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ATTITUDES AND PREJUDICES



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What Are the Attitudes about HIV and AIDS?

Attitudes are our manner of acting, feeling, or thinking that show one's disposition or opinion about a matter. Attitudes about HIV and AIDS have largely been negative for many reasons in the past. Some reasons for most people having negative attitudes about HIV and AIDS are:

- People assume that it is a result of unacceptable sexual behaviour.
- People tend to judge others more harshly than they judge themselves.
- People are fearful about a disease with no cure, and fear brings negativity.
- People know less about HIV and AIDS than they think they do. Most people think they are reasonably educated about this disease. In fact, more people believe myths about HIV and AIDS than really believe the facts.
- HIV and AIDS has been categorised differently from other diseases, which lends to having negative attitudes about it.
- People associate it with things they are not comfortable talking about: sexuality, fornication, cheating, adultery, promiscuity, homosexuality, STDs, dying, being thin, no cure, etc.

These attitudes about HIV and AIDS can be:

- **Fear**
- **Disgust**
- **Denial**
- **Hate**
- **Pity**
- **Self-righteousness**
- **Judgement**
- **Rejection**
- **Hopelessness**

➡ STAT 16

➡ FACT 78

Almost all of these 'attitudes' can be summed up in the phrase **NEGATIVE ATTITUDES!**

1. **Fear** – fear usually comes from ignorance about HIV and AIDS. People sometimes fear to talk about HIV and AIDS because they are embarrassed, or they think it might come to them or their family members. Fear about HIV and AIDS is sometimes based on one's past sexual behaviour. "If I do not talk about it then I won't have to think about it and it will go away." Fear never helps and often keeps people in slavery to the very thing that would make them free from HIV and AIDS...risky behaviour.

2. **Disgust** – this negative attitude often comes from being judgemental. This attitude says, “You have HIV and AIDS because you are not as good as I am.” This kind of destructive, negative attitude forgets the fact that “*all have sinned and come short of the glory of God*” (Romans 3:23), including the person with this attitude. Besides, we neither know “how,” “where,” or “under what circumstances” a person became HIV infected, nor is it our business to know.
3. **Denial** – says, “HIV and AIDS is not my problem; it will never come to me or my family.” This is a rather ignorant attitude about HIV and AIDS and comes from lack of knowledge about the disease. Denial pushes the crises of HIV and AIDS to other people, while refusing to take any ownership about the outcome of the disease. Denial also is blinded by the fact that HIV and AIDS now affects everybody...not only the infected.
4. **Hate** – a particularly destructive attitude. An attitude of hate often categorises HIV and AIDS by a particular lifestyle that makes them feel uncomfortable – often because of lack of compassion. Particularly in America, this wrong attitude prevails regarding HIV and AIDS. It is wrongly categorised as ‘the homosexual or gay’ disease. Therefore, one with an attitude of hate toward homosexuals can transfer this hate towards HIV and AIDS-infected people. They may wrongly or rightly conclude that an HIV or AIDS-infected person is “gay...or whatever” and then discriminate because of their own prejudice.
5. **Pity** – an attitude which vastly differs from empathy or sympathy. This attitude has a hidden undertone of “you poor thing, you couldn’t help it.” Most HIV and AIDS-infected people are very strong in their feelings that they do not want pity. What they do want is understanding, compassion, and to be loved for who they are, not for what they might be infected with.
6. **Self-righteousness** – is a negative attitude that “looks down” on others as being less than oneself. When projected towards the HIV and AIDS-infected, it can convey an attitude of “too bad you were stupid enough to become infected and that you are not as good as I am.”
7. **Judgemental** – these attitudes are often unspoken and sadly, are often found in churches and among the religious. It is a negative attitude that says, “You have this disease because you did something wrong.” In fact, the judgemental person makes his/her own conclusions before he/she even knows the facts. People set themselves up as being superior and the one to give out blame. A judgemental attitude “blames” the one infected with HIV and AIDS on something they do not find acceptable.
8. **Rejection** – is a particularly hurtful attitude towards the HIV and AIDS-infected. Rejection usually has fear and disappointment as its root. An attitude of rejection towards the HIV and AIDS-infected person says, “I am afraid of you; I care about myself more than I care about you, so I don’t want to be around you.” It is a selfish attitude that disregards the feelings of another person. Rejection of the HIV and AIDS person divides families, leaves permanent emotional scars and hurt, and fails to deal with the issues surrounding HIV and AIDS in an understanding way.
9. **Hopelessness** – is a negative attitude that sees everything about HIV and AIDS

