

February 22-26, 2021 Edition

The "BIG Story" Of The Bible #38

Finding Jesus In The Old Testament

Riverside DNA- Progress

By: Ed &/or Judy Gardner

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When you read the Bible ask yourself if there's anything you're reading where God is speaking to you personally... anything that you need to start applying in your own life. Then try to reflect on what you read... what you heard from God throughout the day and we know you'll be blessed.

*** These are EXTREMELY rough drafts so if you see typos... well yuo knew the rest ;0) These are essentially the ramblings of thoughts running through Ed or Judy's mind the week before Ed teaches a lesson on these concepts. They are pretty much how Ed gets ready for the weekends. They are not necessarily coherent so if they don't make much sense... sorry about that.

**** Also these devotionals are the product of both Judy & Ed's experiences and education. Figuring out which are from Judy and which are from Ed (sometimes both are contained in a single day) is half the fun.

You can also get these devotionals on Riverside's Facebook page (www.facebook.com/EagleRiverside). You don't have to have a FB account to read them but if you do have an account if you "like" the Riverside page and click the box to get updates the devos will show up on your wall every weekday (along with other news and event updates).

Monday:

We are made right in God's sight when we trust in Jesus Christ to take away our sins.
Romans 3:22 (NLT)

As you learn more and more how God works, you will learn how to do your work.
Colossians 1:10 (MES)

Each one of us did the work God have us to do. I planted the seed, and Apollos watered it. But God is the One who made it grow. 1 Corinthians 3:4-5 (NCV)

Reflection:

"We must not ignore the small daily differences we can make which, over time, add up to big differences that we often cannot foresee." (Marian Wright Edelman)

You and I are not here to save the world, thank God. Jesus has already paid the price to redeem humanity. He's taken that one giant step that mankind could never take. That's the foundation of the Christian life. The hard work's already been done. Woo hoo! We can take a deep breath. We already know who's going to win in the end. But in the meantime, there is work for us to do.

We don't work so that we can be good enough. Jesus has already bridged that gap on our behalf. We work because we have been made part of God's family. And all families have chores. We don't all have to do the same chore to do, but we all have to do something. God is asking each of us to do the work He's placed in front of us, to take our next baby step.

It is an aspect of faith to do our part and leave the big picture outcomes up to God. We aren't expected to always be successful. We're not expected to always be right in even figuring out what God is asking us to do. Our task is to be faithful. To try to put our best foot forward or take those little leaps of faith as they present themselves. But we have no jurisdiction over the outcome.

Our journey involves some messes and mistakes. That's part of the human experience. But in God's kingdom, we can choose to believe that everything is being worked together in harmony, even when it doesn't feel like it. Sometimes we're just too close to the picture to see it.

So for today just ask God to show you the open doors He's placed before you, and ask for the courage and faith to walk through them.

Prayer: Father, today I open the door to my heart and ask You to come in and make Yourself at home. Show me where to go from here. In Jesus Name I pray, amen.

Tuesday:

"Unless you are faithful in small matters, you won't be faithful in large ones. If you cheat even a little, you won't be honest with greater responsibilities. And if you are untrustworthy about worldly wealth, who will trust you with the true riches of heaven?" (Luke 16:10-11 NLT)

Reflection: St. Francis of Assisi advises, "Start by doing what's necessary, then what's possible, and suddenly you are doing the impossible."

It is the little steps, when added together over time that make the most dramatic changes. If the goal is to live a vibrant life, a life in harmony with God's design, then the assignment is to take the next step, one foot in front of the other. Often our next step is not glamorous. It is some mundane little task (like eating a reasonably healthy breakfast) which will prepare us for our next step. If we sit around and say, "I'll do my job when God gives me something important to do," we may be sitting around a long time. Often we want to wait for our ship to come in when what will lead us to greater responsibility and opportunity is rowing the boat we already have. God expects us to practice with the little things. That process is what makes us ready for the big things.

It is the ordinary chores of daily life that prepare us for the future that God has planned for us. We need to build up our strength by "working out" our muscles on our day to day tasks. If we don't master the little things that God has given us responsibility for, how will we be ready for anything big? How can we show compassion to an enemy if we are not moved to have a little patience with the slow driver in front of us?

