

**SMALL GROUP MINISTRY SESSION**

**Life Lessons**

**Kathryn Warrior, Unitarian Universalist Community Church of Washington County, Hillsboro, OR**  
**Inspired by Life Lessons (2008 Session from Baton Rouge) and the “Life as a Walk in Forest Park” essay by Peggy Johnson**

**Chalice Lighting:** Life is a gift for which we grateful. We gather in community to celebrate the glories and the mysteries of this great gift. --Marjorie Montgomery

**Opening words**

Do not think that the knowledge you presently possess is changeless, absolute truth. Avoid being narrow-minded and bound to present views. Learn and practice non-attachment from views in order to be open to receive others' viewpoints. Truth is found in life and not merely in conceptual knowledge. Be ready to learn throughout your entire life and observe reality in yourself and in the world at all times.--Thich Nhat Hanh

**Check In:** How is it with you since we last met?

**Topic:** Life Lessons

Life is a succession of lessons which must be lived to be understood.--Helen Keller

Everyone gets the experience, some get the lesson. -- T.S. Eliott

*Life as a Walk in Forest Park—Peggy Johnson*

*Mike and I took a walk in Forest Park one glorious January morning. As we walked down the sometimes very muddy trail, I kept my attention pretty much focused on the trail immediately in front of me lest I should misstep. But after a while I relaxed and began to really enjoy the walk, noticing the variety of plants around me. Soon we were near the top of a ridge and since the foliage was very sparse I began to try to see what the view might be. As long as I only took an occasional glance I was fine, but if my attention strayed too long from the trail I invariably slipped in the mud.*

*It occurred to me that life is like that too. If you concentrate too hard on the immediate problems of daily life, you never see the world around you. If you spend too much time trying to see what the future might be, you will invariably slip in the mud. However, if you stop now and again when you reach the crest of a hill you can get a pretty good look at the long view and refresh yourself in the bargain. It doesn't hurt to stop and “smell the roses” whenever you need to rest either but if you do it too often your progress will be slowed.*

*We chose a trail that was fairly level to make the going easier. Soon we realized that many others had chosen this trail for the same reason and that the relatively heavy traffic had worn away the gravel and contributed to the slipperiness of the ground. Indeed, in places, it was quite precarious footing. I came close to falling on several occasions and once almost became mired in the mud. Later we branched off onto a trail that was fairly steep and less traveled. Although it was slippery in places it was not nearly so as the first one. It did require me to rest more frequently on the ascents. In one place a large tree had fallen across a ravine. One could see that several adventurous people had used it as a bridge. It did make a short cut but it was covered with moss and looked very slippery, so there was some danger in using it. Trees had fallen across the trail in several places requiring us to step or climb over them. In one place we had to walk around a gate that blocked the path. In another place someone had laboriously built a fence that went clear to the top of the ridge and down to the bottom of the ravine, but someone had later broken down the part that went across the path.*

*I find similarities to life in all of this. The well-worn path may be easier but it also may be more crowded and have its own sometimes hidden dangers. The less traveled path may have more unknowns and be more arduous but it also avoids some of the dangers of overuse. Shortcuts in life are possible, but while they may save time they can also be dangerous. There are inevitably going to be barriers on life's path. Sometimes you can climb over them and sometimes you have to find a way around them. Occasionally someone has broken them down for you.*

*At one point we followed a nature trail. There were markers to indicate various types of flora and if you had the map and guide book you could identify the plant, learn its scientific name, its natural habitat and other interesting information. We didn't have the map or guide book and so couldn't even always tell which plant was being pointed out and of course learned only what we could observe from a cursory inspection. Although we enjoyed this part of our walk we missed a great deal by not having the guide.*

*We took our dog, AG with us on this walk. Now AG just loves to roam about in the woods and although relatively large, he is very gentle and friendly. He never met a dog, cat, or person he didn't like. As took place on a normal work day, there were very few people about so we didn't have AG on his leash. As we approached a fork in the trail we saw two women accompanied by three large dogs. One of the dogs passed us on the trail and then came back towards us. The owner said, "I don't know what he'll do. He's been pretty good so far but every once in a while he'll go after a dog." Sure enough, he went right for AG, snarling and biting. AG was totally bewildered and wasn't prepared to defend himself against this unprovoked and unexpected attack. Fortunately, Mike was able to pull the dog off AG and its owner was able to, belatedly, leash it. AG wasn't hurt but he may have been disillusioned.*

*As you proceed along the trail of life there are many paths and we don't always have the right trail maps. Consider the choices carefully. Have an adventure! Rest and refresh yourself along the way. Stop to smell the roses and admire the long view but don't forget to pay attention to the trail lest you slip and fall in the mud. Get over or around obstacles as best you can. And remember that you may run into some big mean dogs out there that aren't muzzled or leashed.*

### **Responding to any of the topic readings:**

#### **Life Lessons Questions:**

1. What are some of the most important lessons you have learned over the course of your life?
2. Were there turning points in your life — key events or experiences — that changed its course and sent you in a different direction? What have you learned from the important choices or decisions you made?
3. What do you think you know now about living a happy and successful life that you didn't know when you were 20?

### **Closing Words**

Take Courage friends.

The way is often hard, the path is never clear,

And the stakes are high.

Take courage. For deep down there is another truth.

You are not alone

Wayne B. Arnason