

Obstacles to Grace-Danice Loveridge - Men's Emmaus Walk, October 5, 2023

(Slide 1) Please 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.

(Slide 2) It was about 11pm on Monday evening June 22, 2015. I was finishing up my evening emails and beginning to get ready for bed. My husband Mike, was already in bed for a couple of hours and suddenly I hear him talking on his cell. He came out of the bedroom and I heard him saying, "okay, he's going into surgery now. We will be right there. What hospital? All right, see you soon."

Mike hung up the phone, grabbed me by the shoulders, looked me in the eyes and said, "Get ready to go, we have to go to the hospital. Randy has been shot." Randy was my 28 year old son.

(Slide 3) I'm Rev. Danice Loveridge and this talk is Obstacles to Grace

As we drove to the hospital, my mind kept thinking about my relationship with my son, one that was filled with hurtful words from him, nasty text messages, and voicemails that blamed me for everything that was going wrong in his life. To protect my inner sanctity, I placed a boundary around him about a year prior to this happening. The boundary was; until we can have a mutually loving, respectful and honest relationship, I can no longer take your calls or respond to your text messages.

While this boundary gave me safety from the onslaught of hurtful words, it also cost me dearly. I was not allowed to have contact with my grandchildren, and my son and I had only unpleasant contact with each other. I so desperately wanted a loving relationship with him but he was unable to have a loving relationship with me due to obstacles in his life.

You see our relationship with God is like this too. We all have common obstacles to prevent us from fully experiencing God's grace. An obstacle to grace is **anything** that keeps us from a full and loving relationship with God through Christ. These

Obstacles to Grace-Danice Loveridge - Men's Emmaus Walk, October 5, 2023

obstacles, like boulders, can be small or large, but all create a road block. One thing I have learned is that God will use those obstacles to bring about the changes we need.

(Slide #4) The Christian life takes place in the real world affected by the consequences of sin.

The number one reason for obstacles to grace is S.I.N. Notice what letter is in the middle of this word.... I... That other trinity of Me, Myself and I. Sin is: pretending that we are the center of the universe, We are the standard for supreme goodness, instead of acknowledging God as the rightful center of all.

Sin is alienation- alienation from God, alienation from others and even alienation from ourselves.

(Slide 5) Sin is anything that causes us to miss the mark.

Hamartia is the Greek word for sin. It means to miss the mark or target. Life diminishes where sin is, because sin creates an obstacle to grace. This includes the “little” sins and the “big” sins. It is anything that separates us from the love of God and the love of our neighbor. When we miss the mark, we are not able to love God and love neighbor as Jesus commanded in the book of Matthew, chapter 22: 36-40

34 Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. **35** One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: **36** “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” **37** Jesus replied: “ ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ **38** This is the first and greatest commandment. **39** And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ **40** All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

(Slide 6) There are two types of obstacles to grace:

Obstacles to Grace-Danice Loveridge - Men's Emmaus Walk, October 5, 2023

Those that hinder our relationship to God (as seen by the vertical arrow)

Those that hinder our relationship with each other and with ourselves (as seen by the horizontal arrow on the next slide)

Let's start with those obstacles that hinder our relationship with God: In order to determine these for ourselves, we must take a personal inventory. This is done by intentionally being still and listening. Asking for God to reveal to us the hidden things in our lives that block the Spirit's power.

- Idolatry- worshiping and serving false gods. Placing anything of more importance than God. Or spending unhealthy amounts of time with certain activities or people. What type of gods have we made in our lives? Perhaps it's the pursuit of money? We also can idolize people, positions, power, and possessions. All of these can separate us from God.

I know I have been convicted of this by spending unhealthy amounts of time with unhealthy people in pursuit of money.

- Blasphemy- speaking irreverently or profanely of God; using God's name to curse or revile anything. Proclaiming things to be holy that are not holy. Deut 5: 11 speaks of this,

"You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name."

Guys, this includes saying words like JC, and GD as swear words. We fall into these habits of using these words and not realizing that every time we do, we call on the name of God. I hear my 16 year old grandson using these words and I reply to him to "now finish that prayer". He gives me a questioning look and I say, "You've called on God's name and have God's attention, how would you like to finish that prayer?"