as being dark and gloomy. It is a pessimistic attitude and neither helps the infected nor the affected. An attitude of hopelessness fails to look at the positive things in life right now and fails to maximise all the joys that life can bring now.

What Has Shaped Our Attitudes Regarding HIV and AIDS?

In the early 1980s when the HIV virus was isolated and first known, there was a great deal of mystery surrounding it. At first, it was labeled as a 'homosexual' disease and people wrongly believed that only gay people had this disease. Therefore, from the beginning a stigma surrounded HIV and AIDS, even though many of the beliefs about this disease were false. HIV and AIDS at first was considered the "bad" people's disease, which brought a great deal of misunderstanding and prejudice against those who became infected. It wasn't until several years after the onset of HIV infection and subsequent AIDS worldwide, that the true pattern of this disease began to be seen by people. It wasn't, after all, "those people's disease...those bad people" but it became a disease that cut across all races, nations, religions, socio-economic structure, and ages. Truly, HIV and AIDS is now a disease that hits everyone. It does not discriminate and infects the following:

- The rich and poor alike
- People of all colours of skin
- People from all nationalities
- Religious and the non-religious
- Males and females
- Presidents and paupers and everyone in between
- Adults and children no matter what age
- Professionals and unemployed
- Urban and rural
- All sexual orientations of people
- And even the unborn

Are Attitudes about HIV and AIDS Becoming More Positive?

For certain, as knowledge and education about HIV and AIDS has been made available, more and more people are putting a face to AIDS so that we can all see that people with AIDS are just like I am...just like you...just like members of yours or my family. More and more people are identifying with AIDS because more and more of us are becoming infected. Many people in some African countries have lost 25% or more of their extended family to an early death from AIDS.

However, there is still a great deal of ignorance about HIV and AIDS. Many people, including church people, are still afraid to talk about it, let alone deal with it. There is still a stigma attached to AIDS that causes many who are suffering from it to remain silent about their status. They are afraid of some of the following misfortunes that, unfortunately, still do happen to people once it becomes known that they are HIV positive:

- They are shunned (a negative attitude).
- They are judged (a negative attitude).
- They are considered bad (a negative attitude).
- Some lose their jobs (a negative attitude and action).
- Their spouses sometimes chase them away (a negative attitude).
- People are afraid to be around them, even to shake their hand (a negative attitude).
- People think it will never happen to them (a negative attitude).
- Friends assume they sleep around and have bad habits (a negative attitude).
- Some hospitals and clinics don't want to treat them (a negative attitude).
- Many churches pretend it isn't their problem (a negative attitude).
- Some HIV people don't want to know their status (a negative attitude).

If we are going to help STOP this disease, then our attitudes must change about it. If we are going to be a positive source of strength to large numbers of infected people, including members of our families, then we must change our attitudes about HIV and AIDS.

AIDS THRIVES ON:
A TTITUDES
I GNORANCE
D ISCRIMINATION
S EX & SILENCE

⇒ STAT 44

A Short Quiz to Test Attitudes about HIV and AIDS

Instructions: Answer each question with only one of three possible answers. Think carefully about why you have answered it in such a way.

