

2018 Devotions

Introduction

These reflections are offered as an extension of our weekend sessions to help deepen the talks given by our speakers and to offer further thoughts and reflection about our weekend's focus.

Members Pilgrimage Ministry Team wrote these devotions prior to Pilgrimage 2018 based on our team's reflections about our weekend scripture. These reflections and devotions were shared with our speakers, and we look forward to the way in which they will expand the conversation for all who attend.

Please use these reflections as a guide. Feel free to adjust them and/or use the parts that work best for you and your particular group. Some leaders choose to do a short session at the close of each day. Others go through devotions on Saturday during free time. Some use them as follow up sessions after they get home. Do what works best for your group.

We encourage all adult leaders in your group to take notes during the sessions so you will be prepared to help your students connect what they hear with their own lives and the lives of others, as well.

Plan Ahead

We encourage adult leaders to consider and pray over devotions prior to the 2018 weekend. Read everything carefully, determine what supplies you need, and gather supplies in advance.

The 2018 Theme

"Christ is just like the human body—a body is a unit and has many parts; and all the parts of the body are one body, even though there are many." (1 Corinthians 12:12).

Join us as we explore and celebrate what it means to Plug In and fully live our lives together for Christ, each other, and the world.

Friday Evening Session

Time: 45 to 60 minutes

Session Theme: **Focus: Let's Go**

1 Corinthinians 12-13

We are all one in Christ, even though we are often very different from each other. The thing that makes us one even though we are different is that God loves all of us and longs for us to belong to God and each other. **What keeps us from fully plugging in?**

Give everyone a chance to settle into this time in one or more ways:

- Share their jeers/cheers of the day
- Play a game that your group enjoys
- Sing a song that you typically sing when you are together
- Light a Christ candle

Reflect

1. Divide everyone into groups of 4-6 youth (1 adult per group, if needed)
2. Ask each group to think about Pilgrimage and:
 - Share what they have been looking forward to most
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Dig In

Share "Into the Dark Room" (found on the following page)

- What keeps you from fully plugging in to the body of Christ?

Close Out

Close in prayer.

Friday Evening Session

Into The Dark Room

By Abby Martin, Pilgrimage Ministry Team Member and Former Conference Youth President

(The fear of letting go and walking into the “dark room” where God can further develop us often keeps me from fully plugging into God’s love, grace, and purpose. So I want to share this devotion with you.)

There was now a trench that kept distancing me further and further away from God’s side. As I sat there during worship, I looked around at my friends who seemed to be deeply connected more than ever to the God who I could once hear so clearly. I questioned if something was wrong with me. If I did something to create this distance. My heart was in pieces.

As I sat there praying, “God, where are you? Where. Are. You.?” I heard a gentle whisper saying, “Abby. Where are YOU?” It was in those next few moments within the silence and listening where I saw this image. Standing in front of a black abyss, God was calling out to me. Waving me down. And as I met God in front of the abyss, I held on as we ran into the darkness together.

This thought of being called into the darkness can seem terrifying when we first think about it. For weeks before this encounter I had felt like I was running in the dark. I had lost sight of where God was leading me and I felt alone. However, I realized after hearing from God, I wasn’t alone. In fact, I was exactly where I needed to be the whole time. It was just going to take the act of me putting my fear to the side and understanding that God was calling me to go into the darkness. To go into the darkness WITH HIM. Where I would not be alone. Where I was never alone. Because even there in the darkness, His right hand upheld me.

God is calling us to go into the dark room where we can unplug and let go of what is holding us back.

Just like the process of developing camera film, we need to go through a developing process. You’re brought into the dark room where the developing of the full picture takes place. There are 9 different chemicals that film is placed in before the entire picture is revealed. And just like the film, our Creator is dipping our lives into each chemical process and putting the entire picture together piece by piece. It’s a delicate and intricate work that happens in the dark room. You need a specific light and correct timing for the full image to be forged onto the negative. However, here’s the warning about the dark room: if the door to the dark room is opened image in the negative will be destroyed. The entire picture would never be produced.

