

March 6-10, 2023 Edition

The Year_(s) Of ^{Following} Jesus Part 62

Secret Generosity

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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 ;O) 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:

And all of us... can be mirrors that brightly reflect the glory of the Lord. And as the Spirit of the Lord works within us, we become more and more like him and reflect his glory even more. 2 Corinthians 3:17-18 (NLT)

Reflection: If we were to look up the opposite of generosity in a cartoon dictionary, we would see a picture of Scrooge McDuck. Generosity's opposite is stinginess or hoarding. It is the behavior that comes from being insatiable. It says, "more, more, more" and "mine!"

Generosity is the natural result of feeling rich... not being rich, because Scrooge McDuck was rich in material goods, but he operated from a scarcity mentality. He believed that wealth is limited and therefore he would only get his share if he kept it all to himself and away from others.

Jesus wasn't like that. He came to this world and He gave all of Himself. He knew the secret of generosity... that the more you give of yourself the more that returns to you. One of His closest friends when He walked this earth said this about Him:

We know what real love is because Jesus gave up his life for us. So we also ought to give up our lives for our (each other). 1 John 3:16 (NLT)

I used to think that John was talking about Jesus' death on the cross. But now I think there was more than just His ultimate sacrifice on John's mind when he wrote those words- John spent every day for 3 ½ years with Jesus. Yes, John was a witness to Jesus' death on the cross but he was also witness to 1,277 days of Jesus sacrificing His life in different ways. Read through the gospels and you will find plenty of times when Jesus served even though He was tired or sad.

Now we're told to do the same thing. As children of the King of kings, we are wealthy beyond measure! We are not guaranteed financial wealth (although the Bible does tell us how to put money to work for us to be good stewards of our earthly resources and gain even more to work with); but we are privy to the perspective of God. Our Heavenly Father knows that in His economy there is always enough of the most valuable resource: love.

How would your day change if you adopted the standards of your Father, the King of kings and Lord of lords, rather than follow the tune of this world's scarcity mentality? What would you have to focus on to be mindful of your wealth and nobility as a child of God? What would it mean for you to reflect the glory of Jesus with your life today?

Prayer: Father, I want so badly to reflect the glory of Jesus in my life... forgive me for the times I'm a reflection of something else. Today I pledge to lay my life down for the people You have entrusted into my life. Give me the grace to treat them the way Jesus would if He were here in my place. In Jesus Name, amen.

Tuesday:

Dear friends, if God loved us that much we also should love each other. No one has ever seen God, but if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love is made perfect in us. 1 John 4:11-12 (NCV)

Trust steadily in God, hope unswervingly, love extravagantly. 1 Corinthians 13:13 (MES)

Reflection: There are two mentalities that threaten generosity. One is insatiability, but the other masquerades as a friend; it is the concept of fairness.

Generosity isn't fair. To play the game of generosity, you either shoot for extravagant love, or you go home. Fair isn't a valid play.

Fair is a child's word. It is like the Law of Moses. It was designed to train the clueless what it means to look not just at our own desires, but the desires of those around us. We cannot be generous unless we've first grasped fairness, because we all begin as children who see the world not as it is, but as though it revolves around us (I blame my mom for that belief... she always told me how wonderful I am and I could never figure out why everyone else didn't see what she did ;o).

Fair is an important lesson in elementary schools. Fair is an important lesson on playgrounds. Fair is even an important lesson in courtrooms.

But there is no fair in the kingdom of God. Jesus came to show us a God of extravagant love. I am so grateful that Jesus doesn't treat me fairly! Instead He treats me generously and mercifully. That may not be what I deserve, but it's what I need in order to even get in the game! And that's what He asks me to give others – the generosity and mercy He's given me. If I choose to give less then I'm no longer playing His game... I'm playing someone else's game and believe me... you don't want to get into playing Satan's games.

How would you approach today differently if you traded the concept of fairness in for generosity? What would it look like to shoot for extravagant love? How might playing the generosity game change you whether you win, loose or draw?

Prayer: Father, I thank You that You don't treat me fairly... as I deserve to be treated but with extravagant love, extravagant mercy and extravagant grace. Teach me what it would look like in my life if I loved, accepted and forgave the people around me extravagantly. In Jesus Name, amen.

