

## ALERT YOUR PERSPECTIVE

Week #1 of a 2-Week Series, "Turning Trials into Triumph"

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So, how many people here have had -- or currently have -- a challenge or adversity that you're facing or dealing with? And how many people have ever had an obstacle that you felt was getting in your way of living the life you really wanted to live? And how many people, if you could, would want that problem to disappear, vanish and be gone like that? Anybody would like something to be gone? Okay, last one: How many people would agree that, if you could, ideally you would like to have a life that is happy, easy and trouble-free? Anybody want one of those?

You know, I think that we all want our lives to go smoothly. We want our lives to go easily and to always go the way we would like it. We all want to live in the flow. You know, we all would like our lives to be fun, positive and prosperous all the time. And when that does not happen in our lives, we get upset. When things don't go the way we want, or things get in our way, we get frustrated. We tend to blame; we get a little bitter. We complain. And we argue against life, feeling that something's wrong. You know, *"This is bad; it is unfair."*

So, on a scale of 1 to 10 -- 1 being low and 10 being high -- how well do you handle the obstacles and adversities that get in the way? How well do you react when the path you're on takes a curve that you did not plan on?

You know, I truly believe it is how we handle the obstacles and adversities in our lives that plays the most significant role in how much we enjoy and how much meaning and fulfillment we get and experience in our lives.

Life has always given us stuff to deal with, and it always will. Jesus said, *"In this life there will be trials and tribulations."* And what he is saying is: if you are alive, you're going to go through some stuff. You're going to go through some hardships, some struggles, some heartbreak. You know, there are going to be difficulties in our lives.

But he also said, *"But be of good cheer, for I have overcome the world."* And he's saying: don't get down about it, because you've got the power -- the spiritual power, the human resources and abilities -- to not only handle those things, but to actually gain from them. To become wiser; to become stronger; to become more passionate; more understanding; more insightful; more grateful; more self-aware. And we get better in our lives, not in spite of those difficulties, but because of them.

So, I want you to think of the person that you are today. Think of how proud you are of yourself, of all you've gained and all you've attained. And how many people would agree that who you are today is a better person because of the adversities you've gone through? How many people would agree with that? See, we all agree with it! We don't like it, but we all agree with it! That it is the obstacles and adversities in our lives that have the potential to lift us.

Marcus Aurelius said, *"What impedes you empowers you,"* if we use it wisely. And that's what we're going to talk about today and next week as we begin a two-week series on Ryan Holiday's book, *The Obstacle is the Way*. It is a quote from Marcus Aurelius that says, *"What stands in the way becomes the way."*

Now, Aurelius, as you probably all know, was the emperor of the Roman Empire, and he was also a Stoic philosopher. Stoicism, as you might know, originated in ancient Greece and Rome, and it emphasizes living virtuously and living in alignment with nature. It focuses on cultivating inner resilience and inner

wisdom to navigate us through the challenges of life. Not looking outside of ourselves for validation; not looking outside of ourselves in terms of gaining possessions to feel happy. And by not blaming or resenting or fearing or shutting down or doing nothing.

Now in 170, Aurelius sat down to write -- not for an audience, not for publication, but for himself -- to teach himself to build his inner resilience and understanding of how to handle all of the challenges in his life. And what he wrote was one of history's I think most effective formulas for overcoming any negative situation we could ever face. I'll tell you what that is a little more in a second.

Overcoming of obstacles is absolutely an important and vital life, skill, and discipline. And it requires three components -- three critical steps: perception, action and will. Next week we'll look at action and will. Today we're going to focus on perception and perspective.

When I walked into my first Unity Church in Canada, interestingly, one of the posters they had in one of the social rooms said, *"Two men looked through prison bars. One saw mud, the other stars."* And I was captured by that, because here's the very same scene that these two are in. And yet, they have two completely different perspectives. One was positive; one was negative. One was one that seemed bring us down and one to lift us up.

Perception is our ability to see and understand and then decide the meaning of the things that happen in our lives. Our perceptions absolutely make a huge difference on how we see, how we understand, and especially how we interact and what we experience in our lives. And they truly can -- our perceptions can -- lift us up or they can bring us down.

Ryan Holiday says:

*"You will come across obstacles in life, fair and unfair. And you will discover time and time again that what matters most is not what these obstacles are, but in how we see them; how we react to them; and whether we keep our composure. This reaction determines how successful we will be in overcoming or possibly thriving because of them."*

So, this morning we're going to look at three things we can do to overcome obstacles and, particularly, help us alter our perspective.

