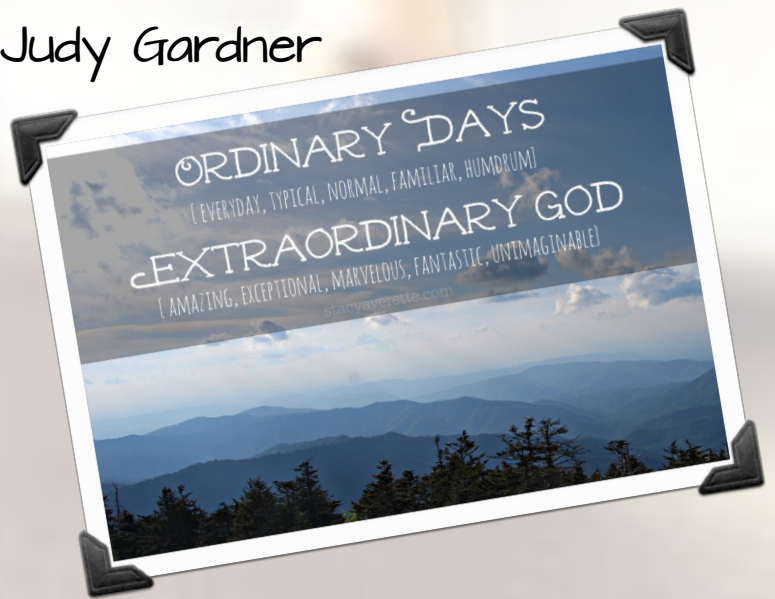


April 29-May 3, 2024 Edition

Following
The Year^(s) Of ^ Jesus Part 122
Making Ordinary Days Extraordinary

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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 ;D) 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 Reflection: This week we're going to be looking at the idea of turning ordinary days into extra-ordinary days. I often feel like in order to have an extraordinary life I need to be doing extraordinary things. I see the stories of the heroes in the Bible and the amazing things they do and I say to myself, "self... why aren't you doing miraculous things like that?" I know I harp on it a lot but that's because I need to hear it so often... God only shares His power with those who are actively developing the character of His Son. You want more of God's power in your life? The way to achieve that is to develop His character first and foremost.

So how do I develop the character of Jesus in my life? I'm so glad you asked. I was going to try to come up with a really creative way to segue into that topic but since you asked I'll just share what I was going to say now. Jesus' character is developed in the trenches of every day life. I love the way that The Message paraphrase of the Bible translates Romans 12

Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Romans 12:1 (MES)

We usually think our character is transformed most in flashy, spectacular circumstances. But the truth is, it's in the mundane, day-in, day-out ordinary moments of life that our fates are determined. Will I choose to live my everyday life with God... doing what Jesus would do when I'm just living my ordinary life? Or will I choose my own way? The answer to that question is possibly the most important thing you will ever decide when it comes to accessing the power of God. Verses like this used to freak me out:

Always be joyful and never stop praying. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-17 (CEV)

How exactly I would wonder, does one NEVER stop praying? What about eating? What about sleeping? What about watching TV (I know Paul [who wrote that sentence] didn't have a TV to distract him but that's another topic for another post)? I think what Paul had in mind was not that I be constantly engaged in a formal prayer... but that everything I do, I do as though God were with me (which He is... even though I can't see Him). When I let the conscious awareness of God's presence with me in the everyday circumstances of my life develop to the degree that it impacts how I choose to live during those moments... that's a prayer. This week will be all about developing that moment by moment awareness of God's presence in my ordinary life. I found that the best way for me to develop that moment by moment awareness was by taking my ordinary day and doing the same things I ordinarily do/did and only changing one thing- do those things with an awareness that God was there. That He cared deeply about my moment by moment life because transformation happens in its greatest forms during those seemingly mundane, unimportant, ordinary moment. So I've given you scripture cards at the end of this reflection packet that you can cut out and put in strategic places throughout the environment in which you live (bedroom, bathroom, closet, car, etc.) to remind you that each moment can be a holy one if you do whatever it is you're doing with an awareness of the presence of God. I did this years ago and I can honestly say it is the one thing I've tried in my life that most changed me and drew me closer and closer into the presence and then the image of Jesus.

