

PREJUDICE VS. RACISM

A RACIAL EQUITY WORKSHOP



Presbyterian Women in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Inc.



Presbyterian Women Purpose

Forgiven and freed by God in Jesus Christ, and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we commit ourselves

- to nurture our faith through prayer and Bible study,
- to support the mission of the church worldwide,
- to work for justice and peace, and
- to build an inclusive, caring community of women that strengthens the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and witnesses to the promise of God's kingdom.

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Words of Love: Don't Kill Each Other

This resource was created in collaboration with PW’s churchwide board of directors’ 2018–2021 Racial Equity Committee (REC), under the co-leadership of Joy Durrant and Jo Ann Burrell. The workshop and supplemental sermon was originally presented in 2019 by Stephanie M. Patterson, keynote speaker and workshop presenter at The Big Event of Shenandoah Presbytery, co-sponsored by Shenandoah Presbytery Committees on Educational Resources, Mission and Outreach, and Presbyterian Women.

Learn more about racial equity and find additional resources at www.presbyterianwomen.org/antiracism.

USING THIS RESOURCE

Dear Presbyterian Women,

The Racial Equity Committee (REC) has created a new module to add to the wonderful resources that our predecessors developed for practicing cultural humility. The REC cultural humility help us to become self-aware, critical practitioners of culture, to understand the dynamics of organizational power, to learn how to create environments that are welcoming to diversity and change, and thus to live into that inclusive, caring community at the core of Presbyterian Women.

It is our prayer that this REC module helps to teach our civic responsibilities with compassion—encouraging us to speak up, speak out and recognize the need for actively working on racial equity in the USA and throughout the world. It is our hope that the module will help you focus, as well as feel hopeful and more prayerful in your journey towards equal justice for all.

The REC wishes to thank our PW staff liaison Stephanie M. Patterson for her leadership in the creation of this module. It is patterned after a workshop she gave at a PW Presbytery Gathering. Working with the REC, Stephanie then enthusiastically and expertly coordinated the transformation of her workshop into a module that can be used at all levels of PW. Well done, Stephanie!

Presbyterian Women and the Racial Equity Committee pray that all who use our resources grow in knowledge of the issues, become energized and empowered to take action and emerge as stronger leaders.

Your sisters in Christ,

Jo Ann and Joy

Co-Chairs of the Racial Equity Committee (July 2018–July 2020)



Jo Ann Burrell
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WORKSHOP LEADER GUIDE*

Background Information for the Leader

Introduction

Talking about race can be hard. Talking about racism can be even harder. There are many reasons this is the case. Yet, given the power and pervasiveness of race in the lives and day-to-day experiences of people in the United States, honest and informed discussion about race and racism is an opportunity all people need.

In the last twenty years the racial demographics in this nation have shifted dramatically. Since 1980, the Hispanic population has more than doubled, while the white population has shrunk from 80 percent to 66 percent.¹ Most young people today have more experience with racial diversity than any generation prior. At the same time, profound shifts have taken place in the ways we think about race. Paradigms such as colorblindness, inclusion, multi-culturalism, diversity and even white privilege have all come to frame the ways that Americans talk about race in a post-civil rights era nation. These paradigms have been prevalent not only in society at large, but also in churches. Many people are already, familiar with many of these paradigms—even if they are not always clear about what they mean.

And yet some things have not shifted. The existence of racial diversity has not meant the disappearance of racism. Just consider the example of New York City, one of the most diverse cities on earth. In NYC, people of color are in the majority and whites are in the minority. Yet on any significant measure of social well-being—poverty rates, access to quality education, representation in influential political and economic institutions, the criminal justice

system—communities of color fare worse than do white communities. Shifting demographics have not resulted in changing equality.

In addition, just as diversity does not automatically translate into the existence of racial equity, the paradigms we use to talk about race and what it means often confuse, rather than clarify, meaningful dialogue about racism. Consider the contradiction, for example, in telling people that difference doesn't really matter (we are all human underneath our skin tone, after all) and then teaching them we should recognize, value, and affirm our many differences ("Black is beautiful!" and we need to celebrate African American culture).² The simultaneous persistence of this colorblind paradigm and this diversity paradigm makes it harder for us to navigate the challenges of race and racism in our lives as faithful Christians.

