

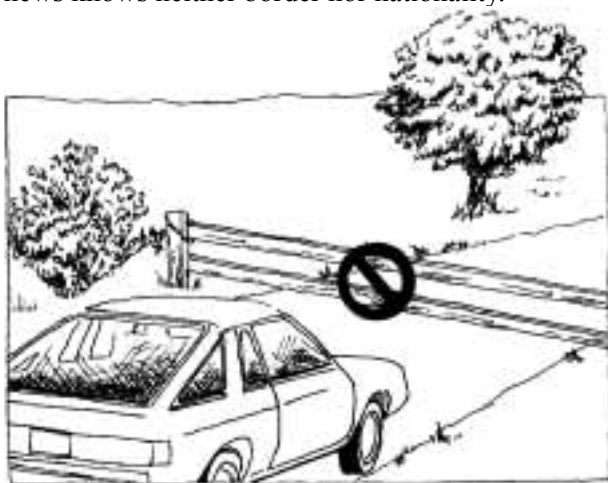
Lesson
6

Overcome the Barriers

The apostle Paul was in prison. He could no longer preach the good news of Christ. He was no longer free to minister to people's needs. He, whose desire was to speak about his Savior, was chained to a stock. Yet he was able to say, "But the word of God is not in chains" (2 Timothy 2: 9)!

There are many barriers or roadblocks that we may experience in trying to share the good news of Christ. These barriers will be different from one country to the next and from culture to culture. We cannot ignore these problems if we are to win men and women to Christ.

Since having witnessed Christ's wonderful power, I believe there is no barrier strong enough to prevent the spreading of the gospel. God's Word is to go to all people everywhere. Christ's good news knows neither border nor nationality.



One proverb says, "Prevention is better than cure." The more we know about the barriers, the better we will be able to overcome them. We saw in our last lesson some of the needs for sharing the good news. Now we will see how to overcome some of the barriers to sharing the gospel. Remember that with God the impossible becomes possible!

In this lesson you will study . . .

Identity Barriers
Religious Barriers
Language Barriers
Social Barriers

This lesson will help you . . .

- Identify barriers to personal evangelism and know how to overcome them.

IDENTITY BARRIERS

Objective 1. *Explain how God looks at man's identity.*

In many countries of the world today, there is a great desire in the hearts of men to find their true identity. Every person wants to be recognized by the country of his or her birth. Everywhere, people are proud of who they are. This is normal.

As Christian workers, we should look at people as God sees them. The love of God covers all. He has so *loved* the whole world! And this means *all* nations, *all* races, whatever the language or color might be. When the Holy Spirit came to give the disciples power to witness about Christ, people from all nations of the earth were present in Jerusalem. All of them heard the disciples glorifying God in their own language (Acts 2:1-12).

As a country, Israel has had a unique position in the world. In Bible times it was said to occupy the central part of the known world. It was a crossroads for communication. Ships from many nations traveled the seas around this small country. God surely had all nations in mind when He sent Jesus there. This put the gospel within reach of the entire earth.

In heaven there will be people from all nations, singing and praising God in every language. The apostle John saw a vision of it (Revelation 7:9).



The same Jesus who saved me is the One who saved you, no matter what nationality you are. We are different from one another. We eat different types of food. We talk differently. We are different in the way we dress. But Jesus makes us all as one. The Holy Spirit unites us.

In some countries it has been the practice for people to take a Christian name when they become Christians. But we must remember that taking a Christian name does not change a person's life. Christ has not sent you to change people's names or their way of doing things. He has sent you to share your Christian life and faith with them, so that their *lives* will be changed.

The same Spirit that led Philip to the African in the desert (Acts 8:26) also led Paul to Europe (Acts 16:6-9). The same Spirit that came upon the disciples on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:4) is the One that came down in Cornelius' house (Acts 10:45). If you and I are aware that God treats all men alike, we will be able to see all men as God sees them. We will be able to overcome barriers of race and color. Then God can use us not only in our own home and country, but also among other people who may be very different from us.



