

Pt. 17 “Lessons We Learn”

Acts 28:16-24

If Life does not turn out the way you imagined Don't Give Up!

When I entered **Plum Junior High School...**

1. I had a Gym Teacher named ...Mr. DelaStreeto
2. He introduced us to a lot of new things as 7th grade boys.
3. I'll never forget the fun we had as Mr. DelaStreeto introduced us to track and field games
 - to things like the 100-yard dash, relay races, and, most of all, the hurdles.
 - As any red-blooded American boy would have done, I had done my share of running and climbing and bicycling and the like.
 - But hurdles I had never seen, nor had I ever tried.
 - I soon found out that there is quite an art to jumping hurdles.
 - You have to pace yourself just right; you have to anticipate which foot you are going to lead with and get it up and over at just the right moment.
 - Then you have to worry about that trailing foot and whether it is going to snag on the hurdle.
 - All of that in a few seconds' time, and just when you get one hurdle right, a few yards away there is another one.
 - It's tough. I never got it quite right.
 - Those hurdles tripped me up every time.
 - I just couldn't coordinate eyes and feet and body.
 - And that was the low hurdles; don't even talk to me about the high hurdles.
 - When I saw those I just quit trying. Too much!
4. But now do you know what my real problem was with the hurdles?
 - Was it that I was not strong enough to jump? No, no problem with that.
 - Was it that I was not fast enough? No, I can move fast without any problem.
 - No, I could not jump the hurdles because I thought I could not jump the hurdles.
 - My problem was not a physical one; it was a mental one.
 - Because I believed I could not get over the barrier, I truly could not get over the barrier.
5. Life is like that for many of us.
 - If the way is clear and there are no barriers, we are fine.
 - If our health is good and our bills are paid, we can move.
 - If we're not in any conflict and not under unusual pressure, we can keep going.
 - If our feet don't hurt and three square meals are on the table, day by day, we stay calm and we move forward.
 - As they used to say, back in East Tennessee where I once lived, “Lord willing and the creek don't rise, I'll be there.”
 - But very, very few of us can really expect to live that way.
 - Very, very few of us can expect to travel an open road, with no barriers.
 - Almost none of us can expect to sail through life on flowery beds of ease, while others fight to win the prize and sail through bloody seas.
 - No, we are going to sail through some bloody seas. We are going to encounter some barriers.
 - We are not going to go forward thru life without jumping some hurdles. It just won't be.

6. The issue is, then, not whether you can advance without barriers.
 - The issue is whether you can advance without hindrance!

Let me say that again. The issue is not whether you can advance without barriers; the issue is whether you can advance without hindrance. And there is a difference. There is a distinction.

Definitions...

Barrier...a fence or other obstacle that prevents movement or access.

a circumstance or obstacle that keeps people or things apart or prevents communication or progress.

synonyms: [obstacle](#), [obstruction](#), [hurdle](#), [stumbling block](#), [bar](#), [block](#), [impediment](#), [hindrance](#), [curb](#)

Statements...

1. Barriers are things that are set up to challenge you.
 - a. They prevent you from doing what you want to do easily.
 - b. Like hurdles, they stand in the way of a quick run around the track.
2. They are part of the way life is.
 - As a junior high kid, I could have run around the barriers instead of jumping over them, and believe me, I tried that.
 - But Mr. DelaStreeto... caught it every time. It was against the rules; it was not the way the game is played.
3. Barriers challenge you, and they are just there; they have to be jumped.
4. No one is going to whisk through life without barriers. They just are.

Hindrances... – now hindrances are different.

Hindrances are the conditions of heart and spirit that make barriers insurmountable.

Statements...

1. Hindrances are the attitudes, the stuff inside you, that make the barriers difficult.
 - a. My hindrance as a twelve-year-old was the belief that I could not jump those barriers, because I had never tried it before.
 - b. Never before had I had to do this thing they put in front of me, so I just knew that I could not do it.
 - So, guess what? I could not.
 - Because I believed in the hindrance.
 - I had a mental problem with it.
 - I could not advance over the barrier because I could not advance without hindrance, I could not advance without first dealing with my attitude of defeat.
2. FBC believers...Today I am convinced that with God's Help...there is no hindrance to your advance or to mine.
 - a. There are barriers, to be sure, but there need be no hindrance.
 - b. We can advance in our life without hindrance.
 - We can move forward.
 - There is no need for us to feel that we will stop in our tracks;
 - there is no hindrance to our advance.
 - With God...all things are possible

Proverbs 23:7 ⁷ For as he thinks in his heart, so is he.

2 Corinthians 10:5 Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;

Romans 12:2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

Philippians 2:5 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:

Someone has said...

