

Faith & Culture



Anti-Racism:
Prejudice and
Stereotypes



Anti-Racism: Prejudice and Stereotypes

Main Idea

Understanding the truth beyond stereotypes can help us combat our own prejudice and bias, and work against racism.

BIBLE CONNECTIONS

Matthew 7:1-4

Don't judge, so that you won't be judged. You'll receive the same judgment you give. Whatever you deal out will be dealt out to you. Why do you see the splinter that's in your brother's or sister's eye, but don't notice the log in your own eye? How can you say to your brother or sister, "Let me take the splinter out of your eye," when there's a log in your eye?

BACKGROUND FOR LEADERS

Many people think that discussing bias, prejudice, and stereotypes is impolite or can make the problem worse. In fact, studies have shown that having conversations about these issues, even when we don't get things exactly right, goes a long way to help us overcome such attitudes in ourselves. This is especially important for children, who quickly notice differences among people.

GATHERING ACTIVITY

What Are Stereotypes? What Is Prejudice?

Say: Today we're talking about prejudice and stereotypes.

Ask: Does anyone know what those words mean?

Say: *Prejudice* means "pre-judgment." A prejudice is a judgment someone makes about another person just based on their appearance or a surface interaction.

Supplies:

- Posterboard or butcher paper
- Marker
- Paper plates
- Crayons

Say: Oftentimes, those judgments are negative, hurtful, and untrue. The opposite of prejudice is *open-mindedness*.

Pass out paper plates and crayons.

Encourage the learners to draw their face on the outside (bottom) of the paper plate. Along the rim, they may write words describing assumptions others may make about them simply based on their appearance. On the inside (top) of the plate, encourage students to draw a heart and write words that describe their personality or who they feel they are inside.

Invite the learners to share their plate portraits, if they are comfortable.

Say: Sometimes people have a prejudice about a whole group of people. These prejudices are called *stereotypes*. There can be stereotypes about any group of people. Let's think of some examples to help us understand.

Ask: Do you know of any stereotypes about how boys and girls act or feel?

Write down the learners' suggestions on a second poster or large piece of paper. Choose a stereotype from the list to explore further, such as "Boys don't cry," or "Girls love pink."

Ask: Are there some boys or girls who fit into this stereotype? How do you think someone who doesn't fit into one of these stereotypes might feel? How can we say this in a way that doesn't hurt anybody?

Help the students alter the statement so that it no longer represents a stereotype. Most stereotypes can be altered by using the word *some* in front of them. For example, "Some girls love pink."

STORY CONNECTION

Say: All people struggle with bias and prejudice. We get a bad first impression or are taught a stereotype about a group of people, and it influences the way we treat them. Even Jesus had prejudices. Can you believe it? Jesus shows us how to overcome our own prejudices by listening to others and allowing them to teach us. Let's look at a story about a time when Jesus had the wrong idea about a group of people, but was able to learn and grow in love for them.

Say: Jesus went around his country teaching and healing people. One day as he and his friends went along, a woman came up and was calling to Jesus to help her daughter, who was very sick. But this woman was Canaanite, a different ethnicity than Jesus and his friends.

Ask: Does anyone know what *ethnicity* is?

TIP: Learners often name prejudices that are based on skin color, gender, age, ability, or other immutable parts of their identity. (For example, "They think because I'm a girl, I like to play with dolls," or "People think I can't speak English because I'm Hispanic.") When prejudices are based on qualities shared by groups of people, they are stereotypes. Use this activity to transition into discussing stereotypes.

TIP: Telling the story in a calm, smooth voice will draw the children into the story.

Say: Your ethnicity is your cultural background, like what language your family and ancestors spoke. It can sometimes mean what part of the world you are from.

Say: Jesus sees the woman, a Canaanite, who is different. Many of the Jews thought that the Canaanites and other non-Jewish people were bad news. At first, Jesus tries ignoring her. But she kept asking. Finally, Jesus tells the woman no. “I’ve only been sent to the people of Israel,” he said. “It’s not good to take food from children and give it to dogs.”

Say: Whoa, Jesus! That’s not very nice!

Say: The woman said back to him, “But even the dogs get to eat the scraps of food that fall off the table.” She was reminding Jesus that she was still a person in need.

Say: Jesus said, “You’re right, and you have great faith.” And the woman’s sick daughter was made well.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Ask: Why do you think Jesus said no? How do you think it felt to be that woman who so badly needed help, being told no because of her ethnicity? Have you ever been told no or not been able to do something because of your ethnicity, gender, race, or ability? What do you think made Jesus change his mind?

PRACTICE AND REFLECTION

Seeing Things Clearly

Say: One of the reasons we have prejudice is because it’s not always easy to see things clearly or see them the way someone else does.

Ask: Have you ever had an argument with a sibling or friend and had to share your side of the story? Was your version different than the other person’s version of what happened?

Say: There is always more than one way of seeing things! Jesus taught his disciples and teaches us that we shouldn’t judge or stereotype others because it’s like trying to get a speck out of someone else’s eye when we have a log in our own. A log! We couldn’t possibly see clearly with a log in our eye! When we judge or stereotype others, we can’t see them clearly. We can’t learn who they really are because we have already decided what they are like based on stereotypes.

Say: Today we’re going to make clear and foggy telescopes as a reminder to try and get rid of stereotypes and prejudices so we can see others more clearly.

Supplies:

- Construction paper
- Tape
- Rubber bands
- Wax paper
- Clear plastic wrap or cellophane

- Help the learners make a long tube by rolling a sheet of construction paper lengthwise, then taping it into place.
- Cut small squares of plastic wrap and wax paper, and give every learner one of each.
- Using the rubber bands, fix the wax paper square over one end of the tube to be the “lens.”
- Invite the learners to look around the room or at one another and describe what they can see through the wax paper. Probably not much—perhaps light or general shapes.
- Swap out the wax paper square with the clear plastic square and repeat.

Send home the “Practice and Reflection at Home” sheet on page 5 with each child. This will help engage the whole family in this spiritual practice together.

PRACTICE AND REFLECTION AT HOME

Today your child learned about prejudices and stereotypes, including why we have them, how they hurt, and how we can work against them. It can be difficult to have conversations about this with our children. But studies show that before the age of ten, children are actively picking up on prejudices and stereotypes in our culture—OR learning to develop more inclusive, open, and justice-oriented mindsets.

Chances are your child is noticing differences among the people around him or her. If your child asks a question that you aren't prepared to answer, that's okay! Tell them that you aren't sure and need to think about it, or use a computer at home or at the library to seek information together about language, skin color, ethnicity, immigration, or other concerns. Questions about others' differences are a great opportunity to explore difference without placing a value judgment. Notice diversity with your child, and wonder together how others see and experience the world.

FURTHER READING

As you continue to think about combatting assumptions and negative attitudes toward others, check out the Sailboat note, "God Rewards Kindness and Respect," at 1 Samuel 26:20 in the *CEB Deep Blue Kids Bible* to learn about David, who listened empathetically even at great risk to himself.