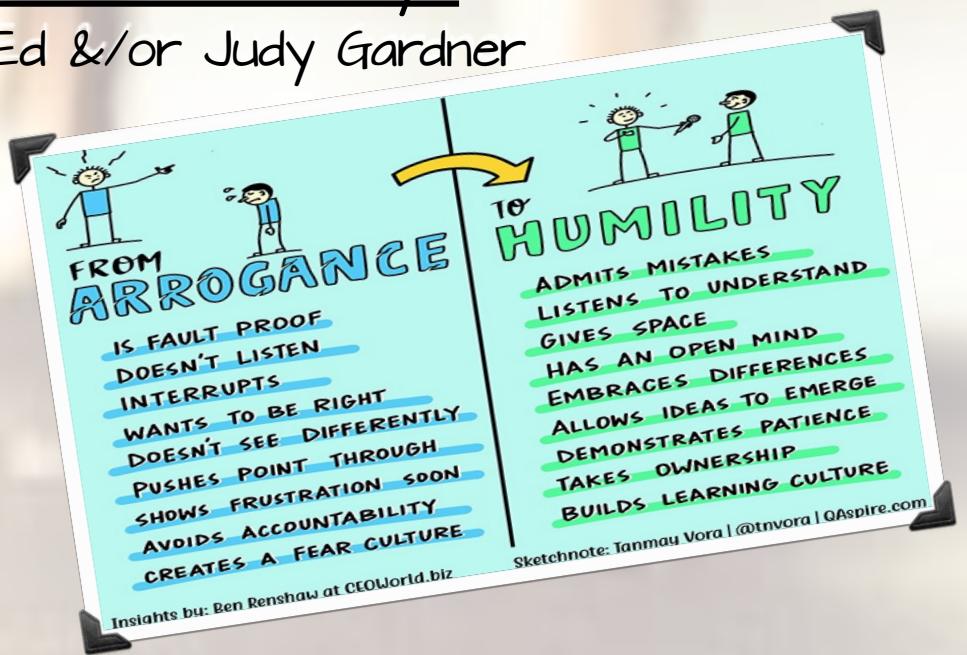


Jan. 29- Feb. 2, 2024 Edition

Following The Year_(s) Of ^ Jesus Part 109

What Is Humility?

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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 you 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:

So the creation of the heavens and the earth and everything in them was completed. On the seventh day God had finished his work of creation, so he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because it was the day when he rested from all his work of creation.

Genesis 2:1-3 (NLT)

Reflection: We can't talk about meekness and gentleness without addressing the nature of power. Genesis' account of creation turned the ancient world's idea of power completely on its head. In early civilizations it was understood that only the strong survive. One of the popular creation stories of the day was the battle between two gods: Marduk and Tiamat, where the victor makes the earth out of the broken body of the other god, with people coming to life from the many drops of blood shed in the process. Brutality and violence were considered an inescapable part of life, and the foundation for great power.

In God's poem of creation we are introduced to a power so great that it stands uncontested. God is an artist, a designer, a builder of life and harmony – not the warrior associated with ancient power. His power is eternal, dare I say elegant? After He completes His masterpiece, which He does without undue effort or struggle – simply speaking His will into being, He does something else unexpected. He rests.

It was rare for a ruler of the ancient world to rest. Rarely did anyone have enough power to step away from the constant vigilance of not being overthrown. Those who had power, claimed it at the expense of others, and there was always someone waiting in the wings, building their forces, ever watchful for any sign of weakness to make their play for supremacy. The game of thrones provided no rest.

God commanded the Israelites to rest one day every week. They weren't even allowed to pick up manna from the ground on their rest day. Thou shalt not even exert thyself enough to bend over and pick up food. I guess the three second rule was suspended for the day. The day of rest set them up to experience what God feels like in His holiness and power. He promised them that in working less, they would actually accomplish more, overproducing in their leisure even when contrasted with the constant vigilance of their Middle Eastern peers. God taught the Israelites a very important lesson that seems so counterintuitive:

Power and rest go together.

When we allow ourselves rest we are connecting with an ancient practice of holiness. Resting proclaims with our actions that we are willing to step out of the rat race. We have confidence that God will make the most of our lives even if we take a breather from always having to be on top of everything. The productivity of Heaven comes not from exerting effort, but from respecting our own human limits.

