



MOUNTAIN IN MY REARVIEW MIRROR

A Guide to
Overcoming
Overwhelming
Obstacles

BILL BUTTERWORTH



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Mountain in My Rearview Mirror: A Guide to Overcoming Overwhelming Obstacles

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“Got struggles? Then *Mountain in My Rearview Mirror* is the book for you. Bill Butterworth weaves humor and powerful stories together with solid help for those who feel overwhelmed. It’s enjoyable, helpful, and nobody tells a story like Bill. I heartily recommend it!”

LEE STROBEL

Author of The Case for the Real Jesus

“Life struggles are unavoidable, and they can range from minor frustrations to major losses. But God has a path and a plan that can bring you into a better life than you had before. In *Mountain in My Rearview Mirror*, Bill Butterworth provides substance, hope, and practical answers for those dealing with the obstacles that affect us all. His book will inspire and guide you.”

JOHN TOWNSEND

*Psychologist, speaker, and author of
Boundaries and Who’s Pushing Your Buttons?*

“Bill Butterworth has had some mountains to climb in his life. We all have—or will soon. And when we’re facing the uphill challenges of life, we want an experienced guide beside us—one who can provide the coaching and encouragement to get us over the tough parts and get back to enjoying fullness of life. You’ll find the reality and wisdom in Bill’s book to be the very thing to help you face the highest hurdles before you.”

JOHN TRENT, PhD

*President, The Center for StrongFamilies
Author of The Blessing and The 2 Degree Difference*

“When facing mountains, you want guidance and encouragement from one who has been in the valley but also scaled the heights. Bill Butterworth is that person, and *Mountain in My Rearview Mirror* is the book. With humor, real-life illustrations, and biblical wisdom, Bill shows us how to overcome—and put behind us—the seemingly insurmountable obstacles in our own lives.”

MARK MITTELBERG

Author of Becoming a Contagious Church and Choosing Your Faith

“There is no question about it: We all face difficult times. But Bill Butterworth offers us a map to guide us through those times when we think the obstacles are too great to overcome. Bill is a fellow traveler, a guide, who will show you that not only can you make it through your tough times but that you will come out the other side stronger and better.”

BILL DALLAS

CEO, The Church Communication Network

“As a speaker, Bill has famously brought thousands of live audiences to laughter and tears. And I’m glad to say Bill’s writing is exactly like Bill’s speaking: very funny, very smart, and very, very relevant. The GTO story alone is worth the price of this book! Bill has a way of sneaking up on you—one minute you’re in hysterics over his description of a childhood faux pas, and the next minute you’re realizing a life-transforming spiritual insight.”

RENE SCHLAEPFER

*Conference speaker and senior pastor
Twin Lakes Church, Aptos, California*

“*Mountain in My Rearview Mirror* is brimming with hope, encouragement, compassion, and realism. Bill shows the way to overcoming adversity as only one who has been through it can. In doing so, he’s as likely to have you laughing as crying. Don’t miss this book!”

JUD WILHITE

*Author of Stripped: Uncensored Grace on the Streets of Vegas
Senior pastor, Central Christian Church, Las Vegas*

“In his latest book, *Mountain in My Rearview Mirror*, Bill Butterworth once again opens up his life to us in his winsome and powerful way. I appreciate Bill’s incredible ability to communicate with authenticity and wisdom. As you read this book—on an airplane, in a coffee shop, or on your break at work—you will want to warn people around you that laughter or even a shout of ‘You’re absolutely right, Bill’ may burst forth at any time.”

ERIC HEARD

Pastor, Mariners Church, Irvine, California

“Once again, Bill Butterworth delivers practical hope in equal measures of help, perspective, and inspiration. *Mountain in My Rearview Mirror* is an incredible resource for us mere mortals journeying on this trouble-filled road trip called life.”

MIKE HOWERTON

Lead pastor, Overlake Christian Church, Redmond, Washington

“The introduction to this book says, ‘This book is punctuated with the power of story.’ Yes, and it is accented by the delights of humor. Bill Butterworth is one of the funniest guys I have ever known—and one of the best storytellers. He uses these rare gifts to communicate life-changing truth from God’s Word. As you read this book, you will laugh, and you will cry—and you will grow.”

