



devotional

brought to you by
the conference
council on youth
ministries

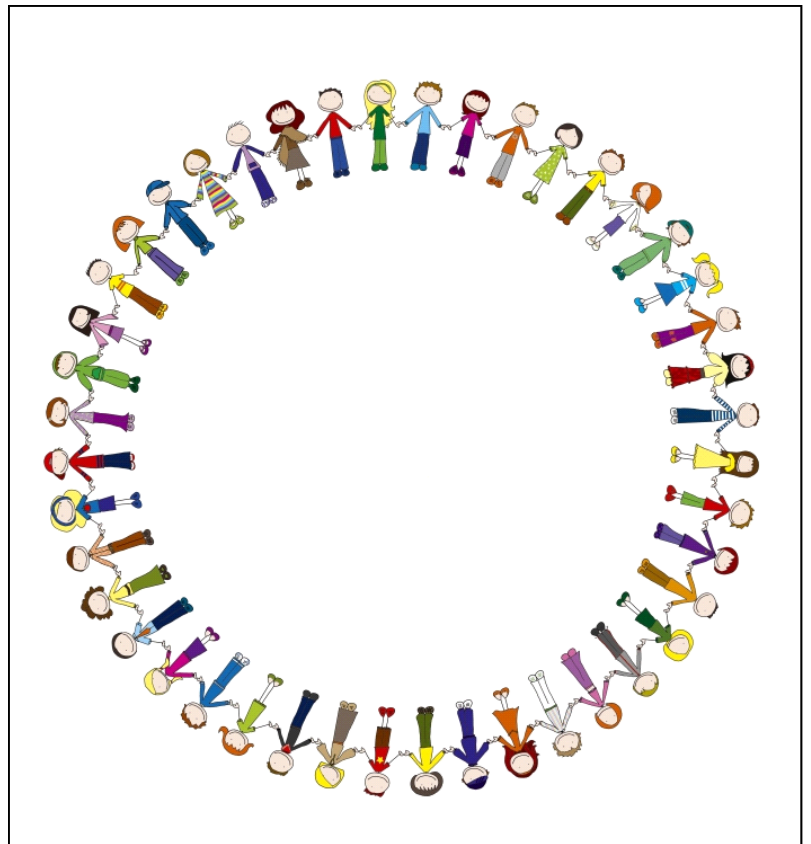




Table of Contents

1. Introduction
2. Diversity
3. Stereotypes I See
4. Prejudice (Part 1)
5. Prejudices in Me (Part 2)
6. Acceptance and Truth
7. Embrace
8. Action



The Conference Council on Youth Ministries gathered the initiative to do something about all the talk of being an agent of change in our church. Enclosed you'll find a series of devotionals that have been constructed by your CCYM. This is a representational group of students and adults who have a beautiful heart with a passion for integration, truth, and justice! We encourage you to use this devotional in your local church however it works best for you. It's coming at a great time to be used for lent. Use it as a small group study, Sunday school curriculum, or simply make it available to the folks in your church by putting it on your website or you can print copies or find more information on CCYM, visit www.umcyouth.org.

Each devotion is broken down into several parts. First, there is a definition to unpack some of the obtuse words we used. You'll also find a scripture and prayer focus along with a word from one of our CCYM'ers. In the end, you'll notice a 'do something' section. After all, faith without works is dead. Encourage your students to take these actions and thoughts seriously....you never know what truth and beauty can develop after a bit of soul searching with our Maker. Keep in mind that this topic might be a sensitive one with your students and that the conversation could become heated and or offensive. If you are doing this in a class setting, please mention to your students that you wish to create and maintain an environment of inclusiveness where all are welcome. Also, things that are discussed in the group shall remain confidential within the group. Have fun with it, don't be afraid to dream, and let us know how it goes!



