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# Obstacles: Stumbling Blocks or Stepping Stones?

*A Reflection based on Joshua 3 and 4 and on 1 Peter 2:4-7*

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The book of Joshua marks a turning point in the narratives of the Old Testament. It recounts the transition of landless wanderers into the landed people of Israel.

It is in Chapter 3 that we meet the Israelites as they are preparing for the momentous point in their history when they are about to cross the Jordan River and enter the Promised Land.

But it was harvest time, and the river was in flood. In ancient times the Jordan River was probably 100 feet wide and 3 to 10 feet deep. Flooding could increase it to as much as 600 feet in breadth and 150 feet in depth – not exactly the best time for a river crossing. An obstacle – a stumbling block to be sure.

Did the people remember what God had done for them when they were at the Red Sea with Pharaoh's armies in hot pursuit? Would God act so again?

As in the parting of the Red Sea, God again made a way when there was no way. The waters on the upstream side rose up in a heap and stood still, and the downstream side toward the Red Sea was cut off. God created a pathway along dry ground.

The people were told to follow the priests who were bearing the Covenant Box of the LORD. When the Israelites had been in the wilderness and after they had received the Law at Mt. Sinai, the LORD's Covenant Box always went ahead of them. The Covenant Box of the LORD was regarded as a manifestation of God's presence and power. The living God was among them.

So, too, is the living God among us. God does not abandon us when we find ourselves in the wilderness or when obstacles or challenges confront us.

The 4th chapter of the book of Joshua points us to the importance of remembering God's mighty act. In setting up memorial stones, the people are not only reminded of what God did that day, but that they are to pass on to each succeeding generation that the God they worship is a living God.

As the Israelites stood at the bank of the Jordan River, their obstacle became a stepping stone – a stepping stone into the Promised Land and a new beginning.

If you've ever visited a Jewish cemetery, you've probably seen rocks that were placed on top of the headstones. Whenever someone visits the grave of a loved one, they find a rock close by and place it on top of the headstone as a sign of remembrance.

What memorial stones have you set up in your life? Can you think of a time when God acted in your life – turning a perceived stumbling block into a stepping stone?

For me, one example was the time I entered seminary. When I received the syllabus for each of my two courses that first semester, I literally broke down and cried. I just could not imagine how I was going to get through all the readings, papers to be written, etc. while working full time. Then a friend and co-worker reminded that she and others were praying for me. At the seminary, I was blessed with two wonderful tutors; and in getting to know the other students in my classes, I learned the value in meeting together to discuss the readings and in so doing, we encouraged one another. When I received my first paper back from the professor with the word "Bravo," that became my first memorial stone. It provided me with the encouragement to continue and say to myself, "I can do this." And after completing that first semester, that, too became a memorial stone for me. I told myself – one semester down, seven to go. I can do this.

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