

FOURTH CLERGY TALK

TALK #9 OBSTACLES TO GRACE

Overview of All Talks

One message is delivered during The Walk to Emmaus 72-hour experience; it is communicated throughout the music, meals, clergy meditations, attitudes and actions of the team members, and the talks. You have been selected to deliver one of the 15 talks. In reality, you will deliver 1/15 of the Emmaus talk—one message, fifteen presenters.

Prepare your talk using the outlines provided. In general, 2/3 of your presentation will come from the outlines; the remaining 1/3 will come from your original insights and personal experience.

The talks are sequenced in a defined order; each builds on the next to provide pilgrims with the complete message of Emmaus. Do not try to cover more than your assigned topic. The expanded outline intends to provide a solid understanding of the material from which your talk will be developed. The abbreviated outline helps you see the progression of the main points. *Neither outline is a script*; you will need to add personal examples to give life to the content and make it real to the hearers. Use visual aids to help convey the main points.

The Holy Spirit, as well as feedback from the team after your talk preview, will provide additional guidance for your unique presentation of this talk. Once you incorporate the suggestions offered after your preview, your presentation no longer belongs just to you but to the team God is forming to deliver the Emmaus message.

This presentation is allotted a maximum of 20 to 25 minutes. Please honor the time limit out of a spirit of cooperation, charity, good stewardship of time, and consideration for the hearers.

Overview for Speaker

This talk intends to help pilgrims identify obstacles to their relationship with God and open themselves to the work of the Holy Spirit and the spiritual disciplines that will enable them to overcome those obstacles. The pilgrims have learned that they were created in the image of God for a relationship with God (*prevenient grace*) and that God invites them to accept this relationship in and through Jesus Christ (*justifying grace*). They also learned that *justifying grace* involves more than a single decision of faith; living the Christian life requires that we use all the *means of grace* God offers us through Christ and his church. Just before lunch they participated in the Dying Moments Communion service in a manner that enabled some of them to give up part of their personal pain and brokenness (a wrong attitude, action, wound,

or addiction). In that sacramental moment they were allowed to see and hear the Holy Spirit remove each obstacle to grace they had the courage to name.

Obstacles to grace are those cunning ways we let the things of the world, the flesh, and spiritual evil disrupt our relationship with God and with our neighbor. Simply put, this talk covers the topic of *sin* and how to overcome it. Normally, the human journey is the story of how each of us struggles with the choices and forces that form barriers between God and ourselves. As Christians, we all experience times when we refuse to let God love us and save us by grace alone—because of bad theology, wrong choices, or poor self-image. One goal of this talk is to help pilgrims better understand the many ways we diminish our relationship with God by worshiping false gods and investing our time and attention in the wrong areas. A second goal is to help pilgrims understand ways we diminish and even destroy our relationships with others in the body of Christ when we neglect the means of grace and let anything other than God become our priority.

The primary means to overcome the obstacles to grace can be clearly seen in the cross of Jesus Christ. In the cross we can overcome every obstacle to grace. In Christ we find the grace and power to worship God in spirit and in truth. In Christ we find the help we need for remaining faithful in all our relationships. In the cross of Christ, we can find restoration for every relationship—and the beginning of the renewal of all creation.

Our spiritual life and growth in Christ are possible because grace overcomes sin. At the end of this day on the Emmaus Walk, participants will experience the Candlelight service where the Emmaus community gathers to pray for them and support them as they deal with other obstacles to grace in their lives. In the examination of conscience that follows, pilgrims will have the opportunity to come to God in prayer, renew their relationship with Jesus Christ, and deal with the obstacles to grace in their lives. All of the Spiritual Directors on the team need to be available to assist the pilgrims who need guidance in this process. For many pilgrims, this talk and the rest of the events of this day will work together to become one of the most profound experiences of unconditional love and grace in their adult lives.

This talk is scheduled for Saturday at 4:30 p.m.

Expanded Outline: OBSTACLES TO GRACE

Begin by leading the Prayer to the Holy Spirit:

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

Introduction (1-2 minutes)

Choose a story or experience from your life that is brief, personal, and related to the main point of this talk. If you cannot think of an appropriate introduction, consult the Weekend Spiritual Director or Community Spiritual Director. A good introduction will engage the hearts, minds, and attention of pilgrims and move them into the theme of how obstacles can occur in our relationship with God and our neighbor. For example, you might do the following:

- Option 1: Share a specific way you overcame some obstacle to grace and how doing so changed your life. Feel free to name the fears or obstacles you had to overcome.
- Option 2: Share the life story of someone else that illustrates the main theme of the talk.

