



The “Isms” That Are Tearing Our Society Apart

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"For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility." Ephesians 2:14

Our world is a mess. Everywhere you look, you see divisiveness and prejudice based on race, gender, age, marital status, political affiliation and religion. Instead of embracing our differences and using them to enrich our conversations and practices, we use them to discriminate and show preferences that are not based on truth, but instead based on the lies perpetuated by our upbringing or the media. As Christians, we struggle with how to respond without being seen as “preachy,” so we often just avoid these tough topics, which only makes the problems worse. A one-hour conversation with your 4word Local Group will just scratch the surface as we focus on three of these topics, but we hope that you will dig in and have some honest discussions that will impact your workplace, church and home.

Racism is defined as “prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism directed against someone of a different race based on the belief that one's own race is superior.” In fact, many “isms” could be defined the same way as we treat others disrespectfully just because they look different on the outside or because they were born into a different culture. Racism has existed for centuries and, as much as we know in our heads that we were all created equal, the tenets of the past have been hard to erase. People continue have their dignity diminished because of negative stereotypes based on ideas and history, not each person’s individual worth. It is heartbreaking that there are some who are beaten, denied healthcare or passed over for a promotion simply because our society has perpetuated a culture war that is tearing us apart.

Sexism is prejudice primarily against women. We experience bias as we are seen as less intelligent or capable than our male counterparts. Women are passed over for pay raises and promotions by male leaders who have an inherent belief that women are “less than” simply because of their gender. Even at church, women are denied leadership responsibilities as men perpetuate a belief that women should be “submissive” and not heard, relegating them to stereotypical roles. In their recent comprehensive study of thousands of companies and employees, McKinsey and Company found

“Since 2015, the first year of this study, corporate America has made almost no progress in improving women’s representation. From the outset, fewer women than men are hired at the entry level. And at every subsequent step, the representation of women further declines. Women of color are the most underrepresented group of all—behind white men, men of color, and white women.” [Read their enlightening study here.](#)

Agesim is the pushback against something we all have in common—getting older. The multi-billion-dollar cosmetics industry wants us to nip, tuck, inject and slather magic serum on our wrinkles to “prevent the signs of aging.” It seems that aging enhances men and devalues women, as we see older women portrayed as feeble minded, greying, worrisome and sagging in the media and in movies. (I once heard a news report concerning an “elderly” woman who happened to be in her early 60’s!) In the

workplace, there are some industries where aging is seen as a detriment rather than an opportunity to glean from a person's wisdom and experience.

The answer to prejudice and discrimination based on differences in who we are has focused on "diversity." But that is just the first step in addressing the issue. In [her excellent TED Talk "INCLUSION over Diversity,"](#) Kenyona Matthews says that diversity is like a fruit platter—it looks good, but all the different pieces are kept apart. It's not about hiring more women or people of color, but about hiring people of diverse backgrounds. It's about taking time to share experiences and understand those of our counterparts, giving everyone at the table a voice—creating a "fruit salad" that is well mixed with delicious blended flavors.

As Christians, how are we to respond to discrimination based on race, gender, age, or a host of other differences? How do we shine the light of Christ in a world that is becoming increasingly darker?

- **Embrace the truth that we are all children of God, created in His divine image from the same two parents in the beginning of humanity.** Seeing every person through the eyes of God should dispel the lies of racism, sexism and all other battles based on differences. Be grounded in the Word, Seek God's wisdom and rely on His truth to shape your beliefs, words and actions.
- **Practice that truth by connecting with people with diverse backgrounds and learning from them.** Don't judge by outward appearances, but instead include these people in conversations as you make your "fruit salad." Try to understand the "why" behind a person's beliefs and cultural practices to appreciate her history. Jesus spent much of His time with the marginalized, listening and ministering to them, and so should we.
- **Check your own unconscious biases.** "We all have unconscious biases, whether we realize it or not (in fact, the whole notion of unconscious bias is that we may NOT be aware of our preconceived notions about people or groups of people)... address unconscious bias and how it can play a role in the ways in which colleagues talk to one another, communicate in general, and make decisions. For instance, asking a woman if she has children or intends to in the future does not affect her skills and ability to do her job any more than it affects a man's." [FairyGodBoss.com](#) Look for your bias, then find ways to prove it wrong to change your mindset.
- **Be careful with your words.** One phrase that slips from your mouth can be perceived as microaggression, the everyday slights, insults, or negative messages that come from prejudice, whether deeply held or unconscious. For example, [in this month's podcast,](#) Joi Freeman tells of an incident when she was doing voiceover for a project and was asked to "sound more black." Of course, she was crushed at that moment and the effects are still with her today.
- **Create a culture of "allyship,"** with relationships that are based on trust, consistency and accountability. Support other women and minorities by getting to know them, advocating for them and encouraging them to reach higher as they push beyond their limiting beliefs. Being an ally instead of a competitor benefits everyone in the long run.

Discussion Questions

1. Have you been the victim of discrimination or bias at work? Share your experience, how it made you feel, and what the outcome was. How does that experience impact your life today?
2. Have you witnessed or been the focus of sexism in your church? Why do you think women are still relegated to stereotypical roles at within the church? How can you affect change?
3. Were your biases shaped by your upbringing? Did your family or community embrace racial inequality? What do you remember about racism from your childhood, and how do those memories affect your perception of minorities today?
4. Do you find female colleagues supportive, your “allies” in the workplace? Or do you experience more competition as they try to hold you back? Talk about ways we can build one another up as advocates rather than competitors, and why it is so important to support one another’s goals.
5. Do you “own your voice” as a woman in the workplace, or do you hold back out of fear or your perception that you are not good enough? What is the cost of remaining silent? What do you need to become a more vocal advocate for yourself?

Growth Opportunity

Spend some time reading the attached scriptures and watching the TED Talks. Listen to Joi Freeman share her perspective on racism and sexism in this month’s podcast. Then reach out to at least one person with a different background from yours and really get to know her (or him). Share your experiences and listen to hers as you do your best to empathize with her feelings and fears. Think about creating your “fruit salad” rather than your “fruit plate” as you cultivate new relationships.

Additional Resources for More Insight

What does the Bible say about prejudice and discrimination? *(from The Gospel Coalition)*

- We are all made in the image of God. Genesis 1:27
- We are all sinners, corrupted by the fall. Romans 3:10-30, 5:12-21
- We are all, if believers in Jesus, one in Christ. Galatians 3:26-28
- Separating peoples was a curse from Babel. Genesis 11:7-9
- Bringing peoples together was a gift of Pentecost. Acts 2:5-11
- Partiality is a sin. James 2:1
- We should love as we hope to be loved. Matthew 22:39-40
- God's grace is universal. John 3:16
- Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer. 1 John 3:15
- Love rejoices in what is true and looks for what is best. 1 Corinthians 13:4-7
- Christ came to tear down walls between people not to build them up. Ephesians 2:14
- Heaven has no room for racism. Revelation 5:9-10, 7:9-12, 22:1-5

4word August Podcast with Joi Freeman

["Don't Let Racism and Sexism Steal Your Hope in Today's World"](#)

TED Talks

["INCLUSION over Diversity"](#) Kenyona Matthews

["Color Blind or Color Brave?"](#) Mellody Hobson

["How Racism Makes Us Sick"](#) David Williams

["3 Ways to Be a Better Ally in the Workplace"](#) Melinda Epler

Articles

[What does the Bible say about racism?](#) Dr. Jim Denison

[Is the Bible Sexist?](#) Ravi Zacharias Ministries