The Holy Spirit Breaks Down Barriers

BIBLE PASSAGE
Acts 10-11 (Peter and Cornelius- Gospel to the Gentiles)

REMEMBER VERSE
Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. 
Colossians 3:15

SCHEDULE
Anticipate
5–10 minutes

Celebrate & Respond
Large Group
35–55 minutes

Respond & Bless
Small Group
20–25 minutes

Environment: FAITH COMMUNITY
God designed us to live in community and to experience Him in ways that can only happen in proximity to one another. The faith community serves to create an environment to equip and disciple parents, to celebrate God’s faithfulness, and to bring a richness of worship through tradition and rituals, which offer children an identity. Our love for each other reflects the love we
have received from God.

**Equipping Volunteers**

God’s Holy Spirit was breaking down barriers when Peter entered the house of the Gentile centurion named Cornelius. “‘You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile,’” Peter said in Acts 10:28. “‘But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean.’” This statement reveals both the ancient barrier between Jews and Gentiles and the way God’s Spirit was, even then, breaking down this barrier.

At the time of this divinely ordered encounter between Peter and Cornelius, most Jews assumed that Gentiles had to convert to Judaism in order to be a part of the faith community. This was an understandable assumption: the Old Testament restricted contact with Gentiles, and Jesus had said His ministry was for the Jews. For hundreds of years Gentiles had dominated the Jews and scattered them about their empires. The Gentiles had even destroyed their temple. To counteract this threat to their culture, Jews created hundreds of social, religious, and cultural boundaries between themselves and Gentiles.

Though most of Jewish separatism and its rules were of divine origin, God had, through the death and resurrection of His Son, inaugurated a new day when barriers between “clean” and “unclean” people were no longer necessary. These barriers blocked the spread of the gospel, so God set about breaking them down. God gave Peter a vision and declared clean not only the food the Gentiles ate but also the Gentiles themselves. Later, God proved this declaration by filling the Gentile believers with the same gift of the Spirit that He gave to the apostles at Pentecost.

God showed, through Jesus’ sacrifice, that He had broken down age-old barriers. God showed that He wants everyone—of every race, culture, and background—to be a part of His faith community. He showed that the day had come when He would “pour out [His] Spirit on all people” (Joel 2:28).
1. Around the World

Lead kids through an Anticipate in which they explore the world as a big, beautiful, and varied place full of many different kinds of people. Help them explore different ways people look, act, eat, and live. Explain that many of these differences exist because of the geography of the land and the traditions of the different cultures, but every culture and person is interesting and beautiful because God envisioned this diversity and creativity.

**SUPPLIES:** world map, country bag (campuses) or box (NN), Flash drive: Around the World music

**SET UP:** Set out the different boxes throughout the room for the children to explore when they enter. Play “Around the World” music on flash drive

**ENGAGE:** Point out the world map to the kids. Let them know that, at each point on the map, they can discover pieces of information about that region or country’s culture, weather, animal life, geography, traditions, or food. Remind the kids that the word “culture” encompasses the way of life, ideas, and traditions of a group of people.

Once the kids have spent some time looking at the map, images, and fact cards, ask, If you could travel to any place on this map right now, where would you go? If you could try one of the foods from any country, which one would you eat? Which country’s weather makes it the best place to live? What’s the most interesting thing you learned today?

2. Earning Rocks

See if any children have earned any rocks for the Rock Wall today. Children who memorized last week’s memory verse, children who brought their Bible, or those who brought a friend. Pass out the rocks and let the kids write on the rocks their name, or the verse they memorized. (kids add rocks to rock wall at beginning of next section).

Last week’s Remember Verse:

*Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.*

*Colossians 3:15*
Celebrate// (Large Group) 20–35 min

1. Welcome & Traditions

   ROCK WALL CELEBRATION- Open up Celebrate time by celebrating all of the rocks that the kids have earned this week! Let them add them to the rock wall and encourage everyone to keep working on their verses, remembering their Bible and bringing friends!

   WELCOME VISITORS- Use this time to also welcome any new visitors. Give them a big round of applause for coming! And have a nearby leader give each visitor a high five!

   CONNECT ACTIVITY- To finish up welcome time, let kids engage in today’s connect activity! Encourage them to find someone they don’t know yet and find three things that are unique to themselves and one thing that is the same between them.

