

“Obstacles Are Opportunities”

Job 1:1; 2:1-10

Psalm 26

Hebrews 1:1-4; 2:5-12

Mark 10:2-16

Jesus teaches that healthy change occurs from a base of child-like dependence on God. Terry Hartsell Kenne writes,

Our daughter planned a small family wedding at our church. When my husband and I arrived early on the day of the wedding to make sure everything was ready, we noticed a banner from the missions conference was still behind the pulpit. Its message seemed appropriate for our occasion, too: WORTH THE RISK.¹

Worth the risk? Yep, a marriage relationship takes work. And sometimes it’s hard. It’s not always easy. Whatever the issue might be, it looks like an obstacle, or something in the way of staying together. But with Jesus Christ living his life in and through each one of us, an obstacle can turn into an opportunity to make the marriage relationship even better. In fact, any relationship better.

Jesus teaches that healthy change occurs from a base of child-like dependence on God. To make a marriage relationship work, any relationship work for that matter, obstacles need to be embraced as opportunities for making things better. A child-like dependence on God is the best approach. In this regard, Bobby Schuller in *Change Your Thoughts Change Your World* writes, “When we face setbacks in life, our temptation will be to curse them, dwell on self-pity, blame others, or hurry on to something that isn’t meant to be.... There is no tragedy [setback] God can’t redeem. Though you cannot see it now, God will get you through whatever it is you’re facing, and you might even find a

¹The source of this story is Terry Hartsell Kenne in *Christian Reader*, “Rolling Down the Aisle.” Found September 28, 2021, on preachingtoday.com.

gift within.”² Believe that God is for you. Believe that God is with you. Believe that God will see you through to a better outcome. Therein lies the significance of thinking and self-examination: Learn. Evaluate. Plan. Dream. Get back up after a fall. Press through the pain.³ See obstacles, things that are in the way, as opportunities to grow.

The Old Testament, Psalter, Epistle, and Gospel Readings remind us that obstacles emerge for even Christians that can become opportunities for growth as a person and Christian. Job 1:1 reads, “There was once a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job. That man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil....” Psalm 26:2-3 reads, “Prove me, O LORD, and try me; test my heart and mind. For your steadfast love is before my eyes, and I walk in faithfulness to you.” Hebrews 2:9 reads, “.... but we do see Jesus, now crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.” And Mark 10:9 reads, “Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.” Remember, everything works out for good for those who place child-like dependence on God.

The Pharisees often attempted to trap Jesus over his abandonment of traditional thought and practice in Judaism. Judaism allowed a man “to write a certificate of dismissal to divorce her.” Jesus said, “.... What God has joined together, let no one separate.” The writer of Hebrews challenges us to see that God speaks today and we need to be ready to hear and listen. The psalmist pleads with us to continue, intentionally, in a life of faithfulness, and to live in a trusting relationship with God in the tough times. And

²Bobby Schuller, *Change Your Thoughts Change Your World* (Nashville, Tennessee: Nelson Books, 2019), 147.

³Adapted from Bobby Schuller, *Change Your Thoughts Change Your World*, 33.

Job teaches us to ask hard questions of God and patiently listen for the answers as an act of depending on God and being faithful to God.⁴

When I was in seventh grade, I participated in a Fresno Unified School District Summer School program of track and field events. Any seventh grader could participate. I chose to run in the 440-relay and the 100-yard hurdles dash. Passing the baton was an obstacle that provided many opportunities to fine tune the handoff. Realizing how to take the hurdle, an obstacle, in stride was another opportunity to develop measured strides that perfectly timed the legs and feet stretch over the hurdle in a natural running flow. Eventually the bruises and scratches healed, and I rarely missed a hurdle. In both instances, I depended on and trusted my coach to help me conquer the obstacles of baton and hurdle.

Depend on God. Trust that God is with you in all things that are obstacles in your life. Do not quit. See God work things out to a good end, even in the pain. Jesus' words, "I am the way, the truth and the life," the words of the Greatest Commandment, the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount and Matthew 25 outline what turning obstacles into opportunities looks like. Amen.

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⁴In the two paragraphs of textual analysis above, I have benefited from the thinking of Rebecca Abts Wright, Jill Duffield, Kimberly Bracken Long, Osvaldo D. Vena, Michael Lodahl, Leticia A. Guardiola-Saenz, and Peter J. Paris in Joel B. Green, Thomas G. Long, Luke A. Powery, Cynthia L. Rigby and Carolyn J. Sharp, editors, *Connections, Year B, Volume 3* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2021), 353-356, 356-358, 359-361, 362-364, 364-366, 367-369 and 369-371.