

The Barrier Buster

for use as

STEP 1

Lesson 11

Focus:

Jesus breaks down
barriers between
believers.

Lesson 11

Bible Basis:

Ephesians 2:12–22

Materials:

- (Optional) device with Internet access like a computer, laptop, or smartphone
- (Optional) a selection of photos depicting groups of kids of various ethnicities, ages, and/or personality types

Students will discuss barriers and the need to break them down in order to have unity amongst the body of Christ.

No one understands the natural barriers between human beings more than middle schoolers who are often magnetized to others exactly like themselves. Why? For them, it is safe and predictable to be part of the herd and pretty darn scary to be aligned with someone different. Fortunately, Jesus Christ's message is completely different. In the kingdom of God, there are no outsiders or rejects, only unity between believers.

Photographs can be an excellent way to draw in your students to the themes of a lesson. Using the photo-sharing website Flickr, tell your students you will be showing them a variety of photographs depicting groups or friendships. (If you have a very large group, you can subdivide them into smaller groups, perhaps assigning each group to a photograph. But if your group is relatively small—say, less than 20—you can show them the photos one at a time and discuss together).

The photos selected here emphasize how the individuals in the image tend to break certain barriers one might expect to find, such as race, age, stereotypes, or interests. If you do not have Internet access in your classroom, simply print out the pictures at home or gather some a selection of photographs (from magazines, family photos, etc.) that depict groups of children that are various ethnicities, ages, and/or personality types.

[<http://www.flickr.com/photos/beija-flor/511667626/>]
 [http://www.flickr.com/photos/cuba_photos/360544567/]
 [<http://www.flickr.com/photos/fantasyangel/3344413135/>]
 [<http://www.flickr.com/photos/23755623@N08/2347532405/>]
 [<http://www.flickr.com/photos/sele3en/3726585697/>]

Lesson 11
Memory Verse

You are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household.

—Ephesians 2:19

Ask your group to answer the following questions after each photo, remembering to allow your students plenty of freedom to bring up new ideas or discussion points as you move along:

- ▶ **What is a barrier that could have hindered this friendship?**
- ▶ **What do these people appear to have in common? Are there any clues in the photo?**
- ▶ **If you saw any of these individuals, would you hesitate to become friends with him or her? Why or why not?**

After a short introductory discussion of these issues, tell your class that today you will be studying how Jesus Christ came to break down barriers between members of the body of the Christ. It is not just unity for unity's sake, but because the common bond of faith in Jesus Christ melts away many of the manmade obstacles to unity and friendship.

(Continue on to Steps 2 and 3 in your *Middle School Teacher's Guide*. Your Step 4 appears below.)

The Barrier Buster

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STEP 4

Lesson 11 Focus:

Jesus breaks down
barriers between
believers.

Lesson 11 Bible Basis:

Ephesians 2:12–22

Materials:

- crime scene tape or plastic yellow streamers
- (Optional) scissors

It is important to conclude the lesson with the understanding that God doesn't always call us to be "BFFs" with every Christian we meet. There is a natural chemistry between individuals, and certainly some young people will connect more naturally with certain friends over others. This doesn't make them discriminatory or rude; it's just the way God made us.

On the other hand, middle schoolers in particular need extra help in learning how to encourage and promote unity, especially within the church. To conclude, try this role-playing game where students practice encouragement and love.

Tie up a small group of confident students with crime scene tape or plastic yellow streamers. Attach a sign to the group that says REJECTED on it. Tell the rest of the class that they will demonstrate the difference between acceptance of fellow believers and rejection. Different students in the larger group will think of something isolating and discouraging to say to the tied-up group. Taking turns, they will walk over to the group, say something discouraging, and add more plastic tape to the scene (they can tape off a section of the room, drape the students with tape, etc.)

Be careful to assist them with their comments, so that no one makes seriously hurtful remarks. Consider things like, "Oh, look at those guys over there. They are so weird!" or "I can't believe she said THAT at church!"

After a handful of people have isolated them even more with their comments, switch the method to encouragement and love. One-by-one, allow students to take scissors—or do it by hand—and begin to remove the yellow tape from the group as they make uplifting comments. Consider statements like "Hey, would you like to come to our Wednesday night meeting?" or "I really appreciated what you shared last week." Little by little, the isolating effects will dissolve until the small group is blended in with the larger group.

As you close your lesson, pray for your students, asking God to equip them in creating unity in the body of Christ.

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