

Luke 17:1-4

¹Jesus said to His disciples, “It is inevitable that stumbling blocks will come, but woe to the one through whom they come! ²It would be better for him to have a millstone hung around his neck and to be thrown into the sea than to cause one of these little ones to stumble.

³Watch yourselves. If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. ⁴Even if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times returns to say, ‘I repent,’ you must forgive him.”

Berean Study Bible

1

In a bad place, be a better person. Luke 17:1-4

The world is a bad place. 17:1a

Awareness. 1a “it is inevitable”

Avoidance. 1a “stumbling blocks will come”

Don’t be a bad person. 17:1b-2

Don’t cause problems. 1b “through whom they come”

Don’t be a problem. 2 “a millstone hung around his neck”

Dealing with bad people. 14:3-4

Care for yourself. 3a “Watch yourselves”

Correct your brother. 3b “brother sins, rebuke him”

Care for the broken. 4 “repent... forgive”

2

Don’t stumble on the stones. Luke 17:1-4

Beware of stumbling. 17:1a

Stumbling blocks are everywhere. 1a “it is inevitable”

Stumbling blocks may be helpful. 1a “stumbling blocks will come”

Seriousness of stumbling. 1b-2

Causing stumbling is condemned. 1b “woe to the one through whom they come”

Causing stumbling has consequences. 2 “millstone hung around his neck”

Care for stumblers. 17:3-4

Regard yourself. 3a “Watch yourselves”

Rebuke your brother. 3b “brother sins, rebuke him”

Receive your penitent. 4 “repent... forgive”

3

Having a hard time is really hard. Luke 17:1-4

I will get hard times. 17:1a

Hard times will come. 1a “it is inevitable”

Hard times will differ. 1a “stumbling blocks”

I won’t give hard times. 17:1b-2

Hard times giving is condemned. 1b “woe to the one through whom”

Hard times givers are condemned. 2 “a millstone hung around his neck”

I will help those in hard times. 17:3-4

Hard timers need correction. 3 “If your brother sins, rebuke him”

Hard timers need compassion. 3-4 “if he repents, forgive him”

4

I can avoid the stumbling blocks. Luke 17:1-4

I don’t have to stumble over stumbling blocks. 1a “it is inevitable”

I don’t have to be a stumbling block. 1b-2 “woe to the one through whom”

I don’t have to allow others to be a stumbling block. 3a “If your brother sins, rebuke him”

I don’t have to abandon others to their stumbling blocks. 3b-4 “if he repents, forgive him”

5

Problems, what problems? Luke 17:1-4

There will always be problems. 17:1a

The problem of the world.

The problem of the flesh.

The problem of the devil.

Be the solution, not the problem. 17:1b

Overcome the lust of the flesh.

Overcome the lust of the eyes.

Overcome the pride of life.

Help others get past their problems. 17:3-4

Get by with remembering.
Get by with rebuking.
Get by with repenting.

6

Are you part of the problem, or part of the solution? Luke 17:1-4

Don't be part of the problem. 17:1-2

Problems are inevitable. 1a "inevitable that stumbling blocks will come"
Problems are avoidable. 1b "but woe to the one through whom they come"
Problems are punishable. 2 "have a millstone hung around his neck"

Do be part of the solution. 17:3-4

Solutions begin with me. 3a "Watch yourselves"
Solutions bring change. 3b-4 "repent"
Solutions see the future. 3b-4 "forgive him"

7

When we fall. Luke 17:1-4

When I fall into sin. 17:1-2

I still keep my salvation. 1a "Jesus said to His disciples"
I always face challenges. 1 "inevitable that stumbling blocks will come"
I must fight my flesh. 1b "woe to the one through whom they come"
I must see my sin is serious. 2 "better to have a millstone"

When you fall into sin. 17:3

I will be gracious. 3a "Watch yourselves"
I will be challenging. 3 "If your brother sins, rebuke him"
You must repent. 3b "and if he repents"
I will be accepting. 3b "forgive him"

When we face up to sin. 17:4

Sin is always possible. 4a "if he sins"
Sin is perennial. 4a "seven times in a day"
Sin has an alternative. 4b "returns to say, 'I repent'"
Sin is always forgivable. 4b "you must forgive"

8

Roadmap for a difficult journey. Luke 17:1-4

Travel theme. 4-wheel-drive theme.

