

July 12-16, 2021 Edition

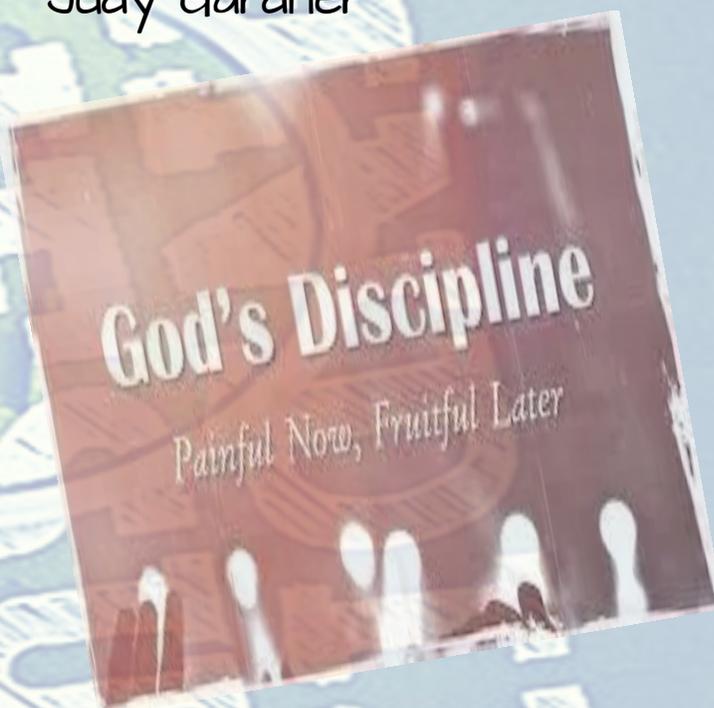
# The "BIG Story" Of The Bible #58

## Finding Jesus In The Old Testament

### Joseph & The "Discipline" Of God

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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](http://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:** The next 2 weeks we'll be looking at one aspect of Joseph's story (and of our own) that we don't particularly enjoy looking at- God's discipline. We don't like to talk about God's discipline but as it turns out- we all need it:

*No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening-it's painful! But afterward there will be a peaceful harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way. Hebrews 12:11 (NLT)*

We know that we need discipline, we just don't like to admit it. Sometimes even to ourselves. But we all recognize that if our parents had allowed us to live life the way we wanted to live it when we were growing up not only would we all be spoiled brats- most of us would be dead (or at least have lost all our teeth to tooth decay from all that sugar we would've eaten).

Our parents discipline us so we can learn what is good and bad, right and wrong, helpful and harmful. We don't come into this world truly understanding all of that. I mean, sure, there are some things that kids seem to organically understand that we somehow lose as we age but the wisdom of children doesn't create a well rounded adult.

That's where discipline comes in. The Greek word for "discipline" is paideia. Technically it means "discipline" but it's about much more than what I normally think of when I ponder what discipline is. Paideia is defined as:

*The whole training and education of children which relates to the cultivation of mind and morals, and employs for this purpose commands and admonitions, correction and consequences.*

From this Greek word we get the English word "pediatrics". That helps me wrap my mind around what it might mean when the Bible says God "paideias" (or disciplines) us. God disciplines us in order to nurture our entire, holistic development. He is committed to us becoming the amazingly awesome people He dreamed of when He created us but that can't happen by just leaving us alone. We need coaching. We need teaching. We need correcting. We need God's discipline.

The story of the apostle Paul's conversion is told in several places in the New Testament. We learn an important part of Paul's origin story in Acts chapter 26 that we don't get anywhere else:

*I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions. We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' Acts 26:13-14 (NLT)*

What's all this about kicking-against-the-goads? What's a goad anyways?

I'm glad you asked.

A goad was an instrument that a farmer used to get a stubborn ox moving when it had decided to stop listening to him. It was a long stick with sharp spikes at the end and it was the only thing that would get an ox's attention. And it wasn't even that dangerous to the ox- it just made the ox uncomfortable. Ok, very uncomfortable but still, uncomfortable.

If an ox decided it wasn't going to listen to it's master anymore you could beat that ox almost to death and it wouldn't care. It wouldn't budge. But (and as a friend of mine likes to say, this is a VERY big but) if you took an ox goad and simply tapped the ox on the ankle (the only place that wasn't covered by muscle), why suddenly that ox would have a change of heart and start

moving again. The farmer didn't need to make the ox bleed- he just needed to properly motivate the ox in the only way that ox would understand.

