

DEALING WITH OBSTACLES IN YOUR LIFE

We are studying how to become a good leader and there are all of these lessons to help you learn how to become one. Maybe you have grandchildren that have no one teaching them how. Maybe they have family situations, the worst possible situation, and yet you can see leadership in them. You can sense that God is calling them. I worked in a Franklin Graham Crusade in our town once. I was working at the altar praying with people who came down to give their hearts to the Lord. One of these people was a little boy who might have been around 7. He had come forward to accept Christ as his Savior. I was praying with him and suddenly something hit me and I thought, "This little boy has a big call on his life. I need to talk to whoever brought him." I said to him, "Are you here with your parents?" He said, "No, I am here with my grandmother." "Where is your grandmother?" He answered, "Up there." She was at the very top of the bleachers and I was on the very bottom, down where the football players stand. I thought, "All right, you have to do it or not. It doesn't matter how hard it is to climb up all those stairs and back down. You go do it. This is important in this little boy's life." I climbed those stairs and took him with me. I talked to the grandmother, and I said, "I have prayed with your grandson. He has asked the Lord into his heart. But, I need to tell you something. While I was down there, the Lord told me this little boy has a big call on his life. I want to tell you that you need to really watch over him. Make sure he is protected. A lot can come against him to stop him because the call is so great. I wanted to encourage you in it."

Today we are talking about dealing with obstacles. How do you deal with obstacles? What do you do when you have setbacks? What do you do when there seems to be an immovable rock in front of you? Do your obstacles stop you? Do you get frustrated and try anyway and keep trying and keep trying? Do you remember the book we read to our children about the little engine that could? He was trying so hard to get up the hill. All of the big engines were not having any trouble. He was trying so hard and he just kept saying, "I think I can, I think I can." The last sentence in the book is, "And he did." That is how you have to be with all of these obstacles.

You may be having health or financial obstacles, marital or children obstacles. It does not matter. Do you think your life would be so much better if you would just quit having all of these obstacles? We all think that. Have you ever thought that the obstacles could have been allowed by God to strengthen you and to make you more determined and more purposeful, or to be an influence on others when they see how you handle it? God uses anything in our lives if we turn our lives over to Him. He even uses the devil for His own purposes. The devil thinks he and God are equal, but they are not. Satan was an angel. He was not equal to God and he never will be. He tries so hard to make people think that he is, that good and evil are equal, but they are not. God laughs at that.

God can use your obstacles as stepping stones. I have just seen an amazing website and I want you to go to it. It is called Life Without Limbs (<http://www.lifewithoutlimbs.org/>). This is a man 25 years old who was born to a pastor and his wife. They were devastated when he was born because he had no arms and no legs, and he had one funny looking foot. When he was 9 years old, he was so tired of kids taunting, teasing and being mean to him that he wanted to commit suicide. There are a lot of kids like that today. You might be watching today feeling the same way. I hope you will realize what this young man realized. He broke before the Lord and said, "Lord, I don't like being like this. I can't do anything about it. The obstacles are huge, but Lord if You can do something with my life, I give you my life just like I am." He said, "Of course I prayed for healing, I prayed for miracles. But until I get them, this is who I am and what I am." You need to go to that website and look at all of it. It will make you cry. I cried and cried. You can see Jesus in this man's face, just shining out of him. I said, "Lord, I want to be like that." God can use even your obstacles as stepping stones. This young man goes all over the world. Remember, he has no arms and no legs, just a trunk. Yet, he goes all over the world speaking and telling people "God can help you overcome any obstacle."

What is the secret? Is there a secret? Yes, there is. The secret is to see your obstacles as challenges, not problems. When you think it is a problem, it will wear you down, make you negative, tire you out, and discourage you. It definitely makes you want to quit. When you think it is a challenge, you might say, "I'll show you. I'll figure it out. Devil you are not going to stop me." What does it do to you on the inside? It inspires you internally. It causes you to look for answers when you do not even realize you are looking for answers. It causes your creativity to activate. It causes you to invite other people to come into your life and your situation and give their opinion. It can become a great motivation to other people.

You do not have to be the leader of an organization to be a leader. You can become a leader even if you are the janitor in that great organization. Why? Because you have a good attitude and you have these leadership characteristics. You will rise to the top. Someone told me if you put peanuts in the bottom of a jar, and then put sand on top, and shake the jar, the things that should cause a problem to keep the peanuts down are the very things that make the peanuts rise to the top, every time. You should try it. You will be surprised. You think the sand is heavier and should keep the peanuts down on the bottom, but the peanuts move on up through the sand. Whatever happens to you that could be a great negative can become a great motivation to you. How do you handle obstacles? There is a way. You break them down into solvable parts. You say, "I can't solve it all, but I could do this," and you do it. Then you will see another thing you can do, and another, and another. Inch by inch, anything is a cinch. Isn't that what they say?