A final challenge that people encounter when it comes to teaching and learning about racism is perhaps the most obvious but least acknowledged. Our different racial identities tend to create such different experiences among racial groups that meaningful dialogue on race and action for racial justice can be complicated. This is often the case even among those who share an economic status but do not share a racial identity. To state it directly: white people in the United States tend to have a more difficult time talking about race and racism than do people of color because of their/our different experience with racist structures. Whites are more likely to fear discussions of race, less likely to believe that racism is an ongoing problem and

more likely to explain manifestations of racial injustice as isolated incidents rather than ongoing histories.³ White youth are affected by these tendencies. Studies indicate, for example, that white parents, who likely perceive the immediate dangers of racism as less threatening or relevant to their children, typically begin discussing race with them later in their children's lives, with less frequency and usually with less facility and preparedness than do parents of African American or Latino/a children, who perceive a clear, immediate threat to their children from the presence of racism in society, for which they feel compelled to prepare them.⁴

In short, we come to a conversation about responding to racism from different places—places deeply shaped by the racial differences that social structures generate in our lives.⁵ And this reality impacts work with youth and adults. If whites have had less support in identifying and discussing race, and white youth have had fewer adult models of interrupting and responding to racism than have their peers of color, their lenses and understanding can make learning and dialogue about racism with their peers of color more difficult than might be the case with other topics. Or, in an all-white group, these same lenses might make it difficult for the ongoing power and impact of racism today to be taken seriously—even and perhaps especially because some adults and many of our youth are fluent in the language of diversity.

But even though these challenges are real, fear not! The act of simply enabling a better understanding of how racism affects all our lives is itself one critical response to racism. Those of us who care deeply about justice and peace and who understand work for justice to be central to our call as Christians do well if we continue to work toward clarity about what racism is (and isn't), how our different experiences with it impact our relationships across racial lines, and how understanding both of these

better equips us to respond effectively to racism itself. As beautiful as it would be, our task is not to equip ourselves or others to achieve transformation of the entire globe in one fell swoop tomorrow. If we equip them in developing a clearer understanding of racism, then we are, in fact, preparing them to be able to respond to racism that they encounter in their lives.

This workshop is designed with all these complexities in mind. Its structure supports productive dialogue, whatever the racial demographic of your group.⁶ It is designed to provide participants a chance to experience (through a simple simulation) the reality that we are all affected by racism and show how this impact affects our racial self-understandings and identifications and our interpersonal relationships across racial lines.

Prejudice or Racism?

One of the most prevalent beliefs about racism, which this workshop is designed specifically to address, is that racism is the problem of people who have negative views of those who are racially different from themselves.

While negative views of those who are racially different are a real and important problem, this is one of the most significant confusions to stymie effective responses to and productive discussions about racism. So, the central focus of this workshop is on understanding the important difference between prejudice and racism. The benefits of this understanding matter in regard to all three challenges described at the beginning of this leader guide. First, clarity about prejudice and racism will enable the participants to identify the presence of structures of advantage and disadvantage based on race (racism). Second, it will make it possible to understand more clearly that our different relationships with these structures not only shape the lenses through which

we see them, but also impact our particular racial experience. Third, it will enable participants to distinguish racism and prejudice while recognizing that racism is the root cause of interracial tensions and creates perfect conditions for arriving at negative assumptions about other groups based on false or incomplete information (prejudice).

According to psychologist Beverly Daniel Tatum, prejudice is best understood as the stereotypes and negative assumptions any of us might hold about another racial group based on incomplete or false information. Prejudice is interpersonal. Prejudice is not the same thing as racism. Racism, writes Tatum, is a system of advantage and disadvantage based on race. It's structural. There are relationships between prejudice and racism, but they are distinct phenomenon.

Using Tatum's analysis, anybody of any race can demonstrate or act out of prejudice and can do so in relation to any other group—whites against Latino/as, Latino/as against Blacks, Blacks against whites, and so forth. But by definition, because of the nature of the structure of the United States (think back to the NYC example), only white people can be actively or passively complicit in racism. Our current social structures advantage white people while people of color are disadvantaged. A person of color can certainly have prejudice toward a white person or white people generally, but in almost no case does their doing so create a systemic disadvantage for white people.

