



NO LIMITS

WITH PASTOR DELMAN

NO MORE FENCES

S E R M O N G U I D E

No More Fences

Acts 15:36-41

INTRODUCTION

I think fences are what caused Paul and Barnabas (two men who had partnered in planting churches across the Roman Empire) to reach a point where they called it quits. They had prayed together, labored together, and witnessed God's power together, but their relationship fell apart because of fences. And some of us are dealing with a fence or fences right now. We have barriers with family members, friends, coworkers, church members, or even spouses. If there's anything this message invites us into, it's learning how to tear down the fences that ruin our relationships.

KEY POINTS

1. Address the Bruises That You Bear

The tension in Acts 15 is rooted in something that happened earlier in Acts 13, when John Mark deserted Paul and Barnabas during their first missionary journey. Paul never forgot that abandonment, and by Acts 15, he is still emotionally bruised and psychologically scarred. Trauma works this way. It sears our minds and bodies with memories, pain, disappointments, and sadness. Many conflicts we face are influenced by something from our past, and what appears to be the issue on the surface is often not what it's about underneath. We come to conversations with bruises, painful experiences, and legacy burdens that shape how we handle family, finances, intimacy, integrity, and everything else. God is calling us to choose no more fences. No more allowing childhood hurt, rejection, failure, betrayal, or shame to dictate how we show up. Healing begins with acknowledging the bruises we bear and communicating them honestly with safe people in safe spaces so that fences don't keep forming.

2. Be Aware of the Biases We Bring

Colossians 4:10 reveals that Barnabas and John Mark were cousins, meaning Barnabas's insistence on bringing him wasn't just ministerial, but personal. He had a bias. And the truth is that we, too, bring biases, things like family systems, cultural expectations, gender roles, parenting philosophies, and assumptions shaped by how things were done in our homes. Biases influence how we show up in conversations and can easily lead to fences. Sometimes we project expectations on others without realizing those expectations were shaped by our own context, not theirs. If we want to stop building fences, we must become aware of the biases we bring so we aren't intolerant, dogmatic, inflexible, or convinced we "know best."

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3. Adopt New Patterns of Communication

Barnabas and Paul's relationship began as mentorship: Barnabas recruited Paul in the early days of the church and held more status, seniority, and authority. This dynamic likely influenced the "sharp disagreement" in Acts 15. Some of us come from systems where communication looked like fussing, fighting, shouting, shutting down, or walking away. In that environment, fences go up quickly. Scripture calls us to a different kind of communication: listening to understand (Proverbs 4:7), speaking the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15), and letting no corrupt word come from our mouths but only what builds up (Ephesians 4:29). Healthy communication tears down fences; unhealthy patterns fortify them.

4. Prioritize the Purpose of the Relationship

Paul and Barnabas were called to ministry for a purpose: to spread the gospel and strengthen the churches. Yet conflict distracted them from their shared mission. When relationships lose sight of purpose, people get defensive in the details. Couples forget that their purpose is to build a God-fearing family; business partners forget that their purpose is success; church members forget that their purpose is to advance the kingdom. Fences grow when we approach relationships as if someone must win and someone must lose. Paul and Barnabas both had good points, but they lost sight of the bigger picture. Keeping purpose at the center helps us seek win-win solutions instead of adversarial ones.

5. Recognize Our Imperfections

Paul later tells Timothy, "Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me in ministry." He didn't see that usefulness during the conflict. Paul eventually realized the hypocrisy of holding John Mark's past against him when others had not held his past against him. Paul had persecuted Christians and inspired fear in the early church, yet Barnabas took him in, vouched for him, and gave him a chance when no one else would.

Sometimes fences arise because we forget our own flaws and failures. Remembering our imperfections deflates ego and cultivates compassion, empathy, humility, and grace. If God can change us, surely He can change others. Before we look down on someone for their failures, we must remember: "He did it for me." This is where love comes from, love that lifts, restores, and tears down fences.

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QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Where have you built emotional fences in your own life, and what bruises might be influencing them?
2. What biases (family background, expectations, assumptions) might be shaping how you show up in conflict?
3. Which communication patterns in your life need to change in order to strengthen relationships rather than build fences?
