

January 3-7, 2022 Edition

Surviving The Holidays #5

The Gift Of Jesus

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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 Reflection: Give yourself to Jesus: I once dated a boy in high school who told me he couldn't be exclusive because - and I quote - "It wouldn't be fair to the other ladies." This boy was the classic poster child for "fear of commitment." Or, maybe he was just the poster child for all teen boys. (No offense to current or former teen boys...) He was not willing to give his heart to me because he wanted to play the field. I kinda feel like that's how we treat Jesus sometimes. We're not quite willing to settle down, because we fear we might miss out. "If I become a Christian - and really commit - does that mean I can't hang out with my friends anymore? What about those parties? Do I have to stay home? What about those movies? Can I not watch them? What about those websites? Can I not scroll through? What about those apps? Can I not swipe right?" Thinking of Jesus that way is a bit like a poverty mindset. It's all about what you're missing out on. Not what you're gaining. Oh boy... I'm getting ahead of myself. That's for later in the week.

Today, let's focus on what it would mean to actually commit. To go all in with Jesus. To put a ring on it, if you will.

To give yourself to Jesus is to say you want to do life together. One thing I can tell you for certain is that Jesus - God - the Holy Spirit - is all about love. Giving yourself to Him means giving yourself to a life of love.

I want you to show love, not offer sacrifices. I want you to know me more than I want burnt offerings. Hosea 6:6 (NLT)

This isn't about religion. This isn't a big list of rules of thou shall and thou shalt not (although, those big Ten are pretty darn helpful in maintaining polite/non-anarchist society...) This is about relationship. God is calling for us to know Him more. What an invitation!

We all have the ability to give our lives in service to God. That doesn't mean you have to be a preacher. Or a missionary. You just live your life - with Jesus in the forefront.

Whatever you do [whatever your task may be], work from the soul [that is, put in your very best effort], as [something done] for the Lord and not for men. Colossians 3:23 (Amplified Bible)

Do what you do... for God.

Prayer: Father, I want to give myself to You. I want to be called Yours. Show me the next step. I'm all in. Amen.

Tuesday Reflection: Connect with Him: I'm reading this book, "Parenting Generation Screen." It talks about the hazards of letting our kids have free rein over their cell phones. But, one thing the author really focuses on is, "connection before correction."

We'll have a much better relationship with our kids if we work on relationship first... and not just lay down the law. Same goes in our relationship with God. We have to connect before we're ready to make any course corrections.

We connect with Him. That means making some time to read his word. More on that tomorrow. But, suffice it to say, you're here, aren't you? Pat yourself on the back for reading this devotional!

"Come near to God and he will come near to you. You are sinners, so clean sin out of your lives. You are trying to follow God and the world at the same time. Make your thinking pure."
James 4:8 ERV

What a promise! Come near to God and He - the creator of the entire universe - will come near to you. Whoa. Think about that for a moment. Let that sink in.

Here's another crazy thought: He won't just draw near to you. You can talk to Him, too!

You can talk to Him - pray to Him - any time of the day. No lines. No reservations. Just start talking. But, when you talk... be sure to give time to listen, too. Make some connections.

Prayer: Jesus, thank You that I can be surrounded by Your presence and have You by my side all day every day. Lord, thank You that You desire a relationship with me and that I'm able to talk to You whenever I want. I love You! Amen.

Wednesday Reflection: Direct your life towards Him: I have no sense of direction. Seriously. I've gotten lost - like really lost - walking in my backyard. (Okay - in my defense - it's like 5 acres of woods...)

Turns out - if you don't know where you're going, often times you don't reach your destination. Whether it's hiking or driving... it doesn't really matter. Lost is lost. Don't get me started on roundabouts.

When I'm hiking - I find it's best to hike with a friend. Even better - a friend who has hiked this trail before.

When I'm driving - I use good old Google maps. Yeah, sometimes you get off course and end up at the end of some dude's driveway in the middle of nowhere when you were trying to find the dump... but most of the time, you find where you're going fairly easily.

Directions sure do help. Today, we're focusing on directing our lives toward Him. Much like hiking or driving or assembling Legos for that matter, having a plan and a focus and directions... helps a lot.

In our Christian walk - we direct our lives by going to church, worship, fellowship with other Christians, and studying the Bible. Alright, alright. Did that last one throw you off a little bit? Don't worry.

This year, we're doing a bit of a choose your own adventure as a church community. We're diving into the Bible on a daily basis through one of two different daily devotionals on the YouVersion app. Don't access the app? That's fine - you can get everything at Bible.com.