Distinguishing racism and prejudice is not a game of semantics. If we are not clear in understanding what racism is, our responses to it will be ineffective! Consider this. What if we focused all of our energy on working against the phenomenon of people holding negative views of people racially different from themselves? If we woke up tomorrow after having successfully rid ourselves of all such

prejudicial thinking (wouldn't that be great?!), we would still wake up to lives lived in social structures where white Americans continued to benefit and receive privileges (advantages) while people of color continued to struggle (disadvantages). What a disappointment that would be and how far would we have missed the mark as we aimed to create racial justice.

Pursuing clarity here in our thinking and in the thinking of your participants is critical to developing a vision for what our antiracist responses might look like.

Both prejudice and racism need to be challenged and responded to. But we can't make serious inroads against prejudice if we don't also work against racism. And we are less likely to be able to work together against racism if we don't better understand how prejudice and inter-racial tensions relate to our different experiences with racist structures. So again, we're not talking semantics!

Indeed, if we choose to believe the prophet Micah, that what is good and what is required of us is to do justice and love kindness and walk humbly with our God, then careful consideration of one of the most confused and challenging dimensions of our life together in the United States makes this first (or ongoing) act of helping to explain and clarify racism central to our call. And it is more than that. Responding to that call is a doing and loving and walking that is deeply life-giving and hope-renewing as well.

Goal for the Workshop

The goal of our workshop is to identify the role that race plays in our own lives and the difference between prejudice and racism. Then we will consider antiracist responses.

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WORKSHOP INSTRUCTIONS*

Arriving (10 minutes)

Place individual numbers 1, 2, & 3 (folded so participants cannot see their chosen number) together in a basket. As participants arrive, have them draw one from the basket. This will determine which group they will be a part of during the game. If conducting this workshop virtually, consider using the [break out rooms](#) on *ZOOM Video Conferencing* to form groups.

Gathering (5 minutes)

Gather the group and go through the true/false list together from the PowerPoint on page 11 (or a method of your choosing) with the participants. Address, as a group, any questions that participants may have about the statements.

Opening (5 minutes)

1. Prayer and Scripture

Distribute the Participant Handout and say the prayer in unison. Have participants read *Micah 6:8*.

2. Do Justice?

Invite participants to come up with a definition of justice. Then briefly discuss what it means to “do” justice. As a group look again at some or all of the PPT slides from the activity and think about how justice relates to the statements.

Ask:

- Where do you see evidence of injustice on this list?
- What would justice look like?

Exploring (15 minutes)

3. The Game

The unfair set-up of this game (of which participants are initially unaware) is that group 1 will always win handily and group 3 will always struggle. To make

it most effective, the group leader should wander among the groups as they work on their “clues,” praising the succeeding group and expressing dismay toward the group(s) who struggle. Participants will quickly begin to react differently to the game and develop negative feelings toward the other groups. The unfair set up of the game will then become the example of RACISM. The negative assumptions and attitudes participants begin to experience toward the other groups become the example of PREJUDICE.

To begin, ask participants to look at the numbers drawn from their arrival and go to the spots designed for each of the three groups. If conducting the workshop virtually using *ZOOM*, explain the game and the rules to the larger group before sending the participants to their designated break out rooms.

Explain how the game works:

- The game will be conducted in two rounds of two and a half minutes each. In each round, groups will work together to identify a list of objects using a set of clues that are written down on a sheet of paper.
- Whichever group has the most points after the two rounds wins. (Only one group can win.)

Explain the rules:

- Groups must not talk to other groups during the game or get out of their seats.
- Within each group everyone has to agree on their final answer for each set of clues.
- The groups must write their answers down on the paper that lists the clues.

After explaining the game and the rules, hand out the first set of clues to each group (Game Clues, Round One—located on pages 12, 14 and 16).

Note: The clues are different, but, at this point, don't tell this to the participants! Give each group their questions for round one face down. *Each* participant in groups one and two gets a copy of the questions, but only give *one copy for the entire group* to group three. If conducting this workshop virtually using ZOOM, the [in-meeting file transfer](#) can be used to provide groups their questions.