Note: Each person described in the sentence has AIDS. How do you feel about him/her? **Do you feel:**

- **Sympathetic**
- **Somewhat sympathetic**
- **Not sympathetic (serves them right for getting infected)**

1. **A woman goes away on a job opportunity, away from her husband, and two years later she begins to get symptoms and finds out she is HIV positive.** Do you feel sympathetic, somewhat sympathetic, or not sympathetic for this married woman?
2. **A pastor finds out he is HIV positive.** Do you feel sympathetic, somewhat sympathetic, or not sympathetic for this pastor?
3. **A doctor performs an operation on a patient that he doesn't know is HIV positive. He accidentally gets a needle prick and becomes HIV positive.** Do you feel sympathetic, somewhat sympathetic, or not sympathetic for this doctor?

4. **A young man moves in with his gay lover only to find out that he too, has become HIV positive.** Do you feel sympathetic, somewhat sympathetic, or not sympathetic for this young man?
5. **A small baby has just been diagnosed with HIV because the mother was HIV positive.** Do you feel sympathetic, somewhat sympathetic, or not sympathetic for this newly born baby?
6. **A married man takes a job in a city away from his wife and family. He finds out when called home to donate blood for his sick child, that he is HIV positive.** Do you feel sympathetic, somewhat sympathetic, or not sympathetic for this married man?

Answers to the Quiz

Many will have answered ‘sympathetic’ towards those in the questions that they felt were ‘innocent’ victims of HIV infection. Others will feel ‘unsympathetic’ towards some who they feel really deserved to be HIV infected because of an action that was considered inappropriate.

While there are no ‘correct’ answers, some questions that we need to ask ourselves are these:

1. Doesn’t **everyone** who is infected with HIV and AIDS need our sympathy?
2. Doesn’t **everyone** who is infected with HIV need our understanding?
3. Could there ever have been a time in our lives where we acted inappropriately, and did we deserve to get AIDS because we did so?
4. If the person you felt ‘unsympathetic’ towards was your son or daughter, would you still feel the same way?
5. Does it really matter **“how”** one became infected in order to deserve the sympathy of others, or should we sympathise unconditionally, on the basis that he/she is a human being and is faced with a life-threatening disease?

You see, we all have attitudes about HIV and AIDS that are a result of how our thinking has been shaped from our background and knowledge. Some of our attitudes have become much more positive, accepting of HIV-infected persons, and helping in this terrible plight that is killing people. However, when put to the test, some of our attitudes still need some work!

Why Do We Have These Negative Attitudes about HIV and AIDS?

- AIDS is closely related to at-risk sexual activity, since the biggest way it is spread is through sexual contact.
- Sexual misbehaviour and sin is a more visible sin than some others.

- In many churches, sexual sin is the ONLY sin for which church discipline will be applied. For example: in some churches a pastor who steals money will not be strongly disciplined. However, in most cases if he commits adultery, he will have to leave the ministry for some time.
- Sensational media coverage which is often biased, characterises some of the attention given to HIV and AIDS. Some of the media coverage has been a positive, good thing which has brought the general public to a greater awareness of the AIDS crises. Other negative media attention has only served to deepen negative attitudes that are already present about HIV and AIDS.
- Probably the greatest cause of negative attitudes about HIV and AIDS is **ignorance**. Most people know far less about the disease of HIV and AIDS than they think. Most have learned little bits and pieces about HIV and AIDS from the media. They accept it as gospel truth when it may not be, and wrongly assume they are knowledgeable about HIV and AIDS. Very few, including professionals and church leaders, have attended a reputable seminar or class that teaches the facts about this crises facing our world. Again, most people feel they don't have to learn more about HIV and AIDS because **"it isn't my problem."** Here is where we see negative attitudes through ignorance!

