Finding Freedom From Prejudice

PREJUDICE PACKERS

We all have prejudices. Unfortunately, many of us have packed around various types of prejudices for most of our lives. Some of your prejudices you might not even be aware of. Fundamentally, prejudice is a preconceived, usually unfavorable, evaluation of another person based on a characteristic or a group we associate them with. Our tendency to develop prejudices is somewhat a natural outcome of the way God created our brains to recognize and develop patterns of thought. We are wired to learn patterns. Our ability to subconsciously learn patterns prevents us from consciously thinking about every move we make. For example, think about driving a car. When you get into the driver's seat today, your driving patterns kick into gear, allowing you to drive with very little thought. While that is a bit scary, it's nearly as scary as unknowingly living with patterns of thinking that dishonor God and the people He loves. When our patterns of thinking involve negative and devaluing generalizations about people, and the groups we associate them with, they are not pleasing to God. Unfortunately, far too many of us are living our day-to-day lives with God-dishonoring prejudices. We have unknowingly joined what I call the Prejudice Packer Club. We're packing around our prejudices, allowing them to steal, kill, and destroy our relationships with others, which also negatively impacts our relationship with God.

In our culture today, the word prejudice is commonly associated with negative beliefs toward "people groups" defined by a person's race/ethnicity (e.g. Caucasian, Black, Hispanic, Arab), gender, religion (e.g. Muslim, Mormon, Buddhist), or sexuality/sex orientation (e.g. gay, transgender). However, based on the way I have defined prejudice above, you can see our prejudices cover a much broader spectrum. I will touch on that a bit later. For now, I want to unpack for you the basic building blocks of our prejudices so you can grasp what you'll need to know to turn to God and begin to dismantle these destructive mindsets through prayer.

UNPACKING PREJUDICE

A prejudice is empowered when we indiscriminately associate a devaluing general belief with all people within a "people group." For example: "all men are cheaters," or "all women are liars." The first injustice is how an individual, in this case, a man or woman, is judged and smeared with a negative label based on the actions of others. The individual is not given a chance to demonstrate the true content of their character but found guilty by association with other members of the same "people group." I like the saying I heard many years ago, "generalizations generally don't apply." Generalizations are misguided and don't reflect the heart of God. I believe God sees each of us as individuals. He does not cast His judgment upon us based on the actions of others. We need to follow suit and do the same if we desire to live a life that truly pleases Him. The first key to your breakthrough is recognizing that you

have made a devaluing generalization and asking God for His forgiveness. The prayer at the end will help lead you through this process.

I will explain the key prayer principles to equip you to purge these devaluing generalizations from your mind in the section entitled Lighten Your Load, but first, let me uncover a few of the other sinful tendencies that empower our prejudices. At the top of the list is our pride, or sense of superiority, over the "people group" involved. It may be quite obvious to you or super subtle, but in most cases, when we have judged others, our pride has gotten the best of us. While you may not have said it out loud, but in your heart, you likely believe you are better than "those people." If you get really honest with yourself, allowing the Holy Spirit to reveal what's in your heart, you'll realize how you have looked down on and devalued these people. You have fallen into the trap of judgment.

Judging others is another one of the key sinful tendencies at the heart of our prejudices. Out of our prideful self-perception, we have promoted ourselves to the position of the "self-righteous judge" who renders guilty verdicts and punishment upon all those whom we have come to dislike. We are warned of the sin of judgment in various places in the Bible. However, James Chapter 2 clearly captures God's heart towards this issue of judgment as it relates to prejudice. Verse 1 in The Passion Translation begins by saying, "My dear brothers and sisters, fellow believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ—how could we say that we have faith in him and yet we favor one group of people above another?" James goes on to describe a situation in the church where people treat a wealthy influential man favorably and totally disregard a poor man. He continues in verse 4 to sternly warn the believers of how God views this type of behavior: "then you've demonstrated gross prejudice among yourselves and used evil standards of judgment." In the New American Standard Bible, the words of James are translated as "judges with evil motives." Ouch! I hope you can clearly see that we do not represent the heart of God in our relationships when we fall into judgment and devalue God's precious children.