BOB THUNE

Senior pastor, Southwest Community Church, Indian Wells, California

For Gary and Linda Bender

*Thanks for all you taught me on that
climb up Camelback Mountain*



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And finally, my dear wife, Kathi. In many ways, you are the embodiment of what it means to overcome overwhelming obstacles. I am so blessed to have you in my life.



INTRODUCTION

THE LESSON FROM CLIMBING CAMELBACK MOUNTAIN

YEARS AGO SOMEONE told me in a public speaking class, “If you speak to the hurting, you will never lack for an audience.”

I have never forgotten that adage, yet I have to admit I didn't jump on it as soon as I heard it. Why? Because when I first heard those words I wasn't hurting. Not only was I not hurting, to the best of my recollection, I had never been hurting in any sort of significant manner up to that time in my life.



However, God, in His providence, allowed my life to come crashing down several years later.

As soon as I began to hurt, I realized the power in that quote. People in pain find great comfort from those who also have experienced pain. Upon reflection, I realized how “charmed” a life I had led up to that point. Happy marriage, healthy children, rising career, no major illnesses—life was good.

Then my marriage ended. I knew we had had our struggles in our seventeen years together, but I didn’t see the divorce coming. We tried to end it as amicably as possible, attempting as best we could to pay attention to our kids and how they would be affected. Needless to say, since I was making my living primarily as a speaker on marriage and family issues, the end of our marriage sent my career into a tailspin. I crashed and burned. I was convinced I would never again be happy, healthy, and whole. It was an obstacle I felt I could not overcome.

However, this is not a book about divorce recovery. It’s bigger than that. It’s a book about the basics of rising from the ashes. It’s a look at putting the pieces back together. It’s a series of lessons on overcoming overwhelming obstacles.

In the midst of my recovery from the early stages of my personal trauma, an event occurred that continues to teach me things about myself to this day. It’s a marvelous metaphor for me—and I hope for you.

My world had dramatically changed, and I was crushed against an overwhelming obstacle. I wanted to be alone so I could cry, so I could grieve, so I could feel sorry for myself. I didn't want to deal with anything or anyone; I spent hours curled up on the couch in the fetal position.

The telephone became a real intruder. Because I was totally depleted of all energy, both physical and emotional, I didn't want to pick up the phone and explain to yet one more person how my life was dredging below rock bottom.

Thank goodness for my answering machine. When I would hear the voice of someone with whom I wanted to connect recording a message, I would pick up the receiver.

One autumn morning my good friend Gary Bender called. Our friendship goes back a long way, yet often our lives got so busy that blocks of time would slip by without either of us realizing it. As I heard Gary's voice on my answering machine, I realized we had not spoken since I had become single again. Taking a deep breath, I picked up the phone. "Hi, Gary, I'm here. I'm just screening my calls," I sheepishly admitted.

"How's it going, friend?" he asked. "It's been a long time since we've talked. Bring me up to date."

"Well, I hope you're sitting down," I began. "Updating you on how I'm doing may include some surprising news."



And with that I launched into the whole story of my personal catastrophe. Gary was stunned.

“Bill, I had no idea” was about all he could say initially.

“I know, Gary. No one had any idea. I’ve been doing a pretty good job of keeping to myself these days. I’m just so embarrassed by this whole series of events. I don’t know any other way to handle it.”

As he started to regain his composure, Gary asked me, “So what can Linda and I do for you?”

“Pray” was the only thing I could think of at that moment. “And keep being my friend.”

“Are you busy over the next few weeks?” he asked sincerely. When I explained that I was facing the accompanying obstacle of being virtually unemployed, he understood I had plenty of time on my hands.

“So you’re just kind of hanging out?”

“Yeah,” I replied, realizing how sad it sounded. “I’m just hanging out.”

We talked for a few more minutes. When I hung up the phone, I remember thinking, *Well, that didn’t go very well!* Here I was, pouring my heart out to my friend, and all he really seemed to care about was that I was hanging out all by myself.

The next day it all made sense.

Around 10:30, a FedEx guy was knocking on my front door. He delivered an envelope from Gary containing a

round-trip plane ticket to Phoenix, where Gary and his wife, Linda, lived.