Key to understanding the Acts of the Apostles in the Bible

1. Notice the last word of the book.
 - a. The very last word in the Book of Acts is “unhindered”. - Akolutos, unhindered, without hindrance.
 - b. The very last sentence in Acts sums up all that has gone before; Vs. 31
- it says that the apostle Paul “proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.” Unhindered.
2. Does that mean that Paul faced no barriers, no hurdles?
- Does that mean that Paul had it easy and could just sit in an ivory tower and write elegant theological essays for the world to admire? It does not.
3. Where was he when Acts ends? Do you know? He was in prison!
- Shackled to a Roman soldier – and yet he was unhindered!
- He was advancing! How can this be?

Paul was Unhindered because...

1. He knew that God loved Him

- a. that His kingdom included Paul;
- b. that who Paul was and what Paul did matters to God.
- c. He had experienced the kingdom of God.
 - (1) And because he had personally experienced the kingdom, he knew that it had no boundaries, and that God could overcome every barrier.
 - (2) Paul advanced without hindrance because the thing that meant the most to him was his personal experience with the living Christ.

Remember Pauls history...

- (a) There is that powerful moment when deacon Stephen, full of the spirit of God, preaches to the people on the streets, and gets the crowd excited.
- Some receive Christ as savior, but others stir up hate, and they stone Stephen. They kill him.
- Who was it who stood on the sidelines, cheering them on? Saul of Tarsus.

And who was it who went on a crusade against the church? Who was it who thought up acts of terrorism against Christians? Saul of Tarsus. Who was it who got himself a sheaf of warrants and set out to Damascus to root out this Christian thing? Saul of Tarsus again.

But who was it who encountered the living Christ on the road to Damascus and had his entire life turned around? Who was it who was knocked off his horse, got his eyes blinded, and ended up acknowledging as Lord the very one he had cursed? Saul of Tarsus. A changed man. So changed that he even quit using the name Saul and became known by his Roman name, Paul.

The rest is history. You know it. You know that this persecutor of Christians became the foremost missionary of the Christian movement. You know that this one who had breathed out threats and slaughter against the followers of Jesus had become the premier preacher of Jesus. Paul the missionary – did he encounter barriers as he went on his preaching missions? Of course he did. Without question. Beatings, imprisonment, shipwreck, threats, misunderstandings – barriers all. But he advanced without hindrance. Nothing stopped him. Why? Because he had personally encountered the love of God. Because he knew Christ and the power of His resurrection.

Look at him, brought to trial before the Roman governor and then again before King Agrippa. What does he do? He tells his story. He gives his personal testimony. He does not so much theologize or preach as simply to tell his own story. He is about to be sentenced for criminal activity. Wouldn't you think he would hire a good lawyer? Wouldn't you think he would try to hide his story? But no! Paul knows that nothing can stop him from moving forward in his life. There are no hindrances, only barriers. There is nothing to hold him back, because he knew personally the call of Christ.

The first key to advancing without hindrance is to know that God loves you; that His kingdom includes you; that who you are and what you do matters to Him. When you know that the infinite God, in all His glory, is paying attention to you, loving you, claiming you, then, I tell you, nothing will stop you. Nothing will hinder you from doing Kingdom business. Nothing.

2. He testified to others about the Lord Jesus Christ.”

He got outside himself and taught others about the one who had made all the difference. Paul advanced without hindrance because he saw everything that happened as an opportunity to give to others what they needed.

Now I want you to remember Paul's circumstances as the Book of Acts closes. He has been sent to Rome because, as a Roman citizen, he had the right to appeal his conviction to Caesar. He had been accused of breach of the peace back in Jerusalem, and had spent a long time in prison, waiting for trial, waiting while governors changed and officials did their paperwork and figured out what to do. Paul had been incarcerated for a long while. And now it was going to be even longer – it's kind of like waiting for the Supreme Court to decide a case. It may take years for a case to make its way up the appeals process and get on the Supreme Court docket. So Paul has to sit in Rome, under arrest, waiting for two years for his case to come up. Down time. Wasted time, we would call it.

But not for Paul. Not for the prince of the apostles. What does the text tell us? He “welcomed all who came to him .. and [taught] about the Lord Jesus Christ”. Paul kept on doing what he knew he was called to do, no matter what the circumstances. His chains were a barrier, but they were no hindrance.