- Resisting God- refusing to obey God, quenching the Spirit of God. 1Thess 5:19 says *"Do not quench the Spirit."* I know that I refused to obey God

Obstacles to Grace-Danice Loveridge - Men's Emmaus Walk, October 5, 2023

by refusing to treat my mind, body and spirit as God's Temple. I was determined to eat, drink, think, say and do whatever I wanted, whenever I wanted. As you can imagine, this did not serve me well.

- Ignoring God- or not listening when God is speaking. We must set aside time daily to listen and seek out God. When we do this, we should write down the things that are revealed to us.

Another way we ignore God is by not taking time out of our schedule for rest in God; i.e. not taking Sabbath. Deut 5:12-14 says:

12 *"Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the LORD your God has commanded you. 13 Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 14 but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your ox, your donkey or any of your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns, so that your male and female servants may rest, as you do."*

Initially when I began my Christian walk, I resisted giving up my Sunday "sleep in" day. I was just too busy to go to church and I certainly did not have time to seek God daily. Any other "too busy to seek God folks who use Sunday as a "sleep in day" ? As my relationship with God deepened, I began to realize I needed to set aside time for my spirit to refresh and be in the presence of God. This also set the example for my family of how to observe Sabbath. I also began to intentionally seek our God daily. Now if I don't seek God, I feel off center and out of touch with my Creator and others.

- Disobedience- is intentionally rejecting the relationship God offers and failing to develop the talents and gifts given to us by God. The Holy Spirit calls out to us, convicting us of our disobedience. Then, when we seek, listen and obey, the Holy Spirit guides and directs us to a new joy in Christ in which no man can take from you. Obedience in the little things and the big

Obstacles to Grace-Danice Loveridge - Men's Emmaus Walk, October 5, 2023

things brings an exquisite thrill. do not be concerned about the results of your obedience, as that is not your business. Obedience is your business!

- Unbelief- hearing the truth but refusing to believe and obey the truth. I remember as a teenager, walking away from my faith and God because it no longer “fit” my life. I can’t imagine that any of you did that too?
- Ignorance- unknowingly alienating ourselves from God and others. This lack of understanding can defeat us. We are tasked with learning the Truth about God and developing a relationship with God through Christ to overcome ignorance.
- Pride- focusing attention on ourselves rather than giving the glory and honor to God. Pride is the idolatry of self. Remember the other Trinity of me, myself and I? This idolatry of self leads to claiming we are the best, we never make mistakes and we are perfect. Everyone should listen to us and follow us because we are humanity’s savior.
- Unforgiveness toward God or others- How many of you have been angry with God for allowing certain things to happen in your life or not answering your prayers the way you desired? I have. Or perhaps you have been harmed by someone repeatedly and deeply. Me too! But, we are told to forgive. If we do not forgive, then we ourselves cannot be forgiven. Matt 5:14-15 says:
“For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”

This was a big one for me. My son had harmed me in so many ways that to continue to forgive him was very hard. I learned that forgiveness does not mean I had to forget what he had done, and it did not mean that I had to place myself in an abusive situation either. What it did mean was I had to release my hand from his neck, stop trying to control him and allow God to heal him.

Obstacles to Grace-Danice Loveridge - Men's Emmaus Walk, October 5, 2023

Now let's talk about the second major obstacle to grace:

(slide 7) Obstacles to our relationships with others

- Murder- can be physical, emotional or spiritual. Murder happens whenever we kill another person by thought, word, or deed. Randy and I were murdering each other with our words and actions. This created a huge obstacle to grace in our lives. We needed to change how we thought and talked to and about each other in order for healing to take place.
- Addiction or abuse- this can take many forms. Addiction is whenever we have an unhealthy obsession over something. This can be Drugs, alcohol, food, sex, pornography, gambling, power. Abuse is when we are abusing our own bodies by what we consume or when we are taking advantage of or harming another person.

Guys my son was abusing drugs and alcohol at this time and he was abusing me with his thoughts, threats and words. But at this same time, I too had an addiction. I was addicted to sugar. I don't know if you know this but the pleasure center in the brain lights up when you consume high carbohydrates the same way it lights up when you ingest cocaine and other drugs. I was 100 pounds overweight, and prediabetic with many other medical conditions. I needed to deal with my own addiction to food and how this was impacting others in my life. I needed help. Addiction impacts every aspect of a person's life and leads to the next obstacle:

- Lying- saying things we know are not true to or about another person. The whole reason we lie is to make another look bad, make ourselves look good, or to evoke an emotional response. Sometimes, we even defend these lies in order to keep the charade going.

