

October 25-29, 2021 Edition

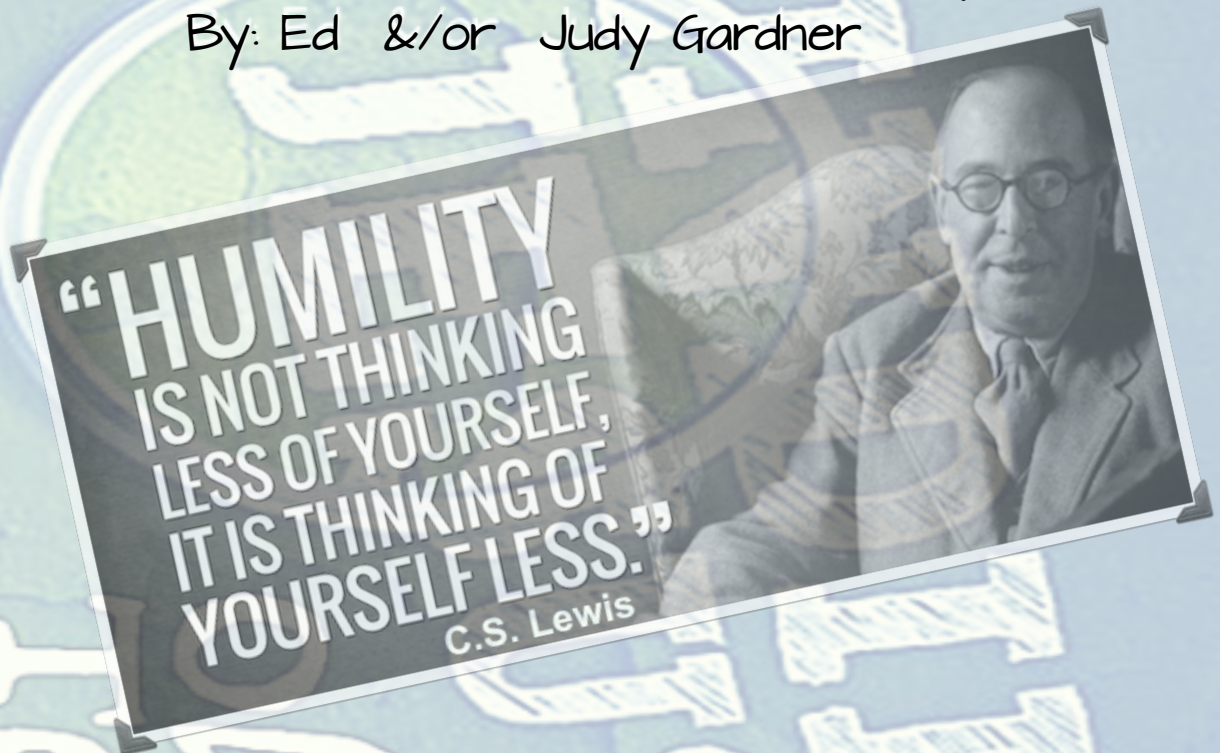
# The "BIG Story" Of The Bible #75

## The Gospel According To Moses #2.6

### What's The Deal With Humility?

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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:**

So the creation of the heavens and the earth and everything in them was completed. On the seventh day God had finished his work of creation, so he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because it was the day when he rested from all his work of creation. Genesis 2:1-3 (NLT)

Welcome to gentleness, or as I like to call it, self-control part two. It takes a strong foundation of self-conditioning to be able to choose how we respond in the moment, especially when threatened. If the threat is bigger than us, our instincts tell us to run. If the threat is smaller than we are, our instincts tell us to fight. Neither response reflects gentleness. The Greek word for gentleness can also be translated as meekness or humility. Sadly none of these translations do justice to the word. Again, I was not consulted. Humph. Gentleness and meekness have a modern connotation of softness, or even weakness. In the ancient world, gentleness was a word used to describe the ideal war horse. Gentleness was known as power under control. We might use the word "appropriate" today instead. A gentle person acts in the way that is most appropriate (most consistent with intent and values) rather than falling victim to instincts. A gentle act is one where we override our fight or flight drive in order to behave strategically. A well trained war horse knew what was required in each situation and delivered that action unflappably. He didn't get spooked and run when the battle got heated. He held still when his rider wanted him to, and had the strength to kick another soldier in the head when that was the desired response. The perfect war horse aligned each action with the objectives of his rider.

