



A “Practical” Approach to the Climate Crisis

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Every day I talk with people who want to know what can be done on a “practical” level to address the climate crisis. They are eager to find a way to make a meaningful difference but often get stymied by a sense of powerlessness in the face of an overwhelming situation.

I know this feeling well. I, too, have wrestled with it. Thankfully, two persons have helped me to realize the enormous potential we all have:

First, meet Powerless Peter. He acutely feels the weight of hopelessness with the climate crisis. Now, meet Empowered Paula. She seems to have never met a problem she cannot handle. She declares that the wisdom behind her success is the simple motto, “Make the solution match the problem.” When Powerless Peter asks Paula for “practical” advice on how to confront the climate crisis, she says, “First, let’s make sure we understand the problem, so we come up with the right solution.”

Powerless Peter quickly explains that he already knows everything about the science of greenhouse gases. Paula patiently affirms and adds, “We also need to be clear that we are talking about more than a science problem. We are talking about a social change problem. The leaders of the fossil fuel industry and our government have known the science of climate change for a long time. The science doesn’t seem to scare them straight.”

Powerless Peter glumly declares, “That’s why I have given up on politicians, and why I focus on what I can practically do at home.” Powerless Peter then recounts all the ways he reduces his energy usage. Again, Empowered Paula affirms Powerless Peter: “What you are doing is great, but I also want to be honest with you, because you’re my friend. I do a lot of things you do, but at the same time, I continually ask myself: Do all of these things really amount to bringing a garden hose to fight a forest fire?”

Empowered Paula explains how a lot of changes to individual lifestyles can initially seem “practical” because just about everyone can grab a garden hose and turn on the faucet, but they are not practical compared to the scale of the problem. They also do not address the climate crisis as a social change problem. She asserts, “That’s why I always say, ‘Make the solution match the problem!’ The practical thing is to build a movement powerful enough to confront those who seem to currently have all the power.”

Powerless Peter finds himself curious by Empowered Paula’s spirited resolve. “Where do you get all your hope?” he asks. Paula responds, “I realize it’s not just a science problem and not just a social change problem, but it is also a spiritual problem—or what I would call a faith problem. For me, faith is the courage to act despite what seems like an impossible situation.”

“Believe it or not, Peter, being with you and knowing how much you care about these issues helps give me a bit of that courage. I believe together we can help build the movement we need.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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