We are on a journey on the best road. 1a "Jesus said to His disciples" + Hebrews 13:5

We are on a journey we take together. 1a, 3a "disciples... brother" + 1 John 3:1-2

We are on a journey with potholes. 1 "inevitable that stumbling blocks" + Matthew 16:23

We are on a journey where choices have consequences. 2a "would be better"

We are on a journey that others follow. 2b "cause... to stumble" + 1 Corinthians 11:1

We are on a journey where I might crash. 3a "Watch yourselves" + James 4:8

We are on a journey where you might crash. 3a "If your brother sins"

We are on a journey where we can help. 3b "rebuke him; if he repents, forgive him"

We are on a journey, and we all need help. 4 "...repent ...you must forgive" + Matthew 6:15

9

Trouble ahead. Luke 17:1-4

There will always be trouble-makers. 17:1a "It is inevitable that stumbling blocks will come"

There will be trouble for trouble-makers. 17:1b "woe to the one through whom they come"

Be there in the trouble of trouble-makers. 17:3 "rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him"

Other possible titles

When your brother has an addiction.

Building blocks are better than stumbling blocks.

Stumbling blocks and millstones.

Don't be a sucker for stumbling blocks.

Be a strider, not a stumbler.

Step over the stumbling blocks.

Don't be part of the problem. Be part of the solution.

Get out of the way!

How to help the hurt, and the hurting.

When I am the stumbling block.

Avoiding the inevitable.

Fail forward.

Did you have a 'nice' trip?

Quotes and illustrations

Quotes on stumbling blocks, v1-2

The noun σκάνδαλον [Strong's 4625] occurs 15 times in the Greek New Testament (and 25 times in the Greek translation of the Old Testament). It is properly the trigger or trip-wire used to close a trap or a snare or a noose. Hence, this word came to be used for the whole trap, snare, or negative cause-and-effect.

σκάνδαλον was also used to refer to the immovable bedrock protruding through the earth which might cause a traveller to trip and stumble. Hence, it refers to a stumbling block. In the New Testament it is most often translated in this manner.

This noun is found most often on the lips of Jesus. Matthew 13:41, 16:23, 18:7, 18:7, 18:7, and Luke 17:1. It also occurs in Romans 9:33, 11:9, 14:13, 16:17, 1 Corinthians 1:23, Galatians 5:11, 1 Peter 2:8, 1 John 2:10, and Revelation 2:14.

σκάνδαλον is the basis of our English word, scandal.

Let us stop judging one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any **stumbling block** or obstacle in your brother's way. Romans 14:13

Now I urge you, brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who create divisions and place **stumbling blocks** that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Turn away from them. Romans 16:17

But we preach Christ crucified: **a stumbling block** to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles. 1 Corinthians 1:23

Brothers and sisters, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the **stumbling block** of the cross has been abolished. Galatians 5:11

⁷ To you who believe, then, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, "The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone," ⁸ and, "A stone of stumbling and a rock of **offense**." They stumble because they disobey the word—and to this they were appointed. 1 Peter 2:8

Anyone who loves their brother and sister lives in the light, and there is nothing in them **to make them stumble**. 1 John 2:10

A different word that is also translated as 'stumbling block' is the Greek noun πρόσκομμα [Strong's 4348]. This is a combination word, consisting of the preposition πρὸς [Strong's 4314] strictly meaning 'towards' but also used in the sense of proximity or 'in relation to'; plus the verb κόπτω [Strong's 2875] meaning, 'to cut, incise, cut off, sever'. While κόπτω can be used strictly as 'cut', as in palm branches were 'cut' and strewn on the path for Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Matthew 21:8, Mark 11:8), this word can also be used in the sense of personal loss and grief, and can be used for mourning. Therefore, πρόσκομμα means, 'to strike against, to bump into, to stumble over'. It occurs 6 times in the Greek New Testament. The cognate verb, προσκόπτω [Strong's 4350] occurs 8 times in the Greek New Testament.

There will always be rocks in the road ahead of us. They will be stumbling blocks or stepping stones; it all depends on how you use them. Friedrich Nietzsche

The right attitude can transform a barrier into a blessing, an obstacle into an opportunity or a stumbling block into a stepping stone. Cory Booker

Many a professing Christian is a stumbling-block because his worship is divided. On Sunday he worships God; on weekdays God has little or no place in his thoughts. Dwight L. Moody

A stumbling block to the pessimist is a stepping-stone to the optimist. Eleanor Roosevelt

Why did the achievers overcome problems while thousands are overwhelmed by theirs? They refused to hold on to the common excuses for failure. They turned their stumbling blocks into stepping stones. They realized that they couldn't determine every circumstance in life but they could determine their choice of attitude towards every circumstance. John C. Maxwell