Friday Evening Session

In my own life, I've realized that I'm wanting to open the dark room door before the entire picture is produced. I've told people recently that I feel like a racehorse who is ready for the gates to be opened so I can go ahead and run the race. However, I'm ready to run a race that hasn't been fully developed yet. Maybe you feel like that race horse? There's so much expectation and excitement where you're ready to take off running. However, maybe you're already in that dark room with God, but you feel as if you've been forgotten. That maybe your calling will never come into fruition. Sometimes, it's feelings like these that cause us to unplug from the Holy Spirit and keep us from being developed further.

However, it's in the dark room where we need to unplug and let go so that we can plug into the voice of God and follow where He is leading us.

Reasons why we should run into the dark room daily:

- The dark room produces maturity and steadfastness
- The dark room is the secret place
- The dark room presses and crushes
- The dark room produces an unwavering faith

To go into the dark room daily means to die to self daily. To lay down our lives in full surrender. The dark room isn't a place of fear, rather it can be seen as the secret place with God. The secret place is a place of healing. A sacred space shared between just you and God. A place of grace and love. The dark room allows God to press and to crush in a way that humbles, matures and cleanses you. When I entered the dark room, I was terrified. I couldn't see what was in front of me when I would take a step. However, God was telling me that I needed to go into the dark room to find my lamp/light. I needed relighting and reminding that 1) I can't do this journey on my own strength and 2) the approval from those around me will not fully satisfy. The dark room would press me and remind me that only God can satisfy every need and desire of my heart. That my identity lies within Him and not from the accolades of others.

Sometimes our lamps need relighting and that relighting is in the dark room where God pulls us in, reminds us of the race that was created specifically for us to run and that the process takes time. That developing takes time. Fear of letting go and walking into the "dark room" so that God could develop me into the person He has called me to be keeps me

from fully plugging into God's love, grace, and purpose. What keeps you from fully plugging in?

Saturday Morning Session

Time: 45 to 60 minutes

Session Theme: **Let Go: Doubts and All**

1 Corinthinians 14-19

God is always reaching for us through the Spirit to plug us in to the body of Christ. Very often the thing that is keeping us from fully plugging in is our doubts. What would it look like for us to show up and be seen for who we are doubts and all?

Give everyone a chance to settle into this time in one or more ways:

- Share their jeers/cheers of the day
- Play a game that your group enjoys
- Sing a song that you typically sing when you are together
- Light a Christ candle

Reflect

1. Divide everyone into groups of 4-6 youth (1 adult per group, if needed)
2. Ask each group to think about Pilgrimage and:
 - Share what they have been looking forward to most
 - Explain what stood out to them most from the session and why?
 - Think of something new that they learned
 - Sum up the Saturday morning talk in 5-6 sentences
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Dig In

Share Laure Kalau's devotion found on the next page.

Close Out

Close in prayer.

Saturday Morning Session

Visible & Invisible Parts of the Body

By Laure Kalau, Pilgrimage Ministry Team Member and Pastor of Haw River UMC

A few years ago, I began feeling some pain in my chest and when I felt the pain coming I would stay still until it was gone. After a while, the pain that was once excruciating became manageable because it lasted only a few minutes...until last year. It was on mother's day, I became very sick, the pain was once again excruciating and this time it lasted several minutes. Since it was a special Sunday, I had a full day of celebration planned and nothing was going to get in the way of my mother's day celebration. And so, I put on my cute dress and my high heels and went on to work then out to lunch with my family. During all this time, the pain was so sharp that I could hardly stand but I pressed on to make it through the day. The next day, I went to the Doctor, after a number of tests there was a diagnosis-- a small organ located under the liver was causing pain and I needed to be treated right away.

I wondered how in the world, a tiny invisible organ could cause so much discomfort to my whole body. Paul writes so eloquently that the body isn't one part but many. Just because we cannot see the internal parts of the body doesn't make them less important. Paul notes, "If the whole body were an eye, what would happen to the hearing? And if the whole body were an ear, what would happen to the sense of smell? But as it is, God has placed each one of the parts in the body just like he wanted". Many times we give a lot of attention to the external and visible parts of the body but Paul reminds us that each part of the body has a unique and specific purpose.

