

CORE COMPETENCIES

Core Beliefs

- Trinity
- Salvation by Grace
- Authority of Bible
- Personal God
- Identity in Christ
- Church
- Humanity
- Compassion
- Eternity
- Stewardship

Core Practices

- Worship
- Prayer
- Bible Study
- Single-Mindedness
- Biblical Community
- Spiritual Gifts
- Giving Away My Time
- Giving Away My Money
- Giving Away My Faith
- Giving Away My Life

Core Virtues

- Love

"I show sacrificial and unconditional love for others."

- Joy
- Peace
- Patience
- Kindness/Goodness
- Faithfulness
- Gentleness
- Self-Control
- Hope
- Humility

One of my favorite people in the Christmas drama has got to be Joseph. He's also one of the more easily overlooked. Joseph isn't flashy, doesn't say anything grand or get a lot of press. In fact, after Jesus' twelfth birthday, he's never again mentioned in Scripture. Yet, his responsiveness and obedience to God is pivotal in Jesus' birth, the fulfillment of multiple prophecies, and even Jesus' very survival as an infant. Joseph obeys. He listens to God's instruction and then does what he is told. But as you look intently at this godly man this week, try to put yourself in his shoes (or sandals). Ask yourself what it would have been like to be him. What would he have been thinking and feeling? This person, as amazing as his actions were, was also a regular, ordinary person. A carpenter. Investigate Joseph this week, and let God speak to you through his life.

In His Name,

Richard Gotthardt, Pastor of Spiritual Formation

Christmas Series: Week 3

Joseph was in intense pain. His fiancée Mary was pregnant, but not by him. What could he do now? How would he ever be able to trust her? How would he ever be able to hold his head high in the community again? Of course, everyone would think this was his child. His head was spinning from the implications of Mary's news.

What would he do? He could publicly expose her for what she was, but he didn't want to hurt her like that. No, instead he would divorce her quietly and move on with his life. The decision was made. He would tell her in the morning.

That night as he slept fitfully, an angel came to him in a dream to assure him, "This child has been conceived in Mary by the work of the Holy Spirit." When Joseph awoke, he believed what the angel had said and obediently took Mary to be his wife.

Joseph's visitation with an angel began a season in his life marked by the joy of obedience and yet the difficulty of trusting God and moving forward in obedience even when others don't understand. This week we will focus on Joseph's encounter with an angel and his response to the news of Mary's pregnancy. As we focus on different aspects of this account, ask the Holy Spirit to teach you about God, His purposes and our response to Him.

Day 1: "Devastating" News

Joseph was betrothed to Mary. Imagine his anticipation and excitement in their upcoming marriage. After Mary had learned of her pregnancy from the angel Gabriel, she left and stayed with her cousin Elizabeth for three months (Luke 1:39-56). Upon her return, Joseph learns of her pregnancy.

Read Matthew 1:18-25. Try to imagine what it would have been like for Joseph to learn this "devastating" news.

What do you think might have been some of Joseph's thoughts and emotions as he learns of the news of Mary's pregnancy?

Think of a time when you have received surprising or devastating news that deeply affected your expectations for your life. What were some of your thoughts and emotions?

Day 2: Joseph

Just as Mary was an ordinary woman chosen by God, Joseph was an ordinary man chosen by God to walk a difficult road. As you reread Matthew 1:18-25, focus on what this passage tells us about Joseph's life and character.

Read Matthew 1:18-25.

In the space below, note all of the descriptions given about Joseph in this passage.

In his acceptance of Mary as his wife, Joseph follows God down a difficult road of obedience marked with shame and probably ridicule. His trust in God's purposes enables him to persevere in obedience.

Describe a time you have endured shame or ridicule out of obedience to God?

How did this persevering obedience strengthen your trust in God?

Spend some time thanking God for strengthening and helping you persevere in obedience to Him.

Day 3: God

Today we will focus on God's role in this passage. As you start out today, pray and ask the Holy Spirit to show you how God was at work in this passage.

Read Matthew 1:18-25

In the space below, write down all of the ways that you saw God at work in this passage.

What "proof" does the angel offer Joseph to prove the validity of his message?

God shows himself through the birth of Jesus and Old Testament prophecy to be a God that will come through. He was faithful in bringing about His deliverance of His people.

Think about some of these promises from the New Testament:

"When you were dead in your sins...God made you alive in Christ. He forgave us all our sins." Colossians 2:13

"But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. In keeping with His promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness." 2 Peter 3:10 & 13

What promises of God have been most important to you in difficult times in the past?

What promises of God do you need to hold onto right now?

Think on these promises and ask God to deepen your belief that He will come through on His promises.

Day 4: Joseph's Response

Today we will focus in on Joseph's response to God. Reread Matthew 1:18-25, noting how Joseph responded to the news that his future wife was pregnant.

Describe Joseph's initial response to Mary's news (vs. 19).

What is Joseph's response after waking from his dream?

What would have made it difficult for him to respond in obedience?

Joseph's encounter with the angel differs from Mary and Zechariah in that the angel comes in a dream. Joseph never actually speaks with the angel and yet, he immediately responds in obedience. The message of the angel was consistent with the prophecy that had been given about Jesus. Joseph's knowledge of this prophecy probably strengthened his ability to trust and act in obedience.

How are you grounding yourself in knowledge of God's Word so that you can respond in obedience to His call?

Day 5: Invitation to Perseverance

As you reread Matthew 1:18-25 today, focus on your own heart and your response to His calling to persevering obedience.

Reread Matthew 1:18-25.

Describe an area of your life in which obedience to God might lead to feeling shamed, misunderstood, or even ridiculed by others. Be specific.

How are you being obedient or disobedient in this area?

Are there excuses you are using to keep you from being obedient to God in this area of your life?

What beliefs about God are revealed by your action/inaction in this area?

What truths about God's character can you focus on to strengthen you and help you persevere?

What steps of obedience are necessary for you to take in this area?

When Zechariah, Mary and Joseph were visited by angels, all three of them felt fear. Each time the angel responded saying, "Do not be afraid." Spend some time praying asking God to help you not to fear as you face opportunities to follow Him even in the face of shame or ridicule. Let Him speak these words to you, even now: "_____, you don't need to be afraid."