**OBSTACLES TO GRACE**

**WE ALL SIN**

Romans 3:23 …all we have sinned….

Romans 7:21-24

Matt. 22:36-40

Gen. 1:1-31, especially vv. 28-31 sin affects society

2 Cor. 5:17; Rev. 21:14 sin in a Christian’s life

**TEN COMMANDMENTS**

Exodus 20: 1-12 The Ten Commandments

Mark 12:30-32 The Greatest Commandment

**OBSTACLES**

**With God**

Idolatry Deut. 5:7-8

Blasphemy Deut. 5:11

Resisting God 1 Thess. 5:19

Ignoring God Deut. 5:12-15

Disobedience Luke 19:11-27

Unbelief Mark 9:24; John 20:26-29

Ignorance Eph. 4:17-19

Pride Matt. 6:5-8

Unforgiveness Matt. 6:9-15

**With others**

Murder Deut. 5:17; Matthew 5:21-22

Addiction & Abuse Deut. 5:18; Matt. 5:27-30

Lying Deut. 5:20

Gossip 2 Cor. 12:20; I Tim. 5:12

Stealing Deut. 5:19

Coveting Deut. 5:21

Laziness Heb. 6:12

Dishonor Deut. 5:16

**With ourselves**

Lack of love Mark 12:29-34

Bitterness Heb. 12:14-15

Spiritual Blindness Luke 6:37-42

**OVERCOMING OBSTACLES**

Mark 1:14-15

John 3:16

James 4: 7-8

1 Tim. 2:1-4

Luke 6:27-30

Matt. 25:34-40

Matt. 16:24-26

Rom. 5:20-21 Rom. 8:31, 38-39

**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.**

**OBSTACLES TO GRACE**

When I turned fifty—before the movie “The Bucket List” came out, I decided to update my list in things I wanted to do before I couldn’t anymore. One of these adventures would require me facing my fears--especially of the water.

The following summer I went on my first (and last) white water rafting experience. It was part of an adventure work camp when we took the youth to Tennessee. They did the trust exercises like falling off of tall tree trunks backwards into the arms of the others--I watched. They climbed and rappelled down the climbing wall--I watched. Then came our day for white water rafting. I donned my helmet and life jacket and shakily went to the raft with the adults.

The kids wanted to be in their own rafts with a guide, so we adults were riding in our own with a guide—a guide who really wanted to be with the kids--especially when he found out I’m very frightened of water.

The ride was exciting enough—we watched the beautiful mountains and talked when we were not paddling into a rapid. Then suddenly—without warning we hit a rock at the beginning of a rapid.

Beside me, my friend almost fell out of the raft and was grabbed back on by the guide. We were stranded with the raft rapidly filling with water.

2

The rafts with the kids passed us by. The high-schoolers laughed. The junior highs were wide-eyed (probably wondering who would take them back to Ohio if the counselors died).

Finally one of the other guides was able to stop his raft of kids and came across with a rope. We had to get out of the raft and stand on a rock in the middle of the Ocoee River while they deflated the raft a little and pushed it off and pulled us back in. I literally rode that rapid into calmer water with my legs straight up in the air--praying for dear life. The concrete beneath my feet at the end never felt so good.

Facing my fear was a good thing, but because we weren’t paying attention, our lives could have been in danger. Our inattention created a real obstacle toward a successful trip.

Every day we face obstacles—some are physical and some are spiritual as well. We are always confronted with decisions to make that will test our willingness to stand with Christ in grace in spite of an overwhelming trial or enticing temptation. Every one of us faces obstacles to God’s grace in our lives. How will we handle them?

*“Obstacles to Grace” overhead*

The talk I am sharing with you is **“Obstacles to Grace” and my name is Sharon Hausman.**

**An obstacle to grace is anything that keeps us from enjoying the loving relation­ship God offers us in Christ.** We all experience obstacles to grace because the Christian life takes place in a real world affected by the consequences of sin. Yes, this is the “sin” talk.

**Some have described sin as the “big I”—**Sin ismaking myself the center of the universe and the standard for supreme goodness instead of acknowledging God as the rightful center of all creation.

3

The essential nature of every obstacle to grace is experienced as anything that separates us from God, from others—and even from ourselves. Obstacles to Grace are ways we block God’s love from growing in our lives.

Have you ever told a white lie to your friend? Don’t you find you are almost afraid to talk to that friend because you might let the truth slip out? You begin to build a wall between yourself and others because of a little lie, you lose the friendship because you created the obstacle.

My talk is based on a lot of Scripture and I won’t give you all of them, but you will get them later on this Weekend.

