

December 7-11, 2020 Edition

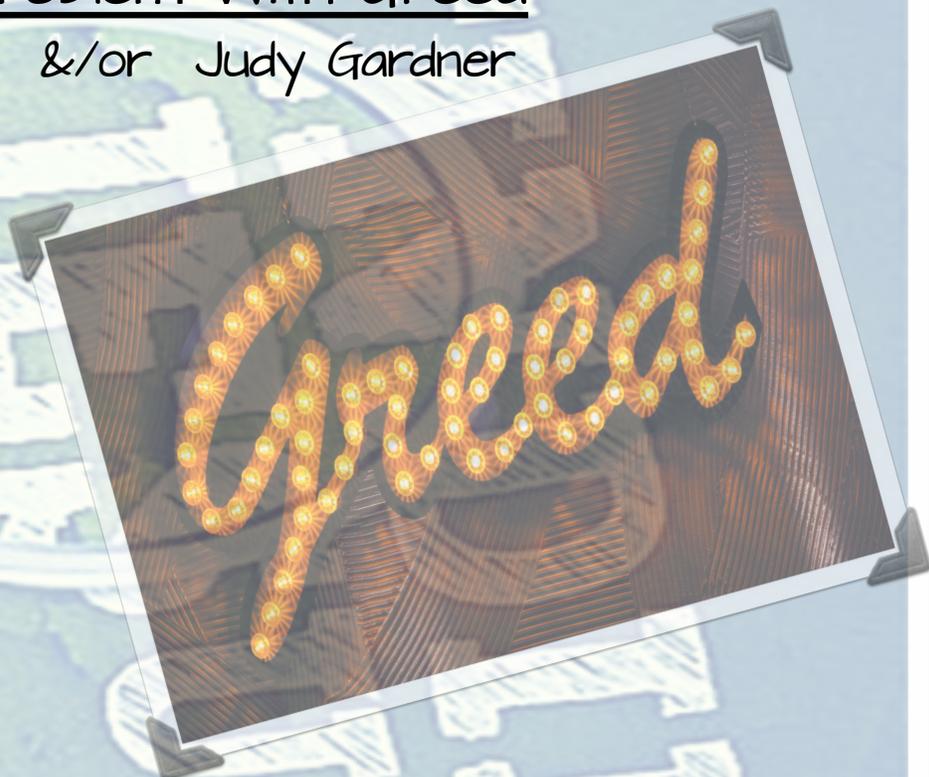
The "BIG Story" Of The Bible #28

Finding Jesus In The Old Testament

The Problem With Greed

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:

Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions." Luke 12:15 (NIV)

Reflection:

I know... I know... nobody likes to talk about greed. Greed obviously has played a huge role in the problems in our world and we are all painfully aware of the havoc that can be wreaked when greed goes uncontrolled... in other people.

Because certainly I don't have a problem with greed... it's always someone else's problem. But Jesus says this is a big problem for all of us...for me and for you. It may take different forms in all of us but it's a sneaky problem. Which is probably why He says to "watch out" for greed. This week our study takes a slight turn as we go from outward, fairly obvious problems to internal cancers that can eat our souls without us even realizing it.

But Jesus says one more thing that I hope you noticed... He said to watch out for "all kinds of greed". Greed it would seem, takes different forms... not just the obvious one that we automatically think about when we hear the word.

First off there's financial greed, right? I think that's pretty obvious. It's such a huge problem that nobody is immune from it's influence... either real or perceived. For instance... people will site greed as the number one reason they don't go to church. Their perception is that all the church cares about is their money and how to separate them from as much of it as possible. Whether the perception is real (probably in some cases) or perceived doesn't much matter. Because of that we at Riverside don't beg for money. In fact every time I talk about money I make the disclaimer:

If you think all we're interested in is your money and that we stained by the sin of greed then don't give any of your money to us... but don't let that stop you from finding an organization that you do trust to be generous to. Because giving is more about your health than it is Riverside's continued existence.

In fact... one of the main reasons we almost never talk about money at Riverside is because whenever I do bring it up I always tell you not to give us any money... so much so that our treasurer is now begging me... Pastor Ed, for the love of God... please stop talking about money!

A second kind of greed is sexual greed. Wow... did you feel that? Did the temperature just rise a few degrees in here? I know what you're thinking... please Pastor Ed, go back to talking about money!

Ok... I won't take too much time on this one. But when I take the gift of sexual intimacy... a gift that God intended to be a blessing... and use it for my own selfish purposes then sex becomes a toxic, destructive force in our lives. It can take the form of an actual physical

relationship outside of the bounds of God's plan for us, it can take the form of pornography, and it can even take the form of a seemingly innocent emotional relationship with sexual undertones that we think is fine since nothing "physical has happened".

