

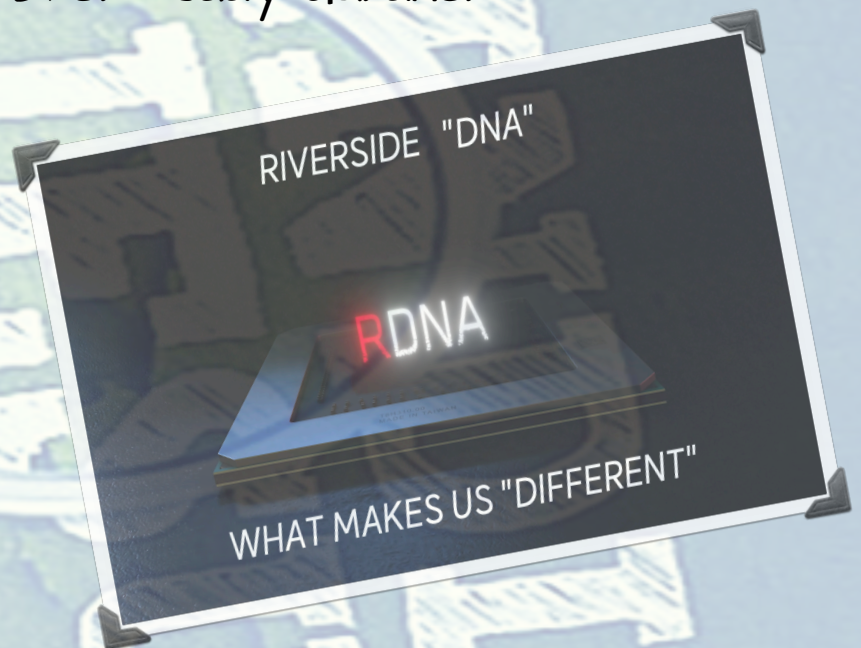
January 25-29, 2021 Edition

The "BIG Story" Of The Bible #34

Finding Jesus In The Old Testament A Review- What Have We Learned So Far?

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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:

I ask God... to make your eyes focused and clear, so you can see exactly what it is God is calling you to do. Ephesians 1:18 (MES)

Reflection: We do church different. It's kinda our slogan. But what exactly does it mean? How do we do church different? And why (and while we're at it... why don't you use correct grammar in that slogan?!?!? I mean for crying out loud... can I buy a vowel... and an "L"...?!?!?)?

I guess you could say that Riverside functions as a family and that family has a set of values (priorities, traits, personality quirks (boy do we have personality quirks ;o), shared perspectives or community direction) which weave themselves into everything that we do, and choose not to do. It's what makes us different. I guess you could say it's what flavors us.

But not everyone in the family is always aware of the values that have shaped who we are. Some come to the All About Riverside class and say, "Oh, I knew we did it that way around here, but I didn't know we do it that way on purpose!" It can come as quite a surprise that our little experiment in, as I like to call it "disorganized religion," really does have a rhyme and reason behind it.

The purpose of this series is to get Riverside's values, the DNA of who we are, why we look how we look, and why act how we act, out in the open. What we want is for you to know to what extent what we do around here is done on purpose. Consider this our full disclosure series. We want you to feel like you know exactly why Riverside exists and why we do things the way we do them. We want you to know why & how we do church different (there you go again... where's Vana White when you need to buy a vowel... and an "L"?).

Our hope is that at the end of this sermon series, you will have a clearer vision of what your unique values are and how they fit in around here. Some of you will feel more at home here than you ever have. You'll be able to say, "No wonder I feel at ease here! What I believe, who I am, fits in with the Riverside family values. Cool."

Some of you will realized that, although you would never design a church to be like Riverside, it's the place God wants you for this stage in your life. You may say, "Hmmm. These aren't really my people. I can see that there is some gap between my individual values and the values of this community, but for right now, this place has something God wants me to be exposed to (or there's something I'm supposed to do for this group of people). I'm good with that."

Some of you will say, "Uh oh, I'm clearly at the wrong church!" And we want you to know that that's okay with us. God is the mastermind of over 10,000 varieties of beetles – you know beetles, those hard shelled bugs, not the British pop group. I mean who can appreciate that kind of diversity? Only one person... God.

If God enjoys that much diversity that much in one species of bugs, I am confident that He is purposeful in designing the huge variety of humans – the pinnacle of His creation. God made us all purposefully and wonderfully unique. And because of our God designed uniqueness and because of the complicated circumstances that all of us have been through which cloud

our views no matter how hard we try to see clearly... there has to be a wide variety of Christian churches to reach each unique individual.

