

Center Voices from the Margins

MATTHEW 15:21–28

2

GOAL

To Honor God’s Diversity, youth consider ways to listen to voices from those who are marginalized.

- A** Art
- AM** Active/Movement
- AT** Abstract Thinking
- C** Conversation
- CT** Concrete Thinking
- D** Drama
- G** Game
- M** Music
- QC** Quiet/Contemplative
- S** Service
- T** Technology
- X** Extra Prep

Note: bit.ly addresses are case-sensitive.



PRAYER

Dear God, open my eyes and ears and heart to the voices of oppressed people and transform me into an example for others. Amen.

THIS SESSION

From reading the Bible, we know that Jesus, a marginalized Jew, hung out with a diverse crowd of people who were not in good standing with religious authorities. Yet many are surprised to read where Jesus’ understanding of his ministry is challenged, and even corrected. The healing story we read from Matthew’s Gospel is also found in Mark 7:24–30. Both versions show that Jesus—in all his radical inclusivity—stumbled when approached by an outsider. The lesson Jesus takes from this encounter broadens the scope of his ministry as he pivots to center the voice of the Canaanite woman, affirms her faith, and honors her request. Participants learn from Jesus the value of centering voices of people from the margins as we seek to *Honor God’s Diversity*.

THE BIBLE STORY

Matthew 15:21–28 tells about Jesus’ encountering a Canaanite woman whose daughter is tormented by a demon. The woman is a member of the aboriginal population of the land, neither Jew nor Gentile. As she cries out repeatedly for Jesus to have mercy on her and heal her daughter, Jesus ignores her. Unsatisfied with his response, the woman persists, turning Jesus’ analogy on its head. Apparently moved by the woman’s comment, Jesus has a change of heart, commends her faith, and heals her daughter. Matthew’s Gospel concludes with Jesus sending his followers to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19). After centering the Canaanite woman’s voice, Jesus’ ministry is broadened beyond the house of Israel.

CONNECTIONS WITH YOUTH

Adolescence presents a wonderful opportunity for youth to consider other points of view than those of their parents/caregivers. Peer acceptance is important, and, depending on the diversity of their peers, they can learn much from people who grew up in different circumstances than their own. This session offers a chance to nourish that openness to face the challenge of listening to voices of those other than those of their immediate group.

SESSION PREPARATION

Depending on the options you choose:

- “Life Chances Game” (p. 16): Prepare Resource Pages 1, 2, and 3 as instructed on Resource Pages.
- “September 11 Racist Reactions” (p. 16): Preview the YouTube video and determine if it is acceptable to show your group. Also, for a brief summary of what happened, read an article at bit.ly/FMSeptember110

GETTING STARTED

- Paper
- Pens
- Tape

WHAT'S MY NAME?

As youth arrive, invite them to take a sheet of paper and a pen. On one side of the page, have them write down a bad name someone called them. Then, on the other side, have them write their first name. When they are finished, give them a piece of tape to post their sheet of paper on a wall or some other visible surface. Be sure that they post their piece of paper so that only their first name is visible, and the bad name is hidden.

OPENING PRAYER



Lead the group in this prayer or one of your choosing:

God of all, help us to hear you today. Spark our imaginations and transform our hearts as we try to make the world a better place. Give us wisdom and courage to be more like you. God, we give you thanks and praise. Amen.



INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or both options.

- Newsprint
- Marker

DEFINING MARGINALIZE



Work as a group to write a definition of the word *marginalize* and write it on the newsprint. (*Marginalize means to treat something or someone as if they are not important. Marginalized people are those whose needs have been ignored because society usually treats them as unimportant.*)

Based on the definition, ask youth to name groups of people who are marginalized in our society. Write their ideas under the definition. Keep this list posted visibly for the remainder of the session.

- Index cards
- Pens



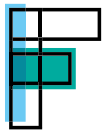
Centering, as used in this session, is the point or person on which an activity or process is focused. When one centers on oneself, then one's thoughts, ideas, and conversation revolve around oneself. When centering on another, the focus turns to understanding the thoughts, ideas, and voice of the other person.

CENTERING ANOTHER

Distribute index cards and pens. Have each person write any ten items of information about themselves on their card, such as place of birth, favorite animal, and so on. Form pairs and invite one person to read aloud the ten items on their card while the other listens carefully. The second person in the pair then reads aloud the ten items on their card. Gather the group and have each person tell the other participants ten things about their partner (or as many as can be recalled). Each partner will mark the items on their card that the other person correctly recalled (do not have partners reveal the marked cards). After each person has told the group about their partner, have the pairs confer about which items were correctly recalled. Ask the group:

- ➔ What helped you to recall items from your partner's list?
- ➔ What did you discover about your partner by focusing and listening closely to them?
- ➔ How did this activity allow you to honor and value your partner?