I speed-dialed Gary's number. "What's this all about?"

"Linda and I want you to come out and spend a few days with us," he explained. "We think you could use a little change of pace. Linda will be here when you arrive, but the next day she will be leaving to visit a friend in Colorado, so you and I will have a few days to be a couple of bachelors. I figure we should do bachelor things like play a lot of golf, eat barbecued ribs, and raise our cholesterol!"

Before I could respond, he added, "Please don't turn me down, Bill. You know you'd do the same thing for me if the tables were turned." And then he added the big line: "No one should have to go through what you're going through *alone*."

So that's how I ended up in Phoenix. Gary and I played lots of golf, ate a ton of ribs, and sent our cholesterol levels off the chart. It really was just what I needed. The change of scenery did me good, and even better was the fact that there was someone in my life who wanted to help me.

The night before I was supposed to leave, Gary poked his head into the guest room where I had already retired for the night. "We really had a good time, didn't we?" he said with unbridled enthusiasm.



“Yeah, Gary, this whole trip has been great!” I replied honestly.

“Well, I have one more idea before you get out of here,” he continued.

“What’s up?” I asked.

“Okay, your flight home isn’t until tomorrow afternoon, right?”

“That’s right,” I replied. “It’s not till around four.”

“Perfect. Whaddya say tomorrow morning we get up real early and drive out to the base of Camelback Mountain? We can climb the mountain and see the sun rise over Phoenix. It is breathtaking—it’ll change your life!”

I hesitated for a second. Would this really change my life? Besides, Gary was a jock and I had the athletic prowess of tile grout. What he thought might be easy could be flirting with death for me. But how could I refuse without looking like a complete weenie?

“Okay, Gary, it sounds good to me!” I gushed, hoping my fake enthusiasm wasn’t detectable.

Immediately, I knew I was in trouble when Gary started throwing together gear for the hike. Hiking boots, loose-fitting shorts and shirts, and my favorite piece of equipment—a belt with eight plastic water bottles attached to it with Velcro.

“Tomorrow I am going to die,” I concluded, and with

that I decided I should at least get a good night's sleep before it happened.

The next morning proved to be one of the most amazing adventures of my life.

We awoke at o-dark-thirty and drove to the base of the mountain. If nothing else, dressed in my hiking gear, I at least looked the part.

"Are you sure you're up to this?" Gary asked as we stretched our leg muscles in preparation for the hike.

"No problem," I lied. "I'm in great shape—I take the trash cans down to the end of the driveway once a week."

While we were warming up, it quickly became obvious that Gary and I weren't the only two people with the cool idea of climbing Camelback to see the sunrise. Literally dozens of people were streaming toward the mountain, forming a human chain winding its way up the slope.

I also noticed that this line of humanity was *old*. Yes, the senior partners of the AARP were on patrol, presiding over this predawn ritual much like they had done when Calvin Coolidge was president.

When we finished warming up, Gary got in line behind a dear old gent, and I followed behind my friend. I started off strong, actually feeling exhilarated by the entire experience.

Then I got to the third minute of the hike.

That's right. It only took me a little over two minutes



to feel the cornucopia of pain that was beginning in my body. My thighs were screaming. My lungs felt like they were going to explode. I was light-headed. Worst of all, every drop of water in all eight water bottles was drained dry.

Obviously my pace had slowed down to a crawl. The senior behind me didn't like that development one bit. "Get the (blankety-blank) out of the line if you can't keep up, you (blankety-blank)!" I was surprised to hear such ripe profanity from a ninety-year-old, leather-skinned, bow-legged, tattooed, chain-smoking, blue-haired woman.

At her recommendation, I gladly stepped out of line. I was coughing, wheezing, and watching the mountain swirl around me in my predeath gaze.

"Are you okay, Bill?" Gary asked, genuinely concerned.

By now the whole scene seemed like something out of a movie script. So in my best Hollywood voice, I said, "Go ahead, Gary—save yourself. On the way back down, if the buzzards haven't eaten my body, take it back with you. And tell my kids I love 'em, okay?"

"Come on now, Bill, relax," Gary encouraged. "You just need a little rest. You can do it!"

"No, I can't," I replied.

"Yes, you can."

