**Obstacles to Grace – WW#47 – Larry Carnes**

I remember a time that I was greatly bewildered once as a young boy of about eight or nine years old. My mother had taken my sister Rhonda and myself to the Plaza Shopping Center to get a few things one late afternoon. Now most of the shopping adventures that I took with my mom and sisters, most generally did not consist of looking at anything that would appeal to a boy in the prime of his youth. Come on now, how could any guy get excited about the latest dress patterns from Mc Calls or large selections of zippers and buttons!!!! But thank God our first stop was at **Woolworth’s.**

Woolworth’s had an aisle that was dedicated to the fantasies of a young boy! Cap guns, yo-yo’s, plastic bow and arrows, model cars, Tonka trucks, and comic books. AHHHH, heaven on earth!!!! The only disadvantage to going into a place like this, was my sister and I had to follow my mom’s rule of shopping, “**Stay next to me and don’t wander off, because I don’t want to lose you.**” That meant that I had to wade through all the unimportant stuff, like sewing needles and thimbles, cosmetics, and Dippity Do. Now I had about as much patience, as, well………. A eight or nine year old boy in a department store would have!!!! Now as my mother and sister was standing in the hair care aisle drooling over the brand new heated rollers to curl hair,

I saw the opportunity to make my get- away and head for the land of fantasy and adventure five aisles over. Now I knew I was breaking the **Ultimate shopping rule** established by my mother, but after-all, I was almost ten years old, and most adventurers usually started at this age, right???????

Now unbeknownst to me, my mother was fully aware of me making my escape from the pack, and sneaking off to adventure land. So, she saw this as a teaching moment for me to remember the **Golden Shopping Rule**. While I was lost in the middle of the newest “Tarzan the Apeman” comic book Mom and Rhonda decided to make their purchases and move over to the next store!

Now can you imagine the sunken feeling that my heart felt when I returned to the hair care isle and no mommy and no sister!! Had the rapture come? Did I even know what the rapture was? **Most importantly where in the world was my MOMMY ????** When I began crying for her and making my way up to the front of the store, the lady at the cash register was in on the lesson building moment that Mom had planned for me. She gently ushered me out, the front door of the store, over to the next storefront where my mom and sister were waiting patiently on a bench in front of the store.

**My desire to go in search of things that would bring me satisfaction, even though they were cap-guns, and yo-yo’s, were still an obstacle to keep me from the loving and protecting presence of my momma**. Obstacles to grace constantly attack us, but God’s grace is always sufficient for us and His strength is regularly made perfect in our weakness.

Ladies, the title of my talk is “**Obstacles to Grace**”, and my name is Larry Carnes.

We all experience obstacles to grace. Maybe not quite as dramatic as the example I gave you, but we do have them none-the-less. I have certainly had my share of obstacles in my life. My father walked out on my family when I was eight, so I grew up not having a male role model, then there came the drugs and alcohol of my teenage and early adult years, broken promises, and many disappointments. I felt that God certainly couldn’t use me because of my past. Let me share my favorite words in the Bible, “*But God chose …. the foolish things of the world to shame the wise.”* - 1 Corinthians 1:27

He showed me I could be of use for His kingdom purposes and still continues to show me today! **Thank you, Lord!!** It was all made possible through His wonderful, marvelous, and matchless grace.

Maybe some of you ladies are sitting here today wondering what in the world I’m talking about. What is an obstacle to grace anyway? Well, ladies it’s **anything that keeps you from enjoying the loving relationship that God offers you through Jesus Christ.**

Now you all know that we are living in a world today that has a standard of “anything goes, as long as it gives me pleasure”. We are in a world that is affected by the consequences of sin. Sin is nothing but **self-centeredness** rather than **God-centeredness**. I like to call sin **“I- TROUBLE”.** Sin is all about you making yourself the center of the universe and the standard for supreme goodness instead of acknowledging God as the rightful center of all creation!!!

Sin is also **alienation**. Wow, that’s a big word! What does it mean? Well, ladies, it means that you are foreign, or distant from God. The Greek word for sin gives us the visual of an archer that has missed his target. We can miss the target in any number of ways. If we aim too high, too low; we are off course to the right or to the left. Sin is anything that causes you to miss the target of God’s will for your life. **It is anything that separates us from the love of God and our neighbor.**

In a broader sense, sin is anything that **diminishes life**. Sin can be an abuse of any part of God’s creation- land, water, air, as well as plants, animals, and people. For Christians, anything less than a **new creation in Jesus Christ** falls short of the biblical vision. The Apostle Paul said in his second letter to the Corinthian church, “*Anyone who is joined to Christ is a new creation; the old is gone, and the new has come.”* (2 Corinthians 5:17)

There are **3 Primary Types of Obstacles to God’s Grace** in our lives;

1. Those that hinder our relationship with God.

2. Those that hinder our relationships with other people.

3. Those that hinder our relationship with ourselves.

***But, thanks be to Jesus Christ we can overcome any obstacle to God’s grace!!!*** The cross of Christ is made up of a vertical beam and a horizontal beam. These two beams will help us to be aware of these 3 types of obstacles to grace in our lives. [Notes by Belinda: Consider changing the wording in the above paragraph so as not to give away that we are forming a cross.]

