

Walking With The Characters of Christmas
“Joseph: A Man Who Took Risks To Follow God”
(Part 3)

Intro: Some risks we take in life are just plain stupid...while others come from the heart of God. Back when I was 15 yrs old, I was at my best friend’s house riding dirt bikes (explain the crash)

That was just youthful, don’t think about the consequences risk. BUT, there are times when God calls us to take risks in order to follow Him. Today we are going to look at a great risk taker of the Christmas story...Joseph. This is probably not your idea of Joseph, but as we’ll see today, He was asked to risk much to follow God.

- The Bible gives us 3 distinct snapshots of Joseph’s life and the risks he embraced in order to follow God. (Joseph in Nazareth – taking Mary as his wife / Joseph in Bethlehem – fleeing to Egypt / Joseph leaving Egypt to move back home to Nazareth.)
- Joseph risked 3 valuable things in order to follow God. I believe they are the same 3 issues God asks us to risk to follow Him as well. Last week we talked about how God has a plan. This is true! But in order to experience it His plan requires some risk.

I. Joseph Risked His Reputation To Follow God

Matt. 1:19-21,24-25 “Joseph, her fiancé, was a good man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement quietly. As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. “Joseph, son of David,” the angel said, “Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus for he will save his people from their sins... When Joseph woke up, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded and took Mary as his wife. But he did not have sexual relations with her until her son was born. And Joseph named him Jesus.” (NLT)

A. Joseph risked people never understanding his decision to follow God

1. Risked his reputation: WHY? He took Mary as his wife while everyone believed she had been unfaithful to him.
2. Joseph was more than likely a well-known, established business man in the area as a carpenter. Nazareth was not a big city. Its population may have been as big as 1600 or smaller. It’s referred to as a village.
3. We live in a small town. What are small towns known for? Everybody knows everybody’s business! You can’t keep things quiet or private. This was surely the case in Nazareth.
4. I’m sure Joseph and Mary were the gossip of the town. People haven’t changed in 2000 years. Can’t you just imagine the talk in the market / with the neighbors / after the synagogue meeting?
 - “Surely Joseph can do better than this?” “Why on earth is he lowering himself to stay with Mary?” “Maybe the baby really is his?”

5. How was Joseph supposed to answer his critics? How believable did the truth sound? An angel...baby from God...going to be the Messiah...? Joseph risked his reputation to take Mary as his wife and have people never understand his decision.

B. Following God often requires us to risk our reputations

1. Following God doesn't always follow cultural norms / it's not always politically correct / culturally popular / it doesn't always make sense in the natural.
2. If we are too overly concerned with our reputations...if we are too concerned what people think of us, we will give in to this pressure and not follow God.

Prov. 29:25 "Fearing people is a dangerous trap, but trusting the LORD means safety." (NLT)

3. If we end up fearing people the trap we fall into is never being able to follow God. We make decisions based upon how it will affect our reputations...our image. We are so image conscious in our culture that it controls us.
4. There will be times in our spiritual journey with God that He will ask you to risk your reputation to do what is right. To risk your reputation in order to follow Him not the culture.

Matt. 16:25 "If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it." (NLT) Sometimes, it's our reputations He asks us to sacrifice.

5. Back in December of 1996, (before Foothills), I was asked by my denomination to resign at my current church. They thought it was best for me to leave Molalla. My response was to spend time praying and seeking the Lord; after which I would give them an answer. (Share the story)
6. Are you more concerned with your reputation...how other view you? OR are you more concerned with following Christ? There will be times when you have to choose between the two.
 - Opportunities to share your faith / not participate in the dirty joke – hanging out at the bar – taking a stand on a moral issue – getting more involved in ministry, serving, mission trip / getting baptized

Rom. 1:16 "For I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes—the Jew first and also the Gentile." (NLT)

- There will be times when God will ask us to choose to risk our reputations in order to follow Jesus.

