



Dear BJUMC Family,

When I was a kid, my mother instilled a rule in me that was ever important for making and maintaining friends. She said “if you can’t say anything nice, then don’t say anything at all.” This is an important note about how we operate in a society, and a rule which seems to have been long forgotten. With the influx of the non-stop news cycle, social media, multiple communication platforms, the rise of the “keyboard warrior” has taken on ever more increasing levels, as people now have the freedom to vent their frustrations, anger, discontentment, fears, and other woes without fear. Sadly, this cultural phenomenon impacts us in all walks of life, not just on those platforms. We have put aside our manners, our due respect for others, an ability to engage in polite and meaningful discourse, and we instantly go in for the attack.

It has been said that “friendlier people have more friends”. This is a true maxim, and a rather obvious statement, so much so people think it is ridiculous even to say. Yet, it is a statement that bears remembering, and taking to honest heart right now, in the face of a constant onslaught of attack. If we want to have friends, if we want to be a part of a thriving, flourishing community, we need to embrace the characteristics of the community that we want to be a part of.

Additional cliché’s include “you get what you give,” and “you are what you eat.” These two go hand in hand in explaining the truth about how a community is built up. On the one hand, if we want a community that is loving and supportive, caring, nurturing, and fostering joy, love, peace, and happiness, we must put those things into the community. Additionally, what you digest into your heart, what you allow yourself to be subjected to, what to meditate on, or perhaps better stated, ruminate on, all impact the state of your heart.

It is clearly very important that we must be intentional about our mental health. A certain portion of our mental health is beyond our choice or control. Chemical imbalances can lead us to various issues, which can have broad and diverse impacts on us. But we can impact and influence both our mental health, as well as our disposition through intentional action. We can choose the degree of negativity we allow ourselves to be subjected to, we can turn off or limit the 24-hour news cycle that we know feeds upon our fears in order to increase their ratings. We can be intentional about the television shows we watch, the books we read, the music we listen to, even the conversations and discourse we choose to subject ourselves to.

Our choices matter. Psychologists have proven that those who listen to music that is angry, abusive, or with repeated calls to violence tend to view the world as a more violent place, same story with our television and movie choices. Those that watch nothing but happy or funny movies and television, listen to uplifting music, etc., tend to engender those traits in their lives. The messages of these outlets also sneak into our psyche, our norms, or our general ethos.

I want to be clear, I am not intending to tell people not to be educated about the world, or to go stick our heads in the sand, or even that we can't enjoy the occasional action flick or harsh music. I absolutely think we all need to know what is going on in the world, and staying up to date on all matters is important for us to understand the systems, societies, powers, and struggles near and far, and the fibers of connection that go throughout the globe. Truly we are one planet, and what happens in one place impacts people everywhere, now more than ever, through our global economy. What I am saying is that we have a responsibility to be mindful about what we are ingesting. Are we ingesting facts, or are we ingesting anger and rage, fear. To some extent it is important to have an emotional response to the events across the globe, but we must be mindful to keep it in its proper place, and not let that response rule our entire emotional state, and thus, what we put out into the world.

We must, then, be intentional about creating healthy balance in our lives. We must be intentional about focusing on the Lord a reasonable amount, and including our faith in our discourse on the daily dialogue of events and "ongoings". We must also be intentional about finding the time to find joy, love, peace, hope, and all the fruits of the spirit, that we may share in the grace of God daily. I fear, in our negativity, we have lost sight of the joy of the Lord, and all the blessings the Lord pours out upon us daily.

Our church family should be a place where people can come to find love, hope, peace, joy, empathy, support, nurture. Indeed, it is a place where we can bring our sorrows, but we need to give those to God. We must release of our hurt, our pain, our anguish, and give that to God, the one who can provide true comfort. We must allow God to use the rest of the congregation to comfort us, to love us. It is an intentional choice to receive these things, to allow others to feed us joy, happiness, and contentment. We must actively we willing to receive these things. It is the same choice we make when we choose to receive God's grace. We must be willing to allow it into us. We must not block it out, we must not put it off, or toss it aside, rather we must make the intentional choice to allow the glory of God, the Joy of the Lord, and likewise, the joy, happiness, peace, and love of this community to enter into our hearts, and transform us, heal us, nurture us, protect us, and perfect us.

**GALATIANS 5: 22-23**

<sup>22</sup> By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things.

Friends, these are all intentional acts. Whether we are intentional about what we put out is in the name of politeness, or in the name of our witness to the lord, what we put out into the world matters. Likewise, what we choose to allow into us matters, and is a series of intentional choices. How it impacts us is a mixed bag, partly a natural response or chemical response, but also partly our choice to allow things like joy and happiness to grow, or to allow anger and resentment to fester and multiply.

I pray for us all. I pray for our community. I pray for our Township, I pray for our State, I pray for our nation, and I pray for our world. There is overwhelming negativity in the world today. Yet, we, the church of Jesus Christ, stand in hope and joy, in opposition to that negativity. Let us be the church that is known for that hope, that joy, that inspiration, that love. Let the fruits of the spirit truly grow, that our bounty overflows.

Amen,

Pastor Matt