The first option is a year-long walk through the Bible called the Bible Recap. We started January 1st - so don't freak out. You can still catch up.

The other option is a three week long devotional talking about Jesus and the Jesus movement.

Three weeks is as long as it takes to make a habit. So, either way - whichever devotional adventure you choose - in three weeks time, you'll have set a healthy habit of bible reading on a daily basis.

A handful of us at Riverside did the Bible Recap together this past year. It was so interesting and I feel like it brought me to a deeper level of understanding - while also bringing me closer to my fellow Christians. We grew together in Christ - which is one of the things we're called to do.

A quick note about time commitment. I get it. You all have busy lives - and/or - let's be honest here, some of you might think the Bible is boring and don't want to read it every day. Guys, I'm the youth pastor... I get it. I hear kids complain about that all the time! But... there is so much there: adventure, war, love, even some R rated stuff.

There are some times where it might feel like a slog to get through. I get that, too. When I have that feeling... I press through. For some of those boring... um, I mean challenging books... I tend to use the YouVersion feature of having the app read to me.

One other note on that: choose a translation you will actually read. I didn't realize when I was growing up that there was more than one translation. But, there are so many! And finding one that you understand is important. Here's a scripture from The Message paraphrase.

"So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: 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. 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. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you." Romans 12:1-2 MSG

I find The Message helps break things down for me in terms I can understand. Do you want to know the best translation? It's the one you'll actually read.

Prayer: Father, help me direct my life towards You. Inspire me to pick up my Bible or open up the Bible app. I want to draw closer to You. Keep me motivated, please. Amen.

Thursday Reflection: correct yourself: Do you remember timeout? Growing up, I had to stand in timeout in the corner by our front door. More than once, I ended up with grease from the hinges down my nose. I'd have to stand there and think about what I'd done wrong and then come apologize and have a conversation about it. (Shudder.)

God - I am so thankful You don't put me in timeout. But, You do show me the errors of my ways.

*"The Lord corrects the one he loves, just as a father corrects a child he cares about."
Proverbs 3:12 ERV*

Correction is important. Like a ship headed towards the rocks, the Captain "corrects" his course and goes to safer waters.

We correct ourselves, because.. unlike Jesus... we are only human. When - not if - we mess up... We fess up, pray, and listen. Talk to God about what's going on and ask Him to redirect you.

"But if we confess our sins, God will forgive us. We can trust God to do this. He always does what is right. He will make us clean from all the wrong things we have done." 1 John 1:9 ERV

We give it all to God when we connect with Him, direct our lives toward Him, and correct ourselves when we veer off course.

Prayer: Father, You know I'm stubborn sometimes. Okay, a lot of the time. Help me to accept correction and to know that You offer correction in love. Thank You for caring about me. Amen.

Friday Reflection: GET Jesus for yourself: Saving the best for last... what do you get when you connect with God, direct your life towards Him, and correct yourself when you get off course? YOU GET JESUS!!!

"This is how much God loved the world: He gave his Son, his one and only Son. And this is why: so that no one need be destroyed; by believing in him, anyone can have a whole and lasting life. God didn't go to all the trouble of sending his Son merely to point an accusing finger, telling the world how bad it was. He came to help, to put the world right again. Anyone who trusts in him is acquitted; anyone who refuses to trust him has long since been under the death sentence without knowing it. And why? Because of that person's failure to believe in the one-of-a-kind Son of God when introduced to him. John 3:16 - 18 The Message

Judgement - is not what God wanted Jesus to bring. Jesus brought love and compassion and redemption... and grace.

But God's free gift is not like Adam's sin. Many people died because of the sin of that one man. But the grace that people received from God was much greater. Many received God's gift of life by the grace of this other man, Jesus Christ. Romans 5:15 (ERV)

Free. Did you catch that part? This is a free gift we get. The amazing- overwhelming - never-ending - reckless love of God. We get a gift of His one and only son. And it's a gift we get to keep! No wrong size. NO exchanges. Just - sheer joy. Give Him your heart - Get Him in return.

If you haven't done that before... we can do that together right now. And if you have already given Jesus your heart - it's okay to renew that promise. Right here. Right now.

Let's pray this together: Jesus, I want You in my life. I want to be closer to You in 2022 than I have ever been before. I want to walk with You and be led by You. I don't have much to offer in return - but what I do have - You can take and use whatever way You see fit. Jesus, I am Yours. Amen.