

Judge Not Lest You Be Judged

Week Nine
Ed's Story

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Walking into class a bit late on Monday morning, Ed and Amy are both wondering why they even bothered coming back to the University. Taking a seat in the back of the classroom, Amy asks Ed, "did you tell Scott that you accepted the position?" Ed replies, "I did that first thing this morning." Amy asks, "so, we're all set?" Ed replies, "almost. I have to give notice down at the gym. I'm sure there's a few other details." Amy tells Ed, "we'll just coast for the rest of the time we're here."

As Dr. Lawrence gives her lecture, to Amy, the professor's words go in one ear and out the other, making far less sense than they did last week. Ed contemplates why he ever came to this University, wondering why he even stayed as long as he did. Jenny and Pete are in the dark, for Ed and Amy have not yet announced anything that transpired over the weekend.

After class, Jenny asks Amy, who got in very late last night, "how did it go over the weekend, girl?" Showing her excitement, Amy exclaims, "I got the job!" Jenny replies, "that's awesome, girl! I prayed for you! I knew you'd get it!" With a half-hour before they have to be at their next class, Amy and Ed fill in Jenny and Pete on the details of their trip.

Jenny asks, "what else did you guys do down at the beach?" Amy looks at Ed, who nods his head. Amy energetically announces, "Ed and I are getting married!" Jenny exclaims, "what? Are you serious? When did this happen, girl?" Amy energetically explains, "after I got the job! We were on the beach, and Ed asked me! And, Ed got a job as a personal trainer at a gym downtown. And, then we looked at houses and went to the beach a lot." Quite surprised at what she is hearing, Jenny exclaims, "what? You guys go away for a weekend, and like wow, girl! I'm so happy for you guys!" As Amy and Jenny converse, Pete cannot believe what he is hearing.

It is hard for those who walk by to not notice Amy and Jenny's energetic conversation. Among those who become aware of Amy's excitement is Dana, who just exited the classroom building. Standing in the alcove, Dana listens as Amy tells Jenny and Pete, "I'm not finishing out the semester here. I'm hanging around for a while, but then I'm out of here. But, don't tell anyone. Ed's going to make the announcement to the fellowship when he gives his talk on Friday." Jenny tells Amy, "my lips are sealed." Hearing the news, Dana's lips, however, are not. Dana immediately texts to Donna, Theresa, Rodney, and a few others, "Amy is out of here. She's not finishing out the semester."

Thanks to Dana, rumor gets around campus that Amy is leaving before the end of the semester. But, no one dares to ask Amy about her plans. By the end of the week, a few members of the fellowship know that Amy will be leaving earlier than anticipated. Even though Amy made her reasons for leaving the University perfectly clear when she addressed the fellowship, a few twists by the gossipers were added along with a few more rumors.

Friday evening, the Interdenominational Campus Fellowship meets once again. For once, Dana is in an upbeat mood. Dana will be listening carefully to Ed's talk tonight, hoping to learn exactly when Amy will be leaving. Once Amy is gone for good, Dana's plan is to make a move on Ed.

Before the meeting begins, Rodney walks to the back of the room where Ed is hanging out with the usual group. Fearful that Ed may reveal his secret, Rodney asks Ed, "are you still giving the talk tonight?" Ed laughs, and replies, "of course, junior. Why wouldn't I? You're the one that got the concussion, not me." Rodney asks Ed, "will you please stop calling me 'junior'?" Ed replies, "no problem, Steele. You got it." Those who are standing around laugh, quite amused that Rodney walks into the same trap week after week. Rodney walks away, knowing that, if the conversation goes any further, Ed will certainly outwit him.

Rodney takes the stage, and announces, "okay, everyone. We're ready to begin." Everyone in the room stands up and quiets down. Rodney opens the meeting with prayer. During Rodney's prayer, Dana has her eyes glued to Ed and, as usual, not paying one bit of attention to anything Rodney is saying. From Dana's perspective, Amy, who is standing next to Ed, does not look too happy. Amy, however, is thinking to herself that neither of her parents can attend her wedding. Once Rodney concludes his prayer, the praise band takes the stage.