And the first thing we need to do to overcome obstacles is to **HAVE AN INTENTION TO ADVANCE**. So, here's what it really is says in its entirety: *"Our actions may be impeded, but there can be no impeding of our intentions or our dispositions, because we can accommodate and adapt. The mind adapts and converts to its own purpose the object to our acting. The impediment to action advances action. What stands in the way becomes the way."*

And so what he is saying is: there are a lot of things we can't control in life. There are a lot of things that are going to get in our way. There are a lot of conditions and situations -- the economy, the government; we can go on and on and on about the number of things that can impede our actions. But he said one thing that you can't impede is our attitude; is our mindset; it's our outlook; it's our intention and how we choose to show up in our lives.

And having that intention -- before even anything happens -- that we will advance, you know, and gain through those experiences is a powerful way to live. A powerful way to utilize our life energy. You know, the intention to choose to see all obstacles in our lives as opportunities to practice some virtue, whether it's courage, or whether it's to lift ourselves to a higher consciousness, or generosity or forgiveness or patience or humility or love or dignity or kindness. That every obstacle in our lives is an opportunity for us to move from within to expand and bring forth something greater and something better.

You know, every single great man or woman or leader or group or cause or class became great and elevated themselves because they confronted their obstacles and were willing to learn and gain from them.

And so, every single day we have the opportunity to choose. And we answer one of two questions: Will this obstacle block me from my happiness? Or will it help me to rise: to move through it and to bring forth something even greater and something better?

You know, this ability to overcome is an opportunity. It is a practice; it is a tradition. And Ryan Holiday says it is our birthright. And a part of the reason and the work that we're here to do is to overcome; is to move through the things we would rather not face and to walk through them to see what gift, what blessing, what teaching it has for us.

Life is always testing us. Life is always calling out more from us. The question is: Are we ready to answer the call?

In the Book of Matthew, Chapter 22, Verse 14, it says, *"Many are called, but few are chosen."*

Dr. Tom Costa, a fabulous minister ... I knew he said, *"No, that's the wrong way. It should be: 'Many are called, but few choose.'"* We'd rather run, hide and avoid all the difficult stuff! But for those who choose to have the intention to advance through and walk through the adversities in our lives will be lifted to a higher place.

You know, it is a powerful thing to have an intention to allow the adversity to be a launching pad to lift us to greater possibilities. And that is by facing whatever challenges and difficulties that we have and to overcome them. Because I truly believe setting an intention to move through adversity is a game changer. It is a life changer!

You know, we could live on a superficial level, but I believe when we face the difficult stuff, we take life to a much deeper level; a much more profound meaning and sense of purpose; and a sense of our own value and the reason why we are here.

You know, having an intention is an awareness that struggle is a vital part of survival; that struggle is a vital part of growth; and it is a vital part of greatness.

Do you know that lobsters, butterflies and baby chicks all have to struggle to survive? In fact, they all have to struggle to be born, and then they have to struggle to be able to thrive. And it is that struggle that gives them the strength and the power to fly and to live and to do the great and amazing things that they are here to do.

So, my question is: What challenge in your life – what's for you right now? What adversity are you facing? And what is calling you to face it, to move through it and to set an intention to advance through it?

Are you willing to set an intention not to run and avoid from the obstacles and difficulties in your life? Are you willing to see it as a benefit and a blessing? Because it really is!

So again, think of whatever it is that you might be facing that's an adversity; that's an obstacle.

*"This obstacle is here to bless me and benefit me. This obstacle is here to bless me and benefit me."*

Let's say that together: [with congregants] *"This obstacle is here to bless me and benefit me."*

And the truth is: Are you willing to have the intention to advance through it and gain the good and bring forth the good that it is meant to bring forth into your life?

So, the second thing ... First one is intention to advance. The second one is to **DISCIPLINE YOUR MIND.**

You know, our minds are incredibly creative, powerful gifts that God has given us. But as amazing as this gift of our mind is, it's not always easy controlling this mind.

Anybody ever had your mind kind of run wild all over the place and you couldn't think straight? Anybody ever? Have your mind jumping all over? How many people have ever had your thoughts go negative and then you keep thinking even worse scenarios? And you just run .... And how many people's mind ever wander while you're meditating or, even worse, while you're having conversation with someone? [Congregants laugh] Your mind is dancing around?

Here's my favorite. How many people have ever had an imaginary argument in your mind with someone else? [Congregants laugh] Anybody ever? *"Oh, they said this. Well, I'll say that."* It is amazing! As great as it is, sometimes we make up some weird, unhealthy stuff.

