

December 16-20, 2024 Edition

Following

The Year^(s) Of Jesus Part 154

Jesus On Dealing With As-Is People

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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:

Welcome with open arms fellow believers who don't see things the way you do. And don't jump all over them every time they do or say something you don't agree with- even when it seems that they are strong on opinions but weak in the faith department. Remember, they have their own history to deal with. Treat them gently. Romans 14:1-2 (MES)

Reflection: I love to get deals. When I go down south one of my favorite things to do is hit the outlet malls so I can find clothes that fit me for dirt cheap (I know... it's hard to believe I don't spend thousands on my wardrobe... but it's true).

Have you ever spent much time in outlet stores? There are racks and racks, or shelves and shelves of random stuff that is dirt cheap. Why is it there? How did it come to be there? Well, either there's something wrong with it or nobody else wanted it. And now... here it is ready for you to take it home and brag about the bargain you got to your friends.

Have you ever thought that relationships (the ones you treasure and those other ones as well) are very similar to the things you find at an outlet mall? Most of the good ones are already gone and all you have left to choose from are like clothes at an outlet mall... there's something wrong with them or nobody wants them (or both).

You may have lamented this before in your life but did you ever stop to think about the fact that it's the same story when other people look at you? There's either something wrong with you or nobody wants you (or both). Sounds like a real downer of a devotional today, huh?

The good news is... there is Someone who wants you. There's Someone who knows everything about what's wrong with you (even stuff you don't realize yet) and still wants you. In fact, He gave His life for you. But He also gave His life for the people that surround you who drive you CRAZY! The people you can't stand. He cares about them... He cares about you... and He wants for those of us who claim to be followers of His to care about the people nobody else cares about as well.

The holidays are upon us... and I have a feeling that you will have to spend time with the people you'd least like to spend time with over the next few weeks. How do you think Jesus wants you to handle those moments? Probably like He would if He were here in your place. This week we're going to look at the three most powerful things you can give the people that God brings into your life (some of them you already know... some may be just around the corner). Consider it a Christmas present not just to them... but a Christmas present to yourself as well (because in giving these three gifts to the people who push our buttons the most we will become more like Jesus ourselves- and that's coincidentally what Jesus wants most from you this Christmas as well).

Prayer: Lord, I don't always treat people the way You would if You were here in my place. I don't always even remember that that's the goal. Today remind me of what my mission is with everyone I come into contact with. In Jesus' Name, amen.

Tuesday:

Accept each other just as Christ has accepted you so that God will be given glory.
Romans 15:7 (NLT)

Reflection: The first gift that Jesus offers you is also the first gift that He wants you to offer to those people you have to deal with... you remember them, the ones that have something seriously wrong with them? That gift is the gift of grace. Acceptance is the gift of radical acceptance and it feels great when we receive it but for some of us it can be difficult to give to other people.

When I have a tough time giving grace to someone in my life I try my best to remember how much grace Jesus had to give me. When I first offered my life to Jesus I wasn't much to look at. I had spent 3 ½ years throwing my life away and wasn't sure all the preachers were right who said Jesus will always take me back. But I didn't really have any other options. I was at the end of my rope.

So one night I prayed a very simple prayer. I said to God, "if You really exist and if You really want my life then I'll give it to You. And I'll do what I already think I know that You want me to do, and do my best to learn the rest." Then I waited. I was hoping for one of those Hollywood moments where the heavens part and light shines down into the darkness and angels descend playing harps. But I didn't get a Hollywood moment. I got very little actually right at that moment. I wondered if I had been heard... and if I had maybe I had been rejected.

But I had (been heard) and I hadn't (been rejected). As I started taking baby steps towards the life I thought God wanted for me (often in the wrong direction even) God started blowing my mind with answered prayers and miracles that nobody else could see but I was constantly looking around wondering if anyone else was seeing this. I can't prove to you that God exists (just like you can't prove that He doesn't)... but over the last 28 years God has absolutely proved to me beyond a shadow of a doubt that He is there and He cares about me.

He offered me the gift of grace... He radically accepted me right where I was and loved me even though I had nothing to offer Him. Even though I had spent a good part of my life running from Him and living a life that had nothing to do with what He dreamed of when He created me. Even with all that God accepted me and welcomed me back into His family.