After three numbers, Rodney takes the stage and announces, "tonight, we'll be hearing from Ed Becker, who I hear has some interesting news for us. Ed, please come on up to the stage." Ed walks up, wondering how

Rodney knew that he has some news to disperse. Taking the stage, Ed candidly asks Rodney, “what news is that, Steele?” Realizing that he made an announcement based upon rumors, Rodney turns an interesting shade of red. Rodney knows, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that he has just been busted. And, Rodney does not dare to challenge Ed in a public setting.

Sparing Rodney from further embarrassment, Ed begins, “thank you for giving me the opportunity to share with you tonight what the Lord is doing in my life. I’ll try to keep this short. First, let me tell you where I’m coming from. For my entire life, I have been told that I’m not good enough, that I’ll never succeed, or that I shouldn’t even bother to begin something because I’ll fail. I was even told by my guidance counselor in high school to not bother applying to this University because I’ll never get accepted. I applied anyway, just to prove him wrong.”

Explaining where he does find his success, Ed relates, “as I searched for something that I could succeed at, I found it was sports. In high school, I played football and was on the swimming team. As some of you may already know, I’m also a halfway decent springboard diver, and I have a part-time job as a personal trainer. I’m a whole lot better at sports than I am at academics.” Referring to himself as a “halfway decent springboard diver” is the understatement of the year. Even though he is not on the University’s diving team, Ed, without a doubt, is the best diver in the University’s division.

Making Amy’s plans public knowledge, Ed explains, “two weeks ago, Amy announced that she was not going to return to the University next semester. Amy’s plans have slightly changed. Last weekend, Amy interviewed for a position as a lifeguard near her hometown, and they offered her the position. Amy has decided to move on, and will not be finishing out the semester here at the University.” Hearing the news, Dana smiles, quickly realizing that what she heard by eavesdropping on Amy and Jenny earlier in the week is accurate. Ed glances over at Rodney, who suddenly has a look of concern on his face. One can easily conclude that Rodney is very paranoid about something.

Taking his phone out of his pocket, Ed reads, “in First Corinthians, chapter 9, verse 24, it says, ‘Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win.’ Right now, I’m running in a race that I cannot possibly win. The race I cannot win is right here at this University. I might end up getting a degree in computer science. But, if I work in that field, I will probably fail. Honestly, guys, I’m not very good at what I’m here at the University to study. Like Amy, I really don’t belong here.” Ed then confesses, “the only reason I’ve made it this far is because a good friend of mine gives me a lot of old tests and helps me with a lot of my projects.”

Revealing his plans for the future, Ed announces, “what I really want to do in life is to be a personal trainer, and someday own my own gym. Another thing on my list is to coach a high school sports team, preferably a diving team. When Amy and I were away last weekend, I interviewed for a position at a gym as a personal trainer. I got the position, so I will also not be returning next semester.” Ed’s audience is quite shocked at the announcement but, in a way, not surprised. Sitting cross legged on the floor and shocked at hearing the news, Dana holds her head down as if she is carefully studying the carpet.

Ed smiles, and tells the group, “now, for the big news.” Ed pauses for a moment, as Amy walks up to the front of the room. Amy stands next to Ed and, holding Amy’s hand, Ed announces, “when we were away at the beach last week, Amy and I got engaged and we’re getting married.” Most everyone in the fellowship stands, cheering and clapping wildly for Ed and Amy. The news, coming as quite a surprise to everyone in the fellowship, is not exactly what anyone was expecting to hear today.

During the brief celebration of Ed and Amy’s engagement, Dana, in tears, sneaks out of the room. Dana is followed by Donna, who hopes to console her. During the clapping and cheering for Ed and Amy, very few people see Dana and Donna leave. Those who are aware that they left pay them no attention.

Once the celebration subsides, Ed concludes, “when Amy and I went away last weekend, it became perfectly clear to us that God ultimately has a different path for us than the one we were on. And, as we always hear from our pastors, God’s timing couldn’t have been more perfect.”

