

## BUILD YOUR INNER CITADEL

Final Week of the 2-Week Series, "Turning Trials into Triumph"

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Sunday, August 3, 2025

So, how many people have ever been busy all day, and at the end of the day, it felt like you got nothing accomplished? Anybody ever have one of those days? How many people have a bunch of things that you'd like to do, but you've been procrastinating and putting them off and still haven't done anything about them? And how many people ever started something you really wanted, but it turned out to be so much harder than you thought, and you just gave up? You stopped doing it. You just quit.

You know, there's a joke that says, "*Jesus is coming. Look busy.*" [Congregants laugh] And so, success in life, overcoming obstacles, and in our spiritual life is not about looking busy or even being busy, or having constant activity. It is about taking not just action, but right action. You know, the best action: intentional action. So at the end of the day, we can say that we have progressed; that we have accomplished some of the things we wanted to towards a better life.

How many people read M. Scott Peck's book, *The Road Less Traveled*? Anybody remember the first three words? "*Life is difficult.*" And that is an absolute truth of this human, earthly experience: life is difficult. We will all have struggles, adversities, obstacles, hardships and heartbreaks. Now, we also have profound levels of joy and love and peace and exhilaration and happiness and abundance. But the fact is: life is hard. And it is meant to be hard, because the meaning and the value of facing and working through those obstacles brings us tremendous results.

In the Book of James, it says, "*Count it all joy, brethren, when you face trials of any kinds. For the testing of your faith produces perseverance; and let perseverance finish its work in you so that you may be whole, complete and lacking in nothing.*"

And so, it's saying: life is hard, but be joyful that, when you're facing the tough stuff, because if you go through the tough stuff, you'll get more good stuff.

And the truth is: it says that we are here, you know ... We all know that we are here to bring forth the glory of God. And by moving through these difficult times consciously and positively and joyously, we can experience our wholeness. We can experience a sense of oneness and a connection to our divine nature and reach the level of self-realization of unifying our mind with the mind of God.

And sometimes obstacles and adversities feel like they really get in our way. But the truth is: they really are the way to a fuller and richer experience of life and a greater connection and knowing of our oneness with God.

I want you to think of an obstacle that's going on in your life that you're facing and dealing with right now. Kind of see it; feel it; notice your attitude and your mindset towards it. And what if we ask, if we face that same obstacle and move towards it, instead away from it? What if we embraced it and even welcomed it, instead of hating it and being angry at it and wishing it wasn't there?

You know, this is the second week in our two-week series on Ryan Holiday's book, *The Obstacle is the Way*. It's actually inspired by Marcus Aurelius, the former emperor of Rome -- the Roman Empire -- and his quote that says, "*What stands in the way becomes the way.*" And the book really says that there are three disciplines that we need to overcome obstacles and turn our trials into triumphs.

And the first one is perception, and that's what we looked at last week. Perception is how we see and understand, and the meaning that we give to the things in our lives and around us. And then we can have a perception of seeing something as negative, as bad, or that that will just ruin my life. Or we could

have the perception that that's a challenge. It's an opportunity to learn and to grow. It is a way to allow me to think differently and have a different perspective, and maybe learn more about myself and more about life.

And the three things to do to help us alter our perception and improve our perception: number one is to have an intention to advance. To know that, no matter what happens in our lives, it's to help us advance. And then the second one is to have a disciplined mind. Sometimes our minds just freak out. Sometimes our minds think very negative thoughts. And we need to learn how to quiet and calm our minds down so that, through our minds, we can receive the ideas and inspiration and clarity to handle the obstacles most effectively. And the third one is to adapt and accommodate. If we want to progress in life, we have to make some shifts in how we see things, and how we behave; how we act. We need to change ourselves. We need to be flexible.

There's a modern proverb that says, "*Blessed are the flexible for they shall not be bent out of shape.*" [Congregants laugh] And that's important thing, because you know we get angry that the world isn't changing, but the truth is: we need to do it. And that's: the more we're flexible, the less we are bent out of shape when life doesn't go the way that we want.

And so, today we're going to look at the second and third disciplines, which are **ACTION** and **WILL**. And so, these two disciplines are the finishing part of that formula to overcome and turn our trials into triumph.

So, let's look first at **THE POWER OF ACTION**.