That's what this week will be all about. Tomorrow when you read Tuesday's devotional it will be too late to incorporate the first practice so let me give you this first one really quick. Cut out the scripture from Psalm 118:24 and tape it to your alarm clock. Then when the alarm rings tomorrow and you roll over and turn that annoying thing off take a moment and read these words:

This is the day the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. Psalm 118:24 (NIV)

And when you read those words let them remind you of how God wants you to face the day. When you read those words remember that this day you're in- this one right now- is the only one you're guaranteed so if you're going to choose your response to whatever life may throw at you you can't wait for the perfect day. Joy has to be chosen today no matter what today has in store. One thing I've learned is that how I choose to start my day and how I choose to frame it is one of the most important things I can do if I'm going to live each day with purpose and meaning and satisfaction and joy. So I start off each day with a very short prayer: "Lord, thanks for this day. Bless the day and bless me and help me to feel good and enjoy myself whatever comes my way." And then I get up and see what that day has in store. That's your assignment for tomorrow- wake up with God. You've got to wake up anyways- might as well try waking up with Him and see if that changes things (mostly what it will change is you). Then when you can read the devotional for tomorrow we can move forward with the rest of this week.

So go ahead... take your everyday life and give it to God... just for this week. I think you'll be impressed with the results.

Tuesday Reflection: Ok... I hope you were able to get through day 1 of an "Ordinary Day With God" without too many hiccups. Did you "wake up with God" this morning? If not... don't beat yourself up too much (that's my job, right ;o). Instead start working on these other two practices in an ordinary day and wake up with God tomorrow (unless you can get a nap in today... always choose a nap if you have that awesome opportunity!).

Take the scripture from your scripture cards (located on the last page of this handout) with 2 Corinthians 7:1 and put it on the mirror in your bathroom:

*We should stay away from everything that keeps our bodies and spirits from being clean.
We should honor God and try to be completely like him. 2 Corinthians 7:1 (CEV)*

When you go in there take a look at the card and then take a good, hard look at yourself. You've got some cleaning up to do, am I right? Your hair is all messed up (if you have any ;o), your breath stinks and there's a film all over your teeth, you've got gunk in your eyes (I don't think anyone truly knows where that comes from). You're a mess and you didn't even do anything-you just slept. Now think about how much your spirit needs a clean up. This scripture card placed carefully on your bathroom mirror will remind you every day that we have stuff in our lives that gunks up our spirit. As you brush, clip, tweeze, deodorize and whatever else you do for your body, take a moment to thank God for cleaning up your spirit. Ask Him to forgive you for the stuff in your life that gunks up your soul and separates you from Him. Ask Him to walk with you today- on this day that He has made (remember the scripture you read when you woke up????).

Now you're ready to face the world... except for one thing. You're still in your jammies (or whatever it is you sleep in... we don't need to get into specifics here other than to say you should probably put some clothes on before you go outside). Take the scripture from Colossians 3 and put it where you can see it while you get dressed:

Dress in the wardrobe God picked out for you: compassion, kindness, humility, quiet strength, discipline. Be even-tempered, content with second place, quick to forgive an offense... And regardless of what else you put on, wear love... Never be without it. Colossians 3:12-14 (MES)

Because how you clothe your spirit is as important (probably more important) as putting clothes on your physical body. How do you feel when you read that list? It's a little intimidating, isn't it? You may be able to pick out a few that you're doing pretty well on. You might even be tempted to congratulate yourself on the pieces of spiritual clothing you wear on a regular basis and ignore the other ones that you struggle with. But don't fall for that temptation (and that's exactly what it is- a temptation straight from the pit of hell. Too dramatic? I don't think so). Take time to really think about each one. Because what you're reading in Colossians 3 is a pretty good description of the character of Jesus. And do you remember why the attributes of Jesus' character are important for a follower of His to remember? Come on... say it with me:

God only shares His power with those who are actively developing the character of His Son.