When you say “go,” the groups may turn their clues over and start the two-and-a-half-minute round. Walk around the groups as they work, smiling at group one as you see them successfully identifying each item, sharing your consternation or confusion about why group three is struggling (perhaps even saying to them things like “You need to work harder and quicker”). If conducting this workshop virtually via Zoom, the above task can be accomplished by joining each group to check-in on their progress.

When you call time and rejoin the groups, begin with group three and ask them to share their answers. On the board or sheet of newsprint award twenty points for each correct answer. Make clear your disappointment if/when they do not get an item correct. Do the same with each group, showing them the discrepancies in the scores before they begin round two (Game Clues, Round Two—located on pages 13, 15 and 17).

Follow the same procedure for round two. Then declare group one the winner! (They always win.)

4. Debrief the Game

As soon as the game is concluded and you have declared a winner (but have not distributed the prize!), tell the participants that you are stepping out of the role you have been playing as game leader and that you need to admit to them the game was rigged. Ask someone in group one to read one of their clues and then someone in group three to read theirs.

To debrief, questions should include the following:

- What are your initial reactions to learning that the game was rigged?
- Ask each group how it felt while playing the game.
- Ask each group what they started to feel toward or think about other groups.
- What do you think your relationships with each other would have started to look like if we played this game for a long time and there was a really big reward at the end (like free college tuition or a huge raise for whichever group came out on top)?

The following themes will almost certainly emerge and should be emphasized:

- The successful group may have begun to think the other groups were “not as intelligent” or had something wrong with them (because they assumed the game was fair; this is the most common conclusion).
- The middle group is likely to have experienced a desire to just “work harder.” Close to keeping up, they buckle down and focus, thinking “if only” they do so, they can catch up.
- The third group is likely to have gotten frustrated, wanted to quit and begun to have negative feelings toward the successful group.

Point out to the participants the way the unfairness of the game affected the way they felt toward each other.

Invite member(s) of the “winning” group to take their prizes, then offer the “losing” group to choose their prize before then offering prizes to everyone else.

Responding (15 minutes)

5. Prejudice and Racism

Explain to the participants that their reactions to the game help illustrate the difference between racism

and prejudice, as well as the relationship between these two terms. Direct them to the *Participant Handout* where the definitions are located.

Ask participants the following questions:

- How does your experience of the game help illustrate the difference between racism and prejudice?
- How does your experience of the game help you understand the way in which prejudice is a result of racism?
- How does learning that the game is rigged (racism) help you rethink your experience of prejudice?
- How do the structural rules of the game impact how you see the list of true statements that we compiled in our first activity?

Emphasize these teaching points:

- Structures of racism mean that some groups “get more” than others and it has nothing to do with intelligence, effort or ability.
- Because we don’t always see that racism is at work, we interpret its effects as meaning that something is wrong with other groups (“people of color don’t work hard enough” or “white people cheat”).
- Racism negatively affects some groups, unfairly gives others advantages, and makes tensions between racial groups higher.

6. What Can I Do?

Invite the participants to strategize how they could disrupt the game. Questions to discuss:

- Groups one and two: Once you know the game is rigged, what could you do to interrupt it (call the game master out, refuse to play, share the clues with other groups and so forth)?
- Groups two and three: What kinds of behaviors would you want from group one so that you would know that you could trust that they were going to help you challenge the rules of the game and make it more fair?

Closing (10 minutes)

7. One Thing We Can Do

Spend a minute and allow any person in the group to say one thing they will consider doing about racism. It might be an individual effort or an idea for a group of people. An alternative option is to invite each person to say one thing they learned from this lesson.

8. Covenant Prayer

Say this prayer or one of your choosing:

God of justice, we want to learn what is good and how to do justice. We commit together to keep learning, growing and challenging together those structures that harm your beloved children and keep us from caring for each other as we should. Give us courage and vision to challenge prejudice and racism and to encourage those around us to do the same. Amen.

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Game Answers

Make copies of the participant **Game Clues** (pages 12–17) to be distributed to the three groups during the game. Copy enough for one sheet per player, *except* for group three, which should only receive *one* sheet for the entire group to share.