"*No* . . . I can't."

"Yes, you can."

“*No . . . I can’t!*” I finally blurted out in utter exasperation.

By now Gary could see that I was serious, so he paused for a moment and then changed tactics.

“What if we climbed this mountain *at your pace?*” he suggested. “We could go as slow or as fast as you wanted. We could stop and rest whenever you needed. I really think you need to get to the top of this mountain, buddy. So what do you say?”

All I could think of in response was “Well, if we do that . . . we won’t see the sun rise!”

Gary smiled, patted me on the shoulder, and said, “Come on, let’s keep going on our journey.”

And with that we started our slow, steady, lengthy hike up Camelback Mountain. Throughout the hike, Gary would stop and share his water with me, since I had foolishly drunk all mine in the first two minutes. What a friend! *No one should have to go through this alone* kept running through my mind.

Ultimately we made it to the top. Gary and I were exuberant over our accomplishment. And we were both correct in statements we had made earlier in the morning. I had accurately predicted that we would not see the sun rise. By the time we got to the peak, we had a “Phoenix at high noon” thing going on.

But Gary was right too. The hike changed my life. Sure, the view of the city of Phoenix was breathtaking.



But more important, I did it! At a time in my life when I felt as if I couldn't do anything right, I had achieved a pretty cool goal.

I looked at Gary, who was beaming broadly. He was so proud of me. I wanted to do something to make this an occasion I would never forget.

"Gary, would you do me a favor?" I asked as an idea dawned on me. "Would you take a minute while we're on this mountaintop and just say a little prayer for me and my kids? It would really mean a lot to me."

He nodded, and right there, in the midst of God's glorious splendor, my friend prayed that I would be able to overcome this overwhelming obstacle.

It was a short prayer. It was nothing exceptionally eloquent or grandiose. But by the time he said "Amen," I was weeping.

After a few more moments of taking in the view, we started down the mountain. I soon learned that going *down* a mountain is not all that difficult. I could keep a healthy pace. I could take in all the sights. I could even carry on a bit of a conversation at the same time!

That trip up Camelback symbolized my life, and it also symbolizes yours. Life is a mountain journey. All of us are somewhere on that journey.

Some of us are on the way up the mountain—probably most of you who are reading these words right now. Your life is tough. You are tired, fatigued, near exhaustion.

Emotionally, your thighs are screaming and your lungs are about to explode. And you feel as if you have totally depleted all the water in your emotional tank. You think it just can't hurt any worse than it does now.

My hope in writing this book is that you'll see that you can get to the top of the mountain, where a new experience awaits you. What I gained at the top of Camelback Mountain can be summed up in one key word:

Perspective.

Had I seen the skyline of Phoenix before? Yes. Had I ever seen it from that perspective? No. And what did I have to do in order to gain that perspective? Endure the pain of climbing the mountain.

Honestly, I see things in my life today that I never would have seen without the opportunity to overcome the overwhelming obstacles in my life. I'm a different man—a better man—today. For all the theologians out there, let me be clear. I don't think God caused my obstacles, but He certainly did allow them to happen. And I think He did so in order to strengthen me in the way I live my life. He was building character.

There is another spot you might be on this mountain: working your way back down. Life is going pretty well right now. Life is good. The pace is such that you can even stop to smell the roses.

Of course, life is more than one mountain journey. It feels as if no sooner do we get past one obstacle than



we are met head-on by another, and the mountain climb begins all over again.

That's the way it works. That's life.

My hope is that what you discover in the following pages will help you navigate difficult terrain: despair and discord, fear and doubt, guilt and shame, and overwhelming adversity.

This book is punctuated with the power of story. Just as the climb up Camelback Mountain has stayed with me, I believe stories stay with us light-years longer than bullet points do. Oh, I'll make some points; you don't have to worry about that. But my goal is to give you the water you desperately crave on your eventful life hike.

And, of course, I'd like to help you gain a new perspective as well.



ONE

CHAPTER

THE LESSON FROM THE CHURCH BASKETBALL LEAGUE

IN HIGH SCHOOL I yearned to be an athlete. The “cool” kids in school were all jocks, and most teenage boys aspired to be as cool as them. Unfortunately, my swim in the DNA pool left me with abs resembling a doughnut rather than a six-pack. I was tubby—that’s the kindest way to put it.