The bad news is that diversity isn't for sissies. A world of differences can cause friction and misunderstandings. But it is also an opportunity for symphonic masterpieces when God is designing all the instruments to work together in harmony. We believe in the great and miraculous harmony of God's design. Not all people have the same bent, gifts or purposes. Neither do all churches. The key is to embrace the vision that God has in mind for each individual human being and each individual church.

We believe that each of us will be the most satisfied and fulfilled when living in alignment with who God designed us to be. The same is true for Riverside. God hasn't asked us to be the biggest or best church in town. He hasn't asked us to be the hippest or freshest church in town. He's asked us to be faithful to His unique design for Riverside. We want you to know up front what we think that looks like so you can know who we are and where we're headed. Then you can decide for yourself if this is where God is asking you to be.

Prayer: Father, open my eyes to the unique way You've created me. Open my eyes to the unique way You've designed all of these churches in the world. And show me what part You want me to play in this grand plan to reach the world in the Name of Jesus. In His Name I pray, amen.

Tuesday:

'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.' This is the first and most important command. And the second command is like the first: 'Love your neighbor as you love yourself.' All the law and the writings of the prophets depend on these two commands. Matthew 22:37-38 (NCV)

God authorized and commanded me to commission you: Go out and train everyone you meet, far and near, in this way of life, marking them by baptism in the threefold name: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Then instruct them in the practice of all I have commanded you. I'll be with you as you do this, day after day after day, right up to the end of the age. Matthew 28:18-20 (MES)

Reflection: The purpose of a community gets expressed in how it lives out the values of the group. There are some purposes that are universal in God's followers. Jesus is really the biggie. You can't really consider a church to be Christian unless it follows the teachings and values of Christ. He's kinda THE big deal around here. This is supposed to be the case in any community of Christians. The centrality of Jesus is the thing that we all have in common. Christianity (and Christians) are pro Christ. The purpose of any Christian church is to teach and follow Jesus.

But HOW we teach and follow Jesus looks much different in Eagle River than it does in Kenya, Africa. Jesus is the same, but a lot of the details are different. In one of my devotionals a week or two ago I reprinted an article by Max Lucado about how the variety among churches pleases God. He doesn't do cookie cutter. God's an artist. He makes people

who need and respond to different things. Because of that, different churches attract different people. It's a good thing.

We like Rick Warren's take on the purpose of the church in general. In reviewing hundreds of scriptures describing why God created church communities and what He wants from them, five themes surface over and over again. Those themes are: worship, fellowship, discipleship, service and evangelism.

A balanced church provides the opportunity to make a big deal out of God. Singing, praying, expressing gratitude, telling the stories of all that God has done – these are forms of worship. You can worship God all by yourself while you're out fishing. I'm sure you've heard that one. And it's true (in fact... solitude is an important Christian practice... it's just not the ONLY Christian practice). But fellowship (interacting with and connecting with others) can only be done in groups.

Discipleship means being a student of Jesus. Christians make a practice of integrating Jesus' teachings into our daily lives. Although this can be done all alone on a deserted island, most significant lessons involve other people. How can we learn to forgive if we are never in a position to be disappointed or hurt? How can we practice patience if no one is getting on our nerves? Community inspires us to take steps toward acting on our values. It also provides the challenge and the feedback to take us to the next level, which may not always be all that comfortable. Acting the way Jesus would act isn't much of a challenge when we're alone on a mountain top. It can be a strenuous exercise when dealing with others.

Service is something we understand because it is part of our culture. We like good customer service. Those who serve are acting out one of Jesus' well worn practices. There are lots of opportunities to serve outside of the church community, but how we serve each other and how we serve our neighbors is how the church gets evaluated.

And finally... evangelism is the process of attracting others to want to try out Jesus' values for themselves. If we live lives of meaning, purpose, service and satisfaction, people want to get in on what we're doing. Service and evangelism are how we add value to this world, and how we welcome those who want to try it along side of us.

These are things that every church should share... but how we go about them... which ones we focus on or are especially good... which ones we struggle with. These are the things that make churches different. Over the next 8 weeks we'll look at what values drive Riverside and how those values determine the way that these purposes are done. I'm also hoping that as we look at the values that drive Riverside you'll also take this time to look at the values that drive your own life. Why do you do the things you do the way you do them? Does what you say is important to you really line up with what your actions suggest is the truth about what's important to you. We have to be intentional about how we do church & about how we do life as individuals or we'll slip into the path of least resistance.