Round One

- Item 1: ruler
- Item 2: chalkboard
- Item 3: apple
- Item 4: shoes

Round Two

- Item 5: calendar
- Item 6: microwave
- Item 7: roller blades/skates
- Item 8: jump rope

Workshop Leader Notes for PowerPoint

[Download PowerPoint Leader Notes \(PDF\)](#)

Workshop PowerPoint Presentation

[Download PowerPoint Presentation \(PPT\)](#)

Workshop Endnotes

1. National Center for Educational Statistics at <http://nces.ed.gov>.
2. “For Whites (Like Me): On White Kids” <https://charterforcompassion.org/for-whites-like-me-on-white-kids>.
3. “Race shapes Zimmerman verdict reaction” (2013, July 22). *The Washington Post*, www.washingtonpost.com/.
4. Erin N. Winkler, “Children are Not Colorblind: How Young Children Learn Race,” <https://inclusions.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Children-are-Not-Colorblind.pdf>.
5. Beverly Daniel Tatum, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?: and Other Conversations on Race* (New York: Basic, 1997).
6. The game (How Does Racism Work?) used in the exploring section is a modification of an exercise first created by Anne Rhodes (Ithaca College).
7. Statistics for facts presented on the true/false slides of PowerPoint presentation can be found on the following web sites:
www.nationaljournal.com/;
<http://ac360.blogs.cnn.com/2008/08/09/study-black-man-and-white-felon-same-chances-for-hire/>;
www.pewresearch.org;
www.ipsnews.net/;
www.nytimes.com/;
www.slate.com/;
<https://deathpenaltyinfo.org/executions/executions-overview/executions-by-race-and-race-of-victim>;
www.civilrights.org/equal-opportunity/fact-sheets/fact_sheet_packet.pdf;
www.sentencingproject.org/template/page.cfm?id=122.

Workshop Writer

Jennifer Harvey is a writer, speaker and educator on racial and gender justice, faith-based activism and Christian Ethics. She teaches at Drake University, is the author of *Whiteness and Morality: Pursuing Racial Justice through Reparations and Sovereignty*.

Game Clues

Group 1 · Round 1

Item 1

- Has a rectangular shape
- Has lines
- Used for measuring
- Contains numbers that go up to twelve

Item 2

- Can be square or rectangular
- Comes in different colors
- Used with a dusty substance the color of snow
- Usually found in places of learning
- Usually found on the wall

Item 3

- Many colors and sizes
- Has thin or thick exterior
- Grows on trees
- Can be found in pies or on a stick

Item 4

- Ranges in size
- Comes in pairs
- Has a sole
- Worn on the lower half of the body

Game Clues

Group 1 · Round 2

Item 5

Shows the months, weeks, days of the year
Keeps you organized
Is made out of paper or kept electronically
Might hang on the wall or be in the form of an app

Item 6

Rectangular
Uses energy
Has door and timer
Heats up objects

Item 7

Form of transportation
Has eight wheels (each in the pair has four wheels)
Can be entertaining
Brakes are usually made of rubber
Only one person can use them at a time

Item 8

6' to 8' end to end
Made of wood or plastic and twisted fiber
Has handles
Used by children and athletes
For fun, exercise
Involves jumping or skipping

Game Clues

Group 2 · Round 1

Item 1

- Has a rectangular shape
- Has lines
- Has many uses
- 6" to 36" long

Item 2

- Way to communicate
- Can be square or rectangular
- Comes in different colors

Item 3

- Many colors and sizes
- Has thin or thick exterior
- Has many uses
- Grows on trees

Item 4

- Ranges in size
- Comes in pairs
- Used for protection

Game Clues

Group 2 · Round 2

Item 5

Keeps you organized
Is made out of paper or kept electronically
Has to be updated on a regular basis

Item 6

Rectangular
Three dimensional
Uses energy
Heats up objects

Item 7

Form of transportation
Has eight cylinders
Can be entertaining
Popular during the 1980s

Item 8

6' to 8' end to end
Made of wood and fiber
Has handles
For fun, exercise

Game Clues

Group 3 · Round 1

Item 1

A stick of wood or plastic

Item 2

Way to communicate

Can be square or rectangular

Comes in different colors

Item 3

Many colors and sizes

Edible

Item 4

Ranges in size

Can be open or closed

Game Clues

Group 3 · Round 2

Item 5

Is made of paper or can be electronic
Has to be updated

Item 6

Found in a home
Has three dimensions
Has a timer

Item 7

Form of transportation
Has eight cylinders

Item 8

Made of wood and fiber
Has handles
Flexible

PARTICIPANT HANDOUT*

Racial Equity Workshop

Racial Identities Matter

Our racial identities affect our experiences with education, employment and many other areas of our lives—including our relationships with each other. The prophet Micah tells us that God requires of us justice and kindness. Learning to recognize the ways unjust social structures affect our lives and the lives of others can help all of us to begin or to further develop concrete strategies to work against racism.

