

Talking about Acceptance

HEARTLINES film – The Miners

Preparation for the discussion

Read the notes “Leading a discussion group around the eight values” on pages 2 & 3. It is recommended that you also read the Bible notes on Acceptance in the ‘Go deeper’ section on page 32.

KEY THOUGHT to keep in mind when leading a discussion on acceptance:

Divisions and prejudices still exist in our nation and in our churches. We can only start to accept one another if we have a change in heart, and this starts with seeing others as God sees them - made in His image.



Moagi and Johnny Meyer



Moagi and Sandra

1) Introduce the discussion 3 Minutes

Briefly introduce the film “The Miners” and the value of “acceptance” that the film highlights. Read the following Scripture from Galatians 3:28 **“There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus”.**

2) Show the film 17 Minutes

Show the HEARTLINES film “The Miners” as provided on the DVD in the back inside cover of this book. If you are extending the discussion over 2 sessions, and have already watched the film, read the summary at the start of the second session.

3) Start the film discussion 20 Minutes

1. What do you think is the central message portrayed in this film?
2. What has caused the deep-seated resentment between Johnny Meyer and Dan Mokwena?
3. What makes Sandra finally say “For the first time since my mom died I don’t feel so lonely”?
4. What do you think about Meyer’s reaction and behaviour when he finds Sandra and Moagi together at the prayer site?
5. Do you think that Johnny Meyer was being reasonable with his ultimatum for Moagi not to see his daughter anymore? Explain.

[film summary]

The Meyer and the Mokwena families live in the mining community of Carltonville. Sandra is the only daughter of Johnny Meyer. He has a tough job raising his daughter after the death of his wife. Moagi is Mokwena’s son who has just returned from boarding school in Taung. The story unfolds in the context of a racially divided community where people are now being forced, not only to work together, but also to live side by side. It is against this background - to the utter dismay of their parents and certain community members - that Sandra and Moagi begin their friendship. Johnny Meyer struggles as a single parent and as he is confronted with this new - although platonic - friendship of his daughter’s, he is also faced with issues of affirmative action at work. Dan Mokwena is promoted to shift boss and tensions rise. A crisis eventually brings these two families together.

4) Discuss the film quotes *15 Minutes*

Show the following clips as provided on the DVD and use the relevant quote as a discussion starter:

[CLIP 1] Teacher's question to learners in the classroom discussion

"Is racism dead in this country?"

[CLIP 2] Johnny Meyer when confronting Sandra about her friendship with Moagi

"It doesn't work, Sandy!"

[CLIP 3] Meyer talking to Mokwena at the mine followed by Moagi's parents discussing their son's friendship with Sandra

"You keep your son away from my daughter" (Johnny)

"This white girl...is she just trying to cause trouble?" (Mrs Mokwena)

[CLIP 4] Sandra arguing with Johnny during a meal time

"And you are also a hypocrite. The same God that you pray to expects us to treat everybody as we would like to be treated ourselves."



Sandra and Johnny

[film discussion summary]

We live in a country with a history of people refusing to accept one another.

Whites have oppressed blacks. Tribes have rejected tribes. City dwellers mock rural people. The educated have contempt for the uneducated. The rich look down on the poor. The young disregard the old, while the old are impatient with the young. And as we see from the discussion between Mokwena and his HR manager in this HEARTLINES film, suspicion is rife between foreigners "amakwerekwere" and the locals.

The South African Constitution enshrines the equality of all citizens. This might provide a healthy legal foundation to our democracy, but we all know that even good laws don't change behaviour. Laws don't stop racism and they don't make acceptance happen. Accepting a person starts with how we see them and this starts in the heart.

"Is racism dead in this country?"

5) Discuss: How can we practise acceptance? *25 Minutes*

1. Are we only interacting on a superficial level when it comes to mixing with people from other races and cultures in South Africa today?
2. In Genesis 1:26-27, on day 6 (the pinnacle of creation) we read "Then God said, *"Let us make human beings in our image ... So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."* (NLT)

Q: What does it mean to be made in God's image?

3. Jesus often spent time with people who were deemed 'unacceptable' by the local community (see Matt 9:11).

Q: Is there anyone in your life who you struggle to accept because they do things that you find unacceptable?

