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Learning to Lean on Jesus
Philippians 4:10-20
December 4, 2016, Jeff Germo

I believe that the big lesson in the life of every follower of Jesus, from the day they receive him, to the day they die and join him in eternity is trust. Do I trust Jesus enough to obey him in everything? The job Jesus gave us to do while we await his return is to teach Jesus-followers to obey him in every way. The reason we, at times, have trouble following Jesus is because we don't really trust him. We trust him as long as it's comfortable for us. We want to choose which things to obey him in. "I'll do this thing, but I won't do that thing because doing that thing will mean I'll have to give up some other thing I find comfort in. So, I don't really trust that Jesus is enough."

As we grow in our trust of Jesus it affects every single area of our lives. It will affect how we treat people. Do we treat them with love, patience, kindness, or not. It will affect how we face conflict, or how we handle people who might disagree with us. When someone has a differing opinion do we trust God enough to be ok with that, or does it wreck our day, or create a rift between us and them? If we are weak in our trust of God we will think it's all about us and that we have to manipulate people to think like us. If we were honest, we would admit that we are all tempted in this way. In some ways, I have a long way to go learning to trust Jesus.

I got an email from a young 14 year old girl from the church last week about the sermon from last Sunday. I'd like to read it to you because she got it so well. She actually expressed the intent of the sermon much better than I did. I want to be just like her when I grow up. I asked her for permission to read this.

"About your sermon that you made on the 27th of November, specifically on the part where you talked about unconscious iniquities, conscious iniquities, conscious virtues, and unconscious virtues.

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Now, let me just stop right there because I actually didn't say it like that. I wish I had, but I couldn't wrap my head around what words would best encapsulate this process. The words I used were, Unconscious Incompetencies (call it what it is - Sin) > Conscious Incompetencies (Sin) > Conscious Competencies > Unconscious Competencies. I talked it over with Ruthie and we tried together to come up with a better way of saying this because neither of us was happy with it. And then this fourteen year old girl gets it and it flows off her tongue so easily. Anyway, she said it so much better.

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Our **unconscious iniquities** get uncovered and become, **conscious iniquities**. As we train with Jesus they will become **conscious virtues**. And then as we continue to train with Jesus in community those conscious virtues will become **unconscious virtues** as we practice them with others and allow Jesus to change us.

She continues:

I was very intrigued, because I had always had the assumption that the phrase "patience is a virtue", was only a saying, and that you were either born with patience or not born with patience. I had also thought that there was no way for me to stop being so impatient, that I was just not born with it.

However upon hearing your sermon. I have found myself recognizing when I am thinking impatient thoughts, and I have also found myself trying my hardest not to act upon them. I have also realized that it is nearly impossible to go straight from being impatient to not thinking any impatient thoughts or not being impatient at all.

That was always my expectation, that I needed to go straight from bad to perfect, but upon hearing and thinking about your sermon I have come to realize that patience can be like dance. So I'm not

sure if you know, but I have been dancing for 11 years, and when I started dancing of course I wasn't very good. But as I got older and more experienced I found myself getting better, and soon dance became like second nature to me.

Do you think that patience or any virtue can be like that? I know we can not get better at anything passively. We must work always to be more Christ-like. And I hope that as I keep growing in my faith and as I grow older that I will keep trying and striving to be more patient and of course more Christ-like. Now obviously I struggle with many other of the fruit of the spirit; all of them in fact. I was merely using patience as my example because it was what I started on first."

Isn't that amazing? She is fourteen years old and she said it so much better than I did. That is how we grow in every area of our lives. That is what discipleship with Jesus is all about. It is the process of learning to trust him. It doesn't happen overnight. It takes a lifetime of cooperation with him. And as we learn to trust him enough, to surrender the various areas of our lives, we gain a new freedom each time.

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The degree of trust we have in God affects every single area of our lives. It will affect the career path we choose. It will determine whether or not we are willing to take risks to use the gifts he has given us and be involved in the ministry of the church.

It will affect our choice in the kinds of friends we spend time with. It will affect the choices we make about what we do when others aren't looking, or the things we do in our spare time. It will affect who we choose as a life partner. It will affect how we handle our finances, the kinds of things we spend our money on, the kinds of toys we buy, and whether or not we hoard or stockpile wealth, and whether or not we give to God out of the first part of our income, or just give him the leftovers when we know we have enough to make it to the end of the month — so we don't have to trust him. The degree to which we trust God will even affect how we feel about ourselves. It will also affect whether or not we are willing to own our sin.