DIVERSITY

Diversity \ di-vur-si-tee \ : noun : the state or fact of being diverse; difference; unlikeness

The Word

The Tower of Babel- Genesis 11

Break it Down

Everybody has dealt with diversity in there life. Perhaps it is not being able to go into a store without feeling like you're in the wrong place because of how you dress, the groups you hang out with at school, or the color of your skin. One particular experience that sticks out in my mind was hanging out with my friends recently and we went out to eat. That doesn't seem like a big deal at all and it didn't to me at the time. I was with a group of friends that was quite diverse in the color of our skin. It was a Friday night and our school just won the biggest football game of the season so we decided that we would go out to eat to celebrate, but every restaurant around was full. We ended up in the next town which is known for wealthy Caucasian people.

We sat down and started eating and we were having a blast. We started to look around and everybody was staring at us. First, I thought it was because we were being too loud but that was not it. The table next to us was being way louder. Then it finally clicked in my brain- it was because our group looked different from theirs. I was so mad and it took me walking out of the restaurant to cool off before I could come back in. I realized I shouldn't care about what they think of me or my friends because they're missing out on some amazing people.

Sure, everybody says it's bad to have racism and to judge people in school. But, as soon as you get out of school you are supposed to stay with your own "kind" of people. God made us different for a reason so why do we make it such a big deal?

- Kelly, High School Student, Hopewell UMC

Ponder It

What does diversity look like in your life?

Why aren't we all the same?

Am I comfortable with diversity? Why wouldn't I be?

Prayer Focus

Spend some time thanking God for the beauty in differences. Spend time thanking God for the beauty in that we were all created in the image of God, and the uniqueness that each of us bare.

Do Something

This week, take some time to be conscious of the diversity or lack of diversity in your life- at school, work, and home! Take some time to blog, journal, or share your thoughts with a friend or family member.



STEREOTYPES I SEE

Ste-reo-type \stēr-ē-ə-ṭīp \: noun: something conforming to a fixed or general pattern; especially : a standardized mental picture that is held in common by members of a group and that represents an oversimplified opinion, prejudiced attitude, or uncritical judgment

The Word

Luke 10:25-37

Break it Down

Almost everyday, people go out into the world and are placed into a category, simply because of appearance and culture. It has always been hard for me to sit around and see people being singled out because of how they dress or who their friends are. Honestly, almost no one is like their stereotype and it really hurts to be labeled something that you certainly aren't. For example, dressing a certain way doesn't instantly make you do drugs. In fact, it's probably the people you don't expect to be doing those things that are. We've all been labeled and it would hurt most of us. If we wouldn't want it being done to us why do we keep doing it ?

Meredith, High School Student, McDonough First United Methodist Church

Ponder It

What stereotypes are placed on you?

How does it feel to be labeled?

Why do we let this happen?

Prayer Focus

Lord God, help me to see that which will help me break out of the cycle of stereotypes.

Do Something

Look for stereotypes that exist in the world around you! Break the cycle, step outside of your comfort zone and intentionally spend time with someone outside of your clique.



PREJUDICE (part 1)

Prej·u·dice- \prej-uh-dis \ : noun ; injury or damage resulting from some judgment or action of another in disregard of one's rights; especially : detriment to one's legal rights or claims

The Word

Luke 4:1 - 26

Break it Down

Prejudice is an awful thing. So many people out there experience prejudice every day. When I was in elementary school there was a girl that rode our bus who was Hispanic. I noticed that no one sat with her or talked to her. She always sat in the same seat day after day and always by herself. One day I decided to sit with her and tried to talk to her in Spanish. Although I do not speak Spanish very well, and she did not speak English very well, she knew I was trying to be her friend. I think everyone should try to be like Jesus and not judge someone by the color of their skin or the language they speak. Jesus loved and cared for everyone, and we should do the same.

Alexandria, High School Student, Cumming FUMC

Ponder It

Invite someone in who lived during the Civil Rights movement to your small group, Sunday school class, etc or have a planned conversation with someone who did.

Prayer Focus

Jesus, help me to be more like You. Help me to see and treat people like You did.

