

February 1-5, 2021 Edition

The "BIG Story" Of The Bible #35

Finding Jesus In The Old Testament

RDNA- Acceptance

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May God, who gives this patience and encouragement, help you live in complete harmony with each other, as is fitting for followers of Christ Jesus. Then all of you can join together with one voice, giving praise and glory to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, accept each other just as Christ has accepted you so that God will be given glory.

- Romans 15:5-7 NLT -

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:

For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him. "There is no judgment against anyone who believes in him." John 3:16-18 (NLT)

Reflection: Ever since we took that first bite from the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, we've found it natural to form judgements. We reflexively label and compare. Is this bad or good? Do I like it? Are they better than me? Are they good enough for me? Do I approve? We naturally evaluate ourselves and others and try to judge how everyone measures up to our standards (otherwise know as "how things are SUPPOSED to be").

The biggest problem with this compulsion is that our human judgements are inherently flawed. I'm going to say that again...

OUR JUDGMENTS ARE INHERENTLY FLAWED

One of the basic human perception flaws is called (by social scientists) the self-serving bias. When surveyed, 95% of students ranked themselves in the top 10% for their ability to get along with others. I'm wondering if the other 5% were math majors. But it's not just a bias of the naïve. 95% of professors ranked themselves in the top 10% of their teaching peers. And even among those educated to look for this bias, 95% of psychology professors ranked themselves in the top 10% for understanding and compensating for their own self-serving biases.

Not only are we poorly qualified to judge ourselves and others, we don't really have the authority. Who does? Well, as far as humans go, Jesus would be the only one. He had all the power and authority of God, but didn't cling to it. Instead He poured out all of that power to enter into the mess of humanity. He limited Himself. He made Himself approachable. He didn't set up a club for the uber-spiritual that excluded sinners. He made Himself a friend of sinners. He didn't reserve His attention for the important, but welcomed children to Himself.

The important people were often secretly judging Jesus in their thoughts, saying things like, "Some prophet! If He really had special knowledge, He'd realize that the woman He's treating with acceptance and dignity is really a hooker!" What they soon learned was that not only did Jesus recognize the working girl for what she was, He knew their secret thoughts as well. He'd come back with a zinger like, "Oh yeah, well who appreciates being forgiven more: the one who knows she's got problems or the one who's too arrogant to know how messed up he is?" (I may be paraphrasing Jesus a bit.) I'm just saying, we should be careful who we throw stones at in our heads. Jesus has a way of rattling our glass houses when He sees one.

On the last night that Jesus spent with His disciples the Bible says that God gave Jesus back the power and authority that Jesus gave up to enter into this world... what would you do if you suddenly had all the power of the universe at your finger tips? You knew you were getting ready to leave these disciples that had spent 3 1/2 years with you and they just didn't seem to be getting it. How would you use this power to give them something they'd never forget?

Do you know what Jesus did?

He washed their feet (ewwwwwwww!). Foot washing was THE WORST job in the first century. There were no socks... there was no running water in your house to clean your feet. So slaves would bring a basin of water and a towel and wash the grime and dirt off your feet. Have you ever tried to use a bowl of water to clean up something REALLY dirty instead of a hose or faucet that just keep pouring out clean water until the dirt is all washed down the drain? Jesus can tell you all about it.

He showed them what true power & authority with God's character does – He wrapped a towel around His waist and washed their feet. It was a task reserved for the lowest of servants. If Jesus, having been given all the authority to judge the earth, chose not to judge, but instead to humble Himself - to serve and to sacrifice Himself to save sinners, I guess I'm a little hesitant to think that I'm qualified to do what He refused to do even though He had that authority.

Prayer: Father, thank You that You didn't send Your Son into the world to condemn us, but to save us. Teach me how to live my life in such a way that I show You how grateful I am with my life. In His Name I pray, amen.

Tuesday:

Accept other believers who are weak in faith, and don't argue with them about what they think is right or wrong. Romans 14:1 (NLT)

Who are you to condemn someone else's servants? They are responsible to the Lord, so let him judge whether they are right or wrong. And with the Lord's help, they will do what is right and will receive his approval. Romans 14:4 (NLT)

Reflection:

In the Old Testament, God frequently had to endure the complaint from His people, "Aw, come on, all the other nations are doing it!" Here He is, a loving and faithful parent, trying to teach His people how to live a blessed life. He fed them when they were hungry. He gave them holidays and events to celebrate. He provided rules and structures to protect the weak and build a blessed community. He instructed them to rest regularly to set an example to the other nations. He taught them to welcome foreigners who desired to join their community, but He also required that they not dilute their heritage by turning their backs on His laws and teachings for them. To join them, you had to become like them. In that way, the Jews had an exclusive role in the development of God's blessings to the human race.

