**OBSTACLES TO A LIFE OF GRACE**

(preferably 20 - 30 minutes)

PURPOSE:

* To be aware of the obstacles which prevent us from living a life of grace.
* To understand the nature and sources of these obstacles i.e. sin
* To present remedies to grapple with obstacles and more fully live a life of grace.

CORE IDEAS:

* We encounter obstacles as we try to live a life of grace.
* The sources of sin are spiritually unhealthy attractions of the world - our focus on self or selfishness and the devil.
* There are remedies to assist us in overcoming these obstacles.

INTRODUCTION:

1. It would be wonderful to live a life of grace without failing, but we encounter obstacles which can lead to sin.
2. We need to realize that other than Jesus no one has lived a life without sinning.
3. We tend to fall back into old patterns of thought, word, and deeds when faced with obstacles.
4. We need to admit our sins and seek remedies to live a life of grace.

WE NEED TO BE REALISTIC ABOUT THE OBSTACLES WE ENCOUNTER:

1. In the life of grace we encounter obstacles. (see 1 John 2:1)
   1. These obstacles arise from our individual lives and the world around us. (see James 1:15)
   2. These obstacles are not sent by God. (see James 1:13)
   3. Obstacles can lead to sin when we give in to them. Sinning is missing the mark because we fall short of God’s purpose.
2. Sin has very definite effects.
   1. We are alienated and become strangers to God, ourselves, and one another. (see BCP p. 848; Eph. 2:12; Rom. 7:14-17)
   2. The outcome of sin is spiritual death. (see James 1:15; Rom. 6:20-21; Rom. 1:28-32; Gal: 6:7-8)
3. Some people deny the reality of sin. (see 1 John 1 8,10)
   1. Some equate sin to socially unacceptable behavior.
   2. When we mask the nature of sin, we attempt to justify ourselves and refuse to trust God.
   3. If we deny the reality of sin, we infer God does not care about how we live our lives.
4. God intends for us to be free, full of life, and joyful. To live into what God intends, we must be realistic about how we frustrate God’s purpose for us.

SIN INVOLVES A CONSCIOUS WILFULLNESS:

1. Sin, which is missing the mark, means failing to love God, neighbor and ourselves.
   1. We must be conscious of our rebellion against God. (see Rom. 5:13)
   2. When we sin, we choose to go against God’s will. (see James 4:17)
   3. Feeling temptation is not sin but dwelling on, entertaining, or acting on temptation is sin.
   4. We do not fall from God’s grace by accident.
   5. We can become oblivious to sin unless we realize the sources of sin.

THERE ARE MANY SOURCES OF SIN:

1. The unhealthy attractions of this world are the unjust and improper use of God’s creation which lead to waste, hoarding, greed and lust for power that creates divisions among the people of the earth. (see Luke 12:12-21; 1 John 2:15-17; James 4:1-4; James 5:1ff; Rev. 3:15-18)
2. The focus on (me first) self or our selfishness is the internal forces, appetites, and desires which arise from our being and lead us to misuse our lives and those of others. These are not just sinful acts but attitudes such as pride, envy, hatred, and lust. (see Rom. 6:12-13; 1 Cor. 3:3; Rom. 13:13-14)
3. The “devil” in biblical terms “Satan” means adversary i.e. one opposed to God’s will. (see Eph. 6:12; 1Tim. 3:6;1 John 3:8)
   1. Satan is the personification of deep spiritual evil.
   2. Satan has no power unless we cooperate with him and stand against God’s purposes.

THERE ARE REMEDIES TO OVERCOME THE OBSTACLES TO GRACE:

1. We must repent, that is, turn again and again to God. (see 2 Cor.10:7a; Heb.12:18-24; Gal. 5:1; 2 Cor. 7:1)
   1. We have the freedom to choose God’s will or our own.
   2. By turning to God, we can join in His creative work and give to others as he has given to us.
2. Confession is honestly confronting sin. (see 1 John 1:7,9; 1Cor. 3:18; 1 Cor. 4:14)
   1. Confession is not wallowing in our past sins.
   2. Confession is giving over our sins to God.
   3. Confession is grasping the wonder of God’s power to redeem us.
3. To resist sin we must train ourselves and training requires discipline.
   1. We develop spiritual muscle through God’s help in resisting sin.
   2. Spiritual direction, counsel, and the sacraments help us develop spiritual muscle.
   3. The Sacrament of Reconciliation restores us to God and opens new areas for growth.
   4. A life centered in prayer nurtures our fellowship with God.
   5. Sharing our struggles and joys with fellow Christians nurtures our life in grace. (Group Reunion and Ultreya)

REMEDIES ARE NOT AUTOMATIC:

1. We must have the will and discipline to use these remedies.
2. Sin cannot be dispensed once and for all. To dispense with sin once and for all is a gift of God which belongs to our final victory in Christ.
3. We can expect to grow in our mastery over sin by trusting in God’s grace.
4. There are two biblical metaphors which apply.
   1. From the athletic arena “training”, “running the race” – training which results in spiritual strength. (see 1 Cor. 9:24-27; 1 Tim. 4:7-10; 2 Tim. 2:5; Phil. 3:14)
   2. From the battlefront, the Greek strateia, “strategy” which means being forearmed so that we may gain victory over sin. (see 1 Peter 4:1-2; 2 Cor. 10:3-6; Eph. 6:13)

COMMENTARY:

1. The spirit of this talk is not pessimistic but one of hope.
2. An analysis of sin is useful but not the point of the talk.
3. The primary focus of the talk should be remedies.

FURTHER SUGGESTED READING:

*Speaking of Sin* by Barbara Brown Taylor