

## "Obstacles, Faith, and Forgiveness"

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**Intro:** We've all faced obstacles in our lives. These obstacles try to stand in our way and keep us from our goals. Remember when you first learned to ride a bike? Your challenge was to get that bike to roll on just two wheels, without falling over. I remember when I first learned to ride a bike... I was five years old, and too short to step over the seat, so I had to stand on a rock, to get on. My dad helped me overcome the seemingly impossible task of riding a two wheeler, with no training wheels. He grabbed the back of the seat and said, "peddle, peddle, peddle..." and I did... then he let go... and I wrecked in the dirt... and scraped up my knee, and ripped my jeans. But I didn't let the obstacle of riding that bike get the best of me... I got up... dusted myself off, and climbed back on that rock, so I could mount my mighty steed. And that time... I rode all the way down the road.

### Illustration:

Linda Down discovered real power and she needed it. She had dealt with the limitations of cerebral palsy all her life. One day, she got this crazy idea of running the New York Marathon. But Linda walked with difficulty, so running seemed out of the question? She used canes with arm clamps to steady her arms. On top of this she was 25 pounds overweight and jobless. In a state of depression, she began reading in the Scriptures about the power of God at work in people's lives. She read Philippians 4:13- I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. While training, she listened for God. She thought as she was running in the dark at night: Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction about things not seen (Hebrews 11:1). She thought about her limited dreams, her inability to see beyond the obstacles of life. Faith, she said to herself, was running in spite of the insurmountable obstacles. As the New York Marathon began that cold morning, some 12 years ago now, she wore gloves on her hands to soften the impact of the crutches. It was windy on the bridge and uphill. She had not expected the beginning to be so difficult. As she finished the mile long Verrazano Narrows Bridge, there were no runners in sight ahead of her. Spectators were gone for the most part. But one little girl ran out into the street and cheered her on, "You can do it!" Others on the curb later applauded and cheered and shouted. They brought tears to Linda's eyes and helped her to keep going. Ten hours later Linda was still running in the dark through dangerous neighborhoods. Some admiring spectators walked with her for safety. Then an ABC-TV camera crew showed up and followed the story of her courage. She continued to run. She

wore a hole in one sneaker from dragging it across the ground; her hands ached and throbbed; her arms became black and blue and swollen; she couldn't speak to anyone because of fatigue, but she continued to run because she prayed: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Then two parks and recreation trucks in Central Park came by and stayed with her to light the way. After 11 hours of struggle and over 27 miles, Linda crossed the finish line. People were crying and Linda was crying at the response and support that she had received from God and these people. She thanked God for the power to do such a miraculous thing. Later she was invited to the White House and was pictured on the front page of the New York Times. Her story was not just a story of noble effort, it was the story of the power of God at work.

**Just like I had to overcome obstacles (even small ones) to ride a bike... and Linda Down had to overcome a much greater obstacle to run the race... as believers we have to overcome obstacles to our faith. Let's look someone who had to do just that.**

### **Mark 2:1-12 NIV**

A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. [2] So many gathered that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. [3] Some men came, bringing to him a paralytic, carried by four of them. [4] Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus and, after digging through it, lowered the mat the paralyzed man was lying on. [5] When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

[6] Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, [7] "Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

[8] Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, "Why are you thinking these things? [9] Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk'? [10] But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. . . ." He said to

the paralytic, [11] "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." [12] He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"

### **1. Obstacles Will Stand Between You and Jesus (vs 2), (So Overcome them...)**

The crippled man faced a huge obstacle... he was paralyzed for years, maybe his life... we don't know. There was NO way that he could walk... And all those years being crippled looked him in the eye and threatened to keep him from ever hoping for more than that.

When he heard Jesus was in town, he made up his mind to see him... and asked his friends to help get him there. They did... but then they faced another obstacle... the crowd. How could they even get to Jesus... since the crowd was so big, and tightly packed together to attempt to get through. But this man and his friends would not be overcome. They had faith that Jesus could heal him... and they had to act upon that faith. So they raised their friend to the roof, and made a hole in the roof and lowered their friend down. Their faith was proved by their determination.

### **2. Faith Demands Action (vs 4-5)**

#### **James 2:17 NIV**

In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

Faith always demands action. When an obstacle stands in the way of our faith, we've got to respond by overcoming the obstacle to reach Jesus.

Example: Many of you will go off to college... If you go to a secular college, you will sit under professors who deny the existence of God. They have filled their heads with the world's

knowledge, but never admitted the truth of a creator God. They will do they're best to convince you that religion, or any kind of belief in God, is simply a crutch for weak-minded people to lean on to feel better about life. They will try to prove to you that there is no God. That will be an obstacle for your faith. Many young people are stopped by that obstacle, and will turn their back on God. But you have to make up your mind to blast through that wall, and continue to seek after Jesus.

"80% of Christian teenagers forsake their faith when they graduate high school." Don't be another statistic!!!! You can live for God every day of your life, if you have FAITH. Faith that demands action.

### **3. Jesus Forgives Sin, and Amazes People (vs. 5,10,12)**

The paralyzed man found out that not only would Jesus fix his problem... and heal him, but that Jesus would forgive his sins. Jesus' primary mission was to come to earth to give all mankind an opportunity to be forgiven by God. We are all in need of forgiveness, and because of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross we can have that forgiveness.

When the paralyzed man sought after Jesus', Jesus decided to make a point about his purpose. He decided to reveal to that man, and to the crowd standing by, that He had come to bring forgiveness.

**(re-read Vs 5-12)** [5] When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." [6] Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, [7] "Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

[8] Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, "Why are you thinking these things? [9] Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk'? [10] But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. . . ." He said to the paralytic, [11] "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." [12] He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"

Forgiveness was something that Jesus offered to the man, that couldn't be seen. It was intangible... invisible to others. They couldn't tell whether or not the man was forgiven, and so to make it clear to those standing by that Jesus really meant what He said, He gave them a sign they could see. Jesus commanded the man to rise and walk... and to everyone's amazement... he did... Jesus has authority to forgive.

#### Conclusion:

Maybe you're here, and you know you are in need of forgiveness. You know that just like the paralyzed man... you've done wrong in the sight of God... You messed up, but you want to make things right. With every eye closed... if that's you tonight, raise your hand so I can pray for you.

#### Challenge:

You will be faced with opposition. You will have obstacles in your life. There will be people and situations that will try to destroy your faith. It's up to you to have faith. It's up to you whether you will stand for truth... or deny it. It's up to you whether you will press in to know Jesus, or whether you will let the cares of life destroy your relationship. It's up to you to have faith that demands action.

#### Prayer:

Lord, give me faith to fight for truth. Give me strength to stand for You. Let my faith be stronger than the obstacles before me, AMEN.