What would change in your pace and schedule if you better appreciated the relationship between power and rest? Do you have permission to stand down from flop just one day from life's demands?

Prayer:

Father, Help me to see the relationship between rest and power. Help me to see the sacred nature of rest... not simply the physical restoration of it but the renewal of mind, body, spirit & heart. Teach me how to rest the way You rest. In Jesus' Name, amen.

Tuesday:

You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.

Though he was God,

he did not think of equality with God
as something to cling to.

Instead, he gave up his divine privileges ;

he took the humble position of a slave
and was born as a human being.

When he appeared in human form,

he humbled himself in obedience to God
and died a criminal's death on a cross.

Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor

and gave him the name above all other names,

that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,

to the glory of God the Father. Philippians 2:5-10 (NLT)

Reflection: Today we'll look at God's take on true power in the life of Jesus. Philippians 2:6-11 is probably one of the oldest Christian statements of faith found in the New Testament. Scholars believe that it is a hymn of the early church. Before the gospel accounts were written down or Paul had drafted any of his letters to churches, the first believers learned about Jesus in worship and through eyewitness stories of his life. This passage is something that the earliest Christians sang at their gatherings.

Paul tells the Philippians church that Christian maturity comes by copying the attitude of Christ. Jesus had all the authority of Heaven. He came to earth to demonstrate with His life what power and holiness truly look like. In God's kingdom, the higher up you go in power and status, the more willing you are to put yourself at the service of others. Sacred service isn't given by the weak and oppressed who have no other choice but to serve. The greatest Power the world has ever seen, poured Himself into the lives of others as a servant, until

even His life had been spent on our behalf. Sacred service is true nobility, where the King puts all His resources into the wellbeing of His subjects.

God doesn't encourage us to be powerless or pitiful. He asks us to provide ourselves with the rest and resources needed to grow stronger and more powerful. But Jesus gave us the ultimate example of what to do with the power that He gives us. His life teaches us that the powerful find true satisfaction and meaning in service. Jesus is the model of gentleness and meekness – great power harnessed in service of the higher good.

How would your life shift if your attitude about power more closely mirrored Jesus'? Would you have the courage to say "no" to some demands on your time in order to say "yes" to more moments of sacred rest and service?

Prayer: Father, I want to understand Your upside down kingdom where the servants are the held in the highest regard. Show me how to live my life as a servant, the way Jesus did. In Jesus' Name, amen.

Wednesday:

Moses was very humble--more humble than any other person on earth.
Numbers 12:3

Reflection: Today we look at our third example of meekness, gentleness and humility – Moses. I used to think Moses (who wrote the first 5 books of the Old Testament) couldn't have possibly written Numbers 12:3 because the simple act of writing that he was the most humble man on the face of the earth would disqualify him from that conversation. But that's because I misunderstood humility. Gentleness/humility/meekness isn't thinking less of yourself... it's thinking of yourself less (and instead focusing on God's plan for your life).

It's fascinating to watch the shift in Moses' perception of power from a young man to the great leader of Exodus.

In his youth, Moses' ideas of power were strongly influenced by Egypt. As a member of Pharaoh's household he would have been taught that extreme power on earth belonged only to the Pharaoh who ruled the people as an incarnation of deity- Pharaoh was considered a god on earth. Power was about rule and conquest and a strong military.

From his biological family he would have learned about the God of creation, who passionately values each individual human life. His sense of morality was shaped by his people, but his sense of power was shaped by those who currently represented power in his world. When young Moses came across an Egyptian soldier beating one

of his people, he reacted powerfully. He killed the Egyptian. What greater power is there than to hold life and death in your hands?

But the result of standing up for God's people using human forms of power was exile to the desert. There Moses learned to settle down and serve over a period of forty years! He became a father and a shepherd. He spent his days looking out for the welfare of small, smelly, simple-minded sheep. That was the training God provided to play a role of true power.

Moses had lost his thirst for confrontation. He went back to Egypt as a man whose passions had been harnessed in the service of others. That was the man of power that God would use. Moses would stand in his rural shepherd garb and insist that the most powerful man he had ever met forfeit his entire slave labor force. He would lift his staff and bring about great destruction. And finally, he would lead God's reluctant sheep out of slavery and to the brink of the promised land.

What powerful things do you dream of being a part of? What lessons would you need to learn from an ancient murderer turned shepherd turned deliverer turned hero to truly wield more power from God?

