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### **Trouble**

by William P. Wilson, M.D.

-- *Commentaries from past newsletters – Late Winter 2002*

*Sometimes I'm up  
Sometimes I'm down  
Oh, yes Lord  
Sometimes I'm almost to the ground*

#### **Refrain:**

*Nobody knows the trouble I've seen  
Nobody knows but Jesus  
Nobody knows the trouble I've seen  
Glory Hallelujah!*

*I never shall  
Forget that day  
When Jesus washed my sins away,  
Oh Yes Lord.*

#### **Refrain:**

*Nobody knows the trouble I've seen  
Nobody knows but Jesus  
Nobody knows the trouble I've seen  
Glory Hallelujah!*

"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."(John 16:33)

I have quoted the words to an old spiritual because it is a song that speaks to life. One of the main themes of existential philosophy and of Christianity is that life is full of trouble. There are troubles in our childhood, troubles in adolescence, troubles in early adulthood, troubles in our middle years and finally there are more troubles in old age. They come in all flavors. There are intra personal troubles, interpersonal troubles, physical troubles, psychological troubles and (sadly) spiritual troubles. All of them have to be dealt with so we should ask does being a Christian make a difference in dealing with our troubles? Is the promise Jesus made to be trusted?

Before we try to answer these questions we should first determine what trouble is? According to the dictionary trouble is something that worries or disturbs. So if trouble comes our way we develop worries that are created by the circumstances of the events. Worry is an emotional state that is characterized primarily by anxiety. Anxiety in these situations is a state of dread because we do not know how to cope or what the future

holds for that particular situation. We worry because we fear the consequences of the situations.

The most common of our troubles has to do with relationships. We have troubles in our relationships with our parents, wives and husbands, children, friends, other church members, fellow workers, pastor, doctor, and dentist. Life is full of relational troubles.

Troubles begin at birth. We can have birth injuries or be born prematurely. Birth always involves some trauma. Hopefully our parents love us even before we are born, but not all parents do, so troubles in the world can begin immediately. We have a radical need for love and if we do not get it, we will grow up with a serious defect in our emotional life. Also, when we come into the world we find that there will be relational troubles with persons other than our parents. If there are other children in our family they will be jealous. It is not uncommon for an older child to try to harm a new baby. Many times the older child tries to regress and wants to be treated like the new baby. They do not want to share the love of their parents with a child that requires so much attention. Our oldest child wanted to sleep in the same room with us because his brother was temporarily housed in our room. He also wanted to nurse from a bottle even though he had not used one for 6 months. Later he would pinch his brother and pull his hair. It took considerable punishment to get him to quit trying to get rid of his brother.

In my own life, my relationship with my brother was profoundly influenced by my jealousy of his presence in our home. I had never realized that our differences had their origin in early childhood until I was attending a conference in St. Petersburg FL. Barbara Schlemmer was the speaker. The title of her talk was "Healing of Early Life Hurts." She focused on the first five years of life. She gave the talk and then asked us to cooperate in a demonstration. We closed our eyes and were to be open to any images that might be memories of that year. As she opened with a prayer for the first year nothing came to my mind. She then prayed for the second year and again nothing came to mind. As she began to pray for the third year, I suddenly saw myself as a child age 2 years and 3 months standing in the front yard of our home looking out across an uncultivated field in front of me. As I stood there I realized that my brother had just been born in our house (they did home deliveries in those days). Because of his coming, I believed that I would never be loved again. This lie remained in my subconscious until I was over fifty years old. In a few moments of time I finally understood why I had never been able to relate closely to him. At the end of Barbara's prayer she asked us to pray that God would heal the hurts we had visualized. I prayed, repudiated the lie and was healed.

I planned to visit my brother for two days after the meeting as he lived nearby, so when the meeting was over I went to his home. I was amazed at the change in my attitude toward him. I loved him with a different love. We were by now both Christians, and for the first time in our lives we had much to talk about. My relationship continued to be one of real brotherly love up until his death of a brain tumor several years ago.