**The Greek word for sin is *hamartia,* which isan archery term meaning “to miss the mark or target.”** I remember back in high school phys. ed. We had a day or two of archery classes. Personally, I did good to hit the paper and I even cheered if I hit the haystack. But an experienced archer knows you want to hit the bull’s eye, not around it.

After your experience this morning, I imagine you want to hit the bull’s eye of a perfect relationship with the God who loves you, too. But we have a problem.

In Romans 3:23, Paul says, “…all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.” Even Paul, as a mature Christian, struggled with doing what he knew to be good because he often found himself doing the opposite (Romans 7:21-24).

4

We can miss the mark in any direction. We can aim too high as well as too low, or too far to the right as well as too far to the left. Sometimes we will make so many rules that we make the Christian faith too hard. Other times we think we say we are not able to spend the time we need to develop our relationship with Christ or other people. If I want you to agree with me, more than I am willing to listen to you, my need to be right—may not be what God intended.

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

Sin not only affects our personal lives, but sin affects our lives in society as well. Sin is anything that diminishes life. For instance, sin can be abuse of any part of God’s creation—littering, using the land, water, or air, as well as plants, animals, and people (Gen. 1:1-31, especially vv. 28-31) just to satisfy our own convenience and needs.

For Christians, anything less than the new creation in Jesus Christ falls short of the biblical vision (2 Cor. 5:17; Rev. 21:14). Remember the ten commandments you may have learned in Sunday School (Exodus 20: 1-12)? Jesus redefined them in the Greatest commandment that states that we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength and to love our neighbor as ourselves (Mark 12:30-32)

Let’s keep the Greatest Commandment goal in mind and let’s look at how we create obstacles. Now we need to learn some ways to overcome the obstacles so we can grow closer to Christ every day.

**We find that 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.**

5

I want you to take a clean piece of paper out—I’m going to give you some lists. Make a circle about the size of a quarter in the middle of your paper. Count up about three lines above the circle.

**The vertical list reminds us how obstacles hinder our relationship with God.**

**Idolatry**—I’m not talking about wooden or golden idols—although sometimes the Oscars can come close. Even today we worship and serve false gods (Deut. 5:7-8). Is spending time with God first or your T.V. schedule, your romance novel (golf game), your family, your work?—the priority list goes on.

**Blasphemy**—When we speak irreverently or profanely about God; using God’s name to curse or revile anyone or anything (Deut. 5:11). I’ve told my teenager at home OMG better mean you are praying to our Father.

**Resisting God**—We know what God says to do, and we don’t want to do it. You can read Exodus and Numbers and even Acts and see how that has worked for people in the past. Paul warned us not to quench the Spirit of God (1 Thess. 5:19). When I resist God, my life is saying, “My comfort and temporary happiness is more important than what God wants to free me to be and do.

*Now skip to the bottom of your circle.*

**Ignoring God**—We don’t making time for God in our lives. We might give ourselves permission to break the Sabbath this week because we need the time for ourselves, our families, and our employees. (Deut. 5:12-15).

6

**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**— We refuse to believe and obey the truth.

**Ignorance**—Mark Twain has said, “It’s not the part of the Bible I don’t understand that bothers me, it’s the part I do.” Sometimes we don’t try to get informed about what is happening in this world. Then we unknowingly alienate ourselves from God and others by what we aren’t aware of. Our lack of understanding can defeat us if that is our excuse.

**Pride**—There’s another word with the big “I” in the middle. When we focus attention on ourselves either in bragging or constantly feeling sorry for ourselves rather than living to give honor and glory to God, pride will be our downfall (Matt. 6:5-8).

**Unforgiveness toward God or others**—Jesus has said over and over, if we do not forgive, we cannot be forgiven (Matt. 6:9-15). Realize that forgiveness is not the same as forgetting. You don’t have to remain in an abusive or hurtful relationship to be forgiving.

Some of those burdens you laid down at Dying Moments Communion this morning may need to be worked through more. Hurt is hurt—and sometimes it feels like maybe even God did the hurting. Please speak to your Spiritual Director if bitterness or unforgiveness is an obstacle to grace in your life.

**If these first obstacles get in the way of our relationship God, the second set of obstacles block our relationship with others.**

**7**

Perhaps you have heard a country western song by Jaron and the Long Road to Love. After a bad break up, he goes to church and the preacher tells him, “You can’t go hating others who done wrong to you. Sometimes we get angry but we must not condemn. Let the good Lord do his job and you just pray for them. And Jarod prays,

“I pray your brakes go out running down a hill.

