

Even More People Who Overcame Barriers

Introduction. Every one of us faces barriers in life — obstacles that seem too high to climb, too wide to cross, or too heavy to move. These barriers appear in many forms: a strained relationship, a health crisis, a financial burden, or even doubt deep within our own hearts.

History reveals well-known people, both in the past and in the present, who overcame barriers. For example, Nick Vujicic was born without limbs, yet he became a motivational speaker, inspiring millions with his positive outlook. Harriet Tubman escaped slavery and led hundreds to freedom via the Underground Railroad. Michael Jordan was cut from his high school varsity basketball team.

Scripture reminds us that barriers aren't the end of the story — they're opportunities for God to reveal His power through our faith. Barriers don't stop the people of God; they set the stage for breakthroughs and accomplishments. When we face what looks impossible, we're exhorted to trust in the One who makes "all things possible." So today, as we explore our final four people in the New Testament who overcame obstacles, let's open our hearts to learn how God enables us to rise above every obstacle — not by our might, but by His power.

I. Mary Magdalene (Luke 8:1-3)

- A. Luke details that Mary was possessed by seven demons which were cast out by Jesus (Mark 16:9). But because she was a woman, she was marginalized in the patriarchal first-century society, with no mention of family support.
- B. Apparently, after Jesus cast out her demons, and she followed him faithfully, she joined with other women in supporting His work financially. She had the distinction to be the first to witness the resurrected Jesus and proclaim the news to the disciples (John 20:11-18).
- C. Mary certainly shows that your life can be amazingly better after coming into contact with Jesus Christ. She went from tormented outcast to key witness of the resurrection. She furthermore demonstrates how we are all one in Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:28; cp. 1 Corinthians 11:11-12). Men and women, while they can't have the same roles in the kingdom, can all be valid parts of it.

II. The Blind Men (Luke 18:35-43)

- A. In Luke 18:35-43 the blind men (cp. Matthew 20:29-30; Mark 10:46-52) faced several clear barriers before receiving sight and salvation, including physical and economic barriers, social and status barriers, informational barrier, the opposition of the crowd, and the internal barrier of need and shame.
- B. In the narrative, Bartimaeus (whose name is given in Mark 10:46) summons the courage to risk embarrassment, rebuke, and disappointment, and breaks through each barrier by persistent, louder crying to Jesus, clear confession ("Son of David"), and a specific request to see again.
- C. Jesus responds with both physical healing and the words, "Receive your sight; your faith has made you well." While faith wasn't always necessary for healing, it's absolutely necessary for pleasing God.

1. Our faith opens the door, not for miraculous healing like in first century days, but for spiritual healing which we may now continually experience.
2. Faith lays the groundwork for approaching God (Hebrews 11:6). This faith is based on hearing the Word of God (Romans 10:17). The Word of God instills belief in Jesus as God's Son (John 8:24; 20:31). Our faith is a necessary counterpart to God's grace in salvation (Ephesians 2:8-10; Romans 5:1-2; 1 Timothy 1:14). As we grow in our faith, we become more powerful against the devil (1 John 2:14).

III. Paul (Acts 9:1-2)

- A. Saul was a zealous persecutor of Christians, blinded by a divine light during his conversion on the road to Damascus. He also faced ongoing opposition, imprisonment, shipwrecks, and physical ailments (2 Corinthians 11:22-28; 12:7-10).
- B. After his dramatic encounter with Jesus, his sight was restored by Ananias and was baptized. He spread the gospel across the Roman Empire despite incredible hardships, declaring, "I can do all this through him who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:13).
- C. Paul shows us how to overcome the tradition of growing up in a wrong religion. He had excellent credentials as far as a Jew was concerned (Acts 22:3; Philippians 3:4-6).
 1. But when the time came and he saw the evidence, he left what had grown old and vanished away (Hebrews 8:13).
 2. It really says something about the gospel when people who were steeped in 1,500 years of religious beliefs left them immediately and followed Christ. Furthermore, the apostles all suffered and most gave their lives for the proclamation of the message. What does that say to you about its truthfulness and accuracy?

IV. Apollos (Acts 18:24-28)

- A. In Acts 18:24-28 Apollos is impressive and gifted, but he still has some clear "barriers" or limitations God has to address.
- B. His understanding of the full revelation of the New Covenant was incomplete, knowing only the baptism of John. He didn't know of Jesus as the Messiah or salvation in Christ, which taught a transformative change so that people could now "walk in the Spirit" (Galatians 5:16-18).
- C. Because he needed to know "the way of God more accurately," Priscilla and Aquila take him aside and give him the doctrinal instruction needed to be complete in Jesus Christ. Before Apollos goes to Achaia, the brethren write to the disciples to welcome him, effectively endorsing his work. Until this was done, his effectiveness and acceptance among the churches would be limited.
- D. Instead of resisting, Apollos humbly and willingly allowed himself to be taught, even though he was already eloquent and "mighty in the Scriptures."
 1. We know that churches need doctrinal instruction and moral instruction. Sometimes people don't realize they're rebelling against the will of God.

2. Christians, especially young Christians (ages 13-24 is the key disengagement window for a young person's faith), face real battles:
 - a) They face relentless claims that the Bible is full of contradictions. They also deal with a world that demands answers for what they believe — and why.
 - b) They face a culture saturated in pornography that's destroying marriages before they even begin.
 - c) They face constant pressure toward sexual immorality and confusion about identity, marriage, and the home.
3. Therefore, they need to be taught:
 - a) How to actively defend their faith, and respond when their beliefs are challenged — in a classroom, social media, or face-to-face (1 Peter 3:15).
 - b) How to build a biblical worldview about money, marriage, and parenting.
 - c) How to recognize and resist temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13).
 - d) How to live in front of their friends, including selecting good friends, expressing godly speech, wearing clothes that are modest and righteous, and remaining faithful in view of a skeptical world.
 - e) How to speak to their friends about Jesus with confidence.
4. Like Apollos, this isn't a small issue. This is the moment where faith is either strengthened — or quietly slips away. It's a critical period, and too often we just keep doing the same thing. Too often we're entertaining when we should be equipping. We should be showing our young people how to wield the sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17).
5. When Apollos was fully instructed, he was connected to the wider church so that his great talents were fully and rightly used.

Conclusion. When you face your next challenge, don't retreat. Stand firm. Pray boldly. Keep walking forward. Because the same God who parted the sea, who rolled away the stone, and who still moves hearts today, is the same God who will help you overcome.

I am deeply indebted to Chris Reeves and Brad Harrub for the use of their material.