Prayer

Our hearts and minds
long for a world where justice is real.
May each of us,
with our different experiences,
our unique identities,
learn to take strong steps
of courage and compassion
to bring such a world into being.
Amen.

Micah 6:8

*He has told you, O mortal, what is good;
and what does the LORD require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?*

Definitions Matter

Prejudice includes stereotypes and negative assumptions that any of us might hold about another racial group based on incomplete or false information. Prejudice is NOT the same thing as racism. A person of any racial group might hold prejudice against another group.

Racism is a system of advantage and disadvantage based on race. It's structural. There are relationships between prejudice and racism, but they are distinct phenomenon. For racism to happen a group must suffer systemic disadvantage. **Power + Prejudice = Racism**

PARTICIPANT HANDOUT (cont.)

Reflection Questions

Where do you see examples of prejudice and examples of racism playing out at your church, in your neighborhood or in your community? What can you imagine doing to make sure that you are being an ally against both prejudice and racism?

What makes challenging prejudice or racism hard? What resources could you draw on to give you support in doing this?

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Continue to Educate Yourself!

Visit the Racial Equity page on Presbyterian Women's website at www.presbyterianwomen.org/antiracism. There you can download a list of [PW-offered resources](#) and [recommended books/videos](#) and download the [Racial Equity Education Challenge](#).



WORDS OF LOVE DON'T KILL EACH OTHER

by Stephanie M. Patterson

I'd like to talk to you about words of love.

This term that I am using “words of love” was presented to PW by Eugenia Anne Gamble, the author of the 2019–2020 PW/*Horizons* Bible Study, *Love Carved in Stone: A Fresh Look at the Ten Commandments*. In this Bible study, Eugenia provides us with words, or phrases, of love:

(1) I Am Your God; You Shall Have No Others, (2) Don't Trivialize My Name, (3) Keep Sabbath, (4) Honor the Life-givers, (6) Hold Your Marriages Sacred, (7) Do Not Steal, (8) Speak Truthfully, (9) Don't Fixate on What You Don't Have, and our focus for this moment, (5) Don't Kill Each Other.¹

Eugenia states that the purpose of this particular lesson in the Bible study is to understand the many faces of murder and how the community is to honor life by refusing any and all death-dealing behaviors. Have you considered racism as a type of murder?

For what is murder, but

- (1) the killing of the spirit,
- (2) the killing of one's self-esteem,
- (3) and the killing of one's capacity to survive.

The choices we make, even if that choice is to do nothing or to be silent, can destroy and diminish life.

Recently, while I was teaching a technology class to adults in Louisville, Kentucky, we deviated from our course topic to rejoice about the tenth birthday of the son of one of my students. The class began discussing what a treat it was for a child to become a preteen because the doors of independence begin to open a little wider. They're growing up.

My students talked joyfully about what they taught to their preteen children. Even though the conversation continued to be upbeat and filled with laughter, my body began to fill with anxiety as I began to remember my conversation with my son when he turned 10. Even though he was

a multi-racial kid, no one was going to stop and ask him, “How do you identify?” before jumping to conclusions. When he walked into a room when he was 10 or even today—people fail to see the potential in his life, in my beloved child, all most people see is just another black male. As my class continued their conversation, one of my students with a bubbly, optimistic attitude, asked me the question, “Professor Patterson, do you have a son?” I replied that I did, then the student asked, “Well, what did you teach him when he was a preteen?”

