



The Encyclopedia of Ethical Failure¹ is designed to “disseminate relevant information and general guidance on Government Ethics issues.” It is written in a series of short vignettes to aid in training employees in the “do’s and don’ts” of being a government employee. Many of the stories are humorous even as the wrongdoing carried monetary and other penalties. Here’s one:

Military officials discovered that a General was misusing Government personnel, improperly accepting gifts of services from subordinates, and misusing his position. What did he do? The General used his enlisted aides to help host unofficial functions at his headquarters, provide driving lessons to a family member, and to feed a friend’s cat. Although the aides were initially paid with \$30-\$40 Starbucks gift cards for their services, the General, taking full responsibility for his actions even though he retired, rectified the misuse and underpayment for services by retroactively paying the aides almost \$2,000 (p. 5).

Our Bible is full of stories that are designed to help us learn life lessons without always pointing a finger at us or shaming us. I think God knew long before we humans figured it out that we learn better through stories than we learn through guilt. Sometimes guilt is what’s needed, but more often than not a story causes us to think and to reflect and then we can take the learning into our soul better because we figured out what God was after ourselves.

People sometimes say they don’t believe the Bible because it is not **factually** true. They complain because archeologists have dug up the city of Jericho and it’s doesn’t support the Biblical story of Joshua and his troops circling the city 7 times blowing their horns and the walls all falling down (Joshua 6). It does make a wonderful children’s song, though! The Biblical story – whether factually true or metaphorically true- does tell us something important about our relationship to and with God. We are to pay attention to what God tells us to do. God will be faithful if we are faithful. God tells Moses, “I will be with you” (Ex. 3:12) and Jesus tells his

¹ http://ogc.osd.mil/defense_ethics/dod_oge/eef_complete.pdf (September 2, 2017)

disciples at the end of the Gospel of Matthew: “I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Mt. 28:20). God will be with us and that is comforting especially in times of trouble and uncertainty.

God often calls us to be active- not simply to be a passive vessel. God calls Moses to be God’s emissary to Pharaoh and to call on Pharaoh to let God’s people go- another great song!

In our passage from Exodus today, Moses is minding his own business, tending sheep belonging to his father-in-law. Seeking grazing in the wilderness. Focused on his task of ensuring the sheep have something to eat and thus protecting the wealth of the family since money as we know it today was at that time generally tied up in livestock or goods to trade. An important job within the family.

Moses was focused on doing what he had been called to do and then this burning bush appears out of nowhere! Not only burning but not being consumed. So Moses, drug out of his focused, linear approach, recognizes that this burning bush is indeed something special. Something so special that he needs to turn aside and investigate. And out of the burning bush comes God’s voice: Moses, Moses!

Moses replies as each of us should reply: Here I am. Like Isaiah: Here am I (Is. 6:8). Like Mary, the Mother of Jesus: Here am I, the servant of the Lord (Lu. 1:38). When God calls, respond: Here am I, do with me as you will.

Being called by God is nothing to ignore lightly. Being called by God is to step out onto holy ground. What you have known is changed- is transformed- into being a disciple who strives to follow the way of Jesus.

Being a disciple means we strive to let our love be genuine and to hate evil. To hold fast to what is good and to love one another with mutual affection. To be patient in suffering, to contribute to the needs of saints and to extend hospitality to strangers.

One of my long-time friends in Houston was rescued last week by two strangers who brought their boat to her subdivision and offered her a ride to a place where she could then be passed on to ultimately get to her daughter’s house in Sugarland, located southwest of Houston. Anned has lost her car but her house is not flooded although others in her neighborhood were. She said she has heard more “bless you” and “thank you” in the last week than in many, many years past. And her question to me was where she should give her money to those who are going to be rebuilding. She who faces costs associated with replacing her car is concerned about giving to those who need help rebuilding their lives. Someone I’m proud and honored to call friend. This emergency has brought out the best in so many people. Communities have come together to help regardless of race, ethnicity, gender or any of the other aspects that too often divide us.

One of the best stories of seeing a need and responding by doing what she could with what resources were available is the owner of a Pizza Hut. Her store was ok but she realized that the neighbors around her were not so lucky. Their area was flooded and they were running out of food after 5 days. She called her husband to bring whatever kayaks or canoes he could find- and then she and her workers baked 120 pizzas that got delivered, free of charge, to those families stuck in their homes! Saw a need. Figured out what she could do. Gathered resources. Delivered to those in need. Love was genuine. Hospitality was extended to strangers.

And this is not a onetime gift. The owner said she would keep on baking pizzas and delivering them as long as she had supplies. Is the owner a Christian? I have no idea. What I do know is that she saw a need, saw she had an ability to help, and she did so. This is what God calls us to be and to do.

To love our neighbors regardless of political affiliation. To love our neighbors whatever their skin color, ethnicity, gender or faith tradition. To care for one another. We do this because God has asked it of us. We do this because it is the right and ethical thing to do. Listen to where God is calling you to use your gifts and talents. See the burning bush that is not consumed. Turn aside from your preoccupation with tending your figurative sheep. Do not be afraid for God will not ask of you more than you can handle. Trust in God to have your best interests in mind. Trust that God will be faithful as you are faithful. And, trust that Jesus will be with you to the end of the age. **Amen.**