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Now, remember, we don't learn this stuff overnight. **The big question is, will I trust God and live my life in a way that honours him and puts him first in everything, or will I take matters into my own hands and do things my way, with my relationships, with my time, my gifts and talents, my words, and even with my thoughts?**

We should be learning each day to give all these things up to God. None of us is perfectly there yet. We all have a long way to go, but we can learn to trust him in every area of our lives and take risks that honour him.

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Remember the story in Genesis about Abraham and Sarah? God called Abraham, in Genesis 12, when he was seventy-five years old and told him that he was going to make him into a great nation — that his descendants would be too numerous to count. The problem was that he and his elderly wife were childless and had remained so for another twenty five years. And in that twenty five year period God taught Abraham and Sarah to trust him.

In that process they failed many times, and their lack of trust led them to lie and cheat and try to manipulate events to produce the outcome that *they* thought should happen. One time in particular they decided to take matters into their own hands by getting Abraham to sleep with Sarah's servant Hagar so they could have a child through her. They didn't trust that God would do what he said. That was in chapter 16 of Genesis.

Just previous to that, in chapter 15, God had reminded them that *he* was going to give them a child from their *own* seed and that *their* descendants would number the sands of the sea shore and the stars in the sky, meaning that they would be too numerous to count. They didn't trust God enough to wait for his good timing. Well, fifteen years later Isaac was born to Abraham and Sarah. God fulfilled his promise to them. Their trust grew immensely, but God was not finished building their trust. It would be a lifetime project, and the ultimate test was when God asked Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. Abraham, of course, passed the test and God provided

a substitute ram to take Isaac's place. Their whole life's journey was a lesson in learning to trust that God will always do what he says.

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And it's the same for us as Christ-followers. **Will we trust him enough to follow him in every way, or will we take matters into our own hands and try to manipulate people and events so we get the outcome we think we deserve?**

That is what today's passage deals with.

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Philippians 4:10–20 (NLT)

10 How I praise the Lord that you are concerned about me again. I know you have always been concerned for me, but you didn't have the chance to help me.

Remember the context of this letter. Paul is in jail, probably in Rome. He's chained day and night to a Roman guard. He has been using those opportunities while he has a captive audience to talk to the guards about Jesus. He has no idea how long he'll be in jail. As a matter of fact, he doesn't even know if he will ever get out. He may die there of old age. Or as far as he knows, get executed. And yet, all through the letter there is a very hopeful, contented, and joyous tone. He doesn't write about the terrible conditions he is living in. He cares more about the Philippian Jesus-followers than he does about himself.

One of the reasons he is joyful is because of the love the Philippian church has shown him. They sent Epaphroditus all the way from Philippi in Greece to care for his needs in Rome, Italy. They sent a care package to him and he is overjoyed because of the love and concern they have so practically expressed to him. Now, apparently, some time had passed since they had been able to last care for him, but he acknowledges that they had sent Epaphroditus as soon as they could.

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11 Not that I was ever in need, for I have learned how to be content with whatever I have.

How many of us can say the same thing? Do you believe it's possible to live a life of contentment? Is it possible to be content when friends disappoint us? Is it possible to be content when we see others around us with bigger and better things than we can afford? Is it possible to be satisfied with our life when we are in a job that is not fulfilling for us? Is it possible to be content when we are terminally sick? How in the world is any of this possible?

The only way any of these things are remotely possible is if we learn to trust God. If our trust is in our trophies, or our money, or job security, or in our image, or health, or in perfect relationships, or any other earthly thing, we will never live a life of contentment because these things are fleetingly precarious. We could lose our health. We could lose our job. We could lose our security. We could fail at something and lose the image that we have worked so hard to project and protect. We could be let down by people we thought were our friends. If our trust is in any of these things we will never be content.

I think it is harder today than ever to live with contentment because things are changing at a faster pace than they ever have. By the time you get a new piece of technology its already outdated, so you're always longing for the newer upgraded model of iPhone, iPod, computer, car, TV, or whatever.

I think it was the week after I got my Samsung Galaxy Note IV that they introduced the next generation. Now they have the Note IIV. I'm very glad I was not suckered into buying that one since they have a tendency of blowing up on airplanes. All the ads on TV tell you that you *deserve* to have these things you can't afford.