And finally, greed can be seen in power and control... even in the church. Have you ever known someone who had to be seen as incredibly spiritual? How always had to be right and had to make sure you knew they were right? Sometimes the words, "God told me" or "I had a dream/ vision and you need to listen to me" are used inappropriately.

That's why Jesus said, watch out. Be careful. Be on your guard. Greed will take over and strangle your faith faster than almost anything... and we won't ever know what hit us.

Prayer:

Father, open my eyes to the ways in which greed impacts my life. Give me the strength to look honestly at my life and see what changes need to be made. In Jesus' Name, amen.

Tuesday:

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. Psalm 23:1-2 (NKJV)

Reflection:

Have you ever asked yourself the question, how much is enough? Enough money, experiences, stuff, power, etc.

Maybe you think... I can't have a greed problem... I don't have enough to have a greed problem. If we compare ourselves to people around us here in Eagle River and Anchorage we will find plenty of people who have more than we do so we can pat ourselves on the back and say we don't have an enough problem. But once we start comparing ourselves to people in other parts of the world those feelings of superiority start breaking down.

Now I'm not trying to get you to feel bad about how much you have... but I do hope that you and I will reflect on this word, enough. How much is enough? Who will I compare myself to? It's not an easy question. The Bible talks about my responsibility to save for the future, to take care of my family and live up to my responsibilities. Talk about a mind freeze!

And I'm not saying I have all the answers... but Judy and I do spend time thinking about how much is enough. Our enough level keeps changing and I'm not here today to give you a number. Why? Because it's all relative. You might look at our level of enough and think, "that's not NEARLY enough!" or maybe "whoa... that's WAY too much you greedy pigs!"

I'm not trying to get you to adopt my standard of enough... but I do hope this will prompt you to spend some time with the word, enough, today and ask yourself... how much is truly enough?

Prayer: Father, how much is enough? Give me wisdom today as I spend some time with this word and try to discern just how much is truly enough. In Jesus' Name, amen.

Wednesday:

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.

Philippians 4:11-12 (NLT)

Reflection:

The truly amazing thing about this concept of contentment and enough is that if we're worried about money we think the antidote is to get more of it. But history has proven that doesn't fix things. It just gives us more to worry about. But contentment... you can't buy that.

True godliness with contentment is itself great wealth. 1 Timothy 6:5-6 (NLT)

Now I know what you're thinking... it's easy for you to say Pastor Ed... you don't have a greed problem. You just don't know me very well. I struggle with this all the time. I talked last week about my troubles with anxiety and worry as a younger man. God has transformed me. I don't struggle very much with those things anymore and I say that not to toot my own horn but to say, if this is something God could teach me then He can do it in anyone. Because this is a learned behavior.

For me, preaching or writing is nothing more than one beggar telling other beggars where he found bread. I never claim to have this all together... but I have found the bread crumb trail that leads to transformation even when you follow it as poorly as I do.

In our culture we seem to have this idea that if you're a driven, get things done kind of person then contentment isn't in the cards. Now it may be tougher for you... but it's not off the table. I doubt there was ever a more driven, type A, get things done kind of person than the apostle Paul who took the message of Jesus to the entire Roman empire. Who wrote half of the New Testament. And yet even Paul says he learned this behavior of contentment. How has this played out in my life?

Every preacher dreams of a big church. A fancy facility, an awesome office, lots of really cool people. I've been here for 15 years now and whenever I think about that list all I can say is, well one out of three aren't bad ;o)

Not that I'm complaining about this facility (thank You God for this building!). But can you remember the first time you walked into this place? Sure... I sometimes wish I had more here at Riverside but God uses the concept of contentment to ease my troubled mind.

That's one thing that happens to me a lot during communion. I stand back by the sound booth waiting for my turn and ideally I get my mic on and set up and make sure I've got my notes and then I try to just get quiet and focus on Jesus and all that He's done for me. And an awful lot of the time what God focuses my mind on is you folks. And how blessed I am that you guys let me be part of your family here at Riverside. And I will have this wave of contentment wash over me. There is very little like it... that feeling of true contentment.

Now I wish I could spend my life there. Never losing that feeling... but the reality is, often as I leave the building I can be torn out of that place by the way someone drives or the some other silly problem and I lose that feeling.

But those moments of asking... am I content? What has God done for me? Those moments can carry you. And as you string more and more of those moments together you can get to a place where you live in contentment more and more and find yourself being impacted by greed less and less. And then when you start to feel that insatiability working on your soul you can arrest that process and remind yourself of how blessed your life truly is.

