

May 29- June 2, 2023 Edition

Following The Year^(s) Of ^Jesus Part 74

The Golden Rule- A Radical Way Of Living

By: Ed &/or Judy Gardner

May 27/28, 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 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 in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets. Matthew 7:12 (NIV)

Reflection: This week we're looking at Matthew 7:12. Jesus is coming to the end. He's wrapping it up. And in this passage He tells us what it's taken him 2 1/2 chapters to tell us in one single sentence.

We call it the Golden Rule, but why? You'll never find that phrase in the Bible (alright... some Bibles write "The Golden Rule" before this section but that's the Bible companies... Matthew didn't write that in his gospel... Jesus never mentions it) but it's all over modern Christianity. So where did it come from?

Back in the 1670s some preacher referred to it as the Golden Law. It was golden because it was so valuable and it was a law because... well they liked the idea of more legal codes back then in the church I guess. At some point someone decided "law" didn't sound very Jesus-y so they switched it to the Golden Rule.

But I don't like Golden Rule much either. So I think I'm going to call it "The Whole Enchilada". Why not? Why can't I coin a phrase? Are those guys who made up Golden Law and then Golden Rule so much better to me? Don't answer that... let's just move on :-)

Why the Whole Enchilada, you ask? Because Jesus says this sums up everything. Everything in the Old Testament can be summed up in this one phrase. Do for others what you would want them to do for you. Sounds easy enough. Sounds like a catchy slogan. Maybe somebody should write it out on a poster with mountains or sunsets behind it so we can hang it on our walls.

But the Whole Enchilada (ok... I'll call it the Golden Rule from now on to prevent confusion) is more than a nice thought or a catchy slogan. It was a radical way to choose to live. It still is. Think about it... what would tomorrow look like for you if you chose to live out the Golden Rule in your life? How would that change your behavior? How would it cause you to make different choices? Think about it. Jesus drops this little bomb at the end of a speech in which He tells us that if we're going to live the blessed life (a life where God's blessings are flowing into our lives and miracles are happening all around us and we are becoming the people we would most like to become) then we have to look at how we handle our anger, our lust, our greed, our worry, our prayer life, how we treat people we can't stand, whether we do what we say we're going to do. If you were going to do for others tomorrow what you would want done for you (not just giving them whatever they want but really thinking about what the most loving thing to do is and then taking the initiative and doing it) what would that mean? With your children, your parents, your neighbors, your co-workers, your ex (if you have one), the person that ticks you off the most? Not such a nice thought anymore, is it? But it is the thought that will change your life faster than maybe any other thought you might have. So how about it? Are you ready to live a Whole Enchilada kind of life (I know... I said I wasn't going to use that anymore but I could sense you getting a little tense and wanted to break the tension before you pray ;o)?

Prayer: Father, show me what it would mean to live a Golden Rule kind of life. Today I want to think creatively about what every person that I come in contact with needs and then take the initiative and do it for them. I'm not sure what that will look like but I know You do. Show me the way. In Jesus Name, amen.

Tuesday:

*May your kingdom come and what you want be done, here on earth as it is in heaven.
Matthew 6:10 (NCV)*

Reflection: What a crazy thought. That I could somehow be instrumental in bringing Jesus' Kingdom to this earth. But you can you know? In fact, Jesus is counting on it. In His model prayer to the disciples this is something He taught us to pray. If you've been going to Riverside for very long then you know that we take this very seriously. The idea of bringing the Kingdom of God to this earth through our own lives. So let's break it down.

What's a kingdom? It's a place where the will of the king is done. What the king wants... that's what happens. Now when it comes to the Kingdom of Heaven (where God is King), how is His will done in Heaven? Perfectly, right? But what about on earth? How well is God's will done down here on earth? If you're paying attention you'd have to say, "not so well". But that doesn't mean Jesus just wants us to give up. What does He want (I'm glad you asked)? He wants for you to bring the Kingdom of Heaven down here to earth. How? By doing your best to accomplish what God wants down here on earth. That's what the Sermon On The Mount is all about. What would bringing up there (Heaven), down here (to earth), look like? So Jesus tells us. It would mean you pay attention to your anger, your greed, your integrity, your lust, your judgment, your generosity, how you treat people that really tick you off, etc., etc., etc.