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It's like you have the devil on one shoulder telling you, "You deserve more", and the Holy Spirit on the other shoulder whispering, "just trust God."

For example, if you think it would be really great to own a bigger big screen TV or a new iPad, but you don't have the income necessary to purchase these things, and especially if it means you have to sacrifice your tithe to the Lord so you can have your new toy, God is obviously not in those decisions. We tend to think we somehow deserve to have certain toys because everyone else has them. When we buy into that lie what happens to our trust in God? It fades to the background. That sort of thinking is what Paul calls 'idolatry'.

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Colossians 3:5–6 (NLT)

⁵ So put to death the sinful, earthly things lurking within you. Have nothing to do with sexual immorality, impurity, lust, and evil desires. Don't be greedy, for a greedy person is an idolater, worshipping the things of this world. ⁶ Because of these sins, the anger of God is coming.

Why is greed and coveting idolatry? Because when we are greedy or covet what someone else has, we put those things ahead of God. We listen to our base desires and obey them rather than God. Paul says the wrath of God is coming because of the kind of idolatrous thinking that says I deserve to have something I can't afford, or I deserve to have something because my neighbour has one, or because the ad on TV said I deserve it. We don't "*deserve*" any of those things. It's not wrong to own them. It is wrong to own them if owning them keeps you from obeying Jesus, or if in owning them you make them more important than God, or if they control you in any way.

When Abraham and Sarah were in the middle of their journey of learning to trust God they struggled intensely with this. And in Genesis 15 God said this to Abraham:

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Genesis 15:1 (NIV)

"Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward."

In other words don't look down at your circumstances for your contentment. Don't look to anything on this earth for contentment. Look up to God.

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He is your reward, not a certain outcome you think you need. If we wait for a certain outcome before we allow ourselves to be content, we will always live frustrated lives.

Paul continues:

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Philippians 4:10-20 (NLT)

¹² I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little.

Paul presents two extremes here. Neither is wrong. One, in which he doesn't have enough to survive, and the other where he has an over-abundance. The temptation in both situations is the same – to forget God. When we have more than we need we are all tempted to think we don't need God. We may not verbalize that, but we tend to live that way. We become complacent, comfortable, and self-sufficient. We don't need to trust God because we can take care of ourselves. We have everything we need.

When we are at the other end of the spectrum we may desperately cry out to God, but we may not really trust that he can meet our needs, so we think we need to take matters into our own hands. We don't wait for him to rescue us, and so because of our impatience we don't get to see his hand deliver us like he wants to. We become our own rescuer, our own deliverer, our own savior. We think we can do better than God. What is Paul's secret to contentment? He knows something he has learned through experience.

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¹³ For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength.

This is something that wasn't just head knowledge for Paul. He believed it from his heart, because he had experienced it over and over again, which led him to act out in faith.

¹³ For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength.

John Ortberg tells this story:

Many years ago I was walking in Newport Beach, a beach in Southern California, with two friends. Two of us were on staff together at a church, and one was an elder at the same church. We walked past a bar where a fight had been going on inside. The fight had spilled out into the street, just like in an old western. Several guys were beating up on another guy, and he was bleeding from the forehead. We knew we had to do something, so we went over to break up the fight. ... I don't think we were very intimidating. [All we did was walk over and say,] "Hey, you guys, cut that out!" It didn't do much good.

Then all of a sudden they looked at us with fear in their eyes. The guys who had been beating up on the one guy stopped and started to slink away. I didn't know why until we turned and looked behind us. Out of the bar had come the biggest man I think I've ever seen. He was something like six feet, seven inches, maybe 300 pounds, maybe 2 percent body fat. Just huge. We called him "Bubba" (not to his face, but afterwards, when we talked about him).

Bubba didn't say a word. He just stood there and flexed. You could tell he was hoping they would try and have a go at him. All of a sudden my attitude was transformed, and I said to those guys, "You better not let us catch you coming around here again!" I was a different person because I had great, big Bubba. I was ready to confront with resolve and firmness. I was released from anxiety and fear. I was filled with boldness and confidence. I was ready to help somebody that needed helping. I was ready to serve where serving was required. Why? Because I had a great, big Bubba. I was convinced that I was not alone. I was safe.

