

Fran and Jesus on the Job: Dealing with a Difficult Manager

Presented by Mary Lowman

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Day One

I continue the story of our friend, Fran and Jesus on the Job. A few months ago, Fran was faced with an ethical decision. She actually refused to make a presentation to a client using deceptive methods—even though her manager asked her to do it—and as a result the account was taken away from her. She made the right choice, though it wasn't easy.

Today, as Fran arrives at work, she's a little nervous because it's the day for her appraisal with her manager, Marilyn. She says to Jesus: "I'll be glad when this is over. I hate appraisals. But I hope it goes well because the better the appraisal, the more raise I get, and I could use a nice raise."

Jesus replies: "Fran, I'll go right into that appraisal with you, so take a deep breath and know that whatever happens, I'm in this with you."

"Thanks, Lord," she smiles at Jesus' words of encouragement. It really helps her to keep her perspective. After all, she works for Jesus not for Marilyn, and as long as he is pleased with her work, she has the approval that is important.

"You know, Lord, my track record is good this year. I was second highest in sales volume in the whole office, and my account retention record is the best. And, you know, I got that big order from John Warton last week; nobody's been able to break that account before. So, I think I'm in good shape."

"Do you think Marilyn will have anything to say about the D3 University account, Fran?" Jesus asks.

The D3 University account is the one Fran had to give up because she refused to submit deceptive figures in her proposal. Marilyn gave it to Tom, a young salesman, who blew it and lost the business.

"Well, who knows, Lord, but with my good record, I don't see how she can refuse to give me a good rating on my appraisal. After all, I didn't lose that account; Tom did! Well, it's about time to go." Fran starts to rush out.

"Why don't you have a quiet moment of prayer before you go in there? Do you have time?" Jesus asks.

Fran smiles, as she shuts her office door. "Of course I do, Lord. I can't afford not to take time for prayer, can I?" She sits down beside Jesus and prays quietly, "Dear Father, give me your strength, your perspective, your calmness and your peace as I go into this appraisal. I ask you to put the right words in my mouth. I pray for a favorable appraisal, if that is your will. Thanks for giving me Jesus to be right here beside me during this. That helps a lot. I pray this in his name. Amen." Together they head toward Marilyn's office for the appraisal.

Day Two

Our friend, Fran, a workplace woman, was headed into her boss's office for her annual appraisal. But thankfully, she's not going there alone; she is aware Jesus is right beside her.

"Come on in, Fran," Marilyn says in a rather rigid voice, as she closes the door behind her. "I've already completed your appraisal, and what I'd like you to do is look it over and then we'll discuss it." She hands Fran the appraisal form.

Fran's eyes begin to focus on the appraisal form and slowly she realizes she has been given a very poor appraisal. Marilyn has given her the grade of "Does not meet the requirements of the job," which means Fran will be put on notice. By being put on notice, she is given three months to improve and if not, she will be fired. She gulps hard and silently prays.

"Lord, do you see this? Can you believe it? There's no way she can justify this poor rating. It means I get no raise, and I may get fired. Lord!"

"Yes, Fran, I see it. The important thing now is to stay calm. Remember, you prayed about your words, so be very careful what you say. Measure your words carefully," Jesus assures her.

With her heart beating like crazy, Fran looks up at Marilyn. "I guess you can see that this appraisal is very shocking to me. I really don't understand how you can honestly appraise my work as not meeting the requirements. Here are my sales figures; as you know, I'm second in the whole office in volume and first in customer retention. I just don't understand," Fran says to Marilyn, as she hands her the sales figures.

"Listen, Fran, numbers don't tell the whole story. You demonstrated a total unwillingness to obey orders, you were insubordinate, and as a result we lost the D3 University business. I could fire you for that, Fran, but I'm giving you a break. You have three months to shape up and decide if you're a team player or not. Otherwise, you'll be looking for another job."

Fran can't believe her ears. "Jesus," she says, "are you going to let her get by with this? You know how unfair this is; after all, I was doing what you told me, I was doing the right thing, and now I'm about to lose my job. Jesus, where are you?"

"I'm right here, Fran; I haven't moved an inch," he says comfortingly to her. "Have I ever failed you?" he asks Fran. "Have I ever left you or forsaken you?"

"No," Fran replies, "but this is different. I'm really in trouble. What do I do?"

"I thought you'd never ask," says Jesus, and he begins to put into her mind what to say to Marilyn.

Day Three

Fran, our workplace woman has just received a very unfair and vindictive appraisal from her manager. This means Fran will be officially "on notice," and could lose her job in three months. She went into panic mode, but with Jesus right beside her, she hears him tell her exactly what to say.

Fran turns to Marilyn, her boss, "Well, Marilyn, I think the procedures give me the right to voice my objection to this appraisal. I'd like to express my feelings."

Marilyn's face gets redder, and she stands over Fran intimidatingly. "You can do whatever you like, but it won't get you anywhere. I've reviewed all this with Ed, Vice President of Human Resources, and he's in total agreement with what I've done. Insubordination is an offense for which any employee can be fired. You'll find it in the personnel handbook, if you don't believe me."

"Oh, I believe you, Marilyn," Fran replies, "but I don't feel I've been insubordinate, and I'd like to follow the procedures for expressing how I feel." Fran is amazed at the calmness in her voice, and the

peaceful feeling she has. She's also amazed at Marilyn's lack of control; she's never seen her so angry and hateful.

Jesus whispers in Fran's ear, "Please remember that Marilyn is angry because you did the right thing. You were a light shining in her darkness, and she didn't like it. Don't take it personally; I'm going to get you through this, Fran, I promise."

