



Hebrews 4:12 (KJV)

For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper
than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing
asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow,
and is a discernor of the thoughts of the intentions
of the heart.

OBSTACLES TO GRACE

Overcoming What Hinders Our Relationship With God

Teaching Conference Notes

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Scripture references are included throughout for teaching and study. Readers and teachers are encouraged to read the cited passages directly from their preferred Bible translation.

This material is designed as a teaching resource. The speaker may expand, shorten, or adapt illustrations and discussion time according to the audience and ministry setting.

Teaching Purpose

To identify the attitudes and actions that hinder relationship with God, others, and ourselves and to lead participants back to the reconciling work of Christ.

Teaching Sections

- The Reality of Sin and Obstacles
- Obstacles in Our Relationship with God
- Obstacles in Our Relationships with Others
- Obstacles Within Ourselves
- The Cross Restores What Sin Has Broken

Teaching Covenant

- Allow Scripture to examine your own heart before applying the teaching to someone else.
- Do not confuse grace with permission to remain unchanged.
- Listen for the invitation of the Holy Spirit and respond honestly.
- Ask, “Lord, what are You saying to me?”

Teaching Section 1: The Reality of Sin and Obstacles

Read

Matthew 22:36-40; Romans 3:23

Big Idea

An obstacle to grace is anything that hinders us from enjoying the loving relationship God offers in Christ.

Teach

The Christian life takes place in the real world and is affected by the consequences of real sin. Grace is not an escape from reality; it is God’s transforming presence within it.

The teaching uses the “big I” to describe self-centeredness: putting ourselves at the center rather than acknowledging God as the rightful center.

The Greek term hamartia is commonly explained as “missing the mark.” Sin misses God’s will, separates us from love of God and neighbor, and diminishes life.

Illustration

An archer can miss high, low, left, or right. Missing the target does not require everyone to miss in the same direction.

Application

Do not limit sin to the failures you personally find easiest to recognize. Ask where your life is missing God's target.

Key Statements

- Sin is more than rule breaking; it distorts relationship.
- We can miss the mark in many directions.
- Grace meets us in the real world.

Reflection and Discussion

- Where do you see separation from God, others, or yourself?
- What has become too centered on "I"?

Teaching Section 2: Obstacles in Our Relationship with God

Read

Exodus 20:1-7; James 4:7-8

Big Idea

Idolatry, resistance, neglect, disobedience, unbelief, ignorance, pride, and unforgiveness can hinder intimacy with God.

Teach

Idolatry gives ultimate loyalty to something other than God. Blasphemy dishonors God. Resistance and disobedience reject His will, while neglect lives as though relationship with Him requires no attention.

Pride makes the self the center. Unbelief refuses trust. Ignorance may leave us spiritually blind when truth is available but unattended.

Unforgiveness is also a serious obstacle. Forgiveness is not the same as forgetting, excusing evil, or remaining in an abusive or harmful relationship.

Application

Ask which obstacle most accurately names your present struggle. Confession becomes more useful when it is specific.

Key Statements

- Name the obstacle honestly.
- Forgiveness does not require pretending harm was harmless.
- Draw near to God and resist evil.

Reflection and Discussion

- What competes with God for first place?
- Where are you resisting something you already know God is asking?

Teaching Section 3: Obstacles in Our Relationships with Others

Read

Matthew 5:21-24; Ephesians 4:25-32

Big Idea

Sin becomes horizontal when it damages, uses, deceives, dishonors, or refuses love toward our neighbor.

Teach

The April teaching names murder and harm, addiction and abuse, lying, gossip and slander, stealing, coveting, laziness, and dishonor as relational obstacles.

These behaviors are not isolated private failures. They erode trust, damage community, and weaken Christian witness.

Bitterness is described as a dangerous virus of the spirit because it rarely remains contained. What we nurture internally eventually shapes speech, attitudes, and relationships.

Illustration

A virus spreads when it is allowed to reproduce unchecked. Bitterness can spread through a family, ministry, or community in much the same way.

