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GROWING in CHRIST



40
Days
to
Deeper
Faith

ARNIE COLE &
MICHAEL ROSS

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JESUS IS “GOD WITH US”

DAY 1:

A RIGHTEOUS MAN

“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. 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.”

—Matthew 1:20–21

→ SEE HIM

Joseph of Nazareth—Redefining Honor

He isn't rich by any means, yet life is good for Joseph. He enjoys working with his hands—building, creating, shaping, pounding. His trade as a carpenter keeps him busy, and the future looks bright for this upstanding Nazarene. A smile stretches across his face as he smooths the rough surface of a wooden door he has made. Once put into place on his neighbor's house, the oak barrier will be sturdy and reliable for years to come—much like Joseph himself.

Sturdy and reliable—a righteous man who keeps the law diligently. This is the kind of person Joseph was raised to be. After all, his family can trace their ancestry back to King David.

But Joseph has a new reason to live up to his family's proud heritage. He has given his heart to a beautiful young lady named Mary. (A big wedding ceremony is in the works.) Joseph imagines the countless memories Mary and he will share as husband and wife: hearty meals by a

crackling fire, endless talks late into the night, the laughter of children—lots of children. Joseph dreams of filling his home with sons and daughters!

Then one day, his dreams are crushed.

“Mary. Oh my beautiful Mary. What’s wrong? You seem different somehow. Happy, almost glowing—yet frightened as well.”

His bride-to-be blinks away a tear and lowers her head, placing Joseph’s hand on her abdomen. Mary looks up again and meets his shocked expression with an uneasy nod.

Yes. There is a baby in Mary’s womb! But how—why?

Joseph pulls his hand back and quietly leaves. Distraught, he walks aimlessly through the village. He eventually comes to his house and steps inside. Joseph latches the door behind him, curls up on the floor, and begins to weep.

How could this happen? How could she betray me this way? There’s only one thing to do: release her from marriage. She must wed the father of the child.

Strangely, though, Joseph feels no rage, only a great disappointment that settles like a permanent knot in his chest, weighing him down and making it hard to breathe. How could his judgment be so flawed, so far from the mark? He had looked forward to marrying the young woman whose character and temperament had made her seem all the more likable.¹

Joseph wipes the tears from his eyes and drifts off to sleep. Suddenly, the voice of an angel calls to him in a dream.

“Joseph, son of David,” the angel says, “you should not fear to take Mary home as your wife, because the infant conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and when she does you must call his name Jesus, since he will save his people from their sins. God is fulfilling prophecies, Joseph!

“Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his

1. Ann Spangler and Robert Wolgemuth, *Men of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 318–19.

name shall be called Emmanuel.'

“Emmanuel,” the angel says. “Emmanuel, God with us.”²

Then Joseph wakes up and does exactly what God’s angel commanded in the dream. He trusts the Lord, even if it defies common sense, even if it threatens all of his well-laid plans and hopes and dreams, even if it means ridicule and shame and being misunderstood by others. He knows that this is one special child growing inside Mary.

So he takes his bride home as his wife, but he does not consummate the marriage until she has the baby. Then he names the child Jesus.

→ HEAR HIM

Explore the Word: Matthew 1:18–25

Mary’s pregnancy put Joseph in a desperate position: How could he uphold his integrity and reputation when his fiancé had become pregnant?

He planned to divorce her quietly, which in that culture would have been gracious, sparing her and her family from terrible disgrace. From all Joseph knew at that point, Mary had committed adultery, and according to the law, the penalty was death for her and dishonor for her family (see Deuteronomy 22:13–21). To understand how offensive Mary’s pregnancy was, we have to examine ancient Jewish culture.

The Jews had a special custom for couples getting married. Before they could marry, the couple would enter an engagement period called a “betrothal,” which would normally last about one year. After the waiting period, the couple married and only then joined together in sexual union.

But this betrothal differed significantly from modern engagements. Once a man and woman were betrothed, everyone considered them as good as married. Although

2. Walter Wangerin Jr., *The Book of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 588.

they reserved sex for marriage (after the betrothal period), people called them husband and wife. Only death or divorce could dissolve the bond. They couldn't get "cold feet" or date around to find a better mate: they had essentially gotten married.

