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## Spiritual Formation Part 5

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### Barriers to Growing in Christ Part 2

***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

This was a woman in deep need and in deep sin, who came to get some water. She had a barrier, not just of knowing Christ, but also of making Him real and known to others. She was an outcast—a cancerous lump in her community. How could she make the Savior of the world known when she was an outcast, hated and rejected? Jesus came to make her well. The women gave Jesus a drink to quench a temporary, yet real and needed thirst. Jesus then pointed her to an eternal thirst she had. Quenching her thirst would redirect her from sin to Him, and transform her from a social pariah to a person of real warmth who could proclaim the great news of The Word. Her barrier was that she did not want to do what was right. She had slipped into wrong relationship after wrong relationship. She did not know how to get out of her rut. She knew of God, perhaps all she needed to know, yet somehow she was not able to overcome her sin and cross that barrier to growth and healthy relationships. Perhaps, she thought there was something wrong with her, and that she did not deserve a better life. Perhaps, her heart was hardened from pursuing exciting and forbidden relationships in order to find meaning, yet only finding a meaningless life. She had to learn a lesson we all have to learn—a need to surrender to His Lordship. Christ has to be our meaning, not anything else found anywhere else where we just want to do our own thing and go our own way, perhaps not even caring about the long term effects and consequences. Who cares what others think or what God has to say? But, what will it get us in the long run?

The first thing the woman realized was that God cared for, and had a plan for her, even though she was considered a social pariah. She was willing to be challenged and confronted for her sin. She was willing to repent and become clean. She was able to learn and develop character, so God used her to transform her community. It is the

same for us. We must see our sin and deal with it by confession and removal. We have to see His love and care for us! We are to study the Word, seek wisdom, be prudent, and lean on the strength of the Lord! These things do not come merely by chance; they come by knowing and following Christ (Proverbs 12:4; 28:20; 31:10)! She had to learn and follow. Have you learned that lesson?

This woman had a thirst, and a desire to obtain the living water. This desire translated to willingness to grow, and willingness to strive and be challenged in the faith. She was able to do so—crossing one barrier in order to know Him, and another barrier in order to grow in Him. This barrier was one most Christians may never cross. For us, it is a lesson given to shake us from our situation to see what is in front of us. Perhaps, we need to be kicked out of our complacency into areas where we fear to go. The journey He has for us need not be feared, because Christ will not call you to an area in which He has not gifted you and for which He has not given you a desire. It is when we do not heed His call that we get in trouble, not because the call is too difficult, as He gives us all we need.

Jesus is directing us to look around and consider all the opportunities He has provided. What stops us? Is it our culture? Is it our fear? What about our past failures? Can we see what He has for us, the wonders of His grace and new life? Can we see His plan unfolding in front of us? Can we walk by faith, even when we are not sure where He is leading? Or, do we even see what is around us? Is the barrier so tall it blocks out the Son? Perhaps we are too busy running from what is ahead, taking the long road in a desert of despair and hopelessness.

## **Background**

The route Jesus took on His journey to Galilee is the most direct route, traveling through Samaria, which lies between Judea and Galilee. Samaria is known today as the West Bank. This direct route from Judea to Galilee was about 70 miles, or a two and a half day walk on a safe and well made Roman road, well-traveled and patrolled by Roman guards. This road was laden with frequent rest stops, inns, and oases. But, most of the Jews chose not to go through Samaria. Rather, they chose to embark upon the hot, harsh, and foreboding desert and the rocky road northeast from Jerusalem to Jericho, up the Jordan valley and then crossing the inhospitable Jordan River—twice. Thus, because of the prejudice they exercised against the Samaritan people, they journeyed almost twice the distance on a much, much hotter and sinister road—not by a carriage or car, but by foot. To illustrate this in Southern California, it would be as if Samaria was Oxnard, and you needed to travel to Santa Barbara from Pasadena. So, instead of taking that nice freeway, you cut across the Los Padres mountains, skipping the rest stops, motels, and the straight and easy way. And remember, you are on foot, and you are doing this because you hate strawberries and detest the Disney store outlet. Sounds ridiculous, huh? Well, prejudice is that! We all are created and loved by our Lord. But, our Jesus ignored the customs and prejudices and cut His way right through those barriers of ignorance, narrow-minded thinking, and fear, and went through Samaria. Then, He sat down and asked for a drink.

Perhaps you need to consider the efforts you put forth to stay where you are in your faith. Usually, when we do not want to grow, we busy ourselves with other activities so our Bible never gets read. We have so many social engagements, we never stop and pray. We spend so much time at work or school we negate our study and social interaction with mature Christians. The things you may be chasing and which fill your life may be good things. School is important; so is work. But, what about what is really important—your time in Him? Are you taking a shortcut to your life, skipping your meals in Him? All you will accomplish when you venture off His road is to get lost and tired.

### **Why were the Samaritans hated?**

They were the remnant of the 10 tribes of the Northern Jewish Kingdom who had been taken captive by the Assyrians in 729 B.C. They then intermarried with them instead of remaining separated, as the Southern peoples did in Babylon. Thus, ever since the days of Nehemiah, when the two Southern tribes came back from captivity to find their Northern brothers in heinous sin, intermarried with Gentiles, and forsaking much of the Law, they have been regarded as reprobates—a hated, heretical, Jewish cult. Although the Samaritans were still Jews and practicing their faith, they differed because they accepted only the five books of Moses, and they stirred and mingled in some idolatrous practices. They had even erected a temple on Mt. Gerizim as a rival to the temple in Jerusalem, perhaps because either they were not welcome in Jerusalem or chose to rebel—or probably both. This animosity directed toward one another was centuries old, and they hated each other even more than they hated the Gentiles. No wonder the Samaritan woman was so surprised when Jesus talked to her.

I hope you have been, and can be encouraged further in your faith, and that you are ready to trust the Lord in all of the circumstances in which you find yourselves—today, tomorrow, and even yesterday—knowing that our Lord is there and is responsive!

### ***Discovery Questions***

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

1. When you were growing up, did your parents tell you not to associate with people of certain social classes or ethnicity? How did you feel about it? How have those feelings changed since Christ has become more rooted in you?
2. What are your thoughts about the Woman?
3. What does it mean to you that God cares for, and has a plan for you?
4. What are the barriers that the Woman may have had to overcome in order to accept who Christ is?

5. The question we have to ask ourselves is *what barriers do we place in the way of growing in Christ?* Consider personal and cultural barriers!
  - a. Barriers from knowing Christ further, about Him, His story, character...?
  - b. Barriers from growing in Christ, taking the time and effort in your spiritual walk?
  - c. Barriers from following His will?
6. How do His ways give freedom?
7. Read John chapters 14 and 15: Knowing you are Christ's friend and are called to abide in Him:
8. What are some of the things that prevent us from really seeing the barriers? What can you do about it?
9. What do you need to do, to be focused upon to build your life on His precepts?

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