How many people have heard of Demosthenes? Great. [Laughs with congregants] It's not important that you know him, but ... He was born in 384 BC. And he was sickly and he was frail and he had a debilitating speech impairment at the age of seven. He lost his dad. And the people who were supposed to take care of him stole all his money and deprived him of an education.

And nobody expected anything from this sick, frail kid. And people looked at him, they felt sorry for him. They thought what a horrible life he was leading, because things weren't just going in his way at all. None!

But then he saw a great orator in the court in Athens and, wow! He was captivated with the power of the speech. And he was absolutely captivated So, he went home and immediately took action. He started doing these exercises to help him articulate his words better. And so one of the ones he did: he put pebbles in his mouth and tried to say the alphabet. And he would memorize speeches. He would run up hills and try and do his talks. I mean, he did all kinds of crazy exercises to get control over his voice, his power, his knowledge. He memorized all these great speeches and delivered them and delivered them and delivered them.

And, over time, he found his voice. He found his power. He became a powerful and amazing speaker. When he reached age, he sued the people who stole his inheritance. And they had lawyers and he didn't have a lawyer; he used himself. And he did a stunning job and impressed. And he won. There was hardly any money left, but he felt so good that he'd accomplished this. He felt so good of what he had become and the good reputation he had. He went on to be a great speaker he became the voice of Athens. And he had a fabulous legal and political career.

He was asked, "*What are the three most important traits for speech making and in life?*" And he said that those three traits are: action, action and action. [Congregants laugh] He absolutely believed that action is the cure for our predicaments.

Aurelius said that, *"The impediment to action advances action."* And he [Demosthenes] realized that his speech issue advanced his action to use the marbles and all the different ways that he tried to improve his speaking skills. All of the practice, all of the focus; it triggered all of the study that he did. It triggered him holding that vision of being a great speaker. His impediment to action actually drove new and amazing actions that changed his life.

Every one of us has some disadvantage in some way; in some way we've been dealt some bad hand or something we wish we had more of. And instead of complaining, we need to utilize, learn from it, advance from it. And the only way to do that is through action. Take action!

So, I want you to think of that obstacle that is going on in your life right now and ask: What is one small step I can take? What is one action that I could advance this today that will help me change and improve that situation?

You know, too often when challenges happen in our lives, you know what we do? Nothing. We tend to complain first. And then we might wait or procrastinate or think we've got to wait for a sign or wait for all our ducks to be in a row, or all the conditions have to be ideal.

But the truth is: the real power comes in just taking a small step. Just taking some courageous action in the direction of the situation. Because when it comes to changing or improving our lives, most of us: we just want to be at bat, and we want to swing and hit a home run. We want to do some massive action that's going to launch us into greatness and be an overnight success and change our lives overnight. Sometimes we think that only big actions count, and smaller ones don't ... and they don't make a difference. And that's just not the truth!

Rosa Parks, when she refused to give up her seat on that bus, didn't know that she would ignite and be a part of a powerful movement. She just did the action that was right there before her, and it triggered things.

Sometimes we think we need to know all the steps. And we don't! Just the next one. And when you do that one -- take that action -- more doors will open to see what other actions that you are meant to take.

In the Book of Zechariah it says this: *"Do not despise small beginnings, for the Lord rejoices to see the work begin."*

You know, action is a powerful thing. It's not just a movement. Action is a transformative mechanism that changes things. That's why Einstein said, *"Nothing happens until something moves."* That action is important.

That's why in the Book of James it says, *"Faith without works is dead."* And it means that faith with works is alive. Action changes things! Actions change us! No matter what's going on in our lives, Demosthenes says action will help cure it. Action will help improve it.

If we want to improve our health and our fitness or lose some weight, take action! Write an action plan of going to the gym and a healthier diet. And if you need help and support, get it. Hire somebody or do it with a friend. You know, if you're having trouble with your finances, take action! Record and track how you're spending your money, develop a budget, and save regularly. Even if it's \$10 a week, take some kind of action.

If you're feeling stuck spiritually, get into a prayer group, or find a prayer partner, or do some book study. Take some action! There isn't anything in your life that isn't working or going well that taking some action will not help.

Feeling a little bit lonelier? You'd like to meet more friends or feel more social connection? Join a circle group. Volunteer. Step out in faith and get involved in some way. We need to take action.