Sadly, as seems to be the nature of us all, they didn't really appreciate their national heritage until they lost it and were enslaved and scattered throughout the other nations. Only then did they realize the consequences of living in societies who figured out their own rules, aside from the instructions of God. Only then did they see the true value in having a kingdom designed and ruled by God. It was at that point that they began to long for the Messiah who would restore them so they could once again be a blessed and powerful people.

But instead of behaving like the Messiah that they expected Him to be, Jesus constantly confounded them. He showed them an intimate picture of a God almost too good to be true - a Divine power that cares for everyone & everything, even the wildflowers and the little birdies. He spoke about even the marginalized and messed up being "homes" in which God wanted to take up residence. He fed and healed and taught, but not just His own people. He extended His attention into Samaria, beginning with a woman of questionable lifestyle. He healed the child of Roman Centurian. He taught the people of the 10 cities of the Decapolis and He fed them too. He lived His life as though there were a sandwich sign that He constantly wore that read:

Everybody's Welcome

The church that Jesus inspired and inhabited with His Spirit, was a community in which everyone was welcome. It was an inclusive community. There were no exclusions based on culture, gender, social standing or religious upbringing. Was it easy? Heck no! Most of the letters of the New Testament were written to help people smooth out their differences. Diversity and inclusion make for one messy community! But Jesus wouldn't have us take the easy path of only welcoming those who know how to fit in. Learning how to serve and accommodate people who are "not our people" provides a depth in His kingdom that can't be accomplished in a friction free environment. It's almost as though Jesus' plan was that those who needed Him most would be welcome. And then those who needed Him most would act as a grain of sand inside of an oyster creating the beautiful pearl that only comes through irritation and friction.

So how are you doing at welcoming people? Would the people in your life say that the sign, "Everybody's Welcome" is one that you are doing a pretty good job of living up to in your life? And if not... why not ask Jesus to help you with that one. He spent 3 1/2 years training His disciples to really understand that one. He'll spend as long as He needs to for you to get good at it as well.

Prayer: Father, thank You that I am welcome in Your family. Forgive me for the times I've lived my life exclusively rather than inclusively. I want to learn how to live my life by the sign that everybody is welcome. Show me how to do that. In Jesus' Name, amen.

Wednesday:

I am the good shepherd; I know my own sheep, and they know me, just as my Father knows me and I know the Father. So I sacrifice my life for the sheep. John 10:10 (NLT)

My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one can snatch them away from me, for my Father has given them to me, and he is more powerful than anyone else. No one can snatch them from the Father's hand. The Father and I are one." John 10:27-29 (NLT)

Reflection: I don't know of anything that takes greater faith than to trust Jesus to clean up the trash in other people's messy lives. Maybe it's because we find ourselves so reluctant to let go of our own junk, but when it comes to other people, we often wanna help out and make sure the job gets done thoroughly.

I heard a story once of a preacher who went down for a historical tour of the holy lands. The tour guide was giving a lecture about how local shepherds still lead their sheep by the sound of their voices, just as they did in Jesus' day. Sheep follow because they've learned to trust their shepherd, who never bullies or drives his sheep. No sooner had he finished his talk, than the bus rounded a corner to see a man yelling, driving a flock of sheep into the town by beating them with a long stick. The preacher asked their guide to explain what he had just seen, and the guide responded, "Oh that guys not a shepherd. He's the butcher."

We appreciate it when Jesus doesn't bully and drive us. Grace empowers us to make the tough choices. The longer we experience Jesus' presence in our lives, the easier it is for us to trust that He knows best what will keep us fed, well rested, and satisfied. But when it comes to other people's lives we often feel like we are helping Jesus if we herd others into doing the right thing (which translates to, "what we think they should be doing"). We're like sheep dogs. We wanna feel like were supporting others to be better behaved, and we're not above nipping a few stragglers to do it.

