

Joke: The boss was busy and he told his secretary to tell any visitor that came by that he didn't want to be disturbed. If they persisted with some story about how important it was, she should tell them "That's what they all say."

Later that day, the boss' wife stopped by to visit her husband. The secretary told her that he didn't want to be disturbed. The wife said, "That doesn't apply to me, I'm his wife." So obediently, the secretary said, "Yeah, that's what they all say."

Joseph - The Gift of Obedience

Luke 2:1–5 (NIV): In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. 2 (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) 3 And everyone went to their own town to register. 4 So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. 5 He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.

That is the beginning of the Christmas story we all love to hear. You can almost see Joseph walking next to the donkey carrying a very pregnant Mary. It is cinematic. It is romantic. Everyone is just happy to be serving the Lord. But have you ever thought about what it was like leading up to this journey?

(SHOW JOSEPH VIDEO)

Well, now we know a few things.

The donkey had a name. . . Delilah! And. . . she had some attitude, too! And one more thing we learned is that Joseph was a donkey whisperer!

While the Skit Guys took some poetic license there, it is pretty interesting to stop and think about what it must have been like for Joseph leading up to that first Christmas journey.

There had to be more questions than there were answers. He has to be concerned about how things would go and what people would think. Unlike so many of the other people mentioned during this time, Joseph only had a dream to go on.

Zechariah couldn't speak. So he knew God was up to something.
Mary was pregnant. She could not deny God was at work.
The shepherds would have a gaggle of angels appear.
And the Magi had a divine star that was literally moving in the sky.

But Joseph had a dream. That's it. He had to trust that what he was told during his sleep was actually from God and not because he had some bad pizza before he went to bed.

That was faith!

It is amazing that this quiet man, who we don't really know much about, may have been the most faith-filled person in the Christmas story. He chose to obey God because of a dream and, in doing so, set an example for us to follow. Let me share a few of those lessons today.

First, Joseph showed us how to: Obey God In Difficult Times

Obeing God is challenging because let's be honest, most of us just want to do what we want to do, however. ..the challenge is intensified when you throw in difficulties.

Here's a difficulty. . .your Fiancé, whom you have not slept with, is pregnant.

Here's a difficulty. . .she is telling you that it is God.

And well Joseph has a plan. . .avoid the difficult times.

In the gospel of Matthew we read this:

Matthew 1:18–19 (NIV): This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit.
19 Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

So, Joseph has a plan. It is a benevolent plan. He is going to step away quietly so Mary is not exposed. He is not running away. He is planning to do a righteous thing here. There is only one problem with his plan. . .it is not God's plan.

Isaiah 55:8 (NIV): 8 “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the Lord.

And in Jeremiah we read:

Jeremiah 29:11 (NLT): For I know the plans I have for you,” says the Lord. “They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.

Back to our story we read this again from Matthews gospel:

Matthew 1:20–25 (NIV): But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” 22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 23 “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”). 24 When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. 25 But he did not

consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

During the most difficult time of Joseph's life, God called him to be obedient to make sure God's Word, the promises foretold so many years ago were fulfilled.

But honestly, who would have blamed him if he would have followed his original plan? The truth is, no one would have known Joseph even had a dream. No one would have blamed him.

As someone once said, "things are not always as they appear."

Obedience is not about who is watching or who knows what. Obedience is about trusting God's plan even when it seems impossible and doesn't make sense. Joseph is obedient because he is a righteous man who trusts God's plan is the best plan.

Obedience to God is tough when life is good, much less when life is difficult.

That baby that Mary was carrying would grow up to say these words:

John 16:33 (NIV): 33 "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

Difficult times are going to come in this world. . .Jesus said that. But He also tells us that He has overcome the world!

What a promise! God is not asking us to hop on our donkey and take a pregnant wife on a journey. He's asking us to trust, that no matter how difficult life gets, trust because He has overcome the world.

He's got this.

And really, He's got us.

Not only that, but that baby would be the Prince of Peace—the one who would calm the storms of our lives and see us through the difficulties that we have come our way.

The truth of the matter is that we experience peace when we obey God in the midst of the difficulties of life. I'm not saying that the difficulty is peaceful, it's not, but God is able to bring peace into the difficulties if we will just learn to trust Him.

