

Responding to Prejudice

Quarter 10 | Lesson 6 | Character Development

1. **Connecting:** Do an activity to highlight differences in a positive way.
2. **Teaching:** Learn biblical responses to prejudice from the story of Peter and Cornelius (Acts 10:1–35).
3. **Responding:** Practice responding to prejudice in practical ways.

SUPPLIES

- Bibles

Optional Supplies:

- Memory Verse Poster
- *The Action Bible*, images of Peter's vision and preaching to Cornelius
- Pencils
- Student Pages

Teacher Devotion

*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit.
Rather, in humility value others above yourselves.*
Philippians 2:3

As human beings, we seek others who are like we are. We look in the mirror to see if we have our father's eyes, and we are pleased when others say we have our grandmother's hands or our sister's intelligence. We often form friendships based on common interests and like-minded thinking. These similarities create bonds between us. We become WE, and others who are not like us become THEY. But all human beings have 1 important characteristic in common. We are made in the image of our Creator. We are *all* WE—precious creations of our good and gracious God, who intends for us to treat others with kindness and love. But often we do not allow this similarity to bring us together.

Think of a time you noticed that someone was different. Did you treat that person as though she was less valuable or less worthy of honour because she was not like you? If so, how do you think your words and actions made her feel? And how did they make you feel? Prejudice grows when we think more of ourselves than we do of others. But when we count others more significant, we often find that our differences create new ways to show love and honour. So set aside thinking about yourself and focus more on thinking of others. Do not allow differences to separate. Instead, allow them to bring richness and new perspectives to your life. Celebrate these differences, and thank the One who made us in His image with creativity and love.

Lesson Time

1. Connecting: Do an activity to highlight differences in a positive way.

Greet the teens by name as they arrive. Ask them if they saw others more positively in the past week. Encourage the teens to avoid using names as they share their stories.

Teacher Tip: This lesson about honouring differences may be difficult for some of the teens, as beliefs about others are often rooted in family and cultural traditions. Pray for your students before and during the lesson. Ask God to give the students courage to overcome any prejudice and to allow their love for others to grow.

Gather the students together.

Last time, we learned about prejudice. “Prejudice” means forming our opinions about others based on their outward characteristics, such as their appearance, religion, abilities, or gender, instead of their inward characteristics, such as their integrity, courage, or compassion.

The Bible teaches us that all people are created in the image of God. He values each person equally. He does not show favouritism or partiality. Sadly, many people do not view others the same way God does. Instead they allow their prejudices and their differences to separate them. Let’s do an activity to see that differences can be interesting.

To do this activity, line up in the order I tell you. For example, if I say, “Tallest to shortest,” you will line up in that order. But here is the challenging part: You cannot speak at all! You can use hand motions, facial expressions, or any other way of communicating that does not involve talking. In order to do this activity without speaking, you will have to work together!

Choose a characteristic your students will use to form their line. Some ideas are: youngest to oldest, largest feet to smallest feet, birthday order according to calendar date, or shortest fingers to longest fingers. You can use these ideas or think of your own. Have the students repeat the activity with 3 or 4 different characteristics. Then gather them for discussion.

Teacher Tip: Be sensitive when choosing the order for students to line up in. Be sure to choose characteristics that will make the game fun and will not hurt any of the teens’ feelings.

As we can see from this activity, we all have differences. Some of our differences are obvious on the outside, such as the length of our hair or our height. Some cannot be seen on the outside, such as our birthdays or what our favourite colours are. But all of these differences make our world a more interesting place. Would you want to live in a world where every person was exactly the same? I know I would not!

Though our differences can be interesting, sometimes we do not appreciate these differences. And when we judge people based on these differences, unkindness and prejudice are often the result.

2. Teaching: Learn biblical responses to prejudice from the story of Peter and Cornelius (Acts 10:1–35).

Teacher Tip: You can use the example below or share your own example that fits your community. If you share an example of your own, be sure to change the names in the story.

Imagine that I am walking on the street and I pass a woman who is begging. She has disfigured hands, and her clothing and hair are dirty.

- **What is your first reaction to this woman?**

Allow 2–3 students to share their thoughts.

- **How do you think we should respond to her?**

Allow 2–3 students to share their thoughts.

How we choose to respond to someone who is different than we are can be the result of prejudice. For example, if I move away from the woman and make an unpleasant face, I am showing her and others that I am judging her. This is prejudice because I am judging the woman based on what she looks like or how she acts.