There was a 50-year-old woman and she was debating whether to go back to school. And she told her friend, *"I'll be 54 when I graduate. I'm already old. I'll be 54."* Her friend said, *"In four years you're going to be 54. You'll be 54 either with a degree or without a degree. And you get to choose!"* And what's it all about? it's action. Action – action! -- is the thing that make things happen.

Now, a couple of things about action. Number one: **it's got to be an important ... the right action**. It's not just about "busy," and we can't just do everything. We learn to say, "No," and discern: What is the most important action for me to take today? What are the important priorities that I need to set? What are the things that will make a difference that are the first things that I should be doing?

Now, Demosthenes had speech exercises where he was putting marbles in his mouth. For him, that was his priority, and the very best and right thing for him. But for you: what is yours? It isn't the same for everyone. We have to tune in and see what is our priority; what is it we want to achieve; and what would be the best thing for me to do today?

Another important thing is to **make sure that these actions are consistent over time**. Again, we all like things to change overnight, but things take time to change. Anybody heard of the Law of Gradual Accumulation? Okay, there's a law, and it's called the Law of Gradual Accumulation. [Congregants laugh] And it really says that small incremental changes -- whether it's your finances, education, you want to learn music or a language -- it's about the consistency over time that things change. That things improve.

And that's how it is for most of life. Even though we all want to hit it right out of the park immediately, the truth and reality is consistency. Small, incremental steps over time makes a huge difference.

Now, when you really get down to it, this whole action thing, to me -- what it's really about: it's about moving energy. When we are stuck or unhappy, it's because energy is stuck in some way in our lives. And action gets energy moving. It gets energy unstuck. It gets it flowing. It gets it expanding. It gets it increasing and moving in our lives.

Action is powerful stuff. And whatever it is that's going on in our lives in terms of obstacles or goals: Are you willing to take the action and to allow things to move unfold and change in your life?

The second thing for overcoming and turning trials into triumphs is **THE POWER OF WILL**. Will is the inner strength and resilience that we build up within ourselves that help us be prepared mentally, emotionally, physically and spiritually for when life gets tough.

Life isn't always going to be easy. We're going to hit a wall. We're going to have some challenges; things like that. And it's our inner resilience that gives us the strength to move through and to hang in there and endure in those times where things aren't going the way that we want. It is that inner resilience -- and building an inner fortress, or citadel -- to fortify ourselves that helps us walk through the tough times; to get through the dark days; and to get up when life knocks us down. You know, the will to succeed; the will to move on; the will to get up is the thing that helps sustain us in those difficult times.

In 2 Corinthians, Chapter 4, Verse 8 and 9 it says: *"We are hard-pressed on every side, but not crushed. We are struck down but not destroyed."* And it's talking about resilience. Because we will feel knocked down; we will feel a little crushed here and pressed here and there. But we just need to hang in there. The challenges we face really call us and are begging for us to endure. Calling us to develop that resilience and that strength.

You know, in 1878, Thomas Edison was not the only person who was experimenting with incandescent lighting ... but he was the only one who persevered and was resilient to keep doing it 10,000 times

before he discovered what would work. Everybody knew him for his resilience, his perseverance, and his will that he would keep on keeping on. He would do whatever work was needed.

Nikola Tesla spent a year in Thomas Edison's lab, and he made a comment about him. He said this. He said, *"If Edison was looking for a needle in a haystack, he would start at once and he would examine every straw, one after the other, until he found the object of his search."*

It was his resilience, his will, his desire to persevere and do what was needed. That's what brought him the genius. That's what made him an incredible inventor.

I did not know that Abraham Lincoln battled his entire life with crippling depression and nearly committed suicide twice. And he'd already had a hard life. He grew up in poverty. He lost his mom when he was just a child. He did not go to college; he educated himself. He educated himself in law and actually practiced law in a small town. He lost the love of his life when he was a young man. He lost eight elections. Plus the battle with depression.

And with all of the adversity this man faced, he accepted his struggles and chose to find strength in them. To find benefit and meaning and patience and the resilience to endure anything. He built an inner fortress -- an inner citadel -- to fortify himself through the difficult times that we all face in life. It gave him the strength to handle the political situation of the Civil War, plus the strength he needed to get the Emancipation Proclamation passed.

You know, will is expressed in stoic maxim that says, *"Acknowledge your pain, but keep moving forward to your task."* Acknowledge your pain. Life is tough. It's painful! It's not easy! But keep moving forward to your task. That is the power of will.