Wednesday:

"But when the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit upon his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered in his presence, and he will separate the people as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will place the sheep at his right hand and the goats at his left. "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world. For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home. I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me.' "Then these righteous ones will reply, 'Lord, when did we ever see you hungry and feed you? Or thirsty and give you something to drink? Or a stranger and show you hospitality? Or naked and give you clothing? When did we ever see you sick or in prison and visit you?' "And the King will say, 'I tell you the truth, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me! "Then the King will turn to those on the left and say, 'Away with you, you cursed ones, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his demons. For I was hungry, and you didn't feed me. I was

thirsty, and you didn't give me a drink. I was a stranger, and you didn't invite me into your home. I was naked, and you didn't give me clothing. I was sick and in prison, and you didn't visit me.' "Then they will reply, 'Lord, when did we ever see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and not help you?' "And he will answer, 'I tell you the truth, when you refused to help the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were refusing to help me.' Matthew 25:31-43 (NLT)

Reflection:

I don't know about you, but I find this passage incredibly intimidating! Even thinking about the poor, the marginalized, and those without can be terribly discouraging. There are so many needy people. Their suffering and lack is all so real and overwhelming. I wonder if that's part of why we don't serve more; serving at all draws our attention to how many vulnerable and hungry people there are in this world... how much we are NOT doing. When I was younger I thought Matthew 25 was a list of all the people I had to help. It didn't matter if I helped the hungry if I didn't help the prisoners... but I don't think that anymore.

It's important to remind ourselves that we aren't asked to solve poverty or end world hunger. We're just asked to give a cup of water or spend a few minutes listening to someone who feels imprisoned in their lives. We can't fix everything. Baby steps are okay. We don't have to check every box on the list either. There are endless opportunities to serve that aren't mentioned in this passage. God encourages us to make progress. Perfection is His business.

The heart of the gospel is the good news that we are saved and made right with God by betting our lives on Jesus' sacrifice on our behalf. The business of saving the world has already been done by Jesus. Once we put our trust in Jesus to redeem us there is nothing that can happen to us, nothing we absolutely must do or not to, that will make God love us any less or any more. In God's eyes we were born with immense worth. Jesus paid His life for us before we had anything to offer Him.

If we place our hope in Jesus we are already saved. The purpose of service is to add blessings to our salvation as we become a blessing to the world. In this passage, those who provided the cup of water didn't do so because they felt like they "had to" in order to be "good enough" for God. When they are told that they served and fed Jesus Himself they respond with confusion. When did we do anything for you, Lord? Their service wasn't to earn their salvation. Instead it was a natural overflow of the fullness they already felt they had in Christ.

If you and I take the mission of this scripture to heart, we will find ourselves in places where we feel uncomfortable, overwhelmed, and unappreciated. I would encourage us to pray that God would provide us with opportunities to find meaningful and satisfying ways to serve in our everyday lives. Jesus can be trusted to save us, but He can also be trusted to help us in finding ways to live generously.

Prayer: Father, I know there are so many needs in Your world... open my eyes to ways in which I can be a blessing to people who have no one else blessing them. Teach me to be

more like You. Teach me to see You in the people all around me who are in such desperate need. Show me how I can help. In Jesus' Name, amen.

Thursday

Whoever accepts a child in my name accepts me. Matthew 18:5 (NCV)

Reflection: Yesterday we talked about our mission to serve "the least," but who exactly does that include? Certainly no one wants to accept help from someone who would describe them as "the least of these."

When I was a youth minister in Southern California, one Sunday a month the teens would go to an "old folks home" to put on a church service. I remember one young man groping for words during his prayer, "and God, help these... well... these OLD people." One of the seniors in the crowd laughed out loud. It was like, "Thanks for the service sonny, but do you have to call us old?"

The reality is that people "in need" are actually just like us. They may not have everything they need, in fact their needs may be quite intense, but they're just people. We all find ourselves in a place of need. We are born needy and dependent. Infants can't survive without someone caring for the basic needs of life – food, safety, shelter, rest. And if we are lucky enough to live long enough, we're gonna need some help again before it's all over.

