

Obstacles are things that prevent the continuation of something that has already started or hinder something from even beginning. For example, if you are traveling and suddenly come across a river too wide to cross, that's an obstacle. Or if you are cooking and the gas runs out before the food is fully prepared, that's an obstacle.

Similarly, in the spiritual realm, obstacles can prevent a believer from continuing their journey of faith or hinder their progress in seeking God. Recognizing and avoiding these obstacles is essential to the life of faith.

The Bible outlines three main categories of obstacles:

- Obstacles that come to God's people from their loved ones
- Obstacles that come to God's people from unbelievers
- Obstacles that come to unbelievers from God's people

1) Obstacles from Loved Ones to God's People

The "loved ones" mentioned here are those who may not have fully committed to God's truth or those whose faith is weak. These are the people Jesus warns about in Luke 17:1-4 (ESV):

And he said to his disciples, 'Temptations to sin are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom they come! It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were cast into the sea than that he should cause one of these little ones to sin. Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him; and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' you must forgive him.'

Biblical Explanation:

Here, Jesus acknowledges that temptations (or obstacles) will inevitably come, but He emphasizes the great responsibility believers have not to be the source of these temptations to others, especially the “little ones”—those who are weaker in faith. This passage highlights how believers must be careful in their interactions, words, and behavior because we have a responsibility to encourage each other in faith, not hinder one another.

How do loved ones cause believers to stumble?

Sometimes, a fellow believer may be weak in faith and may be hurt by negative words or actions. For instance, if someone gossips or speaks ill of another believer, the offended person may feel discouraged or even tempted to abandon their faith altogether. This is why Proverbs 18:21 (ESV) states:

Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits.

The power of our words is significant. If we use our words to gossip or slander, we can easily discourage or damage a fellow believer's faith. We must avoid becoming stumbling blocks to others by guarding our speech and showing love and grace.

Spiritual Understanding and Knowledge

In Romans 14:13-21 (ESV), Paul discusses how even our knowledge can become a stumbling block:

Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother... If your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died.

This passage teaches us that our freedoms, including the knowledge we have, must not become stumbling blocks to weaker believers. While we may know that something is permissible (like eating food sacrificed to idols), we must consider how our actions affect those who may not have the same level of spiritual maturity. For the sake of love, we must avoid causing others to stumble in their faith.

2) Obstacles from Unbelievers to God's People

Unbelievers often create obstacles for the gospel. They can try to stop the preaching of the gospel, persecute Christians, or even imprison them, as seen throughout the New Testament. For example, in Acts 12:1-4 (ESV), we read:

About that time King Herod laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church. He killed James the brother of John with the sword, and when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also.

Biblical Explanation:

Throughout history, pagans and authorities hostile to the gospel have created obstacles for Christians. In the early church, Herod's persecution of Christians was a direct attempt to stop the spread of the gospel. Similarly, in 2 Corinthians 4:8-9 (ESV), Paul explains how Christians often face affliction from unbelievers:

We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed.

Obstacles from unbelievers—whether in the form of physical persecution, rejection, or societal opposition—have been present

throughout church history. However, these trials do not stop the gospel from advancing. Instead, as Paul declares, they often serve to refine believers' faith and perseverance.

3) Obstacles from God's People to Unbelievers

Sadly, sometimes Christians themselves can be an obstacle to unbelievers. When non-believers witness hypocrisy, sin, or immorality in believers, it can lead them to reject the gospel. As Romans 2:23-24 (ESV) warns:

You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law. For, as it is written, 'The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.'

Biblical Explanation:

When Christians live in a way that is inconsistent with the gospel they preach, they become an obstacle to others coming to faith. Hypocrisy, sin, and poor conduct can lead unbelievers to say, "If that's what Christianity is, I'd rather stay where I am." Jesus Himself warned

against this in Matthew 5:16 (ESV):

In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

When we live according to God's standards, we reflect His light to the world, leading others to glorify Him. But when our actions don't align with our faith, we hinder others from seeing God's true character.

Conclusion

As believers, we must strive to avoid becoming obstacles for others—whether for fellow Christians or for unbelievers. James 1:12 (ESV) assures us:

Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.

If you have stumbled or been caused to stumble by a fellow believer, don't give up on your faith. The Bible encourages us to rise again and continue. Proverbs 24:16 (ESV) says:

For the righteous falls seven times and rises again, but the wicked stumble in times of calamity.

Jesus, in John 16:33 (ESV), reminds us:

In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.

Obstacles will come—both from within the church and from outside. But we can overcome them by clinging to Christ, walking in His strength, and helping others to do the same.

What Does the Bible Say About Obstacles? What Are Their Effects?

2/2

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