

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES THROUGH THE STUDY OF GOD'S WORD

Do you ever wonder why obstacles have to blemish the path of life? Dreams turn into major disappointments; future plans fail; hopes fade away. How do you hold it together when things fall apart? For me, the secret was found in the Bible. God's Word has sustained me through life's trials over and over again. I discovered that obstacles can turn into blessings. God uses the difficulty to draw us closer to Him; He allows our pain to develop more compassion in us. Then we can help someone else down the road because of what we went through. Our experiences become our future ministry. Others are helped when we witness of the way God sustained us through the hard times of life. Only He can turn circumstances around for good. My prayer for you who follow along in these lessons is that you'll be encouraged to pursue more of God through the study of His Word...and find the Bible to be your Source of strength and inspiration for daily living.

The Amplified Bible tells us in Isaiah 58:10 ***"Pour out that with which you sustain your own life."*** I believe God has called me to pour out on others the very things He used to sustain me, truths that held me together when everything around me was seemingly falling apart.

Matthew 4:4 tells us, ***"Man shall not live, be upheld and sustained by bread alone, but by every word that comes forth out of the mouth of God."*** God's Word became the food that nourished and sustained me.

His Word became my **LIFELINE** when I thought I was sinking; my **PLUMB LINE** when I needed a pattern for living; and my **GUIDELINE** when I needed wisdom for decisions. There is power in the Word of God and that's what these lessons are all about. So let's get started.

As God's children, I think it's safe to assume that there is no such thing as a coincidence when it comes to our life experiences. The Bible tells us that He planned out all of our days before we were even born.

DAY ONE

1. Read Psalm 139:13-16 and list the verbs (action words) that explain His part in our birth. There are at least five depending on the version you are using.

This Psalm explains that God has a plan for each one of us! It's so detailed that God wrote it down before we were even born. Just think, the entire span of our lives is a sovereign decision, and it is written in God's royal register in heaven. In fact, every day is a blank canvas where God desires our cooperation to complete it. I remember watching my children "paint" on the magical pages of a special coloring book when they were little. It was the kind that didn't need real paint, but where a brush dipped in water revealed the colors hidden beneath the dry pages. It was a wonderful way to keep a child occupied without making a mess. Just add water to expose what was already there. God plan is already there, ready to be revealed. It's written down, even though we can't see it. Yet, as we cooperate with Him and water our lives with His Word and prayer, the picture becomes clear and beautiful. And sometimes God allows us to color outside the lines!

In the Purpose Driven Life, Rick Warren states that, "God prescribed every single detail of your body. He deliberately chose your race, the color of your skin, your hair, and every other feature. He also determined the natural talents you would possess and the uniqueness of your personality...Many children are unplanned by their parents but they are not unplanned by God."

Our Father is a God of plan and vision. We know His Word is true, but we may wonder why things have to get so difficult. What keeps His plan from being fulfilled?

2. What is the declaration of Isaiah 14:24?

3. What does Isaiah 14:27 say about anything standing in the way of God's purposes?

4. Now, look up the definition of the word, "obstacle" in a dictionary and write out its meaning. Then list some synonyms the definition conjures up in your mind.

5. Explain how Proverbs 19:21 distinguishes man's plans from God's purposes?

6. What does Psalm 33:10-11 have to add to these truths?

Nothing can defeat or frustrate God's purposes, not even our own man-made plans! If you thought of some synonyms for the word, "obstacle," you probably came up with words like, "hindrance, obstruction, or blockade." An obstacle is something that gets in the way of action or stops our progress. It applies to something that must be

moved or overcome before one can continue toward a goal. An obstacles blocks passage or makes progress difficult.

There are all sorts and sizes of obstacles...from little problems, to delays, detours, opposition, offenses, dashed hopes, illnesses, financial burdens, broken relationships, indecision and even weariness. You could probably name a few of your own.

Yet, have you ever thought that obstacles can also be a set of circumstances arranged by the Lord to accomplish something specific within our lives. He permits these things to show us His faithfulness and to teach us to trust Him. The Lord tests us through divine arrangements placed in our path for the purpose of our growth. We must either move them or overcome them—it's up to us to cooperate with God in making that decision.

