

Joseph - Doing What Is Right...

Even When Plans Are Destroyed

NOTE to the instructor: A major focus should be on Joseph's character traits. These would include: 1) a desire to do what is right, and 2) a willingness to trust and obey God, regardless of the consequences.

A LOOK AT THE BIBLE (three basic issues in Matthew 1:18-25):

- 1a. What were Joseph's plans? How were they destroyed? (Note: At this time, he did not know that the Holy Spirit was involved.) [Verse 18]
- 1b. How *could* he have responded? How *did* he respond? (Focus on values, attitude and character.) [Verse 19]

2. Once Joseph knew that the Holy Spirit had caused this to happen, how did he respond? Consider this: If he chose to obey God, people would misunderstand. They would probably think that he - a supposedly righteous man - had either: 1) himself committed sexual immorality, or else 2) chosen to marry a woman who did... and this would not have been considered a good thing. [Verses 20, 24-25]

- 3a. God made some promises to Joseph. What were they? [Verse 21]
- 3b. It is believed by many that Joseph had died by the time Jesus had begun his ministry. (For example, he is never mentioned, even though Mary is mentioned several times.) If this is correct, then Joseph didn't live to see some of these promises fulfilled. Does this mean that God failed? Did Joseph have any reason to *not* trust that God would eventually keep his promise?

APPLICATION:

1. Have your plans ever been suddenly destroyed by circumstances beyond your control? How did you respond? What could you learn from Joseph's example?
2. Have you ever been in a situation in which you knew what you should do (God's will), and you were afraid of how people might respond? What could you learn from Joseph's example?
3. [The following question assumes that Joseph had died by the time of Jesus' ministry and that he didn't live to see the promises of verse 21 fulfilled.] Have you ever been in a situation in which it seemed that God's promises to you weren't being fulfilled? What could you learn from Joseph's example? [Example - Does God ever fail? Is there ever a circumstance in which God *can't* be trusted?]

SHARE WITH THE REST OF US:

Pick one aspect of this lesson and show the rest of us what you have learned. Your goal is to show us how we can apply these truths to our lives. Do whatever you wish, to accomplish this.

You may wish to tell us about something you have personally experienced. You may wish to illustrate with other people's experiences, or give a typical example. You may use a skit, a short talk, question and answer, visual aids, etc.

Mary - Accepting God's Will...

Even When it Could Be Frightening and People Might Misunderstand

NOTE to the instructor: A major focus should be on Mary's character traits. These would include: 1) a willingness to accept God-given opportunity, and 2) a willingness to trust and obey God, regardless of the consequences.

A LOOK AT THE BIBLE (three basic issues in Luke 1:26-38):

- 1a. What were Mary's plans? [Verse 27] What opportunity did she suddenly face, which could totally change her future? [Verses 26-31]
- 1b. How *could* she have responded? How *did* she respond? (Focus on values, attitude and character.) [Verse 38]

- 2a. Initially, she did not know that the Holy Spirit was going to be involved. All Mary knew was that she was going to have a son who would become a king. [Verses 32 - 33] In verse 34, she asks an obvious question... "How?"
- 2b. There are two ways to ask such a question: 1) with an attitude of distrust and unbelief; and 2) with an attitude of trust and a desire to clearly understand God's will. How would you describe Mary's attitude? Why?

- 3a. Mary receives the answer in vs. 35-37. The key verse is probably v. 37: "Nothing is impossible with God." What does this mean? [This phrase "nothing is impossible with God" is in a *context* - the context of God enabling a person to do *his* will. Actually, there *are* some things that are impossible for God to do! For instance, he cannot lie - Hebrews 6:18.]
- 3b. How might people misunderstand, if Mary accepts this opportunity God has given her? How does that influence her final decision? [Verse 38] (Answer - it *doesn't* influence her decision.)

APPLICATION:

1. Have you ever been faced with unexpected opportunities to do something? How about something that was wonderful but frightening, and which might be misunderstood by others? What could you learn from Mary's example? In what way could you apply the statement, "Nothing is impossible with God" to *your* situation? (Remember that this statement was given within the context of being empowered to do God's will.)

- 2a. Have you ever had questions you wanted to ask God? What was your attitude, when you had those questions? What could you learn from Mary's example? [We won't necessarily have an angel to give us an answer, but we have God's Word. God also uses circumstances in life to guide us.]
- 2b. [OPTIONAL] How would you respond if God *didn't* want you to know (at least for now) the answer to your question?

SHARE WITH THE REST OF US:

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You may wish to tell us about something you have personally experienced. You may wish to illustrate with other people's experiences, or give a typical example. You may use a skit, a short talk, question and answer, visual aids, etc.

Additional Comments about Mary's and Joseph's Situation and Their Trust in God

The issue is... "Trust and Obey."

JOSEPH: Trusting God when opportunities are suddenly lost - when doors are closed - and doing what is right. [Remember Romans 8:28.]

MARY: Trusting God when opportunities are suddenly gained - when doors are opened - and accepting his will. [Remember Matthew 6:33.]

For both Joseph and Mary, things would never be the same.

Imagine if either of them had said "No" to what lay ahead for them!

Obviously, this wouldn't have happened, since both already had an attitude of trust and obedience *before* this happened. That's why they could respond properly when it *did* happen.

The time to begin trusting God is *now*, before the crisis occurs. If you wait until the crisis, it will be much more difficult for you to respond the right way. And if you *willfully* choose to *not* trust him *now*, he might not give you an opportunity *later*.

About Following their examples...

Their situation was more extreme than ours ever will be. If they could find God trustworthy in *their* situation, then we have no legitimate reason to not also trust God in *our* situations.