

Obstacles or Opportunities?

Week 22: May 28-Jun 3 – *Galatians 5, 6; Acts 15, 16*

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Helpful Resources

Map of Paul's Missionary Journeys

Making Sense of It All

- The Big Picture

We've watched the early church experience great success after Jesus' departure (*Acts 1-14*). The gospel of Christ spread from Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria, Africa, Damascus, Antioch, Cyprus, and into Asia Minor, thus fulfilling Jesus' prophecy in *Acts 1:8*. However, our adversary, the devil, opposed its progress every step of the way, hoping to discourage, distract, divide, or destroy the Church. Every place the gospel advanced, he set up obstacles.

However, while obstacles are meant to obstruct or hinder progress, our sovereign God turned those obstacles into opportunities for the gospel to progress. For example, a zealous Pharisee named Saul pursued and persecuted Christians, but God intervened, changed Saul's life, and chose him to be a special instrument in the history of the Church. The greatest menace to the gospel became the greatest missionary for the gospel.

In this review (*Galatians 5, 6; Acts 15, 16*), we will consider how the Lord used the obstacles of the enemy as opportunities to advance the good news of salvation to more people.

- Obstacles and Opportunities

OBSTACLE: That which opposes; anything that stands in the way and hinders progress; a hinderance or obstruction

Satan opposes God, His people, His purposes, His gospel, and His church (*1 Jn. 4:1-3; 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Jn. 1:7; Mk. 4:4, 15; 2 Cor. 4:4; Rev. 12:9*).

OPPORTUNITY: A fit or convenient time; a time favorable for the purpose; a suitable time; a convenient means; a situation or condition favorable for attainment of a goal; a good position, chance, or prospect for advancement or success

Despite the enemy's obstacles, God creates opportunities for the advancement of His purposes (*Gen. 50:20; Rom. 8:28; 1 Jn. 4:4*).

1. **Liberty or the Law?** After Paul and Barnabas planted churches in the region of Galatia (Asia Minor), the enemy mobilized jealous Jews to confuse those coming to Christ. Their argument was that Jewish Christians still needed to follow the Law of Moses and Jewish traditions (i.e., circumcision, sabbath, diet). But God prompted the Apostle Paul to write a letter to the Galatians explaining how Christ had set them (and us) free from the restraints of the Old Testament Law. We have freedom in Christ (*Gal. 5:1*). Now, we are under the law of love — love God and love our neighbor as ourselves (*Gal. 6*). Because of the Galatian obstacles (Judaizers), God used the opportunity to bless the Church with the letter of *Galatians*, which has instructed all believers as part of the New Testament.

2. **Confusion and the Council** (*Acts 15:1-35*): Even in his home church at Antioch, Paul battled the Judaizers who attempted to convince Jewish Christians to be circumcised as a requirement for salvation. However, this obstacle gave the early Church leaders (Apostles and elders in Jerusalem) an opportunity to establish a precedent for all churches. Their decision to hold to salvation in Christ alone unified and strengthened the Church.
3. **Divide and Conquer** (*Acts 15:36-41*): The enemy attempted to thwart the missionary efforts of Paul and Barnabas by sowing division among them. However, God used their separation to form two teams. Thus, the Church benefited and the gospel advanced.
4. **Dead End or Detour?** (*Acts 16:1-15*): Though Paul and Silas faced opposition in other places in Asia Minor (and the Spirit prompted them to move on), the Lord rerouted them to Macedonia (Europe). Thus, what seemed like a dead end became a new path. Because they traveled to Macedonia, a new continent received the gospel, new churches were planted, and Paul met Timothy who was to become a life-long friend and ministry partner.
5. **Prisoners or Preachers?** (*Acts 16:16-40*): The enemy quickly obstructed the ministry of Paul and Silas with a rowdy mob, and before long they were beaten and imprisoned. However, rather than view prison as a loss, they turned it into another gospel victory. The Lord gave them the opportunity to share the good news with the jailer and his household.

The Bottom Line

Despite the enemy's obstacles, the Lord can turn them into opportunities for the gospel to advance.

Questions to Consider

1. How do we typically respond to obstacles? Explain why.
2. Is it our natural tendency to view obstacles as opportunities? Why or why not?
3. Consider these obstacles. How could God use them for His good?

You get flagged as dangerous on social media by angry opponents for sharing your faith.

When your boss hears that you've been sharing the gospel at work, you are fired.

A dispute arises that divides church members, and a group of them leaves.

Your HOA votes to prohibit any Christmas decorations related to Jesus.

You are ostracized because of your Christian views and values.

You have a sharp disagreement with a close friend over biblical beliefs.

You try to witness to your neighbors, but no one is responsive.

People complain about something at church.

4. Knowing this truth — that God can turn obstacles into opportunities — what does that tell us about Him?
5. What is required of you to view obstacles as opportunities?
6. What obstacles have you faced recently? Could they be opportunities for the gospel?