

July 26-30, 2021 Edition

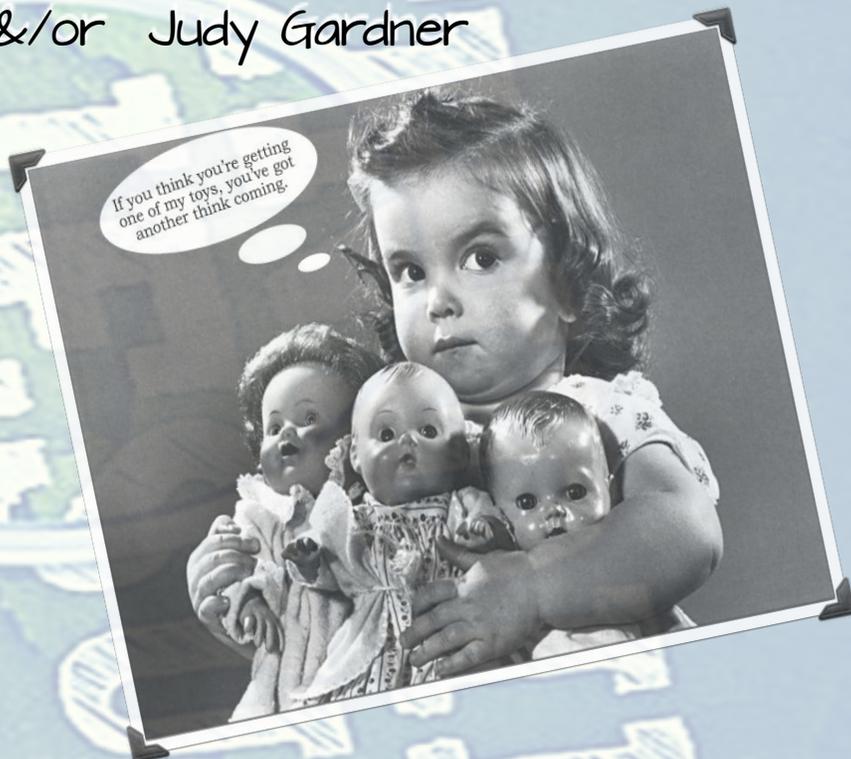
The "BIG Story" Of The Bible #60

Finding Jesus In The Old Testament

Superiority: The Silent Killer

By: Ed &/or Judy Gardner

July 24/25, 2021



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:

Don't judge others, or you will be judged. You will be judged in the same way that you judge others, and the amount you give to others will be given to you. Matthew 7:1-2 (NLT)

Reflection: So today we reach the part of the sermon on the mount where Jesus talks about judgment. Why now? Why wait til almost the end to bring up judgment, self righteousness & superiority?

I think it's because if you ever get the stuff Jesus talks about at the beginning of the sermon on the mount (anger, lust, lying, worry, forgiveness, etc.) under control then another more subtle problem will crop up. You'll start to feel pretty good about yourself. You'll start looking down at people who are still struggling with the things God has helped you overcome. It's like they say, there's nothing a smoker hates more than a former smoker who quit.

And so Jesus brings up judgment. What does Jesus mean when He says, "don't judge" you might ask. Well... I think there are times Jesus is cryptic and hard to read but this isn't one of them. What He means is, don't judge.

I've mentioned many times that when I first started getting serious about actually doing what Jesus says I memorized the sermon on the mount. When I got to chapter 7 I was a little loopy. That's A LOT of material to commit to memory (at least it is for me). And I was memorizing out of the New King James version of the Bible. I still remember trying to memorize this passage.

Judge not that you be not judged. For with the judgment you judge you will be judged.

Pretty soon "judge" started to sound like a made up word. Go ahead and try it. Say "judge" about a hundred times and see if it doesn't start to lose its meaning.

But don't let it lose its meaning. This is a pretty important one. If you read the gospels closely you'll notice the only people Jesus routinely gets into it with are the Pharisees. He's constantly going after them. Not because they are constantly breaking the letter of God's law. They were pretty much flawless and the external observance of God's Law. They always did the externally "right" thing to do. So why was Jesus always letting them have it?