There are so many things that happen in early childhood that effect our lives. Brutal, cruel drunken fathers, drug addicted parents, sexual abuse, discord in the home, overly

attentive or neglectful parents and many other things can profoundly influence our later lives. As I have noted elsewhere I am convinced that the influences that cause many personality problems occur in the first five years of life. We do not remember the things that happened in this period of life, but they have had a profound influence on our personality and many times on our behavior. The fact that they are outside of conscious memory usually makes them inaccessible to ordinary psychotherapeutic techniques.

In our later childhood there are troubles in our relationships with our parents that have a profound effect on our lives. A very successful young business woman was in my office recently who had an alcoholic father. He was mean, cruel, hateful, and brutal. He would get drunk and abuse his wife and children verbally, physically, and emotionally. When he got on his drunken rampages, he often threatened their lives with a gun. On one occasion while he was abusing his wife he was shooting his gun into the ceiling and walls intermittently pointing it at the patient, her mother and brother. She was terror stricken so she ran out of the house across the yard. As she did her father told her to come back. She didn't obey him; instead she kept running. As she neared a tree on the edge of the yard he shot at her. She could hear the bullet whiz by her head. All the while her mother was screaming for her to come back. When the shot barely missed her, she turned and ran back.

Her father's verbal abuse was worse. It went something like this. He told her she was ugly, that she was stupid, lazy and worthless. She believed him. Her life since then had been directed toward proving him wrong. She dresses fit to kill. She is immaculately groomed and carefully coiffured. Even though she only has a high school education she has worked hard and established and managed a growing business that has been quite successful.

The abuse by her father has left her with a load of anger that influenced her relationships with men up until recently. Her first husband suffered from sloth and spent most of his time spending the money she made. After one child she divorced him and several years later she remarried. She realizes that she easily gets angry with her second husband and will blow up at him over minor things. Trouble has followed her throughout her life. Until she came to me, nobody knew the trouble she had seen in her life but Jesus. Fortunately, she had become a Christian along the way and now through a series of encounters with the Lord has been healed. She is an example of a person who had troubles in childhood that have profoundly influenced all her days for good and for bad until God healed her.

Throughout our school years we are going to have troubles. Since children are cliquish, they may reject a child who desperately wants to belong to the group. This creates hurt that affects the child's self-esteem. They wonder what it is about them that causes them to be rejected. Then there are teachers who reject certain children and sometimes even make their lives miserable. One of my patients was consistently embarrassed by a teacher when he was seven years old. This left indelible scars on his soul that profoundly influenced his relationships with all people.

Then there are troubles that beset kids in adolescence. One of my patients came to me because he had trouble relating sexually to women. He was disturbed by this so he sought help. As a child his parents had a boarder who lived in the house. This man coaxed the child into performing oral sex on him over a period of 2 years. Eventually the patient refused to continue and brought the relationship to an end. Even so, the experience had profoundly distorted his view of sex and although he could perform heterosexually he could not establish intimate relationships with the women he courted.

In late adolescence both boys and girls have many troubles. Such things as acne, voice changes, lack of breast growth, obesity or thinness have a profound effect on how a person sees them self. Because of deviance from the norm self-esteem suffers although our sense of wantedness is the primary determinant of good self-esteem. It is rejection or neglect by our parents and to some extent our peers that makes us feel inferior.

All through adolescence and for the rest of our life we have to learn how to relate to persons of the opposite sex. When I was twelve I admired a little girl who lived near my home. One day on the way home from school I approached her and told her I liked her and wanted to get to know her. I do not remember her exact words, but in essence she told me to “drop dead.” I was crushed for a few days and then made another effort with a different girl that was successful. The only trouble with that relationship was that I was so afraid of the girl’s mother that I did not kiss her. I have watched my children and the children of others struggle with establishing relationships and ending them. I distinctly remember my daughter’s reaction to the loss of one of her friends when the friend moved to another town. She learned from this event that relationships with friends are more temporary than with family.

