

IS THERE A CURE FOR PREJUDICE?



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**Most of us recognize prejudice
in others. But it may be difficult
to see it in ourselves.**

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PREJUDICE

ARE YOU INFECTED?

Prejudice is like a virus. It harms its victims, and people can be unaware that they are infected.

People can be prejudiced not only toward those of another nationality, race, tribe, or language but also toward those of a different religion, gender, or social class. Some judge people negatively based on their age, education, disabilities, or physical appearance. Yet, they still feel that they are not prejudiced.

Could you be infected with prejudice? Most of us can recognize prejudice in others. But it may be difficult to see prejudice in ourselves. The truth is that all of us are prejudiced to some degree. When people think about a group negatively and then meet someone from that group, says sociology professor David Williams, “they will treat that person differently and honestly not know that they did it.”

For example, in the Balkan country where Jovica lives, there is a minority group. “I thought that no one in that group could be a good person,” he admits. “But I did not think that I was prejudiced. ‘After all,’ I told myself, ‘this is simply a fact.’”

Many governments pass laws to fight racism and other forms of prejudice. Nevertheless, prejudice continues. Why? Because those laws only address a person’s actions. They cannot control a person’s thoughts and feelings. And prejudice starts in a person’s mind and heart. Is the fight against prejudice, then, a losing battle? Does a cure for prejudice exist?

The following articles will discuss five principles that have helped many people combat prejudice in their own minds and hearts.

GET THE FACTS



The Problem

Prejudice is often based on misinformation. Consider the following examples:

- Some employers have mistakenly believed that women are unqualified for scientific or technical jobs.
- In medieval Europe, Jews were falsely accused of poisoning wells and spreading disease. During Nazi rule, Jews were again slandered. But this time they were accused of causing the economic crisis in Germany. Both cases resulted in the Jews becoming victims of extreme prejudice, some of which is still evident today.
- Many people wrongly conclude that everyone who has a disability is sad or bitter.

People who believe myths such as those may point to examples or alleged evidence that seems to confirm their bias. And they think that anyone who disagrees with them is ignorant.

Bible Principle

“A person without knowledge is not good.”—PROVERBS 19:2.

What does it mean? Without knowing the facts, we make bad decisions. If we believe myths rather than facts, we will misjudge people.

How Knowing the Facts Helps

If we know the facts about people, we are less likely to believe common but false



Does the Bible Promote Prejudice?

Some claim that the Bible promotes prejudice. But what does the Bible actually say?

- **All humans are related:** God “made out of one man every nation of men.” —Acts 17:26.
- **God is impartial:** “God is not partial, but in every nation the man who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.”—Acts 10:34, 35.
- **God focuses on the inner person, not the outward appearance:** “Mere man sees what appears to the eyes, but Jehovah sees into the heart.”—1 Samuel 16:7.*

* Jehovah is the name of God as revealed in the Bible.

assumptions about them. And once we learn that we have not been told the truth about a particular group, we may be more likely to question assumptions that we have made about other groups of people.

What You Can Do

- Remember that sweeping generalizations about groups of people do not apply to all individuals of that group.
- Acknowledge that the information you have about others may be limited.
- Try to get the facts from a reliable source.

REAL-LIFE EXAMPLE

Jovica / BALKANS

Jovica, quoted earlier in this series of articles, grew up hearing his countrymen, the news, and television programs give negative reports about a minority group. “I became filled with prejudice—and even hatred—for those people,” he says. “And I thought I was completely justified in feeling that way.

“However, while in the army, I had no choice but to live and work with fellow soldiers from that minority group. In time, I learned more about them. I even started to learn their language and to listen to their folk songs. I began to have pleasant dealings with them, and I started to view them differently. Still, prejudicial feelings can surface. So I avoid news reports that put that ethnic group in a negative light. Also, I do not watch movies or popular comedies that mock them. I know that prejudicial feelings can grow into anger and hatred.”



They triumphed over hatred

What helped an Arab and a Jew to overcome their prejudice?

Watch the video *When Will Loyal Love Triumph Over Hatred?* Search for the video title on jw.org.

SHOW EMPATHY

The Problem

If we focus too much on how different others are from us, we could conclude that such differences are flaws or defects. In effect, we would be regarding as inferior those who are different. Once we develop this negative view of others, it becomes difficult to show empathy. Our lack of empathy can be a symptom of a deeper problem—prejudice.

