

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES



Prov 16:9... A man's heart plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps.

Rev. Lenroy Pascall

IDENTIFYING OBSTACLES

- Obstacles are what make simple things hard to do.
- Obstacles can be practical, external factors, like time and money; or internal barriers such as fears, beliefs or needs. Below are questions for surfacing these different types of obstacles:

Identifying External Obstacles

- What is stopping you? _____

- What makes this hard to get done? _____

- What do you need that you don't have to reach your objective? _____

- Is there one key obstacle here – that if you conquered that one thing it would make a decisive difference in reaching this goal? _____

- What one resource or tool would make all the difference if you had it? _____

Identifying Internal Obstacles

- What goes on inside you when you think of launching int this? Feel free to name an emotion, a physical sensation, a memory, anything. _____

- Relax for a minute, and pay attention to what’s going on in you. Where do you feel pressure or strain or stress around this idea/situation? _____

- You've found it hard to make this change. What do you gain from not changing? _____

- What would you lose that's important to you if you did change? _____

- What's driving your responses? _____

- What belief is behind your responses? _____

How well is that belief serving you? _____

- What's the critical voice in you saying about this situation? _____

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES: Seven Strategies

1. Dream Without It

Imagine that the obstacle is gone, and ask the person to dream without it.

Experiencing the possibility that the dream could happen can provide enough energy to tackle the obstacle.

- *Let's just remove the obstacle from the equation for a minute – imagine it is all taken care of. How does that change things? _____*

How do you feel about pursuing this dream now? _____

- *If you had unlimited resources and couldn't fail, what would you do then?"*

- *What if you **did** have the money (or time, or resources)? Then what? _____*

2. Find What Worked in the Past

Different change strategies work for different people. A great way to find something that worked for you is to explore what you did in similar situations in the past. The act of reflecting on past successes builds courage and confidence as well as bringing to mind practical solutions.

- *When you faced this kind of obstacle in the past, how did you overcome it?*

- *Tell me about a time when you faced into a fear and beat it. How'd you do it?*

3. Brainstorm Options

- *What resources do you need to conquer this obstacle? Where could you get them?*

When we are mulling over a challenge we face on our own, we tend to stop thinking creatively after two or three options. If these options don't look attractive, we get stuck. Thinking out of the box gets people unstuck by pushing them beyond that initial set of options and back into the creative zone. Ask yourself these questions to find ways around an external obstacle.

**What Five Options For How I Could Tackle This
Challenge.**

- *What's another option?* _____

- *What else could I do?* _____

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- *If I get really radical, what would I try?* _____

- *OK. Now I have options I've thought of or listed so far. Which of these would I like to pursue?* _____

4. **Walk in the Light**

Internal obstacles have the most power over us when they live in the darkness, unexamined and not understood. When we bring them into the light, name them and talk about them with others, they lose much of their aura of invincibility.

- *Can you name what you are afraid of?* _____

What's the thing you don't want to happen? _____

- *What's your worst-case scenario?* _____

What makes that the worst for you? _____

- *What goes on inside you when you attempt to tackle this? Can you describe it?* _____

5. Stir Up the Darkness

Sometimes the veil around an internal obstacle is thick enough that you can't name the obstacle – they know they've hit a wall, but they don't know how or what or why. One way to gain new information on the obstacle is to stir up the darkness: intentionally do the thing you are afraid of (in a small dose) and track what happens inside you as you do it.

- **Here's an exercise that may help:**

This week, find a small way to do the thing you fear, then sit down for 20 minutes immediately afterward and journal about it to discover what's going on in you. Jot down what happened, what emotions you experienced, and any physical sensations you had (i.e., you got a knot in your stomach). Doing this will help surface the internal obstacle.