So who do you imagine you and I are in this analogy? You guessed it, we're the ox. In Acts chapter 26 Paul is the ox that had found it "hard" to kick-against-the-goats. What does that mean? That Jesus had been disciplining Paul for a while and Paul wasn't listening. If you know Paul's story then you know that he starts out as Jesus' greatest enemy. He is behind the first organized persecution of the early church and is the ring leader at Stephen's death- the first Christian martyr. Paul would write many years later that he was responsible for the deaths of Christians. In other words multiple deaths. We don't know for sure how many but the whole time Jesus must have been tapping him on his metaphorical ankles with a metaphorical ox goad.

And Paul being as stubborn as an ox just kicked against them. I'm thinking Paul had a nagging suspicion that the Christians were right. That all of that was in fact from God. But he couldn't bring himself to abandon the life he had always known. My guess is that Stephen's sermon in Acts chapter 7 left Paul with some sore ankles. Jesus' discipline gets more and more intense until finally He appears to Paul and finally convinces him to change.

What's the lesson here? For me it would seem the lesson is, listen up when Jesus is still just tapping your ankles before things get too painful. Don't get me wrong- Jesus' discipline is not punishment. It's correction. The pain we feel is most often the consequences of getting off track from the life I was designed to live.

So my question for all of us today is, are you kicking against the goads?

**Tuesday Reflection:** Have you ever been taught about the 5 Ws? The questions one should ask when you're gathering information or problem solving? Most of us have heard of them. We're to ask who, what, when, where and why (sometimes how is thrown in there too). These questions help us to get to the bottom of a situation and understand it better. So this week we're going to look at the 4 Ws of God's discipline to try and wrap our minds around how it worked in Joseph's (and his brothers') story.

The first W of God's discipline we'll look at this week is to ask "who God disciplines?" That's the first question we're going to ask of this concept of discipline and as it turns out the answer is pretty simple:

*My dear child, don't shrug off God's discipline, but don't be crushed by it either. It's the child he loves that he disciplines; the child he embraces, he also corrects. God is educating you; that's why you must never drop out. He's treating you as dear children. This trouble you're in isn't punishment; it's training, the normal experience of children. Only irresponsible parents leave children to fend for themselves. Hebrews 12:6-7 (NLT)*

Who does God discipline? All of us. Now some of you may be thinking, "wait just a rootin-tootin minute there, Pastor Ed! Doesn't that verse say God disciplines His children? How can you say He disciplines everyone?" Well, first of all let me congratulate you on your use of the exclamation "rootin-tootin"- I love that phrase. Secondly, do you remember the story we talked about yesterday with the apostle Paul being disciplined by God before his conversion to Christianity? That's just one example of God disciplining someone who isn't yet a Christian. There are tons more we could look at but for now let's let that suffice.

God disciplines all of us. We don't all listen. In fact most of us probably don't even feel it anymore. One of my favorite preachers (Erwin McManus) tells a story about the time his son got in trouble at camp for punching another kid who said something about his mom (not Erwin's mom- his son's mom which would make that Erwin's wife I guess but I'm digressing again). In order to stay at camp both kids had to apologize to the other and Erwin's son didn't want to. Erwin asked the kid what he believed Jesus was telling him to do. "Ask the other kids to forgive me" his son said. But he said he wouldn't do it. He'd never apologize even though he could hear Jesus telling him to. Erwin told his son that the voice of God can be muted by ignoring that voice over the course of time. If we ignore the voice (discipline) of God that voice will become dimmer and dimmer until the day will come when we disbelieve that we ever heard that voice in the first place. But, if we listen to that voice (discipline) and do our best to respond to it then that voice will become clearer and clearer and we will enjoy a fellowship with the Creator of the universe as He guides us through our every day lives.

But it's not easy, is it? In the story of Joseph we know that Joseph and his brothers (and even his father, Jacob) are being "disciplined" by God. They all needed it- desperately. What we see playing out in their lives is God's "discipline". It may seem harsh that God would let all of those things happen to them but the question is, how much of what they went through was orchestrated by God and how much wasn't? We'll deal with that question next week (probably on Thursday) but for today maybe spend some time thinking about how well you (and I) are doing at responding to the voice of God in our lives. I'll leave you with this verse to ponder- the part that I really have to do some thinking on is where it says, "Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it". I have to confess, that part stings a little bit for me.

*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 12:2 (MES)*

Do you know what that verse is taking about? Discipline. How are we doing at recognizing and responding?

