

LESSON 6 Overcome the Barriers

There are many barriers or roadblocks that we experience in sharing 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 people 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 for all people everywhere. Christ's good news knows neither border nor nationality.

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!

The Plan

- A. Identity Barriers
- B. Religious Barriers
- C. Language Barriers
- D. Social Barriers

The Goals

1. Identify barriers to personal evangelism.
2. State how a Christian worker can best overcome religious barriers.
3. Identify two language barriers and ways to overcome them.
4. Explain what a personal evangelist should do when faced with social opposition.

A. IDENTITY BARRIERS

Goal 1. Identify barriers to personal evangelism.

There is a great desire in the hearts of people to find their true identity. Every person wants to be recognized by the country of his or her birth, and everywhere people are proud of who they are.

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 and *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 various languages (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 and 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.

Furthermore, the same Jesus who saved me is the One who saved you, no matter what nationality you are. We may eat different types of food, talk differently, and wear different forms of clothing, but Jesus makes us all 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 culture. 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 we are aware that God treats all people alike, we will be able to see every person as God does. 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 people who are very different from us.

John’s vision indicates that in heaven there will be people from all nations, singing and praising God in every language. (Read Revelation 7:9.)

Application

- 1 God wants to change our
(identity/life).
- 2 In the eyes of God, all people 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).



B. RELIGIOUS BARRIERS

Goal 2. State how a Christian worker can best overcome religious barriers.

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 this 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 people. He had his father’s religion. He was loyal and committed to all the traditions of his family. He had imprisoned men, women, and children who were speaking about Jesus. For him Christianity was something new and totally against his culture and his father’s religion. Yet this same man met Christ and became a servant of the living God.

Some people seem to have great magical power in their religious practices, and they are treated almost like gods in their culture. No celebration, no sowing of seed, no marriage or burial, could be done without their advice. Yet some of these sorcerers have repented of the witchcraft and have accepted Jesus as their personal Savior. Their lives were completely changed. They destroyed 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 witnessing. Do not be afraid to share what Christ has done for you. Our Lord is forever the same. He said, ““All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me”” (Matthew 28:18). 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 break. We cannot do it alone, but the Holy Spirit working in us will do it!

Application

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 did not work for you.
- c) show by your life that you have something better to offer.

6 We do not 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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C. LANGUAGE BARRIERS

Goal 3. Identify 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 globally. 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: “‘Haven't you 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 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).

Application

8 Two language barriers are

a)

b)

9 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.



D. SOCIAL BARRIERS

Goal 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 are. 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 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, the young pastor the apostle Paul put in charge of the church at Ephesus, also 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 people of higher position, to people with more education, or to those with great riches. They may treat you as unworthy to speak to them. 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!

Application

10 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.

11 What is the most important truth you have learned in this lesson?

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Check Your Answers

7 Your answer

1 life.

8 a) wanting to share the good news with someone, but not knowing their language.

b) illiteracy.

2 alike.

3 who we are.

9 a) Try to learn their language.

4 barriers.

10 a), c), and d) are true

5 c) show by your life that you have something better to offer.

11 Your answer should indicate that you 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.

6 a) the power of the gospel is greater than any other force.

