

Dealing With Life's Obstacles  
March 18, 2018

After crossing the Jordan River into the Promised Land, the Israelites faced a formidable obstacle. The city of Jericho was the first city they came to and the strongest. It was a huge test of their faith in God.

We all face various kinds of obstacles in life. Some we are born with. Some people are born with physical handicaps. Others develop physical problems as they grow, like food allergies or asthma. I met a man at seminary who developed type 1 diabetes in his twenties.

Some obstacles are placed in our way by other people. A bully torments you. A neighbor lets his dog run loose. Someone steals your car and suddenly you are without transportation. Maybe you are denied a job because of discrimination. These are obstacles that others throw up in our way.

Some obstacles are just a part of your current stage of life. To finish this grade in school will require you to write reports, read textbooks, pass tests, and do projects. All of these are obstacles that need to be worked through in order to move to the next higher grade.

You want to attend college but you have no one to pay your way and have to hunt for grants and scholarships. Or you have to work your way through school. Or worse yet, you take out loans. And paying back those loans will be a big obstacle after graduation.

Finding an affordable and decent place to live is an obstacle for many people. And for some people, supplying the needs of their children becomes an obstacle.

We all face various kinds of obstacles in life. Some of you may have some specific obstacles on your mind today. You are facing a problem right now. None of us know all the obstacles that will pop up against us this week. But God knows. God knows what obstacles are coming your way. And God already has a plan to help you. God also has a plan for how He wants us to respond to the obstacles that we face.

**James 1:2-4 (NIV) Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.**

Obstacles test our faith. How do they test our faith? They test our faith because we have to persevere in trusting God. Obstacles test our beliefs about God. And this is how...

**In the face of obstacles:**

- Do I believe God's promises to me?**
- Do I believe in God's presence with me?**
- Do I believe in God's power to help me?**
- Do I trust God's love for me?**

**These and other faith questions face us when obstacles confront us. And then faith answers, "Yes, I will trust God through this obstacle."**

Obstacles, trials, problems test your faith in God. They test the theology you say you believe. So we must reaffirm our faith in God and then perseverance in obeying God.

**Perseverance means to push through, while trusting in God.**

Perseverance obeys God no matter the obstacle in our way. Only as we push through, with the help of God, will our faith grow.

Now when new obstacles arise our faith, or lack of faith, is exhibited in our responses to them. There are two kinds of responses. **We respond first inwardly (v 2) and then outwardly (v 5) to obstacles we face.**

James writes of both. The first, the inward concerns our attitude towards the obstacle.

**1. Adopt the right attitude toward an obstacle.**

When you come to an obstacle in your path, do you fuss and fume inside? Do you think to yourself, "I don't deserve this," or "I don't want to deal this," or "Not again," or "It's not fair," or other thoughts like these? Do you grumble? Do you complain? Do you pout in your spirit?

James says to adopt a different attitude. This attitude should be along the lines of, "Oh good, here is an opportunity for me to see God at work, making my faith stronger."

**James 1:2 (Phillips) When all kinds of trials... crowd into your lives..., don't resent them as intruders, but welcome them as friends!**

Is that how YOU respond to obstacles, problems, set-backs and trials? Our attitude says something about our faith in God. Our first response is an inward response.

And then what outward response do you take? Do you try to get someone else to take care of it for you? Do you avoid it, ignore it, hoping it will go away? Do you try to bargain with God to just miraculously remove it? Do you resent God for allowing it and slack off in prayer?

Or do you take it immediately to God in prayer? People of faith take it to Jesus. And then if they need wisdom to get through it, they seek that from God. That is what James writes next.

**James 1:5-8 (NIV) If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.**

And here is the point about an outward response.

**2. Seek God's help if needed.**

You may already know what to do to work through this obstacle. But sometimes you won't. The Israelites did not know how to take Jericho. So they depended on God.

If you need help in dealing with the obstacle in your path, seek help from God. But do so with faith in His love, His power, and His presence. This is why trials test our faith. They test what we believe about God. So reaffirm what you believe about God and seek His help to plow

through the problem. When God gives you victory, your faith in Him will grow. I will illustrate with the Israelites experience.

