

“Life Lessons We Learned as Kids: Welcome”

Scripture: Matthew 18: 2-4; Matthew 10:40-42; 1 Peter 4:8-9

Graphics: children, kids, bikes, summer

Big Truth: We learn all kinds of lessons as kids. Most of them we don't even know we're learning until much later in life. Yet, many of the lessons we learn as kids are God's lessons for us, since when we are young, we are more open to learning and growing. Four of those lessons are to welcome others, wonder about the world, forgive others, and share what we have. Each of those lessons is 100% biblical - lessons that Jesus taught to his disciples. As we grow in discipleship, these lessons are for us, too.

Focus Phrase: Hospitality is sharing the presence of Christ.

1. Introduction

- A. **PRAY!** (Jesus, you are Lord...)
- B. Author and lecturer Leo Buscaglia once talked about a contest he was asked to judge. The purpose of the contest was to find the most caring child. The winner was a 4-year-old child whose next-door neighbor was an elderly gentleman who had recently lost his wife. Upon seeing the man cry, the little boy went into the old gentleman's yard, climbed onto his lap, and just sat there. When his mother asked what he had said to the neighbor, the little boy said, “Nothing, I just helped him cry.”
- C. When my grandson, Levi, mimics what he knows is the act of being fed, he will bring “food” (a foam carrot or pretend pot of soup) to everyone in the room and feed them from his own hands...and not just once, but over and over until he gets distracted by something else.
- D. As adults, we think it's cute and we take pictures and post stuff on social media. Yet, what would it look like for us to learn lessons from the children in our lives? Or, better yet, to recall the lessons we learned as kids and then re-apply those to our lives as followers of Jesus?
- E. Jesus asked his disciples in Matthew 18:1-5, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” He called a child, whom he put among them, and said, “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.”
- F. We're starting a new series today called **Life Lessons We Learned as Kids**. It's a fun summer series that can take us all back to the days of summer when we played outside with our neighborhood friends...when we were dog-tired at the end of a game of hide-and-seek, and when we were so thirsty that we drank from the garden hose and lived to tell about it!

- G. Yet, it's in the relationships we built with our neighborhood friends or in the elementary classroom...or in Sunday School or the kids ministry at our church, that we learned incredible spiritual lessons that have sustained us in our faith throughout life. Over the next few weeks, let's revisit some of those.
- H. The four lessons we'll re-learn from Jesus' perspective are:
 - i. welcoming strangers
 - ii. wondering about the world
 - iii. forgiving those who hurt us, and
 - iv. sharing everything we have.

2. Scripture

- A. This morning we'll begin with **Welcome!** This is really all about Christian Hospitality and how each one of us, and the church, are called to welcome people in Jesus' name. Yet, it's much more than that, as we'll see.
- B. There are multiple places in the bible that command us to practice this idea of Christian hospitality. 1 Peter 4:9 is one. 1 Peter 4:8-9 says, "Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins. Be **hospitable** to one another without complaining."
- C. Romans 12:13 says, "Contribute to the needs of the saints; pursue **hospitality** to strangers."
- D. One of my all time favorites comes from Hebrews 13:2, which says, "Do not neglect to show **hospitality** to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it."
- E. Maddie took some of our kids ministry kids aside a few weeks ago and asked them what they thought of when they heard the word *welcome*. Here's a video she made to give us their perspective...
- F. **VIDEO of the kids**
- G. I love the fact that our kids have incredible insight into what *welcome* feels like and what *welcome* does. Hospitality is welcoming someone into your space. It's having fun together and honoring someone. That's good stuff!
- H. The Greek word for hospitality used in the scriptures we just read is awesome. It's **philoxenia**. Say that with me... "philoxenia."
 - i. Philo is the root word for love...it's a brotherly love between two people.
 - ii. Xenia is the root word for stranger. You may have heard the term *xenophobia* which is the fear of strangers.
 - iii. Philoxenia is the *love* of strangers or stranger-love.

