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## Prejudice in the Early Church

### Acts 6

*Sojourners* magazine published a study guide on race. In that guide, racism is referred to as the United States' "original sin." They name it so because slavery was allowed by the Constitution, and it had an early foothold on the country that has plagued it to this day. Unfortunately the church has often followed society. Instead of challenging the racism that followed emancipation, the church succumbed to segregation. Most churches were segregated; young African Americans dressed for church on Sunday were turned away from worship at "white" churches. Many Klan members claimed Christianity. Today, the church still lags in challenging racism.

GROUP DISCUSSION. Define the terms *racism*, *prejudice* and *discrimination*. How are they different? How are they related?

PERSONAL REFLECTION. How have you struggled with the area of race and racism? What are the ways in which racism affects you? What are your sins associated with race? How have you been sinned against?

Being in the minority is seldom easy. This was especially true for the Greek-speaking Christians in the early church. In this passage, we see how the early church dealt with prejudice and the effects this had on leadership and perspectives for the future of the church. *Read Acts 6.*

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**1.** Which widows were being neglected (v. 1)?

Why do you suppose this happened?

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**2.** The names of the men chosen indicate that they were Greek-speaking (v. 5). Why was this important?

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**3.** Why was it also important that the men were chosen by the whole group (v. 5)?

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**4.** What do we learn about Stephen in verses 8-15?

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**5.** Who began to oppose Stephen (vv. 8-10)?

What motivations might the other Greek-speaking people have had in opposing him?

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**6.** Stephen was brought to trial before the Sanhedrin, the high court of the Jews (v. 12). Why might a Grecian Jew have had a problem getting a fair trial before a jury of Hebraic Jews?

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**7.** What similarities and dissimilarities exist in the racial situation within the church today?

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**8.** Why do you think the cultural and racial elements in this passage are often not discussed?

What does this say about our own sensitivity to racial and cultural issues?

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**9.** What kinds of factors determine whether a church is meeting the needs of different groups of people?

**10.** How might churches with different racial makeups relate or form partnerships?

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**11.** How would our churches and our society be different if everyone was empowered for leadership as exemplified in this passage?

*Pray about areas in your life where you have avoided or not sought out opportunities to relate to others, or when you have failed to welcome others into your circles.*

**Now or Later**

To become more familiar with the issues of racism and prejudice, collect newspaper articles on racism during the week before or after the study. Brainstorm about ways that your group or church could become more involved in dealing with these issues.