You know, the line says in Scripture, *"As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he."* That might not be such good news sometimes. [Congregants laugh]

Here's some information and advice I'm going to give you that's going to be powerful about disciplining your mind. And here it is: Do not believe your mind all the time! [Congregants laugh] Do not always believe what's going on in your mind, because we think some crazy stuff. You know, *"Everybody hates me. Nobody loves me."* Not true! *"If that happens, it'll ruin my life."* Not true!

There are all kinds of things that we think that are just not true. They're not healthy. And it's important for us to be able to rise above that kind of thinking and realize that's just not true.

You ever had a time where you're just freaking out and you have to calm yourself down? *"Okay, Richard, just relax. Everything's going to be okay. It's in the end of the world. We've gotten through bigger stuff than this. God's right here and right now."* And we have to talk ourselves down and calm ourselves.

These minds are brilliant, but we need to teach and work with them to discipline them in a way that'll help us to handle obstacles. Because we don't want to be freaking out at every little thing that goes on in our lives.

And we are already dealing with a disadvantage: a biological baggage that we call the "fight-or-flight response." See, back then when it was like lions and tigers attacking us, you freak out. Now it's like a bill came: *"Woo!"* Freak out! Someone stood you up; they ghosted you. And it's like, *"Oh!"* Freak out! Like, we sometimes let these emotions go wild over things that, really, we could just stay a little bit calmer about.

To have a positive perspective, we need to learn how to discipline the mind. And the most important discipline is learn how to quiet the mind. Not let things get out of control; not freaking out; not supersizing all of our problems. But to find a sense of calm by stilling and quieting our minds.

Immersing our minds in the mind of God is an important thing, because the human mind -- by its nature -- jumps around. That's why Paul said, *"Do not conform to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."* Our minds need renewing because they can judge by appearances. They can start running all over the place. And learning to discipline the mind by quieting the mind on a regular basis -- calming it, soothing it -- brings clarity. It brings peace. It brings a level of awareness and opens the mind for inspiration and ideas and clarity to move through things in a greater way.

You know, the Buddhists have a thing called "equanimity." And it's about finding balance. Because life has got its ups and downs. Don't let everything be ... having your attitude and your emotions keep having to go up and down. And it is a way of cultivating a more stable, even-minded way of dealing and moving in life. You know, not getting too carried away when everything's going well, and not getting too low

when things are struggling and difficult. And that helps us also become a little bit more objective; not so emotional and not so subjective.

You know, Epictetus said, *"Don't let the force of an impression, when it first hits you, knock you off your feet. Just say to it, 'Hold on a moment. Let me see who you are and what you represent. Let me put you to your test.'"*

And so he's saying: when we start freaking out, don't just let it knock us out. Calmly say, *"Hey, let's just take a moment and check things out. Let's look at this more objectively and not think it's going to ruin the world or ruin our lives."*

Anybody ever do this in therapy? They first tell you to tell the story that you would tell. And then they tell you to repeat the story but do it in the third person. Anybody ever have that practice? It is a very powerful thing. And it's stunning how it takes it from to more objective.

So, let's just do a little one. *"So, I got passed over for a promotion today and I'm so ticked. The guy they gave it to is some jerk who hasn't even been as long in the business as me! I was so angry, I left work. And when I was driving another jerk cut me off. So, I honked my horn and gave him the finger several times."* [Congregants laugh] *"Then I was still fuming. When I got home I started plotting a way for revenge for this guy, because he totally ruined my entire evening."*

Repeat the story, but as somebody else. *"So, Bob didn't get selected for the promotion. And it was given to someone who has less experience in the business. You know, Bob got angry; left in the car. He got cut off and he started flipping the bird and honking at the guy. Still angry, he started plotting revenge against his boss and allowed it to ruin his entire evening."*

Now, if I were the same person, would you see how different that would be? Just pulling it back a little bit: create some objectivity to bring greater ideas in a more positive way to be able to handle things.

Sometimes just pulling back from the facts helps discipline the mind to not freak out and realize there are solutions here. And also to realize that we added the story and drama. The fact is: we didn't get a promotion and we went home. Those were facts. But all the other things were window dressing that we make up.

And when you see the second version of the story, you realize, *"Oh yeah; there's even more. I could trim down even more because it was just, you know, I didn't get a promotion. That pretty well could be, you know, the whole experience."*

It takes practice to discipline the mind: to calm ourselves down; to quiet the mind; to find equanimity and balance; to find objectivity.

