

## **Freedom in Faith February 16, 2020**

**Overarching theme:** In 2020, FUMC will be a **Go** church!

### **Instructions:**

When using this material as teacher, feel free to pick and choose the point you want to emphasize in the lesson. The format of the curriculum is designed to have an abundance of information in which to refer as desired.

### **Core Point:**

The past is the past. There is nothing that can be done about it. The past can only be used to gain wisdom for the future. What can change is the future. When we, as God's people, are willing to follow God in our daily lives, God will make a good way in the future. The way may be bumpy at times and have curves, but the process will be filled with God's love and grace.

### **Book of Luke:**

The Gospel of Luke was written sometime after 60 A.D. and before 70 A.D. The Gospel narratives were probably written to help people remember the story from actual witnesses. Most likely, decades after the death and resurrection of Jesus, the stories about Jesus had morphed into half-truths. Each Gospel had many similar stories but with a unique perspective from the eye witness. The author, Luke, was most likely a physician and worked with Paul on a missionary journey. Luke wrote a companion letter, which is called Acts, after the Gospel of Luke was written. Both letters, Luke wrote to Theophilus which means "God's Friend." There is speculation that Theophilus was a wealthy influential believer, or a name for a group of people receiving the letter. We really do not know for sure. The purpose for Luke writing the Gospel letter is explained in chapter 1 verses 1-4. Luke wrote to give an orderly and researched account of what was fulfilled in the eyewitness account of Christ Jesus. The people that received the Gospel of Luke were most likely gentile Christians struggling to journey as a Christian and understand the fullness of Jesus.

### **Reflect on this Scripture:**

#### **Luke 15:11-32 (NRSV) Parable of the Prodigal Son**

<sup>11</sup> Then Jesus said, "There was a man who had two sons. <sup>12</sup> The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So he divided his property between them. <sup>13</sup> A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. <sup>14</sup> When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he

began to be in need. <sup>15</sup> So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. <sup>16</sup> He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. <sup>17</sup> But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! <sup>18</sup> I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; <sup>19</sup> I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.'"

### **Luke 6:37-38 (NRSV)**

<sup>37</sup> "Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; <sup>38</sup> give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back."

### **Proverbs 21:5, 20 (NRSV)**

<sup>5</sup> The plans of the diligent lead to profit as surely as haste leads to poverty.  
<sup>20</sup> Precious treasure remains in the house of the wise, but the fool devours it.

### **Questions to Ponder:**

What jumps out at you from these passages?  
How would you describe the prodigal son?  
Who do you know that is like the prodigal son?  
What does prodigal and squander mean?  
How is the prodigal son like our consumer culture today?  
What is the core message in verses 37-38?  
How do all three of these passages relate to life?

### **Commentary:**

The story of the prodigal son can be viewed from several different perspectives depending on which person in the story is the study. Let's look at just the prodigal son himself. In the Dictionary, the word "prodigal" used as an adjective means, "spending money or resources freely and recklessly; wastefully extravagant." Consequently, the noun form of prodigal means, "a person who spends money in a recklessly extravagant way." So, we can bring forth the idea that the prodigal son was one who received his inheritance, after asking for it from his father, and then spent it all on doing "the high-life things." He lived into the consumer mentality of his culture. The word in the verse 15:13, "squandered" means to waste (something, especially money or time) in a reckless and foolish manner. It seems that the prodigal son got tired of living an orderly and disciplined life with his well-to-do close family. He went from having everything on the farm, to have nothing in the city. Proverbs is right when it says in verse 21:5, "The plans of the diligent lead to profit as surely as haste leads to poverty." Being disciplined with your

finances can lead to good things, while being undisciplined with you finances can make you broke and in bondage. The prodigal son, like us, lived in a consumer culture where spending can drive people to rein and poverty. We think that being able to purchase any thing we want, at any time we want, makes us free. Sadly, it does not, it leads us to bondage. It is ridicules to think that we can become wealthy by listening to the advertisement that calls us to spent money in order to save money. When you spend it, you spend it. There is no saving in that proposition. It is crazy to think that the paying of 27% interest on a credit card is worth the purchase of an item that will give only momentary benefit. I do realize that sometimes life creates some difficult challenges that are hard to overcome. Those challenges cannot be overcome by being like the prodigal. The consumer mentality can be a very selfish culture that creates bondage for people, leaving them in the pig pen to eat.

Christianity calls us to be givers of that which God has given us. I really like the spiritual principle found in Luke 6:38, "give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back." It is not about being a taker and a consumer of everything, it is about being a giver in everything. We all have bills to pay, people to see, and life to live. We can either do it recklessly and wastefully, or wisely and responsibly. Wisely and responsibly will help you not live life as the broke prodigal. The Christian life is one lived with a giver mentality. Start at the beginning of the month by giving to God, through the church, by both tithe and talents. Spread the Gospel message by the giving of God's grace in all you do. If you wait to the end of the month to give of your income to God, then you will never have enough to give. Sadly, some will give more in tip to the server for Sunday lunch than in the offering plate on Sunday morning. God has called us to a culture of giving, and when we give ourselves over to that giving culture, the rest of life will find better order. Order will lead to financial freedom.

I use the idea of the culture of giving because I think people get the idea of giving. Let's look at it in a different way for a moment. Could it be that the "giving culture" of God is really the "returning culture" of God. If you believe all originates with God and all comes from the grace of God, then what you give is actually a returning to God. So, the giving of your tithe to the ministry of the church and your talents to the ministry of the world is the returning of what God has already given you.

However you view the culture of God in Christ, whether giving or returning to God, find the way to live in the joy of it all.

**Questions to Ponder for accountability in the group:**

How are you living into the consumer mentality?

What do you find is the negative to living the consumer life?

What difference does being a giver first mean in your life?

How would you recommend someone become a giver over a consumer?

What culture do you think we are called to live into, giving or returning?

What does it mean to return something to God?

**Activity of for the life of a disciple:**

1. Remember to find encouragement for the day by reading the daily devotional from FUMC.
2. Ponder and pray on this scripture this week: Matthew 6:33, "give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back."
3. What can you give, or return, this week toward the ministry of Christ in this World?