   Example: Peter and Sarah.
   Peter likes to play soccer, goes to Christian Heritage Academy, and has a pet dog. Sarah likes to sing in choir, plays basketball, and has a pet cat. They both have a little sister!

2. Remember Verse

   Pass out Bibles to any kids who don’t have one to use during today’s lesson. Introduce kids to this week’s Remember Verse. (Same as last week.) Open your Bibles and read it together. Pass out Memory Verse cards to those who did not receive them the week before. With Bibles still open, take the opportunity to encourage kids to share their ideas on what the verse means. God’s word encourages, comforts, and teaches us. Jesus gives us peace. We are encouraged to be thankful for our differences, valuing those unique qualities of each member of the church community.

   Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Colossians 3:15

   Memory Motion- When kids learn motions they are less likely to lose the verse from their memory. Going through the scripture, create motions for words or sections of words and practice saying the verse with the motions. If there is a larger group, split up and then have the kids come back together and share their different ideas.

3. Prayer of Release

   Next, pray a Prayer of Release. This is a time for kids and leaders to pause, be still, and ask God to quiet their hearts and minds. Encourage kids to quiet their voices and take a seat. Then ask them to pray with you.

4. The Big God Story- The Holy Spirit Breaks Down Barriers

   SUPPLIES- props: medium-size blocks (enough to build a small wall or barrier), object to represent a Jew (e.g., a teddy bear), and an object to represent a Gentile (e.g., a doll); Flash drive: Peter’s vision video, Italian centurion, animals

   SET UP- Though this part of The Big God Story can be delivered verbatim, read it before the lesson, so you can personally interact with the material. Before teaching, point out that what they are about to hear is true and is recorded in the Bible. Open your Bible, and encourage kids to do the same, to the passage and leave it open and visible throughout The Big God Story. Encourage adult volunteers to keep an eye out for kids who need help finding the Scripture passage. You may even want to write the reference in large print on a whiteboard.

   Use the blocks to create a barrier in the storytelling area, and ask an adult volunteer to sit on one side of the barrier. Cue images and video. Place the props near the storyteller.

   ENGAGE- Today, during Connect, you looked for people matching certain categories and discovered some
of the ways we’re different. God made each of us unique. Sometimes we like the ways we’re different from each other—and sometimes our differences make it hard for us to get along. Sometimes our differences build barriers between us.

What are barriers? Right! Barriers are like walls. Though we don’t usually build physical barriers like walls between each other, we often put up invisible barriers between each other—we don’t trust each other, or we’re not very friendly to each other. Do you think God wants us to put up barriers between each other? No! Do you think it’s easy or hard to talk with someone behind a barrier? (Talk with the person on the other side of the barrier.) God wants barriers to be knocked down. But He knows how hard it is for us to knock them down on our own. In fact, we can’t always do it on our own! God’s Spirit breaks down barriers for us so we don’t have to.

Today we’re going to hear about one of the ways God’s Spirit broke down barriers so that all people could be included in His faith community. In this case, God broke down a barrier between the Jews and the Gentiles. Gentiles are people who aren’t born into the Jewish community. However, because of Jesus, Gentiles can now be included in God’s faith community. People didn’t always know that, though. It took an amazing moment through the Holy Spirit to bring the apostles and first believers to the knowledge that everyone—even Gentiles—can be part of God’s family.

Today in The Big God Story we start at the house of a Gentile named Cornelius—a centurion in an Italian cohort. A centurion is someone in the military. So this man, Cornelius, wasn’t just a Gentile; he also served in the army of a Gentile nation—a nation the Jews did not like very much. So Cornelius’ being both a Gentile and a centurion put two barriers between himself and the Jews. Even so, the Bible says Cornelius “and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly” (Acts 10:2). Just like the Ethiopian official we heard about last week, Cornelius loved God, but he wasn’t completely allowed into the faith community. And just like God broke down a barrier for the Ethiopian man, He did the same thing for Cornelius. God did this through an extraordinary vision and an extraordinary vision He gave to Peter (play Peter’s Vision video).

While Peter was still wondering about the vision he’d seen, he heard a knock at the door. When Peter opened it, several men were standing there. Peter asked why they had come, and they said, “We have come from Cornelius the centurion. He is a righteous and God-fearing man, who is respected by all the Jewish people. A holy angel told him to have you come to his house so that he could hear what you have to say” (v. 22).