I pray a flower pot falls from a window sill

and knocks you out like I’d like to

I pray your birthday comes and nobody calls,

I pray you’re flying high when your engine stalls.

I pray all your dreams never come true.

Just know wherever you are, Honey, I pray for you…

and the song goes downhill from there.

The scary thing is that too often that is how we feel toward others who have hurt us and obstacles to once beautiful friendships go up with walls that we can’t take down ourselves.

**Give yourself a bit of room and start at the left of your circle. Here are some of those obstacles between us and others.**

**Murder**--The Ten Commandments say 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. In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warned us, “You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, ‘You shall not murder’---but I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister you will be liable to the council…” (Matthew 5:21-22) We see on the news teens committing suicide or beating each other to death because of pictures posted or words written on the internet, and we know anger becoming like murder is true at a new horrifying level.

8

**Addiction and abuse can take many forms**. We are aware of alcohol and drug addiction. Our hearts break when we hear of child abuse. Any physical abuse, substance abuse, or abusive relationship that diminishes life becomes an obstacle to grace. No matter how some folks in Hollywood, politics or sports show us, 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**—We may think we’re, o.k., but do you ever catch yourself saying things that you know are untrue (Deut. 5:20)?

**Gossip**—How many of us have caught ourselves sharing too much information about someone we don’t even know that well. We get involved in gossip or slander—saying things with that hurts others.

***Hopefully, you can start at the right side of the circle.***

**Stealing** is taking things away from those who own or deserve them (Deut. 5:19). It might be a piece of clothing or attention.

**Coveting** is when we refuse to be satisfied with what we have

(Deut. 5:21). We have an unhealthy desire for someone else’s position, power, property, or relationships. Often tragedy can follow.

**Laziness**—is when we refuse to even try to be good users of the life, gifts, graces, property, and power God has entrusted to us.

9

**Dishonor**--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.

Jesus said, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Let’s move to your circle because we are aware of some Obstacles to that can deeply hurt our own relationship with ourselves

*Go back to the center and write three words that show that we should say, “not loving myself”*

**There can be in us a lack of love for ourselves in a healthy manner so that we can love our neighbor (Mark 12:29-34).** We might resent others demanding so much out of us, but we refuse to choose to take care of ourselves. If you’ve ever flown on a plane you’ve heard the flight attendant warn you if the oxygen masks come down, get your own mask on first before your children. It feels hard, but it is true.

**Bitterness** is like a dangerous virus of the spirit that can quickly spread to others (Heb. 12:14-15). Maybe life has been wrong up to now, but even today you can choose to learn the lessons and not keep the bitter root growing. Life is too great for you to miss. A grudge that leads to bitterness only shrivels your soul. God wants you to blossom and grow—you’ve got to give him your bitterness.

**Spiritual blindness** (Luke 6:37-42)—it seems so much easier to see someone else’s failings while missing our own. Sometimes maybe we are in the wrong in our thinking and actions and we keep ourselves from being the beloved and loving child God wants us to be.

10

That’s some of the rough stuff. There is good news to overcoming these obstacles to knowing God’s grace.

*Take a moment and draw a shape around the words you have written. What do you see?* Hopefully, a cross.

See that’s the good news. Through the cross of Jesus Christ we can overcome the obstacles to grace. Through Jesus Christ we can overcome the obstacles to grace. The cross of Christ covers all our sins. The cross restores our relationships—with God, ourselves, and our neighbors

**The vertical line in the cross reminds us that Jesus Christ restores our relationship with God**. **Because of Christ, we can fix our relationship with God. In Christ….**

**1. Remember that Jesus has called us to repent.** We need to admit that we face some particular obstacles because of our humanness. On the cross, Jesus has offered us forgiveness for our sinful past and shortcomings. And in his resurrection, Jesus has given us the promise of eternal life (Mark 1:14-15). That is what reconciliation is: repentance, forgiveness, and eternal LIFE.

**2. Remember our baptism**. When he faced a temptation, it has been said that Martin Luther, one of the fathers of the faith, would touch his head and say, “Remember, Martin, you are baptized.” We are different because we remember God has chosen us to rise above your trials and temptations with victory.

11

**3. Recover our identity as children of God.** We allow this to happen when we center our faith in the cross of Jesus Christ. The cross 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).

**4. Receive the power to walk in the Spirit.** This is a very important step that we sometimes neglect as we try to live the Christian life on our own: Receive the power to walk in the Holy Spirit. This is the most life-changing gift God offers us, but we must accept it every moment of the day to live a Christian life that would give our God joy for us.