Who is someone in the Bible that had to overcome almost overwhelming obstacles? Nehemiah did. He is such an interesting man, and the Bible shows him good and bad. He had severe obstacles. For one, he was living in Iraq. The children of Israel had been carried off to Babylon and that was in Iraq. He was the king's cupbearer. He heard that the wall around Jerusalem was down and everything was in shambles. He was heartbroken. The king asked, "What is wrong with you? Why are you so sad?" Nehemiah prayed very hard, "Lord, let me have favor with him", and then he told him. The king did; he told Nehemiah, "Go back and do it. I will give my stamp of approval to anyone that tries to stop you." What were some of the obstacles he faced? First, he had to get the king of a foreign land who did not know our God, only served foreign gods and idols, to let him go and to give him the material. He did not have the money to buy the material. From then on, it was one obstacle after another.

Look at Nehemiah 2:10, "But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard of my arrival, they were very displeased that someone had come to help the people of Israel." The only people left in Israel were the remnant, not great leaders, just the weaker people left there. They could not do much good in another country so they were left there. These two men thought, "We are going to have an advantage. We are going to take advantage of these people." So, they were very displeased from the minute they heard that he had just arrived.

Now look at Nehemiah 4:11-12, "Meanwhile, our enemies were saying 'Before they know what is happening, we will swoop down on them and kill them and end their work.' The Jews who lived near the enemy came and told us again and again 'They will come from all directions and attack us.'" What did Nehemiah do as a great leader? He is an example of one of the finest leaders you could ever study. He began to isolate the problems and attack them little by little, one at a time. If obstacles are people, like these two men were the obstacle with everything they did, you can try to get them on your side, sometimes by asking for their help. It works. In the case of these two men, it did not work. They did everything from start to finish to stop it. How did Nehemiah conquer this obstacle? In Nehemiah 4:14-15, "Then as I looked over the situation, I called together the nobles and the rest of the people and said to them, 'Don't be afraid of the enemy. Remember the Lord who is great and glorious, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes.' When our enemies heard that we knew of their plans and that God had frustrated them, we all returned to our work on the wall."

They solved the obstacle. How did they do it? As the leader, Nehemiah looked over the situation, called everyone together, and spoke a very encouraging word to them. First he said to not be afraid, but he did more than that. He said, "Remember our great and glorious God." Then he said, "Fight for your brothers, fight for your sons, fight for your daughters, your wives, your homes." I want to say that today. There are those of you watching right now that your brothers, sons, daughters, wives and your homes are in disarray and God says to fight for them. You say, "No, the obstacles are too great. It will never happen."

Remember your great and glorious God. He will fight for you. Listen to what happened. It does not say, "We frustrated them." The scripture says, "When our enemies heard that we knew of their plans and that God had frustrated it, then we all returned to our work." God will frustrate the enemy's plans.

In the next Scripture, you are going to see another aspect of Nehemiah. Now they are going to lie about it. First they get angry because he is coming. Second, they tried to go against him by getting all the people riled up. Now, they are going to go against him by lying about him. Here is a third obstacle. Here is what it says. "According to his reports, you plan to be their king. He also reports that you have appointed prophets in Jerusalem to proclaim about you. Look there is a king in Judah. You can be very sure that this report will get back to the king, so I suggest you come and talk it over with me." Nehemiah replied, "There is no truth to any part of your story. You are making up the whole thing." Then he says, "They were just trying to intimidate us imagining that they could discourage us and stop the work. So, I continued the work with even greater determination." That is what I am talking about. Obstacles. If you handle them right, they can make you more determined than ever. You have to say, "Nothing is going to stop me. I am going to get this done." Whether it is losing weight, whether it is leading a group of people,

leading a business, or stating a new ministry, whatever it is. Maybe it is pulling your family back together. Just say no, and attack it with even greater determination. If you are having this issue in your family, or in a business that feels like a family, you can have a meeting to figure out the answers to get everyone on your side. Be open to all answers. Do not be closed minded because you might miss something.

About a year ago, we wanted to go to New Orleans and do prophetic evangelism on Bourbon Street during Mardi Gras. That was a very wicked place to be for 11 women who were mothers and grandmothers, but God called us. Then we got negative information from people that we were looking to for support. Do you think it did not discourage me? I felt like, "What am I doing taking these women to New Orleans? Am I doing the wrong thing?" I went to God and prayed, "Help me to know, please help me to know." How did God help me to know? We called a meeting of the group of us and I was very honest with them. I told them, "We just need to hear from God. We need to know. If He says 'Don't go' we are not going. But, if God says go, we are going to go. I need to know if we have heard God speak."

Everyone began to share what they thought. I am so glad I did that. I wish I could take the credit for it and say, "Wasn't I smart." That is not true at all, it just kind of happened and I knew it was God leading it.

It just happened. When it happened I knew it was God. When people gave advice, even the ones that asked questions and pointed out things, someone would pop up and say, "I know the answer to that." We made the decision to step out on the water and go to Bourbon Street. We were safe because we were working with another ministry that had watch guards set up around everyone. Can you imagine going where everyone is drunk and doing things they should not be doing, with wild parties. What in the world are 11 women doing down there ministering prophetically to people that are getting drunk? We were there because God sent us.

