**OBSTACLES TO GRACE**

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**New-Ark Area Men’s Walk to Emmaus #50**

Please turn to page 48 in your purple 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.

It started innocently enough. Most falls from grace do. It wasn’t anything overtly sinful. I wasn’t breaking any commandments. I wasn’t harming anyone else and it brought me pleasure, so why not? What could possibly be wrong with a silly game where you match up cookies?

I’m definitely not a gamer. Most of the time I can’t even understand what I’m looking at on a video game. Even my preschool nieces and nephews are amazed at my ineptitude with video games. However, one of my older nieces downloaded Cookie Jam on my cell phone. I didn’t pay any attention to it, until one of the younger kids was playing with my phone and asked for help playing it. I helped him for a while. Then, he kept making mistakes, so I decided it was easier for me to just do it myself. “Here buddy, give me the phone. Let me show you how to do it.” It was the beginning of a down-hill slide.

Have you ever played? When you match the cookies, there’s a big explosion and it’s so satisfying. Then, the levels get harder and it’s thrilling when you finally beat a really, hard level. I found myself enjoying it so much that I wanted to spend all my free time playing that stupid game. I became emotionally involved in the game. In the beginning, when I ran out of lives, it was annoying. As time went on, it became infuriating. I was seriously getting angry, losing my temper, over cookies, but I couldn’t get enough. I would look for opportunities to play my game. I had papers to write for school, and I’d think as soon as I beat this level, I’ll write. In the evenings, I found it was easier to skip reading the Bible, so I could play my game. I’d stay up late playing my game and then not feel like getting up early in the morning for prayer. One evening, my husband was trying to talk to me and I thought, I wish he’d stop talking so I can focus on my game. He’s really getting on my nerves. At that moment, I felt the Holy Spirit convicting me. This innocent, silly game was an idol for me and it had to go. My first reaction was to deny it and make excuses. It was nothing. What was it hurting? The Holy Spirit spoke very clearly to my heart, “It is hurting Me. It is hurting your relationship with Me and your relationship with other people. Get rid of it.”

Immediately, I uninstalled it from my phone and stopped playing it. By God’s grace, I am free, even of my Cookie Jam obsession!

**\***The title of my talk is Obstacles to Grace, and my name is **\***Karen Osborn.

**\*The Christian life takes place in a real world affected by the consequences of sin.** You might want to write that down. The Christian life takes place in a real world affected by the consequences of sin. We’d like to think that once we become Christians our struggles end. We’ve experienced God’s amazing grace. Our sins are forgiven through Christ. We’re indwelt by the Holy Spirit and empowered to live for Christ and to be like Him. As true as these things are, we quickly discover that it’s not as simple as it sounds. All of us experience obstacles to grace. We allow the distractions of the world, the desires of our flesh, and the attacks of the enemy to disrupt our relationship with God. These things that disrupt our relationship with God are common. They are obstacles to grace. Write this definition down. **\***An obstacle to grace is anything that keeps us from enjoying the loving relationship God offers us in Christ. An obstacle to grace is anything that keeps us from enjoying the loving relationship God offers us in Christ

Life takes place in the real world, and the real world is affected by the consequences of sin. **\***What is sin? You might want to write this down. **\***Sin is self-centeredness rather than God centeredness. Sin is self-centeredness rather than God centeredness.

**\***Some have described sin as the “big I”- making myself the center of the universe and the standard for supreme goodness instead of acknowledging God as the rightful center of all creation. It is seeking my desires and my will for my life rather than God’s.

Sin is alienation. **\*The essential nature of every obstacle to grace is experienced as alienation from God, from others, and even from ourselves at times.** 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. It’s an **\***archery term that means to miss the mark or target. We can miss the mark by aiming too high as well as too low, or too far to the 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.** Sin is anything that causes us to miss the target of God’s will for our lives. **\***It is anything that separates us from the love of God and the love of our neighbor. The book of Matthew, Chapter 22, verse 36-40 says, “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus replied, “Love the Lord your God with all heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it. Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” Sin is anything that separates us from the love of God and of our neighbor.