When I graduated from high school, I was planning to attend a popular Christian college. There was no academic reason why I shouldn't have been accepted but God intervened. He placed an obstacle on my path that shut the door to my dreams. I wasn't accepted and was heartbroken over the rejection. God shut the door to one school and opened it to another, but it wasn't until later that I could really thank Him for doing so. You see, the man He planned for me to marry was already enrolled at this other college, so He had to stop me from moving in the wrong direction. He put an obstacle on my path. Even though it was painful at the time, it was God's protection over me. Someone had told me as a young girl to pray for the husband God would give me some day. I had been doing that as well as asking God for guidance in choosing a college. I just didn't expect things to happen the way they did. But God knew best, and I'm very glad He stopped my plans and rearranged my steps. Since obstacles can be for our own good, how we respond to them is the challenge! Sometimes they're not in God's will and we need His help to overcome them or to move them out of the way.

DAY TWO

1. What does 1 Corinthians 13:2B say it takes to move mountains? _____

2. Check out Hebrews 11:1 for a definition of what it takes.

3. What does Mark 11:22-23 say we can do in order to move a mountain out of our way?

It takes our *faith* in the absolute supreme power of the Almighty God to move mountains of obstacles out of our way. It also takes our *mouth*. We must "speak" the Word of God out loud, believing that what we "say" will happen. God gives us authority through Jesus Christ to speak to our mountains to move out of the way!

4. What does Luke 10:19 say about overcoming our obstacles? _____

5. What's the key from Romans 12:21 for overcoming evil? _____

Can you tell of a time you did that? _____

6. Verses in I John 5:4-5 give insight into overcoming evil obstacles. Describe an overcomer.

Now let's look at the books of Haggai and Zechariah in the Old Testament where God's people were hindered from completing God's plan. The people of Judah had been held captive for 70 years but were finally allowed to go home. They wanted to rebuild the house of God in Jerusalem that had been destroyed, but soon faced serious opposition. Their enemies exerted political pressure to stop the reconstruction, and the Jews were afraid to continue for sixteen years. God sent messengers or prophets to encourage the people to begin the process again.

7. Read Zechariah 4:6. What is the encouragement given here?

So often we think we have to make something happen in our own strength. We often think things won't get done unless we do them. We can even get to manipulating situations in hopes they will turn out according to our wishes.

When our younger son went to junior high, he was not placed with any of his friends from grade school. It was a difficult transition, and we were concerned about the kind of friendships he was forming in his new school. My husband and I wanted him to transfer to a Christian academy but felt impressed to wait on God. It had to be our son's decision. We did not manipulate or hound him with our desires. We just prayed. After he tried out for boys' basketball and made the team, it seemed that he was to remain in public school. But God was at work. I will never forget the day he announced that he needed to go to a Christian school. I couldn't believe what he was saying. I almost argued with him since he had just made the team, until I realized this was exactly how we had been praying. This change happened by God's Spirit, not by our human effort or manipulation. Even though he made the team, his mind was changed in answer to our prayers. It was the best decision he could have ever made as we saw this was God's plan for his life. I'm so thankful that nothing interferes with God's purposes.

The Bible tells us that our might and power is futile. God's Spirit is what makes the difference! In Hosea 1:7, God says, ***"I will personally free them from their enemies without any help from weapons or armies."*** God wants us to depend on Him, not on our own strength or reasoning.

8. In light of the above verses, write down what Psalm 20:7 has to say?

God had warned the kings of Israel to not acquire great numbers of horses because He wanted them to recognize His power and might in fighting their battles.

9. Can you think of some things we might try to acquire today for our protection and security instead of trusting in God alone?

Psalm 33:16-18 says, ***“No king is saved by the size of his army; no warrior escapes by his great strength. A horse is a vain hope for deliverance; despite all its great strength it cannot save. But the eyes of the Lord are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love to deliver them from death and keep them alive in famine.”***

What if we replace the words above with things of our vernacular? For instance, *“No one is saved by the size of their bank account; a sizeable retirement is a vain hope for deliverance; despite all its great wealth it cannot save.”* Oh, Lord, help us to trust in your unfailing love to keep us alive and well in the days ahead.