Judgment. The Pharisees judged anyone who struggled with the things they were good at. And Jesus couldn't stand it. This week we'll look in detail at what Jesus has to say about judgment but for today just think about the concept of judgment and what kind of damage it does.

Prayer: Father, open my eyes to the areas I'm tempted to judge other people and remind me every time I start to feel superior to someone else. In Jesus Name, amen.

Tuesday:

To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people-robbers, evildoers, adulterers-or even like this tax collector.

I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." Luke 18:9-15 (NLT)

Reflection:

This parable is an important one if we are ever going to truly understand Who Jesus is. And to truly understand this parable I think we need to understand just how explosive and revolutionary it would have seemed to the people Jesus is speaking to.

In the first century there were basically 3 kinds of people in Israel. There were the sinners (tax collectors were the worst but there were also prostitutes, criminals and others who lived lives that were rejected by the religious establishment), there were the religious leaders (who were heroes... the common people loved, trusted and looked up to the Pharisees, Scribes & Priests) and then there was everyone else. People trying to please God but not really sure what that would look like.

Jesus comes along and tells a story about a Pharisee and a tax collector. In ancient Israel there are ZERO examples of a parable where the religious leader was the object lesson. There were also ZERO parables where a tax collector was the hero. It was unheard of. We use the word Pharisee now in a negative sense but they wouldn't have in the first century. Jesus was the only one to do it.

And what is the problem with the Pharisee? Arrogance and denial. He is so blinded by his own righteousness that it's made him arrogant. It has built a wall between the Pharisee and God. But the unusual thing about this particular sin is that the Pharisee is blind to it. What do you think the Pharisee would say if you asked him how his spiritual life is going? He'd probably say something like:

It's going great! I'm worshiping more than ever. I'm praying longer than ever. I give more than ever. I just know I'm making our Father so proud!

But he was wrong. His sin was separating him from the Father more than the tax collector's sin was. Which is fascinating if you think about it. Does that mean God doesn't care about sin (I don't think that's what Jesus is saying here)? Does that mean God doesn't like it when we worship or pray or give (again... I don't think so)?

What it says to me is, the sin of superiority which leads to self righteousness and judgment is more destructive than other sins simply because we don't even know we're doing it. It blinds us. We'll talk more about that tomorrow but for today ask God to show you any area of your life where arrogance and blinding you to something that's separating you from Him.

Prayer: Father, I want to lead a life that genuinely pleases You. Open my eyes to where I am suffering with arrogance. I don't want you to humble me... I want to humble myself. So today, I humble myself before You. In Jesus' Name, amen.

Wednesday:

The Pharisee stood over by himself and prayed, "God, I thank you that I am not greedy, dishonest, and unfaithful in marriage like other people. And I am really glad that I am not like that tax collector over there. Luke 18:11 (CEV)

Reflection: The deeply ironic thing about the verse you just read is that most modern Christians would read that story and then say to God, "Lord, I thank You that I'm not like that Pharisee in the story who thanks You for not being like the tax collector. I am so proud to be superior to the jerk who thought he was superior to everybody else!"

And when we do that, we are doing the exact same thing as the Pharisee. We do it for lots of different reasons but if we're not careful then all of us will join in the judgment game without even knowing or recognizing that's what we're doing.

Think about it. Counseling offices are filled with people who are trying to get a handle on their anger, resentment, guilt, worry, etc. When you struggle with one of the those things you pretty much know it. Even greed (which is nothing more than appetites gone wild) can leave us addicted to substances or destructive behaviors sends millions of people each day to meetings where people try to recover their lives. But superiority... that one's stealthy. There are no Betty Ford clinics for the insufferably arrogant.

But not because they're not needed. Much of the world's problems revolve around superiority but since we don't recognize it in ourselves we don't know we need help and so even if there were a clinic one could go to it would go out of business sooner rather than later for lack of clients.

Even when you know this is a danger you can still be blinded. There are so many areas that I still struggle with this (I know what you're thinking... you Pastor Ed???? What do YOU have to be superior or arrogant about? I know, right!!! So if this is a problem for me then I know it's got to be a problem for you too ;o).

