

A Christmas Biography

Joseph: Compassionate and Faithful

2021.12.5



TALKING WALKING POINT

Leaders' Guide



A publication of DISCIPLE, the adult discipleship ministry of Triangle Community Church.

Talk together about the glory of God's kingdom. –Psalm 145:11
Love the Lord your God and **walk** in all his ways. –Joshua 22:5

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

- 1 What from Sunday's message interested you? ...made sense to you? ...confused you? ...intrigued you? ...upset you? ...encouraged you? ...and **why**?
- 2 Read Luke 1:26–38 and Matthew 1:18-25. What common elements do you find in these accounts?
- 3 Granted, angelic visits are rather compelling—and yet one could easily envision both of these events turning out quite differently had Mary and Joseph been of more worldly character, mindset, and values. What sort of preparation do you think it would take for you to respond as Mary and Joseph did?
- 4 Pastor Doug described Joseph's decision-making process as: [1] gather what facts you can, [2] ask God for wisdom, [3] consult your biblical grid, and then [4] make your decision. Review Luke 1:26–38 and Matthew 1:18-25, and try to identify those four elements in each account.
- 5 Think of a significant decision you made in the past year. Which of those elements made it into your decision-making process? Which ones were absent?
- 6 Read Proverbs 11:14 and 15:22. What additional element does God urge us to use in decision-making?
- 7 Tell about a decision you've made in which godly counsel proved pivotal in the outcome.
or
Tell about a decision which could have been vastly improved had you sought godly counsel.

God wants believers to have a firm commitment to truth and justice, while maintaining love and compassion.

8 Imagine a "bird's eye view" of a house: one side of the roof is "truth and justice", the other is "love and compassion". It's **almost impossible** to walk the ridgeline!



9 On which side of the roof do you **more naturally** walk? **Why** does that seem more correct to you?

10 Now, try to understand someone in the group who finds the **opposite** side more correct. What did you learn? How did it impact you?

Application-Challenge

- Resolve to be both compassionate and biblically faithful as you face life's challenges.
- Make obedience to God a higher goal than your own immediate, personal happiness.

1 Standard soft-ball discussion-starter—but take note of any strong reactions (to follow up on later).

- 2
- the list of characters (Mary, Joseph, Jesus, angel)
 - miraculous event
 - angelic visit
 - questions/consternation

etc.

3 Hear what group members have to say, but make sure you broaden the horizon—What would their parents have needed to be like? What religious instruction must they have had to react in this way? etc.

- 4
- [1] Both received unsolicited info from an angel. Mary followed up with questions.
- [2] Mary's questions, though directed to the angel, were (of course) requests for God's wisdom. Joseph "**planned** to send her away **secretly**" (v. 19). The option of resolving this secretly is outlined in the Old Testament—so Joseph clearly consulted the Scriptures (ie, God) on his options.
- [3] Both had humble, righteous orientations toward life's "curve balls"—Mary told the angel, "Behold—I'm God's bonds slave. Do what you want." (v. 38). Joseph "was a righteous" (ie, biblical; v. 19) and a kind man, and that's what informed his options and choices.
- [4] Both of them made decisions; neither one waffled back and forth.

5 You likely will need to "prime the pump", so be prepared with your own answer to this question. (But wait for others to think and answer. Check your watch—20 seconds feels like an eternity!)

6 The need for biblical counsel. Getting godly advice is the normal Christian life. Proceeding without godly counsel is the way of the fool! (Proverbs 12:15) Please put in a strong appeal here for group members to take advantage of God's generosity in giving them pastors, Community Group Leaders, and TCC's Biblical Counseling Ministry to help them both when they need to make important decisions (jobs, moves, etc.) and also when they feel "stuck" in the Christian life (stagnation, difficult relationships, etc.)

7 You likely will need to "prime the pump", so be prepared with your own answer to this question. (But wait for others to think and answer. Check your watch—20 seconds feels like an eternity!)

