

May 15-19, 2023 Edition

The Year^(s) Of ^{Following} Jesus Part 72

Honoring Women Like Jesus Did

By: Ed &/or Judy Gardner

May 13/14, 2023



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 ;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:

There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus. Galatians 3:28 (NLT)

Reflection: Who would you say is the most compassionate person who's ever lived? Well, turns out there's a real easy answer to that question- it's Jesus. He treated people in ways nobody every treated anyone before and not just the powerful or popular- but especially the powerless and the outcast. He left people asking the same question over and over again- who **IS** This Guy?

It's about Jesus, because the impact of Jesus on this world is greater than any human being who ever lived. It is in fact so deep, it has gotten woven so deeply into our world, that in many ways, folks don't recognize just how deep His impact has been. So we're going to step back and look at it, and I think by the end of this series, you're going to have such a sense of wonder and admiration, and a kind of pride about who Jesus is, and that you and I get to be part of His story (ever notice how close to "history" the words "His story" are? Coincidence? I think not ;o). So we're going to walk through this over the next several weeks. Over the course of the next few weeks we're going to focus in on the amazing influence that Jesus has had on our world by going through a series that is based on a book by John Ortberg called, Who Is This Man?

One of the most unusual marks of Jesus' ministry was His tendency to include those who others excluded. In the ancient world, the more power you had, the more people you could exclude as beneath you. The pecking order determined who got to reject and who was rejected. Then came Jesus who claimed that the ultimate power in the universe was an includer- not an excluder. Even of women. Who could believe it?

John chapter 4 tells about a remarkable conversation that Jesus had with a Samaritan woman. It seriously unsettled His disciples. You see, Jesus didn't teach about women's rights. He didn't remind His followers that God created men AND women in His image. He didn't argue about the worth of a woman before God. He did something much more subversive, "He treated a woman like someone who had her own identity."

In the social structure of Jesus' day, women had no more rights than children. They were defined by the men around them. Men to whom they were property. Even in the Greek world daughters were not allowed to receive any kind of inheritance. Aristotle taught that women were men who had failed to developed fully. You could love your wife, just as one might love their dog, but she wasn't considered a peer. A woman's place was always under the authority of a man.

And then Jesus showed up and started teaching about a kingdom that valued & welcomed women. God's kingdom stood above any human authority and was not dependent on the approval of anyone in its membership requirements. Not kings, not husbands, not even sisters.

One day when Jesus was at Lazarus' house there was a bit of a dustup over what was truly valuable. Martha adhered to the only roles that women had ever played – cook, maid,

hostess, childbearer, remote control finder... She complained to Jesus that her sister Mary wasn't helping in the kitchen (Mary was sitting and listening to Jesus). She thought Jesus would put Mary in her place and everything would be right in the world again.

There was a little girl at church years ago that asked Ed for a cookie after her mother had already told her no. Ed figured she believed that because he was a pastor that he had some sort of special authority from God, and believing she really deserved a cookie, expected him to trump her mother's call. Turns out it was much more than that- and when he told her that her mom was in charge of her and not him Ed was surprised that she seemed SO shocked by that revelation. He found out later why that was- the little girl had somehow come to the erroneous conclusion that Ed wasn't just a pastor but that he was God Himself (BOY was she wrong and BOY was she disappointed when she learned the truth!).

Similarly, Martha went to Jesus confident that Mary would be instructed to get back in the kitchen where a proper Jewish hostess belonged. But Jesus surprised her. He did that to people a lot. He commended Mary for sitting at His feet to learn from Him, essentially taking the role of a student or disciple.

No wonder women followed Jesus everywhere. They even traveled with Him and the disciples. And at the end (or maybe it only looked like the end) they followed Him to the cross. Women stood witness when Jesus drew His first breath, and when He drew His last. And women were first on the scene to Jesus' resurrection. They were told to go and testify of His return to the disciples. Ironical considering that women were not allowed to testify in court. By the way, the other group that was considered too inferior to testify was shepherds. And God sent them to witness Jesus' birth. Looks to me like God'll use just about anyone. Maybe even you.

Prayer: Father, You are constantly surprising us. Help me to see over the next few weeks how surprising Jesus' life was/is. It's surprising that You want to use my life to make a difference in this world. Show me how to do that. In Jesus' Name, amen.

Tuesday:

For the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost." Luke 19:10 (NLT)

I'm here inviting outsiders, not insiders - an invitation to a changed life, changed inside and out." Luke 5:32 (MES)

Reflection: As if the inclusion of women, as we talked about yesterday, wasn't enough of a slap in the face to the religious leaders – Jesus' first sermon expanded the circle of God's children in yet another direction. Jesus was a rabbi, a teacher of the Jewish Law. Other teachers gave sermons, had disciples, and drew followers. But after His first sermon depicting God as an inclusive gentile-lover, Jesus' audience responded by trying to kill Him. Not your typical response to a new rabbi. Didn't seem like a promising sign.