Like God, we need to show some acceptance and patience with ourselves just as we are. But we also need to encourage ourselves to keep moving forward into the people God is making of us. We need to have compassion for ourselves even when we've blown it, then we will be able to better tolerate negative feedback. This empowers us to learn from our mistakes without wasting all of our energy being disappointed in ourselves. Each day, we can begin this journey exactly where we are. We just have to be willing to take one step at a time (which will end the day a little further ahead). Put enough of those days together and the results can be miraculous.

Prayer: Father, today I want to row the boat You've already given me instead of waiting for my ship to come in. Show me the next step You want me to take. In Jesus' Name, amen.

Wednesday:

*"So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life - your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life - and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him."
(Romans 12:1 MES)*

"Let love be your highest goal..." (1 Corinthians 14:1 NLT)

Reflection:

*"God does not command that we do great things, only that we do things with great love."
(Mother Theresa)*

It is easy to get distracted wanting to do great things for God, but God wants us to use our everyday, sometimes tedious lives as worship to Him. Pouring ourselves into the tasks at hand brings a focus that improves the quality of everything we do. We cultivate deep personal satisfaction and contentment when we value the little things that we do for God and for others.

God has sent His own Son to demonstrate how much our lives are worth to Him. Let's not diminish that gift by telling ourselves that our contribution is not important. We may never know the significance of some small gesture of kindness we make when we are hardly even paying attention. We have to learn to be content taking our baby steps with the best attitude that we can.

God wants us to use our whole lives as worship to Him. In that way, there are no small parts, no insignificant steps. Each step matters to the extent that we use it to serve God. One of God's favorite ways for us to show Him love is to show love to others – the good, the bad, and the ugly. This may sound like sitting around in a circle singing Kum by yah, but serving others with an attitude of love is one of the most challenging things we are asked to do. If we master this, there are no rules needed. Loving God and loving people fulfill all of God's laws.

Prayer: Father, sometimes I can't believe how much You must love me. Today help me to see myself through Your eyes. I want to take my life and lay it down before You, not to repay Your generosity (which I could never do) but in gratitude for what You've already done and will do in my life. In Jesus' Name, amen.

Thursday:

For everything there is a season,
a time for every activity under heaven.
A time to be born and a time to die.
A time to plant and a time to harvest.
A time to kill and a time to heal.
A time to tear down and a time to build up.
A time to cry and a time to laugh.
A time to grieve and a time to dance.
A time to scatter stones and a time to gather stones.
A time to embrace and a time to turn away.
A time to search and a time to quit searching.
A time to keep and a time to throw away.
A time to tear and a time to mend.
A time to be quiet and a time to speak.
A time to love and a time to hate.
A time for war and a time for peace. Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 (NLT)

I have learned how to be content with whatever I have. 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. For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength. Even so, you have done well to share with me in my present difficulty. Philippians 4:11-14 (NLT)

Reflection: It is hard not to get impatient. Sometimes the current chapter of our lives seems like it will last forever; but it never does. Life changes. There is always another season just around the corner (and the older I get the more I notice just how quickly these seasons

are changing). We have to remind ourselves that we will not be where we are forever. If you're in the middle of a season of life that isn't your favorite (single when you want to be married, up to your elbows in diapers when you'd like to be out on the town, etc), remember that this won't last forever either. Just because you haven't yet fulfilled some dream yet, doesn't mean that it won't happen in another season.

When Judy and I decided to go into full time ministry we thought (foolishly) that the act of hitching our professional lives to Jesus' wagon would mean everything would be amazing and make sense to us. It didn't take long to realize that just wasn't the case. At first it seemed like everything was following this grand plan. We saw God's hand in guiding us to what we thought was the perfect job. All signs pointed to divine providence and intervention in our job search. When I got my first job in ministry I was so sure it was the perfect job, situation and church for me and my family.

But then things started getting tough. We LOVED the people we worked with. Even more important we liked the people we were working with (well... most of them... a couple of them were challenges but you know how that goes...). But it didn't take long to realize we weren't a great fit for that particular church. We were hired because we represented a new direction that the church wanted to go in. At least they wanted to go in that direction until the elder who was instrumental in our hiring and in taking the church in a new direction had health problems and needed to step down from his leadership position. Then they were suddenly very comfortable with where they were.