Now I'm not saying you're ever going to be perfect at this. I'm not even saying you won't always have one or two of those traits that you are struggling with (or three, or four...). But the good news is, it's not the perfect that God shares His power with. It's the committed. It's the available. It's those who are actively trying. If we're using the imagery from this week's lesson it's the "connected":

I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing. John 15:5 (NLT)

So today as you get ready to go out into the world be careful to clothe yourself not only with a shirt and pants or a dress but more importantly with the character of Jesus and think about how you are reacting to the people you come across. This practice while going about the ordinary activities in your day will do more to form Jesus' character within you than a thousand Bible classes. Continue today to take your ordinary life (your sleeping, eating, drinking & walking around life) and cultivate a moment by moment awareness of God's presence with you.

Wednesday Reflection: Ok... so yesterday you woke up with God, you cleaned up on the inside and outside with God, and then you got dressed with God (clothing both your physical body and your spirit). Today we're going to get specific on what we do before we leave the house. Today I want you to take the scripture card from Philippians 2 and put it somewhere that you'll see it before you leave to go out into the world:

Go out into the world uncorrupted, a breath of fresh air in this squalid and polluted society. Provide people with a glimpse of good living and of the living God. Carry the light-giving Message into the night. Philippians 2:14-15 (MES)

Does that pretty much describe how you go about your life as you leave the confines of your home and head out into the big, wide world? Yeah- me neither. I'm thinking this is going to be a day where we have lots of opportunities for growth. God's plan is that when you are out and about in the world people will see your life and that'll make them think, "wow! God must be awesome!" We don't always do a very good job of that but that's the plan. What blows me away is how often we (and I'm including myself here) are ashamed to admit we associate with Jesus. What blows me away even more is that Jesus is NEVER ashamed to associate His name with us. So today as you leave the house and head out into the world (no matter where you're going) make a conscious decision to cultivate that moment by moment awareness of God in your life. Whether you're shopping, eating out, getting gas- whatever you're doing remember you're doing it with God and as His ambassador to a world that doesn't know Him.

And speaking of going out into the world, most of us will get into a car and drive when we leave the house. Today cut out the scripture for the car and tape it up somewhere you'll notice it while you're driving:

In a word, what I'm saying is, Grow up. You're kingdom subjects. Now live like it. Live out your God-created identity. Live generously and graciously toward others, the way God lives toward you. Matthew 5:48 (MES)

I've got to confess something here- this is one of my greatest struggles. When I drive is when I have the toughest time living generously and graciously toward others. I don't know why. Maybe because I learned to drive on the streets of Southern California? No matter the reason this is the place I KNOW I have the most growth potential. And I don't think I'm alone. I've noticed something as I read through the posts of the Facebook group, Glenn Highway Traffic Update- we all hate someone on the road. Maybe not a specific someone but a definitely a "type". There are constant wars between the law abiding motorists who are in no hurry and obey the speed limits and the road warriors who are so desperately trying to pass them. One of the most often rehearsed arguments is over the passing lane (maybe you've noticed). The observers of the speed limit make the claim that if they're going the speed limit they can drive in the far left lane because nobody should be passing them anyways since you'd have to be breaking the speed limit pass. The speed demons will point out that the far left lane isn't called the "fast lane" in the traffic codes but the "passing lane" and it is illegal to travel in the far left lane unless you're passing someone and then by law you are required to get out of that lane into one of the other two lanes.