For those who have always thought of Jesus as a cosmic Mr. Rogers, you have to admit that very few people tried to kill Mr. Rogers. Barney – yes, but never Mr. Rogers. He was

just too sensitive and unassuming. But Jesus was no Mr. Rogers. The religious leaders were so outraged by Jesus' teachings because He was unapologetic and authoritative. He claimed to know exactly who God is. He did not back down when threatened or questioned. In fact... As far as I can tell... He's the only human being (who wasn't crazy) to never say, "I don't know." He always knew what to do... What to say... He just didn't seem to care if those in power were impressed with Him or not.

"When he began to teach, people were sometimes delighted and sometimes infuriated but always astounded." ("Who is This Man?" page 17) He taught with a confidence and authority that people had never seen. It wasn't just what He knew, it's what He understood. Jesus' wisdom extended from the practical to the profound. He could reach the simplest and the most intellectual of listeners. He taught in stories that convicted and compelled. When people listened to Jesus they didn't just gain knowledge. He changed how they saw the world.

Jesus offered a new vision of God to anyone who would listen. He was just as likely to give His attention to a Samaritan woman as He was to the religious elite. The path to God's wisdom was open for all. Like never before, Jesus showed His followers what it looked like to love God with all your mind. His last words to them were to teach the whole world about God's open invitation to His kingdom.

Centuries later, Jesus' followers would remember how He encouraged learning. Martin Luther would begin a movement to teach reading and writing to the common person so that the Bible could be read by everyone. Monasteries became universities where learning would be revered as an act of worship. The belief in a Creator who had designed an orderly and rational world, with universal laws (gravity, etc) that could be observed and predicted, became the foundation for modern science.

Jesus' fingerprints are on every part of our society & culture. The main question for today is, are His fingerprints evident in your life? Can people see His influence in your own life? In the way you treat people? In the way you treat yourself?

Prayer: Father, thank You for the impact Jesus has had on our world. Show me how to live a life where his impact is apparent in the way I live. In Jesus' Name, amen.

Wednesday:

When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and sat down again. He asked, "Do you understand what I have just done for you? You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and you are right, because that is what I am. If I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash each other's feet. I did this as an example so that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, a servant is not greater than his master. A messenger is not greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, you will be happy if you do them. John 13:12-17 (NLT)

Reflection: Jesus came to reveal the greatness of God, but in Jesus greatness looked like something no one had ever seen before. In the Greco-Roman world, greatness was personified in the hero. The hero triumphed against the odds to receive the glory of honor

and social status. Excellence, power, self-mastery – these were the qualities of a hero. Humility, on the other hand, was for the unworthy – those without position or status. The greatest in the ancient world would be the one that rose to the highest rank.

Then Jesus walked among us and taught that the greatest position belongs to the one who serves the least of us. Never before had service and humility been something one would choose. Those who served had always done so because they had no choice. Now Jesus told His followers to become servants, to place themselves in a position to honor others rather than seek to be honored.

And Jesus didn't just talk about the unimpressive and the lowly – He reached out to them Himself - with words of God's love, with bread and fish, with healing and hope. On His last night with the disciples Jesus had time for one more lesson, but He didn't open His mouth. Instead He got a basin of water, wrapped a towel around Himself, and washed His disciples feet. To their shock He took on the duty of the lowest slave on any household's totem pole. "He entered the world wearing swaddling clothes and exited it in the towel of a slave. Think of him whatever we may. Greatness looks different now." ("Who is This Man?" page 86)

And although they couldn't imagine anyone lowering themselves any further, Jesus wasn't finished showing the world what Love is willing to do, even for those on the bottom of societies heap. Jesus chose to humble Himself and to die the death of a criminal. The ultimate symbol of punishment and humiliation used on the powerless by the powerful, and Jesus turned it into a symbol of Love's outrageous sacrifice.

Prayer: Father, thank You for sending Jesus to show me what true greatness looks like. Teach me to live a life of blessing and influence by learning to be a servant like Jesus. In Jesus' Name, amen.

Thursday

God told Moses, "I'm in charge of mercy. I'm in charge of compassion." Compassion doesn't originate in our bleeding hearts or moral sweat, but in God's mercy.
Romans 9:15 (MES)

The king will answer, "Whenever you did it for any of my people, no matter how unimportant they seemed, you did it for me." Matthew 25:40 (CEV)

Reflection: Compassion is a strange thing, isn't it? We often feel compassion for one person or group but might be totally indifferent to another. Why is that? I think it's human nature. It's the way our hearts just tend to work. The problem is... we don't get to decide who is worthy of my compassion and who isn't. That's something God has already decided. As far as God's concerned... everyone is worthy of compassion.