Just hearing his voice assures Fran, and the peace that passes understanding sweeps over her. But somehow, the more peaceful she feels, the more upset and out of control Marilyn seems to be.

After pacing in front of Fran, Marilyn turns and says, "There's a place on page 3 of the appraisal for your comments, if you insist on getting yourself in further trouble. After you write them, return the appraisal to me. I'll take it to Ed."

"Marilyn," Fran says, "I can request an interview with Ed, isn't that right?"

When Fran sees how angry this makes Marilyn, she says to Jesus, "Oops, I think I said the wrong thing. Guess I shouldn't have brought that up, huh Lord?"

"No," Jesus responds, "it's okay, Fran. Marilyn is uncomfortable because she's been lying to you, and she knows you could get her in a bunch of trouble if you go talk to Ed."

"Lying to me? Why, of course," Fran replies. Suddenly it's all so clear to Fran. Marilyn is bluffing about Ed, trying to frighten Fran. She never dreamed Fran would think of talking to Ed. And now Fran has the advantage over Marilyn. All she has to do is insist on her right to talk to Ed, and Marilyn will be in trouble. What will Fran do now?

Day Four

Fran has been given a very bad appraisal and put "on notice" by her manager, Marilyn, because Fran refused to submit dishonest numbers to a prospect, as Marilyn told her to do.

With Jesus to guide her, Fran has calmly asked to exercise her right to talk with the VP of Human Resources, Ed, and voice her disagreement with the very bad appraisal she received. It has become clear to Fran, by the way Marilyn is reacting, that she doesn't want her to talk to Ed, and she is certain Marilyn has been lying to her.

Marilyn stares at Fran with a look of fear and hatred, and she says to Fran, "If you think you can get me in trouble, you're wrong, Fran. My job is secure; they'll believe what I tell them, not what you write on that form or say to Ed."

For the first time, Fran sees Marilyn is an insecure, desperate woman. The facade of being in charge and having it all together has fallen off like a coat. Seeing this, Fran can feel nothing but pity for Marilyn. "Lord," she says to Jesus, "look at her. She's pitiful."

"Yes, Fran, you're looking through my eyes now and you see Marilyn to be what she is: A very insecure and frightened woman," Jesus says to Fran.

And now Fran knows what she should do. She turns to Marilyn, and says, "You know, Marilyn, maybe it's not really necessary for me to talk to Ed at this time. If you'll just tell me exactly what I have to do to improve my performance, and put that in writing for me, I'll do everything I can honestly do to improve. I believe another appraisal will be due in three months, and hopefully by then you will be able to change it. That could solve the whole issue, couldn't it?"

Fran turns to Jesus with a funny look. "I didn't intend to say that, Lord. Where did that come from?"

Jesus smiles at her. "From me. You prayed that your words would be pleasing to me, so I put them in your mind. That's an answer to prayer, Fran."

Fran is amazed, and she looks at Marilyn, who has quietly sat down and seems much calmer, almost sheepish. "Fran," she says, "I, uh, I'm sure, uh... Well, yeah, I think that's a possibility. You could possibly pull your appraisal up in three months. Do you still want to talk to Ed?" Marilyn asks.

"No," Fran replies, "as long as I have in writing exactly what I'm supposed to do, I'm willing to give it a three-month trial before talking to Ed."

Fran could have caused Marilyn a lot of trouble; instead, she chooses to show mercy. And all because Jesus was there with her, guiding her every word.

Day Five

If you had a person who caused you lots of grief, would you pass up an opportunity to get back at that person? Our friend, Fran, could have gotten her boss in trouble, but because Jesus was beside her, giving her love and pity for Marilyn, she has chosen to back off and let Marilyn off the hook.

Marilyn can't cover up her obvious relief as she realizes Fran won't insist on her right to escalate this issue. Marilyn realizes Fran has saved her a lot of potential trouble.

"Okay," Marilyn says, "I'll get off a memo to you confirming what we've agreed to. And this will all be between us. If you can improve your rating, then no one has to know about the whole thing—right?"

"Sure, Marilyn," Fran replies, and she gets up to leave. Marilyn closes the door behind her, and Fran has a strong feeling Marilyn may have ended up in tears.

"Jesus, if I'd been on my own, I would have kept pushing her and insisted on talking with Ed. But now I see that by backing off, I've shown Marilyn mercy—the way you always show mercy to me—and her whole attitude changed toward me—right in front of my eyes."

"Well, Fran," Jesus replies, "that's why I guided you to back off. You had every right to escalate this matter to a higher level, and Marilyn's lie would have been exposed. But you chose to show mercy to Marilyn. You were able to see her through my eyes, and so instead of getting angry and demanding your rights, you gave them up. Marilyn just read I Corinthians 13."

"She did?" Fran replies. "I didn't see a Bible on her desk? I don't think she's ever read the Bible, Lord."

"No, not in the Bible, she read it in you, Fran. You are the Living Edition of God's Word. Now, you can wait and see what will happen because you chose to be merciful." Jesus says the words Fran longs to hear: "Well done, good and faithful servant."

Tears come to Fran's eyes. Just to know the Lord is pleased with her is all she needs to know. "You know, Lord," Fran says, "even if I'd been fired on the spot, I could make it just hearing you say those words to me. I guess I don't really need Marilyn's good appraisal; all I need is yours."

"If you'll keep that clearly focused in your mind, Fran, you'll always do the right thing," Jesus says.

Fran has had another incredible lesson from Jesus on how to deal with difficult situations. And in the process, she's been a witness to a woman who desperately needs to know Jesus. Who knows what will come from all this.