When the Israelites first entered the land God promised for them to live in, there was a huge obstacle. There were all these other people already living in the land. These other people were going to have to be overcome in order for the Israelites to settle in the land of Canaan. And the first bunch of these people they encountered were living together in the city of Jericho.

**Joshua 6:1-5 (NIV) Now Jericho was tightly shut up because of the Israelites. No one went out and no one came in. Then the LORD said to Joshua, "See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men. March around the city once with all the armed men. Do this for six days. Have seven priests carry trumpets of rams' horns in front of the ark. On the seventh day, march around the city seven times, with the priests blowing the trumpets. When you hear them sound a long blast on the trumpets, have all the people give a loud shout; then the wall of the city will collapse and the people will go up, every man straight in."**

And that is exactly what happened. Joshua rallied the people together, and led them to be obedient to God's plan. On the seventh day, the walls came tumbling down, and the Israelites took the city.

Now let's go back a bit. Let me give you the back story to set up the context for what happened in Joshua 6. The previous generation of Israelites had all been born in Egypt. They were slaves to the Egyptians in Egypt. This had been going on for about 200 years.

Then God raised up a man, Moses, to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. God rescued them from their slavery there. God did so with some pretty fantastic miracles. But they did not have faith in God. Despite God's rescue of them, they had not learned to persevere. So when a big test of their faith came up, they failed.

It was like this. They sent spies into the Promised Land to scout out the task of taking over the land. And despite all that God had done for them so far, this is what they concluded.

**Numbers 13: 28, 32-33 (NIV) "The people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large... All the people we saw there are of great size... We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them."**

They failed to trust in God. They refused to obey Him. So God had them live in the wilderness for the next 40 years until that whole generation of adults died out. And then God was ready to take the next generation into the Promised Land.

Let me tell you what God did during those 40 years. God did miracles among them every day of those 40 years. He did miracles to lead them, to feed them, and to clothe them. And the faith of that next generation grew.

So now, in Joshua 6, it is time to take the Promised Land. And when God tells them the plan, not one person balks or complains. As strange as the plan sounded, they obeyed. They persevered through seven days of marching around Jericho.

Now why did they have to march around the city? He did not need them to do so in order for the walls to come down. God could have dematerialized them. "Beam them up, Scotty." God

could have rained down fire and brimstone from heaven and melted the walls. God could have washed them away with hail, rain, and earthquake. So why did God have the Israelites march around the city?

He was testing their faith and obedience. They were still learning lessons of trust in God, faith in God, and obedience to God. Even if it sounded ridiculous, which it did, they needed to obey. And God did His part and their faith in Him grew stronger.

God may tell you to do something that doesn't make sense. If He does, obey anyway.

Obstacles come to all of us to test our faith. Obstacles come to churches too.

Right now our church is facing obstacles. We are teaching God's word every week. We are trying to plant the word of God into hearts, believing that God will produce a harvest from our efforts. And obstacles crop up in our way. We need to trust God for help and embrace these obstacles in prayer.

For example, we are praying to have enough workers for Vacation Bible School this summer. This is just one of several needs we have right now as a church. Let us embrace them with joy as God seeks to grow our faith.

### Invitation

If any of you are not yet trusting in Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins, I encourage you to do so today. God loves you and sent Jesus to be the Savior you need. If you will receive Jesus as your Savior and Lord, you will be saved from your sins and can live right with God.

Christian, do you ever wonder why you don't have more of the joy and victory that we see in the New Testament Christians? Could one reason be that you are not adopting the right attitude towards the obstacles in your life? In Acts 5, the apostles had been arrested by the chief priests for preaching the resurrection of Jesus.

**Acts 5:40-41 (NIV) They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.**

They had just been flogged and they left rejoicing because of it. Were they crazy? Or did they have an attitude towards trials that we have refused to adopt?

Could it be that you don't have that kind of enthusiasm for the Kingdom of God, and our church doesn't have the results we would like to see, because we have a very worldly attitude towards our afflictions instead of doing what James says to do?

If Jesus is asking that of you this morning, what are going to say in reply?