We can't talk about gentleness without addressing the nature of power. Genesis' account of creation turned the ancient world's idea of power completely on its head. In early civilizations it was understood that only the strong survive. One of the popular creation stories of the day was the battle between two gods: Marduk and Tiamat. The victor makes the earth out of the broken body of the other god, with people coming to life from the many drops of blood shed in the process. Brutality and violence were considered an inescapable part of life, and the foundation for all power. The one who could do the most damage won the power contest. In God's poem of creation we are introduced to a power so great that it stands uncontested. A power so supreme that it can afford to be gentle and at ease. God is an artist, a designer, a builder of life and harmony – not the brutal warrior associated with ancient power. His power is eternal, dare I say elegant? He doesn't need to force things. He's too strong for that. He uses His great power to create. Creating is a much more difficult act than destroying. After He completes His masterpiece, which He does without undue effort or struggle – simply speaking His will into being, He does something else unexpected. He rests.

It was rare for a ruler of the ancient world to rest. Rarely did anyone have enough power to step away from the constant vigilance of not being overthrown. Those who had power, claimed it at the expense of others, and there was always someone waiting in the wings, building their forces, ever watchful for any sign of weakness to make their play for supremacy. The world's game of thrones provided no rest. It still doesn't. Those who "live by the sword, die by the sword," but long before that they suffer from exhausting vigilance. Those who rule by force cannot rest. They can't afford to appear soft or weak. They must constantly remind others of the damage they can do if they don't get their own way.

The modern world often admires the arrogant, even though we don't usually like to hang out with them. Arrogance is the opposite of gentleness. It is the assumption that our jurisdiction rivals God's. It claims for us a level of authority that humans simply don't have. Humility involves an acceptance of the limits of our control. The arrogant falsely believe that they have the right to make things go the way they dictate. Even as we admire God's supremacy of gentle power, we often react with a bias in favor of arrogance and force here on earth. Aggression sounds so much more powerful than appropriateness. We underestimate the significance of self-control (acting according to our values rather than our instincts) in favor of trying to control the other guy. We don't want to stand down. We are afraid to appear weak. The first step in developing gentleness is to recognize how truly powerful it is. Gentleness has the power to win the day. Force tries to look powerful by acting destructive, but it is often out of control. We don't want to fall victim to the same mindless instincts that make the silver back gorilla pound his chest and throw things until his enemies retreat and his own troop cowers. If we want a more sophisticated power, gentleness is the best tool.

## **Tuesday Reflection:**

You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.  
Though he was God,  
    he did not think of equality with God  
    as something to cling to.  
Instead, he gave up his divine privileges ;  
    he took the humble position of a slave  
    and was born as a human being.  
When he appeared in human form,  
    he humbled himself in obedience to God  
    and died a criminal's death on a cross.  
Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor  
    and gave him the name above all other names,  
    that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
    in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
    to the glory of God the Father. Philippians 2:5-10 (NLT)

Today we'll look at the expression of true power in the life of Jesus. Philippians 2:6-11 is probably one of the oldest Christian statements of faith found in the New Testament. Scholars believe that it is a hymn of the early church. Before the gospel accounts were written down or Paul had drafted any of his letters to churches, the first believers learned about Jesus in worship and through eyewitness stories of his life. This passage is something that the earliest Christians sang at their gatherings.

Paul tells the Philippian church that Christian maturity comes by copying the attitude of Christ. Jesus had all the authority of Heaven. He came to earth to demonstrate with His life what power and holiness truly look like. In God's kingdom, the higher up you go in power and status, the more willing you are to put yourself at the service of others. It's kind of a "downward rising".



Sacred service isn't given by the weak and oppressed who have no other choice but to serve. The greatest Power the world has ever seen, poured Himself into the lives of others as a servant, until even His life had been spent on our behalf. Sacred service is an act of true nobility, where the King puts all His resources into the wellbeing of His subjects.

God doesn't encourage us to be powerless or pitiful. That isn't gentleness. He asks us to develop the strength (self-control) to be able to do what is best, whether soft or strong. Love does what is most loving. That requires the ability to step back from our feelings of fear or anger so that we can make the most loving choice. The world needs the true power of gentleness, a power that creates rather than destroys. If you look online you can find images of extravagantly detailed sand castles. These take hours to build and require a high level of skill. They can be destroyed, however, by anyone. A toddler could crawl her way through one leaving destruction in her wake. Is this because she's unusually powerful? No it takes much less power to destroy than to create. Bringing more love into this world is an act of creation. Love builds and defends and supports growth. Destruction is child's play.