Group discussion on Acceptance

4. Galatians 3:28 says that *“There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”* and Ephesians 2:14 reveals *“For [Christ] himself is our peace, who has made the two [Jew and Gentile i.e. different cultures] one and has destroyed... the dividing wall of hostility.”*

Q: What has Jesus done that enables you to not only respect, but enter into community with, people from other groups? How can we live this out in South Africa?

5. Why should the Church be the primary place in which acceptance and reconciliation are practised? Refer to Ephesians 2:19-21 *“You are citizens along with all of God’s holy people. You are members of God’s family. Together, we are his house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself. We are carefully joined together in him, becoming a holy temple for the Lord.”*

[the Church – a place of acceptance & reconciliation]

Many of us think of the Church as the place or group of people with whom we worship. This is true but is only a very small part of what the Church is. The Church is in fact God’s community of redeemed people — people whose “image” is being repaired — and as such it is meant to be the primary place where acceptance and reconciliation are practised. In the early Church, this was seen in the fact that Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians could be in full community with each other, instead of remaining divided along ethnic lines: “For [Christ] himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed ... the dividing wall of hostility” (Ephesians 2:14).



Johnny

“...for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”



Sandra, Dan, Moagi and Johnny

“The Church is meant to be the primary place where acceptance and reconciliation are practised”



Moagi

[time to think...] 10 minutes

Read the following and ask each person to think about acceptance in their own lives.

Get the group to take a moment to pray that God will reveal any spirit of non-acceptance, prejudice or racism in their lives.

Ask God to bring to their mind the name of one person whom they can begin to accept – just as Christ accepted them

At home this week:

Encourage the group to read the creation account in Genesis 1-3 and to think about how the advent of sin affected the image of God reflected in us. Does Scripture suggest that some groups of people are not made in God's image? **Encourage everyone to memorise Romans 15:7** "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God."



Isaiah

6) Talking about HIV&AIDS (Optional) 10 minutes

1. Talk honestly about what you think about people who have HIV&AIDS, and how you act towards them.
2. Compare this to how Christ would think or act towards the same people?



[leader's note]

Rejecting people because of prejudices is hurtful and destructive. Christ embraced all those who were rejected by their society. The sick included lepers, the poor and the tax collectors. In our society people living with HIV are often rejected. This rejection prevents them from getting help, such as treatment and support. Many people end up dying as they would rather die than admit that they have HIV&AIDS. Followers of Christ need to break this stigma and rejection by loving, supporting and accepting those living with HIV. This will prevent many people from dying needlessly, as well as help many who have HIV to live full lives.

“Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you ...”

7) Acceptance in action: Ideas to make a difference in your community

One suggestion for creating a community of acceptance involves practising the “Love one another” commandments that are found in the New Testament. These commands urge believers to relate to people in practical ways, i.e.

1. forgive one another (Colossians 3:13);
 2. encourage one another (1 Thessalonians 5:11);
 3. teach one another (Colossians 3:16) and
 4. pray for one another (James 5:16).
- Look for practical ways in which you can as a group, and then as a church, act on these suggestions.
 - Identify any noticeable divisions in your church and identify actions and activities that will promote unity in diversity e.g. social events, workshops for creating understanding, introducing multi-cultural worship activities.



What God says about Acceptance

HEARTLINES film – The Miners

We live in a country with a history of people refusing to accept one another. Whites have oppressed blacks. Tribes have rejected tribes. City dwellers mock rural people. The educated have contempt for the uneducated. The rich look down on the poor. The young disregard the old, while the old are impatient with the young. And as we see from the discussion between Mokwena and his HR manager in the HEARTLINES film – the Miners – suspicion is rife between foreigners “amakwerekwere” and the locals.

The South African Constitution enshrines the equality of all citizens. This might provide a healthy legal foundation to our democracy, but we all know that even good laws don't change behaviour. Laws don't stop racism and they don't make acceptance happen. Accepting a person starts with how we see them and this starts in the heart.

THE BASICS of being human

In Genesis 1:1-2:3, we find a majestic passage describing God's creation of the universe. There is a regular rhythm repeated throughout these verses: “God said ‘let there be’ ... and it was so ... and God saw that it was good. And there was evening, and there was morning - the [next] day.” Until we get to the sixth day: all of a sudden, the rhythm changes! For the first time, God speaks, not as an act of creation, but in conversation with Himself, Father, Son and Spirit: he says, “let us make ...” (1:26). In this magnificent rhythm of creation, what causes God to take a moment to reflect and commune within the loving circle of the Trinity?