Bible Principle

**“Rejoice with those who rejoice;
weep with those who weep.”**

—ROMANS 12:15.

What does it mean? This principle can be summarized in two words—show empathy. Empathy is the ability to put oneself in another’s place and feel what he feels.

How Empathy Helps

When we empathize with someone, we become aware of just how similar we are to that person. We realize that he or she may feel the way we feel and may react the way we react. Empathy helps us to see that all people, no matter what their background may be, are part of the human family. The more we focus on how similar they are to us, the less likely we will be to judge them negatively.

Empathy will also help us to respect others. Anne-Marie, from Senegal, once looked down on people who came from so-called lower castes. She explains how empathy helped her: “When I saw the hardships

suffered by those who belonged to lower castes, I asked myself how I would feel in their position. This moved me to question the validity of my supposed higher status—one that I had neither chosen nor earned.” Yes, if we strive to understand another person’s struggles, we are more likely to empathize rather than to criticize.

What You Can Do

Try to see beyond the differences and find similarities between you and people from a group you may view negatively.

For example, imagine how they feel when

- eating a meal with their family
- finishing a hard day’s work
- spending time with friends
- listening to their favorite music

Next, try to imagine yourself in their situation. Ask yourself:

- ‘How would I react if someone made me feel worthless?’
- ‘How would I feel if others judged me before they even got to know me?’
- ‘If I were part of their group, how would I like others to treat me?’

Empathy helps us to see that all people are part of the human family



REAL-LIFE EXAMPLE

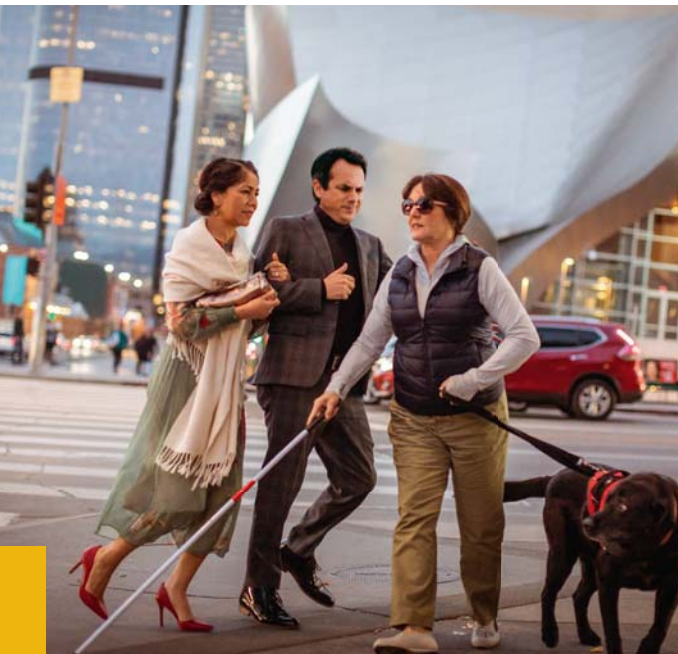
Robert / SINGAPORE

“In the past, I thought that deaf people were strange, intellectually impaired, and overly sensitive. So I avoided them. However, I did not think that my viewpoint was prejudiced, since it did not seem to harm anyone.

“Feeling empathy for deaf people helped me to counteract the prejudice I had. For example, I had the impression that the deaf were

intellectually handicapped because when I spoke to them, they would look at me blankly. So I tried to imagine how I would feel if I could not hear someone talking to me. Of course I would have a blank face! Even if I had a hearing aid, my facial expression might seem to indicate, ‘I am struggling to *understand*,’ when really I would be struggling to *hear*.

“As I put myself in a deaf person’s shoes, my prejudices evaporated into thin air.”



RECOGNIZE THE STRENGTHS OF OTHERS

The Problem

Egotism can lead to prejudice. An egotistical person has an inflated opinion of his own worth. He views himself as superior and judges people who are different from him as being inferior. Anyone can fall into this trap. The *Encyclopædia Britannica* says: “Most [cultural] groups feel—to vary-

ing degrees of intensity—that their way of life, their foods, dress, habits, beliefs, values, and so forth, are superior to those of other groups.” How can we avoid this flawed way of thinking?

Bible Principle

“With humility consider others superior to you.”—PHILIPPIANS 2:3.

What does it mean? To avoid excessive pride, we need to cultivate its opposite—humility. Humility allows us to recognize that in some areas of life others are superior. No one group has a monopoly on all good qualities and abilities.