- iv. In the Ancient Near East culture, this idea of stranger-love was the radical welcoming of guests or even strangers into the home. It was the glad reception of others, to provide for their needs and allow them to rest.
- v. It's everything that our guest preachers on the video said!
 - I. As kids, we experienced welcoming all the time. The first day of pre-school or kindergarten can be a very scary day. It's certainly a scary day for parents, as they leave the child - who they've cared for since birth, usually - into the care of strangers. Yet, it's also pretty scary for the child because they're thrust into a new people group they don't know - people who they must trust and who must welcome them without knowing much about them.
 - J. Before the teacher can get to practicing letters and numbers or how to learn 2+2, or share toys with other kids, the teacher and students need to start with hospitality...with welcoming.
 - K. That's why this is such a foundational lesson...and one that we can learn and re-learn over and over as followers of Jesus. There are always new people!
 - L. Jesus had a lot to say about welcoming. In fact, not only was Jesus the recipient of welcome - of hospitality - but he also welcomed.
 - M. We read Matthew 18:5 earlier, where Jesus said, "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me."
 - N. We have to remember that in Jesus' culture, children were usually considered property with no voice or vote in the family. They were loved and cared for, but one did not make them the center of the universe. For Jesus to say that they needed to welcome a child - to be like a child - was radical!
 - O. The lesson we learn from Jesus is that welcoming others in Jesus' name is unconditional and extravagant.
 - P. Yet, welcome - loving the other in a way that helps them to feel included - is exactly what Jesus is commanding us.
 - Q. Turn with me to Matthew 10:40-42...
 - R. READ Matthew 10:40-42**
 - i. This section of scripture is not focused on hospitality, but on who and how we welcome others.
 - ii. Jesus started at the top of the status pyramid. We welcome others in Jesus' name. When we welcome others in Jesus' name, we're welcoming God into the mix.
 - iii. But what about say a prophet or a righteous person? Jesus said, if we welcome someone in the name of one of the prophets or even a righteous person - someone who is right with God - then they will receive the reward.

- iv. But then, he gets all the way down to welcoming one of “these little ones” in the name of a disciple. He’s not talking here about children, specifically, but little ones being your everyday faithful follower of Jesus.
 - v. The act of welcoming ANYONE, basically, is worthy of the reward, which is to be in right-standing with God and accomplish His will.
 - vi. It’s all about welcoming...
- S. One of my favorite stories about radical hospitality in the New Testament comes from Acts 16.
- i. Paul and Silas were thrown in jail one day because they’d cast out a demon from a slave girl. The only problem was that the demon helped her to be a fortune-teller and the girl’s master made lots of money from that. After they were jailed an earthquake shook the doors of the prison off their hinges and Paul and Silas could go free. Yet they didn’t. When the jailer woke up and saw that the doors were open, he started to kill himself, since death would be his fate anyway. Paul stopped him from doing that and this jailer ended up giving his life to Christ, and then had his family baptized.
 - ii. Then, in Acts 16:33-34, we read these words of radical hospitality: “At the same hour of the night he took them and washed their wounds; then he and his entire family were baptized without delay. He brought them up into the house and set food before them, and he and his entire household rejoiced that he had become a believer in God.”
 - iii. Think about that. The guard, whose job it was to keep Paul and Silas in prison, took them to his house and fed them and cleaned their wounds!
 - iv. Radical welcome - philoxenia - love of stranger.

3. Application

- A. So what is the lesson we learned as kids and how do we apply that to today as followers of Jesus?
- B. First of all, we learned that there are moments in life when we are amongst strangers and there are moments when we are among people we know. Sometimes, there’s a mixed crowd of strangers and friends. I’d go so far as to say that when we come to church on Sunday mornings, it’s a mixed crowd. Some people we know well. Others we don’t know at all.
- C. The key to philoxenia is that it doesn’t matter if we know another person or not. The call is the same: love. And our call is to always be moving the relationships we have from less loving to more loving, without exception.
- D. Our Global Methodist mission statement has three characteristics of a disciple: worship passionately, love extravagantly, and witness boldly. In order to learn and re-learn the lesson that you and I learned in kindergarten about welcoming others, we have to practice **extravagant love!** And that starts right here!

