



Jesus Christ Knows the Pain We Feel from Prejudice

By Sónia N.

My quest is to see people as the Saviour would see them.

I have experienced prejudice or discrimination in one form or another for almost 20 years.

After joining the Church in Mozambique, I moved to South Africa. It is a beautiful country, one of the most prosperous in Africa. Its beauty is accentuated by the diversity of its people and a richness in culture.

South Africa is a nation that is still healing from a history clouded by racial segregation. Although apartheid was formally abolished in 1994, the scars of this previous policy of government-implemented racism still remain.

As a Black Mozambican Latter-day Saint woman living in South Africa for the past 18 years, I navigate discrimination and exclusion, often displayed as microaggression. Racism, classism, tribalism, sexism, and xenophobia are a few examples of the ills of segregation that society still faces. There is something within the natural man that seems to want to divide society and make us believe that being different is bad.



At the Rome Italy Temple open house, members and friends surround the Christus statue, as seen through the visitors' center window.

The Saviour also faced prejudice because of who He was, what He believed, and where He was from (see John 1:46). Yet He did not respond with violence, anger, bitterness, or hate. He taught against all of these things and acted in love and truth. He taught that power and influence come through persuasion, long-suffering, gentleness, meekness, and love (see Doctrine and Covenants 121:41). He taught that when we are offended, we should go to our brother and talk it over together (see Matthew 18:15). He taught us to pray for those who persecute us (see Matthew 5:38–48). And when He was tried unjustly and hung on a cross to die, He taught us to forgive (see Luke 23:34).

Ultimately, it is His love that will change us and the world (see 2 Nephi 26:24).

What We Try to Do

Can members of the Church be susceptible to this way of thinking? Absolutely. We must all put off the natural man in our lifelong effort to become saints through the Atonement of Christ (see Mosiah 3:19).

Whenever my children and I feel isolated, overlooked, stereotyped, or viewed as a curiosity, we come home and talk about it. We say, “What has just happened? Let’s unpack this. Let’s talk about why people behave this way.” Talking about it helps to stop our feelings from festering inside of us.

I try to teach my kids that our greatness is determined by how we treat the people who are marginalized or ostracized in society (see Matthew 25:40). That can mean looking for ways to reach out to others so that we aren’t excluding them.

I’m Trying to Be like Jesus

As painful as some of the experiences are, the lessons we are learning are making my children better people. And me too. Our disappointments have helped us develop compassion and empathy for others.

Experiences with prejudice give me an opportunity to choose. Am I going to be bitter and retaliate, or am I going to give that person not only another chance but a second, a third, and a fourth chance? Am I going to see society as a horrible place, or am I going to be a force for positive change?

And I’ll Keep Trying

I’m not a perfect person; I don’t always forgive immediately after someone affronts me. It takes time, it takes healing, and it takes the Holy Ghost working with me. Sometimes I choose to be offended, and I don’t immediately embrace His promptings. But if I am open to Him, the Spirit patiently works with me until I’m able to understand what Heavenly Father would have me do with the situation.

My quest is to truly see people as the Saviour would see them. To do that, we must be willing to acknowledge that we don’t have all the answers. When we are willing to say, “I’m not perfect; I have a lot to learn. What can I learn from the perspectives of others?”—*that* is when we are really able to hear. *That* is when we are truly able to see.

As I go through this journey, it helps to remember that I’m here for a purpose, that the trials of life are temporary—a necessary part

of mortality—and that I am not alone. Through it all, I'm trying to be like Jesus! *Trying* is active, and when we fail, we can try again. ■

The author lives in Gauteng Province, South Africa.

MORE STORIES LIKE THIS

We can learn a lot from the experiences of others. Join us in this month's online issue to read the following stories:

- Alissia shares the difficulties of being different from others at church, as well as the strengths our differences can bring. Read "We Are Better Together."
- Gabriel describes the choice he faced when unexpectedly experiencing religious discrimination. Read "Facing Prejudice in the Workplace."
- After facing years of rejection because of her children's disabilities, Miyuki found a place of refuge and personal growth in the Church. Read "Finding Belonging in Christ."