And so, right now I want you to think about: What is something that you've overcome that you were resilient in? That your inner strength helped you hang in there to move through a difficult time? A loss, a divorce, some major change in your life or some bold move that you made?

And I think it's important for us to have a list of "resilience reminders" to help us remember that we have overcome things before. And whatever it is we're facing now, we can overcome it, as well.

*"I have overcome many things before, and I can overcome this. I have overcome many things before, and I can overcome this."*

Let's say that together: [with congregants] *"I have overcome many things before, and I can overcome this."*

I saw a TED talk the other day. This woman, Angela Lee Deckworth: she's a teacher and she wanted to study what -- besides IQ -- is a good predictor of if students would succeed or if anyone would succeed in their life. And she did tests at West Point; the National Spelling Bee; of rookie teachers ... She did it all over to get consistency to see: What is that element that has people succeed? And she came up with the word "grit." The people who have more grit -- and you can call that determination, perseverance, resilience -- tend to hang in there in the tough times that are able to get through, even when they don't do well at some point.

And she connected to say, *"How can we get all of our kids to have more grit and more adults to have more grit?"* And she connected ... Everybody heard of the growth mindset? The growth mindset basically says that -- it is a belief that -- the ability to learn is not fixed, but it can change with effort. It can change with time. It can change with action.

Carol Dweck from Stanford University is who came up with that concept. What she is saying: The thing we need to do is to teach our kids about the brain. To teach our kids that the brain can grow and change

in response to challenge. And, whether there's failure or whatever difficulty, that when we move through that and teach that mindset, that people will begin to learn. People will begin to hang in there.

Because sometimes kids fail at something when they're a kid, and they think, *"I'm no good at this,"* and they never do it again ... and they're instilled in that idea. We like to label ourselves as "bad" or "failure" so quickly and give up, and not allowing that process. And teaching: it's a process.

Failure and learning and growth and expansion and rising to great heights takes time. But it requires grit. It requires will. And we can teach ourselves and our kids how to achieve more grit and will.

A rich man goes to his minister and says, *"I want you and your wife to go on a three-month vacation to the Holy Land. And when you come back, I have got a great surprise for you."*

Three months later, the minister returns. And he meets the wealthy parishioner, who shows him a new church. And the parishioner says, *"This is not just a new church. This is a perfect church. It is built with the best that money can buy. I spared no expense."*

And so, the design was incredible. The lighting, the coloring, the sacredness, the modern look: everything was so amazing. The only thing is that there was only one pew in the sanctuary and it was at the back of the sanctuary. And then the minister said, *"Hey, what's with that?"*

He said, *"Well, look at this."* And so, he had some people come in. And they all sat down. And the pew moved to the front and another pew popped up in the back. And as it filled, it just kept moving up. And he said, *"Now the church will fill up from the front."*

And the minister looked at him and smiled and said, *"Oh, this is the perfect church."*

And so, on Sunday the service begins and everything's going great. And at 12 o'clock the minister is still preaching. He is going hot and heavy, strong; doesn't look like this thing will ever end. And right at 12 o'clock a buzzer beeps. And then a trapdoor is right behind the pulpit, and the minister falls through the trapdoor and service is over right at noon.

All people's eyes open up, and one guy leans over to the next congregant and says, "Oh, my God, this is a perfect church!" [Congregants laugh] All right.

Obstacles, adversity; it's all a part of life. And it can lift us to higher levels of peace and joy and fulfillment and knowing our oneness with God. But we have got to do the work. We have got to build an inner fortress of strength and resilience in knowing that we can endure.

You know, Epictetus said, *"In life, you've got to do two things every single day: persist and resist."* Persist and resist. You've got to persist in having a positive perception of what you see in this world. And you've got to resist looking at everything and thinking it's negative and it's going to get worse. You've got to persist in taking the right action and knowing that actions will help move and change the energy and the momentum of your life. And you've got to resist laziness, procrastination and doing nothing. And then, finally, you have got to persist in your will: of building resilience in yourself. And you absolutely have to resist giving up or thinking life will never get better.

Adversity and obstacles are a part of life. They bring out the best in us; they help lift us to a higher level. The question is: Are you willing to do the work to overcome and turn your trials into triumphs?

God bless you all.