

Cultural Barriers to Movements in America

Overview

Every culture has unique barriers that hinder the spreading of the gospel. It's helpful to identify these enemy strongholds so that we can pray more specifically and effectively for the making of disciples. This prayer tool discusses the mindsets in the United States' majority culture that hinder the advance of God's kingdom. Disciple Making Movements will occur when these strongholds are defeated through prayer, and disciple makers act faithfully and obediently to their calling.



Getting Started

The enemy often uses mindsets integrated with common cultural views to create barriers hindering the penetration of the gospel. While many barriers exist throughout the United States, the four mindsets highlighted here are arguably the most prevalent. They are Materialism, Individualism, Deception, and Compartmentalizing.

Materialism (I don't need God)

Many from developing countries envy our wealth and freedoms. While this **prosperity** can be a blessing, it often comes at a hefty price. Jesus warned of the dangers of riches: "But woe to you who are rich..." and "Woe to those who are well fed now..." (Luke 6:24-25). The rich, whom Jesus referred to, pursued material gains over spiritual blessings. They had already received their "consolation" prize, according to Jesus.

Many Americans believe they can solve their problems with **modern technology, science, knowledge resources, and sheer determination**. Some think that if they believe it, they can make it happen. Generally speaking, they have little need to seek spiritual answers. But when confronted with the painful reality that there is something they can't control, as a final resort, they ask for help from a higher power. It often takes a crisis for Americans to look for spiritual answers.



This pursuit of prosperity also creates excessive **busyness**. So many distractions are competing for people’s time and attention—pulling them in many directions and hindering them from hearing God and His gospel. This excessive busyness leads to **stress, exhaustion, and anxiety** in American society.

When prosperous people come to faith in Jesus, they are less acutely aware of their daily need for Him. Wealth often creates **comfort** and a layer of **insulation** that hinders their ability to feel God’s presence, enjoy a deeper relationship with Him, and experience His power. Physical comforts can lead to **prayerlessness** in their lives and blunt the penetration of the gospel in their social networks.

Individualism (I don’t need others):


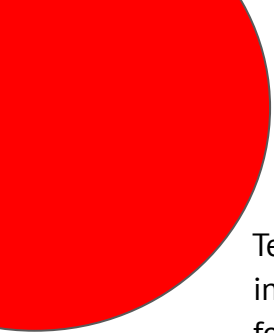
Busyness, self-reliance, and an independent lifestyle contribute to **shallower interpersonal relationships** and **isolation** in America.¹ Faith is a common subject in daily conversations for most cultures, even if in a superficial way. Spiritual topics are less common and can be more awkward in America because many people in this individualistic culture are uncomfortable with personal or spiritual discussions. This hinders our ability to engage in meaningful conversations.

Americans often have no idea if their friends have a spiritual interest, which increases the difficulty of finding a person of peace who can bring the gospel to their relational networks. Many Americans don’t even have one close friend with whom they can share their feelings.² While the gospel travels rapidly in many countries through natural social connections, the pace will be slower in places like America, where we have **weaker social networks**.

Additionally, most active church members have minimal interpersonal relationships with people outside their family and faith community. This hinders their ability to engage with their neighbors in a meaningful way. Most American Christians speak a “different language” than those outside their church, further contributing to the challenge.

¹ According to the U.S. surgeon general Dr. Vivek Murthy over half (58%) of U.S. adults feel lonely consistently. (Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation: The U.S. Surgeon General’s Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community, 2023)

² Only 39% of adults in the U.S. said they felt very connected to others. (Gallup Inc., Meta. The State of Social Connections. Washington D.C.: Gallup Inc.,; 2022).



Teams are more effective at making disciples than individuals. Our American individualistic culture is evident even in the church, where organizing people to form disciple making teams can be challenging. There are far more **solo disciple makers** than disciple making teams in the US.

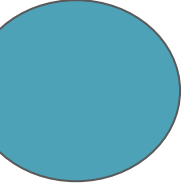
Deception (My needs can be met by something other than God)

The enemy finds ways to deceive people in every culture. **Substance abuse, media influence,** and **pornography** plague many, with the promise of vitality or dulling of pain. Many Americans seek to find their identity apart from God through **gender or sexuality,** and they seek love and acceptance through physical health or **beautification.** Some believe **science** can explain everything. Others believe peace comes through **meditation** or **other gods.** Successful disciple-makers identify how the enemy deceives the people they seek to reach, and they work with God through prayer to break these strongholds. (See the “Spiritual Recognisance” prayer tool for more ideas on identifying spiritual strongholds).

Compartmentalizing (I can keep the various parts of my life separate)

One example of this is that, for many Americans, faith is mainly academic and may have **minimal impact** on their emotions or actions. They turn to “experts” to gain more spiritual knowledge. Many believers are content with **theoretical information** about God rather than taking the time to slowly develop a deep and abiding relationship with their Heavenly Father. When taught spiritual principles, Americans find it challenging to identify specific changes they need to make in their lives.

Most Christians prefer larger gatherings where they can **passively receive information** without being challenged to put the teaching into action or where they are not expected to engage deeply with or minister to other believers. Jesus criticized the Pharisees for having faith without love, and He frequently challenged His followers to put His teachings into practice (Luke 11:42; 6:46).



Coaching is an essential part of unleashing Disciple Making Movements. Disciple makers in America love to learn about disciple making principles but often **avoid coaching** where they will be held accountable.

Conclusion

As stated above, every culture has its barriers to making disciples. The first three barriers discussed here affect the initial penetration of the gospel message. The last barrier discussed hinders our ability to develop mature disciples. Knowing these barriers can help us pray specifically to overcome them. While this discussion has focused on Disciple Making Movements, **these barriers affect all ways of advancing God's kingdom.** All approaches to evangelism and maturing disciples struggle to flourish in our current majority culture in the United States. **Specific prayer** to overcome these hindrances is one of the keys to releasing Disciple Making Movements in our nation.

Prayer Points

Ask God:

- to open people's minds to the emptiness of materialism and their acute need for something more
- to help people slow down and search until they find the only One who can satisfy the deepest yearnings of their souls
- to give disciple makers a deep love and experience with God and the courage to express these feelings in a way that would be understood by those who do not yet know Jesus
- to enable disciple makers to develop deeper relationships with persons of peace, engaging in conversations with them about the most important things
- to enable disciple makers to help persons of peace to deepen relationships and extend their social networks
- to enable disciple makers to help persons of peace build strong spiritual communities where the members stimulate each other toward "love and good deeds" (Heb 10:24)
- to cause the gospel to penetrate deeply and completely in every area of the disciples' lives so that they will bear much fruit