Now He wants me to do the same for the people I come into contact with. He wants me to give grace... the gift of radical acceptance to the people in my life. Those who are easy to accept and (this is the really tough part) those who are totally unacceptable. What about influence you may be asking (I knew you'd be wondering about that...)? Well, we'll talk about that tomorrow. For today let's focus on acceptance and grace. How are you doing at giving grace to the people in your life? Not just the easy ones... but especially the tough ones.

Prayer: Father, thank You so much for the gift of grace that you offer me. Thank You for accepting me just the way I am. Now I ask that you would give me the courage and strength to offer grace and radical acceptance to the people in my life. Show me how to become more like

Jesus today by giving grace to even to the people who make my life harder. In Jesus' Name, amen.

Wednesday:

You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. John 8:32 (NIV)

Reflection: Today we're going to look at the second gift Jesus gives us... the gift of truth. Yesterday we looked at the gift of grace (or radical acceptance) and some of you maybe were wondering to yourselves as you read, "but what about influencing people? If I just radically accept everything that everyone does how do I influence people who need to change"? Great question.

First of all let me point out one very important thing. If you don't first offer people the radical acceptance that Jesus first offered everyone He came across, why would they listen to any truth you might be able to speak into their lives (that's a rhetorical question... the answer is they wouldn't)?

Maybe you've heard it said, people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. It's absolutely true. One of the biggest knocks that people have against Christians is that we often come across as those who turn truth telling into an Olympic event. We use truth like a club, bashing people over the head with it. And when we do we take the power of God's truth right out of the equation because God's truth was never intended to be used as a club.

But God's truth was meant to be a light that when shone into our lives reveals the areas where we need to change. And sometimes God wants to use me or you to help Him shine the light into somebody else's life. Paul put it this way in Galatians 6:1:

Dear brothers and sisters, if another believer is overcome by some sin, you who are godly should gently and humbly help that person back onto the right path.

Sometimes God wants to use us to help those who have stumbled off the right path in their lives. But there are a couple of really important questions to ask before you go charging off and "offering" the gift of truth to the people in your life that you believe so desperately need (or deserve?) it:

1. Is it really my business? Those of us who tend to see the truth that people need to be told more than the grace that they need to be offered often rush in where angels fear to tread. We become self appointed hall monitors of holiness and use the mask of God's truth as a license to attack people that are driving us nuts. Just because you see something that you think is wrong, don't assume God is calling you to fix it (He might be calling you... but proceed with caution or you will be no better than the Pharisees... and we'll talk about them tomorrow). Make sure you have enough of a relationship with someone, based on the grace and radical acceptance that Jesus always starts with BEFORE you go running down the path of correction and truth telling.

2. How can I do this “gently” & “humbly” like Galatians 6 says correction should be done? Jesus was gentle and humble with people who needed His gift of truth (with one exception- the Pharisees and we’ll see why He was more forceful with them tomorrow... for today I’ll just say you DO NOT want to become more like the Pharisees. I’m just saying). The one person in the universe who always knew exactly the right thing to say and how to proceed and He always proceeded with grace, gentleness and humility before He spoke truth.

Tomorrow we’ll look at an event where Jesus offers grace and truth to someone who desperately needed both gifts in her life. For today ask Jesus to show you the truth about your own life. And for Him to give you the courage, wisdom, gentleness & humility to give the gift of truth to the people in your life who need it.

Prayer: Father, forgive me for the times I’ve turned a blind eye to the areas of my life that You want to change. Give me the courage to see Your truth in my life... open my eyes to the things I need to change today. And forgive me for the times I’ve used truth as a club and hurt people. Teach me to be more like Your son in how I tell the truth to the people in my life. In Jesus Name, amen.

Thursday:

They kept demanding an answer, so he stood up again and said, "All right, but let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone!" Then he stooped down again and wrote in the dust. When the accusers heard this, they slipped away one by one, beginning with the oldest, until only Jesus was left in the middle of the crowd with the woman. Then Jesus stood up again and said to the woman, "Where are your accusers? Didn't even one of them condemn you?" "No, Lord," she said. And Jesus said, "Neither do I. Go and sin no more." John 8:9-11 (NLT)

Reflection: In the story from today’s scripture reading we find the perfect combination of grace & truth. Jesus gives both to this woman... and believe me, she needed both.