I would sneak sugary foods, and lie about how much I had. I was ashamed and embarrassed and felt that lying would protect me from the truth. I was only deceiving myself. Everyone else already knew the truth. about me.

Obstacles to Grace-Danice Loveridge - Men's Emmaus Walk, October 5, 2023

- Gossip or slander- sharing things about another person without their permission. Or speaking dishonestly about another person in order to make them look bad and us look good. Critical attitudes and irritations with each other are a form of hatred. This one is so easy to get caught up in. I'm challenging myself to only speak positively about others and to not speak about others without their permission. I'm becoming intentional about not listening to the gossip when others are doing it.
- Stealing- we all know what stealing is. Taking something that belongs to someone else without their permission. Stealing is stealing, whether it's a paper clip or money. It breeches the trust between us and another.
- Coveting- When we desire something that does not belong to us. This includes another person's possessions, spouse, status, and honor. All right guys, let's be honest here. This includes lusting over someone. The strongest sense for men is through their eyes. So, Guard your eyes, they are the window to your heart. Typically when guys see something they want, including another person's partner, they tend to make remarks to other guys about it. By guarding your eyes, you can also guard your mouth.
- Laziness- not applying all of our God given talents to further the Kingdom of God. when we avoid doing what we know we need to because we do not feel like it. We have been created for greatness. It's impossible to be lazy and great at the same time.
- Dishonor- refusing to give the proper respect and honor to parents, pastors, secular leaders or people in positions of authority. Many times, this is connected to anger.

My son was a prodigal son. I know earlier you heard about the prodigal son who dishonored his parents by asking for his inheritance before the father even passed. Randy completely dishonored me, and other family members. He showed no respect for community leaders and only had respect for church leaders if they

Obstacles to Grace-Danice Loveridge - Men's Emmaus Walk, October 5, 2023

could somehow help him financially. This was a huge obstacle in many relationships. But, truthfully, I was also dishonoring him by the things I was saying and thinking.

Lastly there are obstacles to our relationship with ourselves. These are not shown on the diagram.

- Lack of self love- when we despise the person we have become. We fail to forgive ourselves, show space for grace, and speak encouragingly to ourselves.
- Spirit of bitterness- our pain and hatred go very deep and create a spirit of abrasiveness, distance, and distrust toward specific people or toward the general public. Bitter roots need to be traced down to their origin and dug up.
- Spiritual blindness- the spiritually blind fail to see their own faults before pointing out these in others. The spiritually blind accuse others and point out the speck in others eyes without any regard for the log in their own eyes.
Oh that was so me!!! I was so good at feeling sorry for myself and pointing out how my son was constantly hurting me. I was refusing to see the faults I had that were contributing to the situation.

(Slide 8) But, through Christ we overcome our obstacles to grace

A. The shape of this victory is manifested by the shape of the cross. In the Prevenient Grace talk, we learned that God is going before us and providing opportunities for us to be in a relationship. But we do not always respond. In the Justifying Grace talk, we learned about the vertical and horizontal lines of the cross. **The vertical line in the cross reminds us that Jesus Christ restores our relationship with God.**

In Christ we:

- a. Remember our reconciliation to God. Jesus' ministry began with a call to repentance, the offer of forgiveness, and the promise of eternal life.

Obstacles to Grace-Danice Loveridge - Men's Emmaus Walk, October 5, 2023

- b. Remember our baptism, How we are called as a member of the body of Christ and given special gifts from the Spirit.
- c. Remember our identity as a child of God. That we are of sacred worth.
- d. Remember the power to walk in the Spirit. We learn to be guided and directed.
- e. Renounce the forces of the evil one in our lives.

This is good news for each of us and our obstacles! Christ came to overcome them for us. We no longer have to face them alone. This reminds me of the rest of the Prodigal Son story in Luke 15: when the son came home after squandering all that he had and the Father ran to greet him and provided only the best for this one who was lost.

The horizontal line in the cross reminds us that Jesus Christ restores our relationship with ourselves and our neighbor.