For You To Do

- 1 God wants to change our (identity/life).
- 2 In the eyes of God, all men are (alike/in classes).
- 3 When we talk about our *identity*, we mean (how we act/who we are).
- 4 As Christians, we need to get rid of (unity/barriers).

RELIGIOUS BARRIERS

Objective 2. *Tell how a Christian worker can best overcome a religious barrier.*

There are many religions in the world. In some of the developing countries, each tribe or area has its own or several religions. This is, of course, one of the greatest barriers we will meet in trying to win people to Christ.

Several times people have said to me, "I cannot leave my father's religion. I must be loyal to my father's traditions. Christianity is foreign to my ancestors, and it is a white man's religion. I cannot believe it." What can you do when you face a barrier like this?

First, let the people who say these things see the change in your life. Tell them that God loves them. Do not argue—you will not get anywhere! Remember what the apostle Paul said. He was also like these men. He had his father's religion. He was loyal and truly committed to all the traditions of his family. He had taken men, women, and children who were speaking about Jesus and put them in prison. For him Christianity was something new, totally against his culture and his father's religion. Saul had consented to the killing of some of these witnesses of the good news (Acts 8:1-3). Yet this same man met Christ and was ready to forget all that he had been taught before.



In Acts 8:9 we read about a man named Simon who surprised everyone by his powers of magic. I have also seen people like him who seemed to have great power in their religious practices. They were looked upon as great people. No celebration, no sowing of seed, no marriage or burial, could be done without their advice. Yet I have seen some of them accept Jesus as their Savior. Their lives were completely changed. They burned all their idols and quit practicing magic. No one forced them to do this. They did it because they had found Christ.

There is no barrier that the power of the good news cannot break. Do not be discouraged in your work of witnessing. Do not be afraid to share what Christ has done for you. Our Lord is forever the same. “Go,” He said, “for all power in heaven and on earth is given to me”(Matthew 28:18, paraphrased). And not even death or hell can stop the spreading of the good news. The Roman Empire tried but failed. There is no religious barrier that the power of the gospel cannot turn upside down! We cannot do it alone, but the Holy Spirit working in us will do it!



For You To Do

- 5 The best way to overcome a religious barrier when talking to people is to
 - a) try to convince them that their religion is wrong.
 - b) tell them you tried their religion and it didn't work for you.
 - c) show by your life that you have something better to offer.
- 6 We don't need to be afraid to share the good news with religious people because
 - a) the power of the gospel is greater than any other force.
 - b) they are basically good people.
- 7 Have you or someone you know come to Christ from another religion? If you answered *yes*, why did you decide to change?
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LANGUAGE BARRIERS

Objective 3. Give two language barriers and ways to overcome them.

You know your own people better than anyone else. You know their language. That is why it is easy for you to follow Christ's pattern for personal evangelism by witnessing at home.

When Christ saves us and sends us out to be witnesses of His love, He can also help us to overcome language barriers. He can help us to learn other languages, to share with people of other cultures what Christ has done for us.

Many Christian workers in my country have been able to learn other languages in order to reach people of other tribes for Christ. If the Lord gives you an opportunity to study another language, do it. This will give you more opportunities to pass on the good news of Christ's saving power.

The apostle Paul did not need an interpreter, for he knew how to speak both Hebrew and Greek and perhaps other languages as well. If God leads you to share the good news with those who speak another language, you have no reason to let this barrier stop you.

There is another language barrier, which we face with two-thirds of the world's population. That is the problem of illiteracy—not being able to read or write one's own language.

The United Nations spends large amounts of money for educational programs and many countries have emphasized mass education as necessary to their economic growth. The Bible has been translated into well over 1000 languages. Yet, according to the UNESCO 2000 report, 20.3 % of the world's people (15 years old and over) are illiterate. Women make up 2/3 of the world's illiterate population. In my country, according to the same report, 66.1% of the men and 85.9 % of the women cannot read.