Ed then finishes his brief talk, telling the group, “thank you all very much. And, I hope all of you have a great weekend.” The group applauds again as Ed and Amy walk to the back of the room. On her way back, those whom Amy passes want to see her ring, which Amy is very happy to show them.

Rodney takes the stage, who, with a very bad slip of the tongue, announces, “I’m sure we’ll all be glad to see Ed and Amy go.” Quickly realizing what he just said, Rodney raises his voice to a level above the sudden booing and hissing, correcting himself, saying, “I meant to say ‘sad to see Ed and Amy go’! Boy, did I ever screw that one up! I’m so sorry!” It is no secret that Ed and Amy are ticked off at Rodney’s slip of the tongue.

The booing and hissing continues for a while, broken by Ed yelling out from the back of the room, “hey, Steele! While you’re up there, why don’t you confess your secret to the fellowship?” A lot of chatter arises, as many people are surprised to hear that Rodney has a secret. Ed was, of

course, messing with Rodney once again. As Rodney is standing on the stage in a panic, he clearly sees Amy whispering something to Ed.

Great fear suddenly comes over Rodney, noticed by everyone in the room, as Ed again makes his way up to the stage. With everyone now thinking that Ed is going to spill Rodney's big secret, chatter again rises in the room. About to have a major league emotional breakdown, Rodney tells everyone, "okay, everyone. Please calm down." Clearly convinced that Ed is going to spill Rodney's biggest kept secret, Rodney, in a panic, confesses, "okay, Ed. Hold on. I'll tell them. You don't have to."

Everyone in the room quiets down, waiting to hear what Rodney has to confess. Ed interrupts his trek to the front of the room and, standing with his arms crossed against the side wall, is very curious to hear what Rodney has to say. After all, Ed has absolutely no direct knowledge of any secret of Rodney's.

With a quiver in his voice, Rodney announces, "let me first begin by telling everyone that I am very, very sorry. I hope you all can forgive me." In a full-blown panic attack, Rodney pauses, wipes the sweat from his face, then continues, "over the years, we've passed the offering plate around to fund our annual functions. For the last two years, I've taken some of the money from the offering plate." Showing a few tears, Rodney again pauses for a few seconds, and continues, "I am so sorry. I really hope you guys can forgive me. And, I'll be returning what I took." Now sobbing, Rodney continues, "and, effective right now, I'm resigning from my position as treasurer of our fellowship. If anyone wants to fill that position, please feel free." Instead of condemning Rodney, those in the fellowship clap, accepting Rodney's confession and willingness to make his sin right.

Once the clapping subsides, Ed walks up to the stage, and tells Rodney, "I wasn't going to tell everyone about any secret of yours, Steele. But, I do have one more announcement, and it has nothing to do with you." A few people laugh as Rodney steps aside, and Ed announces, "I forgot to mention this before. We're headed to the pizzeria after the meeting tonight. If anyone wants to join us, please feel free to come along." Ed returns the stage to Rodney, and rejoins his friends in the back of the room.

The band takes the stage and begins to play as the offering plate is passed around. Dana, who usually leads the singing, is conspicuously absent. Pete whispers to Ed, "so, Rodney really did have a secret." Ed replies, "apparently so. I really had no idea that Rodney had a secret. I was just messing with him a few weeks ago." Pete informs Ed, "when you walked up to the front, Rodney must have seriously thought you were going to expose his secret." Thinking back, recalling what transpired over

the last five minutes, Ed laughs, and replies, “you’re probably right about that.”

After the meeting, waiting for an opportune time, Rodney walks up to Ed, asking him in private, “how did you know about what I did?” Ed replies, “I didn’t, Steele. I was just messing with you. Everyone has secrets. Apparently the Holy Spirit convicted you of your secret. You should be happy about that.” With a sudden display of anger, Rodney looks at Ed, wanting to say something, but cannot find any words. Rodney walks away, hammering his fist into the air, sorely ticked off that Ed pulled one over on him.

Ed and Amy walk out of the meeting room with their regular group, headed to the pizzeria. Dana, still having a major league emotional breakdown, seeing Amy, screams out, “I can’t believe you did this to me! You stole Ed from me! I can’t believe you did that! Why? Why did you have to do this to me?” Dana breaks out into an even bigger crying fit, now attracting the attention of everyone around. Rodney walks over to Dana, attempting to calm her down.