Consider the example of Stefan. He grew up in a Communist country but overcame his feelings of prejudice against people

Acknowledge that others are strong in areas where you are weak

from non-Communist countries. He says: “I believe that considering others as superior to you is important in counteracting prejudice. I don’t know everything. I can learn something from every person.”

What You Can Do

Try to have a realistic view of yourself and remain aware of your own failings. Acknowledge that others are strong in areas where you are weak. Do not assume that all people from a particular group have the same flaws.

Instead of drawing negative conclusions about a person who is from a particular group of people, ask yourself:

- ‘Are the traits that I dislike about that person actually bad, or are they just different?’
- ‘Could this person find faults in me?’
- ‘In what areas is this person more capable than I am?’

If you answer these questions honestly, you may not only overcome any prejudice you have but you may also find things to admire in that person.

REAL-LIFE EXAMPLE

Nelson / UNITED STATES

“I spent most of my younger years in an area where the population was predominantly of one race and background. But when I moved to a large city at the age of 19 to work in a factory, I found myself working with and living near people of many different races, backgrounds, and cultures.

“As I got to know my workmates and made friends, I saw firsthand that people’s skin color, mother tongue, and nationality told me absolutely nothing about how hard they worked, how trustworthy they were, or what their innermost feelings were.

“I later married a woman whose home country and race were different from mine, and I have found much joy in learning about different kinds of foods and forms of music that were new to me. Life has taught me that all of us have faults and virtues. To be honest, I have become a better person as a result of admiring and imitating the virtues of people who are very different from me racially and culturally.”

EXPAND YOUR CIRCLE OF FRIENDS

The Problem

If we isolate ourselves from people whom we view negatively, we may reinforce our prejudices. And if we limit our friends to people who are like us, we may tend to think that our way is the only acceptable way of thinking, feeling, and acting.

Bible Principle

“Open your hearts wide.”

—2 CORINTHIANS 6:13.

What does it mean? Our “heart” can refer to our emotions and affections. If we have affection only for people who are similar to

us, our heart becomes closed or cramped. To avoid that problem, we must be willing to befriend those who are different from us.

How Expanding Our Circle of Friends Helps

When we get to know others personally, we begin to understand why they do things differently. And as we grow closer to them, we start to see them as part of our own group. We come to value them more, and their joys and sorrows become our own.

Consider the example of Nazaré. She once felt prejudice toward immigrants. She explains what helped her: “I spent time with them and worked with them. I met people who were the complete opposite of what the rest of the community was saying they were. Once you befriend people from a different culture, you learn not to stereotype them, and you grow to love them and value them as individuals.”



What You Can Do

Find opportunities to speak with people who are from a country, ethnicity, or language group different from yours. You could

- Ask them to tell you a little about themselves.
- Invite them to join you for a meal.
- Listen to their stories, and find out what is important to them.

If you try to understand how their experiences have shaped their personality, you may develop a positive attitude toward people from their group.



A Word of Caution

Some people choose lifestyles with habits that are harmful to themselves and to others. Hence, we should be selective when expanding our circle of friends. It is not prejudicial to avoid friendship with unscrupulous individuals who behave in a depraved or offensive manner. While you should not seek to harm people who violate your moral standards or seek to deprive them of their rights, it is wise to exclude them from your circle of friends. —Proverbs 13:20.

REAL-LIFE EXAMPLE

Kandasamy and Sookammah / CANADA

“We grew up in South Africa during apartheid. People of different races were forced to live in separate communities, which fostered feelings of prejudice among the various racial groups. We were not white, and we particularly disliked white people because some had treated us as inferiors. At the time, we did not think that we were prejudiced. Rather, we felt that we were victims.

“To change our attitude, we took the initiative to widen out and have friends from different backgrounds. As we began to associate with white people, we realized that very little set us and them apart. We all experience similar circumstances and challenges.

“We even took the opportunity to host a white couple as guests in our home for a long period of time. We got to know them well. Soon we began to see each other as friends and equals. As a result, we started to view white people in general more positively.”



Genuine brothers

Although they were of different races and political views, Johny and Gideon developed a close friendship.

Watch the video *Johny and Gideon: Once Enemies, Now Brothers*. Search for the video title on jw.org.



SHOW LOVE

The Problem

Feelings of prejudice do not disappear quickly. Just as it takes time and effort to get rid of a virus, it takes time and effort to get rid of prejudice. What can you do to remove prejudice from within you?