As we grow older and our love affairs grow more serious we are going to suffer great disappointments. Someone we love dearly may find someone that they think is more of the person they want to live their life with and reject us. If we have really fallen in love, the pain may be as great as that we suffer when a marriage ends in divorce or when a mate dies.

Some in this age group get all “steamed up” to get married prematurely. This is particularly true of some girls. As a result they do not continue their education. This may leave them ill prepared to deal with problems in later life. They simply have not matured enough to deal with the problems of marriage and family.

Then there is the problem of discovering who we are and who we want to be. For years I took care of the psychiatric problems of most of the male undergraduate students at Duke University. Many of them came to school with top scholarships. They unfortunately did not know who they were and what they wanted to be. Even though they had 13-1600 SAT’s they flunked out of school, not because they were playing too much, but because they had no motivation. They did not have a good sense of self or goals for their lives so it made no sense to study. This caused them and their parents a lot of trouble.

In early adulthood we also have troubles. When we get married there may be trouble adjusting to the new state of being, because when we get married we are reborn. Some part of us has to die to make the new person. Two people have become one, and they have to start life anew. We now have to live our lives for someone else. All of a sudden we have lost the freedom we had in our single life. Some old habits have to be eradicated. New habits have to be developed. Before we marry we are not obligated to communicate with a person consistently. If we have not consistently communicated and had the example set for us we may find this difficult. Poor communication will cause trouble. It is also true that we cannot get together with our friends as often because we have to devote our time to our mates. We may even have to change our friends. This is especially true when we have to move into the new social world of our mate if it differs from ours. This may be fraught with troubles if we do not have flexible relational skills.

Then children come. With each one we are reborn again. In the family's love economy we have to make room for the newcomer. It is easy for parents, but as I have noted above it is difficult for other children especially an oldest child. When our first child is born they will share the previously undivided love of both parents. If one or both parents are love needy, this can cause trouble especially if one or the other parent directs all or most of their love to the child. The other parent may feel rejected which gives rise to resentment. Children, of course, bring all kinds of infections with them. There will be sleepless nights with ear infections or colds. Some children develop colic and scream their heads off all night long. With children we have plenty of troubles.

All the while, we are trying to advance our careers which gives rise to trouble. In the competitive world in which we live, we are going to suffer disappointments. We may be passed over for promotions, we may be released if the company changes its direction or if it merges with another company. Conflict can develop within the work place with a supervisor or another worker. Sometimes we press so hard to succeed that we burn out in our job. One of my friends works for a hi-tech company and in the present economic climate there has been such downsizing of the workforce that he now has 9 jobs to do instead of the one that he had done for several years. When they give him a new job now he just laughs because he knows he cannot do all of them. Management doesn't seem to realize that one person can do only so much.

Economic troubles seem to plague the young people of today. Credit card debt leads many of them into bankruptcy. I am afraid that parents do not do a good job of teaching their children how to manage money.

During the development of our careers we also have children troubles. As a matter of fact once we have them we will always have children troubles. Our children will have problems throughout their lives and we will share in them. I often tell the story of an encounter I had with a little lady on an airplane between Atlanta and New Orleans. She was frightened and I tried to allay her anxiety by engaging her in conversation. It was her first flight and she was quite anxious. I asked where she was going and found that

she was going to Phoenix AZ. I commented that it was a long ways off. She said it was, but she had to go be with her daughter and grandchildren. When I asked if they were ill, she told me that they were not. They had family troubles. Her son-in-law had left her daughter and she was going out to be of comfort and help to her daughter. Without prompting, she then began telling me about her own life and her troubles. She continued for the next hour and finally wound down.

We were nearing New Orleans so she changed the subject and asked me what I did. I told her that I was a physician. "What kind?" she asked. "I'm a brain scientist," I said. "Oh, you're a neurologist?" "No." "A neurosurgeon?" "No." "Oh, you're a psychiatrist, and to think I told you my whole life story!" she said. I reassured her that I understood her problems and hoped that she could be of help to her daughter. I learned from her, and later in my life that as a parent we will have troubles with our children for the rest of our lives. I have five and speak from experience.