If I were convinced that Bubba were with me 24 hours a day, I would have a fundamentally different approach to my life.¹

How we face life, how we face conflict, how we face trials, and obstacles in our lives is greatly influenced by how big our view of God is. Do we believe, with Paul, that *we can do all things through him who strengthens us*? If God is in something he will give us everything we need to do that thing.

In **Deuteronomy 31** just before the Israelites were to cross the Jordan River to take possession of the land, the Lord told Moses to say this to His people,

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Deuteronomy 31:6 (NLT)

⁶ So be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid and do not panic before them. For the Lord your God will personally go ahead of you. He will neither fail you nor abandon you."

That is just as true for you and me today as it was for Moses, Joshua, and the children of Israel when they crossed the Jordan over three thousand years ago.

Paul continues in Philippians.

[17]

Philippians 4 (NLT)

¹ John Ortberg, in the sermon Big God/Little God, PreachingToday.com

¹⁴ Even so, you have done well to share with me in my present difficulty. ¹⁵ As you know, you Philippians were the only ones who gave me financial help when I first brought you the Good News and then traveled on from Macedonia. No other church did this. ¹⁶ Even when I was in Thessalonica you sent help more than once.

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¹⁷ I don't say this because I want a gift from you. Rather, I want you to receive a reward for your kindness. ¹⁸ At the moment I have all I need—and more! I am generously supplied with the gifts you sent me with Epaphroditus. They are a sweet-smelling sacrifice that is acceptable and pleasing to God.

So, Paul again thanks the Philippians for caring for his physical needs, for listening to the Spirit of Christ and partnering with him.

And then he encourages them.

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¹⁹ And this same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from his glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus. ²⁰ Now all glory to God our Father forever and ever! Amen.

How big is God in *your* mind? Is he big enough to handle every single thing you will ever face and more? As we said last week, we have a propensity to look at our problems and our shortcomings and stay fixated on them. And when we do that they tend to get bigger in our minds and God gets smaller. Paul's approach is always the opposite. His focus is always upwards. **"My God is able."** He is all-powerful. He is good, and as Romans 8:28 says, he has your best in mind. That is a winning combination. Whatever you are facing this morning, whether it is physical, financial, relational, emotional, or spiritual, God is able to handle it if you will allow him.

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¹³ For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength. Truly believing this is the secret to living with true, godly contentment. Our focus is upward on our big, powerful, loving God, instead of down on our problems, shortcomings, fears, or failures.

Last week we talked about peace and how, in order to truly live in peace when things are not going well for us, will take a tremendous amount of practice. We have been programmed by our society to think we need things we don't really need. I am as guilty as anyone here of thinking that I can't be happy unless I have certain things. That is the big lie. Believing that lie makes us idolaters. We need to give Jesus permission to reprogram our minds.

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Romans 12:1–2 (NLT)

¹ And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. ² Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.

That is the secret to contentment. We need to let Jesus transform our minds.

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We need a metamorphosis of the mind. It is the way to true freedom. It's not easy. We can't just flip a switch and expect things to change all of sudden. We have been stuck in this mindset for far too long. It's going to take a lot of hard work as we allow Jesus to apprentice us.

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As followers of Jesus we are all on a journey to learn to trust him implicitly in all things, and each of the obstacles we face along the way are opportunities to practice trusting him and seeing that he is good all the time and that he is able to meet all our needs according to his riches in Christ Jesus.

Ruthie and I were talking about this last week and she said, when she is feeling overwhelmed with life or with a situation she reminds herself that Jesus has what she needs. She actually speaks to him and says, "Jesus, you have what I need for this." And when she does that the burden lifts. He has what you need for whatever you are going through.

Communion



Learning to Lean on Jesus
Philippians 4:4-9
Week of December 4, 2016

Objective of this study: To grow in our trust of God, - no matter what.

[Remember, the main goal of each Growth Group is to allow God's Word to change your heart so that others would see Jesus in you and be likewise changed to be like him. He wants to change the world through us]

Worship (5 – 10 minutes)

1. Sing a song or two of praise and thanksgiving to God.
2. Spend five minutes in silence asking God to prepare your heart for how he wants to speak to you.
3. After the five minutes have someone interrupt the silence and read **Psalm 34:1-8** meditatively to the group. Pause after each phrase letting God speak to you.