The problem is that if we teach others to live up to our standards (or risk getting nipped if they don't) we begin to take the place of Jesus in their lives (ouch). We become the supervisors of someone else's servants. We become the self appointed hall monitors of holiness (teacher... someone's not doing it right!!!).

And although our intentions may be good, and our plans for them generous, we just can't know what they need or when they need it like Jesus can. Jesus can see into the human heart. He knows when to be gentle and when to be firm. He knows when we need rest and when we're ready for a challenge. He wants to lead each of us directly so that we get to know Him in the process and enter into the life that He's designed specifically for us. Our job this week is to make sure we're listening and following the Good Shepherd and that we're not taking on the job of sheep dog (a job description found nowhere in the Bible).

Prayer: Father, I need Your help again to be what You want me to be. Show me where I'm being a sheep dog in other people's lives. Teach me to focus on what you want from me instead of what you want from others. In Jesus' Name, amen.

Thursday

*So accept each other just as Christ has accepted you; then God will be glorified.
Romans 15:7 (NLT)*

Reflection: Have you ever noticed what it is that drives you the craziest about the people you love? I have. I live every day with a constant reminder of how infuriating another human that I love can be. Do you want to know who I'm talking about? Sorry... I'm only capable of so much self disclosure.

So let me talk about myself for a moment. When we met the thing that drew Judy to me was my ability to not be shocked by her. I accepted her for who she was and didn't try to bend her to my will. In fact... her craziness was actually pretty entertaining to me. My life had gotten pretty boring and so I welcomed a little... ummmm... how should I put this???? I welcomed a little eccentricity in my life.

After we got married and had spent many years living together she began to notice something about me. My ability to not let things get to me extended not just to her and her... ummmmm... eccentricities but also to my physical surroundings. She noted that I could drop my dirty clothes on the floor two feet away from the hamper and it never bothered me. She conducted an experiment to see how long I could stand such surroundings. I don't have the official results in front of me but my guess is I could stand it a loooonnnnnngggggg time. For sure longer than she could.

For years she worked on me. I was her special project. She was going to get me to focus and get organized in certain areas of my life. As I frustrated and confounded every attempt of hers to "fix" me (I really did want to change... I just wasn't doing a very good job of it) she got more and more frustrated and confounded. She didn't know what she was going to do with me.

Then she had a moment of clarity when she was reading one of the Number One Ladies Detective Agency books. Precious Rabotswe is surprised by her fiancée with a decision he made without consulting her that is going to impact her life. She's frustrated with him but then realizes that his decision was due to his kindness. It was his kindness that drew Precious Rabotswe to him and was what she appreciated about him most. She realized she couldn't see him making any other choice. Yes, he should have checked with her and talked it over with her but she finally decided that if she was going to get the good part of his being so kind then she'd have to put up with it when that same kindness made her life harder.

Judy told me she realized that if she was going to benefit from my laid back, relaxed & accepting attitude then she was going to have to put up with that same relaxed way of looking at life meant I dropped my dirty socks on the floor two feet from the hamper.

I realized the same thing about her. It was her... ummmmm... eccentricities that made her so much fun. I loved the way she looked at life and how that challenged me to look at life differently to. However... sometimes those... ummmmm... eccentricities made my life infuriating. Sometimes she has the ability to break through that relaxed, laid back attitude that I go through life with and when that happens I get... let's say frustrated. There have been times in my past (I'm not happy to admit it) when I blamed everything on her... ummmmm... eccentricities that was wrong in our marriage and wished for a way out. So I wouldn't have to deal with those eccentricities any longer.

But then I realized that if I was going to get the benefit of the lighter side of her eccentricities then I'd need to learn to deal with the times those same eccentricities made my life difficult.

I see this all the time in married couples. After years of living together they divorce over the very same things that they married for... they married each other for the values and qualities in each other that made life seem empty without the result of those qualities and they divorced when they could no longer stand the negative side of those same qualities.

The same thing happens at church. People will be drawn to Riverside's unique ability to accept them right where they are with all their... ummmmm... eccentricities. They bask in the glow of the three signs of Jesus that Riverside strives to live by: Everybody's Welcome, Nobody's Perfect, Anything's Possible.