In mid life children are growing up, we have achieved vocationally about all we are going to achieve, and suddenly there are no more worlds to conquer and we have what some call a mid-life crisis. This creates a restlessness in us and we begin to look for new things to assuage the restlessness that exists in our souls. What we thought would bring us meaning has brought no great satisfaction. We have nothing to look forward to. We don't want to start a new career, so we try any of the other secular things that we hope will bring new meaning into our lives. This can be alcohol, education, psychiatry, sex, exciting new sports, travel. But alas they don't work either. There are still plenty of troubles or we have compounded them.

Then around fifty we hit old age. We can join the AARP or Prime Timers but that won't help very much. The problem is that our bodies are wearing out and we cannot do the things physically that we have done in the past. When I was 52 I was still a scoutmaster and as I did annually, I took my boys on a 50 mile hike on the Appalachian Trail. On Roan Mountain we were caught in a severe rainstorm. The trail became quite muddy and on a descent I slipped and slid about 50 feet down the trail. I strained my knee and had some abrasions, but was otherwise unharmed. My knee was painful so I took a pain pill that I carried for emergencies. It got better and we then started up the next mountain where we planned to camp for the night. About half way up the mountain I was so exhausted that I had to stop. One of my boys came bounding down the mountain, picked up my pack and started back up. I told him to leave it – I could finish the climb. His response was, "C'mon Doc, you are getting old. Face it!" I did face it for I was getting old and I clearly lacked the stamina I had ten years before. I could no longer deny it.

After we reach 50 years of age deterioration proceeds at an increasing rate. Most women will have reached menopause at that age and their childbearing capacity ends. There are dramatic symptoms that are worrisome. These may be severe. Just as ovaries deteriorate, other parts of our bodies such as our joints, lungs, heart, muscles and skin show increasing signs of aging. Many people do not continue to exercise their

bodies and minds and both will deteriorate more quickly. Retirement is a bad thing for many. I wondered what my father would do when he retired since he had been so active in his life. When he finally quit working, he fished and hunted full time until he was 86 years old. My brother played golf full time. Others will volunteer full time. The ones who deteriorate the most rapidly, though, are the ones who really retire.

Many accumulate trouble by going home again. A couple who were friends of mine decided they would move from a community where they had a good church, many friends and family back to the wife's home town. It was a disaster. They built a modular home in a community that objected to that type of construction. They were sued by the residents, and even though they won in the courts they could develop no friends and had no family in that community so they were essentially isolated. They finally moved back to the town where they had previously lived. They spent five miserable years trying to go home again and finding that some can't go home again. If you try, it may result in troubles.

Retirement is also a problem for many people. They do not have criteria to help them decide whether to retire or keep on working, criteria to decide where they are going to live, and what kind of housing they are going to live in. They do not think about the quality of medical care in the community, and what kind of churches are available. Many go to retirement communities and find that they may not like to live around the halt, the lame and the blind. They may not like to live with people whose prime subject of conversation is their illnesses. They may not like to live away from the excitement and energetic activities of younger people. The economics of retirement is a problem for many people. It is recommended that people have 75% of the income they had when they were working. This is difficult for many persons because they may not have worked in occupations where they could build up retirement benefits.

Then too, I have watched many of my colleagues rot away in real retirement. It is not something that I wanted to do, so I have kept on working and finding new excitement in the opportunities that have come my way. My income is the same that it has always been although it is not adjusted for inflation, but I have all I need and a lot to give to the Lord's work. Somewhere I read an article in a Christian magazine that said that Christians can never retire. I agree with that.

