

## Music, Bible Stories, and Prayer

### Children and Anti-Racism

As children and families engage in the work of anti-racism today, much can be learned from the practices of civil rights leaders in years past who incorporated music, Bible stories, and prayer into the Civil Rights Movement of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The following resources can be used to help create a Christ-centered foundation for anti-racism work today.

### Music

The liberation of Black people, both as enslaved people and more recently in the Civil Rights Movement, has been fueled by music. Music has served as the primary link for Black U.S. Americans to their African past, and in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, it is fuel for those who have been part of the Civil Rights Movement. Music was present in the marching, meetings, incarceration, fighting, celebrating, and lamenting. (Wyatt Tee Walker, *Somebody's Calling My Name: Black Sacred Music and Social Change*) It was the strength of God woven throughout the movement, and that same strength of God is woven throughout the work of anti-racism today. The following two songs can be used to help educate and empower children in their anti-racism work today.

#### **“This Little Light of Mine”**

**This little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine  
Oh, this little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine  
This little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine  
Let it shine, all the time, let it shine**

Many U.S. American Sunday school classes teach that the “light” in this song refers to Jesus, and that we need to “let it shine” so that others will know about him. While this is true, for Civil Rights leader Dr. Bernice Johnson Reagon and other Black people during the Civil Rights Movement, the story in the song is that the “light” is life! “This song says, ‘I am not covering up my light. I am not going to move in society where I am obscure and operate in the shadows. If I am not dead, you are going to see me holding space.’” (Bernice Johnson Reagon. [“Music that Inspired the Civil Rights Movement: Student Workshop at the White House.”](#))

Children and families can listen to and sing this song together and imagine the significance of the lyrics to those suffering under racial oppression.

To watch and listen to the Chicago Children’s Choir sing a version of “This Little Light of Mine,” please click this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FzPU1Tb8tmw>

To learn more about “This Little Light of Mine” in antiracism work during the Civil Rights Movement, please watch this video featuring Dr. Reagon: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YkEvaYnZ1uM>

## **“You Matter” by Len Plick**

**You’ve been through the battles, you’ve been through the wars  
You don’t understand it, what all this fighting is for  
You just close your eyes and, hope that it goes away  
Hope that it goes away  
You search for your meaning, but doubt clouds your mind  
You’ll see you mean something, in the eyes of the Giver of life  
You just close your eyes and, hope that you fly away  
You hope that you fly away  
These are just words and  
You don’t have to hear what I say, hear what I say  
Oh, I want you to know  
You matter! You matter!**

“You Matter” is a song written more recently as a reminder that *your life matters*. It illustrates the powerful truth that all have been created with love in the image of God—you matter to God, the Giver of Life. This song can be used to support conversations with children about the Black Lives Matter Movement. At an age-appropriate level, adults can discuss with children the importance of recognizing that when a specific person or group of people are being hurt or treated unfairly because of the color of their skin, we need to talk about that and do something to change it.

To listen to this entire song, find it here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aojgncHTGDo&t=4s>

The following are additional music related resources to support anti-racism work with children:

- India Arie - “What If” (song with lyrics): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TiiBIHbqNMQ>
- Kids VT - “[Songs to Facilitate Parent-Child Conversations About Race](#)”
- Sesame Workshop - “[Coming Together: Talking to Children About Race, Ethnicity, and Culture](#)”

## **Bible Stories**

Scripture is woven with stories and passages of the liberating and radical love of God. The Scripture stories suggested are a few which may be helpful as young people learn about anti-racism. These stories will likely be more tangible for children if read from a children’s Bible. The following children’s Bibles are a good place to start:

- *Children of God Storybook Bible* (COG) by Archbishop Desmond Tutu
- *The Children’s Bible in 365 Stories* (CB365) by Mary Batchelor and John Haysom
- *Growing in God’s Love: A Story Bible* (GGL) Edited by Elizabeth F. Caldwell and Carol A. Wehrheim
- *Kids Spark NRSV Bible* (KSB) by Augsburg Fortress
- *The Spark Story Bible: A Journey Through God’s Word* (SSB) by Debra Thorpe Hetherington

During and after reading these passages, the Wondering Questions can help prompt meaningful conversation.

### **Genesis 1:1-31—Diversity of Creation**

*(Found in COG, CB365, GGL, KSB, SSB)*

God created everything with love and diversity. In fact, God Godself is a diverse, triune God as the Creator, Son, and Holy Spirit. We have been created with diversity in God’s image.

- ❖ I Wonder ...Why did God use so many colors when God created the earth? Why did God create YOU? What is your favorite color from God’s creation? What is your favorite smell from God’s creation? What is your favorite sound from God’s creation? How do you take care of God’s creation?

### **Luke 4:18—Jesus at the Synagogue; Fulfillment of Isaiah 61**

*(Found in CB365, KSB, SSB)*

God entered into this world through Jesus, a brown-skinned, poor, Palestinian Jew. Jesus saw the oppressed, he lived for the oppressed, he died for the oppressed. Followers of Jesus are called to do the same today. Jesus came as a liberator, which means that he came for the freedom of Black people in the United States. (James H. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*) This is good news, indeed. Jesus cares deeply for those who are treated badly by those with power, and he invites us to do the same.

- I Wonder... If you could have lunch with Jesus, what would you eat? What would you ask him or talk to him about? How Jesus was a good friend? What can you do to love and care for people the way Jesus did?

