The "Exciting" SHBC

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Dr. Howard E. Anderson, Sr. - Founding & Senior Pastor



Week 3: Believe in the Unexpected

Scripture: Matthew 1:18-25 | Background: Proverbs 3:5-6

[20] But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. [21] And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."

Matthew 1:20-21

Most of us have plans. We plan where we're going to live. We plan what we're going to do for a career. We plan when we're going to have children. We plan our vacations. We plan our finances. Planning isn't a bad thing. There's nothing wrong with having goals or dreams or expectations for your life. But we must be careful that our plans don't become promises. Why? Because our lives are not our own. God has the ultimate plan for our lives. Just ask Jeremiah in the 29th chapter that bears his name. God says, "*I know the plans that I have for you.*" This is where we are and this is where Joseph's story begins. Matthew tells us that Joseph and Mary were engaged. And in their culture, engagement was much more serious than what we think of as engagement today. It was a legally binding commitment. They were not simply dating and planning a wedding. They were already committed to one another, even though they had not yet come together as husband and wife. Joseph had every reason to believe he knew what the next chapter of his life was going to look like. Until Mary came to him with news that changed everything. And suddenly, we're forced to ask: "What do I do when God's plan doesn't look like my plan?"

Think: God's plan may be different from my plan, but I can trust Him.

Feel: Peace when life doesn't go according to my plan.

Do: Trust God with one unexpected circumstance instead of trying to control the outcome.

Read Matthew 1:18-19

After Joseph discovered that Mary was pregnant, he had a plan. He had to. Think about what that meant for Joseph. This wasn't a minor inconvenience. This wasn't, "Well, I guess we'll have to move the wedding back a few weeks." This changed everything. The future Joseph had pictured suddenly looked nothing like the future he had planned.

POINT #1: SOMETIMES GOD INTERRUPTS OUR PLANS

In light of this revelation, Joseph developed a plan. Matthew says Joseph was a righteous man. He wasn't looking for revenge. He wasn't trying to embarrass Mary. He was trying to do what he thought was right. So, he decided to quietly divorce her. Joseph had a plan for how to move forward, but God interrupted. Maybe this all feels familiar. You had a plan. You thought you knew what this season was going to look like. You thought the relationship was going to work out. You thought the job was going to last. You thought the diagnosis would be different. You thought this Christmas would feel different. And then something happened that you didn't plan for. And here's what makes those interruptions so difficult: We don't always know why things work out the way they do.

It's easy to trust God when God's plan looks like your plan. But what happens when God's plan takes you somewhere you never intended to go? That's the question Joseph had to answer. And that's the question every one of us eventually must answer, can I trust God when I don't understand God?



Discussion Question: How can viewing interruptions as opportunities for growth lead to a more positive mindset?

Read Proverbs 3:5-6; Matthew 1:20-21

God doesn't give Joseph the whole picture. He gives him the next step. God rarely gives us the whole map. He gives us just enough for us to obey. You don't have to understand the plan to trust the Planner. We don't lean on our understanding… we lean on God's wisdom. Sometimes God's interruption is God's invitation. An invitation to trust Him more deeply. An invitation to surrender what we thought our life had to look like.

POINT #2 – TRUST GOD WHEN YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND

That's what makes Joseph's story so powerful. Joseph didn't get an explanation. He got instructions. God didn't sit Joseph down and give him the entire plan. He didn't explain how Mary would become the mother of the Messiah by the Holy Spirit. God simply told Joseph what to do next.

Oh, how we wished God would give us the answers to the test while we are the middle of navigating an unplanned dilemma. Faith does not behave in such a manner. By faith God was saying to Joseph, "I need you to see the impossible; the evidence of that which cannot be seen with the natural eye."

Joseph thought he was losing the life he wanted. God was giving him a role in the life divinely designed for Joseph. And sometimes that's what faith looks like. Not knowing how it's going to work out. Sometimes God wants us to lean into the headwinds of what He's doing in our lives. The chorus of an old hymn of the church makes this point even clearer. Composer John Stallings wrote the song Learning to Lean. The lyrics focus on learning to depend on Jesus in times of need, portraying Jesus as a reliable friend and guide. The chorus goes *"Learning to lean, learning to lean, I'm learning to lean on Jesus. Finding more power than I've ever seen. I'm learning to lean on Jesus."*

Matthew tells us that Joseph woke up and did exactly what Gabriel commanded him to do. He took Mary as his wife. He didn't wait until everything made sense. He didn't wait until he knew how the story was going to end. He didn't ask for another sign. He simply obeyed. Joseph's faith wasn't just something he believed in his head. His faith changed what he did next.

Discussion Primer: Tell of a time when you had to lean into what God was doing in your life. How comfortable were you that you were going in the right direction?

POINT #3 – OBEDIENCE IS TRUST IN ACTION

Think about the risk Joseph took. He knew what people would assume. He knew there would be questions. He knew there would be whispers. He knew this wasn't going to be the life he had originally imagined. But Joseph decided that following God was more important than protecting his plan. Joseph didn't just hear what God said. He did what God said. And notice something else about Joseph's obedience. Matthew says Joseph "did not have sexual relations with her until her son was born." In other words, Joseph was willing to surrender even more of his own plans. He wasn't just willing to take Mary as his wife. He was willing

to let go of what he thought his marriage was supposed to look like because God had given him a different assignment.

Joseph's obedience cost him something. And sometimes we forget that trusting God can be costly. Sometimes trusting God means forgiving someone when you don't feel like forgiving them. Sometimes it means staying faithful when walking away would be easier. The book of Proverbs has a lot to say about this

IMPLICATIONS & ACTIONS

In Proverbs 3:5-6, the passage doesn't tell us to understand everything God is doing. It says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding." In other words, there will be moments when what God is doing doesn't make sense to you. Sometimes we think faith means having an explanation. But Proverbs says the opposite. You don't have to understand everything to trust God.

Here is the incredible part of the Christmas story, Joseph's unexpected interruption wasn't the end of the story. It was the beginning of the miracle. The thing Joseph couldn't understand was the very thing God was going to use to bring salvation to the world. So maybe today, instead of asking, "God, why isn't this going according to my plan?" We need to start asking, "God, what are You inviting me to trust You with?" What if the interruption is an invitation? Because we know something Joseph didn't know yet. We know how the story ends.

