

Under Pressure

Press On – Press Into the Strength of Christ

October 29, 2023

Overarching Theme: 2023 – Living the Dream

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: 2023 can be a year of living the dream of faithful discipleship as we take a next step forward in following Jesus Christ.

Reflect on this Scripture: Philippians 4:10-23

¹⁰ I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned for me but had no opportunity to show it. ¹¹ Not that I am referring to being in need, for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. ¹² I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. ¹³ I can do all things through him who strengthens me. ¹⁴ In any case, it was kind of you to share my distress. ¹⁵ You Philippians indeed know that in the early days of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving except you alone. ¹⁶ For even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me help for my needs more than once. ¹⁷ Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the profit that accumulates to your account. ¹⁸ I have been paid in full and have more than enough; I am fully satisfied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. ¹⁹ And my God will fully satisfy every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. ²⁰ To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen. ²¹ Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers and sisters who are with me greet you. ²² All the saints greet you, especially those of the emperor's household. ²³ The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

Commentary:

In the midst of his concluding message of gratitude to the Philippians, Paul's word about contentment seems more akin to Stoicism than to Scripture. But for the Stoics, self-sufficiency meant relying on one's inner resources. For

Paul, it meant relying on God in Christ to provide the necessary resources. He has learned to be content, whatever his circumstances (4:11). Paul's language suggests that being content was not something that came easily, and this is hardly surprising, in view of the hardships and dangers in which his missionary work involved him. His contentment is no spineless resignation, but a joyful acceptance of what God provides. And in Paul's case, God used the Philippians to provide what he needed. Their action in giving and receiving is described in sacrificial language, reminding us one again of the central theme of the gospel: Christ's gift of himself. They share in the divine giving, and the result, once again, is that God is given glory (4:20).

Paul reminds us here of something that we too often forget: The riches of God are sufficient to deal with all our needs. But unlike some proponents of popular "prosperity" gospels, he does not promise us earthly wealth. Far more valuable than that is the attitude Paul has acquired through being in Christ, an attitude that accepts riches and poverty with equal joy and thanksgiving. In 4:11-20, Paul expresses his gratitude to God – and to the Philippians – for their gift. But far more important than the gift itself were the love and concern the Philippians showed toward Paul – a love and concern that led them to help him.

-adapted from New Interpreter's Bible Commentary, Vol XI, p.548

Questions to Ponder for Accountability in the Group:

1. Paul says *I have learned to be content with whatever I have*, even when he is under pressure. What was Paul's secret? What might help you become more content when you are under pressure?
2. Why do you think that Philippians 4:13 *I can do all things through him who strengthens me* is the second most searched Bible verse in the world? What are some of the ways you experience the strength of Christ when you are in need?
3. On what basis can Paul confidently say, *And my God will fully satisfy every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus* (Philippians 4:19)? Does God bless our generosity? In what ways?
4. Written within 25 years or so of Jesus' cross and empty tomb, Paul offers greetings from Jesus-followers who have a fairly close association with the Roman emperor! What does this say about the

advance of the gospel in those early years? How can we be more intentional about sharing the good news today?

Activity for the Life of a Disciple:

1. Remember to find encouragement for the day by reading the daily devotional from FUMCC.
2. Ponder and pray on this scripture this week: Philippians 4:13
"I can do all things through him who strengthens me."