Application

Examine both actions and attitudes. Some relational damage is visible; some begins in the heart long before anyone else can see it.

Key Statements

- Love of neighbor is not optional.
- Bitterness spreads.
- Grace calls us toward truthful, healthy relationships.

Reflection and Discussion

- Where has bitterness been spreading?
- What relationship needs truth, repentance, forgiveness, boundaries, or reconciliation?

Teaching Section 4: Obstacles Within Ourselves

Read

Psalms 139:23-24; Romans 8:1-2

Big Idea

Spiritual blindness, bitterness, and an unhealthy relationship with ourselves can hinder our ability to receive and express grace.

Teach

The teaching identifies obstacles not only above us and around us but also within us. We may carry shame, distorted identity, bitterness, or an inability to love ourselves in a healthy, God-centered way.

Healthy self-love is not self-worship. Jesus' command to love our neighbor as ourselves assumes a self understood under God's authority and grace.

We need the Holy Spirit to search what we cannot see clearly and to bring our identity, wounds, desires, and reactions under Christ.

Application

Invite God to reveal one internal obstacle you have normalized or failed to recognize.

Key Statements

- Grace reaches inward.
- Identity must be rooted in Christ.
- The Spirit reveals what needs healing and change.

Reflection and Discussion

- Why can it be difficult to see our own spiritual blind spots?
- How is healthy self-love different from self-centeredness?

Teaching Section 5: The Cross Restores What Sin Has Broken

Read

Mark 1:14-15; 2 Corinthians 5:17-20; Matthew 16:24-26

Big Idea

Through Christ, the cross becomes the central picture of reconciliation with God, others, and ourselves.

Teach

The vertical line of the cross reminds us that Christ reconciles us to God. Repentance, forgiveness, baptismal identity, and the power of the Holy Spirit belong to this restored relationship.

The horizontal line reminds us that grace reshapes life with neighbors and our understanding of ourselves. We are called to love, peace, justice, spiritual friendship, accountability, prayer, and service.

The Christian life is a daily decision to take up the cross and follow Jesus. A life in grace is shaped by both dimensions: relationship with God and relationship with others.

Application

Participate in the means of grace: Scripture, prayer, Christian community, remembrance of baptism, Communion, accountability, and active service.

Key Statements

- There is more grace in God than sin in us.

- Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ.
- In Christ, obstacles to grace can be overcome.

Reflection and Discussion

- Which dimension needs the most attention right now: God, others, or self?
- What obstacle will you surrender to Christ this week?

Closing Challenge

Bring the obstacle into the light. Name it, surrender it, receive God's grace, and take the next faithful step. The obstacle is real, but it does not have to be final.

Closing Prayer

Father, search us and reveal what stands in the way of deeper relationship with You. Through Jesus Christ, forgive, restore, and strengthen us. Give us grace to resist evil, love our neighbors, and walk daily in the shape of the cross. Amen.

Personal Response

What is the Lord showing me personally?

What truth do I need to receive or obey?

What specific act of obedience will begin this week?

Recognizing the Obstacle

Read

Psalm 139:23-24

Deepening the Teaching

We cannot surrender what we refuse to name. Obstacles to grace may be obvious behaviors, hidden attitudes, wounded reactions, distorted beliefs, or neglected practices.

Self-examination is not self-condemnation. Under grace, we invite God to reveal what hinders relationship so that healing and obedience can begin.

Teaching Application

Use three questions: What is happening? What is it producing? Is it drawing me toward or away from God and healthy love?

Key Takeaway

Grace is not merely a truth to understand; it is God's gift to receive and a life to live.

Notes / Personal Response

The Big I: When Self Becomes the Center

Read

Philippians 2:3-8

Deepening the Teaching

Your teaching identifies self-centeredness as a root pattern of sin. The issue is not healthy personhood but making the self the supreme reference point for truth, desire, and decision.

