
Spiritual Formation Part 10

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Barriers to Following Christ Part 4

What Blocks us from Encountering Jesus Christ?

GOD AS OUR SAVIOR

John 3-5; 14-15 Barriers??

What God Desires

Verses

Others ↑ ← ← ME → → ↓ Self

Our Environment and Experiences

John 5:1-15

We must have more in our spiritual arsenal than just belief. We must have more in order to grow in Him and make our faith and relationships work. Our faith cannot just be academic, an idea, or even just a hope; it has to be real. Judas was an example of a person who knew about Christ. He had the knowledge and firsthand experience that we do not have; yet, he did not put it into practice. To him, Jesus was just an idea and a hope for his agenda and purpose. Judas was not willing, and thus, not able to abide. When his storm came, he failed, betraying his Lord; so, he fell away. His foundation was sand, made up of grains of false expectations, misplaced hopes, false ideas, and a skewed determination. He knew the will of God, but he did not obey the will of God.

Is there some area of your life where you want to be healed? If you say, "Yes," He will say, "Then stand up, take up your bed, and walk." Perhaps, a miracle will occur; perhaps, it is your attitude that needs to change. In any account, our plight is temporary in the scope of eternity; focus on Him; overcome those barriers!

Need some further, practical help? I know I always do. Along with the classic disciplines of our faith, consistent Bible reading, prayer, fellowship, accountability, study, and combating sin will enable us to strive to do more with rearranging our mindsets, and we can avoid some of the traps that keep us from growing. Here are some thoughts (Ecclesiastes 12:13):

- **Be willing to keep your spiritual life foremost:** We are not to live a separated life, one of a weekly personal life and then a Christian Sunday life. Our faith must infuse us at all times and places. We are to be true and surrendered to Christ, as

in a good marriage where the spouses are in love and supportive, and not there as an arrangement for convenience. Our role is to be a fighter of sin and the ones who embrace Christ. Do not forsake your prayer life or downsize it to just a few, one-sided conversations. Do not allow your spiritual growth to be a hit and miss; this is your priority (Isa. 55:1; 1 Cor. 1:24; Rom. 6:15-23; Gal. 1:6; 2:20-21).

- **Be willing to look ahead:** Take the time to organize, prioritize, and prepare for what lies ahead of you in life. Do this at the start of a new year, a new week, or, at the very least, pop your head up and look around and ask, *what can I do, in the days to come, to make the most of my relationship with Christ and the gifts and opportunities He gives?* Use this mindset to develop an action plan to grow in your faith with consistent Bible reading, prayer, study, worship, and accountability (Jer. 35:15; Rom. 1:6; 2 Tim. 1:9).
- **Be willing to prevent stress from getting to you:** Life is not easy, and we are never told we will have problem-free lives as Christians—only that He will carry us through them. Have the confidence that Christ is at work and has a plan for you. Relax in His arms by exercising your faith and looking to the hope you have in Christ. Being uptight and stressed out will do you absolutely no good; it will not make the problems go away; in fact, they will become worse as a barrier of stress will block your way to recovery and success. Being happy and content is something you make—not take. It has to be declared. See problems as opportunities to learn and grow (Rom. 5:1-5; James 1: 2-8; 2 Pet. 1:3-4).
- **Be willing to prevent “over-busy” yourself:** One of the great works of the devil is to get us so busy with good things we never look up to see what is ahead. Then, we never have the time for the really important things in life such as our family, and, of course, God. Even if it is good stuff at church, working with Christian organizations, volunteering (an important job), or being a missionary, if you have no time for your walk with God, you will find yourself behind a very big barrier indeed. Busyness will tie you up like a bandit and leave you no room for growth or exercising the opportunities and call Christ has for you. Slow down and make the time; prioritize and persevere (Prov. 1:24; Isa. 45:22; 1 Pet. 2:9)!
- **Be willing to not be a slave to guilt:** You cannot change the past; you cannot go back in time and undo the wrong choices you have made. What you can do is look ahead; strive to make wise choices in the days that lie ahead. Seek forgiveness and reconciliation, and be committed to character from now on. Realize the grace and forgiveness Christ has given you. When we feel badly about ourselves, we become trapped in a shame that will not allow us to move ahead and embrace what Christ has for us. Do not procrastinate; get up and get going (Psalm 73:24; John 10:10; Phil. 2:5-8).

To do this, you need help. That is what the Church is for, a community of Believers that worships God and helps one another out—in life, and in growth through Him.

Righteousness cannot be achieved by any human effort; we can do nothing outside of Christ. God's will is in complete control; we must remove whatever is blocking us to realize this. Pleasure, and those choices that are deliberately contrary to His character, will leave you *smack dab* in front of an impenetrable barrier. Receive His grace and sanctification for your life (Duet. 33:27; Rom 7:7-25; Rev. 1:17). We have many resources to help you, see our article on “How to Draw Deeper to God Drawing near to the heart of God .”

Discovery Questions

Read John 5:1-15 and make some observations:

1. What would you do if you were sick and someone came up to you and asked, “Do you want to get well?”
2. What are you like when you are sick? What are your attitudes and behaviors to God and to others?
3. What are your thoughts about the sick man?
4. What are the barriers that this sick man may have had to overcome in order to accept who Christ was?
5. What blocks you from increasing your trust and faith in Jesus Christ?
6. The question we have to ask ourselves is, “What barriers do I place in the way of knowing Christ as my Lord”? What about barriers to knowing Christ; barriers to growing in Christ; barriers to following His will?
7. How are you sick and perhaps crippled, unable to move forward in Christ?
8. What barriers do we place in the way of worshiping Christ in a deeper, more heartfelt way? Consider what distracts you. Remember, worship is not just a service; it is a lifestyle!
9. What keeps you behind the barriers? Where is your life spent in time, purpose, thinking, relationships, service...?
10. What are you doing that is sin? How are you going to remove the sin?
11. Look over the Barriers to Discipleship Chart. Maybe you feel you are OK in your faith and barriers are not a problem. But, what ideas and/or mindsets do you have that keep you from growing deeper in the faith?
 - a. Traditions?

b. Presumptions?

12. Can you make a plan to grow further in the faith? Of course you can! But, are you willing? Draw up a spiritual action plan. Just as a business plan is essential to establishing vision and building a business, so is establishing a plan to build your faith.

- a. What is the goal of this plan?
- b. How will you accomplish this goal?
- c. Who will help keep you accountable?

13. Are we in battle for Jesus or for ourselves? What does God require? Are we maintaining a cause—or Christ?

14. Am I willing to allow God to be God, to sanctify me beyond my comfort zone, experiences, and expectations?

Are you lying in the pool waiting for a miracle? Are you trying your hardest, striving to become a better Christian, yet finding little to no growth or change? Then, you have to ask yourself, *am I doing this on my own efforts or ideas?* We have to reach out. He reaches out to us first, but we still have to exercise our faith and remove our will to receive Him. This is true in our salvation and every step of our growth in Him. You can become the person that God uses, one whom you, and others, admire!

When we remain obedient, faithful, and take seriously our call to be disciples and make disciples, He will show us the way. Just think of His blessings, and the joy of being in Him (James 1:2-8). Most of the time, what holds us back from growing in Christ is not just sin; rather, it is the refusal to realize His divine power. We are ignorant of what He can do, and are afraid even when we do know to follow.

Here, Jesus calls to you to rise up and walk. To walk, we must desire to do so; to grow, we must desire to do so!

Make sure you carefully check out the: [Barriers to Discipleship Chart](#)