In Christ we:

- f. Come to know and love our true selves, being reconciled with who we are and whose we are.
- g. Become reconciled to our neighbors, learning to love and respect others
- h. Seek spiritual guidance from others in the body of Christ. Iron sharpens iron.
- i. Participate in the means of grace, including developing accountability
- j. Pray for others, especially leaders and those in authority
- k. Learn to love our enemies and provide acts of mercy

This is good news for each of our relationships. They can be healed and restored through Christ. Jesus taught us to pray the Lord's Prayer. In this prayer we ask for forgiveness for ourselves, ask for forgiveness of others, we receive daily what we need to move forward, and we ask for deliverance from the evil ways that tempt us.

Obstacles to Grace-Danice Loveridge - Men's Emmaus Walk, October 5, 2023

(Slide 9) Conclusion: The Christian life, although lived out in a world affected by sin, is a daily decision to take up our cross and follow Jesus.

When Mike and I arrived at the hospital, Randy was already in surgery. The bullet had torn through his abdomen and the surgeon warned us this could go either way. I went to the chapel and cried and prayed. I prayed as if his life depended on my prayers. I prayed for forgiveness for my son and for forgiveness for me. For healing of our relationship-if not in this life, then in the next. I asked God to help me take the log out of my own eye and see life from my son's eyes. I prayed so hard that I became exhausted and unable to pray or cry anymore.

By God's grace, Randy survived the surgery. The bullet damaged a significant amount of his intestines but somehow missed every vital organ and major blood vessel. He would spend the next eight days in the hospital. After the breathing tube came out, he called me to his side, took my hand and said, "mom, I'm sorry. I'm so sorry to put you through this." Oh my, I saw God moving in our relationship and grace was coming through. I was sure my son was having a personal "Come to Jesus" moment and that his life would be dedicated to Christ.

I was reminded that the Christian life is lived in the shape of the cross, with appropriate attention being given to our relationship with God and others. I was reminded that God's grace is always sufficient.

(Slide 10) I kept working on myself and the log in my own eye. I began reading the book *Mother and Son, the Respect Effect* by Emerson Eggerichs and learned about how my language with my son had become an obstacle in our relationship. Although I was not the only one responsible for this relationship, I did have my own crucial part in it becoming dysfunctional. I began to guard my thoughts toward him and it resulted in different words being spoken between us.

But, just like our new life in Christ, sometimes, we get a false start. In the following few months, Randy had again gotten angry with me and resorted to unhealthy communications. I needed to return to my previous practice of healthy boundaries in order to protect myself.

Obstacles to Grace-Danice Loveridge - Men's Emmaus Walk, October 5, 2023

Then Randy faced another medical crisis when an intestinal rupture occurred and he became septic. For the second time, his life was in the balance. He endured another surgery and spent 21 days in the hospital, with most of them in the ICU.

Even while on a ventilator, Randy was very angry with me and refused to allow me in his room. Although this hurt terribly, I continued to pray for him and for our relationship. I would wait in the waiting room everyday so I could be close to him and greet the visitors that came to support him. I never let go, or walked away.

You see, when I walked away from God as a teenager, God remained a loving parent to me and kept showing up in my life even when I did not know it. So, when my son pushed me away, I remembered this and I did the same for him.

A few months later, Randy showed up unexpectedly at my door. He said he wanted to talk. He apologized for being so hurtful to me those past few years and for keeping his kids from me. He said that he loved me and wanted a relationship with me. He said he forgave me for all of the things he had been blaming me for all these years and asked me to forgive him too. Through tear flooded eyes, I told him I already had forgiven him and that nothing could separate my love for him-not even him. God was moving in our relationship, removing obstacles and forming a bridge between us. Space for grace was coming through.

(Slide 11) The next February, we celebrated Christmas with Randy and three of his children. That was the best Christmas present he ever gave me! I'd love to say that we have the perfect loving relationship now, but that would not be sincere. Randy I regularly work on addressing the remaining obstacles that stand in the way. The process is slow, but there is nothing that can separate our love for each other.

This is how it is with our Christian walk. Christ remains as the bridge between us and God. There is no obstacle, nor distance, that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Gentlemen, the Christian life is a daily decision to take up our

Obstacles to Grace-Danice Loveridge - Men's Emmaus Walk, October 5, 2023

cross and follow Jesus. It is a life lived in the shape of the cross, with appropriate attention given to our relationship with God and our relationship with others. Our job is to seek out God and inquire about the obstacles in our way. Then we are to be still and listen for God, write down the things that are revealed, and be courageous enough to obey what we have been told.

For there is always more grace in God than there is sin in us. Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus-not even us! Through Christ WE CAN overcome every obstacle to grace!

DeColores!