WOW: Word Of the Week

Hurdles

September 16, 2026

Track and field – what is your favorite event? During my years of ministry in Michigan, I served as a starter at high school track meets—I became quite familiar with the running events, sprints, distance runners, relays. (I can also tell you firsthand about how slowly spring shows up in Michigan—I remember some mighty cold afternoon track meets!) Jan and I recently talked about incredible records in the triple jump (her favorite event), high jump records at 8 feet plus, pole vault records at 20 feet plus. But the most amazing feat to me is the hurdles. Low hurdles, high hurdles, 30-42 inches depending on age, level of competition. Good hurdler is so smooth – runs virtually interruptedly. (Now there's a good word--uninterruptedly!)

Go to the grammar. Hurdle is both a noun and a verb. A hurdle is a physical barrier that runners or horses jump over in a race, or a metaphorical problem and difficulty that you must overcome; an obstacle, challenge, or complication that stands in the way of your progress or success. The verb refers to both jumping over the physical barrier and successfully dealing with and surmounting difficult problems.

This WOW is not about sports, track and field events, or grammar.
Today I am thinking about our spiritual lives. Two ideas or applications.

The first "hurdle" that comes to my mind refers to the barriers, obstacles, hurdles in evangelism, church planting. Church growth and evangelism studies identify levels of difficulty – E1, E2, E3, etc. – based on the number of barriers to be overcome – language, culture, unspoken societal expectations, family, church, social relationships… My commitment to training nationals to do the work of missions and ministry is based in part on the truth that national workers have fewer barriers to overcome. The best evangelists for our own culture and those who were raised here, understand, communicate well, fit in.

Second, but most important for the majority of us today, what is standing in your way of being a totally committed, all-in follower of Jesus? What are the hurdles? What are the barriers, obstacles?

The most often cited obstacles to living the Christian life can be grouped under the headings of cultural factors and spiritual struggles.

Many days, life overwhelms us. How can we find time for prayer, God-time, Listening to God, pursuing the spiritual life? Cultural values glorify independence, the pursuit of wealth, confort, and status whereas the Bible calls us spiritual values, meaningful community, sacrifice, and accountability to others.

The world often glorifies sin. Living the spiritual life in today's world is a struggle—many struggle with sin and countless others struggle with doubt. Individualism, consumerism, and modern entertainment do not align easily with Jesus' teachings. Life often reminds us of our failings, poor attitudes, and pride. Life often disconnects us from God. The rhythms of daily life fill with anxiety, stress, and opportunities to doubt God and discard faith.

These are hurdles deserving our attention, prayer, asking God's help.
What are the greatest hurdles, obstacles in your life? What hinders your involved, faithful service as a follower of Jesus? An important rule in running the hurdles--you have to go over the hurdles not around them!