Welcome

What ads have you seen recently that tried to convince you that you needed or deserved something? (Did you buy it? LOL)

[It's really important when doing this study that we each think about ourselves specifically and ways we need to grow, not how Christians in general need to grow. Do the hard work of letting the Holy Spirit speak to *your* heart.]

Word (30-45 minutes)

1. What stood out from the sermon?
2. Read Philippians 4:10-20
 1. What verse would you say is the key verse in this passage? Why?
 2. Find all the verses that have to do with trusting God and the reason for it.
 3. Put yourself in Paul's context. What are some ways it might have been a struggle for him to put some of these things into practice?
 4. In verse 11 Paul talks about being content with whatever he has.
 1. What are the connections between trust, obedience and contentment?
 5. How does Deuteronomy 31:6 relate to Philippians 4:19?

Work (30-45 minutes)

Sermon Quote: "The degree of trust we have in God affects every single area of our lives.... It will affect our choice in the kinds of friends we spend time with. It will affect the choices we make about what we do when others aren't looking, or the things we do in our spare time. It will affect who we choose as a life partner. It will affect how we handle our finances, the kinds of things we spend our money on, the kinds of toys we buy, and whether or not we hoard or stockpile wealth, and whether or not we give to God out of the first part of our income, or just give him the leftovers when we know we have enough to make it to the end of the month so we don't have to trust him. The degree to which we trust God will even affect how we feel about ourselves. It will also affect whether or not we are willing to own our sin."

1. In what areas above do you find it difficult to trust God right now? Read the list again and let God show you which areas you struggle with.
2. In verse 11, Paul says, ***11 Not that I was ever in need, for I have learned how to be content with whatever I have.*** Consider and discuss the questions in the following sermon quote:

Sermon Quote: “How many of us can say the same thing? Do you believe it’s possible to live a life of contentment? Is it possible to be content when friends disappoint us? Is it possible to be content when we see others around us with bigger and better things that we can’t afford? Is it possible to be satisfied with our life when we are in a job that is not fulfilling for us? Is it possible to be content when we are terminally sick? How in the world is that possible?”

3. **Sermon Quote:** “The big question is, will I trust God and live my life in a way that honours him and puts him first in everything, or will I take matters into my own hands and do things my way, with my relationships, with my time, my gifts and talents, my words, and even with my thoughts?”

If we are not trusting God how will that affect our relationships, our thoughts, or how we might try to manipulate events, circumstances, or people?

4. Read this quote from the fourteen year old girl.

“About your sermon that you made on the 27th of November, specifically on the part where you talked about unconscious iniquities, conscious iniquities, conscious virtues, and unconscious virtues. I was very intrigued, because I had always had the assumption that the phrase "patience is a virtue", was only a saying, and that you were either born with patience or not born with patience. I had also thought that there was no way for me to stop being so impatient, that I was just not born with it.

However upon hearing your sermon. I have found myself recognizing when I am thinking impatient thoughts, and I have also found myself trying my hardest not to act upon them. I have also realized that it is nearly impossible to go straight from being impatient to not thinking any impatient thoughts or not being impatient at all.

That was always my expectation, that I needed to go straight from bad to perfect, but upon hearing and thinking about your sermon I have come to realize that patience can be like dance. So I'm not sure if you know, but I have been dancing for 11 years, and when I started dancing of course I wasn't very good. But as I got older and more experienced I found myself getting better, and soon dance became like second nature to me.

Do you think that patience or any virtue can be like that? I know we can not get better at anything passively. We must work always to be more Christ-like. And I hope that as I keep growing in my faith and as I grow older that I will keep trying and striving to be more patient and of course more Christ-like. Now obviously I struggle with many other of the fruit of the spirit; all of them in fact. I was merely using patience as my example because it was what I started on first.”

Unconscious Iniquities > Conscious Iniquities > Conscious Virtues, and Unconscious Virtues.

Look at the process, the hard work necessary to become fluent. Which of the fruits of the Spirit is Jesus training you on right now? Trust relates to each one of the fruits of the Spirit. For example, the reason we get angry, or lose our patience etc. is because we don’t trust God. With which fruit is God teaching you to trust him right now?

Deuteronomy 31:6 (NLT)

6 So be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid and do not panic before them. For the Lord your God will personally go ahead of you. He will neither fail you nor abandon you.”

5. Break into pairs or smaller groups and spend the rest of the time praying for each other.