

Fran and Jesus on the Job – Incompetent Boss

Presented by Mary Lowman

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Day One

Have you ever reported to someone you felt was incompetent and arrogant? In our story of Fran and Jesus on the Job, Fran encounters a new boss who taxes her patience to the limits. Since her husband's untimely death, Fran has been blessed, really, with a good job and a good boss. Under Marilyn's guidance and with her help, Fran has grown considerably in this position, and she really enjoys working for her. Even more importantly, Fran actually led her to saving faith in Jesus Christ. All in all, Fran is more than pleased with her current situation at work.

Today as she busily writes a proposal for a new client, Marilyn comes into her office and sits down. "Uh oh," Fran says half teasing, "When you come in and sit down, I know we're in for something serious. What's up, Marilyn?"

Marilyn smiles. "Well, I have good news and good news. Which do you want first?"

"Oh, please, the good news first," Fran laughs.

"The good news is I've just been selected as Vice President of Marketing for the entire division," Marilyn reports, with obvious great pleasure.

"No kidding?!" Fran exclaims. "Marilyn, that is awesome. Congratulations!"

"Well, I'm a bit overwhelmed," Marilyn says, "but I am excited about the opportunity."

"You deserve it, Marilyn," Fran says, "and I couldn't be happier for you. But wait a minute," she pauses. "Does this mean you'll be moving?"

"Well, that's the other good news, Fran. You won't have to put up with me as a boss any longer. You'll have a new boss starting next Monday. They're promoting a guy from the Boston office. His name is Ben Mason. I don't know him personally, but evidently, he's done well there in sales, and so they're bringing him here as a manager."

Fran plops back down in her chair. "Sorry, Marilyn, but that is not good news. You're the best, and you've been such a great help to me. What will we do without you?"

As Fran learns more about this Ben Mason, she realizes they have chosen someone with little experience. She asks Marilyn, "Why didn't they choose someone right within our office. There are several here who've got more experience than that."

"My guess is that this is a young guy on his way up, and they may have him on a fast track. I admit it's a little unusual but wait and see. He must be good, or they wouldn't promote him this quickly," Marilyn tries to reassure Fran.

A big farewell party is quickly planned for Marilyn, and Fran sheds some tears as she began to realize she was losing not only a good manager but also a good friend. She has found a good church in Boston to recommend to Marilyn and they promise to stay in close touch. But what about this Ben Mason person? What kind of boss is he going to be?

Day Two

Our friend Fran begins this workweek with a new boss. Marilyn has been promoted and now, Ben Mason joins the department from the Boston office.

At 9am, a meeting of the department is convened, and Ben Mason is introduced. He begins his opening remarks, "Well, I'm glad to be here and look forward to a very successful year. I've been looking at your numbers and we've got some work to do, don't we? Seems to me we haven't secured enough new clients. Maybe some of us are just too contented to rock along the way things are. Well, you'll see some changes in the next few days because I think it's time for a shakeup. We want to be the number one sales office in the company, and I intend to make it happen this year."

A silence falls over the department like a wet blanket. "Whoa," Fran thinks, "what an opening shot he has fired." She goes back to her office with some fear and trepidation. Before she has time to sit down, George walks in. He's been an account manager for over ten years, and he really knows his business. "Fran, can you believe that guy? What a stupid thing to say on your first day in a new office. He must be connected with somebody somewhere to get this job. Man, life is going to be difficult for us."

Fran shakes her head. "I know, George," she says, "I was shocked at what he said. He looks like a child; how old can he be? And how much experience can he have? You're right—we're in for some tough days."

They commiserate together a few minutes longer, and George leaves. Fran feels a cloud of discouragement descending upon her. As she goes home later, she lets her mind run wild with imaginations of how awful it is going to be to work for such a young arrogant man. She does the minimum that needs to be done to get the kids fed, do their homework, and get them into bed by 9pm. Then she calls her friend Louise, who works with her and is also a believer. "Louise, what did you think about Ben Mason? Pretty pitiful, right?"

Louise is quiet. Fran continues. "Did you ever hear such an awful opening message? I mean, it has to break all the rules of being a good manager. Where did they dig this guy up anyway?"

Louise remains quiet. "Louise, are you there?" Fran asks.

"Yes, Fran, but I just don't think we should be talking about him. . ."

Fran feels the sting of her brief remark and knows she is right. But she's not there yet. "Well, I'm just telling you how I feel, Louise. I mean, you have to tell someone, don't you?"

"Yeah, we do need to tell someone, I agree," Louise says very quietly, "but I don't think we should be gossiping."

"Gossiping?" Fran becomes defensive. "I don't think this is gossip. I'm just reporting on the facts. Oh well, I know you're busy; don't want to keep you, Louise. See you in the morning." And with that abrupt ending, she hangs up the phone.

Day Three

Today, Fran met the new manager of her department—Ben Mason—and she's not happy about him. This evening, she calls her friend Louise to commiserate about Ben, but instead Louise refuses to get into a gossip session. Fran ended the conversation rather abruptly, but her face is glowing red, both from anger and from shame. She is angry with Louise for confronting her so forcefully, and ashamed of how she behaved.

Fran steams around the house for half an hour with a fierce battle inside her. Finally, she sits down with her Bible and begins to pray. But few words come out before the tears start. "Lord, I'm so sorry. How could I behave so badly? How could I?" Fran cries out to the Lord. She is so disappointed in herself. She knows better than to gossip. She knows how wrong it is to have such a rotten attitude. She knows to take her concerns to the Lord and not complain to people. She knows all that, and yet she has done just the opposite.