Scriptures on 'Attitudes'

- *"My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality" (James 2:1).*
- *"But God has shown me that I should not call any man common nor unclean" (Acts 10:28).*
- *"Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgement you judge, you will be judged; and with the same measure you use, it will be measured back to you" (Matthew 7:1-2).*
- *"Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me" (Matthew 25:40).*
- *"Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgement without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgement" (James 2:12-13).*
- *"Now it happened that as Jesus sat at the table in the house, that behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Him and His disciples. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to His disciples: Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners? When Jesus heard that, He said to them: Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. But go and learn what this means: I desire mercy and not sacrifice. For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Matthew 9:10-13).*
- *"Judge not and you shall not be judged. Condemn not and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you" (Luke 6:37 & 38).*

- *“Whosoever receives this little child in My Name receives Me; and whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me. For he who is least among you all will be great” (Luke 9:48).*
- *“Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbour for his good, to his edification” (Romans 15:1 & 2).*
- *“Let us not love in theory or in speech but in deed and in truth” (1 John 3:18).*
- *“Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers a multitude of sins” (1 Peter 4:8).*
- *“As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men...” (Galatians 6:10).*
- *“Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy” (Matthew 5:7).*
- *“But when He saw the multitudes He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd” (Matthew 9:36).*
- *“Therefore, you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things” (Romans 2:1).*
- *“Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honour giving preference to one another” (Romans 12:9 & 10).*
- *“Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law” (Romans 13:8).*
- *“Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others” (Philippians 2: 3 & 4).*

How Can We Change Habitual Negative Attitudes Regarding HIV and AIDS?

1. **Change** requires **recognising the need for it**, and realizing that to change will bring about a better result.
2. **Repent of the wrong attitude and ask God to help you replace it with a good attitude.** Asking for forgiveness wipes the slate clean and gives you opportunity to cultivate right attitudes about HIV and AIDS. God will help you, but you must take the first step by repenting of wrong attitudes.
3. **Action** helps to put feet to change. If you recognise a negative attitude regarding HIV and AIDS, then it is important to **do something** to change that attitude. For example: If your negative attitude is **“disgust or judgement”** then a starting place for attitude change would be: practical involvement in some community HIV and AIDS work. Get to know an infected person and you will soon realise that they are just like you are! **Walk the talk!**

4. **Take personal ownership in the HIV and AIDS crises and see what you can personally do to bring solutions.** Involvement will open your eyes to the real situation of HIV and AIDS. It will change your thinking and help you to do your part to bring solutions in a serious crisis facing every community.

PRAYER FOR FORGIVENESS

**LORD JESUS, I REALISE WE ARE FACING A LIFE-THREATENING
CRISIS OF HIV AND AIDS, LIKE WE HAVE NEVER KNOWN.**

**I UNDERSTAND THAT IT THREATENS NOT ONLY MY NEIGHBOUR,
BUT IT THREATENS MY FAMILY AND MY FUTURE GENERATIONS.**

**I RECOGNISE THAT MY PERSONAL INVOLVEMENT
IN BRINGING SOLUTIONS**

TO STOP THIS PANDEMIC HAS BEEN VERY LITTLE.

MY ATTITUDES HAVE OFTEN BEEN NEGATIVE ABOUT HIV AND AIDS.

**PLEASE FORGIVE ME, LORD, FOR SITTING BY AND ALLOWING
SO MANY PEOPLE**

TO PREMATURELY DIE WITHOUT DOING SOMETHING TO HELP.

**CHANGE MY HEART ABOUT THOSE WHO ARE BEING ROBBED OF
THEIR LIVES BECAUSE OF HIV AND AIDS.**

MAY I FIND MY PLACE OF SERVICE

TO BRING SOLUTIONS TO THOSE WHO NEED ME.

**MAY I BE RESPONSIBLE TO SHARE WITH THE UPCOMING GENERATION
LIFE-SAVING KNOWLEDGE**

THAT CAN KEEP THEM FROM THIS DISEASE.

FOR THE SAKE OF ALL THOSE THAT ARE SUFFERING, WOULD YOU

HELP ME TO DO MY PART IN FIGHTING HIV AND AIDS?

THANK YOU, LORD JESUS.

AMEN