DAY THREE

1. Who was the Zerubbabel mentioned in Haggai 1:1? _____

2. What sparked the enthusiasm to keep them rebuilding found in Haggai 1:13?

3. What obstacle did Zerubbabel face in Ezra 3:12?

4. What happened in Ezra 4:4-5?

5. What encouraging word does the prophet speak to Zerubbabel in Zech. 4:7-9?

6. Zechariah 4:10 gives another word of encouragement that all of us can apply today. What's the good word here?

Any mountainous obstacle in Zerubbabel's way would become as nothing before the power of God's Spirit. All of his work for God depended not on human strength or power to overcome obstacles, but upon God's Spirit. Often we won't continue on because someone criticizes us or makes us feel like our efforts are too small. People's opinions can hinder our progress or discourage us from completing the task. Can you think of a time when your opposition came not only from an enemy but also from someone close to you?

7. Which do you think is most difficult? Explain.

Opposition is very difficult when it comes from an enemy, but when a close friend or family member is involved, it can become unbearable. One of the most difficult experiences of my life was when a close friend and I had a major disagreement. Neither of us met the other's expectations, and it took months to work through. I never imagined anything could have come between us, and the pain was often unbearable. We were both believers, attended church together, and shared our lives. What helped me the most was reading about David's anguish in Psalm 55:12-14. ***"If an enemy were insulting me, I could endure it; if a foe were raising himself against me, I could hide from him. BUT IT IS YOU, my equal, my companion, my close friend, with whom I once enjoyed sweet fellowship as we walked to the house of God."*** God's Word became a soothing balm as I realized my problem was not unique. I'll share in later lessons how His Word guided my decisions to bring restoration and healing to us both.

DAY FOUR

1. Describe what God does for our path from Isaiah 42:16.

2. How does the building in Zechariah compare to that of Ephesians 2:20-22?

3. Read 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 to further explain this truth and see the value these temples are to God.

We are all being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit. Notice the phrase in Ephesians 2:21, **“rises to become a holy temple in the Lord”**. God is all about building us up and joining us together to rise up to be a place where His glory dwells, where He can be seen in us. Our enemy opposes us in this building process. How will we respond? I love what Isaiah 60:1 says in the Amplified Bible.

“Arise from the depression and prostration in which circumstances have kept you—rise to a new life.” In other words, don’t just sit there wallowing in self-pity when you face an obstacle. Don’t settle into depression as a way of life. God says to come up higher! He’s in the building up business, and we must do our part to cooperate with the Master Architect and Builder.

4. What does Jeremiah 29:11 promise us regarding our future?

We’ve got the promise and we can take it to the bank! But what do we do when our path is blocked and we don’t seem to have that hope and future? Is the obstacle God-ordained? Or is it God-allowed? Either way, God works it for our ultimate good. When my husband worked for a local CPA firm, it seemed that they owned his body, soul and spirit. They seemed to control our every decision, and the hours he was required to work consumed our lives. I was in a Bible study at the time where God used a verse in John to speak to me personally. When Pilate asked Jesus if he realized he had the power to free or crucify him, Jesus replied in John 19:11, **“You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above.”** In the same way, I had to come to the reality that God was my ultimate authority and that no one had power over me unless He allowed it. God is truly in control! In fact, there is a verse in the Philips Translation from 1 Timothy 6:15 that declares, **“God is the Blessed Controller of All Things.”** Do you believe that today in your circumstances?

5. Name some obstacles you have faced in your life. How did you respond?

6. How should we respond to obstacles? Read Proverbs 3:6.

The Amplified version reads, **“In all your ways know, recognize, and acknowledge Him, and He will direct and make straight and plain your paths.”**

How do I acknowledge God? The Hebrew word for *acknowledge* is “yada” which means *to know, recognize, to have respect for, be acquainted with, or make known to a familiar friend*. Isn’t it interesting to realize that God is asking us to recognize Him as a familiar friend in whatever we face in life! Will we respect Him enough to seek His will in every situation? God wants us to present our circumstances to Him. That means we consecrate or dedicate them to God, so they will be set apart for His use. Nothing is wasted in God’s sight. I love the Amplified Translation of Psalm 119:6-7 which explains this concept with more insight.