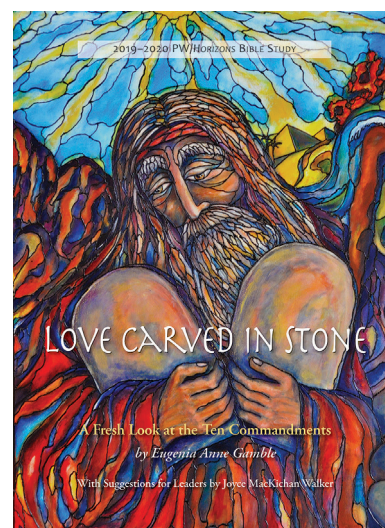
At that moment, I had the opportunity to tell my truth or to brush over the question to try to maintain the oblivious comfort of my class. Well, as an educator, I elected to tell my truth. I informed my students that when my son turned 10, I told him he would no longer be able to walk into a store wearing a hood or hat, even in the dead of winter. I instructed my son that he would no longer be able to keep his hands inside his jacket pockets inside establishments, even if he was cold or simply because it was comfortable. I only told my son a few more things, because I did not want to overwhelm him with this new set of rules, because he was only 10. But I knew, as people of color, we needed to begin the conversation, because he would be looked at by some

as older, even if he did still have a cute little baby face. And more importantly, he would be looked at by others as a threat because black males are singled out as being inherently suspect.

The behaviors I cautioned my son about are considered signs of aggression in black males. Each one of those behaviors has been enough reason for a white person to shoot or kill a black person. They are examples of how white comfort sometimes takes precedence over the freedom and even basic safety of black children, youth and adults. Not only did the talk potentially kill my son’s spirit, it also killed my spirit to have this type of talk with him. But again, I knew it was necessary in an effort to keep my child safe and ultimately alive. Racism had made me an accessory to murder—**the killing of the spirit.**

As I explained to my son that he was no longer able to do certain things, we talked about how these unwritten rules are unfair and unjust. I told him he should still strive to love diversity as God does and love everyone as God intended, and that he should always look for the best in people, even if people don’t care to look for the best in him.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus significantly expands our view of the Sixth Commandment or Sixth Word, as Eugenia so



The 2019–2020 PW/Horizons Bible Study, *Love Carved in Stone: A Fresh Look at the Ten Commandments* by Eugenia Anne Gamble.

**You shall
not murder!**
Exodus 20:13

gracefully puts it. “You shall not Murder.” Here, Jesus expands murder to include being angry with another person, insulting another person and calling a person a fool. Each of these infractions sets in motion escalating consequences. The one who is angry will face judgment. The one who insults another will be brought before the Jewish Council for punishment and the one who calls another a fool will face the fires of hell. It is likely that Jesus is not speaking of hell as we understand it today. Rather, he is saying that when we speak words that shatter a life and leave a person shamed and damaged, we ourselves become useless and damaged. Harsh words! In this

passage, Jesus urges us toward reconciliation and kindness, in our relationships, at all costs. Without our relationships, retaliation, retribution and division will render us useless to the kingdom.

In this brief teaching, Jesus identifies anger as a prime motivation for murder. Whether murder is physical, psychological or spiritual, it is the same violation. Jesus urges his listeners to examine and come to terms with rage in ways that do not defile others, that does not kill one's self-esteem. For failing to do so can result in death to relationships and to our own moral compasses.

Eugenia included a short story in Lesson Five of the current bible study. She says, "I remember once, as a chronically ill child, being assigned a substitute runner for a softball game in our Physical Education class. As I stood at bat, I overheard a child new to school ask a classmate why I didn't run the bases myself. My classmate answered, "Oh, that's Genie. She's broken." There was no intentional harm there, but a wound was inflicted that stayed with me and shaped my self-esteem."

Sometimes, friends, even though our intent is oh so innocent, the impact it carries can inflict deadly harm—**the killing of one's self-esteem.**



Eugenia Gamble introducing the 2019–2020 PW/Horizons Bible Study, *Love Carved in Stone: A Fresh Look at the Ten Commandments.*

We've spoken about a killing of the spirit and a killing of one's self-esteem. Well, what about a killing of one's capacity to survive? In the manner we are accustomed to thinking about murder—the physical type—we have seen reports of these physical murders for years. We continue to hear of people murdered by strangers or police because their race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation or other identities were perceived as a threat to white supremacy—Antonio Gómez (14), DeJuan Guillory (27), Muhlaysia Booker (22), Javier Amir Rodriguez (15), Stephon Clark (22), Jordan Edwards (15), Dana Martin (31), Terence Crutcher (40), Philando Castile (32), Nikki Enriquez (28), Gregory Gunn (58), Emmett Till (14), Sandra Bland (28), Tamir Rice (12) just to name a few.