Prayer: Father, open my eyes to how I really live my life. I don't want to say that one thing is important to me but not let that show up in how I live my life. Give me the ability to integrate my life so what I say matches up with what I do. In Jesus' Name, amen.

Wednesday:

John said to Jesus, "Master, we saw someone using your name to cast out demons, but we told him to stop because he isn't in our group." But Jesus said, "Don't stop him! Anyone who is not against you is for you." John 9:49-50 (NLT)

It's true that some are preaching out of jealousy and rivalry. But others preach about Christ with pure motives. They preach because they love me, for they know I have been appointed to defend the Good News. Those others do not have pure motives as they preach about Christ. They preach with selfish ambition, not sincerely, intending to make my chains more painful to me. But that doesn't matter. Whether their motives are false or genuine, the message about Christ is being preached either way, so I rejoice. And I will continue to rejoice. Philippians 1:15-17 (NLT)

Reflection: There are values that all Christian churches share, but there are also values that set us apart. We believe that this is part of God's plan. Some people are attracted to churches that are passionate and loud and emotional. This isn't good or bad. It's just one of the styles or values that God has handed out more liberally to some than to others. Some people, on the other hand, need a quiet and intellectual community to connect with. People of different cultures are also attracted to different styles and worship practices.

One of the greatest challenges of the early church was figuring out how to survive diversity. For thousands of years the Jews had been God's people. He gave them laws and holidays and practices that set them apart. The earliest Christians were all Jews, just like Jesus was Jewish. They spoke a common language, shared a cultural heritage and got all of the same jokes.

But Jesus came to bless the entire world - all of her cultures and peoples. As the gospel began to reach those "who hadn't grown up going to church," lots of conflicts and misunderstandings occurred. A great deal of the New Testament letters were written to help specific congregations figure out what we all need to have in common, and what we just need to accept about each other cause we're different.

This is a central part of being a community of God. We each get to work through how much God is asking us to have in common, and when to accept and embrace our differences. In modern America many of us have certain ideas about what church is supposed to look like. These expectations come from our upbringing and our experiences (for all of us complicated circumstances often cloud our view and we don't even realize it). But honestly, God doesn't ask us to judge other churches. How can we know to what extent God made them to do exactly what they're doing? Our task is to do the best job we can at being who God is asking us to be.

And your task is to find a community that fits with you well enough that you can participate and grow. You'll never find the perfect church (if you ever do find a perfect church... don't join it... because as soon as you join it it won't be perfect anymore ;o). Churches are like families. There's no such thing as a perfect family. We're all a mixed bag of virtues and annoying behaviors. But we are social creatures. Connection is what we're here for. Imperfection and friction within community is essential to our growth, even if it takes a lot of patience, or maybe BECAUSE it takes a lot of patience.

So celebrate the differences that other churches have from us. There are people in this world that need what they provide. It may not work for you but just remember... as tempted as you might be to judge another church for the way they do things, there is someone over there tempted to judge you for the way you do things. Think about that long enough and it'll make your head swim.

Prayer: Father, again today I want to focus in myself. Turn my eyes inward to see what motives drive me. Teach me what the difference is between judging and discerning. Between accepting and approving. I want to live a life that pleases you and makes you proud to be my Father. Show me how to do that. In Jesus' Name, amen.

Thursday:

*An intelligent person aims at wise actions, but a fool starts off in many directions.
Proverbs 17:24 (GN)*

Reflection: In any community, there is a gap between the values that are taught and the values that are actually acted out when push comes to shove. Hypocrisy is an ever-present part of human communities. But this is a fine line to find because our values should be higher than our actual capacity to live up to them. Values are something we aim at and practice moving toward. Values are ideals of our highest selves and best practices. It is in interacting with each other that we see the discrepancy between what we say we believe, and what we actually do. Noticing that gap is how we make progress we are willing to honestly face that gap and prayerfully find a way to close it (the gap between who we want to be and who we really are).

It takes time and attention to notice the gap and continue to correct our course. Human beings do not naturally stay on track. If we let our lives get so full that we are forced to run on auto-pilot we often discover ourselves miles and miles off track down the road. The values we claim and admire only produce results when we practice them – especially when just going with the flow would be so much easier and more comfortable.

