

Eudaimonia: God (Trinity) **Jeremiah 29:4-14**

Eudaimonia is a Greek word that is best translated to “flourishing” or “thriving”. However, it goes much deeper than that.

Philosophy Lesson: Aristotle’s Virtue Ethics states that virtue is a character trait that is good for a person to have (such as courage, honesty, generosity, etc...). These virtues are achieved through virtuous living.

Aristotle defined a virtuous person as someone who does *the right thing, at the right time, in the right way, in the right amount, toward the right people*. That’s pretty vague since we tend to want black and white answers for everything. However, every situation is different and can’t be handled the same way every time.

Aristotle designed a rule to help us learn how to determine the right action depending on each situation called the Golden Mean (see graphic). It involves finding the balance between excess and deficiency. For example with the virtue of generosity, buying expensive gifts for others at Christmas instead of paying rent.

Finding a balance between excess and deficiency requires **Practical Wisdom** (the ability to make the right decision in the right situation through moral reasoning). Character is developed through habit. It is learned through watching **Moral Exemplars** (people who embody virtues that serve as role models). This could include mentors, parents, prophets, cultural heroes, etc,...

Aristotle believed that a virtuous life of learning from moral exemplars and applying practical wisdom in every situation will lead to the ‘Good life’, or a life of flourishing... aka - a life of *Eudaimonia*.

How does this relate to God?: What does all this Aristotle stuff have to do with God? I believe that the image of God is reflected in all good human work, even secular philosophy. What we will be doing in this series is looking at the Bible as our Moral Exemplar. We will specifically be looking at the prophecy of Jeremiah that he spoke to the Israelites who were in Babylonian exile. (For more information about how to thrive while living in exile, see the Exile series on the website.)

Attributes of God focused on: Read Jeremiah 29:4-14. We are going to take a bit of this passage each week to consider what we can learn from each perspective. This week we will focus on God.

Reread Jeremiah 29:14. What does this tell us about God? He will be found by us if we seek Him. He will deliver us from captivity (sin, human nature). He will bring us back from exile. He allowed us to be in exile.

When you think about God, what attributes do you focus on? Do you focus on His grace and love? Do you think more of how He empowers and provides? Or do you think about how He convicts and disciplines?

God has many attributes and it is very common for us to focus more on one than the others. Not many people like to think of the Old Testament God who kicks Adam and Eve out of the Garden, who floods the earth, and who carries His people into exile. This presents Him as punishing and angry which overshadows His patience and faithfulness. He seems distant and too holy to connect with. However, we have to remember that the people who wrote the Old Testament didn’t know Jesus and had not been transformed by the Spirit.

Some people like to see God for what He makes *them*: empowered by His Spirit, a chosen people, sacred and separate. These attributes of God are a focus on post-Acts Chapter 2. It becomes about how we can experience Him.

The most popular way that people seem to think of God these days is as the person of Jesus: a person full of grace and forgiveness who is loving, accepting, and serving. He is seen as more relatable... sometimes to the point of sacrilege. For example: T-shirts saying 'Jesus is my homeboy' and 'He is rizzzen' do not respect the holiness of God.

We like to play favorites not just as individuals, but also as denominations. The Other Six Days by R. Paul Stevens says, "*Churches and denominations tend to form around one of three: Father-denominations emphasize reverent worship and stewardship. Son-denominations stress discipleship and evangelism thus furthering the work of the Kingdom of God. Spirit-denominations promote gifts and graces. - A rich and full doctrine of the Trinity avoids such stereotypical designations. God is more than the sum of the three. God is not God apart from the way the Father, Son and Holy Spirit give and receive from each other what they essentially are.*"

Balance: We have to learn a balance in the way that we see God, looking at one in light of the others. For example: How the God who exiled Adam and Eve is the same God who offered grace to the woman at the well and is also the same God who speaks to you in your life today.

God is much more than we are capable of trying to comprehend, yet the journey of discovery is how we learn to live in this world as God's children. It's all about balance.

Aristotle's Golden Mean encourages balance between excess and deficiency. But unless we work to balance our understanding and relationship with God as the whole Trinity, we cannot find balance in any other area of our lives. Everything comes back to the Trinity.

If we want a life of eudaimonia, of flourishing, we must learn to balance how we see God. (see 3-legged stool graphic) We can't get too focused on knowledge and leave no room for divine inspiration. Nor can we get so invested in experience that we don't grow in our understanding. We also can't get overly caught up in relationships with others that we lose our connection with God.

Our scripture today starts with "I will be found by you..." but if we back it up one more verse we read that God tells us *how* we can know Him. Jeremiah 29:13 says, "*You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.*"

We have to seek Him to know Him. We grow in our knowledge of Him as we open our mind to understand who He is. We grow in our experience with him as we surrender our soul to His will. We grow in our relationship with him as we commit our lives to His mission.

This is how we thrive in exile. This is how our lives flourish and produce good fruit in this world. This is how we reach eudaimonia.

Discussion Questions:

- How does Aristotle's Golden Mean apply to how you determine a correct action in a situation? Does it show you lean to excess, deficiency, or balance?
- Who are some moral exemplars in your life? Do they help guide you in God's wisdom?
- Reflecting on the three ways we tend to focus upon God's attributes, how do you find you typically view God? How can you find more balance in your view of God?

Golden Mean