**1) The vertical row (up and down) will contain the obstacles that hinder our relationship with God:**

**Idolatry** = worshiping and serving false gods (money, social status, home)

**Blasphemy** = speaking irreverently or profanely of God

**Resisting God** = refusing to obey the will of God, quenching the Spirit

**[Here you need to tell them to leave a space in the vertical list.]**

**Ignoring God** = not making time for God in our lives

**Disobedience** = failing to develop the talents and abilities that God has given each one of 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** = focusing attention on ourselves rather than giving honor and glory to God.

**Unforgiveness** toward God and others = if we do not forgive, we cannot be forgiven.

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

b) Please speak to one of the spiritual directors if you are battling against bitterness or unforgiveness as an obstacle to God’s grace in your life.

**2) The horizontal row contains the obstacles that hinder our relationship with other people:**

**Murder** = this is more than the physical act. The abuse of power can wound or kill others psychologically, emotionally, and even spiritually.

**Addiction and Abuse** = any physical form of abuse, or substance abuse, any type of abuse that diminishes life is an obstacle to grace! That means any form of sexual abuse - adultery, promiscuity, pornography, exploitation of children, youth or adults.

**Lying** = saying things that we know are untrue.

**Gossip or Slander** = saying things with intent of hurting others.

**[Here you need to tell them to leave a space in the horizontal list.]**

**Stealing** = taking things away from those who own or deserve them.

**Coveting** = refusing to be satisfied with what we have (position, power, property, or relationships with others).

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

**Dishonor** =

a) When we dishonor our parents, spouses, children, and other primary relationships in our family, we create an obstacle to the grace of God in our prayer life, and our dishonor has consequences for generations to come!

b) When we dishonor our spiritual leaders, pastors, and others in positions of authority established by God, we create obstacles to God’s grace.

**3) The last group consists of those obstacles that hinder our relationships with ourselves; [we will write these in the center where the two lines cross.]**

**Lack of love** = refusing to love ourselves in a healthy manner keeps us from loving others (we can’t giveaway something that we haven’t received yet).

**Bitterness =** This is like a dangerous virus or an evil spirit that can quickly spread to others, your family, and the church. Hebrews 12:1415 says, **“*Make every effort to live in peace with all people and be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.”***

**[There is another obstacle that goes here – Spiritual Blindness.]**

**[Here is where you instruct them to draw an outline around the words, and see that it is a cross.]**

**But thanks be to God that we can overcome any obstacle that stands in our way of receiving God’s grace by the sacrifice that Jesus Christ made on the cross!**

**VERTICAL LINE OF THE CROSS (5 R’s)**

**\* Remember** that we have been reconciled to God through the blood of Christ.

**\* Remember** our baptism, we has been washed clean of our sins.

**\* Recover** our identity as children of God. The center of Christianity is the cross of Christ because it is the central message of the Bible: God created us, God loves us, and God gave His only Son that we might have eternal life with Him.

**\* Receive** the power to walk in the Spirit - The Christian life is possible if we accept the life of Christ as our model and rely on the power of the Holy Spirit to lead us in our relationship with God. A life of grace involves the daily practices of piety, study, and action that we have learned about this weekend.

**\* Resist** evil and renounce the forces of the evil one. The tiny book of James in the Bible 4:7-8 says, “*Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and He will come near to you.”*

**HORIZONTAL LINE ON THE CROSS**

Jesus Christ restores our relationship with ourselves and with our neighbors!! Through Christ:

**\* We come to know and love our true selves, and therefore we are reconciled to ourselves.**

**\*We become reconciled to our neighbors, and 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 to a better relationship with God and these obstacles that can trip us up at times.**

**\* We learn to participate in all the means of grace, including small groups where there is commitment to accountable discipleship.**

**\* We learn to pray for our leaders and those in authority over us.**

**\* And we learn to love our enemies, feed the hungry, clothe the naked.**

Ladies, the Christian life is a daily decision to take up your cross and follow Jesus our Lord. Jesus says in Matthew 16:24-26, *“Anyone who intends to come with me has to let me lead! You’re not in the driver’s seat; I am!! Don’t run from possible suffering; embrace it. Follow me and I’ll show you how. Self - help is no help at all!! Self-sacrifice is the way, my way to finding yourself!!* **What could you ever trade for your soul?”**

Ladies, your life should be a life lived in the shape of the cross, with appropriate attention given to our relationship with God and our relationship with others, and our relationship with ourselves.

**There is always more grace in God than there is sin in us.** Amen? Grace trumps sin every time hands down! Nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. Not even “the toy isle” at Woolworth’s department store can keep us from the grace that our heavenly Father desires to lavish upon each one of you!!!! In Christ we can overcome any obstacle to the grace of God.

De Colores!