Prayer: Father, I want to grow in gentleness/humility/meekness but it's so hard to know how to grow in an area I'm not even sure I understand. Today I commit my life to growing in gentleness/humility/meekness... whatever that means. Show me how to become more like Jesus. In Jesus' Name, amen.

Thursday

God is kind, but he's not soft. In kindness he takes us firmly by the hand and leads us into a radical life-change. Romans 2:4 (MES)

Reflection: Today's verse was super short but super important. Here's a few statements that make sense to me. God is Love. Love is God. God is kind but not soft. Love is kind but not soft. Love does what is most loving. God does what is most loving. And finally, all you need is love (da, da, da, da, da...)

It's impossible to be clear on what we mean when we use the word love in our culture. We use it too often, and then not often enough. For example, I love God but I've also been known to say that I love chocolate. I love my spouse, but may not feel like it much when I'm not getting what I think need. I love children but cannot be counted on to give them whatever they want – even at Riverside (some of you may find this hard to believe).

The closest I've come to relating to God's love is those tender moments when I watched Jonathan sleep when he was little. (I sometimes try to watch him while he's sleeping now, but if I get caught it is really awkward.) Parental love knows what it means to want the best for another human being, to put ourselves in the service of someone who is depending on us.

Parental love is kind but it's not soft. Sometimes parental love takes a lot of courage. It is an act of love to set limits when limits are not appreciated. It is an act of love to say "no" when saying "yes" is easier but not generous in the long run. Parental love does not always get full credit from the one being loved.

God can relate. He loves us tenderly, but not always exactly how we want Him to. Jesus said that the most important instructions of all (basically fulfilling the whole Bible) are to love God and to love others as we love ourselves. God wants us to embrace the wholeness that can only come from loving Him. He wants us to love others, not in the way that is easiest or most convenient, but in the way we love ourselves – taking into account what is truly generous and appropriate, not just what we have left over. And God holds us responsible for our own lives, for loving ourselves and serving our needs for rest and fuel and connection.

Sometimes people think that if people are given permission to love themselves they will become selfish hedonists. That would be the case if the rule was to gratify others and ourselves, or serve every whim and demand of others and ourselves. But Love doesn't spoil. Love is like the baby bear's bed to Goldie Locks – not too hard or too soft, but just right. Love takes the time to truly see people and assess what is most appropriate. Love does what is most loving.

Man, does that take a lot of work! Sometimes I let my life get so busy I can't see what's best for me or God's kingdom or anyone. Love takes a lot of attention and practice. Love's a pain sometimes. But that's the example God set. God loves us, and yet gives us free will, inviting a host of pain into His own heart. God is kind to us, but He is not soft.

What would God's version of love mean in your life? Would you need to get softer or firmer? Would you pay more attention to yourself or less? Would you need to say "yes" more or "no" more?

Prayer:

Father, I know You love me. I want to love You but I don't always know what that means. Teach me how You love me and then teach me what it will look like in my life to love You. In Jesus Name, amen.

Friday:

Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light.

Matthew 11:28-30 (NLT)

Reflection: I don't know about you, but all this talk of God's love has been both reassuring and convicting. I want to love more like Jesus, but frankly I'm not sure where I'd get the energy.

Thankfully, Jesus knows exactly what I need. Jesus is the master model of perfectly fitting love. He provides challenges so that the strong get stronger. He provides acceptance so that the weak can pick themselves up and get in the game. He provides lessons when we recognize that our rules aren't producing the results we'd counted on. That is the meekness, the gentleness, the humility and the genius of God's kind of love.

Jesus wants to teach us a whole new set of steps in this dance of life. We don't get to set the pace. He tells us to watch Him, and learn to listen to the music of God's Spirit. For me, it can be hard to teach an old dog new tricks (and I am not talking about Ed... but it's hard to teach him new tricks as well... maybe there is a fitting analogy there but I am digressing like he does all the time). I need to set aside the space to rest in Jesus' view of reality. I need to provide time to reset the rhythms of my mind. I need to believe (with my actions) that rest is for the worker as well as the weary.

Jesus is available to you. He longs to draw you to Him like a mother hen sweeps up her frenetic baby chicks, holding them close until they let themselves be still. Let God shelter you under the shadow of His wing today.

Prayer: Father, today I give myself to You to be sheltered in Your loving presence. I don't always know how to do that so please show me. In Jesus' Name, amen.