The second thing that Joseph showed us how to is: Obey God In Distant Places

Joseph is going to have three dream visits from the angel. The first comes when he is instructed to take Mary as his wife even though she is pregnant. The Second comes after the Magi make their visit to see the Christ child:

Matthew 2:13–14 (NIV): When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up,” he said, “take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.” 14 So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt,

Joseph could have had no idea that when he agreed to take Mary as his wife, his life would never be the same. Surely, he just wanted to go back home and live his life. However, it was not safe at home. King Herod was killing baby boys in an attempt to destroy the coming Messiah. So, the Angel in Joseph's second dream says, “Take the family to Egypt.”

And what you need to understand is that Egypt is not a “safe place”. . .it is a safer place. This is a foreign land. Joseph, Mary, and Jesus are refugees. Seeking asylum from a tyrannical ruler. They are far away from family and

friends. They have each other, and more importantly they have God. That's pretty much it. And they will stay there for two to three years.

Have you ever been there? Not Egypt but have you ever found yourself there, in a distant place? It could be physically distant from anyone you know. It could be emotionally or socially distant. Either way, feeling far away can be difficult.

The real challenge of distant places is when we feel distant from God.

When by choices or circumstances, it seems God is not here with us. Christmas is all about God coming to be with us, and yet sometimes we still feel distant from Him.

The truth is, we are never really distant from God. . .it is just a feeling you may be having in the difficult season. Again, the baby Jesus would grow up and say this to His followers in Matthew 28 and in the second part of verse 20:

Matthew 28:20 (NLT): . . .And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Remember what the angel said to Joseph in his first dream, "they will call him Immanuel (which means - God with us)". Christmas is the story of God coming to be with us. We may feel distant from Him, but we are not. He showed up and said He's going to be with us to the "very end of the age."

During this holiday season, if you feel distant from family, distant from friends, hold tight to the promise of a Savior who is always just a prayer away.

Last thing Joseph shows us is how to: Obey God In Daily Life

The final dream we have of Joseph's is a calling back to Jerusalem. Back "home" if you will:

Matthew 2:19–23 (NIV): After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt 20 and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child’s life are dead.” 21 So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. 22 But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, 23 and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets, that he would be called a Nazarene.

God uses life’s circumstances and challenges to work in us to accomplish His plans. Isaiah 11:1 said the the Messiah would be a Nazarene”. God was using Archelaus and working through Joseph to make this come true.

Archelaus was a tyrant even worse than his father, King Herod. Archelaus began his reign by having 3,000 prominent citizens killed. His reputation would cause any good father. . .or stepfather to think twice about taking a child Messiah there. So, instead of heading home, Joseph takes his family to reside in Nazareth.

It is the day-to-day obedience in our lives that builds up the bedrock of being a disciple of Christ. In his most famous sermon, Jesus would say:

Matthew 7:24–25 (NIV): 24 “Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock

Hearing the Word of God is good, no doubt. But obeying it or “putting it into practice” is the key to dealing with the storms of life. This is a challenge for most of us. we just don’t think about it on a daily basis. We get sidetracked by life and work and family and finances and selfishness and anything else that seems more pressing than choosing to obey.

James 1:19–25 (NLT): Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry. 20 Human anger does not produce the righteousness God desires. 21 So get rid of all the filth and evil in your lives, and humbly accept the word God has planted in your hearts, for it has the power to save your souls. 22 But don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves. 23 For if you listen to the word and don't obey, it is like glancing at your face in a mirror. 24 You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like. 25 But if you look carefully into the perfect law that sets you free, and if you do what it says and don't forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it.

When you were a kid, did you ever make a coupon book for your mom or dad as a Christmas or birthday gift? I know I did. You would take the time to write out the things you would do for them. Maybe it would say “unload the dishwasher,” or “clean out the litter box,” or “take out the trash,” or “make dinner”. Either way, most...if not all...of those coupons were really just things that a good kid would do in obedience to their parents. But it seemed like a nice gift to tell Mom or Dad that you were willing to do these things.

What if this Christmas, you make a coupon book for God? Take the time to sit down and write out the different ways you are going to seek to be more obedient to Him. It may feel silly, but what a great way to make a fresh commitment to Him and to remind yourself of what obedience to God looks like.

This mystery man named Joseph. This righteous man who cared for Mary and helped raise the Messiah seemed to show us what simple obedience looks like. God said, “go,” and Joe said okay. He didn't have to be a great religious person. He didn't have to know how everything was going to work out. He didn't have to be seen and respected by others. To be honest, his story stops in Matthew chapter 2. We don't even know what became of Joseph. We just know he was obedient. Oh, that the same thing would be said of us.

Joseph seems to epitomize what the Apostle Paul said in Romans 12:1:

Romans 12:1 (MSG): So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him.