When you do that you are actively engaged in Kingdom of Heaven business. Sounds too simple to be true, doesn't it? When I used to think about Kingdom of Heaven business I was picturing impressive people doing miraculous things. Things that were WAY beyond my capacity. But what I've learned is that those impressive people doing miraculous things all started at the bottom like us. Billy Graham, Mother Teresa, Rick Warren, Joyce Meyer... if you read their biographies you'll find they didn't start out doing the miraculous things they ended up doing. They started with the simple and yet profound work of actively bringing the Kingdom of God down here onto this earth in their own small ways in their own small lives. And over time that simple yet profound work brought about a change in them that they didn't even see happening. And because of their decision to bring up there down here everywhere they went they took the Kingdom of Heaven with them.

So how about you? Are you ready to start with the simple yet profound work of asking what it would look like in your life if you prayed, "let Your Kingdom come... and let it begin with me"? Are you ready to start asking yourself, "what would I have to do in this instance to make sure that God's will is done here, instead of my own selfish desires getting fed"? If you are ready then watch out... it won't be easy but it will be worth it. It will change everything. So let's pray it together right now.

Prayer: Father, May your kingdom come and what you want be done, here on earth as it is in heaven. Let Your Kingdom come and let it begin with me. This is my prayer today. In Jesus' Name, amen.

Wednesday:

Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Romans 12:2 (MES)

Reflection: Ok... let's say for argument sake that I'm ready to bring up there, down here. To try to live my life bringing the Kingdom of Heaven to this earth in the only place I have any control over whether God's will is done down here, in my own life. Do I just pray the prayer and then suddenly I'm perfect at it.

Nope. This takes practice. Just like anything else that you want to do well, you have to practice. If you wanted to learn a new language you would never say, "I wonder if I'll be able to speak Spanish tomorrow when I wake up? I prayed that would become a Spanish speaker. God must want me to be a Spanish speaker. I bet I'll wake up and be fluent."

You would never say, "I wonder if I'll be able to play the piano tomorrow when I wake up? I'm kind of curious about that? I'd love to play the piano. I could bless all kinds of people at church and at home if I could play beautiful music. I wonder if God will just make me a maestro in my sleep?"

If you want to speak another language or play an instrument you have to learn and practice. You learn music theory. You learn how the instrument works. You learn scales and practice those scales. Why? So you can get really good at playing scales? No. So you can be free to play beautiful music.

The same thing is true with following Jesus. You don't pray to get really good at praying. You don't serve to get really good at serving. You don't worship to get really good at worshiping. You don't learn so that you can recite facts and figures and amaze people with your extensive knowledge. You do these things so that you can be free to live a life that is infused with meaning and purpose. It does take practice and learning but not for the sake of practice and learning. For the sake of becoming more like Jesus. And there are lots of things you can do to facilitate that process... but what I've learned over the last 28 years is that my greatest growth and progress doesn't come from the most learning. It comes from the most doing. When I take what I know and then do something with it, miracles happen.

It's like that passage we read earlier. "Readily recognize what God wants from you and then quickly respond to it". So simple and profound and yet so scary. How do I know what God wants? The more you learn and the more you practice the easier that will become. How can I quickly respond? That's really a stupid question, isn't it (and yet I ask it all the time to put off doing what I'm pretty sure God wants me to do)? The tricky part isn't the quickly responding, it's in the "readily recognizing". It may not be easy to do what God wants but it's a much simpler proposition than figuring out what He wants.

So for today, let's agree that we may not always know what God wants us to do... but for those times when we are pretty sure we do know what He wants... let's agree that for today, we will do it. Today you and I will quickly respond to what God wants from us when we finally recognize what that might be.

Prayer: Father, forgive me for the times I have failed to do what I already know I'm supposed to be doing. Today I pledge that I will quickly respond to the things I already know and I pledge that in the future I will do my best to learn more about what you want so that I can be an agent in bringing the Kingdom of Heaven down here at least in my own life. In Jesus' Name, amen.

Thursday:

And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns. Philippians 1:6 (NLT)

Reflection: Do you want to know why I LOVE this verse and yet also find it a little stressful at the same time? Well I'm going to tell you whether you want to know or not. First of all why I love it.