6. Use Hypotheticals

Sometimes obstacles are intractable because we can't imagine living without them. We may cling to a risk aversion that we think protects us but actually causes great loss. Or hang onto a response pattern that helped us cope in childhood but doesn't work at the office. It can be hard to even contemplate letting go of a deep-seated belief or an important safeguard. One way to help is the use of hypotheticals. Hypotheticals are imaginary scenarios that let us

play with new ideas or beliefs without committing ourselves to embrace them.

Here are several examples:

- **The belief:** *You have to save everything in case there's a rainy day*

 - *Imagine for a minute that we can see into the future, and nothing is going to happen that will eat into your financial reserves for the next five years.*
 - How would that change the way you'd live? _____*
 - _____
 - _____

- **The belief:** *You're going to get stuck with all the follow-up on a project because nobody else cares.*

 - *What are some other possibilities? See if you can give three other reasonable scenarios for why the details don't seem to get done. ___*
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____

- **The belief:** *You don't want to get close to people and then, two years later, have to move away and leave your friends.*

 - *What if you knew that those friendships would actually get richer and deeper after you moved? _____*
 - _____

- _____

How would that change things for you? [If it would, then you can explore how you might maintain friendships at a distance] _____.

- _____

- _____

- _____

- _____

7. Find the Reason

People have a good reason for what they do. Even if a belief or behavior seems irrational on the surface, it makes sense within the rationality of the person who chose it. If you can find the reason, and bring it to the surface, you can often change the behavior.

- *What led you to respond in that way?* _____

Walk through the reasoning behind it. _____

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- *You believe that conflict is a no-win situation, and so you avoid it. Can you identify where that belief comes from? _____*
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Where'd you learn to see conflict that way? _____

- *It seems like you're sabotaging yourself – you get close to winning then you do something that snatches defeat from the jaws of victory: what's going on there? _____*
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DECISION MAKING

Developing the ability to make great decisions is a key part of living a purposeful life and overcoming obstacles. Here are some questions for exploring the client's process for making decisions.

- *"How will you make that decision?"* _____

- *"What factors will make the most difference to you?"* _____

- *"What do you need to know to make a great decision?"* _____

- *"What would a great decision look like?"* _____

- *"How do you usually make decisions?"* _____

- *"What other decision strategies could you use?"* _____

Which methods do you want to try?" _____

Thirteen Decision-Making Strategies

Sometimes people are unaware of the decision-making process they are using, or of what other strategies are available. This list contains 13 common decision-making styles. Use it to help the client identify the strategies that are most comfortable and familiar, and what new strategies could be explored. Running a major decision through several strategies can be very revealing.

1. Rational: *"What are the pros and cons of pursuing each option?"* _____

_____ *Which is most advantageous?"* _____

2. Intuitive: *"What is your gut saying?"* _____

What feels right to you?" _____

3. Relational: *"How will this course of action affect the people around you?"* _____

Who will benefit, who will be hurt?" _____

4. Principled: *"How do the key principles and priorities you live by apply here?"* _____

5. Alignment: *"How well does this decision align with your passions, your values, and your calling?"* _____

6. **Decisive:** *"What approach would most quickly lead you to a decision here?"* _____

7. **Adaptive:** *"What decisions could be left open to allow for new information or options?"* _____

What things must be decided now that cannot be put off for later?" _____

8. **Counsel:** *"What does your spouse think?"* _____

How about some key friends or advisors?" _____

9. **Team:** *"What do your team members think?"* _____

What would happen if you decided as a team?" _____

10.Spiritual: *"What decision would best align with your faith? _____*

What is God saying to you on this?" _____

11. Negative Drives: *"What fears or inner drives are influencing your response? _____*

How could you remove those things from the equation so you can make a better decision?" _____

12. Cost: "What would it cost in terms of time and resources to do this? _____"

What would it cost you if you **don't** do this? _____

What's the cost if you don't decide or let circumstances overtake you?" _____

13. Risk/Reward: "What is the payoff for each option? _____"

The risk? _____

Can you live with the worst-case outcome? _____

What steps could minimize the risk if you went with this?" _____

Discern the Spirit's Leading

When you experience authentic salvation by recognizing your sin and separation from God and accepting Christ's death as payment for your personal sins, God sends His Holy Spirit to abide within your human spirit. In this way, God guides you into all truth and prompts you to cooperate in bringing about His purposes for your life. John 16:13 "However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.