- E. When you and I deny ourselves the pleasure of simply talking to people we already know, for a moment, it opens the door to practicing radically loving, extravagant hospitality!
- F. Practice makes perfect, they say. Yet, we may also be tempted to not put our whole self into it. One caution is that it's easy to offer the components of hospitality without truly offering hospitality as Jesus defined it.
- G. Colin Smith writes this, "You can offer the components of hospitality without love, but this is not biblical hospitality."
- H. Stacy and I have experienced this at several AirBnBs we've visited. Sometimes, all the components of hospitality were there without the relationship with the host - without the love. We had all the towels and toilet paper we needed, but there was no personality or love in it. Our favorite stays have been when the hosts gave a personal touch or wrote a note or something there that's just above what you'd expect. We've even stayed at AirBnBs where the host told us they were praying for us, if they find out we're believers!
- I. As we increase our passion for radically welcoming the stranger like Jesus did, the main component is love. I see this in play every Sunday morning with our hospitality team. Their main motivation is not just making coffee. Their main motivation is loving us...loving YOU to create a space of welcome.
- J. Here are some application point for this first message:
 - i. **1 - You and I are commanded to welcome.**
 - a. Jesus said in Matthew 22:39, "Love your neighbor as yourself."
 - b. That extravagant love is what you do when you set yourself aside and see the other...welcome the other...especially if the other is a stranger seeking to be welcomed and loved.
 - c. This is not optional for followers of Jesus.
 - ii. **2 - We are to seek out the opportunities.**
 - a. There are many times when people will come into your life who you don't know. Maybe they want something from you. Maybe they are there to give something TO you. Either way, you're called to welcome them in the name of Jesus and give them a cup of cold water, so to speak.
 - b. Other times, there are people who you are not friends and who don't want something from you or to give you anything.
 - c. Will you respond to the fact that they are simply in your presence and the Holy Spirit just might be nudging (shoving?) you to practice philoxenia?

- d. It starts with a willingness to set aside our pride and self-centeredness, to get outside our comfort circle, and radically love someone. Talk to someone, no matter what kind of history we think they've had.
 - e. It means going TO someone else to say, "Hi. We haven't met, but I'm..." Even if you HAVE met, people are gracious. Find someone.
 - f. Maybe it's a homeless person. Maybe a young gay person in your family who is feeling isolated from the rest. Maybe it's a young person who has made some enemies. Or an older adult who feels like no one cares. Can we be radically loving to everyone that come in our midst?
 - g. And if you CAN...will you?
 - h. One thing I WILL tell you is that this is not a fruitless endeavor. Stepping out in faith is NEVER fruitless. You will be blessed. Which leads me to #3.
- iii. 3 - **We are blessed when we welcome others.**
- a. Jesus said in Matthew 10 that when we welcome others (even the least) in his name, we will receive our reward.
 - b. We don't practice radical Christian hospitality in order to receive the blessing. This is not some kind of health and wealth gospel...that "if you just do A than B happens."
 - c. This is responding in faith and then allowing God to pour the blessings into your life, in whatever form God wants to do that.
 - d. It may be you make a new friend. It may be that God lightens your spirit. It SURE will mean that when you stand before the Lord you'll hear the words, "Well done, good and faithful (stranger-loving) servant."
- iv. We're commanded to welcome. We seek out the opportunities. We are blessed by it all.
- K. Let me boil it all down for us. If you're taking notes, write this down and put in on your fridge or bathroom mirror: **Hospitality is sharing the presence of Christ.**
- L. The Jesus in ME greets the Jesus in YOU and brings us together in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. THAT is philoxenia. THAT is welcome.

4. Conclusion

- A. I'm sure this will come as NO surprise. Let's get out there and DO this. Not just practice it...but DO IT. Pray for God to open a door in your heart and in the world and walk through it.
- B. YOU are the presence of Jesus. Share the presence of Jesus with someone you don't know before you leave here. And then, share the presence of Jesus to

someone this week. Maybe you'll get the chance to crawl into someone's life and just help the cry. THAT would be cool. Bring them to church with you.

- C. We MUST get down to business with sowing seeds and sharing the presence of Jesus in the world.
- D. We did it in kindergarten. We can do it today!
- E. Let's pray...