My name is _____, and the title of this talk is OBSTACLES TO GRACE.

I. The Christian life takes place in a real world affected by the consequences of sin. (3-5 minutes)

- A. Obstacles to grace are common.
 - 1. We all experience obstacles to grace.
 - 2. An obstacle to grace is anything that keeps us from enjoying the loving relationship God offers us in Christ.

B. Sin is self-centeredness rather than God-centeredness.

[Show a visual like the following to help pilgrims remember this point. Point out the capital I in the word sin.]



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.

C. Sin is alienation.

1. The essential nature of every obstacle to grace is experienced as alienation from God, from others, and even from ourselves at times.
2. The Greek word for sin is *hamartia*, an archery term meaning “to miss the mark or target.”

[Show a visual like the following as you discuss points a and b.]



- a) We can miss the mark in any direction, by aiming too high as well as too low, or too far to the right as well as too far to the left.
- b) 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 (Matt. 22:36-40).

3. In a broader sense, sin is anything that diminishes life.
 - a) Sin can be an abuse of any part of God's creation—the land, water, or air, as well as plants, animals, and people (Gen. 1:1-31, especially vv. 28-31).
 - b) For Christians, anything less than the new creation in Jesus Christ falls short of the biblical vision (2 Cor. 5:17; Rev. 21:1-4).

II. 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. (3–5 minutes)

[You can use a personal example to illustrate each of the following main points.]

A. Obstacles to our relationship with God

[List the following words in the center of a poster, overhead transparency, or board, leaving space as shown so you can add other words horizontally in section B. Write the words as shown so that they will fit in the vertical part of a cross, but do not reveal the cross shape yet.]

Idolatry
Blasphemy
Resisting

Ignoring
Disobedience
Unbelief
Ignomice
Pride
Unforgiveness

1. Idolatry—worshiping and serving false gods (Deut. 5:7-8).
2. Blasphemy—speaking irreverently or profanely of God; using God's name to curse or revile anyone or anything (Deut. 5:11).
3. Resisting God—refusing to obey the will of God; quenching the Spirit of God (1 Thess. 5:19).

4. Ignoring God—not making time for God in our lives, thereby breaking the sabbath for ourselves, our families, and our employees (Deut. 5:12-15).
5. 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).
6. Unbelief—refusing to believe and obey the truth.
7. Ignorance—unknowingly alienating ourselves from God and others. Our lack of understanding can defeat us.
8. Pride—focusing attention on ourselves rather than giving honor and glory to God (Matt. 6:5-8).
9. Unforgiveness toward God or others—If we do not forgive, we cannot be forgiven (Matt. 6:9-15).
 - 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 bitterness or unforgiveness is an obstacle to grace in your life.

B. Obstacles to our relationship with others

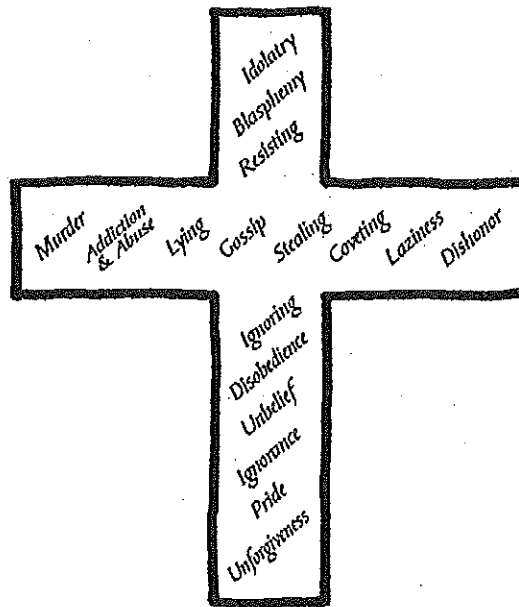
[Add a horizontal row of words to the vertical list.]

