

From Obstacles to Opportunities

Obstacles and difficulties in life can be challenging! B.C.  Forbes was a Scottish financial journalist and author. He once said: "History has demonstrated that the most notable winners usually encountered heartbreaking obstacles before they triumphed. They finally won because they refused to become discouraged by their defeats. Disappointments acted as a challenge. Don't let difficulties discourage you."

Often our obstacles can be used to activate dormant giftings within us that we have failed to realize. These difficulties can also bring new strength to our lives. Don't you love the way the very situations we hate and avoid at all costs can be used to propel us into something wonderful?

Men and women throughout history have allowed life's hard places to be turned into opportunities for good.

- A diving accident in 1967 left 17-year-old Joni Eareckson Tada a quadriplegic. She was confined to a wheelchair and unable to use her arms. Tada developed a determination to overcome her handicap. Her name is now recognized around the world as a person who encourages others to break free from their limitations. She is an artist, musician, author, radio host and founder of Joni and Friends, a ministry to the disability community. In 2005, she was appointed to the Disability Advisory Committee of the U.S. State Department.
- Sheila Holzworth lost her sight at age 10 when the orthodontic headgear attached to her braces snapped. Her eyes were gouged, and she was blinded. In spite of her blindness, Holzworth climbed Mt. Rainer's icy summit in 1981. She also became an international figure in athletics for the disabled. In 1989 Holzworth was named

an Outstanding Young American by the United States Junior Jaycees.

- The apostle Paul wrote of times when he was beaten and left for dead. He describes being stoned, experiencing shipwreck, enduring dangers all around him and surviving many hardships (2 Cor. 11:22-30). He learned to turn these obstacles into opportunities for God.

Opportunities can be defined as “a set of circumstances that provide a chance or a possibility.” These opportunities can be blessings that present themselves to be grasped, or they can be lost. Circumstances are all around us. As these circumstances are grasped, opportunities surface.

The Lord uses adversity and difficult obstacles to strengthen us. He does not always cause the situation, but He will take every hard thing in our lives and use it for our good. I love what James Dobson says in his book *When God Doesn't Make Sense*:

“Is there a logical reason why the Lord asks us to strengthen our resolve and meet our difficulties head-on? We cannot be spiritually stable and emotionally unstable at the same time. We are in a spiritual war with a deadly foe tracking us every hour of the day. Flabby, overindulged, pampered Christians just don't have the stamina to fight this battle. Thus, the Lord puts us on a spiritual treadmill every now and then to keep us in good fighting condition.”

A good verse to hold on to when obstacles try to limit your progress is Romans 8:28: “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”

God has a high calling and a purpose for your life. Allow the obstacles along your path to strengthen you—and turn them into opportunities for good. This probably sounds good, but how do we do this?

- Identify the greatest obstacle hindering your progress. That obstacle may be a mindset of failure or defeat. Often, the greatest battlefield is in our minds. Henry Ford once said, "Failure is the opportunity to begin again more intelligently." Get up and begin again. You learned some valuable lessons during those difficult days. You are now ready to move forward.
- Find the redemptive quality in your obstacle. Find the ingredient necessary for lemonade in your bucket of lemons! History tells us that Winston Churchill was defeated as prime minister after World War II. His wife tried to encourage him. She told him his defeat was a blessing in disguise. "If it is," Churchill replied, "then it is very effectively disguised." Although he was devastated over his defeat, he learned through the hard place. Later he went on to fulfill his very illustrious career. He found a redemptive ingredient in the midst of his great obstacle, including winning the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1953.
- Let the Lord bring comfort and strength to you during this time. David woke up one morning rejoicing over the prospect of going home to Ziklag after a victorious battle. By the end of the day, he and his soldiers felt like the rug had been pulled from under them. Their wives and children were captured. Their homes were burned. His own men turned against him. Someone described that day as the worst of David's life. But David learned to encourage himself in the Lord (see 1 Sam. 30:1-6).

When our circumstances are not encouraging, the presence of the Lord encourages us. When no person is around to encourage us, the Lord will speak to us and encourage us. When you feel you have had the worst day of your life, allow the Lord to comfort and encourage you. He will never leave you and will not forsake you.

Allow the Lord to give you a new plan that turns your obstacle into opportunity. J. Sidlow Baxter, a pastor, author and a theologian, said: "What is the difference between an obstacle and an opportunity? Our attitude toward it. Every opportunity has a difficulty and every difficulty has an opportunity."

Begin to create opportunities out of your obstacles. Fight for the right to fulfill God's destiny for your life. God's future for your life is waiting for you to apprehend it.

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