

youth day

16 JUNE

Uprising that began in Soweto and spread countrywide profoundly changed the socio-political landscape in South Africa. On 16 June 1976 between 3000 and 10 000 students mobilised by the South African Students Movement's Action Committee marched peacefully to demonstrate and protest. Events that triggered the uprising can be traced back to policies of the Apartheid government that resulted in the introduction of the Bantu Education Act in 1953. When the language of Afrikaans alongside English was made compulsory as a medium of instruction in schools in 1974, black students began mobilising themselves.

The march was meant to culminate at a rally in Orlando Stadium. On their pathway they were met by heavily armed police who fired tear gas and later live ammunition on demonstrating students. Twenty three young people were killed on that first day, with some reports going as high as 200 young people killed by the police in the protests that followed in other communities. This resulted in a widespread revolt that turned into an uprising against the government. While the uprising began in Soweto, it spread across the country and carried on until the following year.

In a country where there is a vast disparity in educational outcomes between schools in different areas, we should be mindful that the work to have accessible, effective and quality education for all is not yet complete. Many facets of the #feesmustfall movement have the same cry as those students in 1976.



youth day

Why do we remember this day?

We celebrate this day to remember the brave youth that marched (and died) for the right to learn and not be suppressed intellectually because of race. Due to this public holiday having roots in such a tragic event, it is not just a day to celebrate young people. This event brings to mind the call for accessible education for the greater proportion of the South African population - a fight and injustice still happening today.

As Christ-followers, what can we do on this day?

- Lament and acknowledge that the education system failed so many people for so long and contributes towards disparity of income and livelihoods today, passed on to the next generations. Encourage people to listen to the heart of what young people are protesting. Ask: do we respond with disdain to any student protest, or are we listening to what is truly happening within our youth today?
- While sitting at the table with your primary school aged children, set up a scenario that might make this public holiday more real. Ask everyone to pretend they're in the classroom. Start speaking another language the kids don't understand (or gibberish). Give one child 1 book and another ten books. At the end of the exercise, ask the children what they think about their teachers speaking a language they don't understand or not having as many resources/stationery as other kids. Would that be fair? What would they do if they didn't have a school and teachers like other kids in the province? Discuss the challenges South Africa has overcome and be thankful for any progress made.
- Reflect on 1 Timothy 4:12 *"Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity."* Challenge young people to have their passion for social change to be rooted in scripture, not merely following the loudest voices in society.
- Have a conversation within your family and friends about the state of education in South Africa and what you, personally, can do to make a difference in just one pupil, one family, or one school.