Murder
 Addiction
& Abuse
 Lying
 Gossip
 Stealing
 Cowting
 Laziness
 Dishonor
 Idolatry
 Blasphemy
 Resisting
 Ignoring
 Disobedience
 Unbelief
 Ignorance
 Pride
 Unforgiveness

1. Murder
 - a) The Ten Commandments say clearly, "You shall not murder" (Deut. 5:17).
 - b) Murder is more than a physical act. The abuse of power can wound or kill others psychologically, emotionally, and even spiritually.
 2. Addiction and abuse—can take many forms.
 - a) Any physical abuse, substance abuse, or abusive relationship diminishes life and becomes an obstacle to grace.
 - b) 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).
 3. Lying—saying things that we know are untrue (Deut. 5:20).
 4. Gossip or slander—saying things with the intent of hurting others.
 5. Stealing—taking things away from those who own or deserve them (Deut. 5:19).
 6. Coveting—refusing to be satisfied with what we have (Deut. 5:21). This can be manifested in an unhealthy desire for position, power, property, or relationship that others have.
 7. Laziness—refusing to be a good steward of the life, gifts, graces, property, and power God has entrusted to you.
 8. Dishonor
 - a) 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).
 - b) When we dishonor our spiritual leaders, pastors, and others in positions of authority established by God, we create obstacles to grace.
- C. Obstacles to our relationship with ourselves
1. Lack of love—refusing to love ourselves in a healthy manner so that we can love our neighbor (Mark 12:29-34).
 2. Bitterness is like a dangerous virus of the spirit that can quickly spread to others (Heb. 12:14-15).
 3. Spiritual blindness (Luke 6:37-42).

III. Through Jesus Christ we can overcome the obstacles to grace.

[Draw a cross shape around the words as you explain that Christ can encompass and overcome them every obstacle.]



- A. The vertical line in the cross reminds us that Jesus Christ restores our relationship with God. In Christ we:
1. 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).
 2. Remember our baptism.
 3. 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).
 4. Receive the power to walk in the Spirit.
 - a) 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.
 - b) A life in grace involves the daily practices of piety, study, and action that we have learned about this weekend.
 5. Resist evil and renounce the forces of the evil one (James 4:7-8).

- B. The horizontal line in the cross reminds us that Jesus Christ restores our relationship with ourselves and with our neighbors. In Christ we:
1. Come to know and love our true selves; therefore, we are reconciled to ourselves.
 2. Become reconciled to our neighbors; therefore, we can love one another, live in peace, and seek justice together.
 3. 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.
 4. Participate in all the means of grace, including a small group where there is a commitment to accountable discipleship.
 5. Pray for leaders and those in authority over us (1 Tim. 2:1-4).
 6. Love our enemies (Luke 6:27-30), feed the hungry, clothe the naked, etc. (Matt. 25:34-40).

IV. Conclusion

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. 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.

De Colores!

Abbreviated Outline: OBSTACLES TO GRACE

Begin by leading the Prayer to the Holy Spirit:

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

Introduction (1–2 minutes)

My name is _____, and the title of this talk is OBSTACLES TO GRACE.

I. The Christian life takes place in a real world affected by the consequences of sin. (3–5 minutes)

A. Obstacles to grace are common.

1. We all experience obstacles to grace.
2. An obstacle to grace is anything that keeps us from enjoying the loving relationship God offers us in Christ.

B. Sin is self-centeredness rather than God-centeredness.

[Show a visual like the following to help pilgrims remember this point. This is also a good place to share a personal experience.]



Some have characterized 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.

C. Sin is alienation.

1. The essential nature of every obstacle to grace is experienced as alienation from God, from others, and even from ourselves at times.
2. The Greek word for sin is *hamartia*, an archery term meaning "to miss the mark or target." [Show a visual like the following.]



3. In a broader sense, sin is anything that diminishes life.

II. 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. (3-5 minutes)

[You may use a personal example to illustrate each of the main points below.]

A. Obstacles to our relationship with God

[Write the following words in a vertical list.]

Idolatry
Blasphemy
Resisting

Ignoring
Disobedience
Unbelief
Ignorance
Pride
Unforgiveness

1. Idolatry—worshiping and serving false gods (Deut. 5:7-8).
2. Blasphemy—speaking irreverently or profanely of God; using God’s name to curse or revile anyone or anything (Deut. 5:11).
3. Resisting God—refusing to obey the will of God; quenching the Spirit of God (1 Thess. 5:19).
4. Ignoring God—not making time for God in our lives, thus breaking the sabbath for ourselves, our families, or our employees (Deut. 5:12-15).
5. Disobedience—Sin is intentionally rejecting the relationship God offers and failing to develop the talents and abilities God has given us (Luke 19:11-27).
6. Unbelief—refusing to believe and obey the truth.
7. Ignorance—unknowingly alienating ourselves from God and others. Our lack of understanding can defeat us.
8. Pride—focusing attention on ourselves rather than giving honor and glory to God (Matt. 6:5-8).
9. Unforgiveness toward God or others—If we do not forgive, we cannot be forgiven (Matt. 6:9-15).

