that when they confront others that they do it actively, but they also do it fruitfully. They do it like God does, not to destroy a person, but to redeem him or her. They do it like God does, with a combination of *grace and truth*.

Some people confront with truth only, and as a result destroy the person. They are harsh, mean, shaming, angry or abusive. This does not produce a good result. Others, confront with a lot of grace, but do not deliver all of the truth. They go too soft on how bad the problem really is. God comes forth in his character with both: total love, and total truth that deals with the problem. Again, all of this is seen in the verses mentioned above from Galatians and Matthew 18:

Gal. 6:1 ¶ Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.

Matt. 18:15 ¶ “If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over.

Matt. 18:16 But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’

Matt. 18:17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

Matt. 18:18 ¶ “I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

As well as many other verses that tell us to confront well:

Eph. 4:15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.

Prov. 27:5 Better is open rebuke than hidden love.

Prov. 25:12 Like an earring of gold or an ornament of fine gold is a wise man’s rebuke to a listening ear.

7. The person of integrity can “let the bad stuff go.”

This means that he or she does not let problems or failures continue on by holding grudges, unforgiveness, and labeling people after there has been a problem and that problem has been dealt with. The person of integrity grieves the issue (deals with his or her feelings), forgives, puts the person back in a “debt free” standing, and moves on. They get over it, to use the vernacular.

In managing people, being married, having friends, or parenting, this is one of the most important things that we can do. Everyone will fail us. When we have dealt with it, we have to let it go for things to get good again and progress past the problem. We cannot keep someone in the “dog house.” We have to let go of bitterness for the person to thrive past failure and for our relationship as well. Stop the punishment.

This is certainly rooted in the God of grace who forgives us and then calls us to do the same:

Dan. 9:9 The Lord our God is merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against him;

Dan. 9:10 we have not obeyed the LORD our God or kept the laws he gave us through his servants the prophets.

Eph. 4:31 Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.

Eph. 4:32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Eph. 5:1 ¶ Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children

2Cor. 5:19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

Psa. 103:8 The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.

Psa. 103:9 He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever;

Psa. 103:10 he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.

Psa. 103:11 For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him;

Psa. 103:12 as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

Psa. 103:13 As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him;

Psa. 103:14 for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust.

**Insert Illustration:** This is a great spot for an illustration of the power of forgiveness and how letting something go redeemed a person and brought them out of the place of being a "black sheep" and into future glory. Or, a great place for the power of God's forgiveness and the gospel.

8. The best way is to deal with a negative reality is to never have it in the first place.

This means that people of integrity avoid a lot of problems by their strength of character in saying "no" to things that are not good for them. They do not go forward into things that do not feel right, don't smell right, are with "not so good people," are hair-brained, or whatever. If something is wrong with it, they just say "no." They can walk away.

Prov. 12:26 A righteous man is cautious in friendship, but the way of the wicked leads them astray.

Prov. 3:21 My son, preserve sound judgment and discernment, do not let them out of your sight;

Prov. 3:22 they will be life for you, an ornament to grace your neck.

Prov. 3:23 Then you will go on your way in safety, and your foot will not stumble;

Prov. 3:24 when you lie down, you will not be afraid; when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet.

Prov. 4:14 Do not set foot on the path of the wicked or walk in the way of evil men.  
Prov. 4:15 Avoid it, do not travel on it; turn from it and go on your way.

Psa. 119:67 Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word.

Phil. 1:9 ¶ And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight,  
Phil. 1:10 so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ,  
Phil. 1:11 filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.

Prov. 13:2 From the fruit of his lips a man enjoys good things, but the unfaithful have a craving for violence.

Prov. 5:23 He will die for lack of discipline, led astray by his own great folly.

God's word guides us and protects us from having a lot of problems as we follow it and also develop the character that He asks us to in his Word, as well as our relationship with Him:

Psa. 119:9 How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word.

Psa. 119:37 Turn my eyes away from worthless things; preserve my life according to your word.

Psa. 119:105 Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.

Psa. 3:3 But you are a shield around me, O LORD; you bestow glory on me and lift up my head.

Conclusion: In the end, there are only two ways to live life. We can face the problems and negative realities that come into our lives and exist in the world around us, and thrive. Or, we can choose to not face them and have them destroy us. The first is more difficult in the beginning and leads to life, profits, fruitfulness, love and other good things. The second is easier in the beginning, but it leads to horrible things and ultimately destruction in the end. There are two ways....easy first, hard later, or hard first, easy later. God's way is face the problems now, and you will thrive in the end.

But, to do that requires certain character abilities. As we work on those through spiritual growth, we can resolve the negative realities in the strength and the way of the One who did it best.