

To: Spring 2020 Restorative Justice Group #34

Title: *Everyday Ubuntu: Unity and Someone Else's Shoes*

Lesson 2: Strength Lies in Unity

Two African proverbs begin this chapter:

- *If you want to go quickly, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.*
- *Sticks in a bundle are unbreakable.*

Although much of the text in this chapter deals with the type of unity that is necessary for building social and political movements, I found myself thinking about what the concept of strength in unity might mean for you there in prison. How do these proverbs relate to your present life there? What are some ways that you, inside a prison, can find strength in unity?



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A couple of weeks ago the focus of the Monday worship service, offered by the Prison Ministry Project, was illustrated by this picture of giant redwoods. The reason they grow so tall is that they have complicated root systems that support each other.

Ubuntu rejects the notion that any human being can ever be entirely self-made because no person can exist in isolation. Remember, "*I am only because you are,*" the definition of ubuntu.

These thoughts come together as I think of the different *communities* that exist inside the walls and how they work to offer learning, support, and trust; and how those communities can enhance our individual strength through unity.

Because of my role as an RJ volunteer, the most obvious community that I can think of quickly is the Restorative Justice circle. It becomes clear to everyone in the circle, as the weeks progress, that the people in the circle have become a family. This is a space where we can be honest with others and with ourselves. One graduate, in the early days of the program, told me that the biggest surprise to him was the level of trust that existed in the circle among all those present.

But there are other groups that can offer support and comradeship. There are the different religious groups; it has been clear to me that these are a great and constant source of help and support. How about the classes that many of you take? After a period of time you probably come to know each other well enough to enjoy the learning and share insights. Or maybe the sports groups you belong to? Or the friendships you develop with other residents who share your interests and aspirations.

Something to think about:

- When was a time when you were encouraged by someone else or when you encouraged another person?
- What are the groups you are part of—large or small—that provide you with support, honesty, new learning, and maybe even a good time?

Lesson 3: Put Yourself in the Shoes of Others

This chapter begins: *Who doesn't like to feel as if they know best or know what's "right" in a difficult situation. Everyone enjoys the feeling of being the person with all the answers, the person who stands apart from it all and casts judgement. However, ubuntu encourages us to drop our judgements and embrace compassion and understanding.*

We can never really walk in another person's shoes. Each of us has our own experiences in life. Some of those experiences may help us better understand what another is going through. As Atticus Finch counsels his daughter in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, "If you can learn a simple trick, Scout, you'll get along a lot better with all kinds of folks. You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view, until you climb inside of his skin and walk around in it."

Maybe a point of disagreement gives us a chance to look at and acknowledge another person's perspective. Maybe it gives us a chance to more closely examine our own point of view, the shoes that we are wearing. Sometimes, trying to walk, think, understand another person and their way of being and looking at the world can feel impossible. But maybe we can't or don't have to do it all at once.



Walking in another person's shoes might mean doing it in steps:

- **Even if you don't agree, consider the other side.** You have probably heard this more than once (and will hear it again and again): *Listening is more important than speaking.* Listen hard to what that someone else is saying to you; ask questions. Ask yourself, if I were facing that situation, what would I do?
- **Take time to question.** Ask yourself questions about why you think the way you do. They may be questions you find difficult to answer honestly. Ask the other person good questions, encouraging them to say more about who they are and what they think.
- **Talk to people.** I often say, about myself, that I think with my mouth. Sometimes I need to talk to other people to try to figure out how to understand what I have heard and seen. And of course, if that "thinking" is about someone else, I make sure that I am not gossiping or sharing information that is confidential.
- **Consider what someone else might be thinking.** Take those 2 seconds (or more) that Mr. Haskin talked about and imagine how that other person might be feeling about the situation.
- **It might help to speak the other person's point of view out loud.** Summarizing aloud the other person's perspective may help you hear something you have missed before, because you were thinking of your own perspective. In a way, you are arguing their side of the story.
- **Find inspiration in others' journeys.** When we hear another person's story, sometimes it is clear that the journey to their perspective is truly inspirational. At this point, we may still not totally understand but we can admire the path that the person took to get where they are.

And lastly, sometimes we have to admit the we don't understand (and hopefully keep talking) or that we are wrong (and need to ask forgiveness.)

This isn't easy!!! But we all have to keep working at it. ~ Ms. Pugh, Restorative Justice volunteer