**Wednesday Reflection:** The second "W" of God's discipline is, "hoW does God discipline"? Now I know what you're thinking- you're thinking that "how" doesn't start with a "W" and you're right. But it does have a "W" in it so that's good enough for me. So let's look at how God disciplines which is, with grace and truth. It's a powerful combination when humans are given both grace and truth but in reality it seems like we churches often focus on one almost to the exclusion of the other.

I grew up in a pretty legalistic church. It was all about what you believed (which better be the right things and by the "right things" they meant exactly what/how they believed) and how well you followed the rules. Whether my church wanted me to have this impression or not the feeling I had about God was that He was judge, jury and executioner. That He was constantly watching just waiting for me to mess up (which wouldn't have taken long in my case) so He could squash me like a bug. The impression I got was that even if I did my absolute best to think the right things and follow the rules I would still have to get lucky to get into Heaven. It was a terrifying way to live. That kind of way of looking at the discipline of God (with lots of "truth"

and almost zero grace) really messed a lot of people up and has sent many of us running from God.

It's a tragedy. I heard a preacher once say that if your view of God is toxic and scary then maybe the healthiest thing you can do is reject that God (which as it turns out is a made up God and not at all the God of the Bible). When God's "truth" is used as a club the "discipline" of God scares us and makes us doubt the goodness of Jesus.

But there's another extreme some churches swing to- the grace side of the equation. Those who are on this extreme side of the spectrum portray God as a cosmic Mr. Rogers who just wants you to be happy. This God will let you do whatever you want (something the real Mr. Rogers would never have done himself by the way) and will forgive you for whatever mistakes and sins you commit. This view of God never pushes us to get better than we are and in fact can send us into a tail spin where we spiral out of control until we hit rock bottom.

Because of the kind of church I grew up in I probably lean more towards the grace side of the equation than the truth side and I'm ok with that. But balance is what we need. There were a couple of churches in the first century who had a contingent that leaned WAY over towards the extreme grace side of the spectrum. The church in Rome took Paul's description of the Grace of God and ran with it. If I can't do anything to save myself and if Jesus will forgive any sin I commit no matter what then wouldn't it be logical to say that the more I sin the more glory is poured out upon Jesus? So they had a saying: let's sin that grace may abound! Do you know what Paul thought of that idea? Turns out not much:

*Well then, should we keep on sinning so that God can show us more and more of his wonderful grace? 2 Of course not! Since we have died to sin, how can we continue to live in it? Romans 6:1-2 (NLT)*

Read the rest of Romans 6 and you'll see just how bad an idea Paul thought of that idea. There was also a church in Corinth that had come to a similar conclusion. They also had a saying- "all things are permissible for me". So Paul writes to them and hopes to help them see why that's also a very bad idea:

*You say, "I am allowed to do anything"- but not everything is good for you. And even though "I am allowed to do anything," I must not become a slave to anything. 1 Corinthians 6:12 (NLT)*

What's Paul saying? Well I find it interesting that he doesn't say, "if you do those things I told you not to do then you're going straight to H-E-Double Hockeysticks! In fact he seems to agree with the Corinthians that all things ARE permissible for them. But, says Paul, there are consequences to sin that you will still have to deal with even if you are forgiven by Jesus for them. Tomorrow we'll talk about a time when Jesus dealt with someone with both grace and truth.

**Thursday:** *They kept demanding an answer, so he stood up again and said, "All right, but let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone!" Then he stooped down again and wrote in the dust. When the accusers heard this, they slipped away one by one, beginning with the oldest, until only Jesus was left in the middle of the crowd with the woman. Then Jesus stood up again and said to the woman, "Where are your accusers? Didn't even one of them condemn you?" "No, Lord," she said. And Jesus said, "Neither do I. Go and sin no more." John 8:9-11 (NLT)*

**Reflection:** In the story from today's scripture reading we find the perfect combination of grace & truth. Jesus gives both to this woman... and believe me, she needed both.

This is one of my favorite stories in the Bible because it gives us insight into how God handles His own laws & commandments, especially when we really screw them up. Can you imagine the drama of this moment? The woman is guilty. There's no doubt about that. The religious leaders think they have Jesus trapped (if you don't know the story make sure and read John chapter 8 to get the whole picture). The woman is caught in the very act of adultery and the law of Moses says that is an act that deserves death by stoning (actually it says both the man and woman should be stoned to death so here's my question... where's the guy? Doesn't it take two to tango? There's something deeper going on here than some religious leaders seeking to uphold the laws of God but that's a story for another devotional). Anyways... back to this devotional. The religious leaders think they have Jesus trapped. If he says, "go ahead and stone her to death", then He loses the radical acceptance factor that is causing sinners and underdogs to flock to Him. If He says, "don't stone her"; then He loses the moral high ground of truth. What will Jesus do?