This week I was reading through one such argument (one of my favorite pastimes I have to admit) and one individual made the claim that she didn't care what the law said, she'd drive in that lane if she wanted to because it was against the law to speed and so she'd take it upon herself to regulate speeds and if someone tailgated her she'd slow down even more and if they didn't back off she'd slam on her brakes and their bumper would meet her trailer hitch. She made the case that she was just trying to make the roads safer for everyone. I don't think

she could see the irony in her statement that she hated speeders because they were law breakers so she'd fix their lawless ways but... breaking the law. I found myself wondering what this lady must look like and so I clicked on her name and was taken to her profile page where I was almost assaulted with Christian platitudes. Christians aren't perfect, we're just forgiven. Put Christ back in Christmas. The reason there's so much trouble in schools is because Jesus isn't allowed in there anymore.

Then I saw one that really made me laugh- horn broken, watch for finger. Wow. Now I'm not claiming to be a better "Christian" than she is nor am I claiming she's not really a Christian. In fact I don't want to claim anything about her other than she made me smile. She also made me think about my own behavior on the roads and everywhere else I go. How am I doing at reflecting the generous and gracious nature of Jesus to the people I come into contact with? How am I doing at being an ambassador for Jesus? Even (and maybe especially) to the people that drive me crazy (by the way have you noticed that everyone on the roads is either an idiot or a maniac depending on whether they drive slower or faster than you do?).

Why is this important? Because we do live in a squalid and polluted society that needs a breath of fresh air. You can be that breath of fresh air today and change someone's day. It might seem like an awfully ordinary thing to do but that's what this week is all about. Changing the ordinary moments of our lives. And as we do we carry the light giving message of Jesus into the dark places we walk into and the dark streets that we drive down. And that doesn't just affect you (although it will affect you A LOT) but it will also change the people who feel the breath of Jesus as you pass by. And that's how God changes both you... and the world.

Thursday Reflection: We've talked so far this week about waking up with God, cleaning ourselves up with God, getting dressed with God, leaving the house with God and driving with God. What else does a person do in their ordinary daily lives? Well, most of us will have some form of work to do- whether that word is recognized as the traditional sort where we get paid for a service rendered or not. Many of us don't get paid for the work we do. Whether it's managing a household/family or going to school or some other often overlooked form of work- we all will do some work in our typical day. So today when you work, work with God. Cut out the scripture from Colossians and put it wherever you'll notice it while you work:

In all the work you are doing, work the best you can. Work as if you were doing it for the Lord, not for people. Colossians 3:23 (NCV)

In other words don't work for your employer- work for God. Sure they'll still think they're your boss and they'll still sign your paycheck (if you get one for your work) but you'll know the truth- God is your boss. He cares deeply about how you do your job. Partly because He wants you to your best at whatever you do but also because for most of us our work makes up a HUGE part of our day. Can you imagine how much connection could be formed with God if you used that time not just to do your assigned tasks (I was going to say "duties" but the junior high boy in me giggled too much so I changed it to "tasks") but also to cultivate your moment by moment awareness of His presence in every part of your life? And just as importantly- can you imagine how that connection could be damaged if instead we imagined

that our work life was a part of the pie graph of our life and we didn't give God a second thought during that time? You're going to work in most ordinary days of your life- today try working with God.

You're also going to be interacting with people today. Coworkers, friends, family, acquaintances, strangers in stores, restaurants, on the road. How will you choose to interact with them and talk with them? What will you choose to talk about? With what kind of spirit will you choose to interact with them? I don't know where you could stick the scripture card with 2 Peter 3:10-11 on it but try to keep this in mind when you're interacting with people today:

If you want to enjoy life and see many happy days, keep your tongue from speaking evil and your lips from telling lies. Turn away from evil and do good. Search for peace, and work to maintain it. 1 Peter 3:10-11 (NLT)

How does that make you feel? How have you been doing at following those instructions from God about how to interact with the people in your life? Yeah, me too. Ouch. Am I right? Americans have turned gossip, complaining and griping into olympic level sports. Just for today notice how much negativity you hear coming out of your own mouth and out of the mouths of those you interact with. And if you really want to give yourself something to think about go and read the words that come after verse 11. Go ahead. I'll wait. I want you to feel as uncomfortable as I do. Alright... I'll just print verse 12 here:

The eyes of the Lord watch over those who do right, and his ears are open to their prayers. But the Lord turns his face against those who do evil. 2 Peter 3:12 (NLT)

This stuff is pretty important. If you read Monday's reflection you saw why I think this stuff is so important- because God shares His power, His blessings, His wisdom and His very presence with those who are actively developing the character of Jesus. You want more of those things in your life? Work on your character. How we interact with others is going to be a HUGE part of that equation. Again none of us is going to be perfect at this but the question isn't how good are you doing at this? The question is, is this your goal. God can work miracles in the life of someone who has no idea how they're ever going to make progress. What God has a really tough time working with is when we say something along the lines of, "this is just too hard and I'm not going to do it. I'm not perfect. God doesn't expect me to be perfect so I'll just lean into my weakness a little more and He'll forgive me."

Ever wonder why more of God's blessings or power haven't been flowing into your life? It's not universally this problem at the root of that condition but it's one of the first places I myself look when I wonder that. Have I ceased to try to develop the character of Jesus in every ordinary part of my life? So today when you interact with people do so with the awareness that God is right there and He has a plan for what that interaction will look like- at least as much as you have control over it.

Friday Reflection: This week we've been reflecting on what it might look like to take our everyday, ordinary life and find out what it might be like to turn those ordinary moments into extraordinary moments just by cultivating the moment by moment awareness of the presence of God in your life during those seemingly "ordinary" times. Today we'll finish up by looking at the final three parts of our everyday lives that we might invite God into starting

with our news consumption. Let's face it- the news these days can be pretty discouraging. Wars, natural disasters, evil people, disease, climate change, politics... aren't you glad you took time to read this so you could be encouraged today?

But it's true, isn't it? If all you focus on is the news you see (no matter what flavor of news you ingest), you will have a hard time choosing peace and joy and love and grace because you'll be tempted to embrace anger, superiority, fear, depression or anxiety (or a toxic combination of them). So be careful of how you ingest your news. Get your news with God and it will change the way you see the world. And that will help the process of developing the character of Jesus.

When Joshua was taking over for Moses and leading the people of God into the promised land he was nervous. He had been second in command all his life. Now he was the Big Kahuna. And I think it freaked him out. He was scared. And so God gives him the pep talk of all pep talks in Joshua chapter 1. I don't think it was sinking in which is why I think at the end of that pep talk God resorts to military speak and commands Joshua (the lifelong soldier) to be strong and courageous. He doesn't promise Joshua that he won't have pain or sorrow or trouble or suffering. What God promises is that if Joshua develops God's character then he will always have the presence, knowledge & power of God flowing through his life. And that changed everything for Joshua. Now he could face whatever came his way because he knew he would never be alone.

I think God wants you to hear the same thing. When you read about something that threatens to steal your peace, joy, hope or love remember God's promise to you. He doesn't promise that you won't have pain or trouble or sadness in your life. He doesn't promise that other people will see the world the same way you do or that the politics of this world will make sense to you. He simply promises you will never have to go through whatever this world shows at you alone. Today cut out the card from Joshua chapter 1 and stick it somewhere you'll see it while you're ingesting your news:

I command you! Be strong and courageous! For the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go. Joshua 1:9 (NLT)

And when your life on this side of eternity comes its inevitable end, He promises you won't have to go through that alone either. So be strong and courageous for the Lord your God will be with you **WHEREVER** you go.