So in school my lot was cast as a member of the marching band. Now, I’m sure marching band is cool in many



schools, but in ours it was definitely on the opposite end of the popularity chain. Besides an interest in throwing the shot put and the discus for the track team, I found an outlet for my athletic aspirations . . . the church league.

It's true. I was a regular participant in church softball, church flag football, and of course, church basketball.

Two stars on the church basketball team, Teddy and Gary, were starters on our high school varsity basketball team. Not only were Teddy and Gary big men on campus, but they were also two of my closest friends. I idolized both of them. When Teddy asked me to join the church league, I felt I was one step closer to the cool life.

But there was still one problem. I possessed the athletic ability of a doorknob.

So the good news was that I was on the church basketball team. (Many years later I learned that the church team had a “no cut” policy, as a way to be an example of Christian love.) The bad news is that I sat on the bench every game—no exaggeration.

There just never seemed to be the right opportunity to put me in as a substitute for a good player. (In reality, even though we had a team made up of some exceptional players, there was never a game where the coach felt we had a large enough lead to put the entire game in jeopardy by sending me onto the court.)

But like any good tale of youthful innocence run amok, there was this one game. . . .

It was a snowy Tuesday evening in March, the Philadelphia weather at its worst. Our little band of church boys bravely boarded the church bus for the treacherous three-mile ride to our opponents' church gymnasium. It was a lone rectangular building at the back end of the parking lot. The building was literally the same size as a basketball court, with just enough room on the sidelines for eight to ten loyal fans to squeeze in and watch. The baskets that hung on opposite ends were just a few feet from the small, thin pads placed on the walls to soften the blow if a player ran too far down the court.

We hustled out of the bus and quickly scrambled into the heated gym. My teammates and I were wearing only sweatshirts and sweatpants over our uniforms, so it felt as if the frigid temperature had penetrated down to our bones' marrow. We needed no motivation to begin warm-ups. We were freezing; layup drills were the equivalent of steaming cups of hot cocoa.

I reveled in the pregame warm-ups because they were usually the only playing time I ever saw. Then the game began and I obediently took my usual place on the bench—all the way at the end, the player farthest from the coach.

The game progressed pretty much as usual. Having two starting high school varsity players on our church team made us relatively unbeatable. But soon it became apparent that this night was going to be different. Our



opponents had a player who was actually quite good. As carefully as our team attempted to defend him, he always seemed to elude their grasp, break free, and score two points.

That's precisely when Teddy hatched his plan.

During a time-out, Teddy walked to my end of the bench. "Butterworth, are you ready to get a little playing time?" he asked in an almost seductive tone.

"You'd better believe I'm ready," I replied, not fully believing what my ears were hearing.

"Okay, good," Teddy continued in a hushed tone, almost a whisper. "At the next time-out, I'm going to ask the coach to put you in."

"You are?" I was in shock.

"Yes, but there is a specific reason why I want you in there. We need a big guy like you to defend their star player."

"You do?" I was mystified by Teddy's strategy, and he knew it. So he clarified. "Yeah, the next time he gets the ball and you are defending him, I want you to give him an intentional foul. Do you know what that means?"

"I think so. It means I foul him on purpose, right?"

"Exactly. We do it to send a message. And the message is 'Don't mess around with us!'"

"Okay," I stammered.

"So that means when you foul him, you've got to really foul him. You got it?"

“Yeah,” I said. My assignment became crystal clear. I was being put in to use my extra tonnage as a weapon—a lethal weapon.

The referee blew the whistle, and the teams were back out on the floor. On the bench, I was sweating peanut butter, facing a moral dilemma of gargantuan proportions. I was finally being allowed to play in a game, but my assignment was a sinister one at best. I had never been a fan of the intentional foul, and now I was being asked to deliver one.

I began praying that the other team’s star would suddenly grow stone-cold at the basket. The kid was on fire.

As the scores grew ominously closer on the scoreboard, I heard our coach shout, “Time!” I was completely drenched in sweat, even though I had barely moved a muscle sitting on the bench. I saw Teddy conferring with the coach. They looked down the bench, staring at me.