Yes, we have the physical aspect of murder, but we want to focus, for just a minute, on the killing of one's ability to live.

In the United States, Native people's capacity to survive has been threatened since Europeans first arrived and started laying claim to Native American's ancestral lands. To build the new country, the fledgling U.S. government "authorized over 1,500 wars, attacks and raids on [Native Americans], the most of any country in the world against its indigenous people."² In addition to this government-sanctioned violence, Native people were repeatedly promised safety and autonomy further west through various acts and treaties that were largely broken by the U.S. government. "From 1830 to 1840, the U.S. army removed

60,000 Indians—Choctaw, Creek, Cherokee and others—from the East in exchange for new territory west of the Mississippi.”³ Thousands of Native Americans died from starvation and disease during this forced relocation that became known as the Trail of Tears. Between 5 and 15 million indigenous people lived in North America prior to European colonization, but only 238,000 at the close of the 19th century.⁴ Today, Native people still experience racism in a number of ways, most widely through paltry funding for Native healthcare,⁵ and less funding for infrastructure than for white communities⁶—**the killing of one’s capacity to survive.**

In general, this Word, “You shall not murder,” has to do with executing vengeance or destruction and is used in relation to both active and passive choices. It applies to things we choose to do and to things that happen without our conscious choice but with which we are somehow complicit. It is also used to describe things that we do nothing about or don’t try to stop. It refers to the taking of human life, especially innocent life, in any way, and to all acts of violence and retaliation that impart grievous harm that cannot be undone.

I challenge you as individuals and as a faith-community to

pause and reflect on ways that we “murder” unintentionally or passively, then search your heart to intentionally try to make amends. Your journey to educate yourselves on the topic of racial issues is a great beginning.

So, when God says, “You shall not murder,” remember that the prohibition includes the death of a body, or a spirit or of hope for a future.

In the words of the author Ijeoma Oluo, “Yes, racism and racial oppression in America is horrible and terrifying. The feelings it brings up in us are justified . . . it is in every corner of our lives. We have to let go of some of that fear. We need to be able to look racism in the eye wherever we encounter it. If we continue to treat racism like it is a giant monster that is chasing us, we will be forever running. But running won’t help when it’s in our workplace, our government, our churches, our homes, and ourselves.”⁷ These conversations will not be easy, but they will get easier over time.

I am so glad that you are willing to talk about racial issues. And I’m honored to be a part of this conversation with you.

Stephanie M. Patterson is multimedia associate/designer for Presbyterian Women, Inc. and staff to the Justice & Peace (J&P) Committee and Racial Equity Committee (REC) of PW’s churchwide board of directors.

NOTES

1. Some portions taken directly from the 2019–2020 PW/Horizons Bible Study, *Love Carved in Stone: A Fresh Look at the Ten Commandments* by Eugenia Anne Gamble.
2. Donald L. Fixico, “When Native Americans Were Slaughtered in the Name of ‘Civilization,’” History.com, Updated August 16, 2019; www.history.com/news/native-americans-genocide-united-states.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Joyce Frieden, “Native Americans Need More Funding to Battle COVID-19, Lawmakers Told,” MedPageToday.com, June 12, 2020; www.medpagetoday.com/infectiousdisease/covid19/87032
6. Jordan Davidson, “2 Million Americans Lack Clean Water Access, Especially Native Americans,” EcoWatch.com, November 18, 2019; www.ecowatch.com/clean-water-us-indigenous-2641381524.html.
7. Ijeoma Oluo, *So You Want to Talk About Race* (New York: Seal, 2019), 7.

Let us pray

Oh God of life and love, again we thank you for the precious gift of life itself. We thank you for placing us in a community in which we share that life together. Help us, Lord, to examine our hearts, lives and community for that which diminishes life. Help us root it out. Help us not to kill with a casual word or with the thoughtless inaction. We are grateful for every moment of each day. Thank you. In Jesus’ holy name we pray. Amen.



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