

The Parable of the Moths: How small annoyances can turn into big problems if left unchecked.
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Every geographical area seems to have its own special bugs. When I lived in Utah while attending school, it was the basement spiders I'd have nightmares about. We moved to Philadelphia so my husband could attend grad school and it was the cockroaches that all the row-house residents seemed to share and you could never get rid of. When we returned to southern California where my husband and I grew up, we became all too acquainted with moths.

The problem started not long after we moved in. I noticed a few moths flying around our bedroom. I didn't think much of it because you see moths from time to time anyway. I didn't remember and hadn't made the connection that perhaps they were there because I had left a bag of trail mix on the bookshelf in our room. As the days went on, I saw more and more moths. I'd occasionally squish one or two of them, but it wasn't making a dent. In the back of my mind, I knew there must be a source that kept them nourished and kept them coming, but I pushed that thought out of my mind and told myself I didn't have time to figure it out, let alone clean up any more messes. I told myself that when I had time, it would be a quick fix, problem solved.

When the problem got to be more than just an annoyance, I finally looked into where all of this was coming from. Taking a closer look at the bookshelf, I discovered, to my horror, that the bag of trail mix was full of moths and the contents therein had begun to turn into mush. I immediately threw out what was left of the trail mix, along with the moths. I sanitized the shelf and made sure there wasn't anything left for them to snack on. I thought my problem was over and done with. However, my lack of attention to this problem early on left me with an unexpected headache.

In the days and weeks following my clean up, I would still see a moth from time to time. I didn't know where they could be coming from. Again, I took a closer look and realized the moths had laid eggs in the bindings of my books and in practically all of the video tapes of my large VHS collection. For the next week, I painstakingly took down each book and each tape to check for and clean out any moth eggs. What could have taken a few minutes to clean up in the beginning took hours and hours to clean up because of my negligence. Better yet, I could have avoided the problem altogether by not keeping any food in my room.

Problems are a lot like insects. We can avoid many of them with prevention. When that doesn't happen, we can minimize the impact when we stay on top of them and give them proper attention. Ignoring problems generally leads to them taking more hold in our lives and leaving us with bigger consequences. We are all going to face various trials and problems in our lives. Low-risk health concerns can be addressed by exercising and eating right or, when neglected, they can turn into a major crisis. If we turn to numbing to cope, a few hours to "check out" can potentially turn into major addictions (over-eating, over-spending, drinking, drugging, overworking, or just making ourselves so busy we don't stop to enjoy life). Miscommunication and missteps in our relationships can leave us feeling disconnected and lead to more contention with our loved ones. There are many problems that we can't prevent, such as when a loved one makes a poor decision that affects us directly. We still get to choose our response. We can still choose to actively address the parts we have control over, namely: our behavior and our attitude.

Every day we can choose to be "all in." It means being fully aware of what is happening in our lives. Right here. Right now. We can choose to be deliberate in the choices we make. When we are mindful and present, we can get a jump start on our problems and challenges. We can seek help when needed. We can actively do things to minimize consequences. As always, when we find ourselves deep in a problem, we might have to take a lot more time to dig our way out of it, like I did with the moths. Ultimately, we hope to learn from our experiences. Now, whenever I see a moth, I don't ignore it. I squish it!