This verse tells me that God doesn't expect me to be perfect at this kingdom stuff from the beginning. I don't have to know everything I'm supposed to know and I don't have to be accomplished at the stuff I'm suppose to accomplish. He's SOOOOOO patient with us. It's like the tagline on Max Lucado's book Just Like Jesus:

God loves you just the way you are. He just loves you to much to let you stay that way. He wants you to become Just Like Jesus.

You have no idea how much pressure that takes off me. I used to beat myself up about things I really had no control over. I wasn't as far along as I wanted to be. I wasn't very good at the stuff I already knew and that made me feel guilty. I had thoughts and feelings all the time that I wasn't supposed to be having. I was a complete failure (at least that's what I thought and it was killing me).

Then I read Max Lucado's book, Just Like Jesus. I still remember sitting in a sunday morning class at Riverside reading 2 Corinthians 10:5:

We capture every thought and make it give up and obey Christ.

Max wrote that we aren't responsible for the thoughts we think. We can't completely control what we think (although over time we can make progress even there I've learned), we're only responsible for what we do with the thoughts that come to us.

What a load off my mind (literally)! I can't tell you how freeing that was for me. Guilt and regret are heavy burdens that keep us from living a life that honors God and brings blessings and miracles our way. When I finally came to grips with the fact that I wasn't where I want to be but I'm heading that direction it was like a heavy weight had been

lifted and things started to change rapidly in my life. God is continuing the good work He started. It's His job, not mine. I just participate. That's so liberating for me.

So what's the part that's stressful you ask? Did you see when God will be done with this little project? On the day Christ comes again. Seriously?!?! This is the never ending project? I guess I should be grateful but that just seems like a long time to me. And in some areas I'm impatient.

But I guess I'll have to put up with the impatience (thank God I'm not responsible for the thoughts I have, right? Just what I do with them.) while God does His work in me. And over time I've noticed that even the impatience is being chased out slowly but surely.

So how about you? Are you ready to surrender to this work that God wants to do in your life? Are you ready to accept that you're not where you would like to be but that's ok... God's still working on you. Give the process to Him and let Him do His work.

Prayer:

Father, I do thank You that You have a plan for my life. And I thank You that You are working in my life to complete what You started. Teach me to be patient with myself and You during this process. In Jesus Name, amen.

Friday:

You know these things-now do them! That is the path of blessing. John 13:17 (TLB)

Reflection: So one last word of warning about all of this, Whole Enchilada/Golden Rule/Let Your Kingdom Come & Let It Begin With Me stuff. Sometimes you won't want to do it. You'll just be tired, or not feeling good, or grumpy, or just plain lazy. And when that happens (which will be A LOT if you're anything like me) what do you do? Please remember one thing:

You were made for so much more than this!

So many times we are content to just drift along and see what happens. We don't expect too much of ourselves because, what's the point? Right? I mean nobody else is doing anything special. Nobody else is requiring themselves to treat me the way they'd want to be treated so why should I try if I'm tired/sick/grumpy/lazy? Because:

You were made for so much more than this!

And if you don't decide that this is going to become a lifestyle for you, you're going to miss out on so much. Please don't miss out. This is what you were made for. This is the path that leads to a life filled with miracles and blessing and adventure and joy and peace and hope and meaning and love. I know it seems like doing this will lead to you having less rather than more but don't buy into that illusion. Jesus' kingdom is upside down (I don't know how He did it but I see it over and over again).

What I've noticed is that those who live by the rule of gold (buying into the lie our culture will sell you that it only makes sense to look out for number one and you deserve what

others have and so you have to sacrifice everything and everyone to get ahead) end up empty. Those who live for the Golden Rule end up full. I have seen it over and over again. It is SOOOOOO worth it. Don't buy into the lie that you will lose out if you follow Jesus' way. In reality Jesus' way is the only way to life. It is the pathway on which the blessings of God flow. His blessings don't flow down just any pathway. There's a specific place where life becomes miraculous and blessed and amazing. Don't miss that pathway.

Prayer: Father, open my eyes to the pathway of blessing. Remind me to do what I already know instead of simply thinking about them and talking about them. Today I pledge to build your kingdom here, in my heart. Show me where I'm going off the path and bring me back to it. In Jesus' Name, amen.