“I learn by sanctified experiences Your righteous judgments, Your decisions against and punishments for particular lines of thought and conduct.”

Sanctified experiences! Sanctify means to pronounce them as consecrated and dedicated to God—set apart for the use of God. We must bring our experiences to the Lord for Him to sanctify for His purposes. Then He will use them to teach us how to think and conduct ourselves in all circumstances of life. He will help us move that obstacle on our path or cause us to walk over it so we won’t keep going around the same mountain over and over again. God is always the Victor when we acknowledge Him.

Another part of acknowledging Him is to find scriptures in God’s Word that relate to the problem. The Word of God is never really ours until it has been personalized in our life experiences. We can read and believe truth on the page or when we hear it in a sermon, but when it becomes personalized we can actually witness to its power.

God sometimes speaks a personal word to us that will leap off the page and cause our faith to rise. I’ve heard that such a word is called “Rhema” which means “uttered, poured forth, spoken or commanded.” I love to imagine the body of a sword as the “Logos” which is the written Word of God in the Bible, and the tip or point of the blade as the “Rhema.” It’s that tip that speaks to our particular situation and penetrates and pierces our life with encouragement, challenge or direction for living.

7. Write out the description of God’s Holy Word from Hebrews 4:12.

8. What are we to do with that Sword of the Spirit mentioned in Ephesians 6:17?

Wield means we are permitted to exercise, hold, use, manage, or control the Sword of God’s Word so it will pierce the very core of our obstacle. The key is to study the Word and pray every day in the Secret Place. Know God in the good times, so when the obstacles loom across your path, you will know how to respond.

The Bible tells us that the tongue has the power of life and death. Let's consider what's coming out of our mouths this week. Instead of speaking negative words, do we encourage others? Do we speak words of thanksgiving and praise? Do we verbalize the Word of God over our lives?

DAY FIVE

1. What did David tell Solomon to encourage him in building the temple from 1 Chronicles 28:20?
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2. How did Hezekiah encourage the people facing their enemy in 2 Chronicles 32:7-8?
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Next time someone you know is challenged or discouraged, try speaking words from the Bible to them. Speak them to yourself! God's Word will empower us with boldness and courage to endure. It is a powerful sword that breaks the rock of stubborn resistance. It is a fire that consumes. It is a weapon that penetrates and divides. It is a judge over our thoughts and attitudes. God's spoken Word will make all the difference in the end. Try it next time you or someone you love needs encouraging.

3. In the story of Jehoshaphat in 2 Chronicles 20:21, name the weapon the people used to defeat the enemy. What were their exact words?
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4. What did God tell Joshua when He called him to take the place of Moses? Joshua 1:6-7
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5. What was the command from Joshua 1:8 regarding the Word of God?
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“Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth!” That means we are to speak the Word out loud over our circumstances. There is power in the spoken word. God says in Romans 10:8-10, ***“The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart... if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.”***

Since salvation requires confession from our mouths of what we believe, this must apply to other areas of the Christian walk as well. What are we speaking today?

6. Look up 2 Corinthians 4:13 to see what we are to speak.

Father, thank You that You created me with purpose. Thank You that nothing happens to me without your permission. Help me to believe Your Word and to act upon it. Help me to understand the power of speaking out Your Word in every circumstance and to depend on You alone. As the temple of God, please help me to cooperate with You in this building process. May I arise out of any depression or prostration in which circumstances have kept me. May I rise to become a holy temple, a place where you dwell. Help me to acknowledge You in every situation I face, realizing that these sanctified experiences will teach me Your way of thinking and conduct. I want to have the mind of Christ. I acknowledge that I am utterly helpless and totally dependent on You. I will say what I believe. I will meditate on Your Word day and night to observe all that is written in it. Then I shall make my way prosperous, deal wisely and have good success. In Jesus' Name, Amen.