So stop thanking God that you're not like someone else. Turn that laser like focus that finds faults and weaknesses into the mirror. Start thinking, "there but for the grace of God go I..."). Stop judging. Leave that to God. He's the only One who knows what each of us has been through. Let Him judge. You just love... that's your job... love. And let's start by refusing to judge, condemn or criticize others.

Prayer: Father, forgive me for the times I've judged others. Today I turn in my "judge badge" and ask that You help me to love, accept and forgive the people in my life. In Jesus' Name, amen.

Thursday:

Accept into your group someone who is weak in faith, and do not argue about opinions... Who are you to condemn God's servants? They are responsible to the Lord, so let him tell them whether they are right or wrong. ... each of us will have to answer to God... So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God.

Romans 14:1-4-12-22 (NCV)

Those who think one day is more important than other days are doing that for the Lord. And those who eat all kinds of food are doing that for the Lord, and they give thanks to God. Others who refuse to eat some foods do that for the Lord, and they give thanks to God. Romans 14:6-7 (NLT)

Reflection:

In Eagle River we have a group called the Ministerial Alliance. It's a group of pastors from local churches that meet together once per month just to hang out and fellowship. I really

like it because it reminds me of how complex God must be. I mean the people there only have one thing in common really... their love for Jesus.

We have lots of opinions about what that means. Lots of ideas on what's ok and what's not. But since the only thing we have to agree on is Jesus then we have more that unites us than divides us (although it may not seem like it on the surface).

Once a month I'll see a Lutheran pastor sitting and talking with a Baptist preacher. A Catholic priest eating with an Episcopalian rector. A Charismatic Pentecostal pastor fellowshiping with a Methodist pastor. We all have widely held views on how the Bible tells us to live but we set that aside to focus on Jesus. It really is a beautiful thing. I think God must think it's awesome.

That's a pretty good picture of what I think God has called us to do at Riverside. We don't focus on opinions of how to or how not live (it's not that we don't have our opinions... it's just that God has called us to a rather unique mission where those opinions get in the way rather than help). We focus on one thing at Riverside... Jesus.

I got one of the greatest compliments of my life when one of our members said her friend was looking for a new church because they never talked about Jesus. She told her friend, "come to Riverside... Jesus is all you'll hear about here."

And when we do this right at Riverside miracles happen in people's lives. People who would have turned around and run for the door if I started shaking my finger at them and telling them how they should/shouldn't live are able to let their guard down. They see a ridiculous video clip that makes some of us shudder but totally disarms people who are wary of churches. They are able to sit and listen as the Spirit of God works on their hearts. And they are invited to follow this Jesus and live a life designed by Him.

When that happens all bets are off. The Spirit will lead them and convict them of what they're doing wrong and lead them into the life He has planned. What I've learned over 13 1/2 years of this is, if I get loud about a particular subject or behavior then not much happens except the people who agree with me nod their heads and those who don't put up walls. But if only get loud about Jesus (the one thing we are committed to getting loud about at Riverside) then Jesus can get loud with them when the time comes and that's really the only way I've ever seen lasting change take place. And I've seen it over and over again. People coming in to Riverside already believing they know what we're going to be about and being disarmed and charmed to the point where they open up to Jesus and then He changes them radically. It's miraculous and it's so exciting to be a part of. But it takes complete commitment to the idea of not judging. To the idea of loving, accepting and forgiving even (and I might say especially) people that we disagree with and worry about and want to help them get back on the right track. I've never been able to get someone else back on the right track (not that I haven't tried...), but I've seen Jesus do it over and over again when I'm smart enough to just point people to Him and then I get out of His way.

So how about it? Are you willing to accept people just the way they are? It's not easy. It's terrifying and confusing and frustrating and beautiful and amazing and overwhelming and (I could go on all day...)...

Prayer: Father, teach me how to walk that line between influencing the people of this world and just judging them. I want to do life and ministry the way You want me to... show me what that will look like today. In Jesus Name, amen.

Friday:

I hope all of you who are mature Christians will agree on these things. If you disagree on some point, I believe God will make it plain to you. *Philippians 3:15 (NCV)*

Reflection: The following is from Max Lucado's book, *In The Grip Of Grace*. I figured since we've been talking about accepting others and not judging this would be a great way to think about it in terms of other churches out there that we may have a problem with ;o). Enjoy!

