

Please turn to page 48 in your Worship book and join me in the Prayer to the Holy Spirit.

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in us the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and we shall be created. And you shall renew the face of the earth. O, God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy your consolations. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Back in 1998, during my single years, I developed kidney stones. It was during a follow up exam that the Doctor discovered I had had a

hernia for some time. The doctor told me that it was not causing any problems now but it could in the future. He suggested that we take care of it sooner than later, so I went into the hospital to have a simple in and out hernia surgery. When I woke up from surgery they were wheeling me to a hospital room. You see during that simple in and out surgery they found testicular cancer.

That whole experience really messed with my mind, not to mention the hormonal imbalances it caused in my body after the surgery. It adversely affected the way I looked at who I was. I began to doubt myself and my manhood. Instead of turning to God, I turned to the world. I became involved with a woman that I had met over the Internet. She began our time together by introducing me to a relationship of sexual excess

and alcohol abuse. During this relationship she was able to convince me that she was all I ever needed and that nothing else mattered except keeping her happy! I turned away from my friends for her. I turned away from my brother-in-law and sister for her. I even turned away from God for her. This relationship went on for about 6 months. Then one night, after my Emmaus walk, I decided not to spend the night and her reaction showed me how she really felt about me. She never really cared for me; I was just another man for her to use and then to throw away like a piece of trash! Those were her words! I was finally able to see that she was a major obstacle in my life, an obstacle that was keeping me from my friends, my sister and brother in law and most importantly the grace of

my Heavenly Father. The next morning when I woke up at my home, I took a good look in the mirror and the person looking back at me I had never seen before. I knew at that moment that I did not like that person in the mirror and I wanted no part of what that person had become. So I asked for forgiveness for being so stupid from my friends, family and from my God.

After I overcame the obstacles to grace in my life, I recommitted myself to God and his service, was introduced to a lovely young lady who is now my wife of 16 years, and God blessed us both with a lovely daughter, and together we have all journeyed together overcoming a lot of obstacles on the way to be obedient to the call God placed on our lives,

especially mine! God took that messed up young man and turned him into a man of God.

The title of this talk is the OBSTACLES TO GRACE and my name is Richard Purvis

The Christian Life takes place in a real world affected by the consequences of sin. When we experience sin we not only feel alienated from God, we feel alienated from each other. And we even feel alienated from ourselves. We look in the mirror and we don't know who it is looking back at us.

Obstacles to grace are common. We all experience obstacles to grace. *An obstacle to grace is anything that keeps us from enjoying*

the loving relationship God offers us in Christ.

(Repeat)

What happens to cause this alienation? What causes these feelings of loneliness, of separation? We become so focused on ourselves or on some other relationship that we sever the relationships that are the most important to us.

Sin is self-centeredness rather than God-centeredness. Some have described sin as the “big I” – this is where we make ourselves the center of the universe and the standard for supreme goodness instead of acknowledging God as the rightful center of all creation.

Sin is alienation. (Repeat) The essential nature of every obstacle to grace is experienced as alienation from God, from others, and even from ourselves at times.

The Greek word for sin is *HAMARTIA*,
(spell for them) it is an archery term meaning
“to miss the mark or target.”

You see we can miss the mark in any
direction, by aiming too high as well as too low,
or too far right as well as too far to the left.

Sin is anything that causes us to miss the
target of God’s will for our lives. Matt. 22:36-40
says that “It is anything that separates us from
the love of God and the love of our neighbor.”

***In a broader sense, sin is anything that
diminishes life! (Repeat)***

In Genesis 1:1-31, especially vs 28-31 we
see that “Sin can be an abuse of any part of
God’s creation – the land, water, or air as well as
plants, animals and people”

In 2 Cor. 5:17; we read that for Christians, anything less than the new creation in Jesus Christ falls short of the biblical version.

There are two primary types of obstacles to grace: *Those that hinder our relationship with God and Those that hinder our relationships with other people. (Repeat)*

Some of the OBSTACLES TO OUR RELATIONSHIP with God are: (you may want to write theses down)

IDOLATRY – Deut. 5:7-8 say that this is worshiping and serving false Gods

BLASPHEMY – From Deut. 5:11 we see that blasphemy is speaking irreverently or profanely of God: using God's name to curse or revile anyone or anything

RESISTING GOD – 1 Thess. 5:19 states that resisting God is refusing to obey the will of God; or the quenching the Spirit of God

IGNORING GOD – Deut. 5:12-15 says that not making time for God in our Lives, thereby breaking the Sabbath for ourselves, our families, and our employees is how we ignore God

DISOBEDIENCE – Luke 19:11-27 tells us that Sin is intentionally rejecting the relationship that God offers and failing to develop the talents and abilities God has given us.