Amy asks, “what’s up with Dana?” Always aware of more than meets the eye, Jenny tells her, “nothing anymore. Rodney just walked over to her. Her knight in shining armor just came to her emotional rescue. Everything about that girl is like total status dramaticus. Just as soon as she gets over it, she’ll like move on to another major catastrophe.” Pete comments, “let’s all hope Dana never breaks a fingernail.” Amy laughs, and mentions, “I can’t imagine what would happen if she had a real emergency, like breaking her head open on a diving board.” Pete tells Amy, “who knows? If she hit her head on the diving board, it may improve something.” Joe laughs, telling Pete, “you might be right about that.”

Arriving at the pizzeria, the group places their order and takes a seat near the window. Occasionally glancing out the window, Amy sees no sign of Rodney or Dana. Jenny also checks the window occasionally, also looking for any signs of trouble approaching. Fortunately, tonight, the group will enjoy a peaceful dinner. Rodney and his group have decided to eat at the student center cafeteria because Dana just can’t face seeing Ed and Amy sitting together tonight.

Over dinner, Joe asks Ed, “if you don’t mind me asking, who in your past told you that you’re not good enough or that you’ll never succeed?” Ed explains, “when I was in high school, the guidance counselor was constantly trying to get me to go to trade school. When I was a junior in high school, my parents told me that I should consider buying a truck and start a landscaping business. To use their words, they didn’t think I was ‘college material’. Maybe they were right. Even the pastor of the church that I attended told me that he’d hire me as a custodian and

groundskeeper when I graduated from high school.” Joe advises Ed, “don’t listen to what anyone else tells you. You do what God would have you to do. In the end, that’s all that matters.” Ed tells Joe, “I think I’m on that path now.”

Joe explains to Ed, “two years ago, you and Pete started helping me train. Since then, I’ve made a lot of progress. If it weren’t for you guys, I’d still be struggling with my weight even though I solved my genetic issue. I have all this knowledge about biochemistry and genetics, but that only goes so far. I remember when you told me to take the concept of breakfast, lunch, and dinner, and throw it out the window and, instead, eat five or six small meals a day. Then, when you told me to take a double dose of carnitine an hour before I got on the treadmill, I really saw the weight starting to come off. People need your help, Ed.” Ed replies, “I wasn’t cut out to work with computers. Neither was Amy. You’re right, Joe. I need to do what God has planned for me.”

Suggesting a departure from their usual activities, after dinner, Joe suggests that the group take a long walk around campus. No one objects, and everyone gets five miles in. Joe will see a little more weight come off. Taking a long walk, Jenny is sure to sleep really well tonight. And, Ed and Amy will get a final look at the University campus together.

During the walk, Ed mentions to Joe, “Pete told me that your father knows the author of the *Eddie, The Mechanic* series.” Joe replies, “he does. I don’t know exactly how they know each other, but they do.” Ed asks Joe, “is there any way that you can find out whether Mr. Frazier is a real person, or is modeled after a real person?” Joe replies, “I’ll give it a try. It doesn’t hurt to ask. I’m kind of curious myself.”

Amy asks Joe, “while you’re at it, can you find out if Mr. Zunde is a real person too? The further along in the book I get, the more I’m convinced that Mr. Zunde is a real person. Mr. Zunde’s kind of cool.” Joe replies, “sure. I’ll find out what I can. And, I agree. Mr. Zunde is cool. Mr. Zunde is not one to put up with anyone’s crap. Some of the characters in that series just seem too real to me.” Ed replies, “I’ve noticed that too.”

It has been clear to those reading the *Eddie, The Mechanic* series that Joe, when he speaks in front of a group, now has the energy of Mr. Frazier. It is also clear to Amy that, since Ed has been reading the series, Ed has been sounding a bit like Edward Bogenskaya and Mark Svoboda, especially when dealing with Rodney.

After their five-mile walk, everyone heads home for the night, only to meet up at the gym early tomorrow morning.