When Jesus walked this earth He saw people differently than we see each other. WAAAYYYY back in the beginning of the Bible we see that God made human beings in His image. That we are considered to be children of God. That means that you are a child of

The King. But it also means that everyone you come across today (and the next day, and the next day, and the day after that...) is also a child of The King. It's hard for us to see the crowns on each others heads for a variety of reasons. Sometimes the choices we've made causes our crowns to fade. Sometimes other people's choices fade our crowns. But no matter how dim, if you look closely you will see what Jesus saw... A child of The King. How do you think The King feels when His sons or daughters are treated poorly? When they don't receive the compassion that they deserve?

Today as you go through your day ask God to give you His eyes, to see people the way He sees them. Seeing people for who they truly are is the first step toward having the compassion of Jesus.

Prayer: Father, open my eyes to see people the way You do. Forgive me for treating Your sons & daughters poorly in the past. In Jesus Name, amen.

Friday:

Whoever makes himself great will be made humble. Whoever makes himself humble will be made great. Matthew 23:12 (NCV)

Your attitude should be the same that Christ Jesus had. Though he was God, he did not demand and cling to his rights as God. He made himself nothing; he took the humble position of a slave and appeared in human form. And in human form he obediently humbled himself even further by dying a criminal's death on a cross. Philippians 2:5-8 (NLT)

Reflection: Rising Downward? Humility is a widely misunderstood word in our society. What did you think of when you heard me say that the path to honor begins with humility? Generally when a 21st century American hears the word, "humility" we picture someone who doesn't think very highly of themselves. Maybe someone who doesn't aspire to much in their lives. Maybe a wimp? Is that what God is looking for from us?

Not a chance! In God's book humility is simply the opposite of arrogance. The arrogant are marked by one or more of the following attributes: they are un-teachable (even by God), they believe they deserve what they have and what they don't have (not only do they see the glass and half empty- they want to know who stole the other half!), they have a blatant disregard for others and they are pompous and self important. The reason arrogance is so deadly when it comes to living lives of honor is that it fills up the space where integrity must reside. And integrity is the second step on the road to honor. That's why humility is so important!

The humble are teachable, they never think they have it all together but believe that there is always room to improve. They believe that what they have is a gift. And possibly the most important characteristic of the humble is that they are willing to follow God's plan for their lives- even when it doesn't entirely make sense to them. This is absolutely imperative if we are to take even the first step on this journey. Humility may not seem to

be the way to courage and honor- it's path is counter intuitive to our way of thinking. However, without it you won't even see the need for transformation in your life.

So what does humility look like? I think it's one of those things that is hard to define but you know it when you see it. It is one of the most admired and yet elusive qualities in our society- so much so that even those who are not on this journey are still drawn to humility. I believe that's why people were so drawn to Jesus- he was humble.

It almost sounds blasphemous to think of Jesus in terms of humility. We don't mind thinking of Him as powerful, loving, forgiving, kind & wise- but humble? That's exactly how Philippians 2 describes Jesus. His humility led Him to take a job on this earth that He didn't consider to be beneath Himself (namely going from the form of God to the form of a human being), it led Him to serve the very people He had stepped down to become like and it ultimately led Him to give up His life on the cross for us. The journey of Jesus was a series of what we would consider to be "bad career decisions". Every step along the way He appeared to choose to step down and take demotions rather than taking the initiative and claiming what was rightfully His. From God to human, from teacher to servant, from alive to dead. But at the end of Jesus' apparent downward spiral something fascinating & unexpected happened... He was promoted to CEO of the universe:

Because of this, God raised him up to the heights of heaven and gave him a name that is above every other name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Philippians 2:9-11 (NLT)

Do you remember what I said last Monday? That God isn't expecting us to... "boldly go where no man has gone before". This journey's path is clearly marked out by the footsteps of Jesus, and this is where Jesus' journey on this earth began- with humility. He didn't consider the job God asked Him to do as beneath Him (even though I think we would all agree it was) but humbly went where no God had gone before- he became one of us. Philippians 2 tells us that because of that humble decision God has lifted Him up... that God promoted Him to a place of all honor and power and glory.

Most of us probably believe we have to choose between humility and greatness in this life... but what if you could have both? That's what God is calling you to. Not a life with no ambition but a life absent of selfish ambition. And when we choose the path marked out by Jesus Himself the reward is clear:

Whoever makes himself great will be made humble. Whoever makes himself humble will be made great. Matthew 23:12 (NCV)

Prayer: Father, teach me what it means to be humble. Open my eyes so that I can clearly see exactly what it is you are calling me to become. For those things that I cannot see give me the faith and courage to move forward trusting that You know what You are doing. In Jesus' Name, amen.