He gives both grace and truth. First He deals with the religious hypocrites, but when they're gone He then deals with this woman who nobody cares about... except for Jesus. After everyone else leaves Jesus tells the woman two things:

1. "Neither do I condemn you," (that's grace)
2. "Go now and leave your life of sin." (that's truth)

If he hadn't first given her more grace than she had probably ever been given in her life the second gift (the gift of truth) would have been meaningless to her. He would have been no different than the Pharisees who were using truth as a club and the frightened woman as a pawn. But if all He does is offer her grace without turning the mirror of truth in her direction then He condemns her to a life that gradually becomes darker and darker until what she's left with will be a sort of living death (we think zombies are a work of fiction but the living dead are all around us).

But Jesus never gives the gift of truth without the gift of grace. He offers her both grace and truth and in so doing shows us not only how God deals with us... but also how He wants us to deal with each other. This was what Jesus' whole life was about... what He had come to give us:

*The word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth... For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. John 1:14-16 (NIV)*

Grace & truth are the sign of Jesus' love. It's supposed to be our sign as well. It's not easy and we can easily get frustrated as it seems like the gifts of grace and truth aren't really making much of a difference in our actual lives (or the lives of those we wish would change). That's why there's a third gift Jesus gives us that we need to learn to give each other. What is that gift? Tune in tomorrow and find out.

For today I hope you'll ask yourself if you've been focusing more on grace or truth in your life. Have you been focusing more on grace or truth when you deal with other people? You need to

find the balance that Jesus had between the two. Is it easy? Nope... but very little of value is easy. Don't rely on easy... do what's most valuable even if it's difficult.

## **Friday:**

You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. John 8:32 (NIV)

**Reflection:** Today we're going to look at the gift of truth. Yesterday we looked at the gift of grace (or radical acceptance) and some of you maybe were wondering to yourselves as you read, "but what about influencing people? If I just radically accept everything that everyone does how do I influence people who need to change"? Great question.

First of all let me point out one very important thing. If you don't first offer people the radical acceptance that Jesus first offered everyone He came across, why would they listen to any truth you might be able to speak into their lives (that's a rhetorical question... the answer is they wouldn't)?

Maybe you've heard it said, people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. It's absolutely true. One of the biggest knocks that people have against Christians is that we often come across as those who turn truth telling into an Olympic event. We use truth like a club, bashing people over the head with it. And when we do we take the power of God's truth right out of the equation because God's truth was never intended to be used as a club.

But God's truth was meant to be a light that when shone into our lives reveals the areas where we need to change. And sometimes God wants to use me or you to help Him shine the light into somebody else's life. Paul put it this way in Galatians 6:1:

*Dear brothers and sisters, if another believer is overcome by some sin, you who are godly should gently and humbly help that person back onto the right path.*

Sometimes God wants to use us to help those who have stumbled off the right path in their lives. But there are a couple of really important questions to ask before you go charging off and "offering" the gift of truth to the people in your life that you believe so desperately need (or deserve?) it:

1. Is it really my business? Those of us who tend to see the truth that people need to be told more than the grace that they need to be offered often rush in where angels fear to tread. We become self appointed hall monitors of holiness and use the mask of God's truth as a license to attack people that are driving us nuts. Just because you see something that you think is wrong, don't assume God is calling you to fix it (He might be calling you... but proceed with caution or you will be no better than the Pharisees... and we'll talk about them tomorrow). Make sure you have enough of a relationship with someone, based on the grace and radical acceptance that Jesus always starts with BEFORE you go running down the path of correction and truth telling.
2. How can I do this "gently" & "humbly" like Galatians 6 says correction should be done? Jesus was gentle and humble with people who needed His gift of truth (with one exception- the Pharisees and we'll see why He was more forceful with them tomorrow... for today I'll just say you DO NOT want to become more like the Pharisees. I'm just saying). The one person in the universe who always knew exactly

the right thing to say and how to proceed and He always proceeded with grace, gentleness and humility before He spoke truth.

Maybe today let's ask Jesus to show us the truth about our own life. And for Him to give us the courage, wisdom, gentleness & humility to give the gift of truth to the people in our lives who need it in the way Jesus gives it to us.