Like the tiny internal invisible organ in our bodies, there are times when we, too, feel like we are invisible among our friends, in our schools, even in our communities. We wonder if there is place for us to belong. Sometimes you might feel like you are shrinking in the presence of others because they may be more outspoken, or outgoing, or big in stature that you begin to doubt who you are and what your purpose is. The feeling of invisibility is often created by doubt. This is a feeling of uncertainty. Doubt is a feeling that can lead us not only to lack conviction but can also create fear. When faced with doubts, it is important to let go of fear and be brave to ask the hard questions.

In other words, as a member of the body Christ, the church, you are encouraged to find those who journey with you on your faith and share with them your doubts. These can actually lead you closer to God. For in sharing your doubts, you will find affirmation, and assurance that you belong where you are; that God has placed you there with a specific purpose.

You see, God created you with all your imperfections, yet God saw that you are beautiful. And

Saturday Morning Session

God is always trying to reach for you to plug you in the body of Christ, the church so that you can be an active and confident member of the church.

You may be shy, or you might be the kind of person who would not put their hand in the air to answer any question but when called upon, you are unafraid to share your thoughts; or you may be someone who likes to work behind the scenes when no one else is watching. Whatever good deeds, visible and invisible you do for the church, your work is appreciated. For you are working for the building of the Kingdom of God.

How is God calling you to be an active member of the body of Christ?
Have you ever been in a situation where you faced doubts? How did you handle it?

Caring for the Body of Christ

One of the recommendations I received to help minimize the pain was that I needed to change my diet. If you have ever been on a diet you know it's not easy. And I love food! (I believe food is one of the ways God shows us his love!) Everything I ate was very delicious but not everything was healthy for my body.

Like our physical body, we who are part of the body of Christ, the Church, have to be intentional about the ways we treat others in the church. We are called to love our neighbors and treat everyone the same way we would love to be treated. Sometimes, when life gets busy we tend to focus more on the projects than the people who are serving. It is important to check on those members of the church and express our gratitude for their service.

Also, the body of Christ is not a party of one but a covenant of brothers and sisters who have become ONE through the water of baptism and Holy Spirit. In this covenant, we are called to support one another, to build each other up, to extend kindness and compassion. Above all, we are called to love one another. This Christian love binds us together and to God's love especially when things are not going well.

Just like a physical body hurts when one part is not well, there will be times when the church, the body of Christ will experience pain. And when that happens may we be brave to take care of the body of Christ by doing the work of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Paul notes that the body isn't one part and that every part has its role, the same is true with the church. Every person has been gifted with spiritual gifts not because they are worthy but

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Saturday Morning Session

because God's grace has been freely given to all. May we all receive this grace, accept everyone for who they are and the gift they bring; affirm and value each member as those made in the image of God; may we plug in to Christ so that we may be faithful witnesses of God.

How have you experienced the body of Christ at work lately?

Saturday Evening Session

Time: 45 to 60 minutes

Session Theme: **Let Go: Doubts and All and Plug In**

1 Corinthinians 20-26

Jesus makes it clear that we are all needed and that he longs for us to fully take our place in the body of Christ, doubts and all. How will the body of Christ move toward greater wholeness when each of us fully plugs in with all of our gifts?

Give everyone a chance to settle into this time in one or more ways:

- Share their jeers/cheers of the day
- Play a game that your group enjoys
- Sing a song that you typically sing when you are together
- Light a Christ candle

Reflect

1. Divide everyone into groups of 4-6 youth (1 adult per group, if needed)
2. Ask each group to think about Pilgrimage and:
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Dig In

Share Ben Adam's devotion found on the next page.

Close Out

Close in prayer.

Saturday Evening Session

Rowing Together

By Ben Adams, Pilgrimage Ministry Team Member and Former Conference Youth President

Part I:

Two years ago, I lived by a river where a lot of rowing took place. I had never participated in “crew” and knew very little about the sport of rowing, and so the experience was completely new to me. Each morning I would run along the river and watch the teams practicing their sport, and I’m now convinced it’s one of the greatest team sports.

In rowing, a boat has a certain number of rowers (some have four, others have six or eight), and all of the crew members are synced to row their oars at the same time. Each oar-stroke matters and each oar-stroke must be timed perfectly in order to propel the boat quickly. One mis-timed oar stroke can cause the boat to come to a halt.