We come into this world needy and we exit it needy. In between the crisis of birth and the crisis of death is a whole series of smaller needs. We need help when we are sick. We need help when we have failed. We need help with transitions and catastrophes and the messiness of life. The "least of these" can be anyone who has a need that isn't currently in a position to pay us back for meeting that need.

Many mothers of young children feel like they can't feed the world because they're too exhausted from feeding their own children. But in God's eyes, we are all His children. Serving our own children counts... in fact it counts more than you could possibly know. It is just as sacred to change a diaper as it is to support an orphan overseas, though remarkably smellier. And once our children are old enough to not need as much, we can go from serving them to serving with them and teaching them to be generous to others just as we were generous to them when they needed it the most.

Some of my fondest memories of Jonathan as an adolescent came from watching him interact with people at the downtown soup kitchen. My heart swells just to think about it. That's the feeling God has for us when we serve. It doesn't have to be grand. We aren't expected to save the world. But it sure makes our Father smile when we offer Him little acts of service on behalf of someone who can't repay us. Because when anything is done in love, no matter how small, it impacts eternity.

Prayer: Father, teach me how to teach those who are close to me how to love others extravagantly. Open my eyes to how to open their eyes to how to become more like You. In Jesus Name, amen.

Friday:

We know that "We all possess knowledge." But knowledge puffs up while love builds up.
1 Corinthians 8:1b (NIV)

Dear brothers and sisters, when I was with you I couldn't talk to you as I would to spiritual people. I had to talk as though you belonged to this world or as though you were infants in the Christian life. I had to feed you with milk, not with solid food, because you weren't ready for anything stronger. And you still aren't ready, for you are still controlled by your sinful nature. You are jealous of one another and quarrel with each other. Doesn't that prove you are controlled by your sinful nature? Aren't you living like people of the world? 1 Corinthians 3:1-3 (NLT)

"There will never be enough knowledge to fill the cracks of Christian maturity without the fruit of selfless service manifested in our lives." Brandon Hatmaker

Reflection: Full. Filled. Satisfied. Content. We all long to feel fed. In fact, one of the most common reasons for Christians to feel dissatisfied with a church is to believe that it is not "feeding" them. When we feel unfed we have a longing to be filled. We crave satisfaction. But whose responsibility is feeding? And who needs to be fed? When we are babies our parents have to do everything for us. They clothe us, bathe us, change our diapers when we make a mess and they feed us when we're hungry. But eventually the day comes when human beings need to begin caring for themselves. What would people think of you if they discovered you still lived with your parents and they still dressed you, bathed you, cleaned up your messes and fed you when you were hungry? Doesn't it make sense that eventually we need to pick up a fork and learn to feed ourselves?

We are bothered by the sensation of emptiness – empty lives, empty spirits, empty bellies. As infants we were satisfied with milk, but as we grow we find that we need more to sustain our increasing energy needs. We want food. Babies will reach for it on a parent's plate long before they have the skills to actually chew and digest it.

We long for solid spiritual food – something that fills us. We want something to really sink our teeth into. Unfortunately, most modern Christians equate the "meat" of spiritual teaching with more knowledge. The problem is that knowledge can never satisfy spiritual hunger. We can only feel full from love. In fact that's such an important statement I'm going to say it again.

We can only feel full from love.

Love builds us up, fills our emptiness and quenches our thirst. Knowledge (without love) just puffs us up. We feel bloated or inflated but still not content.

The reality is that we are most filled with God's love when we are serving others. We feel the most fed when we feed His sheep. Jesus fed people. It wasn't just a metaphor. He literally fed them. He passed around the food till everyone had their fill and there were baskets left over.

We can fill ourselves with as much knowledge about Jesus as we can and never feel satisfied. Our thirst is quenched as we live what He lived - when we serve. That's how we will come to truly know Jesus and feel a sense of belonging to Him. It is in acts of service – love demonstrated – that we find the blessings of Christian maturity and ingest the nutrients that make us grow.

Prayer: Father, forgive me for not doing anything with what I already know. I don't want to be a baby anymore. I want to grow up and start doing something with the knowledge that I already possess. Open my eyes to the reality that I am fed as I feed others. In Jesus Name, amen.