

# Building the Beloved Community

## Lesson 7: Power and Privilege

3.17.2024

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**Objectives:** Understand how underlying structures of privilege make achieving goals easier or more difficult.

**Materials:** Flipchart, laptop/YouTube video, materials for Bull-Ring activity (rope/string with a ring, cones, balls), lesson attachments.

**Time allotments** suggested for 50 minute class, followed by 25 minute closing service.

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### 1. Nametags and Graffiti Wall (5 minutes before class begins)

- Make nametags using blank paper, markers, and holders. Youth can create their own unique but LEGIBLE nametag. Make it a regular practice to wear nametags.
- “Graffiti Wall” questions: Write the following on whiteboard. Invite youth as they arrive to grab a marker and weigh in with their responses:
  - ▶ What’s the difference between someone being “lucky” versus being “privileged”?
  - ▶ Does your school allow Muslim students to briefly leave class for prayer? Do you know?
- Teachers complete attendance sheets.

### 2. Silly Fun: Bull-Ring Activity (10 minutes max)

The goal of this activity is to move a ball from one spot to another, using a ring and some rope/string. Each participant grabs a strand of rope/string (and if there are fewer participants than strands, have some participants take two strands). A ball will be placed on the metal ring, and the object is to get the ball into a cup/cone on the other side of the room. All participants should be holding a strand of rope/string. No one other than the facilitator is allowed to touch the ball, and only the facilitator is permitted to place the ball back on the ring should it fall. Start with the bull-ring on the ground and have participants determine the best solution to move the ball across the room and into the cup/cone. Ready... set... begin!

### 3. Chalice Lighting: Light the chalice, saying these words together: *“We light this chalice as a symbol of our faith; the light of truth and the warmth of love.”*

**Teacher reads:** (from Canadian writer and game designer, David Gaider)

*“Privilege is when you think something is not a problem because it’s not a problem to you personally.”*

#### 4. YouTube Video: “What is Privilege?” (5 minutes)

**Teacher introduces:** What do public restrooms designated for men/women mean for transgender or gender-nonconforming persons? What do school schedules mean for Muslim youth who need to step out of class to observe prayer five times a day, with prayer times that change as daylight changes? Do these questions impact us?

And when someone says – “*Why can’t we all just get along and forget our differences. We’re all human, after all, aren’t we?*” – for whom is that statement easier said than done?

Privilege is a form of invisible power, woven into and camouflaged in dominant culture. So people with certain privileges rarely notice them, assuming that everyone else has the same opportunities and benefits, or simply not think about it at all. Privilege keeps them unaware of the obstacles faced by others who do not belong to their privileged group. Here’s a video that tries to make the invisible more visible:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hD5f8GuNuGQ> (3:59 minutes)

#### 5. Activity: Privilege Walk (35 minutes, of which at least 15 min for reflection)

**\*Note to teachers:** As seen in the video, privilege walk is an experiential activity to highlight how people benefit and are marginalized by structures of privilege in society. Though not a perfect exercise, privilege walk offers as a less confrontational way to discuss privilege and promote reflection, inviting participants to open up literally in “steps” rather than primarily through difficult words and dialogue. *Still, certain forms of privilege walks have prompted important critique as being beneficial mostly to straight, white, able-bodied males who may benefit the most from this activity while more marginalized students are made to feel vulnerable.* The set of questions below for this activity was designed with that critique in mind.

**Please remind youth that the purpose of this privilege walk is NOT to blame/label anyone for having more power/privilege or for receiving more help to achieve goals.** The purpose is to highlight how privilege works in society to benefit and marginalize certain people. Whenever activities invite people to share and acknowledge certain aspects of their lives, it matters that we conduct ourselves with trust, respect, and care.

##### **Instructions for activity:**

- Find or clear space large enough for youth to take up to **10 steps forward or back**, with youth at about arm’s length apart from each other. Offer the following instruction to participants:  
  
“As statements are read aloud, please move if a statement applies to you. If you prefer not to acknowledge whether a statement applies to you, or are undecided about your response, simply do not move when it is read. As a community, we will honor that participants may have multiple reasons for choosing not to move.”

- Teachers read statements aloud, pausing after each statement (briefly or longer as appropriate), asking participants to look around and note where they are in relation to others.

Please read aloud at least 10 questions from the list below, leaving enough time for at least 15 minutes to debrief.

### **Privilege Walk Statements** (suggested 15 minutes)

1. If English is your first language, take one step forward.
2. If one or both of your parents have a college degree, take one step forward.
3. If you come from a single-parent household, take one step back.
4. If you mostly attended schools with people you felt were like yourself, take one step forward
5. If you can find Band-Aids at mainstream stores designed to blend in with or match your skin tone, take one step forward.
6. If you rely, or have relied, primarily on public transportation, take one step back.
7. If you feel unsafe walking alone at night, take one step back.
8. If you are able to move through the world without fear of sexual assault, take one step forward.
9. If you were ever made fun of or bullied for something you could not change or was beyond your control, take one step back.
10. If you live in an area with crime and drug activity, take one step back.
11. If you would never think twice about calling the police when trouble occurs, take one step forward.
12. If you have a visible or invisible illness or disability, take one step back.
13. If your family has health insurance take one step forward.
14. If you were ever discouraged from an activity because of race, class, ethnicity, gender, disability, or sexual orientation, take one step back.
15. If you feel good about how your identities are portrayed by the media, take one step forward.
16. If someone in your household suffered or suffers from mental illness, take one step back.
17. If you ever felt uncomfortable about a joke related to your race, religion, ethnicity, gender, disability, or sexual orientation *but felt unsafe to confront the situation*, take one step back.
18. If you can make mistakes and not have people attribute your behavior to your racial or gender group, take one step forward.
19. If you have always assumed you'll go to college, take one step forward.

### Questions for Discussion:

- What did you feel being in the front of the group? In the back? In the middle?
- If you moved and broke contact with the person beside you, how did you feel in that moment?
- What question really grabbed you and stirred your thinking and feeling? If you could add a question, what would it be?
- What do you wish people knew about one of the identities, situations, or disadvantages that caused you to take a step back?
- How can your understanding of your privileges and marginalizations improve your relationships with yourself and others? Or... what can we do so that everyone in the community is standing closer together than apart?

### 6. **Extinguish the chalice**, saying together:

*“May the light of truth and the warmth of love go with us in our hearts.”*

### 7. **Help clean up classroom** before leaving: Please keep regular practice of readying classroom for the next class.

- leave lesson plan and all materials organized
- wipe the whiteboard clean
- tables and chairs neatly returned
- nametags collected in Ziploc bag
- leave any comments for RE staff on attendance sheets