Obviously there are tons of other areas we could focus on when it comes to living your ordinary days with God... but we're going to finish up this week by looking at what it might mean to get your entertainment with God- especially (but not exclusively) as it relates to your online activities. Let's face it... there are LOTS of things out there that are probably getting in the way of the character of Jesus being formed within us. How might your tv, movie or internet viewing change if you thought about what you were watching and what God might think about it. Now I'm not one to say throw away your tvs... stop going to movies and never use the internet (where would I find clips to show during my weekend messages?), but I am one to say, think about what you're putting into your mind and spirits... because that matters a lot. So today take the scripture card from Matthew 6 and put it up on your tv or computer monitor and think about what you're allowing into your life.

Your eyes are windows into your body. If you open your eyes wide in wonder and belief, your body fills up with light. If you live squinty-eyed in greed and distrust... what a dark life you will have! Matthew 6:22-23 (MES)

Jesus doesn't want you or me to have a dark life. He wants us to go through this world in wonder and belief and connection with Him. Would you watch what you're watching if your pastor was sitting next to you (ok... for all of you who attend Riverside that might not be the best example so insert a better one if you need to- maybe your grandma or your 3rd grade teacher or maybe imagine if Jesus Himself were there with you because guess what? He is.)? If not then maybe you need to think about changing the channel... or logging off... or better yet, switch to something that might make you more like Jesus rather than something that is making you less like Jesus. I don't want to beat a dead horse here so I'm going to stop now and let you think about it for yourself. Just remember that Jesus said our eyes are the windows into our bodies... so be careful little eyes what you watch.

And the last thing you'll do today is go to sleep. Today try going to sleep with God. On Monday I mentioned how important how we start our day off is. It's also pretty important how we end our day. Cut out the last scripture card and put it on the other side of your alarm clock so you'll see it when you lay your head down and set your alarm:

I think about you before I go to sleep, and my thoughts turn to you during the night.
Psalm 63:6 (CEV)

When you lay your head down on your pillow thank God for the day and remember any really good things that happened (rather than the bad ones of which there were probably more than a few) and then ask God to guard your thoughts and dreams as you sleep.

And that's it. That's most of what we go through in an "ordinary" day. Tomorrow when you wake up try putting it all together and see what inviting God into the mundane moments of your life might change because there is nothing that will leave you with a greater sense of connection to the divine than that. It's how God created you to live. Do it and I think you'll start to see the hand of God in every little thing in your life.

Place At: Your Workplace

In all the work you are doing, work the best you can. Work as if you were doing it for the Lord, not for people.

Place By: Alarm Clock

This is the day the LORD has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Psalms 118:24 (NIV)

Place On: Bathroom Mirror

We should stay away from everything that keeps our bodies AND SPIRITS from being clean. We should honor God and try to be completely like him.

2 Corinthians 7:1 (CEV)

Place In: Bedroom Closet

Dress in the wardrobe God picked out for you: compassion, kindness, humility, quiet strength, discipline. Be even-tempered, content with second place, quick to forgive an offense... And regardless of what else you put on, wear love... Never be without it. Colossians 3:12-14 (MES)

Place By: Your Alarm Clock

I think about you before I go to sleep, and my thoughts turn to you during the night. Psalms 63:6 (CEV)

Place On: Front Door

Go out into the world uncorrupted, a breath of fresh air in this squalid and polluted society. Provide people with a glimpse of good living and of the living God. Carry the light- giving Message into the night.

Place On: Dash Board

In a word, what I'm saying is, Grow up. You're kingdom subjects. Now live like it. Live out your God-created identity. Live generously and graciously toward others, the way God lives toward you.

Matthew 5:48 (MES)

Place On: Computer

Your eyes are windows into your body. If you open your eyes wide in wonder and belief, your body fills up with light. If you live squinty-eyed in greed and distrust... what a dark life you will have!

Matthew 6:22-23 (MES)

Place On: Wherever You Interact With People

If you want to enjoy life and see many happy days, keep your tongue from speaking evil and your lips from telling lies. Turn away from evil and do good. Search for peace, and work to maintain it.

1 Peter 3:10-11 (NLT)

Place On: Wherever You Get Your News

I command you! Be strong and courageous! For the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go. Joshua 1:9