
Spiritual Formation Part 3

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Barriers to Growing in Christ Part 1

What Blocks us from increasing our trust and faith in Jesus Christ?

GOD AS OUR SAVIOR

John 3-5; 14-15 Barriers??

What God Desires

Verses

Others ↑ ← ← ME → →↓ Self

Our Environment and Experiences

John 4:1-26

In the last three studies we looked at a man named Nicodemus who had to come face to face with his barrier to knowing Christ. He had to learn what it meant to be born again, to receive his redemption and new life. He had to overcome his pride and social status as a religious leader in order to cross the ultimate barrier from sin to His salvation and grace. This barrier had been built by a willful refusal to know Him, and a wall of pride and strong willed self-centeredness. This wall had to be climbed by the ropes of realizing his need and knowing that Christ cared for him. The Spirit sent the rope with which to climb the wall, but his faith had to follow through with the motivation and commitment.

Did you know that there are many other barriers, too? We all have barriers stemming from our will that prevent us from pursuing our faith in Christ. We also struggle with the daily obstructions of life that motivates our attention towards other things causing us to be unwilling to be obedient and follow His will. In this article, we will be looking at barriers that prevent our growth in Him. Some Christians have made that great stride; they have accepted Christ's work, become saved, and crossed that ultimate, impenetrable barrier that only He can remove. On the other hand, many Christians have taken this new life and have done little or nothing with it. We crossed the first barrier, then came to another and decided to just settle down there and not go any further in the faith and walk with Christ. What causes one person to be more mature in his or her life than someone else in the same age range and life experiences? What causes some people to have more virtue and character than others? Why do some Christians tend to do over 90% of the work of the church when they are usually less than 10% of the church's population? Why do some Christians seem to get it and grow

while others stay where they are—shallow, failing, and stuck, repeating the same bad decisions and strife? Because; they came to an obstacle and decided it was too difficult, so they did not go further!

Christ has given each Christian a new life; saved from our sins, it is a purchase we could never fathom or pay. So, why are we so inclined not to do much with it? I believe one of the main reasons is that we place so many obstacles in the path of our walk and growth in Christ. We become stagnant in the faith, so our character and relational growth does not happen, and the work of the Church goes unmet. We just stumble over the opportunities Christ gives us, and the issues of life, tripping ourselves from attaining what is right in front of us. Sometimes, we do not even see Him for all the barriers we have built, brick-by-brick! Sometimes, God brings us into circumstances that require a greater effort, and sometimes we may even suffer; but, more often than not, our backsliding and choice to remain stagnant in our faith is a result of just plain refusing to look up and see the wonders He has for us. We only see our situations and problems, and not Christ as the ultimate solution and the focus of life. We get too comfortable and build a rift into our lives because we do not want to be challenged. We remain where we are and do not go where He wants us to be. When we are comfortable, we feel we do not need to strive anymore. So, our Bible reading, prayer life, Christian fellowship, and other spiritual disciplines go unmet and unused as we miss our opportunities and growth.

Sometimes, it is not about being comfortable; rather, it is about being too stressful. Perhaps a persecution arises; a family member cuts you down for making a commitment to Christ. *Why, it is foolishness and ignorance*, they say, so you cave in to this and decide not to put any more effort His Way. Or, perhaps you lost a loved one. Stung with grief and hurt, you lose hope and become angry at God. *It must be His fault I am going through this. Why should I bother with Him if He does not care for me?* Perhaps your life is so busy that you just do not have time. Work, school, kids, hobbies, even church have become your focus, and the time you once had for Bible study, devotions, and prayer has been taken up by other things. So, you are no longer growing His Way!

The Woman at the Well

This passage reveals an outcast woman, crossing her social and personal barriers to pursue her faith deeper and stronger, and our Lord, who transcends His culture to minister to a person who would not have been met or helped. Our Lord is cutting across strict cultural barriers of race and gender, pointing us to the unity of the Gospel! Jesus interacts with a race extremely hated and rejected by the Jews. This should cause us to think about our own bigoted reactions, those we do either unconsciously or deliberately. To make matters even more scandalous to those who have distaste for others outside of their perceived likeness, our Lord engages in conversation with a moral outcast and models for us the proper approach to take with such a person. He practices listening, respect, care, and conviction, all converging with the Gospel.

For this quest, let us venture into God's most precious Word, and examine the Scriptures carefully to find His Will. The Bible holds the truth for life today, including how to apply your new life—whether you are a brand new Christian or have been a Christian all of your life—and how to grow further in your faith. If you feel that the Bible is not the paradigm for your faith and practice, you will be stranded in a barrier, disappointed and hurt in life. His full measure is given, but you refuse to take it. We are to have the perspective and desire for what God wants, not what we want. Our focus is to be on Him, because He has the best plan for us! Our plans will only lead us into the wrong decisions, and we will miss out on the best opportunities and situations He has for us.

Jesus overcame a cultural barrier to reach a woman in need. He was weary from a long journey and required rest. While His disciples went into town to get some food, an opportunity arose. "The sixth hour" by Jewish reckoning would be noon. But, according to Roman time, which John uses throughout his gospel (19:14), it was six o'clock in the evening, the same time as we use today. So, it was no surprise that Jesus was weary. He had been walking in the hot sun all day. He was thirsty, so He sat beside the well to rest and drink while the disciples went into the city to find something to eat. Here, we have a very beautiful picture of our Lord's humanity.

Discovery Questions

Read John 4:1-26 and make some observations:

1. What Blocks us from increasing our trust and faith in Jesus Christ?
2. What are some of your barriers to growing in Christ have you faced in the past? How does what you have overcome in the past help you in the future?
3. How does being too comfortable or being too stressful get in your way of your spiritual formation?
4. Why do some Christians tend to do over 90% of the work of the church when they are usually less than 10% of the church's population?
5. Why do some Christians seem to get it and grow while others stay where they are—shallow, failing, and stuck, repeating the same bad decisions and strife?
6. Christ has given each of us Christians a new life; saved from our sins, it is a purchase we could never fathom or pay. So, why are we so inclined not to do much with it?
7. Can you names some of the many other barriers to Christian maturity? Are any of these worth it to stay away from Christ and His wonders?

8. How have you been self reflective in this series? Are you discovering what hinders you? What do you need? What do you need to do now to take your spiritual formation more seriously?
9. What do you need to do to venture more into God's most precious Word, and examine the Scriptures more carefully to find His Will?

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