One of the benefits in clearly articulating a community's values, is that then you have a criteria for making choices and evaluating results. In this way, Riverside's values function a lot like a GPS. We can plug in our desired destination and get immediate information on which direction will best take us there.

Values also serve as a focus. In California I like to eat at In-And-Out Burgers. Now they have focus. They do burgers, fries and drinks (nothing else). They do them quickly and with quality. U can't get a steak there or a tofu burger. In-And-Out limits its menu to fewer items in order to keep the resulting quality consistent. Riverside isn't ever going to be all things to all people. I can get myself mighty discouraged just by asking myself to list important and beneficial things that Riverside is NOT doing. There are many wonderful programs and services that we do not offer.

But instead of feeling disappointed in all the things we aren't doing, I try to remind myself that we are doing the best we can to focus our limited energy (which seems for me to continue to diminish as I age) on the few things that God is asking us to really focus on. It's the only way I can move forward and it's the values of Riverside that keep me on track. Your values can do the same for you. You can't do everything (some of us need to repeat that over and over... "I cannot do everything... I cannot do everything...").

You need to focus your life if it is going to have any power at all... make any difference at all. There are a lot of things that Riverside doesn't do well. There are a few things that I think we do very well. The same will be true of your life. The real question is this: Do you want to do everything but not do any of it very well or do you want to focus your life on the things God has asked you to focus on and do those few things in a way that people notice and in a way that pleases God? Think about that today.

Prayer: Father, open my eyes to the areas in my life that I have not truly surrendered to You. Give me the courage to give them to You knowing You will give back what is good for me and keep what isn't. This is hard... show me the way. In Jesus Name, amen.

Friday:

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

Reflection: Jesus was the mastery model of all the virtues (doesn't that just drive you nuts? We have to struggle with most values and be truly good at only a couple of them... what's up with that?). He had that unique skill of looking into the human heart and knowing the exact right response. With the vulnerable, Jesus was exquisitely gentle. With the arrogant, He could be downright cantankerous (and a couple of times pretty violent). Jesus always knew which value to express. He still does. The bad news is that you and I aren't Jesus (it's sort of a good news/bad news kind of thing).

Our judgment is never going to be spot on. We are going to err one direction or another. Having clear values helps us know which direction we are generally going to lean. Everyone has a lean. You can't see it when they're standing straight and well supported. Their lean reveals itself when you knock the legs out from under them and see which side they fall to. Please don't try this at home kids... we are trained professionals (ok... not really professionals... more like bumbling amateurs and you can go ahead and try it at home if you want but don't come running to us when you break a hip ;o).

The value that we will be talking about this weekend is acceptance. Acceptance is one of our most central values at Riverside. It colors just about every choice we make around here. Just to be clear, acceptance isn't the appropriate response 100% of the time. You wouldn't want a police force, for example, to arrive on the scene of a crime and say, "Well, I wouldn't have committed that crime, but I accept you for the criminal that you are. Feel free to carry on. I wish you well in your life of crime."

At Riverside, we try to do the most appropriate thing in any given situation. But we also know that the best and most balanced response often escapes us. Telling you what we value up front helps you to best anticipate our lean. We don't accept everything. We don't, for example, permit our kids to play with matches in class because we accept that most kids are fascinated by watching things burn. But in making a judgement call in which we are uncertain what is best, we usually err on the side of acceptance. Why do we do that? Tune in next week and we'll tell you all about it.

And while we do let you know up front how the leadership will lean at Riverside, we can't guarantee that everyone you run into at Riverside will act consistently with our values. Even people who enjoy the experience of being accepted can sometimes find it hard to accept those who just don't make sense to them. Just like you may have a tough time accepting what's different in them. This series is about letting you know what drives the leadership at Riverside... what makes us do what we do. But we can't force people who go to church here follow the same model (we'll talk about influence later in this series). All we can do is accept the people God sends our way and then pray and hope that people will share with others what they've been given. I guess you could say we use our values for guidance not guarantees.

So spend this weekend thinking about the concept of acceptance -vs- approval. What's the difference? What's good about them? What's difficult about them? I can't guarantee I'll have firm answers for you this weekend but I can at least share the journey God has led me on and then leave you to work out the answers with God as He leads you on your own journey with Him.

Prayer: Father, teach me the difference between acceptance and approval. Between judgment and discernment. I want to learn the things You want me to learn. Today I take another step in the journey You are leading me into. Show me where to go. In Jesus' Name, amen.