In fact, his chains were an inspiration. Do you know that in one of his letters Paul sends greetings to his readers, and mentions that some of the saints are in Caesar's household? He has used his imprisonment to make converts! In another of his letters Paul writes with moving eloquence about the whole armor of God, and we imagine that as he did so, he was looking at that Roman soldier – hmm, let me see that helmet, Gaius – we'll call that the helmet of salvation; let me get a better look at your sword – ah, that reminds me of the sword of the spirit, the word of God. Paul used his confinement as an opportunity to do in a new way what he had been called to do all along. His circumstances were not a hindrance; they were only a barrier to be crossed, a hurdle to

be jumped, a challenge to be accepted.

Some of you will remember Monell Cunningham, one of our founding charter member of this church. Miss Monell lived to the age of 88. But the last year of her long life she spent in a nursing home bed. You would think that that would have been an intolerable, horrible year. Unacceptable, to be confined to that bed all that time. But do you know what Miss Monell did She taught Jesus Christ. She taught Jesus Christ to every roommate, every attendant, every nurse, every person who got within earshot of her bed. Was she hindered? She was not. Challenged, yes. Behind a barrier, of course. But not hindered, because she got outside herself and taught others about the one who had made a difference in her life. You can advance in your life, no matter what the barriers are, if you get outside yourself and see even your problems as an opportunity to give Christ to others.

3. He Advanced without hindrance.

Oh, I want that. I want that for me and I want that for you. I want that for our church. And I believe that it is here. I believe we are advancing. Praise God, advance is here. May I speak with you, just briefly, about your church, and about our advancement?

- Every barrier the early church faced, we too face.
- Every challenge the earliest Christians faced, we also are looking at.
- But just as the early church, by the power of the Spirit, overcame every barrier and crossed every hurdle, so also we are overcoming.
- I believe with all my heart that God has called us to advance His kingdom in this place, and to do it as Paul did it, with boldness and without hindrance.
- Without hindrance of heart and spirit.
- Without feeling down about ourselves.
- Without feeling defeated.
- We are an unhindered church. Barriers, yes, but we are advancing without hindrance.
 - a. The early church faced a lot of issues that had never come up before.
 - It might have blown apart on the issue of how to include people who had not been Jews first.
 - Controversy swirled as Peter and James and Paul debated the issue and fought for their perspectives.
 - But what did the church do? It convened a council; it studied the question and resolved it on the basis of God's word.
 - b. And then the early church faced another crisis when the Jewish widows and the Greek widows each complained that the other was getting more of the goodies.
 - Conflict! But the church did not panic; it simply created a new ministry to attend to those needs.
 - We have multiplied ministries, advancing without hindrance.

If Life does not turn out the way you imagined

Don't Give Up!

Illustration: Never Ever Give Up!

One of the most beloved and colorful sports personalities of our time was a man named Jim Valvano-"Jimmy V," as sports fans around the country affectionately knew him. Valvano died on April 16, 1993, after a year-long battle with cancer. He was forty-seven years old. He will be remembered as a great basketball coach. His North Carolina State team won the national championship in 1983, upsetting that great Houston Cougar team that featured Hakeem Olajuwon and Clyde Drexler. Valvano also will be remembered as an outstanding TV analyst, an eloquent inspirational speaker, and a lovable, wisecracking humorist. But most of all, he will be remembered for the courageous way he faced a debilitating illness.

A few weeks before he died, Valvano was honored on national television, and to that vast viewing audience, he said this:

Today, I fight a different battle. You see, I have trouble walking and I have trouble standing for a long period of time. Cancer has taken away a lot of my physical abilities. Cancer is attacking and destroying my body. But what cancer cannot touch is my mind, my heart and my soul. I have faith in God and hope that things might get better for me. But even if they don't I promise you this. I will never ever give up. I will never ever quit. And if cancer gets me then I'll just try my best to go to heaven and I'll try my best to be the best coach they've ever seen up there. [Then, pointing to his 1983 Championship team, he said,] I learned a great lesson from these guys; they amazed me! They did things I wasn't sure they could do because they absolutely refused to give up! That was the theme of our championship season: "Never ever give up!" That's the lesson I learned from them and that's the message I leave with you: "Never give up. Never ever give up!"

James W. Moore, *Attitude Is Your Paintbrush*, Dimensions, 1998, 61-62.

Illustration and Conclusion:

John Paton was a missionary in the New Hebrides Islands. One night hostile natives surrounded the mission station, intent on burning out the Patons and killing them. Paton and his wife prayed during that terror-filled night that God would deliver them. When daylight came they were amazed to see their attackers leave. A year later, the chief of the tribe was converted to Christ. Remembering what had happened, Paton asked the chief what had kept him from burning down the house and killing them. The chief replied in surprise, "Who were all those men with you there?" Paton knew no men were present--but the chief said he was afraid to attack because he had seen hundreds of big men in shining garments with drawn swords circling the mission station.

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