Find a partner and share a time when you have seen prejudice in our community. Do not use names—only share what you saw. For example, you might say, “I saw a man kicking dirt at an older woman.”

Give students 2–3 minutes to share examples of prejudice in the community. Remind teens not to use names or to judge one another. Then have them discuss the following question with their partners.

- **How could prejudice have been prevented in this situation?**

Most of us are prejudiced in some ways. Our prejudices may be the result of our personal experiences, ideas that are common in our culture, or things we have learned from our families and friends. In some situations, these prejudices have been passed down through many generations. In fact, in most communities, certain types of prejudice are accepted and even encouraged.

- **Most prejudices are the result of differences between people. Why do you think people judge those who are different than they are?**

Allow 2–3 students to share their thoughts.

Though we are often most comfortable spending time with people who are similar and have similar beliefs, differences make our world more interesting and provide us with opportunities to learn and grow. People who are different than we are can teach us new things. We can learn to appreciate new languages, art, and traditions. We can benefit from their new ideas and their new perspectives. But we cannot enjoy these benefits unless we choose to find out who they are instead of letting prejudice keep us apart. Let’s talk about some causes of prejudices and learn God’s truth about honouring differences.

One of the main causes of prejudice is lack of understanding. People often judge those who are different than they are because they do not understand the differences. They may feel uncomfortable or even fearful because they do not understand a person’s culture, language, or beliefs. They may feel threatened if they believe that those who are different are trying to change them or their beliefs.

Another cause of prejudice is the influence of others. Our cultures, our religions, our families, and our friends all influence our beliefs. The things we hear from others or read in the news can affect the way we feel about others.

Prejudice is also caused by our own personal experiences. For example, if we have a negative experience with someone of a certain race or religion, we may decide that all people of that race or religion are the same. This causes us to develop a prejudice about that race or religion.

As I read this story from the Bible, listen for these causes of prejudice—and listen for what we can learn about judging others.

Optional: If possible, share the images from The Action Bible.

Have a student read Acts 10:1–8 aloud from the Bible. If that is not possible, the verses are printed here.

At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly. One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, "Cornelius!" Cornelius stared at him in fear. "What is it, Lord?" he asked. The angel answered, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter. He is staying with Simon the tanner, whose house is by the sea." When the angel who spoke to him had gone, Cornelius called two of his servants and a devout soldier who was one of his attendants. He told them everything that had happened and sent them to Joppa.

Acts 10:1–8

- **What do we learn about Cornelius from this part of the story?**

He is a Roman soldier and a devout follower of God. He is generous and obedient to God. He received instructions from an angel and obeyed those instructions.

When the events in this story took place, Roman and Jewish people had strong cultural and religious prejudices against each other. But Jesus shared His message with all people, so His followers were from different cultures and religious backgrounds. Because of these differences, early church groups often struggled with conflict caused by prejudice.

The day after Cornelius received instructions from the angel, a disciple of Jesus named Peter had a vision. As he was sitting on the roof of the home he was staying in, he saw a vision of animals that Jewish people would never eat because of dietary laws. He also heard a voice telling him, "Rise, Peter; kill and eat ... What God has made clean, do not call common." This happened 3 times.

Listen to what happened next.

Continue the story by having another student read the next section aloud from the Bible.

While Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision, the men sent by Cornelius found out where Simon's house was and stopped at the gate. They called out, asking if Simon who was known as Peter was staying there. While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Simon, three men are looking for you. So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them." Peter went down and said to the men, "I'm the one you're looking for. Why have you come?" The men replied, "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 ask you to come to his house so that
he could hear what you have to say." Then Peter invited the men
into the house to be his guests. The next day Peter started out with them,
and some of the believers from Joppa went along.*

Acts 10:17–23

- **What do we learn about Peter from this part of the story?**

Peter wondered what his vision meant, but he listened to the Holy Spirit and was obedient. He was kind to the men sent by Cornelius, even though they were probably Roman.

Listen to what happened when Peter arrived in Caesarea.

