

Under Pressure
Press On – Follow Christ
October 8, 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 2:1-15

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

who, though he was in the form of God,

*did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited,
but emptied himself,*

taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.

And being found in human form, he humbled himself

and became obedient to the point of death-- even death on a cross.

Therefore God also highly exalted him

and gave him the name that is above every name,

so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure. Do all things without murmuring and arguing, so that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of crooked and perverse generation, in which you shine like stars in the world.

Commentary: Based on the Greek text, Philippians 2:1ff might best be rendered "Since you have encouragement from being united with Christ, be like-minded." "Since you have fellowship with the Spirit, have the same love." "Since you have comfort from his love and tenderness and compassion, be one in spirit and purpose." In other words, the powerful realities of God's grace form the basis for Paul's plea for Philippian unity ("stand firm in one spirit" 1.27). He challenges them to focus more on Christ's encouragement than complaints against one other. However, this requires looking beyond our own needs and interests to the needs and interests of the Christians with whom God surrounds us. That requires the kind of humility and concern for others that isn't natural in self-centered, work in progress people. Thankfully then, God has graciously given us the perfect example of such sacrificial humility: the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul recites what is likely an early Christian hymn that expresses Christians' core belief about our humble Savior's saving work. In this beautiful hymn all Philippians could sing what they believed, concisely and congregationally. This hymn allowed them to sing about what united rather than divided them - "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus," Paul sings. "He made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant... he humbled himself and become obedient to death."

Paul understood that the Philippian Christians would need the kind of selfless love and care that Jesus showed in order to endure the kind of suffering and divisiveness they were undergoing. In the moments of weakness and fear that would certainly come, they'd be more likely to endure if others lovingly encouraged and prayed for them.

The ancient Christian hymn/poem reminded the Philippian Christians that Jesus was their model of such a life that pleases God. After all, besides being humble and obedient, he was also compassionate and forgiving. Now, says Paul, Jesus' adopted brothers and sisters try to do something similar, continuing to work out our salvation with "fear and trembling." In doing so, he's not calling Christian to try to earn our salvation through fearful and constant work and worry. Instead, God's salvation is always God's gracious gift that can and should to awaken within God's adopted children a renewed commitment to press on in a way that's consistent with this relationship. - Adapted from online commentary by Doug Bratt

Questions to Ponder for Accountability in the Group:

1. Under intense pressure from outside sources, the fledgling Philippian Christian community were apparently struggling internally in their

relationships with one another. When you are under stress for an extended period of time, what is the impact on your relationships?

2. In the midst of this pressure, Paul reminds them of their “encouragement in Christ...consolation from [his] love...sharing in the spirit... compassion and sympathy.” How might these resources help them come together and press on in greater unity?
3. Paul then encourages the Philippians to think like Christ (v. 5) by citing what is likely an early Christian hymn. Re-read the words of this hymn (vs. 6-11). How might their attitudes and actions toward one another change if they sought to lean into the humility of Jesus?
4. Paul concludes this section by reminding them that thinking like Jesus will enable them to “shine like stars” in a dark world. How would the church stand out today if more Christians emulated the humility of Jesus rather than the ‘murmuring and arguing’ relational conflict so evident in our culture? How might you follow Jesus in this regard 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 2:3-4
“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.”