Jesus models another way: humility, obedience, and self-giving love. Grace does not erase personality; it reorders life around God.

Teaching Application

Ask participants where “What do I want?” needs to become “Lord, what do You desire?”

Key Takeaway

Grace is not merely a truth to understand; it is God’s gift to receive and a life to live.

Notes / Personal Response

Missing the Mark in Many Directions

Read

Romans 3:23; Matthew 22:36-40

Deepening the Teaching

Hamartia, commonly described as missing the mark, helps show that people can fail God's purpose in different ways. One person may miss through excess, another through neglect; one through action, another through refusal to act.

The target is not comparison with other people. The target is love of God and neighbor under God's will.

Teaching Application

Have participants stop comparing sins and instead ask where their own life is out of alignment.

Key Takeaway

Grace is not merely a truth to understand; it is God's gift to receive and a life to live.

Notes / Personal Response

Bitterness, Unforgiveness, and Boundaries

Read

Ephesians 4:31-32; Romans 12:17-21

Deepening the Teaching

Bitterness can spread through speech, memory, family systems, and ministry relationships. Forgiveness releases vengeance to God, but forgiveness does not mean calling evil good or remaining in unsafe situations.

Reconciliation requires truth and, where possible, repentance and restored trust. Boundaries may be necessary even when forgiveness is sincere.

Teaching Application

Invite participants to distinguish four words: forgiveness, reconciliation, trust, and access. They are related but not identical.

Key Takeaway

Grace is not merely a truth to understand; it is God's gift to receive and a life to live.

Notes / Personal Response

Shame and the Fractured Self

Read

Romans 8:1; 2 Corinthians 5:17

Deepening the Teaching

Some obstacles turn inward. Shame says not merely “I did wrong” but “I am beyond grace.” In Christ, conviction can lead to repentance without allowing condemnation to define identity.

Healthy self-love means receiving ourselves as God’s creatures under His authority, not worshipping the self.

Teaching Application

Ask participants to identify one false identity statement that needs to be replaced with truth rooted in Christ.

Key Takeaway

Grace is not merely a truth to understand; it is God’s gift to receive and a life to live.

Notes / Personal Response

The Cross: Vertical Restoration

Read

2 Corinthians 5:18-21

Deepening the Teaching

The vertical beam of the cross provides a memorable teaching picture: through Christ we are reconciled to God. Repentance, forgiveness, identity, prayer, and the Spirit's power flow from restored relationship.

We do not overcome obstacles by willpower alone. We bring them to Christ and participate in the grace God provides.

Teaching Application

Lead a time of confession focused on one named obstacle between the participant and God.

Key Takeaway

Grace is not merely a truth to understand; it is God's gift to receive and a life to live.

Notes / Personal Response

The Cross: Horizontal Restoration

Read

Matthew 5:23-24; Colossians 3:12-15

Deepening the Teaching

The horizontal beam reminds us that grace reshapes relationships. Christian reconciliation includes truth, forgiveness, peace, justice, service, and wise boundaries.

Spiritual maturity cannot be measured only by private devotion. The way we speak, forgive, serve, and handle conflict reveals what grace is doing in us.

Teaching Application

Ask: Is there someone I need to approach, apologize to, forgive, serve, or establish a healthy boundary with?

Key Takeaway

Grace is not merely a truth to understand; it is God's gift to receive and a life to live.

Notes / Personal Response

Conference Response: A Life Shaped by the Cross

Read

Matthew 16:24-26; James 4:7-8

Deepening the Teaching

Overcoming obstacles is not a one-time cleanup. Christian life is daily discipleship: resist evil, draw near to God, take up the cross, remain in community, and practice the means of grace.

The final assurance remains central to your teaching: obstacles are real, but grace is greater. Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Teaching Application

Write one obstacle to surrender, one means of grace to strengthen, and one act of reconciliation or obedience to begin this week.

Key Takeaway

Grace is not merely a truth to understand; it is God’s gift to receive and a life to live.

Notes / Personal Response