When you say, "Nothing is going to stop us because I believe this is God. We are going," then you see what God had planned. What I learned about Mardi Gras, I would not have known if I had not gone.

There are a lot of people that go to Mardi Gras that do not fit in. They are just wannabes. They are just hoping they can get down there. They have heard about Mardi Gras and what a wild party it is. They get there and want to be a part of it but they do not fit in. They just feel estranged from it all, or they are drunk and not even having fun. We were in the heart of everything, on Royal and Bourbon Street. God would lead us to people and we would speak God's word to them. We had a smile on our face and love in our hearts. We said, "Hi. Are you having a good time tonight? We are here doing something kind of different.

We are giving people words from God and we think we have a really good word from God for you. Could we give you that?" They would say, "Sure." Then we would give it, and they would say, "How did you know that about me?" We would say, "God loves you and we are supposed to tell you." It touched them so deeply that we had 11 people saved. One man who owned a restaurant began to sob and say, "You have no idea how discouraged I am. I left my little daughter with my ex-wife, with her crying and crying not wanting me to leave. I came to Mardi Gras tonight with a broken heart, and now you are telling me that God loves me and has a plan for my life. He cares about me and is going to help me. You have no idea what that means to me." God had a divine appointment set up. What if we had let the obstacles that I told you about stop us? Eleven people would not have salvation, one of them would have been that man.

Let's look at your family. What could be an obstacle in your family that you have to figure out the answer.

There was a woman who was very concerned about her family's financial situation. She was going to try to figure out how to save a small amount of money every month, put it aside and see if she could get her finances better. A man asked her, "What are your barriers?" She answered without a second thought, "My husband because he spends too much money. He likes to spend money." The man's advice to her was, "He is not going to have an interest in what you are trying to do unless he sees some kind of reward for it that is in it for him. You are not going to be able to save without more additional debt racking up." The man said, "Think of a way to get him to buy into what you are trying to do. For instance, tell him why don't we set up a spending budget for you and you can do anything you want to with it, but at the same time we will set this other amount of money aside and watch it grow together. That way he is working on your side, but he is able to have a reward in it for him."

Another set of obstacles that you can encounter as a leader, or as an individual, is your own personal habits. Do you have a destructive habit? Is it an obstacle that is keeping you from going where you want to go. You need to stay away from anything that is an obstacle in your life. For instance, if you have had a severe drinking problem and have conquered it, then stay away from the bars. Do not ever let anyone tell you, "Oh come on. You don't do it anymore. You can just come and sit and talk with us." That is the pig returning to its slop. You do not need to do that. Stay away from anything that is a potential obstacle concerning your own habits. If you are very financially strapped and you have no money, do not go to the mall. The mall is set up to entice in such a way that from the time you get there to the time you leave, sooner or later they are going to wear you down, and you are going to buy something you should not buy.

So do not even go. Instead, come up with an alternative to this obstacle. What is something that you could do that would bring you just as much pleasure, but would not contribute to your financial problems.

One thing you can do is find a way to do it cheaper. Say you love to read. What do you do if you are financially strapped? Go to the library. Andrew Carnegie did a great thing for people in America when he

financially strapped? Go to the library. Andrew Carnegie did a great thing for people in America when he helped found public libraries. You can get movies there, you can get e-books, regular books, the latest books. Just go there and check it out. They have a computer there. You do not have to own a computer. You can go there.

Another thing to do with your obstacles is to determine if you can solve them by yourself or if you need help. If you determine you are going to need some help, ask God, "Who do I go to that can help me with this." Do not get in a hurry. The way you will know what God is saying to you is that it will come real peaceful and steady. It will not go away. A person's name will just keep going over and over in your mind, call this person, e-mail this person. God will send help to you. Do not ever forget the Holy Spirit has another name and it is Helper. You can say, "Holy Spirit, what in the world am I supposed to do? Tell me what to do."

I want you to look at a very important verse in John 14:26. This is a very important verse and you should underline it in your Bible. I am doing this in the Amplified Bible because I want you to see His other names: Counselor, Helper, Intercessor, Advocate, Strengtheners, Standby. "But the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, in My place, to represent Me and act on My behalf, He will teach you all things." If you have a potential obstacle that might be a temptation in your business, have an accountable person that you run it by. Go to them and say, "I just need to run this by you." They will say, "No, don't do it. It is not right." Another thing you can do is learn from the lives of other people, like the man in Life Without Limbs. Learn from people like that. I watched all of the videos on his website and was so inspired. I just thought, "How in the world could I ever think I have obstacles. Look what this man has done. He has a college degree and has gone around the world touching thousands of lives."

Associate with people who will keep you on track and learn to make those obstacles go away. Serve God.

QUIET TIME QUESTIONS

1. How should be our attitude towards obstacles?
2. What types of obstacles do we have?
3. How did Nehemiah deal with obstacles when rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem?
4. What are some good ways to deal with obstacles in our lives?

To watch the video on DEALING WITH OBSTACLES IN YOUR LIFE, Pillar Six, Leadership Skills, go to www.bettyswann.com.

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