His pause introduces the most glorious dimension of creation - the making of men and women. What makes men and women so special is that God describes them as being “in our image, in our likeness” (1:26). An image is something one looks at: an image does not exist for its own sake.



Dan Mokwena



Johnny Meyer

It is to be observed. And, as we see very clearly in the following verses, to be made in God's image means that all creation will witness this representation of God, who rules on His behalf and is to multiply and fill the earth - with God's glorious "likeness"(1:27-29). To be human is to be a prince or princess, representing the King of the Universe. That is no small thing!

Today men and women have literally filled the earth. They inhabit all the continents except Antarctica (and who would want to live there?). They come in different colours, shapes and even sizes - some people, like the Masai of Kenya are incredibly tall, while others such as the Baka of Cameroon, are pygmies. Nowhere does Scripture suggest that certain groups of people are not made in God's image. But somehow, we find ways to decide that some people are more worthwhile than others.

MESSING UP God's image

Sadly, as we know, sin came into the world when Adam and Eve believed the lies of Satan. Humans didn't think it was enough to be made in God's image, and rule on His behalf. They wanted to be their own bosses and to make their own rules (Genesis 3:1-7). This brought chaos into the world. And it changed what it means to be human. Men and women are still called to rule, but now we sometimes rule abusively and relate to each other divisively. We are still called to multiply, but now we do so in pain. We are still called to steward the earth but what was a thing of joy, is now often neglected. And at the heart of it all is the curse of death that we have brought upon ourselves (3:16-19).

This means that while human beings are still in God's image, that image has been tarnished and twisted by sin. It is as if someone threw away a beautiful portrait of you or me and replaced it with an ugly cartoon - a caricature. Perhaps that is why we sometimes hate another race group, or the other sex, or people with certain accents or people who earn a lot (or who earn nothing). It is because we see the worst in each other. The result as Scripture shows from Genesis on, is that people marginalise, abuse and oppress those they don't accept. Life is miserable for everyone!

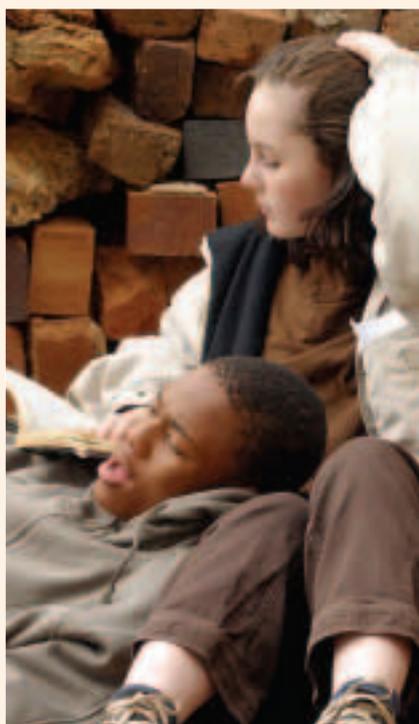
ACCEPTING ONE ANOTHER begins with believing the best of one another

Right from the start Scripture's concern is that we overcome the effects of sin and the division it causes. God told Noah that we are not to harm one another for, in spite of humanity's evil (requiring a cleansing flood) men and women are still "in the image of God" (Genesis 9:6). Whatever we may think of another person - and no matter how disagreeable or even wrong we think their behaviour is - we are first and foremost to regard them as being made in God's image. In other words, even if you have to look hard and beyond the person's sin, you will find in everyone something of God's glory.

**"...you will find
in everyone
something of
God's glory."**

When the Israelites entered into a covenant relationship with God, they were told many times that they were not to “mistreat an alien or oppress him” (i.e. someone outside of their culture and religion: Exodus 22:21). God gave them the law, “love your neighbour as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18). But if we read on a few verses we find that God requires us to look beyond our comfort zones such as to our immediate neighbours: “the alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself” (Leviticus 19:34).

Jesus brought all this to life, offending many faithful Jews of His day, because they had failed to grasp the importance of their own laws on acceptance. Jesus mingled with many categories of people who were highly offensive to His own people. His disciples were asked, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and ‘sinners’?” (Matthew 9:11). Although ethnically Jewish, the tax collectors worked for the oppressive Roman government taking their own people’s money for the foreign rulers. The “sinners” were - prostitutes, adulterers, thieves and so on. The Jews thought that, being sinful, these people should be ostracised. Jesus never condoned the wrong behaviour of anyone but He still befriended them (John 8:1-11). Jesus also made friends with the hated Samaritan ethnic group, and related to women as equals in a way that His contemporaries did not (John 4:1-42). Is there anyone in your life who you struggle to accept because they do things that you find unacceptable?