B. Obstacles to our relationship with others

[Add a horizontal row of words to the vertical list.]

Murder
 Addiction & Abuse
 Lying
 Gossip
 Stealing
 Coveting
 Laziness
 Dishonor
 Idolatry
 Blasphemy
 Resisting
 Ignoring
 Disobedience
 Unbelief
 Ignorance
 Pride
 Unforgiveness

1. Murder—can be physical, emotional, or spiritual.
2. Addiction and abuse—can take many forms.

3. Lying—saying things we know are not true.
4. Gossip or slander—saying things with the intent of hurting others.
5. Stealing—taking things away from those who rightfully own or deserve them.
6. Coveting—an unhealthy desire for position, power, property, or relationship.
7. Laziness—refusing to be a good steward of the life, gifts, graces, property, and power God has entrusted to you.
8. Dishonor—toward parents, pastors, or secular leaders.

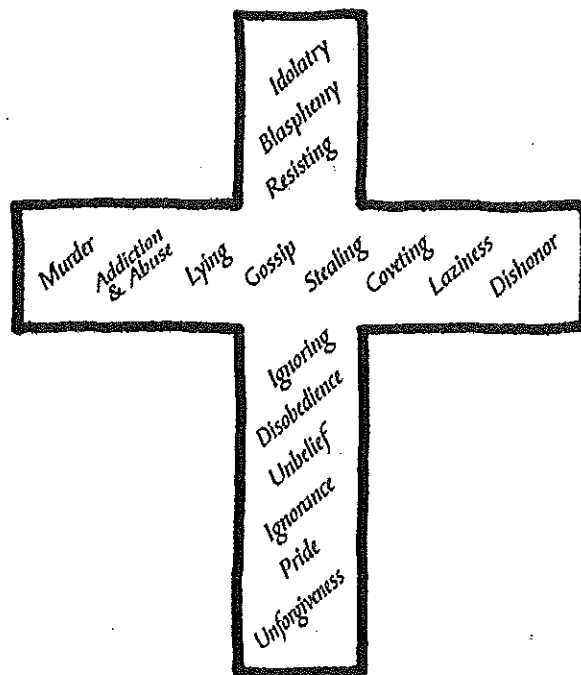
C. Obstacles to our relationship with ourselves

1. Lack of love—refusing to love ourselves in a healthy manner so that we can love our neighbor (Mark 12:29-34).
2. Bitterness is like a dangerous virus of the spirit that can quickly spread to others (Heb. 12:14-15).
3. Spiritual blindness—Luke 6:37-42.

III. Through Jesus Christ we can overcome the obstacles to grace.

The shape of that victory is manifested in the shape of the cross.

[Draw the outline of a cross around the words to illustrate that Christ can encompass and overcome every obstacle.]



- A. The vertical line in the cross reminds us that Jesus Christ restores our relationship with God. In Christ we:
1. Remember our reconciliation—Jesus' ministry began with the call to repentance, the offer of forgiveness, and the promise of eternal life (Matt. 3:1-12).
 2. Remember our baptism.
 3. Recover our identity as children of God.
 4. Receive the power to walk in the Spirit.
 5. Resist evil and renounce the forces of the evil one (James 4:7-8).
- B. The horizontal line in the cross reminds us that Jesus Christ restores our relationship with ourselves and our neighbor. In Christ we:
1. Come to know and love our true selves; therefore, we are reconciled to ourselves.
 2. Become reconciled to our neighbors; therefore, we can love and respect others.
 3. Seek spiritual guidance from others in the body of Christ.
 4. Participate in all the means of grace, including a small group with a commitment to accountable discipleship.
 5. Pray for leaders and those in authority over us (1 Tim. 2:1-4).
 6. Love our enemies (Luke 6:27-30), feed the hungry, clothe the naked, etc. (Matt. 25:34-40).

IV. Conclusion

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 relationships with God and our relationships with others. God's grace is always greater than our sin (Rom. 5:20-21). No obstacle 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.

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