*As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence.
But Peter made him get up. "Stand up," he said, "I am only a man myself."
While talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people. He
said to them: "You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew
to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call
anyone impure or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without raising
any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?"*

Acts 10:25–29

- **What can we learn about Peter and Cornelius from this part of the story?**

Cornelius thought that Peter was like God because the angel had told him about Peter. So Cornelius bowed down to Peter. Peter stopped Cornelius from trying to worship him. This helped Peter to realize that his vision was about all people being equal in God's eyes.

- **How did Peter and Cornelius respond to prejudice?**

Allow 2–3 students to share their thoughts. Then guide them to understand that both men overcame their prejudices in obedience to God. Neither man was too proud to listen to and learn from the other.

Cornelius asked Peter to share a message from God. Listen to what Peter said. You may recognize this verse from our last lesson.

Then Peter began to speak:

*"I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism
but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right.*

Acts 10:34–35

- **What does Peter's message tell us about prejudice?**

God shows no favouritism; He loves everyone who loves Him.

- **What does this story teach us about responding to prejudice?**

Allow 2–3 students to share their thoughts. Then guide them to understand that we can be obedient to God and try to accept others as He does.

Peter and Cornelius chose to honour their differences instead of allowing prejudice to keep them apart. They learned about each other, and they honoured each other.

- **How did these choices help Peter and Cornelius?**
- **How can we use these ideas to respond to prejudice in our community?**

3. Responding: Practice responding to prejudice in practical ways.

Now that we know some of the causes of prejudice and we have heard how Peter and Cornelius responded to prejudice, let's talk about ways to respond to prejudice in our community.

Today, we learned that prejudice is often caused by lack of understanding, the influence of others, and our personal experiences. Last time, we learned to look for the good in others, look for similarities, recognize the flaws in ourselves, learn to appreciate differences, and try to see others as God does in order to avoid judging others.

- **Based on what we have learned, what are some practical ideas we can use to respond to prejudice in our community?**

Teacher Tip: Be sure that as your students make suggestions they do not begin to blame others or become angry. Prejudice is a personal sin as well as a community sin. If any students become focused on blaming others or becoming angry, remind them of what they learned last time about judging other people while having logs in their own eyes!

Prejudice grows when we do not understand or appreciate differences. One of the best ways to overcome prejudice is to learn the truth about a person or a group. When we get to know what people are really like, we often discover that they are not as different as we expected. Ask respectful questions and be curious about others, especially those who are different. Listen respectfully to their answers. Treat others with honour, even when you do not know them. As you get to know a person or a group of people, you may find that they are not so different from you!

Prejudice also grows when we think more of ourselves and those who are like us than we do of others. Listen to what the Bible tells us about thinking of ourselves before others.

If you are using the Memory Verse Poster, show it to the students.

*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit.
Rather, in humility value others above yourselves.
Philippians 2:3*

- **How could thinking less of ourselves and more of others help us to respond to prejudice?**

Allow 2–3 students to share their thoughts. Then guide them to understand that treating others with honour, as Peter and Cornelius did, encourages positive relationships with others instead of promoting prejudice.

We can respond to prejudice by treating others with honour and by thinking of them as more significant than ourselves. Let's learn about and honour each other now.

Optional: If you are using the Student Pages, give the teens time to do the activity on their pages.

Have the students form circles of 5–10 students. Students will take turns sharing something about themselves that may be different from others or something others do not know. Then the rest of the group will ask questions about that difference. Share some examples of your own to help them understand and feel safe sharing with the group.

Remind the students to listen respectfully to the answers. The students can share or ask questions in any order. It is okay if some students share or ask questions more than once. Students are not required to share or ask questions.

After 3–4 minutes, ask the students to answer the following questions quietly to themselves.

- **What is 1 thing you learned about someone in our class that you did not know before?**
- **How has your idea about that person changed because of what you learned?**
- **What is 1 practical way you can show honour to that person or someone else?**

With the help of the Holy Spirit, we can begin to see others as God does. When we pray and trust God, we can deal with the prejudice in our own hearts. Then we can begin to change the prejudice in our community.

Close with a blessing based on Romans 12:18.

Blessing: May you choose to respond to others with peace and love instead of unkindness and judgment. And as far as it depends on you, may you live at peace with everyone.

Family Connection: Encourage the students to ask their family members, "What is something about you that is different from others?" They can then celebrate and honour those differences by asking questions and listening respectfully to the answers.

Lead the teens in singing this quarter's song, if possible. "A Thousand Hallelujahs" by Brooke Ligertwood: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DeS49pSXDts>