Unfortunately, there are more destructive beliefs entwined within our prejudices. Quite frequently, woven ever so subtly into our devaluing perspective is a belief that we, and maybe even our community, church, workplace, or world, do not need "those people." We have been deceived into believing they are not a valuable and integral part of God's plan. We invalidate the unique contributions they bring that are different than ours. This brings to mind the scriptures in 1 Corinthians 12 where Paul speaks to the importance of unity in the Body of Christ. Specifically, verses 21 through 23 reads: "The eye cannot say to the hand, *"I don't need you!"* And the head cannot say to the feet, *"I don't need you!"* On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable, we treat with special honor." Believing "those people" are not needed is a destructive deception that destroys the unity that God desires.

The devaluing of others reaches its lowest level when we dehumanize other people. Deep down, our hearts are not aligned with the Truth when we don't see others as beloved people brought into our world by our Heavenly Father. When we cease to value other people's lives as equal in value to ours, we open the door to a destructive mindset that justifies cruel and abusive treatment and possibly even goes as far as believing these people are expendable.

When we cease to value human life, we have dangerously strayed far into the kingdom of darkness and need to quickly turn to God and get our hearts realigned to His.

UNPACKING YOUR PREJUDICE

Understanding where your prejudices have come from is another key that may help you experience a breakthrough. Let's face it, a lot of the time, we have somewhat innocently inherited some of our prejudices. These prejudicial views were considered an accepted manner of thinking in your family, amongst your friends, in your workplace, school, and even possibly your church. They were part of the culture you were raised in. It doesn't let you off the hook in the eyes of God, but it is a bit different than if you experienced a specific hurtful or traumatic situation or possibly multiple situations, which have deeply anchored your prejudicial beliefs.

If you were one who rather innocently picked up the broadly held beliefs of those around you, praying to forgive those people who passed on the detrimental beliefs to you is a good idea. They didn't intend you any harm. Heck, they likely believed at some level they may have been actually helping protect you. If this was the case, it points to the fact that they, and possibly you, may fear the people belonging to this "people group." Turning to God, confessing, and renouncing your fear, will be key to ushering God's peace deeper into your heart.

More significantly, if you, unfortunately endured one or more very hurtful situations in which a person from this "people group" was involved, you'll need to work through the process of forgiving that person, or people, for what they did to you. Forgiving others in these types of situations can be very difficult and even scary, but remember, through the Holy Spirit, you have access to tap into the love and power of the perfect forgiver - Jesus. Holding onto and harboring the hurt and pain from the past is trapping the trauma inside of you. Turning to Jesus and releasing the person, or people, to Him is your path to freedom. Forgiving others is a faith-filled journey of repeatedly putting your trust in Jesus to be your Protector as you walk out your restoration process together with Him.

LIGHTEN YOUR LOAD

I don't want to be one who just explains the problem of prejudice. I want to help you turn to God and lighten your load. We all need to understand how to prayerfully purge the destructive generalizations and other bad beliefs which are empowering our prejudices. While it is the resurrection power of Jesus that brings deep and lasting change into our lives, we have to do our part and turn to God to tap into His transforming power through prayer. Here are some practical prayer principles aligned with the Finding Freedom Prayer Model to help you find freedom from your prejudice.

2 Corinthians 10:5 says: "We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." In order to take a thought captive, your first step is to co-labor with Christ to clearly identify the thought that opposes the knowledge of God. One aspect of the knowledge of God

is the way He views His beloved children. Hence, you need to identify any devaluating and potentially hate-filled conclusions you have labeled others with. A few examples are: “they are worthless” or “they’re all criminals.” I often refer to these types of thoughts as lies because they fundamentally oppose the Truth of how God sees these people.

Once you have identified the thoughts that oppose the knowledge of God, you need to do your part to make these thoughts obedient to Christ. Over the years, I have found the following 3-step prayer process to be a powerful way to do my part:

1) Take responsibility for devaluing these people, turn to God, and confess your sin(s).