Wow! A lot of really interesting things just happened there! Let’s recap a bit: First, an angel met with Cornelius the centurion and told him to go find a man whom he’d never met—Peter. Then, while Cornelius’s men went to get Peter, Peter himself had a vision in which God told him to eat meat that he didn’t usually eat—meat that was “unclean” by his Jewish Law. Peter refused to eat the meat, but God insisted, saying, “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean” (Acts 10:15). Seems weird, right?! What do you think this means?!

Well, food is a very important part of every culture. What we eat or don’t eat tells a lot about where we come from. Cornelius, and other Gentiles, freely ate the meat of all kinds of animals (show the images of animals), but the Jews weren’t allowed to eat certain kinds of animals because God had given them laws about what they could and couldn’t eat. Because of cultural differences like this one (and many others), Jews considered Gentiles to be “unclean” and weren’t friends with them. In fact, they didn’t even set foot in Gentile homes! In other words, there was a big barrier between Jews and Gentiles—a barrier that God, through these miraculous dreams and visions—was in the process of breaking down (go to the barrier and, as you tell the next few paragraphs, slowly break it down).

So, after Peter got over the shock of the incredible vision and the men showing up unexpectedly at his door, he realized God was up to something interesting. So Peter did something Jews did not do: He invited the Gentile men into his home! Wow! Now that’s breaking down a barrier! Then God led Peter to go to Cornelius’s home. Peter felt strange being in a Gentile’s home (v. 28). But God had led him there because God wanted to show the Jews that He was breaking down barriers and inviting all people into His faith community.

After Cornelius told Peter about the angel and his instructions to get Peter, Peter realized: “God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right” (vv. 34–35). In that moment, God’s Spirit showed Peter that everyone—no matter the culture, race, gender, or nationality—could be included in His faith community! In that moment, God broke down a barrier between Jews and Gentiles! Wow! (Remove the barrier all the way and high-five, hug, etc., the person on the other side.)

Peter spread the good news to everyone listening, and the Holy Spirit fell on them just as He’d fallen on the disciples at Pentecost! And when Peter returned to his home, he told the other Jews what had happened. They were amazed, saying, “So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life” (Acts 11:18). After this, more and more Gentiles started to believe in the good news of Jesus and became a part of God’s faith community. And the Bible says the new believers were called “Christians.”

This part of The Big God Story shows how much God does to bring people into His faith community. He used
a vision and a dream to prove to Peter—a Jew—that the longtime barrier between Jews and Gentiles had been removed. Because of this event, people joyfully realized that God doesn’t show favoritism. He invites everyone into His faith community! Everyone has a part to play in God’s Big Story.

Even today we sometimes put up barriers that block us from sharing the good news with other people and keep us from loving others in the faith community like God loves us. But God’s Holy Spirit still breaks down barriers between people. He still goes to extraordinary measures to show that He loves everyone—from every race, culture, gender, or nationality. And everyone has a unique place in His faith community. (Share a time in your life when God broke down barriers for you.)
Respond// (Large Group) 15–20 min.

1. **Worship Response Stations**
   Spend 5-10 minutes in Worship Response Stations, letting children respond to the lesson they just heard in their own way. Assist younger children and guide when necessary.

   Play the Worship Response Song (Hymns of Majesty) and allow the kids to spend that time in stations. Then after that song, play “Come, Now Is The Time to Worship” and use that song as the transition cue for children to finish up what they are working on and come together as a large group to Worship Through Music.

2. **Worship Through Music**
   Finish large group Celebrate with a time of singing music.
   1. Jump
   2. Dance
   3. Radio the World

   Then exit Large Group to spend time applying the things from today in a small group setting.
Respond// (Small Group) 15–20 min.

1. Reflect: God invites everyone into His faith community. No matter the culture, nationality, race, or gender, everyone who believes in Jesus is included because God doesn’t have favorites. God loves everyone and wants everyone to know Him. (Leaders: Encourage the kids to open their Bibles and read the suggested passages. You may want to assign different verses to individuals or pairs before you begin. This will allow time for a deeper discussion or additional answers to be found if other questions arise.)