If we want to be more powerful with others, to have greater influence, we need to use the most appropriate words for the occasion. Criticizing humans is like shooting fish in a barrel. Anyone can do it, but it's hardly sporting. Often our comments are much more destructive than we realize. Even when we aren't picking fault with someone, it's in our nature to describe life in a way that is discouraging. We need all the encouragement we can get in this fallen world. Without it we won't find the energy to keep on going. And by encouragement I don't mean encouraging others to do things our way. True encouragement promotes the courage for each of us to live out our beliefs and values. Encouragement empowers. It serves us all. Jesus gave us the ultimate example of what to do with power. His life teaches us that the powerful find true satisfaction and meaning in service. Jesus is the model of gentleness and meekness – great power harnessed in service of the higher good.

## **Wednesday Reflection:**

*Moses was very humble--more humble than any other person on earth. Numbers 12:3*

Today we look at another example of humility (gentleness) – Moses. Ed used to think Moses (who wrote the first 5 books of the Old Testament) couldn't have possibly written Numbers 12:3. Wouldn't the act of writing that he was the most humble man on earth disqualify Moses from that title? But that was before he understood the real the meaning of gentleness and humility. Humility isn't thinking less of yourself. Gentleness doesn't say, "Oh shucks, it was nothing." Gentleness stands before one of the most powerful men on earth and tells him to release an enslaved people - armed with only a shepherd's staff.

It's fascinating to watch the shift in Moses' perception of power from a young man to the great leader of Exodus. In his youth, Moses' idea of power was strongly influenced by Egypt. As a member of Pharaoh's household he would have been taught that ultimate power on earth belonged to the Pharaoh who ruled the people as an incarnation of deity. Pharaoh was considered a god on earth. Power was about rule, conquest and a strong military. The Egyptians considered themselves the master race of the ancient world. They were powerful, while the

Israelites were their slaves. They were among the most wealthy and technologically advanced civilizations of their day. The Israelites, on the other hand, had been shepherds. They considered the Israelites to be weak and backward. They didn't even have a ruler, let alone an army of chariots.

From his biological family Moses would have learned about the God of creation, who passionately values each individual human life. His sense of morality was shaped by his people, but his sense of power was shaped by those who currently represented power in his world. When young Moses came across an Egyptian soldier beating an Israelite slave, he reacted with force, killing the Egyptian. What greater power is there than to hold life and death in your hands? But the consequence of standing up for God's people using human force was exile to the desert. That's where Moses learned to gentle himself and serve over a period of forty years. He became a father and a shepherd. He spent his days looking out for the welfare of small, smelly, simple-minded sheep. That was the training God provided to play a role of true power.

By the time Moses returned to Egypt, he had lost his thirst for confrontation and violence. He returned as a man whose passions had been tempered and harnessed by service. This was the man of power that God would use. Moses would stand in his rural shepherd garb and insist that the most powerful man on earth forfeit his entire slave labor force. Eventually he would lead God's reluctant sheep out of slavery, across the red sea and to the brink of the promised land.

## **Thursday Reflection:**

*God is kind, but he's not soft. In kindness he takes us firmly by the hand and leads us into a radical life-change. Romans 2:4 (MES)*

It's impossible to be clear on what we mean when we use the word love in our culture. We use it too often, and then not often enough. For example, I love God but I've also been known to say that I love chocolate. The closest I've come to relating to God's love is those tender moments when I watched Jonathan sleep when he was little. Part of this was because he was so easy to love when he wasn't getting into trouble or asking me to do anything for him. No matter how challenging parenting was, I felt unconditional warmth for him when he was sleeping. Parental love knows what it means to want the best for another human being, to put ourselves in the service of someone who is depending on us, whether we feel up to it or not. This unconditional love is kind but it's not soft. In fact, it can take a lot of courage. It is an act of love to set limits when limits are not appreciated. It is an act of love to say "no" when saying "yes" is easier, but not generous in the long run. Parental love does not always get full credit from the one being loved.

God can relate. He loves us tenderly, but not always exactly how we want Him to. We don't like to hear "no." It rarely feels loving, but God knows what will bring about our ultimate satisfaction and blessing. Jesus said that the most important instructions of all (basically fulfilling the whole Bible) are to love God and to love others as we love ourselves. God wants us to embrace the wholeness that can only come from loving Him. We need the confidence that comes from being in connection with the creator of the universe. As we receive His love we grow in our ability to love Him in return. We need His power to even attempt to love ourselves and others in a

healthy way. Jesus was our mastery model in this too. He spent time refilling His bucket in order to love other humans in the most appropriate way. Love that does what's best rather than what's easiest (or seems deserved) takes a lot of energy and practice.