Moagi and Sandra

“Jesus never condoned the wrong behaviour of anyone but He still befriended them”

REPAIRING God’s image

God’s intention has always been to restore us fully to being his royal sons and daughters. He came and showed us how to be human, *and* he gave us a way to become fully human again. Colossians 1:15 describes Jesus as “the image of the invisible God” and the disciples said that when they saw Jesus they saw “glory” - God’s glory (John 1:14)! Paul goes on to say that “Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behaviour. But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation” (Colossians 1:21-22). Elsewhere Paul says that, “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

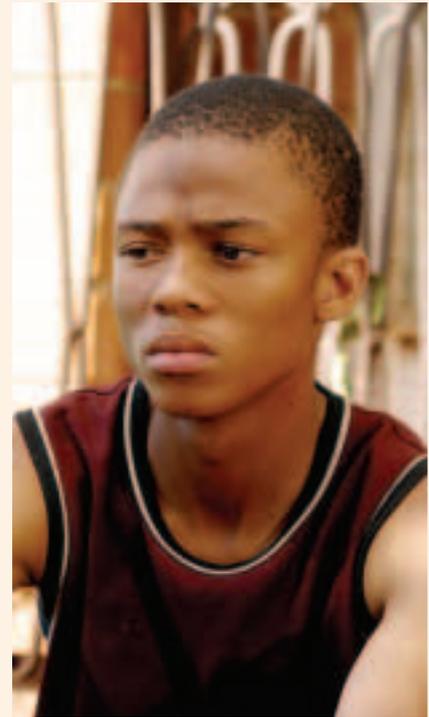
THE CHURCH – the place of reconciliation

Many of us think of the Church as the place or group of people with whom we worship. This is true but is only a very small part of what the Church is. The Church is in fact God’s community of redeemed people - people whose “image” is being repaired - and as such it is meant to be the primary place where acceptance and reconciliation are practised. In the early Church, this was seen in the fact that Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians could be in full community with each other, instead of remaining divided along ethnic lines: “For [Christ] himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed... the dividing wall of hostility” (Ephesians 2:14).

Paul said that this reconciliation meant that “through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers ... in the heavenly realms” (3:10). In other words, this reconciliation through Christ of people to God and between divided people is so miraculous that the spiritual powers (Satan and his hosts) look on in furious amazement.

This reconciliation was all pervasive. Within the church of the New Testament we see reconciliation of male and female and of ethnic and culture groups: to one local church Paul said “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28) and to another, “Here [in the church] there is no ... circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian ... but Christ is all, and is in all” (Colossians 3:11). The use of the word “barbarian” is important in our context, for it has the same background meaning as the Zulu word “amakwerekwere” (a contemptuous reference to the babbling, “uncivilised” sound of foreigners’ languages).

The Bible closes with a vision of the future that goes beyond the magnificence of God’s creation in Genesis. Here we see the glorious conclusion to history, where men and women are in “a great multitude that no one could count” and who come “from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb”, worshipping the one who died on the cross in order to remake them in his image (Revelation 7:9).



Moagi

**“We are all
one in Christ”**

ABOUT GOD’S CHARACTER

ACCEPTANCE comes from God

As we saw in the story of creation, God lives in relationship within His distinct but interdependent three persons - Father, Son and Spirit. We were created out of that perfect set of relationships. And God created humans male and female. Thus He created us in an act of relationship within Himself, and then immediately put us into relationship with one another. These relationships allow for distinction and difference (what could be more different than male and female?). But the complementary nature of the sexes, or cultures, or ethnic groups, or personal strengths, can only be realised through mutual honour and acceptance. In the words of Philippians 2:1-5:

[from the word]

“If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit ... then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves” ... Our attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.”

How can we practise Acceptance

1. Are we only interacting on a superficial level when it comes to mixing with people from other races and cultures in South Africa today?.

2. In Genesis 1:26-27, on day 6 (the pinnacle of creation) we read *“Then God said, “Let us make human beings in our image... So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.”* (NLT) What does it mean to be made in God’s image?

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