Opening her Bible to Romans 7, she reads beginning in verse 21:

So, I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 7:21-25)!

"Wretched, Lord," Fran prays, "that's exactly the way I feel. I want to do your will, yet so easily, so quickly, I go back to my own self-centered way of responding. Please forgive me." After a time of prayer and assurance that the Lord has indeed forgiven her, Fran thinks about what her next steps should be. "First, I have some apologies to make. Then I have to change my attitude toward Ben. He is my manager, and no one is in my life by accident."

She turns to Romans 13 and reads again the passage about those in authority:

Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves (Romans 13:1-2).

She prays for God to help her to respect Ben and his authority over her.

Before going to bed, she phones Louise back with a sincere apology, and the two of them covenant again to hold each other accountable. The next day at work Fran finds a moment alone with George to apologize for her participation in the bad words about Ben.

But now the challenge begins: She must deal directly with Ben Mason, her new boss.

Day Four

Today is the day our friend Fran has her first one-on-one meeting with her new manager, Ben Mason. So, Fran is taking her lunch hour to pray for her 2pm meeting. She goes to her car, where she can have some privacy, and begins to pray.

"Lord, I know my life is in your hands and Ben does not have control over me; you do. Help me to see Ben the way you see him. Remind me that you love him as much as you love me. And guard my words carefully, Lord."

Thinking of her own fears, the Lord seems to impress her with this thought: Ben is afraid, too. “Of course,” Fran says to herself, “he’s trying to cover up his fear with this tough attitude.” It’s as though a veil has been lifted from her eyes, and she can see fear written all over Ben.

As she arrives at his office, Ben asks her to be seated and then says, “I see that you have been a sales leader in the office several times, Fran. I guess you think you’re pretty good,” and he looks at her with a sarcastic grin.

“I enjoy the job, Ben, and hopefully I’ve gotten better at it as the years have gone by,” Fran replies, trying to avoid any defensiveness.

“Well, if you ask me, your numbers are pretty anemic for a sales leader. You ought to be doing twice this much business if you’re that good. What’s the matter? Don’t you like going after new business?” Ben asks with an accusatory tone.

What does she say? Another silent emergency prayer goes up, and she finds some words. “Well, obviously, Ben, finding new business is the hardest part of the job. I would imagine that you must have been very good at new business, and I am looking forward to learning from you so I can do it better. I hope you’ll share your secrets.”

“It’s hard work, Fran,” Ben says, “and I expect a lot more from you than what you’ve done in the past.”

“If you will tell me exactly what you expect, I will certainly do my best to meet your expectations, Ben,” Fran manages to reply.

“Here’s what I expect,” Ben says, and he tells her how much revenue he expects from her in the next six months. The number is almost double her current quota, and Fran has to catch her breath. Both anger and fear begin to grip her heart and mind.

Then she remembers what God showed her about Ben—he is frightened. And she says, “Well, to tell you the truth, Ben, this number is frightening. If you were trying to put fear into me, I guess you have succeeded,” and she looks at him with a faint smile.

“Well, maybe this whole place needs a dose of fear. That’s the new quota, and I expect you to meet it,” Ben says. He then dismisses her, and that is the end of their first meeting.

Day Five

Ever had a new boss who came in with unrealistic demands and expectations? That’s where our friend, Fran, finds herself these days. Since Ben Mason has become their new manager, the whole department has been demoralized.

Fran notices she is praying more now and that’s one good thing this new manager has done for her. She is determined God will help her deal with this with a good attitude and a sense of joy, not fear. Her friend, Louise, is a great help, and together they often pray for the office and each other.

After a few weeks, it becomes obvious Ben’s knowledge of the industry, the competition, and the art of selling is woefully weak. But through all these difficult days, Fran continues to pray for the ability to see Ben the way God does. When she is so exasperated she doesn’t think she can take it another minute, she sees again that Ben is consumed with fear, and he covers it up with bravado.

In a meeting with him, after reviewing a proposal for a new prospect, she says, “Ben, would you like to go with me for this presentation? I think it would be impressive for the prospect to meet the boss, and I’d be glad to have your help.”

He looks at her briefly then turns his eyes away, obviously nervous. "I . . . I, uh. . . I really don't think I have time, Fran," he says, and then looks at her almost like a child, "but thanks for asking me."

"Is there anything else I can do for you, Ben?" Fran asks, trying to give him some word of encouragement. Somehow, he senses her genuine care, and he responds quietly, "Well, if you can tell me how to get these numbers up, that would help. Instead of improving, we've actually done worse since I got here. I don't know what's happening."

"Ben," Fran says, "adjusting to a new place is always a challenge. Don't be discouraged about the numbers. They'll improve, I'm sure."

And before Fran realizes it, Ben is earnestly soliciting her advice. She spends the better part of an hour giving him some help, trying to do so without hurting his pride. She suggests a different approach to the account reps and other motivational things he might do. Finally, he says, "I think you could do this job better than me," and looks at her with a very humble smile.

"Ben, I know you want to succeed, but you need all of us on your team," Fran says. "I just want you to know I'm on your team. I've been praying for you. And I believe you can succeed here."

"Praying for me?" Ben is astonished.

"Well, yes," Fran says, "I believe in prayer, and I talk to the Lord about everything in my life. It really makes a difference."

She assures Ben she is available to help anytime. After that she and others detect some improvement in Ben's approach and things seem to get a little better.

Well, if you're facing a difficult manager, remember Fran's experience. It may encourage you.