Bible Principle

“Clothe yourselves with love, for it is a perfect bond of union.”

—COLOSSIANS 3:14.

What does it mean? Doing kind things for others brings people together. The more you show your love for others, the less prejudiced you become. The more love you feel, the less room you leave in your heart for hatred or contempt.

What You Can Do

Think of specific ways that you can show love for people who are from a group that you may have viewed negatively. These actions do not have to be elaborate. Try to do one or more of the following:

- Show good manners to members of that group by holding the door open or by giving up your seat on public transportation for one of them.
- Try to engage in small talk, even if they do not speak your language fluently.
- Be patient when they act in a way that you do not understand.
- Be sympathetic if they talk about their problems.



With each small act of love, you will move further away from prejudice

REAL-LIFE EXAMPLE

Nazaré / GUINEA-BISSAU

"I once felt prejudice toward immigrants. I was told that many immigrants fraudulently lived off social benefits and that they were more prone to criminal behavior. This made it difficult for me to accept them. However, I did not characterize my feelings as prejudice, because this was how the majority of people viewed immigrants.

"In time, however, I realized that my negative attitude toward immigrants was in fact prejudicial. The practical wisdom of the Bible has helped me to be more loving toward them. Now I do not avoid them. On the contrary, I greet them and speak with them. I try to get to know each of them as a person. Now my feelings toward them are positive, and I feel very comfortable with them."



"I wanted to fight injustice"

Rafika had joined a revolutionary group to fight racial injustice. But when she attended a convention of Jehovah's Witnesses, she finally found the unity she was looking for.

Watch the video *Rafika Morris: I Wanted to Fight Injustice*. Search for the video title on jw.org.

A LASTING CURE

Millions of people have applied the principles outlined in the preceding articles and have made great progress in rooting out prejudice from their hearts. Realistically, though, we cannot completely remove all prejudice on our own. So is the situation hopeless?

An Ideal Government

Human governments have a poor record of changing people's prejudiced attitudes. But does that mean that no government is capable of removing prejudice?

A government that could cure prejudice would need to

1. Motivate people to want to change the way they think and feel toward others.
2. Heal the wounds that make it difficult to treat others fairly.
3. Have leaders of unbreakable integrity who value each citizen equally.
4. Unify people of all nations.

The Bible assures us that God has created such a government. It is called "the Kingdom of God."—Luke 4:43.

Consider what that government will provide.

1 | Superior Teaching

"The inhabitants of the land [will] learn about righteousness."
—ISAIAH 26:9.

"The result of true righteousness will be peace, and the fruitage of true righteousness will be lasting tranquillity and security."
—ISAIAH 32:17.

What does this mean? God's Kingdom will teach people what is right. When people learn right from wrong—justice from injustice—their attitudes toward one another change. All will recognize that the right thing to do is to love all kinds of people.

2 | Healing

God "will wipe out every tear from their eyes, and death will be no more, neither will mourning nor outcry nor pain be anymore. The former things have passed away."—REVELATION 21:4.

What does this mean? God's Kingdom will end all the pain caused by injustice. Former victims of mistreatment will no longer have a reason to feel animosity.

3 | Good Leadership

“He will not judge by what appears to his eyes, nor reprove simply according to what his ears hear. He will judge the lowly with fairness, and with uprightness he will give reproof in behalf of the meek ones of the earth.”—ISAIAH 11:3, 4.

What does this mean? Jesus Christ, the King of God’s heavenly Kingdom, will rule fairly and impartially over the earth. Jesus does not favor one nation over another, and he can ensure that his righteous laws are upheld worldwide.

Is it reasonable for a person to believe that such a government is possible?

Only if he or she first examines the evidence. We invite you to do so in three ways:

- Ask one of Jehovah’s Witnesses for proof that God’s Kingdom will soon fulfill the promises described in the Bible.
- Visit jw.org, and go to BIBLE TEACHINGS > BIBLE QUESTIONS ANSWERED > GOD’S KINGDOM.
- Attend a meeting of Jehovah’s Witnesses, and see love and unity in action.

4 | Unity

God’s Kingdom teaches people to be “of the same mind and [to have] the same love, being completely united, having the one thought in mind.”

—PHILIPPIANS 2:2.

What does this mean? The unity among the citizens of God’s Kingdom will be more than just a veneer. They will be “completely united” because they will truly love one another.



They Broke the Barrier of Prejudice



Learn about these experiences and more on jw.org.



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