One of the purposes was to see whether the couple would remain faithful to each other. If the woman got pregnant by another man, thus breaking her vow to her husband, he could legally divorce her for her offense and make a public mockery of her for her sin.

Joseph discovered Mary's pregnancy. What would he do? His response shows his true character:

Joseph listened to God. He heard what God planned to do through Mary and the Child she bore. Yet to follow the instructions given, Joseph had to do more than just listen.

Joseph believed God. He could have laughed at God or blamed his strange vision on the previous night's matzo balls. But he believed. He didn't have to take Mary as his wife. He didn't have to call the boy's name Jesus. But he had heard the message and believed it as true. How do we know he believed?

Joseph obeyed God. He did what God told him to do. The scriptures purposely use the same language to describe both what God commanded and what Joseph did. What did God tell him to do? He said two things: "take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus" (Matthew 1:20–21). And what did Joseph do? When he arose from his sleep—he didn't put it off for weeks, but acted immediately—he "took Mary home as his wife," and when the Son was born, "he gave him the name Jesus" (Matthew 1:24–25).

The Bible tells us something else about Joseph's righteous character: He "kept [Mary] a virgin until she gave birth to a Son" (Matthew 1:25 NASB). Imagine getting married and waiting a few months before having sex with your wife! But Joseph placed preserving God's ways above fulfilling his own fleshly desires. There would be no question

about the source of this child—the Holy Spirit.

Joseph displayed his righteousness through listening, believing, and obeying God. Perhaps he experienced gossip from some, ostracism from others, yet he did not compromise his integrity. His example set the standard for all who strive to be people of honor. Authors Ann Spangler and Robert Wolgemuth write this in their book, *Men of the Bible*: “During the formative years of the Messiah’s childhood, Joseph lived a consistent and exemplary life of faithfulness and obedience to God. Imagine how important it was that Jesus grew up with a father whose character was worthy of emulating.”³

Do you want to be an honorable man or woman who has a reputation for godliness? Set your eyes on the character of Joseph, one of the true unsung heroes of the Bible.⁴

→ KNOW HIM

• **Listen when God speaks—and trust His Word.** Despite what some people say, the Bible is more relevant than ever. It teaches us how to live in peace with others, stay out of debt, and persevere under pressure. Most importantly, Scripture teaches us how to grow closer to God. But for it to affect us, we have to listen to God through His Word and believe what He tells us.

** Work It Out: It’s a good idea to get in the habit of asking ourselves questions daily: What is God saying to me today? What has God already told me that I know I need to obey? Pray without ceasing? Keep my mind and my body pure? Add to this list. Share some other questions that we should ask ourselves daily.*

• **Obey God—even when nobody’s looking.** The Lord keeps us in His sight, and He looks favorably on those who

3. Spangler and Wolgemuth, *Men of the Bible*, 323.

4. A portion of this devotional lesson was adapted from David Barshinger, “Father of Jesus,” *Breakaway* (December 2004), 27–28.

walk with integrity. If we want genuine faith, we need to follow Joseph's example and put faith into action—obeying the Lord in public, as well as when we're alone. So, if the Lord tells you something through His Word, such as, "flee the evil desires of youth" (2 Timothy 2:22), do you claim to obey in public, then make excuses in private? We often struggle to obey God, but active obedience confirms true faith.

* **Work It Out:** *Which statement best describes your faith: (1) A solid rock on the shore, battered by the elements, but stable in Christ. (2) A wave of the sea, blown and tossed by doubt. (Please explain your answer.) Read James 1:2-27. Based on this passage, name some steps everyone can take in order to build a stronger, more authentic faith.*

• **Pray:** "Lord, help me to be a person of honor like Joseph." Ask God to enable you to honor Him with your words, your actions, your life.

→ NOTES FOR GROWTH

A Key Point I Learned Today:

How I Want to Grow:

My Prayer List:
