



# CREATIVE PARENTING

*The Christian perspective for a happier, healthier home life*

## Parenting Against Prejudice

BY SUSAN E. MURRAY

No family's history is devoid of prejudice or the pain of *isms*. The suffix *ism* has a negative connotation in our culture. We tend to tack *isms* onto painful problems and/or sicknesses—as in racism, alcoholism, and workaholicism. A respected psychologist once said, “Ism’s are the viruses that destroy human society.”

Perhaps your parents and their parents before them held strong views about lifestyles, social class, religion, politics, and race; but they likely were rarely or never expressed openly. Nevertheless, those views made their impression and became such a part of your present-day thinking that you are probably not even aware of their origins.

It was a winter evening in Oakland, California, when I was about eight or nine years old. I was driving with my father and uncle. All of a sudden my dad stepped on the brakes, swearing at some men crossing the street in front of us.

Peering up between my dad and uncle from the back seat, I saw three young black men dressed in their Navy uniforms just crossing the street! I immediately caught my father's emotions, but I was confused. Did he have such a negative attitude towards them because they were in the Navy (and he was an Army man), or was it because they were “colored”?

The impression was made, but there was never any discussion of the incident. I had never seen this kind of reaction by an adult before, but it affected me!

We know our children learn more from our modeling and attitudes than from our cautions and directives. We must ask ourselves hard questions: How does being a Christian change our prejudices? What messages are we giving to our children when we say we love one another but have a hard time extending that love to certain people? Obviously it takes time for Jesus to mold us into His image, so it stands to reason that it takes time to rid ourselves of prejudices towards people who are different from us, whether that be in lifestyle, work priorities, cultural traditions, religion, or race.

I would encourage you to take your own personal journey

of tracing your family's history of prejudice if you've not done it until now. An important part of that journey is to recognize where our own values and prejudices have come from. I would invite you to ask yourself this question: What's an early memory you have that gave you the message some people were different from you and that it was okay, or not okay? If you want to understand why it is you feel the way you do about people unlike yourself, some sleuthing about your family background is a must. This is a very personal process, and it will take some time and energy. However, it will assist you in several ways.

Barbara Mathias and Mary Ann French, authors of *40 Ways to Raise a Nonracist Child*, suggest this process will help you to: 1) define your present point of view, 2) rethink your opinions on race and racism and other prejudices, and 3) communicate better with your child by breaking family patterns that are destructive or misleading.

You might ask yourself some of these questions: When were you first aware of people unlike yourself, in race or way of life? How old were you? This seems to make a difference.

What were your feelings about those unlike yourself? Can you recall how your parents expressed their opinions and feelings? Your grandparents? Were differences in people talked about openly in your family, or were differences mentioned in off-hand remarks, jokes, and stereotypes?

Examine some of the factors outside your family that influenced your opinions about race: How diverse was your neighborhood, school, church? How did your teachers and friends feel? What were the racial and religious issues in the country and in your community during your upbringing?

Perhaps your family has been on the other side of prejudice. What are your family stories? How do you want your children to respond to the multi-cultural world in which they are living? It is not uncommon for non-Christians and Christians alike to have difficulty admitting that our prejudices even exist. We intellectualize the pain of others, mean well, and sincerely pray for guidance in accepting those different from us. But children know wherein our prejudices lie. They catch it from the innuendoes, the stereotypes, the attitudes, the things not said.

May I suggest that a healthy part of being a growing Christian is to explore with our family things that may be difficult to talk about. How are children to learn to love and appreciate all God's people if they don't have a safe place to ask questions and find out what their parents value? What a challenge, a wonderful challenge to serve and try to emulate a God who truly is not a “respector of persons,” who has promised equality for each of us, and who has shown us by His own unselfish life how to love and accept others regardless of their differences from us—their sex, religion, race, or cultural heritage.

It's never too late to start doing things differently, its not too late to parent against prejudice!