

Love That Shatters Barriers

Class Objectives

- **We live in a world that loves to label people. A few examples we see are the labels the world places on race, sexual preference, gender, political party, health status, education, ... and just about anything else you can imagine. Jesus saw past our inclination to label others and treated every person through the lens of created dignity.**

Genesis 1.27 reveals that every human has been created in the image of God. Every person you see around you is an image bearer of God and has a creation-centered dignity about them that transcends preference, prejudice, politics, passion, position, and power.

- **Crossing barriers takes time and courage.**

Crossing barriers is really simple. You just do it.

When we enter someone else's world, it will feel unnatural. When we go, our aim is to touch their heart.

- **We resist our natural tendency to label and accuse, rather than listen and engage.**

In John 4, watch how Jesus simply allowed the Samaritan woman to speak. He gave her a voice and engaged her from where she was. His intention was to lead her toward righteousness, not demean her.

Think About It

1. Have you ever been labeled? What was the label? How did that make you feel?
2. How can you use this experience as a help when the temptation comes to you to label others yourself?
3. What is so bad about the barriers labels create?
4. How is love the answer in breaking down these barriers?

What the Savior Said

John 4:7–26 (CSB)

⁷A woman of Samaria came to draw water.

“Give me a drink,” Jesus said to her, ⁸because his disciples had gone into town to buy food.

⁹“How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?” she asked him. For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.

¹⁰Jesus answered, “If you knew the gift of God, and who is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would ask him, and he would give you living water.”

¹¹“Sir,” said the woman, “you don’t even have a bucket, and the well is deep. So where do you get this ‘living water’? ¹²You aren’t greater than our father Jacob, are you? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and livestock.”

¹³Jesus said, “Everyone who drinks from this water will get thirsty again. ¹⁴But whoever drinks from the water that I will give him will never get thirsty again. In fact, the water I will give him will become a well of water springing up in him for eternal life.”

¹⁵“Sir,” the woman said to him, “give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and come here to draw water.”

¹⁶“Go call your husband,” he told her, “and come back here.”

¹⁷“I don’t have a husband,” she answered.

“You have correctly said, ‘I don’t have a husband,’” Jesus said. ¹⁸“For you’ve had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true.”

¹⁹“Sir,” the woman replied, “I see that you are a prophet. ²⁰Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews say that the place to worship is in Jerusalem.”

²¹Jesus told her, “Believe me, woman, an hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²²You Samaritans worship what you do not know. We worship what we do know, because salvation is from the Jews. ²³But an hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and in truth. Yes, the Father wants such people to worship him. ²⁴God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in Spirit and in truth.”

²⁵The woman said to him, “I know that the Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ). “When he comes, he will explain everything to us.”

²⁶Jesus told her, “I, the one speaking to you, am he.”

As we analyze these verses, we want to look at four societal barriers Jesus broke down through His engagement with this woman who came to gather water. Jewish culture, with its rigid social strata, had this woman pinned down as the lowest of low... almost *worthless*. She was a Samaritan. She was a woman. She was a member of an apostate religion. And finally, she was immoral. No reputable Jewish rabbi would have ever taken the time to be anywhere near the place where she lived, much less initiate a conversation, and engage her in a dialogue. It may be hard for us to see the perplexed and dismayed looks on the faces of the 12 as they return from buying supplies to see Him sitting at the well talking to the woman. *This was something you simply did not do*. But for Jesus, He saw immense value in every human being. He resisted the natural human *reaction* and strove for the other person's *redemption*. This is Jesus living out His purpose ... bringing life ... bringing hope to the hopeless ... rescuing and providing deliverance.

5. In John 4.7-9, How does Jesus handle the racial barrier between him and the woman?
6. In John 4.27 we read that the disciples were shocked when they saw him talking to a woman. How did Jesus break down the gender problem?
7. In John 4.21-25, how does Jesus break down the religious barrier?
8. Now, read John 4.18. How does Jesus handle her morality problem?
9. How would you summarize what you've learned from the way Jesus broke through these barriers? What would be a practical lesson to take away for your personal application?

A Passage to Explore

Acts 11:1–18 (CSB)

GENTILE SALVATION DEFENDED

11 The apostles and the brothers and sisters who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. ²When Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him, ³saying, “You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them.”

⁴Peter began to explain to them step by step, ⁵“I was in the town of Joppa praying, and I saw, in a trance, an object that resembled a large sheet coming down, being lowered by its four corners from heaven, and it came to me. ⁶When I looked closely and considered it, I saw the four-footed animals of the earth, the wild beasts, the reptiles, and the birds of the sky. ⁷I also heard a voice telling me, ‘Get up, Peter; kill and eat.’

⁸“‘No, Lord!’ I said. ‘For nothing impure or ritually unclean has ever entered my mouth.’ ⁹But a voice answered from heaven a second time, ‘What God has made clean, you must not call impure.’

¹⁰“Now this happened three times, and everything was drawn up again into heaven. ¹¹At that very moment, three men who had been sent to me from Caesarea arrived at the house where we were. ¹²The Spirit told me to accompany them with no doubts at all. These six brothers also accompanied me, and we went into the man’s house. ¹³He reported to us how he had seen the angel standing in his house and saying, ‘Send to Joppa, and call for Simon, who is also named Peter. ¹⁴He will speak a message to you by which you and all your household will be saved.’

¹⁵“As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came down on them, just as on us at the beginning. ¹⁶I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ ¹⁷If, then, God gave them the same gift that he also gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, how could I possibly hinder God?”

¹⁸When they heard this they became silent. And they glorified God, saying, “So then, God has given repentance resulting in life even to the Gentiles.”

10. How engrained was the separation between Jew and Gentile? Read Acts 11.19. After the Jerusalem persecution and scattering, where did the early church concentrate in its evangelistic efforts? Why?

11. Why do you think we are told Peter saw the miracle three different times? What does this tell you about the power barriers can hold over people?

12. Acts 11.18 records the rejoicing of the church over salvation being made available to the Gentiles. But, as you think about passages written in times after this, how well did the Jewish *acceptance* of these people go? Explain.

Life Application

This week, make some time each day to spend a few moments alone with God. Every day we will consider how we can demonstrate our love by breaking down barriers we erect between ourselves and other people. Take your time with each passage(s) so you can concentrate on what is being said. Use the questions as a springboard for your positive thoughts throughout your day.

Monday

13. Read John 7.24. Have you ever read this passage and thought about how it applies to the barriers we have discussed in this lesson? How are many of the barriers we grapple with based on superficialities?
14. Now, consider the compliment paid to Jesus at the end of Matthew 22.16. As a disciple, are you committed to having the same reputation?
15. What are some things you can do to *judge with righteous judgment* and move without partiality?

Tuesday

16. Read John 2.23-25. How important was people-pleasing to Jesus?
17. How do people-pleasing and the building and maintaining of wall/barriers between people go together?

18. How did Peter get caught up into people-pleasing? (Galatians 2.11-14) For Peter, how serious of a matter was it?

Wednesday

19. Compare Luke 19.1-10 and Mark 12.43b-44. Did it matter to Jesus if a person was rich or poor?
20. How do economic barriers impact the way we interact with others today? What are some things we can do to break through?
21. Of what does Luke 13.1-5 remind us? Who is in need of repentance?

Thursday

22. Read Mark 10.13-16. How did Jesus regard little children?
23. What does this passage teach us regarding age barriers?
24. What are some things you can do to include our young people in your spiritual activities? What about those older than you?

Friday

25. Read Luke 8.1-3. What can we learn here about how Jesus regarded women?
26. What does Galatians 3.28 communicate about men and women, despite their different roles?