How can we overcome such a strong barrier? We cannot give the Bible or Christian literature to those who cannot read it. Will this stop us from trying to win them to Christ? Far from it!

Our Lord overcame this barrier. When speaking to the educated Pharisees, He referred to the written Word of God: "Have you not read . . .?" (Matthew 19:4). But when speaking to the common people, He spoke of things from their daily life. He did this to get them to understand the love of God. For example, Christ said that God cared for us so much that even the hairs on our head are numbered (Matthew 10:30). In describing the kingdom of God, He told them stories about a man sowing a seed, about a wedding feast, and about a lost coin. He was so practical that all the common people listened to Him gladly (Mark 12:37).

People who cannot read and write can be taught to memorize Scripture verses. When they have the Word in their hearts, it will keep them from sin (Psalm 119:11).



For You To Do

- 8 Two language barriers are
 - a
 - b
- 9 How did Jesus overcome the barrier of illiteracy?
 - a) He taught the people how to read the Scriptures.
 - b) He used stories from their own daily lives to teach them spiritual truths.
- 10 If God sends you to people whose language you do not know, what is the best thing to do?
 - a) Try to learn their language.
 - b) Find someone you can talk to who will pass your message on to the people.

SOCIAL BARRIERS

Objective 4. *Explain what a personal evangelist should do when faced with social opposition.*

The way certain groups are organized may be a barrier to personal evangelism. For instance, in most African countries, wisdom is associated with age. It is believed that the older you are, the wiser you get. So it is not considered proper for a younger person to speak on matters like faith to an older person. A young person needs boldness and courage to speak in this situation.

We are not alone in facing barriers like this. Even Jesus faced them. At the age of 12 he talked to the doctors of the law, and they were all amazed. For them, it was very unusual to see such wisdom in a young lad (Luke 2:47). Later in his ministry, those who were trying to stop him from spreading the good news of God talked about His humble social background. Even His friends were beginning to ask themselves whether He knew what He was doing (Mark 3:21).

When the blind man whom Jesus healed tried to tell the Jewish religious leaders that Jesus must have come from God, they would not accept this. They did not even think He was worthy to speak to them about God. They were the elders, and therefore wiser than He (John 9:28-29,34).

Timothy was the young pastor the apostle Paul put in charge of the church at Ephesus. He, too, faced this social barrier of youth. That is why Paul wrote to encourage him. Paul charged him before the Lord and His holy angels to accept his responsibility (1 Timothy 4:11-12).



You may also face social opposition. You may be led to witness to men of a higher position in the world, to people with more education, or to those with great riches. They may look at you as being unworthy to tell them about God's love. But do not ever stop sharing the good news. Just remember that He who has sent you is always with you. He will give you wisdom. Christ overcame. Timothy overcame. You will overcome too!



For You To Do

- 11** Circle the letter in front of the TRUE statements.
- a** If I follow Jesus' example, I will not be afraid to witness to people of a higher position in life.
 - b** I must speak about Christ only to those younger than myself.
 - c** Wisdom and boldness are needed in sharing the good news with people who are different from us.
 - d** I should be ready at all times to speak to anyone about Christ.
 - e** If we feel unworthy to talk to someone about Christ, we should keep silent.

12 What is the most important truth you have learned in this lesson?
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Check Your Answers

- 1 life.
- 2 alike.
- 3 who we are.
- 4 barriers.
- 5 c) show by your life that you have something better to offer.
- 6 a) the power of the gospel is greater than any other force.
- 7 Your answer. I'm so glad that Jesus Christ has given my life new meaning!
- 8 a) wanting to share the good news with someone, but not knowing their language.
b) trying to witness to someone who cannot read the Bible (illiteracy).
- 9 b) He used stories from their own daily lives to teach them spiritual truths.
- 10 a) Try to learn their language.
- 11 a) True
b) False
c) True
d) True
e) False
- 12 Your answer. I would say I have learned that God's Word cannot be chained, and there is no power that will keep the good news from spreading to all people everywhere!