

## **All I Really Need to Know About Bluegrass, I Learned In Kindergarten.**

by “Doc” Simpson

Robert Fulghum’s classic 1988 bestseller reflects on lessons learned in kindergarten and simple life principles we can guide our lives by. I’ve been thinking about how they apply to bluegrass as well.

Play well with others. Be sure to take turns, be fair and treat others nicely.

Share. Don’t be selfish. Whether you’re singing the lead, or playing backup, be sure to let others shine. Don’t just handoff to the best player, instead look for the newbie and give her a chance to play a lead or sing a verse. Give some of your time, money and talent away. Volunteer to help with a DBA event, or throw a couple dollars in the tip jar. If you’re an experienced player, take the time to teach some of what you know to a newbie.

Don’t bite. Somebody might overlook you for an instrumental lead, forget to say ‘thank you’, or do something insensitive. The opportunities to be offended are endless. It’s tempting to walk away feeling hurt and vow never to return. Or you can talk badly about that person. Or you can bite, or hit, or call names. But there is another way. If you’ve been hurt, go to that person and let them know. Keep in mind the person might not apologize, change, or be nice. But then again, they might change. Their character will prove itself one way or another. Talking is a start.

Don’t be bossy. If you’re a bully, stingy, or cry a lot, others won’t want to play with you. A jam host might do things differently than how you think it should be done. A festival committee might schedule a band you don’t particularly like. Someone might have a different approach to a tune or play the banjo in a way you think is loopy. It’s okay to offer a suggestion to the jam host, the committee, or the loopy banjo player. But keep in mind they might not do what you want. When you feel the need to control something, take a deep breath, get some perspective, and relax. It’s just bluegrass.

Say “sorry” and go get a band aide. Last month I said some really hurtful things to a dear friend and a couple of guys I don’t even know. I was mad and mistaken. By the next day it dawned on me how wounding and irrational I had been. Then I had a choice to make. I could either stay prideful or try to make it right. I choose the latter. I swallowed my pride, sat down with those guys, took ownership of my actions, and determined to do better by them. Now mind you, I am no paragon of virtue. But I don’t think living a perfect life is the goal. We all make mistakes, say insensitive things, or act selfishly on a regular basis. I think the Big Idea is to live an honest life, recognize when we’ve gotten things wrong, and work to make things right.

Go outside and play. On a daily basis, we need to put down our workload and go outside to play with others, laugh and have fun. Remember, this is bluegrass. If you’re at a jam frowning, stressed out, or crying – you’re taking this too seriously.

When you go out into the world, watch out for traffic, hold hands, and stick together. In a time of wars, earthquakes, tsunamis, and nuclear meltdowns, it becomes clear that the only things that really matter are who you are and who you are connected to. Are you a person of good character that stands the storm of tough times? Are you connected to God, family and friends? If not, what are you waiting for? When we get to the end of things, it not about how much stuff we accumulated. It’s about how we conducted ourselves during the journey and who our traveling

companions were. And if we manage to enjoy some bluegrass along the way, the journey is all the sweeter.

So, get out there and go play on the Grass,  
“Doc” Simpson