

Life Lessons

August 9, 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.

Philippians:

The letter to the Philippians is perhaps one of the last letters Paul wrote. In it Paul describes the best of living in Christ with one's friends. Here Paul shares his successes in jail, his hopes for those in Philippi, his complete rejection of the competitive life he left behind, and his daily striving toward the resurrection life with Christ still ahead of him.

In the first-century Mediterranean world, friendship was one of the most important relationship one could have. Friends were two or more people who shared everything together – ways of seeing the world, money, purpose, gifts, help, love and struggle, joy and suffering, prayer, and as the philosophers said, many, many dinners together! Friends even shared the same enemies. We see this theme of friendship in Philippians in the language Paul uses, especially in 2.15 "sharing in the Spirit," "thinking the same way," "having the same love," "being united," and "agreeing." Paul includes Christ in the circle of friends. Christ is the example of the attitudes and actions friends should have toward each other.

Philippi was a city established by Roman soldiers. This meant that some in Philippi had privileged Roman status as citizens of the Roman Empire. Others had only citizenship in their own city. Still others were undocumented and had very few rights under the law. Paul tells the Philippians to "live together in a manner worthy of Christ's gospel" (1.27) because their "citizenship is in heaven" (3.20). In other words, Paul urges them to treat each other as friends who share a heavenly citizenship and who share Christ's attitude of humility rather than recognizing any special human status which might lead them to assert their own privilege.

--adapted from the CEB student bible, pp 1405-1406

Reflect on this Scripture:

Philippians 4:4-7 NRSV

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. ⁵ Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Commentary:

Joy is a theme that runs throughout Philippians. The note of joy continues to echo throughout this chapter. Paul urges the Philippians to rejoice (4.4), and he does so himself (4.10). What he refers to is not a superficial cheerfulness but a deep joy in what God has done in Christ and is continuing to do through the saints. The fact that this joy is "in the Lord" reminds us not only that it derives from the Lord, but also that it is shared by those who live in him. Paul is not thinking of something that is merely an emotional experience or that is in any sense transient but of the deep and lasting joy that comes through a deepening relationship with Christ; this joy is thus expressed in sharing his love and concern for others.

Few of us find it easy to follow the advice of 4.6. We tend to worry about *everything!* Our attitude is the very opposite of the trust in God that Paul commends. It is sobering to remember that Paul was in prison, facing a capital charge, when he wrote this letter. And that was not his only problem, for his responsibility for the churches was a constant concern (2 Cor 11.28). Moreover, the people to whom he was writing were unlikely to be living comfortable lives. Most of them were poor, many were slaves, and few of them would have known the meaning of security. In marked contrast, those of us who live in comparative wealth and luxury today are frequently those who are most worried and anxious. The secret of Paul's composure is that he is relying on God, and not on material goods. This freedom from worry and anxiety does not, of course, imply an irresponsible attitude toward life and one's obligations. It is a mark of Christian maturity to be able to distinguish between the anxiety that cripples and destroys the individual and the concern for others that builds up the whole community.

Paul directs the Philippians to pray (4.6) – with thanksgiving. Once again, we find that Paul's prayers are suffused with thanksgiving. And once again we should remember that Paul had a capital charge hanging over his head and was writing to people who had very little in material terms. All too often our own prayers are nothing but a "shopping list" *without* thanksgiving; our anxiety about the future obscures the benefits that have been showered upon us. Gratitude to God for all that we have been given will allow the peace of God to guard our hearts and minds, protecting us against all that might destroy us (4.7).

– from the New Interpreter's Bible Commentary, Vol XI, pp 546-548

This week we are looking at Life Lessons – those lessons we learn all throughout our lives that help inform how we will act and how we will interact with others. Even though we continue to learn as we grow and mature, it seems that the lessons we learn as children are the ones that we hold on to.

Some years back, Robert Fulghum wrote an essay titled, "All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten." In just 10 simple lessons, he summed up all we really need to know to live a good life. Some of those lessons are "share everything," "play fair," "say you're sorry when you hurt somebody," and, especially important for us now, "**wash your hands.**"

As Christians we find our life lessons in Scripture. From Jesus we hear we should love God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength and we should love our neighbor as ourselves (Mark 12.28-31). We should also love our enemies and pray for those who hurt us (Matt 5.43-48). In 1 Thessalonians we hear we should pray without ceasing (5.17). And in the gospel of John we hear of God's amazing love in what is perhaps the first verse most of us memorized, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (John 3.16).

Lessons on how to live are found in so many places in Scripture. In Philippians, toward the end of the letter, we hear we should constantly rejoice, let our gentleness be seen, don't worry, pray with thanksgiving, and let God's peace surround you. In the best of times these are hard things to hear, in the midst of a pandemic they are very difficult to hear. Until we remember, we are not alone. God is ever with us. In God we find all we need.

Are we able to be open to all God is ready to do for us?

Questions to Ponder for accountability in the group:

As you think about this passage, how can you respond to this Scripture:

Are you rejoicing? How?

How is your gentleness being seen?

What are your biggest worries right now? Are you able to not worry and instead pray?

As you pray, what are you giving thanks for? Are you able to find three things every day to be grateful for?

Is your heart open to receive the peace of God?

Activity 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: Philippians 4.7
And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.
3. Consider the lessons that guide your life, and ask how you can share them with another.