One morning as I watched a team training, another spectator explained to me the occasional mistake in rowing which is known as “catching a crab.” It happens to everyone at some point in their rowing career. Catching a crab occurs when the timing or technique of one rower is out of sync with the others. Though it can occasionally cause a rower to be thrown off the boat by their oar, most often it goes undetected by spectators. Even the rowers have a hard time knowing who is out of sync. Yet, it is clear the boat slows down as a result.

The beauty of rowing is that all members of the boat share in the successes and failures of the boat. In rowing, there can be no superstars. One crew member cannot simply row faster or harder to move the boat along. Everyone has a role to play and the strength of everyone is needed. Likewise, there is rarely a time when an individual does something noticeably wrong. Mistakes aren’t public in rowing. All succeed or all suffer defeat.

In what ways is rowing like being the Body of Christ?

In what ways is rowing different than being the Body of Christ?

What does rowing teach us about diversity and teach us about unity?

Can you think of a time when you “caught a crab” in a group activity? How did your teammates make you feel? How did your team suffer?

Think about a time when your team succeeded. What did your success look like? How did that make you feel?

Saturday Evening Session

Part II:

One morning, I noticed that there was a crew team that was incredibly strong. All of the men on the team looked like bodybuilders and they were wearing very fancy red and black spandex that made them look twice as strong. The eight men got in their boat and waited.

Then I noticed a tiny mouse-like human make his way toward the water. He too was wearing a red and black spandex uniform. There was no way he was on this team! He walked down to the river, put on a headset with a microphone, and crawled into the back seat of the boat to face his rowers.

As the rowers pushed off from the shore, the tiny guy began to give instructions- he aligned their oars, helped square the boat with the shoreline, and eventually yelled, "ready" before blasting an airhorn. For the first few rows he yelled, "stroke...stroke...stroke," and the boat sped away.

The coxswain is the steerer of the boat, and the on-the-water coach. This role is of equal importance (if not more so), than the rowers because this person tells the rowers how to row, where to row, and where to go as they navigate the water. (The rowers face backwards as they row, so they can't see where they are going.) Since the coxswain does not row, it makes sense for the coxswain to be a very small and light person so the boat can move as quickly as possible. The most unathletic person in the boat is actually the most important!

How is the coxswain like this passage from 1 Corinthians?

How you ever doubted someone's ability because of their appearance?

How would you have responded differently? Have you ever been doubted because of your appearance or someone's opinion of you?

Who in your community is underappreciated or doubted because of society's opinions of them?

Part III:

Jesus makes it clear that you are needed and that he longs for you to fully take your place in the body of Christ, doubts and all. This is about what God desires and what God desires it that the body of Christ is whole. It will not be whole without you. Likewise, it will not be whole without others. No matter the size, shape, color, background, experience, language or identity of someone else- all are important members to the Body of Christ.

How will the body of Christ move toward greater wholeness when you fully plug in with all of your gifts?

How can you help others plug into the body of Christ?

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When Home

Time: 45 to 60 minutes

Session Theme: **Let Go: Doubts and All and Plug In and Go**

I Corinthians 27

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

Give everyone a chance to settle into this time in one or more ways:

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Dig In

Complete the devotional activity by Landis Barber found on the next page.

Close Out

Close in prayer.

2018 Devotions

When Home

Reflection

By Landis Barber, Pilgrimage Ministry Team Member and Former Conference Youth President

Supplies: index cards, writing utensils.

Reflection Activity Directions:

- Give each youth an index card and a writing utensil.
- Have youth select a partner or a small group (depending on the size of your youth group).
- Have youth write on their index card their answer to the following questions:
- How will the spirit use you to help others plug in?
- After youth have had time to individually contemplate and write on their index card, have youth share with their partner.
- Then, have youth swap index cards.
- Invite youth to pray for the spirit to move their partner to plug in and for their partner to remain committed to plugging in even after Pilgrimage has ended.
- Have each youth keep their partner's index card as a reminder to pray for their partner in the future.

Other reflection questions:

- How does the world need the body of Christ?
- Together how are we called to go and share God's love in our communities?
- What lessons can we take from Pilgrimage to remain plugged in?
- How can we help each other remain plugged in?