But then they start to see the negative side of that kind of life. They see that the very qualities that make it possible for us to accept someone even when they're unacceptable also make it difficult for us to be organized and on top of things. Sometimes people will try to change us. Riverside will become their pet project and they'll work to get us with the program. But inevitably they will be frustrated and infuriated by our... ummmmm... eccentricities. Sometimes they will have the epiphany that Judy and I both had about our marriage and sometimes they won't. When they don't have that epiphany what often happens is a person has to manufacture a reason to get angry. They have to decide what we're doing is wrong and leave in a huff. It doesn't have to be that way.

Yes... we do have some rather major flaws. And we openly admit Riverside isn't for everyone... and even for those people that Riverside is for at one point in their lives there may come a day when God has moved them to a point where they need less of the unconditional acceptance and more of an organizational structure to move forward in their growth. That's ok. We will miss you... but let's part as friends.

I don't know what God has in store for you or for Riverside. Maybe someday we'll become more organized. But until that day... how about if we all agree to focus on the positive and accept each other "just as Christ has accepted us".

Prayer:

Father, open my eyes to focus on the good things in other people instead of the negative that can come from the same values and personality traits. Help me accept others the same way You accepted me. In Jesus Name, amen.

Friday:

Accept other believers who are weak in faith, and don't argue with them about what they think is right or wrong. Romans 14:1 (NLT)

Who are you to condemn someone else's servants? They are responsible to the Lord, so let him judge whether they are right or wrong. And with the Lord's help, they will do what is right and will receive his approval. Romans 14:4 (NLT)

Reflection: The gospel of Mark tells of a leper who came to Jesus saying, "I know you can heal me if you're willing to." His own sense of unworthiness made him uncertain if he was a candidate for Jesus' healing. In the story, Jesus makes the man well, but even before He does that, Jesus reaches out to touch him. This may seem like a simple gesture, but it was actually quite shocking in their culture. To touch a leper would have made you unclean, requiring of ceremonial washing before you could enter the temple again (or touch another human being... or go to the marketplace... or eat... or sleep... or...). Jesus didn't heal the man and then touch him. He reached out to him while he was still considered contagious and untouchable.

Jesus didn't wait for us to be lovable before He loved us, or acceptable before He came for us. Sometimes we forget how human we really are. It isn't until we disappoint ourselves in some area that we are reminded how much grace we really need. It is human nature to be discouraged when we fall short of who we think we should be. But it is Jesus' nature to

respond to human failings with a healing touch. Our messiness doesn't shock Him. He has compassion for us when we need it most.

Next week we're going to talk about enjoyment. Today I'd like to look at the overlap between acceptance and enjoyment. I don't know about you, but my default setting, my first reaction when something doesn't go my way, is usually not to act like Jesus. When drivers cut me off, for example, I sometimes wish I had the mental telepathy to blow out their tires. My second reaction is often to feel bad about my first reaction. I would like to be a better person than I am. I would love to naturally be above pettiness and impatience and selfishness. I could spend a lot of time beating myself up that I'm not a better person, but really, what good would that do? It definitely wouldn't make me more fun to be around (and Ed appreciates it when I'm more fun to be around).

The reality is that accepting our own propensity for mishaps and mistakes is the first step toward behaving better. When we beat ourselves up we just feel discouraged and defeated and we're tempted to take the focus off our own flaws by focusing on the flaws of others. If we accept and encourage ourselves when we fall short of our own expectations we can better use our energy to focus on making amends and learning from our mistakes. Jesus set the example of being gracious to the sinner who acknowledges his faults. He doesn't expect us to be better than we are. He offers His support in becoming more like Him on the inside one day at a time. It's a lifelong process.

By learning to extend compassion and acceptance to ourselves we remove a lot of unnecessary pressure and discouragement from our lives. We can breathe and laugh more easily. We are less demanding with others. We even learn to be better at accepting reality for being what it is, rather than what we think it should be. We can loosen the tight reigns of the tyranny of our own expectations. And that opens us up to more moments of joy. We don't have to have everything under control, or be perfectly measuring up to our own standards, to notice the small beautiful moment we can appreciate unfolding before us. We can enjoy any little blessing despite the sorrows and messiness of this world (and despite the messiness of our lives).

Prayer: Father, I want to learn to be able to appreciate the beauty and joy all around me. Show me how Your Son was able to do it even with all the heartache and drama that He seemed to attract. In Jesus' Name, amen.