### **Luke 10:25-37—The Parable of the Good Samaritan**

*(Found in COG, CB365, GGL, KSB, SSB)*

For a helpful commentary on the parable as it relates to anti-racism work, please read [“The Good Samaritan Teaches Us Black Lives Matter”](#).

- I Wonder... Have you ever helped someone who was hurt or sad? Has someone ever helped you when you were hurt or sad? What it felt like for the injured person to be passed over by the people who walked on by?

### **John 4:1-42—Jesus and the Woman of Samaria**

*(Found in GGL, KSB, SSB)*

Jesus intentionally went into Samaria, a place that Jews generally avoided. He went out of his way to connect with a Samaritan woman, treating her with dignity and respect.

- I Wonder... Have you ever had a new student in your class at school? Have you ever been a new student in a class at school? What is a question you could ask a new student in your class? What would you tell that student about yourself?

For guidance in finding a children’s Bible that is a good fit for your family, here is a helpful article by Illustrated Ministry reviewing several popular children’s Bibles: <https://www.illustratedministry.com/tag/bible/>

For place to start conversation that is not a particular bible story, [What Is God Like?](#) by Rachel Held Evans is a lovely picture book that draws on Scripture to describe who God is and what God is like.

## **Prayer**

One important element to anti-racism work is the ability to see the beauty of the diversity of God’s creation. When we choose to truly see our neighbors—those whom Jesus has called us to love—then we are able to see what matters to them, see how they hurt, see what brings them joy. Prayer is the starting point for developing this gift of sight. Here are two prayer opportunities for children.

### **Breath Prayer: Help Me to See, Help Me to Love**

Children of all ages can incorporate breath prayer as they engage in anti-racism practices. The following script may be used to facilitate this breath prayer. It may be done with one child or a whole group of children. Eventually, this is a practice that children can learn to incorporate on their own at any time and in any place:

*“First, get nice and comfortable either sitting up in a chair, sitting on the floor, lying down... whatever feels good to you. Close your eyes or just soften your gaze. Now, put your hand on your belly and notice your breath. Notice the rhythm as you inhale and exhale. Feel your hand move up and down as your lungs expand and contract. What*

a gift this is. Now, think of the word that you like to use for 'God.' Maybe it's: God, Lord, Jesus, Spirit, Father, Mother, Parent, Creator. Do you have your word ready? Now, as you inhale, breathe in that word for God. As you exhale, breathe out the words, 'Help me to see.' Breathe in your word for God, and breathe out 'Help me to see.' Try that a few times on your own. As you do this, imagine God opening your eyes and allowing you to see other people the way God sees them—as precious, beloved people. (Wait a few moments for them to inhale and exhale several times.) Next, inhale your word for God, and exhale the words, 'Help me to love.' Inhale your God word, and exhale 'Help me to love.' Do this a few times on your own. As you do this, imagine God filling you with so much love that it overflows, and you want to share it with everyone around you. Now, slowly open your eyes. Stretch your arms way up in the air, wiggle your fingers. Let's give thanks to God for giving us breath, for hearing our prayer, and for helping us to see and to love our neighbors. Amen.”

### **Psalm of Lament**

In his book, *How to Fight Racism: Courageous Christianity and the Journey toward Racial Justice*, Jemar Tisby writes, “If you have not learned to lament, you have not learned to love. To love someone is to know and be known, which means opening oneself up to the possibility of being hurt by another. In love, we leave ourselves vulnerable to the failings and flaws of others. When love is betrayed and people hurt others because of racial arrogance, it is cause for lament.”

Children may write their own Anti-Racism Psalm of Lament to help them learn to love on their anti-racism journey. This may be adapted according to age, but the following basic formula may be used:

For older children:

(Older children could use other means of artistic expression for their psalms of lament, such as spoken word, painting, dance, etc.)

1. **Declaration of Pain-** Tell God how either you yourself are hurting because of racism, or tell God how you see someone else hurting because of racism. (“God, so many Black people are being hurt by the police. Why?”)
2. **Proclamation of God Seeing That Pain-** Call on God to see the way people are suffering from racism. (“God, I know that you see them and love them. You see their pain. You see their suffering.”)
3. **Ask God to Respond to the Suffering-** Tell God what you hope God does in the face of the suffering from racism. “God, please make this stop! Take away the suffering. Help us to treat others with love and respect. Show me how to make change in my community to ease the suffering.”

*(Inspired by an exercise facilitated by The Global Immersion Project on an Immigrants' Journey Immersion Trip in Tijuana, Mexico in May, 2018.)*

For younger children:

(Encourage younger children to finish the following sentences. They could paint or color pictures to go with each statement.)

1. **I am sad because... (or) They are sad because...**
2. **God, You know that \_\_\_\_\_ is hurting.**
3. **God, please help them by \_\_\_\_\_.**

The following books are wonderful resources to help support prayer with children:

- [\*Imaginative Prayer: A Yearlong Guide for Your Child's Spiritual Formation\*](#) by Jared Patrick Boyd
- [\*Prayers for Faithful Families: Everyday Prayers for Everyday Life\*](#) by Traci Smith

For additional resource links and suggestions around Music, Bible Stories, and Prayer, please consult the Resource Roadmap document in this toolkit.

Writer: Mindy Plick, Dir. of Community Ministries, Placencia Presbyterian, CA

APCE: <http://www.apcenet.org> and Office of Christian Formation: [www.pcusa.org/formation](http://www.pcusa.org/formation)