Do Something

Think about how prejudice has changed your life. Talk to your friends about the effects of prejudice.



PREJUDICES IN ME (Part 2)

Prej·u·dice \prej-uh-dis \ : noun : injury or damage resulting from some judgment or action of another in disregard of one's rights; especially : detriment to one's legal rights or claims

The Word

Esther 3:5-6 (Read all of Esther when you have time...cool story!)

Break it Down

In the story of Esther there are four major players; Xerxes the King, Haman the King's right hand man, Esther the new wife to the King, and Mordecai who is the adopted uncle of Esther and an officer in the King's army. As Haman is traveling around the city he noticed that Mordecai would not bow in honor of the King. Haman is so enraged by this disrespect he makes it his mission to not only have Mordecai killed but to do away with all his people, all of the Jews in the land of Xerxes. Not soon after Mordecai uncovers a plot to kill the King. He tells Esther she must warn the King. She does and Mordecai receives the credit and is honored by the King. The King honors Mordecai and once he finds out Haman's intentions towards Mordecai, who saved his life, and against the people of Queen Esther, he has Haman executed.

How many times have we acted like Haman? If we have a dislike towards an individual or feel wronged by someone we place blame on everyone like him or her. Whether it is the person's race, a team, rich people, street people, old people...whatever, we project that hatred of the individual on a group.

Is this reaction our own or is it something we have learned from our parents and leaders? Do we really act this way because of what we have learned from our relatives and teachers? Think about this term "sins of the father". This means that we are accountable for the actions of the generations before us. What can we do about that? Do we run and hide? Do we always insulate ourselves from the tough situations? Or, do we face those sins and work to make them right?

- Chris, Adult Youth Worker, Cumming FUMC

Ponder It

What are the pre-conceptions or prejudices that you have inherited from teachers, leaders, family, and friends?

When you experience something enough it becomes routine. If we witness prejudice in our lives does it become routine? If so, why?

Ask yourself, what are the prejudices in my world that I need to step up to and make a change with?

Prayer Focus

Gracious Father...help me to control my thoughts of prejudice that I have towards people who are not like me...for I know these thoughts are not pleasing to you.

Do Something

Take some time to write a letter of apology to someone that you have looked at recently and felt a prejudice against. Work to explain why you feel the way you do. Strive to lay out a plan to make a change in the way you think.



ACCEPTANCE and TRUTH

Ac·cep·tance \ik- \square sep-tən(t)s\ : noun : an agreeing either expressly or by conduct to the act or offer of another so that a contract is concluded and the parties become legally bound

Truth \ \square trúth\ : noun: sincerity in action, character, and utterance, the body of real things, events, and facts: actuality

The Word

Genesis: 1 (pay special attention to verses 27 and 31)

Break it Down

God created the entire universe to be unified under one purpose. He didn't create the ocean to be greater than the sky; he didn't make the trees better than the ground they grow in, and he didn't design the sun to be more important than the moon. Keeping this in mind, it is wrong of us to think of one kind of person as being more important than another. However, that doesn't mean that we are all exactly the same. We each have our differences: some of us like to play cricket more than baseball, some of us wear Yamakas or turbans rather than baseball hats, and others enjoy 'shrimp on the barbie' instead of burgers. These things make us unique and different from other people, but they don't make us better than them. If we learn to accept these differences, even when we don't like or understand them, we can begin to look at people through God's eyes. Think about a mosaic. It has thousands of files, all with different shapes and colors. Yet your eye only sees one picture. God creates each of us, with our differences, to fit together like the files in the mosaic. Together we create one picture: God's image.

Becca, Middle School Student, Harmony Grove UMC

Ponder It

What is the opposite of acceptance?

If God made us all different, why do we have a hard time enjoying this diversity?

Visit the following website about Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech. Make a list of words from the speech that have a great meaning to you and think about the similarities between Genesis 1 and Martin Luther King's message of unity.