“Butterworth, come here,” the coach barked. I hustled down as fast as a wide body could move. “Are you ready to play a little basketball?”

“Put me in, Coach!” I hoped he was going to ask me to play a little man-to-man defense on their worst player.

“See number twelve out there?” the coach continued. “I want you to guard him. And the next time he gets the ball, I want you to foul him. Got it? Foul him!”

I nodded, but my heart wasn’t in it. The knots in my stomach made my heart inaccessible.



Teddy saw my uncertainty, and he came over to psych me up. “Bill, you can do this. You are going in to replace me so we can really foul this guy. If you get nervous, I want you to look over at me on the bench. I will help you get through it, okay?”

I nodded.

“Just remember, Bill,” Teddy continued, “we’re number one!” He held up the index finger of his right hand, the familiar “number one” gesture that we all knew, embedding in my brain the sign of victory.

I smiled weakly and slowly walked onto the court, feeling more like a convicted murderer being led to his execution than a church-league player. I looked over at Teddy; he was smiling, confident, making the number one sign. At that moment I didn’t feel like number one. I didn’t like where this plan was going. All I could think to do was to gesture back at Teddy. Since it was the late 1960s, I responded with my index finger and third finger spread, not in a V for victory, but in the universal sign of the sixties . . . *peace!*

Teddy wasn’t pleased with my peace sign, so he changed gestures. He held his right thumb straight up at me. “Thumbs-up,” his hand was saying. It was the ultimate sign of hope.

I am sure this nonverbal conversation only took a matter of seconds, but I’ve never forgotten it.

The ref blew his whistle to resume the game. It was

our ball. Gary threw it to my friend Bobby from under our basket. It was at that moment that number twelve from the opposing team seemed to leap out from nowhere and magically steal the ball from us. With our team in shock, he sped down the court all by himself. This was my moment. This was my destiny.

With all the speed I could muster (okay, me and speed might be an oxymoron), I took off after number twelve to accomplish my goal. Because he didn't see me, or else he didn't take me seriously, he slowed down to make an easy layup.

It was just enough of a delay to get me to the point of contact. I used all my body weight and drove it into his midsection, just as he was ascending to the basket.

I hit him. I hit him hard. His body hurtled under the basket and crashed into the thinly padded wall. He seemed to stay glued to the wall for just a second, and then he slid down like wet mud oozing down the side of a cliff.

He was out cold.

I turned away. I looked at my bench. Our coach was looking at me with shocked horror. Teddy was beaming from ear to ear.

The next thing I heard was a gut-wrenching moan from our opponents' coach. "*What have you done? What have you done?*" I knew he would be upset losing his star player, but what he said next completely threw me.

"What have you done to my son!"



Hurting a player was bad enough. But I had creamed the coach's son. This is not a good move under the best of circumstances, but being the visiting team, I knew the situation would only get worse.

"I want this kid ejected from the game!" the coach/father instructed the referee, as he pointed directly at me.

The ref nodded in agreement.

"Not only do I want him ejected, I want him out of my gym!"

The ref agreed again.

Before my coach could return to his senses, I was escorted out of the gym, which meant that I was escorted outside.

Outside . . .

in the snow . . .

wearing only a tank top, shorts, and sneakers.

And perhaps a thousand pounds of blubber.

It was a difficult way to become part of the church basketball team, but I have never forgotten that incident. And I can assure you I have never committed another intentional foul.

Oh, yes. Good old number twelve regained consciousness and actually came back to play in that game. But we beat them. Number twelve just wasn't the same after I ran into him. Of course, all of this was revealed to me on the bus ride home, since I missed the rest of the game while I was outside quickly accumulating a layer of ice. And to

the best of my recollection, that was the end of my church basketball career.

You may have figured out by now that each story I tell will illustrate an important point in the “Mile Marker” chapter that follows it. But be careful, the part of the story I choose as the illustrative point may surprise you! For example, the obvious application of this basketball experience is the concept of me choosing to do something I knew was wrong. But instead, I want you to focus on something else: those three symbols Teddy and I shared across the gym floor. Jesus used three symbols to illustrate the same three abstract concepts—victory, peace, and hope. Read on and we will discover exactly how He did it.