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. This is what you are learning this weekend.

**5. Resist evil and renounce the forces of the evil one**. (James 4: 7-8).

Take evil seriously. Sometimes circumstances happen that aren’t your fault—evil attacks. Ask God to help you keep your eyes on His love and the cross when you are tempted to react as you have in the past. Faith in Christ is stronger that any of evil’s forces.

**Now look at the horizontal line in the cross reminds us that Jesus Christ restores our relationships with ourselves and with our neighbors.**

**12**

**In Christ, we**

**1. Come to know and love our true selves.** Allow the Holy Spirit to help you! Read the positive words in the I John which reminds you that you are “beloved”. When someone compliments you, accept the positive compliment as a gift that person gives t you to be enjoyed not to be argued away. Let Christ help you develop a healthy love for yourself so you will be able to see those great qualities in others so you can really “love your neighbor as yourself.”

**2. Become reconciled with our neighbors.** Take time to understand the differences you may have with someone from their point of view. You may find you can love folks who are different that you when you seek to live in peace with each other and seek God’s justice together.

**3. Seek spiritual guidance from spiritual friends**. A spiritual friend is another member of the body of Christ who knows the pathways in a relationship with God and the obstacles to grace—maybe because they have walked a similar journey. That spiritual friend can walk along with us on our spiritual journey and can help us understand the will of God better.

**4. Participate in all the means of grace.** That means you get involved with your local church family! One of the means of grace that will keep you conquering obstacles would be to participate in a small group where each member is committed to being accountable to grow in their discipleship to Christ.

**5. Pray for leaders and those in authority over us** (1 Tim. 2:1-4). Leaders need your spiritual support to do the work they are called by God to do. This way you help God define His direction—and when you move into leadership, you will need folks to pray for you as well.

13

**6. Let Jesus’ imperatives guide your life**. Jesus tells us to “Love our enemies” (Luke 6:27-30), “feed the hungry, clothe the naked,” etc. (Matt. 25:34-40). If Jesus gives us a command, he expects us to obey as his servants.

When I was a teenager, my father and I would butt heads often. My inability to agree with him kept me angry and rebellious for about twelve years. Even after I became a Christian at nineteen, I was still angry at the way I didn’t think he had special time for me even though—you have to know—he had a wife, five other children and was a respected high school teacher and leader in the community. This anger in me would spawn more arguments and I would say such mean things because I didn’t think my point of view was ever accepted.

When I entered seminary, we had to take a psychological test. I think I’m pretty good taking tests, but my anger evidently surfaced through the answers because I was required to talk to one of the Christian counselors. As he let me talk, all of a sudden the hurt that was behind the anger began to pour out—and I cried a lot of tears. Suddenly, I began to realize that God didn’t create my dad to be perfect, just to do the best he could because he loved God and us children. I left the counselor’s office, with a new awareness, but still not knowing what to do with the new information.

That evening, I was sitting at an outdoor revival service when the answer came—give him a break.

14

That fall, I went home to watch my brother’s ballgame. As the herd of kids got out of the family van, I looked at the stars and remembered how much dad was interested in the stars when he came home from a continuing education class the previous summer. I just walked along with him and asked him about the stars. My mother was in shock—we were carrying on a conversation. She didn’t even mind having to deal with the rest of the kids herself.

Once another student who had been to our church said, “You know your dad thinks you hung the moon.” That was probably an exaggeration, but when I graduated from seminary, it was my dad came to support me when the rest of the family was at my brother’s graduation.

Dad and I continued to work at giving each other a break, because we still disagreed at times, but God helped me remember how much I have been loved, so we become more patient with each other.

Mom had me come to family gatherings early so (in my mother’s words) “You can get your private talks out of the way.”

When dad was dying a few years ago, I was blessed to have the privilege or thanking him again for his love and patience with me.

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.

If there were no obstacles we could not become overcomers. Overcoming is an adventure. There is always more grace in God than there is sin in us (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 every obstacle to grace.

15

Obstacles can destroy your faith or they can make you a stronger Christian. As you to become more trusting of God, you become stronger and wiser. After this Emmaus Walk, you will have many more obstacles

to face. There is a great sense of thankfulness to God and accomplishment as you overcome.

In Romans 8, Paul reminds us that no matter what comes our way, “we are more than conquerors through him who loved us…nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

So whether it is facing your fears or having a desire to re-establish a broken relationship, remember in the cross of Jesus Christ we overcome. “we are more than conquerors through him who loved us…nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

DE COLORES.