Prayer: Father, teach me how to be content. Forgive me for the times I've been insatiable and greedy and selfish. Teach me the difference between godly ambition and arrogance. In Jesus' Name, amen.

Thursday

I'll make a list of GOD's gracious dealings, all the things GOD has done that need praising. Isaiah 63:7 (MES)

Let us be thankful, then, because we receive a kingdom that cannot be shaken. Let us be grateful and worship God in a way that will please him.

Hebrews 12:28 (GNT)

Reflection: This is the nuclear option, ok? When you start to feel like you don't have enough... like you need to reach out and grab in order to make sure you aren't passed over... when you start becoming the center of your own very small, very sad universe then gratitude is the thing that will break you out of that trance.

This one is part of the one-two punch that knocks greed out cold. Because here's the thing about gratitude. Gratitude is always personal. It always takes the focus off of me. If you're grateful for something there's always a personality behind that gratitude. You don't write a

thank you note and put it in the mail with no address on it. Gratitude focuses our minds on God... and when that happens we are worshiping.

We are fooling ourselves if we think that the only time we are worshiping is when we come here on the weekends and sing along with Pastor Jeff and the Riverside worship team. It's true that singing is worship and Pastor Jeff and the worship team do a fantastic job of leading us into the presence of God every weekend. But if that's the only worship you do during the week you're worship time here is going to be stale and unsatisfying no matter how great of a job the worship team does.

In fact... that's why we don't try to stir you up and get you to "worship" in an external way here at Riverside because that's just not good theology. I'm not saying that people who raise their hands and get into the worship here are wrong... but I guarantee this about those people... this isn't the only worship they do during the week. You will never understand how people can get so into the worship times here on the weekends until you start to worship God outside of these walls.

Saying, thank You, Lord, is a form of worship. Did you know that? Every time a grateful word comes out of your mouth or forms in your head you are worshiping God. And the more you pray and ask God to bless your life and then step back and let God give you what is truly going to be good for you... and then as you see His Hand at work in your life, gratitude will be the natural result... and as you thank God for everything He's done in your life worship will be the natural result. Then what happens here on the weekends will make more sense to you. Not that everyone has to raise their hands and be expressive in their worship. We're all different. Express your thanks to God in the way you feel right worshipping... don't let anyone try to convince you how to worship... just worship... and give thanks.

Prayer: Father, thank You for everything you've given me. Forgive me for the times I neglect to live my life with gratitude. In Jesus Name, amen.

Friday:

He gives you something you can then give away, which grows into full-formed lives, robust in God, wealthy in every way, so that you can be generous in every way, producing with us great praise to God.

2 Corinthians 9:11 (MES)

All the others gave what they'll never miss; she gave extravagantly.

Mark 12:43-44 (MES)

Reflection: Generosity is the second part of the one-two punch that can knock greed to the mat. As you reflect on the words enough, content & grateful... generosity is the natural outcome. It is a huge part of the antidote to greed in my life and creates a sort of vicious cycle in my life:

He gives you something you can then give away, which grows into full-formed lives, robust in God, wealthy in every way, so that you can be generous in every way, producing with us great praise to God.
2 Corinthians 9:11 (MES)

God gives to you so you can give to others. God's generosity is meant to be the first step in a vicious cycle of generosity that changes the world. It leads to fully formed lives... robust lives. Amazing lives. And it fundamentally changes us from the inside out. It's not extra credit or an elective. You will never grow up spiritually if you don't learn to live a life that rids itself of greed with a spirit of gratitude and generosity.

But again, I'm not here to give you a number. So what are you here to do, Pastor Ed?

I'm glad you asked...

Jesus tells a story in Mark 12 about a poor widow who gives two pennies to the Temple offering. Nobody watching is impressed except Jesus. And He is blown away. We don't have time to really get into it today but here's a concept that drives my life (I don't always live up to it but it's something I aim for and even achieve on my best days): living a life of gratitude and generosity that is extravagant. What would that even look like? I'm still working that out in my life but if you're mind has automatically gone to money during this devo thought on greed then stop it ;o)

Generosity is about SO much more than your money. Time, energy, resources, stuff, and even generosity of spirit (how you think about people) are opportunities for you to become like Jesus and make Him smile. All of these are areas that Jesus longs for you to live a life that is marked by extravagance. What would that look like in your life? I don't know... let's spend some time today thinking about that. Where can you be extravagantly generous today?

Prayer: Father, I'm not even sure what a life marked by extravagance would look like. Show me. In Jesus' Name, amen.