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Know This Before You Say a Word

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Here's the situation: You want to talk with a friend about spiritual matters, but when you broach the subject they erect a barrier. What do you do then?

Unfortunately, if you don't handle the situation wisely, you could damage the friendship and increase resistance to what you're saying. For years I shared the message with people in the same way--of course I adapted the illustrations to fit the situation--and it worked out pretty well. And then I discovered something that transformed how I talk with people about God that increased their interest.

I learned there are three barriers people have to spiritual truth. Understanding which barrier a person erects will enable you to adapt what you say to their greatest need.

With that reality in mind--here are the three barriers and how you can overcome them:

Barrier One — Emotional

Barrier One: The emotional barrier. This barrier is erected by a person who has been wounded by a Christian or other religious person in the past. Someone with this barrier tends to be emotionally argumentative. They seem more interested in proving you wrong than understanding what you have to say. How do you identify this barrier? If you're talking to someone and they're defensive about spiritual truth they may have been wounded in the past. If I detect this, I may say, "You seem to have strong feelings about this.

What's you're spiritual background?" If I'm right, and they have an emotional barrier, they'll describe something that happened which deeply hurt them. And I have heard some amazing stories of pastor's or other church leaders who refused to meet with a grieving mother, gave shallow answers to a seeking student, or judged and condemned someone for something they or a loved one had done. Some people were angry with God because of the death of a loved one or a personal loss.

Barrier Two — Intellectual

Barrier Two: Intellectual. This person is a serious seeker and wants more information so they can make an intelligent decision about Jesus Christ. While they may ask tough questions, they're non-defensive and sincere in their approach. The more you tell them the more they want to know.

Barrier Three — Lifestyle

Barrier Three: Lifestyle. This is a person who is living in a way that they know would have to change for them to get serious about God--or at least they feel that way.

If you're able to identify the barrier, you'll be ready to get past it. Here's a few ideas to help you do that.

Loved Into the Kingdom

People with an emotional barrier must be loved into the kingdom of God. If you dump information on them, it will just reinforce their negative feelings.

Demonstrate a genuine concern for them and when the time is right share with them the hope you have in Christ. But remember--it may take years of love before they are ready to trust God.

If someone has an intellectual barrier answer their questions as well as you can. Suggest they read a good book like Lee Strobel's, *The Case for Christ*, C.S. Lewis's, Mere Christianity, or Francis Schaffer's, *The God Who is There*. Give them a copy, read it yourself, and then discuss it with them. Don't feel like you have to know all the answers. The answers are there and you may both learn if you search for them together.

The individual with a lifestyle barrier isn't ready to act on the truth. But graciously share it with them anyway and then pray for them. They probably won't show much interest until they reach a point of despair. But if you're there as a friend, when their need is great enough, you may have the privilege of leading them to Christ.

Remember, people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.