In a broader sense, sin is anything that diminishes life. Sin can be an abuse of any part of God’s creation- the land, water, or air, as well as plants, animals, and people. For Christians, anything less than the new creation in Jesus Christ falls short of the biblical vision. The book of second Corinthians, chapter 5, verse 7 declares, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold all things have become new.”

**\*There are two primary types of obstacles to grace: \*those that hinder our relationship with God and those that hinder our relationship with \*other people.** There are two primary types of obstacles to grace: those that hinder our relationship with God and those that hinder our relationship with other people.

**\***First, we’re going to talk about the obstacles that hinder our relationship with God. Please use a clean sheet of paper. As I read these words write them vertically on your paper. Starting at the top of the page in the center write **\***idolatry. Below that write **\***blasphemy. Below that write **\***resisting. Skip a couple of spaces and write **\***ignoring. Below that write **\***disobedience. **\***Unbelief. **\***Ignorance. **\***Pride. **\***Unforgiveness. These are all obstacles to our relationship with God.

Let’s talk about these obstacles that hinder our relationship with God.

**Idolatry** is worshiping and serving false gods. In Deut. 5:7-8, God commands us to have no other gods besides Him. Hopefully, none of you here have any carved idols or golden calves that you worship. Our idols are more subtle. An idol or false god, is anything we worship, love, or treasure more than God. All sorts of things can become idols for us; cookie jam, our career, money, success, pleasure, hobbies, and even sports team, anything that absorbs your heart, your mind, your time more than God.

**Blasphemy** is speaking irreverently or profanely of God; using God’s name to curse or revile anyone or anything (Deut. 5:11).

**Resisting God is** refusing to obey the will of God; 1 Thess. 5:19 tells us not to quench the Spirit of God. To quench means to put out a fire. How do we quench the Holy Spirit? By refusing to submit ourselves to His leading, not doing what He is calling us to do.

**Ignoring God**, this is not making time for God in our lives, thereby breaking the Sabbath for ourselves, our families, and our employees (Deut. 5:12-15).

**Disobedience.** Sin is intentionally rejecting the relationship that God offers and failing to develop the talents and abilities God has given us (Luke 19:11-27).

**Unbelief is refusing to believe and obey the truth.** This refers to refusing to believe obey the truth that God has given us.

**Ignorance** is unknowingly alienating ourselves from God and others. Our lack of understanding can defeat us.

**Pride is focusing attention on ourselves** rather than giving honor and glory to God (Matt. 6:5-8)

**Un-forgiveness toward God or others—If we do not forgive, we cannot be forgiven** (Matt. 6:9-15). Forgiveness is not about what someone did to us or of they’ve done anything to rectify their actions. Forgiveness is about you, the one who was hurt, moving on from the offense and living in freedom. Forgiveness is not the same as forgetting, nor does it mean one has to remain in an abusive or hurtful relationship. If bitterness or un-forgiveness is an obstacle to grace in your life, please speak to one of the spiritual directors.

We’ve talked about obstacles to our relationship with God. Now, we’re going to look at the **\***obstacles to our relationship with others.

Write these words on your paper horizontally at the level where you left a space. On the left side of your paper write **\***murder, then to the right of that write **\***addiction and abuse, then **\***lying, then **\***gossip. Now leave a space in the center and write **\***stealing, then to the right of that **\***coveting, then **\***laziness, then **\***dishonor. These are all obstacles to our relationship with others. Let’s examine these terms more closely.

**Murder –** The 10 Commandments says very clearly, “You shall not murder” (Deut. 5:17). Murder is more than a physical act. The abuse of power can wound or kill others psychologically, emotionally, and even spiritually.