- The soul is made up of the mind, the will and the emotions.⁷ As the Holy Spirit relates to your soul—
 - He teaches your mind how to think.
 - He directs your will how to act.
 - He brings your emotions into alignment (what is right in God's sight).

Aligns the EMOTIONS

- When faced with a decision or **deadline** —tell God that you want only His will.
 - Ask God to shut all doors to **opportunities** that are not His choice.
 - Ask God for a heavy heart if you are making the wrong choice and peace if you are making the right choice. 1 Cor 2:9-10... ***But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him," God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.***

Determine the Don'ts of Decision Making

Doing what comes naturally is not a good barometer for determining God's will in your life. "*What comes naturally*" can be the sinful nature or the "flesh," which operates apart from the Spirit of God. How can you determine if what you think you should do reflects God's will or whether it is your own natural wishes and desires? Gal 5:17... For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you would.

- Don't wait until all else fails before **seeking** God's will. 1 Kings 22:5... **And Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, "Inquire first for the word of the LORD."**
- Don't seek the plan but rather the **Person** who reveals the plan. Prov 3:5-6... **Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own**

insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.

- Don't pray for permission regarding something God has **forbidden**. Ps 119:106... **I have sworn an oath and confirmed it, to observe thy righteous ordinances.**
- Don't make decisions based on **feelings**. Prov 4:23.... **Keep your heart with all vigilance; for from it flow the springs of life.**
- Don't assume that God's will is too **difficult** for you to do. 1 John 5:3...**For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.**
- Don't have divided loyalty where money dictates your decision. Matt 6:24... **"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. "**
- Don't test God by seeking **visible** signs. Deut 6:16..."**You shall not put the LORD your God to the test, as you tested him at Massah.**
- Don't think **trials** and **adversity** indicate you are out of God's will. 1 Peter 4:19... **Therefore, let those who suffer according to God's will do right and entrust their souls to a faithful Creator.**

Discover God's Guidance

Far too often we rely on our own instincts in making decisions. Like Chicken Little . . . when a crisis occurs, we are confused because we have not consistently sought to understand how God guides. Trust that God is ultimately involved in every detail of your life. Listen, learn and obtain His guidance. Prov. 1:5...***the wise man***

also may hear and increase in learning, and the man of understanding acquire skill,

Guidance

Gifts

Discover and use the spiritual gifts, talents and abilities God has given you to serve others. Discern His direction by noticing the opportunities He brings to develop those gifts.

- Reflect on what you really **enjoy** doing.
- Write down past **accomplishments** that have brought you joy.
- Become aware of your **weaknesses**.
- Ask a friend to **evaluate** your strengths. 1 Peter 4:10...***As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace:***

Understanding

Take time to clearly discern what the decision is about and what is involved.

- Do I know all the **facts**?
- Am I aware of the **consequences** of my choices?
- Is there a **deadline** for the decision?
- Am I making a decision based on **guilt**?

Prov. 15:21...***Folly is a joy to him who has no sense, but a man of understanding walks aright***

Impressions

The Spirit of God often brings conviction . . . or establishes truth in your heart . . . through strong impressions of His thoughts or principles regarding a matter.

- Pray for God to **speak** to you about the matter.
- Consider a time of **fasting** if led to do so.
- Spend time in quiet **reflection** and **meditation**, seeking God's heart on the situation.
- Ask God to confirm your impression through another **source**. Ps 16:7...***I bless the LORD who gives me counsel; in the night also, my heart instructs me.***

Desires

When you seek to please the Lord in all areas of your life, His desires will become the desires of your heart. As this occurs, His will in each situation becomes increasingly easier to recognize.