UNBELIEF – refusing to believe and obey the truth.

IGNORANCE – unknowingly alienating ourselves from God and others. Our lack of understanding can defeat us.

PRIDE – Matt. 6:5-8 reminds us that focusing attention on ourselves rather than giving honor and glory to God, this is pride

UNFORGIVENESS – toward God or others – we read in Matt. 6:9-15 that if we do not forgive we cannot be forgiven.

Forgiveness is not the same as forgetting, nor does it mean one has to remain in an abusive or hurtful relationship.

I encourage you to speak to one of the Spiritual Directors if bitterness or unforgiveness is an obstacle to grace in your life.

Now we are going to look at OBSTACLES TO OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHERS

MURDER In Deut. 5:17 we find that the Ten Commandments say clearly, “You shall not murder”

Murder is more than a physical act. The abuse of power can wound or kill others psychologically, kill them emotionally, and even kill them spiritually.

ADDICTION and ABUSE – can take many forms. Deut. 5:18; shows us that:

Any physical abuse, substance abuse, or abusive relationship diminishes life and becomes an obstacle to grace.

Any form of sexual abuse – adultery, promiscuity, pornography, and all forms of sexual exploitation of children, youth, and adults - creates an obstacle to grace

LYING – Deut. 5:20 says that lying is saying things that we know are untrue.

GOSSIP OR SLANDER – saying things with the intent of hurting others.

STEALING - Deut. 5:19 shows us that stealing is the taking away of things from those who own or deserve them

COVETING – Deut. 5:19 states that coveting is refusing to be satisfied with what we have. This can be manifested in an unhealthy desire for position, power, property, or relationship that others have.

LAZINESS – refusing to be a good steward of the life, gifts, graces, property, and power God has entrusted to you.

DISHONOR – Deut. 5:16 tells us that when we dishonor our parents, spouses, Children, and other primary relationships in our family, we create an obstacle to grace in our prayer life, and our dishonor has consequences for generations to come.

When we dishonor our spiritual leaders, pastors, and others in positions of authority established by God, we create obstacles to grace. In addition to the two primary obstacles to grace, there are even OBSTACLES TO OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH OURSELVES

We find in Mark. 12:29-34 that our Lack of love is refusing to love ourselves in a healthy manner so that we can love our neighbor.

Heb. 12:14-15 shows us that Bitterness - is like a dangerous virus of the spirit that can quickly spread to others around us.

In Luke 6:37-42 we read about Spiritual blindness.

The good news is that through Jesus Christ we can overcome any and all obstacles to grace.

The vertical line in the cross reminds us that Jesus Christ restores our relationship with God.

In Christ we:

Remember our reconciliation – in Mark 1:14-15 we see Jesus' ministry began with what? With a call to repentance, the offer of forgiveness, and the promise of eternal life.

We remember our baptism when the blood of Jesus washed us white as snow.

We recover our identity as children of God – We center our faith in the cross of Jesus Christ because it stands as the most powerful witness to the central message of the Bible in John 3:16: God created us, God loves us, and God gave his only Son that we might have eternal life.

We receive the power to walk in the Spirit.

The Christian life is possible if we accept the life of Jesus as our model and rely on the power of the Holy Spirit to lead us in our relationship with God.

A life in grace involves the daily practice of piety, study, and action that we have learned about this weekend.

We resist evil and renounce the forces of the evil one (James 4:7-8)

The horizontal line of the cross reminds us that Jesus Christ restores our relationship with ourselves and with our neighbors. In Christ we:

Come to know and love our true selves; therefore, we are reconciled to ourselves.

We become reconciled to our neighbors: Therefore, we can love one another. Live in peace, and seek justice TOGETHER!

We seek spiritual guidance from others in the body of Christ. A spiritual friend is someone who knows the pathway in a spiritual relationship with God and the obstacles to grace; he or she walks along with us on our spiritual journey and helps us discern the will of God.

We participate in all means of grace, including a small group where there is a commitment to accountable discipleship.

1 Tim. 2:1-4 tells us that we are to pray for our leaders and those in authority over us.

We are to love our enemies (Luke 6:27-30), feed the hungry, clothe the naked, etc. (Matt. 25:34-40)

We are told in Matt. 16:24-26 that the Christian Life is a daily decision to take up our cross and follow Jesus Christ. It is a life lived in

the shape of the cross, with appropriate attention given to our relationship with God and our relationships with others. ***There is always more grace in God than there is sin in us (REPEAT)*** (Rom. 5:20-21). Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:31, 38-39).

In Christ we can overcome any and every obstacle to grace. I know I did and gentlemen you can too.

De Colores!