**Addiction and abuse**—can take many forms. Any physical abuse, substance abuse, or abusive relationship diminishes life and becomes an obstacle to grace. There is an epidemic of substance abuse in this area. It is heart breaking. In the last 6 months, 3 members of my family have died due to complications of drug addiction. All three of them had made commitments to Christ at some point in their lives, but the addiction became an obstacle to their relationship with God and kept them from experiencing the abundant life of grace that He offers. **Any form of sexual abuse**—adultery, promiscuity, pornography, and all forms of sexual exploitation of children, youth, and adults—creates an obstacle to grace (Deut. 5:18; Matt. 5:27-30).

**Lying** is saying things that we know are untrue (Deut. 5:20).

**Gossip or slander** is saying things with the intent of hurting others. I think some people feel better about themselves if they can tear down other people. We need to be careful that we don’t cover up gossip as a prayer request. Have you ever heard people do that? Well, I know this is none of my business and I don’t know all the facts, and I’m not even sure it’s true, but I heard some juicy secret. I’m just telling you, so you can pray about it.

**Stealing** is taking things away from those who own or deserve them (Deut. 5:19).

**Coveting is refusing to be satisfied with what we have** (Deut. 5:2 1). This can be manifested in an unhealthy desire for **position, power, property, or even the relationship** that others have.

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

**Dishonor is a refusal to give value and respect to others.** 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 (Deut. 5:16). When we dishonor our spiritual leaders, pastors, and others in positions of authority established by God, we create obstacles to grace.

We’ve talked about obstacles to our relationship with God and with others. There are also things that create **\***obstacles to our relationship with ourselves.

Write these words on your paper at the intersection of the vertical and horizontal lines. **\***Lack of love, **\***bitterness, and **\***spiritual blindness.

**These are obstacles to our relationship with ourselves**

**Lack of love** isrefusing to love ourselves in a healthy manner so that we can love our neighbor (Mark 12:29-34).

**Bitterness is like a dangerous virus of the spirit that can quickly spread to others** (Heb. 12:14-15).

**Spiritual blindness** is described in Luke 6:37-42. We must have spiritual discernment to recognize and deal with the sin in our own hearts before we can help others.

That’s a lot of obstacles that can impact our Christian lives! I’ve got good news though. **The good news is that \*through Jesus Christ, we can overcome every obstacle to grace. Through Jesus Christ, we can overcome every obstacle to grace.**

**\***Draw a cross shape around the words that you wrote on your paper.

The **vertical line** reminds us that Christ restoresour relationship with God in the CROSS. **\***

In Christ, we **remember our reconciliation**— Jesus’ ministry began with the call to repentance, the offer of forgiveness, and the promise of eternal life (Mark 1:14-15).

We **remember our baptism.**

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. God created us, God loves us, and God gave His only Son that we might have eternal life. John 3:16 says, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting 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 practices of piety, study, and action that you have learned about this weekend.

**Resist evil and renounce the forces of the evil one.** You have the power to do so**. James 4:7-8** assures us that if we resist the devil he will flee from us and if we draw near to God, He will draw near to us.

**The \*horizontal line in 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.

In Christ, we become reconciled to our neighbors; so, we can love one another, live in peace, and seek justice together.

In Christ, we seek spiritual guidance from others in the body of Christ. A spiritual friend is someone who knows the pathways in a 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.

In Christ, we participate in all the means of grace, including a small group that is committed to accountable discipleship.

In Christ, we pray for ourselves, our leaders, those in authority, one another, and for unbelievers.

In Christ, we love our enemies feed the hungry, clothe the naked. This is discussed in Luke 6:27-30 and Matt. 25:34-40.

The Christian life is a daily decision to take up our cross and follow Jesus Christ (Matt. 16:24-26). 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. Romans 5:20-21 assures us that God’s grace is always greater than our sin. Romans 8:31 and 38-39 declares that nothing, not one of these obstacles, nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. In Christ, we can overcome every obstacle to grace.

**\*De Colores!**