And the greatest base for it always will be a daily practice of meditation. The more we practice in meditation to quiet the mind, the more balanced it'll be; the more objective we could be; the more calm we could be in all the situations in our lives. It's the most powerful tool that we have! The question is: Are you willing to commit your time to quietness? To meditation and being still?

So the final thing we're going to look at ... First one is intention to advance. And then the second one is to discipline your mind. And the last one is to **ADAPT AND ACCOMMODATE**. Aurelius says the mind can adapt and accommodate.

Great individuals and great organizations find a way to transform something that goes wrong into making it good, making it right, making it better, because they adapt and they accommodate.

Let me ask you: In your life -- of whatever obstacle or whatever you're facing in your life, adversity -- what do you need to adapt? How do you need to accommodate? What do you need to change? And what perspective do you need to shift to help you see it in a greater and more advantageous way?

Let me give you some examples.

Everybody remember Blockbuster Video? Nine thousand stores; on top of the world: this little organization called Netflix wasn't even close to it. But Blockbuster thought they had it all; they got it all; they knew it all.

Well, Netflix realized in their little DVD and movie exchange thing that that wasn't going to last, because streaming was coming. They adapted. They accommodated. And I don't think Blockbuster exists anymore. And last year Netflix grossed \$39 billion.

There's a huge difference! Context is going to change. Problems will change; difficulties will come up. The question is: Are we willing to adapt? Are we willing to accommodate? Because it is an important thing.

Also Airbnb: it was launched to help the founders actually pay their own rent. And it was a 2008 financial crisis, and they were willing to adapt and accommodate. And now it's a global hospitality platform. Instagram started out as a location-based app called Bourbon. and they refocused it to sharing photos. And then they grew so much they were acquired by Facebook.

I could give you all kinds of stories! Of the Lego company and Apple and Delta: these companies are around because they adapt and they accommodate.

George Clooney: in his first days, he was not getting a lot of jobs. He wasn't exactly giving off the vibe. He thought he was the thing ... and it's all their fault that they weren't realizing how great he was. And somebody had a chat with him, and he realized he needed to shift his perspective. And so, he began to realize: What are they going through? And he said, *"They're under a lot of pressure to find the right person. And so, maybe I could be their solution. I can choose to be the right answer that they're looking for."*

And his mindshift of not just the tyranny of *"Pick me; I'm the best!"* to sharing and realizing, *"Hey, this is a collaboration. If I show up in this way, I could have a positive influence and bless them."* And it absolutely changed his career. Absolutely changed his career!

So, my question for you is: Are you willing to adapt in your life? Are you willing to accommodate? Are you willing to make a little shift? Are you willing to change? Because, again: there are going to be more obstacles. But there are also going to be more opportunities! There are going to be more experiences if we are willing to adapt and accommodate!

An Amish boy and his father were visiting a mall for the first time. And they were amazed by everything that they saw, especially the two shiny silver walls that could come apart and come back together again. The son said to the father, *"What is this, Father?"*

And the father said, *"Son, I've never seen any like it in my life! I don't know what it is."*

While the boy and his father watched wide-eyed, an old woman came up to the sliding doors and pressed the button. And then the doors opened, and she went in. And then the doors closed, and they watched as the lights went up on the numbers above. And then the lights came down from the numbers above. Then the door opened, and out stepped a beautiful 24-year-old blonde woman. [Congregants laugh]

The father was absolutely captivated and whispered to his son, *"Go get your mother."* [Congregants laugh]

What if I told you that the obstacle you're facing -- that you're dreading; that you don't want to face at all -- isn't so bad? That, in fact, it might be a good thing? And, in fact, it is a good thing. That, if you're willing to advance through it, it will lift you and expand you and bring you greater levels of fulfillment and strength and wisdom.

See, we don't have to run from all the difficulties. We don't have to think it's a curse or a bad thing and avoid all that stuff and just run after all the good stuff. Because guess what? It's all life. It's all an important aspect of life. And the best thing we could do is to live it all; embrace it all; give all of it our everything.

And the way to do that is to have an intention to advance. To know that obstacles are going to come and I'm willing to face and advance and grow through them and get the most through them. Secondly, discipline your mind. Your mind is a powerful gift, but don't let it run wild. Don't get that emotional with stuff by calming it regularly; to get equanimity; to be more objective. And to get your mind to be more calmly-centered, because it becomes a greater channel for ideas and solutions and inspiration. And finally, adapt and accommodate. You know life is going to change, but we also need to make some shifts as well to gain the most and to bring forth the best.

The first thing for us to overcome in the obstacles of our lives is to alter our perspective.

God bless you all!