Read aloud the definition of *centering* from the sidebar. How did this activity help you to experience centering another?



FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

READER'S THEATER



Prepare to read Matthew 15:21–28 as a group. Assign parts to read the different voices in the text (*narrator, Canaanite woman, disciples, Jesus*). Depending on the size of your group, assign more than one person to each character and they can read in unison. Carry out the reading and ask each character to answer these questions:

- ➔ What changed Jesus' mind?
- ➔ What did your character learn from this experience?

Read "The Bible Story" paragraph (p. 13) aloud to the group and discuss:

- ➔ Some have called this woman's comments to Jesus *sassy*. Yet she changed his mind, and he opened up his ministry to the entire world. What do you think about that?
- ➔ What makes you change your mind about people you don't know much about and how might that change you?

COMMUNICATING THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS



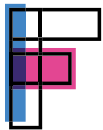
Invite youth to write a letter to one of the characters in the Bible passage. For instance, they may choose to address their letter to Jesus, the Canaanite woman, her daughter, or the disciples. In their letter, they should share their thoughts and emotions about Jesus' encounter with the Canaanite woman. Have the youth write as if they were a witness to the story. Invite a few volunteers to read or summarize what they wrote and describe any strong emotions they felt about this story.

Bibles



This may be an uncomfortable passage to discuss for some youth. The fact that Jesus initially ignores the woman's cries conflicts with an image of Jesus as all-loving. The fact that he was unwilling to heal the woman's daughter challenges our perceptions of Jesus as a merciful healer. Do not gloss over these tensions. Allow youth to wrestle with the Bible passage. Being able to grapple with tough biblical texts is important for strong faith development.

Paper
 Pens



FINDING THE PRACTICE THEN AND NOW

Choose one or more options.

THE ROVING LISTENER



Briefly, prepare youth to watch a video about a church in Indianapolis that centers voices from the margins. Offer this summary information:

Broadway United Methodist Church in Indianapolis, Indiana, works to center marginalized voices in their urban neighborhood. In 2004, they hired De'Amon Harges as the church's first "roving listener." He traveled the neighborhood having conversations with community members. Through this listening, Broadway UMC was able to connect people of like interests. The church is now known as a place to connect and get help from the actual neighborhood community.

Show the YouTube video "Making the Invisible Visible | DeAmon Harges | TEDxIndianapolis" (bit.ly/FMHarges, 10:30). Discuss:

- ➔ What transformations occurred because people's voices were centered?
- ➔ How does Harges's work honor God's diversity in this community?
- ➔ How does our community listen to and connect people in our community?

Internet-connected device

- ☐ Prepared Resource Pages 1, 2, 3
- ☐ Bowl

LIFE CHANCES GAME

G C

Gather in a circle and place the bowl with the Player Squares (Resource Page 1) in the middle.

Play the game, following these instructions:

1. Have each youth select a Player Square from the bowl.
2. Give each person five Life Chance cards. Keep the extra ones in case you need them.
3. Explain that you will read a list of scenarios (Resource Page 3) that will cause the players to either gain or lose Life Chances. For each turn, collect Life Chances from players who lose, and give Life Chances to those who gain.
4. Read each scenario, and take and give Life Chance cards. Once all the scenarios have been read, find the player with the most Life Chances.

Discuss:

- ➔ To the person who *won* the game, what feelings came up as the scenarios were read?
- ➔ To the person with the fewest number of Life Chance cards at the end of the game, what were your feelings as each scenario was read?
- ➔ Do you believe that the game was fair? Why or why not?
- ➔ What does this game teach us about marginalization?

- ☐ Internet-connected device



Note that this activity includes information about violence and trauma. It also includes some offensive racist language around two minutes into the video.

SEPTEMBER 11 RACIST REACTIONS

T AT

Talk with youth about what they know about the events of September 11, 2001. If necessary, offer a brief synopsis of what happened.

Show the first four-and-a-half minutes of the YouTube video “Divided We Fall – Opening Sequence” (bit.ly/FMDDivided, 7:11) about the aftermath of 9/11. Discuss:

- ➔ Why were the Western Asian people in the video treated badly? Why did people have negative attitudes toward them?
- ➔ Were the negative attitudes toward Western Asian people justified? Why or why not?
- ➔ What does this video teach us about holding negative views of an entire group of people?
- ➔ How can we relate this video to our Bible passage?



PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or more options.

MODELING ROVING LISTENERS

C

If you did the activity “The Roving Listener” (p. 15), extend the conversation by leading a discussion about how youth can model this type of listening in school and in their neighborhoods. Allow them to describe what that might look like for them.

Discuss ways your group might model this way of listening to others and create connections between people in your church and surrounding community. Name voices from the margins who need to be centered and heard. Decide if there are concrete actions you wish to take and discuss next steps, including talking with your church leadership.

PRAYING BEYOND OURSELVES

T C

Internet-connected device

Use the World Council of Churches' Prayer Cycle and pray a prayer written by someone in a different country. Go to bit.ly/FMWCCPrayer, scroll down the page, and show the table of calendar dates and countries for prayer. Click the link on a country to go to a new page containing prayer focus areas for the country and at least one prayer from the country and its people.

Discuss the country designated for today's date. Invite participants to add other information they may know about this country and its people. Pray together the recommended prayer. Ask:

- ➔ How does praying words offered by people around the world honor God's diversity?

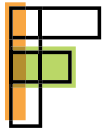
WORDS OF AFFIRMATION

C

Pens, markers

Direct youth to go to the wall where they posted the paper with their names. Invite them to write on the other names a kind word or short, positive affirmation. They may also wish to add colors or pictures to their affirmation of their peers.

When they are finished, encourage the youth, as much as possible, to use positive and affirming language when talking to themselves and to others. Explain that, when someone uses negative words to or about them, they can remember that is not who they are. They are worthy and beloved children of God!



FOLLOWING JESUS

WHAT VOICES CAN YOU CENTER?

QC

Invite youth to a time of quiet reflection. They may choose to close their eyes or lower their gaze to lessen distractions. Slowly read the following prompts, allowing a time of silence between each prompt.

- ➔ Picture yourself in the middle of a quiet, peaceful field. Consider your closest group of friends, your family, and others who surround you during the day in your school or workplace. Whose voices are generally not heard? Who is on the margins that you see every day?
- ➔ If you are on the margins in some way, who else is out there in the margins in the same way or in a different way? How are your voices heard? How can you make them heard? Can you hear each other?
- ➔ Think of one group of people on the margins that you might learn about. How can you do that? Who can help you?

Invite participants to finish the reflection and lead them in this prayer:

Holy One, open our eyes and ears and hearts to be present to your creation. Teach us to listen to one another that we might love each other as you have loved us. Amen.