This is one of my favorite stories in the Bible because it gives us insight into how God handles His own laws & commandments, especially when we really screw them up. Can you imagine the drama of this moment? The woman is guilty. There’s no doubt about that. The religious leaders think they have Jesus trapped (if you don’t know the story make sure and read John chapter 8 to get the whole picture). The woman is caught in the very act of adultery and the law of Moses says that is an act that deserves death by stoning (actually it says both the man and woman should be stoned to death so here’s my question... where’s the guy? Doesn’t it take two to tango? There’s something deeper going on here than some religious leaders seeking to uphold the laws of God but that’s a story for another devotional). Anyways... back to this devotional. The religious leaders think they have Jesus trapped. If he says, “go ahead and stone her to death”, then He loses the radical acceptance factor that is causing sinners and underdogs to flock to Him. If He says, “don’t stone her”, then He loses the moral high ground of truth. What will Jesus do?

He gives both grace and truth. First He deals with the religious hypocrites, but when they're gone He then deals with this woman who nobody cares about... except for Jesus. After everyone else leaves Jesus tells the woman two things:

1. "Neither do I condemn you," (that's grace)
2. "Go now and leave your life of sin." (that's truth)

If he hadn't first given her more grace than she had probably ever been given in her life the second gift (the gift of truth) would have been meaningless to her. He would have been no different than the Pharisees who were using truth as a club and the frightened woman as a pawn. But if all He does is offer her grace without turning the mirror of truth in her direction then He condemns her to a life that gradually becomes darker and darker until what she's left with will be a sort of living death (we think zombies are a work of fiction but the living dead are all around us).

But Jesus never gives the gift of truth without the gift of grace. He offers her both grace and truth and in so doing shows us not only how God deals with us... but also how He wants us to deal with each other. This was what Jesus' whole life was about... what He had come to give us:

The word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth... For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. John 1:14-16 (NIV)

Grace & truth are the sign of Jesus' love. It's supposed to be our sign as well. It's not easy and we can easily get frustrated as it seems like the gifts of grace and truth aren't really making much of a difference in our actual lives (or the lives of those we wish would change). That's why there's a third gift Jesus gives us that we need to learn to give each other. What is that gift? Tune in tomorrow and find out.

For today I hope you'll ask yourself if you've been focusing more on grace or truth in your life. Have you been focusing more on grace or truth when you deal with other people? You need to find the balance that Jesus had between the two. Is it easy? Nope... but very little of value is easy. Don't rely on easy... do what's most valuable even if it's difficult.

Prayer: Father, open my eyes to the balance between grace & truth. Show me which side I tend to focus on and then teach me how to find the balance... which I know will be a little different in every situation with different people... so that I can become more like Your Son. In Jesus' Name, amen.

Friday:

Be still in the presence of the Lord, and wait patiently for Him to act. Psalm 37:7 (NLT)

But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: To the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years is as one day. The Lord is not slow in doing what he promised—the way some people understand slowness. But God is being patient with you. He does not want anyone to be lost, but he wants all people to change their hearts and lives.

2 Peter 3:8-9 (NCV)

Reflection: The third gift Jesus offers us is time. Aren't you glad that He does? We can be mighty impatient... some of us with ourselves... some of us with the people in our lives that we wish would get with program and straighten up. But not God... He's so incredibly patient with us. He gives us the time we need for the gifts of grace and truth (and the cold, hard light of reality) to bring us to our senses.

One day Billy Graham, who was ordinarily to even tempered and peaceful, was throwing stuff around in his office and muttering under his breath. His secretary didn't know what was going on so she went in and asked Billy what was the matter. I love what he said to her...

"I'm in a hurry and God is not!"

Maybe you've felt the same way. We are such impatient creatures (some of us more than others). But God gives us the gift of time. He reminds us that the story of our lives isn't over. This isn't the final chapter... we're still in the middle. That should comfort us when we look at our own lives and the lives of those we love. I am living proof that God is patient. I am living proof that as long as you're breathing God isn't done with you yet. But so are you (living proof that is...), and so are the people you love.

So this holiday season make sure you remember the 3 gifts Jesus offers to you (grace, truth & time) and make sure you offer them to the people in your life as well. It's the best Christmas gift you could ever give... and it will change both of your lives.

Prayer: Father, Thank you for being so patient with me. Forgive me for the times I've been impatient with myself or others. Today I commit myself to seeing the journey of life as a marathon rather than a sprint. Teach me to run the race of life in such a way that I become more like You and that I also draw others towards You because of the grace, truth & time that offer them. In Jesus' Name, amen.