Jesus was not formulaic in His response to people. He taught that the kingdom of heaven is about turning the other cheek when wronged. He demonstrated this truth when He submitted to the cross. He also taught that we are to be as innocent as doves yet as cunning as snakes. He demonstrated His ability to aggress when He got so furious with the merchants in the temple that He took the time to weave together a whip. He then used the whip to drive the livestock (and the people) into a frenzy, flipping over tables and releasing other people's property (animals). That's right, don't mess with Jesus. The fact is that He wasn't a pacifist or a bully. He just knew what was required (was best for everyone involved) and submitted unflinchingly to that course of action. He was able to do this because God let Him see into the hearts of those around Him. God supported and fueled His actions. He knew what the most loving thing was, even when it looked crazy.

Thank God I don't have the ability to see into the hearts of others! I couldn't bear knowing the secret thoughts of others! It's hard enough not to smack Ed upside the head for the things he actually says out loud. If I was forced to hear every snarky comment he's learned to keep to himself our marriage would be unlikely to survive. And over the years I have learned that it works out better when I don't "lose it" over the things that do slip through Ed's filter.

Flipping over tables at the first sign of offense just gets everyone to defcon four. Sometimes one of us is just having a hard day and a free pass on inappropriate behavior is more generous to both of us. Because we don't know what others are going through it is helpful to further gentle our natural response in most situations. We took a parenting class that taught us to use the least aggressive approach first and build up as needed. A polite request can be all that is required when dealing with others. At the very least, we shouldn't bring out the big guns over minor offenses. That would be like a surgeon setting aside the scalpel in favor of an ax. Sure, you cover a lot of ground quickly and easily with an ax, but you don't really have the precision to get to the heart of what needs to be addressed. Plus there's that whole "do no harm" oath. Some choices, no matter how right they feel when we're upset, just have too much potential for damage. Our mistakes are much easier to clean up when we practice gentling our responses.

## **Friday Reflection:**

*Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light. Matthew 11:28-30 (NLT)*

Yesterday we talked about the challenges of doing the most loving thing for those around us. As impossible as that is down here, it can be just as daunting trying to love ourselves appropriately. The odd truth is that loving others as we love our selves is no gift if we treat ourselves poorly. God asks us to cultivate our ability to love ourselves well. Not only is healthy self-care difficult, it often feels selfish. Some people think that if people are given permission to love themselves they will become selfish hedonists. That would be the case if the idea was to

gratify ourselves, or serve every whim and demand. But Love doesn't spoil - not others or self. Love is like the baby bear's bed to Goldie Locks – not too hard or too soft, but just right. Love takes the time to truly listen and assess what is most appropriate. Man, does that take a lot of work! I need a good night's sleep to even play that game.

We won't come up with that kind of energy making demands of ourselves. Love doesn't come from wearing ourselves out, trying to pull ourselves up by the bootstraps. In the end it isn't ultimately our job to make ourselves loving or gentle or humble. Jesus is already in the process of giving us all the tools we need to blossom into the people He designed us to be. Sometimes we enjoy these lessons. Sometimes we'd prefer to go without them. Ed was feeling stressed last week and we somehow got stuck behind a vehicle where the driver was clearly impaired in some way (whether drunk or just not knowing how to react as we followed a slow moving construction vehicle that clearly wanted us to go around him on the shoulder but the driver instead straddled him or her self in such a way that nobody could pass and was clearly unsure about what he/she should do). They had the Glen Highway all torn up and this guy just couldn't figure out what to do, much to the chagrin of all of us stuck behind him. Ed is usually very easy going but I was beginning to see steam come out of his ears (metaphorically). I made a joke about Jesus preparing him for a lesson on gentleness on the heels of one about self-control. I'm helpful like that, making fun of others when they're already stressed. Everyone's good at something. But Ed laughed. Growing in self-control, gentleness and patience isn't for sissies. Sometimes the best thing we can do is lighten up while watching ourselves be human.

Jesus knows exactly what we need. Jesus is the master model of perfectly fitting love. He reminds us to give it a rest, to give ourselves a rest, and to find rest in Him. He provides acceptance so that the weak can pick themselves up and get back in the game. He provides challenges so that the strong get stronger. He provides lessons when we recognize that our demands aren't producing the results we'd counted on. That is the meekness, the gentleness, the humility and the genius of God's kind of love. Sometimes I get so distracted that I can't see what's best for me or for anyone else. I can do indulgent and I can do bossy, but most appropriate often escapes me. Thankfully, Jesus has all the answers that allude me. He's already teaching me one baby step at a time, whether I appreciate it or not. When I've done what I can do sometimes the best thing is to take a time out. I can trust that Jesus will sort me out if I let myself off the hook and rest. He doesn't seem to be in a hurry like I am.