The greatest stumbling block for children in worship is that their parents do not cherish the hour. Children can feel the difference between duty and delight. Therefore, the first and most important job of a parent is to fall in love with the worship of God. You can't impart what you don't possess. John Piper

If Jesus ever commanded us to do something that He was unable to equip us to accomplish, He would be a liar. And if we make our own inability a stumbling block or an excuse not to be obedient, it means that we are telling God that there is something which He has not yet taken into account. Oswald Chambers

Our wounds ultimately give us wisdom. Our stumbling blocks inevitably become our stepping stones. And our setbacks lead us to our strengths. Robin Sharma

I often wonder if my knowledge about God has not become my greatest stumbling block to my knowledge of God. Henri Nouwen

The little troubles and worries of life may be as stumbling blocks in our way, or we may make them stepping-stones to a nobler character and to Heaven. Troubles are often the tools by which God fashions us for better things. Henry Ward Beecher

Great truths that are stumbling blocks to the natural man are nevertheless the very foundations upon which the confidence of the spiritual man is built. H A Ironside

Obstacles are not opposing you, but merely and gently re-routing you. It is important not to view that which stands in your way as your 'enemy.' It can often be your best friend, sending you on a detour that takes you around what would have been your biggest stumbling block. Neale Donald Walsch

Quotes on repentance, v3-4

Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near." Matthew 4:17

Jesus said, "I tell you, unless you repent, you will all perish." Luke 13:3, 5

Jesus began to denounce the towns in which most of His miracles had been performed, because they did not repent. Matthew 11:20

The disciples went out and preached that people should repent. Mark 6:12

God now commands all people everywhere to repent. Acts 17:30

I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents. Luke 15:10

Repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in His name. Luke 24:47

Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret. 1 Corinthians 7:10

Repent, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord. Acts 3:19

Many think they repent when it is not the offense, but the penalty, that troubles them. Thomas Watson

To do so no more is the truest repentance. Martin Luther

Quotes on forgiveness, v3-4

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. Ephesians 4:32

And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. Mark 11:25

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9

For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. Matthew 6:14-15

Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven. Matthew 18:21-22

Bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Colossians 3:13

And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And they cast lots to divide his garments. Luke 23:34

So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Matthew 5:23-24

He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast

love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him. For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust. Psalm 103:10-14

Forgiveness says you are given another chance to make a new beginning. Desmond Tutu

There is no love without forgiveness, and there is no forgiveness without love. Bryant H. McGill

The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong. Mahatma Gandhi

Always forgive your enemies – nothing annoys them so much. Oscar Wilde

The stupid neither forgive nor forget; the naive forgive and forget; the wise forgive but do not forget. Thomas Szasz

To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you. Lewis B. Smedes

Forgiveness does not exonerate the perpetrator. Forgiveness liberates the victim. It's a gift you give yourself. T D Jakes

It's not an easy journey, to get to a place where you forgive people. But it is such a powerful place, because it frees you. Tyler Perry

Without forgiveness life is governed by an endless cycle of resentment and retaliation. Roberto Assagioli

When you hold resentment toward another, you are bound to that person or condition by an emotional link that is stronger than steel. Forgiveness is the only way to dissolve that link and get free. Katherine Ponder

Music and songs

Songs about avoiding, or overcoming, stumbling blocks and difficulties, v1
Be bold, be strong

Songs about watching yourselves, v3
Forgive me my friend,

Songs about helping your brother, v3-4
Brother, Sister, let me serve you (Servant song), SiS 256

Songs about forgiveness, v3-4
Forgive o Lord,,, Heal our land, (Michael Card)

Forgiven (Blankenship & Red), Ot 78
Forgiven (David Meece)
Forgiving eyes (Michael Card)
Freely forgiven, Ot 108
God forgave my sin... Freely freely, SiS 41 / MP 181
From the start... I'm forgiven (Omartian, Hockensmith)
I'm forgiven because... [Amazing love / You are my King], Ot 8
Seventy times seven (David Meece)

Thought starters for personal reflection or group discussion

1. In what ways are stumbling blocks and stepping stones different?
 2. Think about yourself. Make a short list of some of your internal stumbling blocks. What are some of your external ones?
 3. Read James 1:2-4, then suggest some reasons why Jesus would allow His own people (us) to have to cope with stumbling blocks.
 4. Look at how Luke 17:1 ends. How is it possible for me to cause someone else to stumble? Isn't stumbling their responsibility?
 5. Why are the first words of Luke 17:3 the starting point for turning stumbling blocks into stepping stones? How do I actually do this?
 6. We are to rebuke our brother/sister. How does Colossians 3:16 help us to do that well?
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