- Study Scripture to know the **heart** of God.
- Pray, "Lord, may I see my sin as You see it. May I hate my sin as You hate it."
- Claim Scriptures that give you **strength** over weaknesses. Ps 37:4...***Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.***

Advice

God often speaks to us through others. Your wisdom is increased by seeking counsel from people who are . . .

- Grounded in the **Word** of God
- Mature in **godly** wisdom
- Living successfully, having **overcome** similar circumstances Prov 19:20...**Listen to advice and accept instruction, that you may gain wisdom for the future**

Necessity

Evaluate your God-given responsibilities and choose your actions appropriately.

For example:

- If you have young children at home, **decisions** that would keep you from being with them for extended periods of time would not be in keeping with God's will for you.
- Moving a long distance away from a **dependent** elderly parent who would be left alone would not be God's desire.
- Choosing to take a **vacation** at a time when your employer needed your assistance for an emergency is contrary to the Biblical principle of having a submissive **attitude** toward those in authority over you. James 4:17...**Whoever knows what is right to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.**

Circumstances

Not all doors are opened by God, but closed doors can help determine your way at least for the present.

- Circumstances are to be considered, but they are not the _____ answer.

- Learn to see beyond circumstances into what God wants to **accomplish** in your life now.
- When unsure about an "open door," pray for God to close the door if it is not His will for you. Prov 16:9...**Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices; my body also dwells secure.**

Elimination

Even though all the choices may be **permissible**, some may not be the **best**.

- Eliminate one by one the options available to you.
- Eliminate choices that place you in **tempting** situations. (Don't go shopping if you're tempted to overspend.)
- Eliminate choices that would not be the best use of your time. (Don't organize a drawer when work on an assignment is past due.)
- Eliminate choices that require **skills** you don't have. 1 Cor 10:23...**"All things are lawful," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful," but not all things build up.**

God's Promises for Guidance

Ps 119:105...**Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path.**

Ps 32:8.... **I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye.**

Isa 42:16....**I will bring the blind by a way they did not know; I will lead them in paths they have not known. I will make darkness light before them, And crooked places straight. These things I will do for them, And not forsake them.**

Ps 37:23...**The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD, And He delights in his way.**

Prov 16:9... A man's heart plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps.

Prov 3:5-6...Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.

Isa 58:11.... The LORD will guide you continually, And satisfy your soul in drought, And strengthen your bones; You shall be like a watered garden, And like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail.

Ps 37:5-6.... Commit your way to the LORD, Trust also in Him, And He shall bring it to pass. He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, And your justice as the noonday.

Ps 139:9-10.... If I take the wings of the morning, And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, Even there Your hand shall lead me, And Your right hand shall hold me.

Ps 73:24 You will guide me with Your counsel, And afterward receive me to glory.

Ps 48:14.... For this is God, Our God forever and ever; He will be our guide Even to death.

John 16:13... "However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.

John 8:12.... Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."

When Time Has Run Out . . . and You Still Don't Know What to Do?

If you have to make a decision and you've prayed for God's choice, say to Him . .

.

Lord, because You know everything, You know the decision before me and the way I should go. I want only Your will. Since I no longer have the option of waiting, I will choose (pick one of the options). If this decision is not right in Your sight, I ask Your Spirit in me to put a heaviness in my heart. If this is the right direction, please confirm it with Your peace. I am willing to take whatever detours You decide to put in my path, as long as I reach the destination You have for me. In Christ's name I pray. Amen.

Ps 40:8...I delight to do thy will, O my God; thy law is within my heart."

God plays no game of hide and seek—

the more intimately you draw to the heart of God,

the more clearly you know the will of God.

While He blindfolds you from the blueprint, He reveals

His will day by day and unrolls the scroll line by line.