Questions for Younger Kids
• What is a Gentile? (Colossians 3:11)
• What is a faith community? (Acts 2:44–47)
• Why is it important for all people to know they can be included in God’s faith community? (Acts 11:18)

Questions for Older Kids
• What is a Gentile? (Colossians 3:11)
• What is a faith community? (Acts 2:44–47)
• Why did the Jews think the Gentiles shouldn’t be included in God’s faith community? (Acts 10:28; Ezra 6:21)
• Why was Peter’s dream about the animals important? (Acts 10:9–16, 28)
• What kinds of barriers do we put up between each other, and why do we do this? (at school with friends? at home with our siblings or parents? on our sports teams?)
• Why is it important for all people to know they can be included in God’s faith community? (Acts 11:18)

2. God, Please Break Down Barriers
SUPPLIES- 3 large pieces of poster board, markers

SET UP- Draw a barrier on each piece of poster board, and place each piece on a separate table or in another place around the room that’s very accessible. Put markers nearby each piece.

ENGAGE- God desires for everyone inside and outside of His faith community to love each other like He loves us, but this doesn’t always happen. We still sometimes create barriers between ourselves and other people. Sometimes that’s because those outside the faith community can be very different from us. But God calls us to reach out to others outside our faith community because He loves everyone and wants everyone to be a part of His family.

God knows about the barriers we put up between one another as well as the barriers between ourselves and those who don’t know Him. He wants to break down these barriers. And here’s the great thing: God truly has the power to break them down!

Today, take some time to pray about any barriers you know of within your faith community. What steps could you prayerfully take to reach out to those being divided by barriers? What about within your group of friends or at your school? How might the Holy Spirit be speaking to you in your own life and leading you to speak to others? After the kids have had some time to pray and think about these things, encourage them to write a word or phrase or draw something, as a prayer, on one of the poster board barriers.

When everyone’s done, pray as a group, over these things, asking God to use all of you to bring others into His faith community and to break down some barriers. Ask God into the situation and trust Him to break down barriers. Encourage the children to continue trusting the Lord in this and also doing their part for His work.

3. Create: Our Faith Community Prayer Chain
The faith community is a community of people who believe in Jesus. God’s Holy Spirit gives us the ability to love each other and break down barriers. There are small faith communities, like our church, and then there is the larger faith community of all believers around the world. Today, we are going to look at some of the places where Christians live, all over the world.
SUPPLIES- World map (from Anticipate), People prayer chain template (1 per child), scissors

SETUP- Place the world map on a table. Have scissors available.

ENGAGE-
Return to the map you used during Anticipate. Talk about some “barriers” of these different places (the ones listed below and any other ones you want to share). Then brainstorm how you can pray for God’s Spirit to break down barriers in those countries. Also, think of ways you can help your children pray for God’s Spirit to help them and others offer more love to each other.

China
Many Christians in China struggle because the government doesn’t want them there. Also, billions of people live in China, and most of them don’t know Jesus. How can we pray for the people living in China?

Africa
Africa has faced lots of hardships: lack of food and water, disease, war, and more. Even so, Christianity is growing really fast there. How can we pray for the people living in Africa?

United States of America
Though America is one of the wealthiest countries in the world, many people still go hungry and don’t make enough money to survive. Also, many people don’t believe in Jesus. And the ones who do believe are often divided against each other. How can we pray for the people in America?

India
India is one of the most densely populated (a lot of people live there) countries in the world. Most of the people in this country don’t know Jesus. Because most Indian people believe in a different religion (that’s very connected to their culture), it’s very difficult for Christians to live in India. How can we pray for the people in India?

After you’ve prayed for these places, cultures, and people, pass out the Paper People Chain templates and help the kids make chains of people. If there is time, let the kids write prayers or hopes inside the people on the chain.

4. Blessing
Encourage the kids to hold their hands in front of them, palms up. This posture is meant to symbolize a willingness of heart to respond to God’s Holy Spirit and receive what God has for them.

Open your Bible and read 1 Corinthians 1:10 (NLT):
I appeal to you, dear brothers and sisters, by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, to live in harmony with each other. Let there be no divisions in the church. Rather, be of one mind, united in thought and purpose.”

May God’s Holy Spirit give you friendship with and love for one another. May each of you live well together through the power of God’s Holy Spirit, who brings His people together.

HomeFront Weekly: Be sure to send home the HomeFront Weekly for next week’s lesson! This preteaching tool for parents encourages families to spend time in God’s Word together before children arrive at church.