The death of a mate is the most stressful event anyone can suffer. This person has been made a part of us and their death could be likened to having a part of us amputated without anesthesia. Grief is painful, and it is all the more painful if we do not have assurance of a future life together. One of my patients loved his wife dearly. She developed Alzheimer's disease and eventually had to be put in a nursing home. For seven years he cared for her at home and in the nursing facility. He sat by her bed each day for 8-10 hours tending to her every need. Even though he knew she was a Christian and he was too, he was, nevertheless, unable to release her when she died. I reassured him that the day would soon come when they would be reunited, but he missed her so much that it was no consolation to him. When I reminded him that she had not been in

the body that he so tenderly cared for during the seven years, it seemed to make no difference. Eventually with much prayer and a ritual mourning service he was able to release her and ended his grieving. He then could look forward to their reunion.

Life is never without troubles. Yet we have a counselor who will help us deal with our troubles. We have a comforter who comforts us in our hardships and trials. He said that he would make our yoke light (Matt. 11:28-30). In addition to the counselor we should have a church where we can find help. The Apostle encouraged us to comfort one another and to bear one another's burdens (2 Cor. 1:3-7, Gal. 6:2), and we must be sure that it is done in our church.

God is fully aware of our troubles (Luke 12:6,7). Even though He may not intervene in our lives when we are in trouble, He is still with us helping us deal with the problem. He does this by comforting us, giving us guidance and loving us. Even if our troubles are due to sin nothing can separate us from His love. We should always try to determine what we can learn from our troubles. If He does not tell us at the time, He will in the fullness of time help us to understand that there is a lesson to be learned from our trouble. It is hard to believe that good can come out of trouble, but it does. The best example in the Bible is that of Joseph who was sold into slavery by his brothers, sentenced to prison on false charges, and languished there until he was able to interpret the dreams of Pharaoh. He was then able to be the savior of his family and ultimately the nation of Israel. His brothers meant evil for him, but good came out of it. The Christian understanding of trouble and trial is best summed up in the scripture that says, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28). It is hard for some persons who are suffering to believe that scripture. Even so, it is well to give thanks in all things (1 Thess. 5:6-18) for some good will come out of it.

I would like to close with a story that does not have a happy ending, yet I am sure some good came out of it. A young woman was referred to me for counseling because she was severely depressed and wanted to die. The patient was a juvenile diabetic who had every complication in the book. She had such severe renal disease that she required chronic dialysis. She received two renal transplants and had rejected them both. Her diabetic retinopathy had resulted in near blindness. She had severe peripheral neuropathy that had her wheelchair bound. She had every reason to be depressed. I ascertained that she was not a Christian in my interview, so after adjusting her antidepressant medications I asked her to come back in a week. When she returned I found that she was not doing better so I began to talk to her about her support community. I found that she had none. She did have the one friend who had referred her to me, but that was all. Her mother was a cold and undemonstrative person who took good care of her physical needs, but gave her little emotional support. Because of her isolation I suggested that she needed a relationship with the Lord who would comfort her. I did not suggest He would heal her. At first she demurred, but after gentle exhortation she accepted the Lord and was saved. I began to disciple her and taught her how to pray, and had her ask her mother and friend read the Bible to her. Over the

next weeks she returned having grown in her faith. Knowing that she was going to die soon I began to talk to her about death and heaven. I assured her that she would be totally healed in heaven; that she would have a new body and there would be no depression. This assurance comforted her and she seemed much more relaxed and much happier. In time she continued to deteriorate physically and in a few months she died. During the time I was seeing her I did pray for her healing several times, but to no avail.

Did she benefit from her suffering? I know she did for it brought her to salvation, but I too benefited because I shared in her suffering. I learned a lot about comforting the dying. I have to admit that during my long career I had only a few patients that I was called on to work with intensively in their last months of life. In her case I did learn how to be comforting without having false optimism about her physical problems being healed. Treating her problem provided me with knowledge that I will use in teaching my seminary students. They will have to deal with the problems of a dying patient frequently, so much good will come out of her suffering. God says, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose (Rom. 8:28). Our job is to discern the good. Now we can answer the question we asked at the beginning. Yes! Being a Christian does make a difference when we have troubles.