<http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkihavedream.htm>

Prayer Focus

Spend some time in prayer and ask God to help you see people the way he sees them and to help you love all God's children, despite our differences.

Do Something

In order to change our ideas about diversity, first we need to rewire our brains. Try these puzzles to help open your mind to see things in a new way.

Matthew was in bed in the hospital for 3 days. He was not sick, and he did not require any medication or treatment while he was there, yet when he left, he had to be carried out. How could this be possible?

How could a man fall out of a twenty story building and live? (Hint: It has nothing to do with what he lands on, or luck.)

There are six eggs in the basket. Six people each take one of the eggs. How can it be that one egg is left in the basket?

Answers: 1) Matthew is a baby. 2) The man fell out of the first story window. 3) The person who took the last egg took the basket too.



EMBRACE

Em·brace \im-ˈbrās\; verb: to encircle, to hug, to cherish, and/or to be equivalent to.

The Word

Ephesians 2

John 14:12

Break it Down

We've all been brought near to the freedom and grace that Christ offers through the blood on the cross. It doesn't always make sense or is easy to understand. But, we must first believe in order to understand. I believe that as young people in the church, we are continually being built up together in order to be a place where the Spirit of God resides. And I think as days continue to turn on the calendar, we'll understand the fullness of God's plan as we get to witness the beauty that we offer each other by extending love. If we extended love more instead of our occasional harsh words, criticism, divisiveness, judgment, or prejudices we could change the world. I really believe it!

In all this talk about diversity and differences, it's easy to focus in on how we're different from each other. Perhaps we should spend more time thinking about how we are the same and the oneness we embrace together in our common faith in Christ. I don't think any of us desire to be clones or cookie cutter models of each other. However, we do all desire the wholeness and completeness that the Body of Christ offers. What would that wholeness look like? What would we have to do as a church to help bring that to fruition? I'm not quite sure, but I'm certain it requires intentionality. I also believe, even though I don't quite understand yet, I believe that Jesus promises us that we will do 'even greater things' through our faith in him. Gandhi once said that you need to be the change you wish to see in this world. Are you ready for the ride?

- Shari, Conference Coordinator

Ponder It

Would you say the church universal (not yours, but all of them collectively) is unified or divided? Explain.

What kind of change do you hope for in the church?

What would intentionality look like for you to help bring these hopes into reality?

What would you need to embrace to bring it into fruition?

Prayer Focus

Spend some time in prayer seeking God's thoughts and direction on how to be an agent of change and to bring unity to the church, the people in it, and the world around you.

Do Something

As a Sunday school class, small group, or just with a group of your friends or family, make plans to visit a service of a faith tradition that is different from your own.



ACTION

Ac·tion \ ˈɑk-shən \ : noun : the bringing about of an alteration by force or through a natural agency, an act of will

The Word

Isaiah 6:8; 1 Timothy 4:12-16; 2 Corinthians 6:3-10

Break it Down

Sometimes we are unaware of the way our thoughts become actions and reflect our prejudice attitudes towards others! So, what is your next step? How are you going to take action within your community, school, or youth group to reach out to others who are different from you or who do things you don't approve of? Hopefully through accountability and depending on God's amazing power, we can all overcome the struggles of seeing people differently and begin to see them through God's eyes!

-Jessie, Adult Youth Worker, Hopewell UMC

Ponder It

Are you satisfied with how you show love to others?

What's scary about standing up against stereotypes, prejudices, and lack of diversity?

Prayer Focus

Lord, help and guide me in my interactions with people who I have judged wrongly. Open my mind to accept change when it is difficult and uncomfortable. Soften my heart to love without limits and open my eyes to see people like you do no matter who they are!

Do Something:

CCYM is asking for a response from you and/or your youth group about your action plan or commitment to addressing diversity within your group, your church, and your community. Send an email to nqaumcyouth@gmail.com with your thoughts and we will collect them and make them available online at www.umcyouth.org.