2) Renounce (disown) each of the labels and lies you have been believing.

3) Declare the Truths (God’s perspective) that oppose each of the lies/labels.

These are pinpointed prayers you can begin to pray to partner with God to see your mind transformed. I wish I could tell you that by praying these prayers one time, you’ll see all these destructive lies and labels disappear, but this is typically not the case. Seeing the patterns of this world, which have lived and thrived in our souls for years, be transformed into beliefs aligned with the knowledge of God, will take some time. However, be encouraged that it is God’s will to come beside you and conform you into the image of His son Jesus (Romans 8:29).

PREPARE TO PRAY

Below you will find a simple prayer that follows the Finding Freedom Prayer Model to help you pray through any type of prejudice in your life. The first thing I encourage you to do is to ask the Holy Spirit to reveal if there is a “people group” that you are holding some level of prejudice towards. There may be more than one. If so, I’d recommend you pray through them separately.

When it comes to identifying prejudices in your life, I’ll challenge you not to stop at what might be the most obvious ones. Allow the Holy Spirit to search your heart. God may reveal to you that you have some negative judgments against some “people groups” not commonly associated with the term prejudice. Here’s a few “people groups” to consider: police, political officials, lawyers, reporters, or even those who attended a specific school, people receiving or not receiving some level of education, or maybe people associated with a specific sport (e.g. car racing, hunters) or sports team and their fans. Unfortunately, prejudices can even exist within the Body of Christ. Have you checked your heart to be sure it’s “clean” of all devaluing biases toward Christians who are “not like you” (e.g. Pentecostals, Baptists, Catholics, Charismatics)?

In Psalm 139:23-24, we hear the cry of the psalmist’s heart. I believe it is a cry that pleases God. “Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”

I pray you would start your prayer time by sitting before your Heavenly Father and humbly give Him permission to sift and sort through your soul. Ask Him to graciously reveal any prejudices you have that are not pleasing to Him. In the scripted prayer below, you will use the name of the "people group" associated with your prejudice each time you see the words "(*the people group)*" written in the prayer.

While I want you to pray the following scripted prayer out loud, I don't want you to read through the prayer like you're reading a book. I want you to do your best to make these words a heartfelt prayer to God. To do this, I suggest you start by reading over the first paragraph of the prayer silently to familiarize yourself with what the prayer says. Then pause, still your heart before God, and read the words of the first paragraph out loud to Him as if they were your own words. After you have finished praying through the first paragraph of the prayer, pause, silently read through the next paragraph, and repeat the process. Don't just read through the prayer in an impersonal manner, do your best to turn to God and use this prayer to help you express and confess your heart to Him.

As you are praying the prayer, if you sense the Holy Spirit prompting you to pray further into an issue, by all means, follow the Spirit's leading. Once you have covered what the Spirit leads you to pray, return to the scripted prayer and continue.

It's time to lighten your load and begin the process of purging any destructive prejudices from your life. Here is the prayer to help you on your journey.

FINDING FREEDOM FROM PREJUDICE PRAYER

Father, forgive me for judging and holding onto any hatred and bitterness towards *(the people group)*. I ask you to forgive me for every harsh word I have spoken and every unloving action I've done to put down, devalue, hurt, and demean *(the people group)* people.

Forgive me for fearing *(the people group)* and perceiving them as a threat. Forgive me for speaking and acting in anyways to control, abuse, or harm them. *Confess any specific words or actions that the Holy Spirit brings to mind.*

Lord, today I stand in the gap for my family. I ask You to forgive me and members of my family who have knowingly or unknowingly perpetuated prejudice against *(the people group)* people through my generational line. Forgive us for not representing Your heart well. Forgive us for justifying our devaluing perspectives and causing emotional and physical pain through our words and actions to these people.

Pause and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal any specific situations where you were hurt or hurt others. Confess any specific hateful, unloving words or actions you did to God.