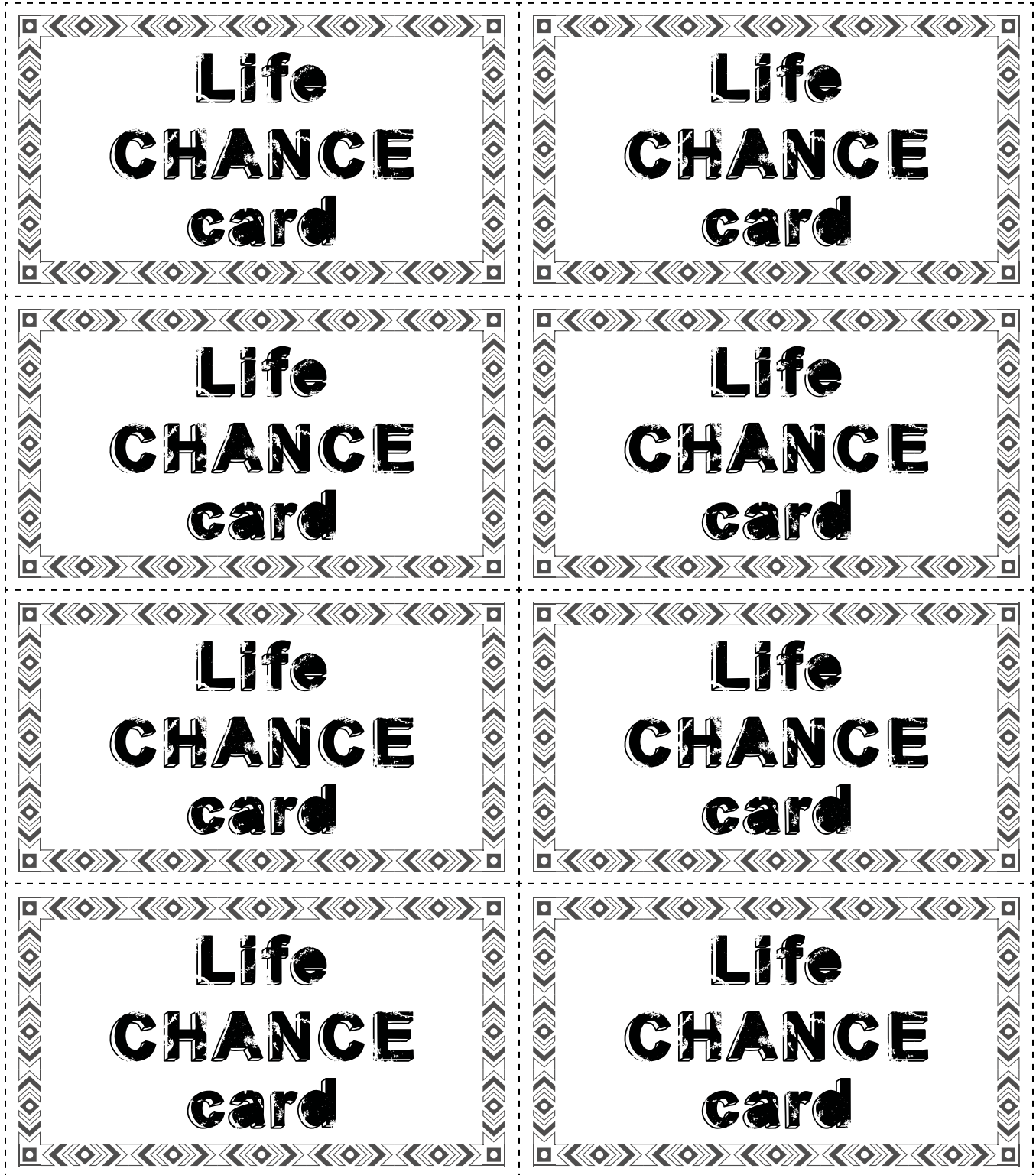
Player Cards

Instructions: Cut out the cards and place in a bowl to begin the game. If you have more than nine participants, make additional copies. More than one player can have the same Player Card.

<p>Jennifer Black woman Married Has children Employed</p>	<p>John White man Married No children LGBTQ+ Employed</p>	<p>Cynthia White woman Married Has children Unemployed</p>
<p>Nasir Western Asian man Married No children English not first language Employed</p>	<p>Donna White woman Transgender Unmarried No children Employed</p>	<p>Zach White man Unmarried Unemployed Has children</p>
<p>Riley Japanese person Gender-nonconforming Married No children Employed</p>	<p>Fred Black man Unmarried Employed No children</p>	<p>Maria Latina woman Unmarried Employed Immigrant Has children English not first language</p>

Life Chance Cards

Instructions: Each participant will need five Life Chance cards, and you will possibly need a few extra. Based on how many youth you might have, print and cut out enough cards for your group to play.



Life Scenarios

Instructions: You will read these during the game.

1 Your child has an emergency at school, and someone needs to pick them up. If you are a woman and a parent, you lose one Life Chance.

2 Your job is giving raises! If you are white and a man, you gain one Life Chance.

3 The police are looking for a suspect and have set up a roadblock on your street. If you are a man and a person of color, you lose one Life Chance.

4 It is tax season. The government gives tax breaks to people who are married and to those who have children. If you are married, you gain one Life Chance. If you have children, you gain one Life Chance. (Note that if you are married *and* have children, you gain two Life Chances for this round.)

5 Your unemployment benefits run out. If you are unemployed, you lose one Life Chance.

6 You are buying a new home. People have complained about *hoodlums* moving into the neighborhood, so the realtor wants to make sure they sell to the *right* people. If you are white, you gain one Life Chance.

7 You are at the airport and have been randomly selected for additional screening. If you are Western Asian or an immigrant, you lose one Life Chance.

8 You are running for president of the United States. To run for president, you must have been born in the United States. If you are not an immigrant, you gain one Life Chance. If your card does not say immigrant, gain one Life Chance.

9 A conservative religious group comes to town to protest your city's annual Pride march. If you are a member of the LGBTQ+ community, you lose one Life Chance.

10 You find yourself in trouble with the law. Your lawyer says you could face up to a year in jail. However, the judge is sympathetic because you "look like you come from a good family." If you are white, you gain one Life Chance.

11 You are completing your written exam for your driver's license. The test is offered only in English. If English is not your first language, you lose one Life Chance.