Suddenly we weren't a very good fit. We were constantly frustrated by the church and frustrating to the church. We still loved the people but I found myself occasionally looking toward Heaven and thinking, "are You sure You know what You're doing?" At the time I had no idea what was happening and why God had us in the middle of it.

But I tried to do my best to be content in that situation. Even when God opened a door for me to move back to Alaska and join a church I was a better fit for I still didn't see the bigger picture. But now looking back I see that God was teaching me how NOT to do church when I got to Riverside. Not that the way my first church did things was wrong. I'm perfectly comfortable realizing that there are people for whom that church was and continues to be a blessing. But it was not how I was wired to do church. Riverside is what it is today because of the lessons we learned at our first church about how we shouldn't do church.

Some of our gifts & lessons are still in seed form, while others have fully blossomed. It is important to find some measure of contentment and appreciation for every stage of life. There are advantages and disadvantages that come with every season. Ask God to remind you of what is beautiful about the season that you are in, and the roles you currently play. Doing your current job with love is what will prepare you for your next job.

Prayer: Father, today I want to thank You for whatever season of life I am in. Open my eyes to the lessons I can learn if I am in a challenging season... and if I'm in a harvesting season of my life then thank You for the blessings You are pouring into my life. In Jesus Name, amen.

Friday:

"Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly."
(Matthew 11:28-30 MES)

Reflection: If there's one thing we learn from the Pharisees, it's that people are much more interested in controlling others than God is. God gave the Israelites 10 commandments, but by the time Jesus entered the scene, there were thousands of traditions that the Pharisees expected the people to comply with. Religion had become a way to exhaust and sometimes exploit the common man, all so that the religious elite could feel powerful and in control.

Jesus was often criticized for not following the rules. Did that embarrass Him? Not at all. In fact, the only people that we read about Jesus arguing with is the religious leaders.

He was gentle with the sinner, but downright confrontational with the rule keepers of organized religion. The problem with rules is that people are so good at manipulating them so that they can feel righteous and yet not ask themselves to acquire the values and character of God's kingdom. Correct action is not what God measures. God looks into our hearts.

If we're not careful we can value our traditions in a way that interferes with listening to what God is asking us to do. This is especially the case when we get too comfortable comparing ourselves to others or deferring to our standards (or even the way we've always done things) rather than concentrating on our own next step. After all, we rationalize, why should we have to work to change our B game to a B+ if the person next to us appears to be stuck at D-? The problem is that we can only see what's happening on the surface. God knows where we come from and what we have to overcome. Only God truly knows if we are working or merely trying to "look busy." Only God can measure progress.

For those of us who prefer comparisons and rules, we can sometimes exhaust ourselves with our own standards and expectation. It's easy to say, "Well, I'd never do that!" if the opportunity has never even presented itself to us. These judgements can come back to haunt us when our circumstances change. God is not above letting us learn the hard way if we need lessons in compassion. It is incredibly disheartening to judge ourselves. The problem is that the judgments and condemnation of human beings doesn't actually have the power to bring about changes in the heart – for others or for ourselves.

When we find ourselves discouraged, fatigued, not measuring up – it's time to ask ourselves if we are serving God or if we're trying to keep up with the petty tyranny of our own expectations. God is not in a hurry. He could have created everything in one big bang, but instead Genesis 1 presents a beautifully paced poem of the world's creation.

God is the inventor of variety, uniqueness and harmony. He's not into cookie cutter Christianity. We are each individual masterpieces. We have time to set a more graceful pace. We have the freedom to explore and discover.

We are encouraged to be creatively engaged with an ongoing relationship with God where we can't always know what's coming next. The game is progress not perfection. Progress may require us to be more flexible than we find comfortable. But we can trust that God is bringing it all together to tell a beautiful story. We just need to let go of seeing ourselves as the director. God has a beautiful part for us to play but it isn't master of the universe. He's already got that one covered ;o)

Prayer: Father, forgive me for comparing myself to others instead of measuring my progress by Your standards and plan for me. Today I resign my imaginary position as manager of the universe and ask You to show me the next step You have planned for me. In Jesus' Name, amen.