Forgive me for my arrogance, my pride, and my sense of superiority over Your precious people. Forgive me for considering them less important than myself and dehumanizing them in any way. Forgive me for looking at all people in this group with disgust and disdain. Forgive me for listening to negative opinions, stories, and media reports, about these people and presuming the information was all true. Forgive me for repeating the information I heard in

order to belittle and slander them. Forgive me for justifying my prejudice and believing I have the right to punish others. Forgive me for believing and justifying, devaluing labels and lies about all *(the people group)* people based on the actions of a few. Forgive me for excluding, ignoring, and dismissing them as Your children and my brothers and sisters.

Lord, I renounce the lie…

- I am better than them
- They are worthless
- They don't matter
- They are a threat / dangerous
- I don't need them or their kind

I declare the Truth is…

- We are all equal in Your sight
- They are unique and treasured
- We all matter to You, Father
- Like me, they are beautiful & broken
- They are valued members of Your Body and our community

Pause and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you any specific devaluing labels you have put on these people, and ask God to reveal His loving perspective of these people. Renounce your lies and declare the Truths as you did above.

Lord, the truth is, not everyone who is *(the people group)* conforms to the lies I have believed. I ask you to break these prejudicial lies and show me how You see *(the people group)* people.

Pause and allow the Holy Spirit to reveal to you the Father's heart for this people group.

I forgive family members, friends, and other people of influence in my life, who slandered and spread hate-filled words about these people.

I forgive every *(the people group)* person for hurting me, rejecting me, and devaluing me or people I know.

Pause and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal any specific person you need to forgive and what you need to forgive them for.

I rebuke every spirit of hatred, anger, and prejudice in the name of Jesus. I ask you to break any generational spirits of prejudice that have afflicted my family line in Jesus' mighty name.

Rebuke any other demonic spirits that God shows you.

Father, release Your love into my heart right now. Flood me with Your love for *(the people group)* people. Transform my mind and open my eyes to Your way of thinking, speaking, and acting towards *(the people group)* people.

Pause to receive His love and allow Him to minister to you.

The Truth is Father, that like me there are *(the people group)* people who are imperfect and make mistakes. However, I pray, You would give me wisdom to lean into love and treat each

(the people group) person with the honor and respect they deserve as a member of the human race.

I thank You Father, for blessing this world with *(the people group)* people. I pray You would continue to bless them with Your love and favor. Reconcile and reconnect me with my *(the people group)* brothers and sisters in the manner in which You desire.

Show me how to be a blessing to *(the people group)* people and be a powerful, relevant expression of Your love in Jesus' mighty name.

Pause and allow the Holy Spirit to reveal any specific actions He desires you to take.

Amen.

CONTINUE YOUR JOURNEY

By turning your heart to God and praying through your prejudices, I believe you will begin to find some level of freedom. As I mentioned earlier, it is unlikely that by praying through this prayer one time, you'll find a prejudice you have held for years will be completely dismantled and destroyed. Most of the time, we do not experience "one prayer wonders," but experience more freedom as layers, or levels, are peeled away. Remember, God doesn't look at you as a project. He has invited you into a relationship to work out and walk out the process of becoming more like Jesus.

I encourage you to reflect upon the impact of your prayer time over the next few days. If you begin to recognize there is still some level of the prejudice operating in your life, set aside some time to turn to God and continue your journey. Here are some thoughts on how to continue.

You may want to completely pray through the above scripted prayer again. Another option is to allow God to show you specific areas of the prayer you need to focus on. You can do this by asking the Holy Spirit to reveal the specific lies, labels, or issues that are still empowering your prejudice. As the revelation comes, look back at the specific section of the prayer which addresses that area and use the scripted prayer to help you pray through what God has revealed to you. Don't get discouraged if you find yourself repeating the process over and over again. Remember, this is a journey, and your all-loving all-powerful Heavenly Father is walking with you and desires for you to join Him in the process of restoring your soul.

By Jason Lehfeldt