8 Read the content in this box...  and then...

9 ...ask these questions. Take note of which group members tend toward one side or the other.

10 Now, bearing in mind who tends toward which side, lead a discussion based on these questions. Seek for genuine listening, learning, and valuing points-of-view that do not come naturally.

- 11 } Point out the memory verses Pastor Doug asked us to memorize (see following page).
- 12 } Urge men in your group to study Genesis with other min in PointMan Bible Studies beginning January.

Sermon Summary (Key Text: Matthew 1:18-25)

God wants believers to have a firm commitment to truth and justice, but not at the expense of compassion. Today as we begin a new series of messages based on the Christmas story, we are going to study life where compassion and justice are joined together. I'm speaking of Joseph, Mary's husband. In order to fully appreciate Joseph's character, we need to know something about Jewish marriage customs. Jewish couples entered into a "betrothal period"—a waiting period in which the couple was considered man and wife, but did not immediately begin living together or consummate the marriage physically. If the bride was found to be pregnant during this betrothal period, she wasn't the pure virgin promised by her parents, and the marriage could be annulled. Mary and Joseph were in this waiting period when the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary and informed her that she would supernaturally conceive a child who would be the long promised Messiah, the Son of God (Luke 1:26–38). Apparently, without informing Joseph about this angelic conversation, Mary left to visit her cousin Elizabeth who herself was six months pregnant with the child whom we have come to know as John the Baptist. Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months before returning home (Luke 1:39-45, 56).

By the time she arrived back in Nazareth, Mary was beginning to show. In Jesus' day Nazareth was a small village of less than 500. Mary's pregnancy would have been difficult to hide and no doubt become fodder for community gossip. Imagine the conversation Mary and Joseph must have had as she attempted to explain her condition! No doubt, rumors begin to circulate—and Joseph was under suspicion. Joseph would have felt betrayed, hurt, shocked, confused, embarrassed and angry all at the same time. But despite the evidence, Mary insisted that she'd been faithful—and then she related a bizarre story about an angel, and a child conceived by the Holy Spirit. But Joseph, hurt as he was, was both compassionate and biblically faithful in the way he planned to deal with Mary (v. 19). And it is these traits I want to focus your attention on today.

I. Resolve to be both compassionate and biblically faithful. Joseph was a "righteous" man; he ordered his life according to God's revealed truth. It was inconceivable to Joseph to marry someone who was unfaithful. Plus, carrying another man's child. Plus—to take Mary as his wife would be a tacit admission that he himself was the father! He had only two options: (1) divorce Mary openly, shaming her publicly, and exposing her to the full rigor of the law (death; Deuteronomy 22:13-21), or he could (2) pursue a private divorce performed before two witnesses (Numbers 5:11-31). Although hurt, confused and probably angry, Joseph couldn't bear to expose his beloved Mary to the shame of a public divorce—yet he was committed to biblical truth, no matter the personal cost. But please note: Joseph was also compassionate; he had a big heart. (As does Jesus—see John 8:3-11.) When it came to morality, Jesus did not lower the bar. He didn't change the standards, but he was compassionate when the standards were broken. And Jesus' compassion towards us obligates us to demonstrate compassion toward others (Ephesians 4:32). Joseph was both righteous and compassionate in his planned dealings with Mary. In good conscience, he could not marry her, but he wanted to deal with her in a manner that would cause her the least amount of embarrassment, and would minimize the consequences to her. Joseph took the "facts" as he knew them, ran them through his biblical grid, and made a decision. We should too: [1] gather what facts we can, [2] ask God for wisdom, [3] consult our biblical grid, and then [4] make a decision. Joseph decided to divorce Mary privately, but God had other plans (v. 20-21)! Joseph's response reveals the depth of his commitment to God (v. 24-25). Not only did he hold compassion and a commitment to truth in proper balance, he also made obedience to God a higher goal than his own personal happiness.

