

WELLSPRING

UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



Sermon Series Devotional

9/12/2021-10/17/21

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Introduction

So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.

II Timothy 2:22-26

Does this sound easy for you? Don't you wish other people took this teaching to heart as you deal with them? Sadly, that isn't always the case for other people or for ourselves. Difficult behavior is a daily issue that requires some skill and wisdom and discipline to handle. It also requires self awareness on our part because there is often something within us that is triggered to respond as we do. This series is designed to help us discover our own inner life, the sources of our responses and the most Christlike way of dealing with difficult behavior.

Suggested Use

Our devotional is designed to be a resource for you and can be used in a variety of ways. Each week, you will be provided a series of questions, reflections, and prompts to engage with. You can complete them all in one sitting or divide them up throughout the week. Whether you are using it in a group or for your own personal time, we suggest keeping a journal that can be used to respond to the questions each week and for prayers.

Week One - Trouble is Our Business

Myths abound on what family is supposed to be like. The same goes for the Church. People often have idealized images of what to expect and how people should behave. We often discover, to our dismay, that family life is not what we expected. The same goes for idealized images of church life where everyone gets along and nobody argues. Where do those ideas come from? Let's do some exploring.

Reflection questions:

1. Think of your family of origin--whatever form that took. List 5 words that describe your family:
A. B. C. D. E.
2. How many of the words are negative? Positive?
3. How would you describe your "place" in your family?
4. How has the dynamic of your family changed over time?
5. Were there any difficulties you experienced with any family members? How have they been dealt with?
6. How did your family deal with conflict?
7. Who has been the most helpful to you in addressing any difficulties?

Read Luke 2:41-52

1. Have you ever experienced a child wandering off? How do you think Jesus's family felt when they discovered he was missing?
2. How did his family react?
3. How does Jesus's response indicate his sense of independence?
4. Have you seen families wrestle with a family member trying to differentiate themselves (act independently)?
5. Have you ever had to deal with resistance to your efforts to express yourself?

Read Mark 10:35-41

1. Within the disciple "family" there has begun a jockeying for position. What are they hoping for? What is driving their request?
2. How does the desire for power play a role in this interaction?
3. What is Jesus's response to their request?
4. How did the other disciples react to the request from the brothers? What kind of division did it potentially set up?
5. What kind of power struggles have you witnessed in your family life? Church life? Have you ever been tempted yourself to ask for power or exert inappropriate influence?

Week Two - To Health or Not to Health

We live in an age of division and “multiple truths.” And it isn’t that there are just multiple variations of what is true but lines of argument have been drawn. Many have just thrown their hands in the air and protested, “I just don’t know what to believe!” In an age when people can simply post anything and call it true, how do you decide what is? How do you draw the line on your own ideas and what you share? This is not just a social issue, it is an issue for people of faith.

Reflection Questions:

1. What has been your experience with the proliferation of false information? How has it affected your level of stress?
2. What criteria do you use to decide what to share with people personally or online?
3. Have you lost friends because of their insistence on a particular world view?
4. What criteria do you use to decide what information is true that you're exposed to?

Read John 18:32-38

1. What are the various stories that were pushed about who Jesus was and what his intentions were?
2. What was Jesus’s response to Pilate when questioned about who he really was?
3. What does Pilate’s response to Jesus’s comment indicate about his confusion over truth?
4. Have you ever felt like Pilate because of so many conflicting pieces of “truth” in your life?

Read Matthew 7:1-6

1. This is a rich text about how we view others and how we see ourselves. What are the cautions that are given and why?
2. What does it say about the flaws we see in others and the relationship to who we are?
3. What is the caution about sharing important information with people who can’t appreciate it?
4. What does it imply about sharing important information with people who might abuse it?

Week Three - We Have a Horizon

We all start somewhere. Our family of origin (see week 1) determines many of our initial beliefs and worldview. They may not always be helpful or accurate, but they are what we start with. Somewhere along the line our peers begin to play a more significant role. How we handle those initial expectations determine the quality of our life, our ability to faithfully live, and our chance to live with the freedom Christ intended.

Reflection Questions:

1. Reflecting back to week 1, what was your “place” in the family and how did it affect how you saw your role?
2. In what ways has your relationship with your family changed over the years?
3. Do you ever find yourself slipping into a previous role when around family?

Read Matthew 8:28-34

1. What was the problem Jesus was confronted with?
2. What was his action and what was the result? How did this affect the economy of the town? How did the people react?
3. Does it strike you as odd that they didn't do any celebration of the healing of this man?
4. What does that say about their willingness to allow him to stay the same so their lives would be unchanged?
5. In family and church life do you think there can be resistance to people growing/changing because people like things the way they are?

Read Matthew 5:21-48

1. This is part of the Sermon on the Mount and there is a repeated theme throughout this section. What is it?
2. The first part of each of these statements reflects a “truth” that was imparted to most of the crowd when they were children. What was the new understanding Jesus was bringing to them?
3. What have been the “truths” you have had to unlearn as you have grown? How hard was it to let go of previous understandings?

Read Hebrews 6:1-2

1. What kind of transition is this scripture describing?
2. Why is it that people are so inclined to stay with the simplest teaching and understandings?
3. What circumstances generally provoke a change?
4. Have you ever struggled with growing into a more complex understanding of things?

Reflections:

We often pick up attitudes from our childhood that linger into adulthood. They are often framed with a certain phrase or words. Sometimes they are helpful, but sometimes they are a hindrance. As you remember your upbringing, fill in the phrases that follow the best you can:

1. Always...
2. Never...
3. You should...
4. You shouldn't...
5. Those people...

As you look back on these phrases, how many of them still feel current to you?

Week Four - Boundary Problems

We live in an age where it doesn't seem like anyone has any privacy thanks to social media and other forums. The ability to place healthy boundaries is in short supply but much needed. How do you avoid the unhealthy dynamics that come with interaction with people who either don't want to respect your boundaries or try to pull other people into the game?

Matthew 20:20-28

1. What did the mother of James and John (sons of Zebedee) ask of Jesus?
2. Why was this a boundary issue?
3. How did the other disciples respond when they heard the request?
4. What was Jesus's response? (He gives 2.)
5. This effort by their mother is called triangulation. What problems does it cause in relationships?

Luke 12:13--21

1. Have you ever felt yourself manipulated? What internal struggles did you deal with?
2. What was this man asking? Do you think it was appropriate for him to ask Jesus?
3. What was Jesus's response to the request? What did he see as the deeper issue?
4. What kind of divide was this request going to create between this man and his brother?
5. Have you dealt with difficult people who were driven by some sort of greed?

Proverbs 6:16-19

1. What do you think the significance is of these things being singled out as things God hates?
2. What is your response to these behaviors when you encounter them?
3. How do these behaviors play a role in your interaction with difficult people?
4. What is your response when you experience these things?
5. What role does the establishment of boundaries play a role in reacting to these behaviors?
6. How hard is it to remember that these people are a child of God too?

John 2:1-10

1. What was the problem at the wedding and what did Jesus's mother want him to do?
2. What was his response? Why do you think he said that?
3. What did he do related to the situation?
4. When a child decides to go a different direction from the parent, it is called differentiation. How does this reflect that?

Week Five - Can this be love?

We face two difficult issues these days. How do we decide what we are hearing or seeing is true? And when we are faced with people who have hurt us, betrayed us, or lied to us, how do we respond? How do we reply when we feel we are being exposed to something that is absolutely false? “Speaking the truth in love” becomes rather difficult.

Read Matthew 18:15-17

1. Assuming sin is defined as creating a separation (between God and self, self and others or within ourselves), what is the directive given here?
2. What do we do if the person doesn't respond to us?
3. What is the value in having a neutral third party help us listen and be understood?
4. What is the purpose of putting the person outside of the community if everything falls apart? Is it meant to be punishment or something else?
5. How does this approach protect the community of faith?

John 21:15-19

1. Given Peter's denials of Jesus during his arrest, how is this conversation between Jesus and Peter an example of Jesus speaking the truth in love?
2. Why do you think Jesus asked the question three times?
3. Was Jesus trying to shame Peter or reconcile? How do you know?

Genesis 3:1-7

1. Do you understand why they would have found the serpent's argument so convincing?
2. Did the serpent lie or tell partial truths?
3. Have you ever been persuaded by a person or social media post that looked so convincing but turned out to be false? What did you do?

1 John 4:1

1. What does it mean to test the spirits?
2. What does this scripture say about people who intentionally spread false information?
3. How does this scripture ask us to use discernment in what we believe?
4. What are some ways to test if something is true?

Reflection questions:

1. How do you use discernment in this era of social media and widely distributed false information?
2. Is it hardest to discern falsehood that is partially true?
3. Is it an option for a Christian to throw their hands in the air and say, “I just can't believe anything anymore?”

Week Six - Making Waves

On TV, when someone comes through hardship as healed and a survivor there is usually a swelling of the background music and people cheer. But in real life, all healing and positive transformation is not celebrated. In fact, often the opposite. As you work through your difficulties and try to become your own (and God's person) you will need to be prepared that not everyone celebrates it. But, you're not alone. Look at the following stories...

Read John 5:1-15

1. Why was the lame man by the pool?
2. Were people pleased when Jesus healed the man?
3. What complications did this create for the man, the man's parents, and Jesus?
4. Does it surprise you that the parents would not stand up for their son because of the possibility of losing temple privileges?

Read Matt 8:28-34

1. What kind of life was this man leading before Jesus healed him?
2. How accustomed had the village become to the man "playing this role?"
3. What did the demons rushing into the pigs and driving them off the cliff represent to the town?
4. Is there sometimes a cost to supporting someone who has transformed and is now healthy? What price are you willing to pay for such a thing? What does this say about the cost of caring for people who are not "our own"?

Read 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

1. What does it mean to regard someone from a worldly point of view?
2. How does our ability to see ourselves and others from God's point of view enable transformation?
3. What do you think it takes to move from a worldly point of view to seeing things the way God sees things?

Reflection questions:

1. Why does change disrupt the system? Is that a bad thing? How do we plan for that so we are not surprised?
2. Is it reasonable to assume that the pain that sometimes comes with healing, growth and transformation is a worthy price to pay?