Life About The Fellow-Ship

God has enlisted us in his navy and placed us on his ship. The boat has one purpose—to carry us safely to the other shore.

This is no cruise ship; it's a battleship. We aren't called to a life of leisure; we are called to a life of service. Each of us has a different task. Some, concerned with those who are drowning, are snatching people from the water. Others are occupied with the enemy, so they man the cannons of prayer and worship. Still others devote themselves to the crew, feeding and training the crew members.

Though different, we are the same. Each can tell of a personal encounter with the captain, for each has received a personal call. He found us among the shanties of the seaport and invited us to follow him. Our faith was born at the sight of his fondness, and so we went.

We each followed him across the gangplank of his grace onto the same boat. There is one captain and one destination. Though the battle is fierce, the boat is safe, for our captain is God. The ship will not sink. For that, there is no concern.

There is concern, however, regarding the disharmony of the crew. When we first boarded we assumed the crew was made up of others like us. But as we've wandered these decks, we've encountered curious converts with curious appearances. Some wear uniforms we've never seen, sporting styles we've never witnessed. "Why do you look the way you do?" we ask them.

"Funny," they reply. "We were about to ask the same of you."

The variety of dress is not nearly as disturbing as the plethora of opinions. There is a group, for example, who clusters every morning for serious study. They promote rigid discipline and somber expressions. "Serving the captain is serious business," they explain. It's no coincidence that they tend to congregate around the stern.

There is another regiment deeply devoted to prayer. Not only do they believe in prayer, they believe in prayer by kneeling. For that reason you always know where to locate them; they are at the bow of the ship.

And then there are a few who staunchly believe real wine should be used in the Lord's Supper. You'll find them on the port side.

Still another group has positioned themselves near the engine. They spend hours examining the nuts and bolts of the boat. They've been known to go below deck and not come up for

days. They are occasionally criticized by those who linger on the top deck, feeling the wind in their hair and the sun on their face. "It's not what you learn," those topside argue. "It's what you feel that matters."

And, oh, how we tend to cluster.

Some think once you're on the boat, you can't get off. Others say you'd be foolish to go overboard, but the choice is yours.

Some believe you volunteer for service; others believe you were destined for the service before the ship was even built.

Some predict a storm of great tribulation will strike before we dock; others say it won't hit until we are safely ashore.

There are those who speak to the captain in a personal language. There are those who think such languages are extinct.

There are those who think the officers should wear robes, there are those who think there should be no officers at all, and there are those who think we are all officers and should all wear robes.

And, oh, how we tend to cluster.

And then there is the issue of the weekly meeting at which the captain is thanked and his words are read. All agree on its importance, but few agree on its nature. Some want it loud, others quiet. Some want ritual, others spontaneity. Some want to celebrate so they can meditate; others meditate so they can celebrate. Some want a meeting for those who've gone overboard. Others want to reach those overboard but without going overboard and neglecting those on board.

And, oh, how we tend to cluster.

The consequence is a rocky boat. There is trouble on deck. Fights have broken out. Sailors have refused to speak to each other. There have even been times when one group refused to acknowledge the presence of others on the ship. Most tragically, some adrift at sea have chosen not to board the boat because of the quarreling of the sailors.

"What do we do?" we'd like to ask the captain. "How can there be harmony on the ship?" We don't have to go far to find the answer.

On the last night of his life Jesus prayed a prayer that stands as a citadel for all Christians: I pray for these followers, but I am also praying for all those who will believe in me because of their teaching. Father, I pray that they can be one. As you are in me and I am in you, I pray that they can also be one in us. Then the world will believe that you sent me. (John 17:20)

How precious are these words. Jesus, knowing the end is near, prays one final time for his followers. Striking, isn't it, that he prayed not for their success, their safety, or their happiness. He prayed for their unity. He prayed that they would love each other.

As he prayed for them, he also prayed for "those who will believe because of their teaching." That means us! In his last prayer Jesus prayed that you and I be one.

Prayer: Father, forgive me for the times I've clustered with those who are like me while being suspicious of those who aren't. Show me how to live in unity with others who follow You. In Jesus' Name, amen.