II. Make obedience to God a higher goal than your personal happiness. Joseph's obedience was costly. Such a black mark on his character would damage his reputation resulting in social and financial repercussions. His obedience also required great self control (v. 25). Joseph set aside immediate gratification because he knew it was the right thing to do—and God blessed them for it. Most of us have no trouble following God when the benefits of living a biblical lifestyle are obvious, and the advantages are easily discerned. But how about when the advantages aren't so obvious? How about when doing the right thing hurts? As Christ's disciples, we are called to radical obedience. But obedience to God born out of love for him brings its own joy. A joy without the regret and guilt we often experience when we choose to go our own way (John 15:8-11). That is the kind of life I want. A life of joy without regret. It is a wonderful thing to have a clear conscience before God, knowing that you and God are walking in the same direction, that you are available for whatever assignment he might want to bring your way, even when you don't understand all that God is up to. Joseph was that kind of man!

Digging Deeper in Your Daily Quiet Time

"Five-Question Bible Study" (see page below) *is a simple way to study any passage.*
We can use it to learn how to be more compassionate and faithful...

Monday—Read Psalm 25. Mark the four occurrences of the word "ashamed" (v. 2,3,20). What do you learn?

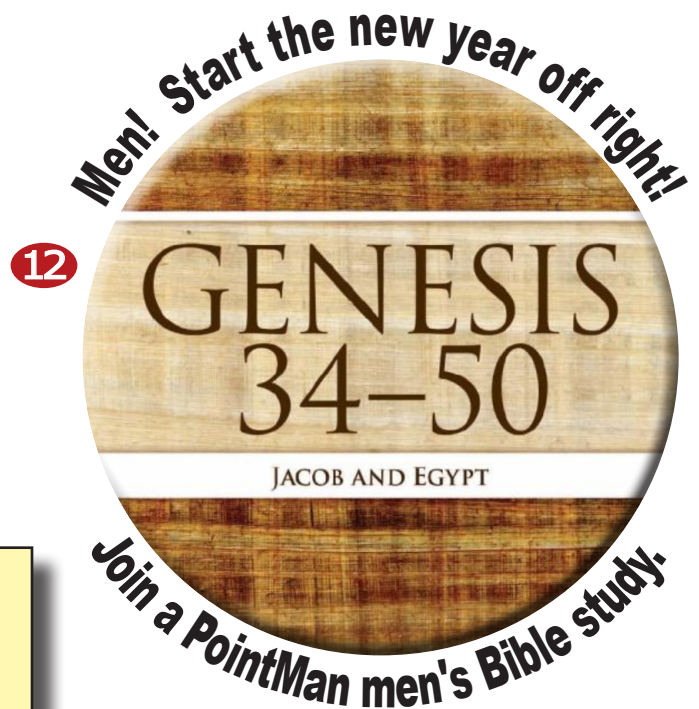
Tuesday— Read Psalm 25. Mark the seven occurrences of "way", "path" and "lead". What do you learn?

Wednesday— Read Psalm 25. Mark "remember" (3x). What do we want God to remember—and to forget?

Thursday— Read Psalm 25. Mark "lovingkindness" (3x). What do you learn about your God?

Friday— Read Psalm 25. Mark all the things David requests of God. Did you find all twenty?

Saturday—***In preparation for worshipping the risen Lord together with your church family,***
read **Luke 1:26-55.**



11 My Memory Verses

Ephesians 4:32

Be kind to one another,
tender-hearted, forgiving each other,
just as God in Christ has forgiven you.

John 14:21

He who has my commandments and keeps them
is the one who loves me,
and he who loves me
will be loved by my Father,
and I will love him,
and will disclose myself to him.

—Jesus

Bible Text: _____

Date: _____



What idea particularly strikes me from this text? [Note in which verse(s) it is found.]



What question does this text raise in my mind—and how would *this text* answer it?



What about Jesus Christ—his character and/or his redemption—relates to this text?



What action must I take as a result of this text? Be concrete and specific.



With whom will I share what I learned from this text? [and what was their response?]