II. Joseph Risked His Security To Follow God

Matt. 2:13-14 "After the wise men were gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up! Flee to Egypt with the child and his mother," the angel said. "Stay there until I tell you to return, because Herod is going to search for the child to kill him." That night Joseph left for Egypt with the child and Mary, his mother..." (NLT)

A. Joseph left everything familiar to follow God

1. Risked his security: WHY? Because they had to leave everything familiar and flee to Egypt...a foreign country. No family / friends / job / They had been in Bethlehem for around 2 years.

2. They would have had a network of friends / business connections / connected to the local synagogue / they were beginning to put roots down as a family. It appeared they had no intention of moving back to Nazareth. Fresh start!
3. Now in the middle of the night, they grab as much stuff as they can and make a hasty dash for the border of Egypt some 75 miles away. Joseph wasn't even told how long they were going to be there. "Stay there until I tell you to return".
4. Talk about risking your security! Imagine all the thoughts going through Joseph's mind as he traveled to Egypt? Where are we going to stay? Can I find work? How can I support my family? How long will we be here? This is more than I signed up for God! I've already risked my reputation...now you want my security too?

B. Following God often requires us to abandon the familiar

1. God often calls us to risk our security by moving beyond the borders of the familiar into the unfamiliar. God asks us to follow Him into areas that are new to us where we have no other option but to trust Him.

- This has always been God's strategy.

Heb. 11:8 "It was by faith that Abraham obeyed when God called him to leave home and go to another land that God would give him as his inheritance. He went without knowing where he was going." (NLT) God called Abraham to leave what was secure and familiar in order to experience what God had in store for him. (without knowing where he was going!)

2. What does it look like to leave the familiar in order to follow God? It means being willing to leave what you perceive to be safe / comfortable / secure in order to experience what God has for you.
3. If many of you are honest, the reason you don't get more involved serving God is because of this issue. It's a security issue. It's a familiarity issue. You want to remain comfortable. You want your life to be predictable. BUT, following God isn't any of these things.
4. God has more for you to experience in His relationship with you. Deep down, you have a desire to experience more as well. Something inside you tells you there is more. BUT, are you willing to risk some security to find it?
5. Risking security can be represented in a variety of ways.
 - Choosing to serve somewhere
 - Choosing to serve as a leader somewhere at Foothills
 - Joining a home group / or class / -some of you have fear with this.
 - Going on our mission trip
 - Giving financially on a regular basis
6. I want to recommend a book by Bruce Wilkenson. *The Dream Giver*. It is a book all about embracing what God has in store for you BUT, you have to be willing to leave the land of the familiar behind. The main character is called "Ordinary".

Luke 9:62 "But Jesus told him, "Anyone who puts a hand to the plow and then looks back is not fit for the Kingdom of God." (NLT) Looking back to what is familiar. Looking back to what

you left behind instead of looking forward to where God is taking you! This is how Joseph lived!

III. Joseph Risked Rejection To Follow God

Matt. 2:19-23 “When Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt. “Get up!” the angel said. “Take the child and his mother back to the land of Israel, because those who were trying to kill the child are dead. So Joseph got up and returned to the land of Israel with Jesus and his mother. But when he learned that the new ruler of Judea was Herod’s son Archelaus, he was afraid to go there. Then, after being warned in a dream, he left for the region of Galilee. So the family went and lived in a town called Nazareth.” (NLT)

A. Joseph risked rejection to move his family back home to Nazareth

1. Risked rejection: WHY? Because after being gone for several years, they all go home. Nazareth is where Mary and Joseph were from. Jesus may have been anywhere from 2-4 years old. It didn’t appear that moving back to Nazareth was Joseph’s first option. He didn’t want to move there.
2. Can you imagine the anxiety of moving back after being gone for 3-4 years? So much for the fresh start? Imagine the questions? “Where have you guys been?” “haven’t see you guys for awhile”?
 - Would they be accepted? Would they be welcomed? How would their families respond? Would they be shunned? Could Joseph start his business up again one more time?
3. Can you imagine the small town gossip that is spreading throughout Nazareth? “Hey, Mary and Joseph are back”. Yeah, they couldn’t make it anywhere else so they had to come home.”
4. Joseph may have had to embrace a major dose of humility to move back to Nazareth. BUT, there are times when God asks us to risk even rejection in order to follow Him.

B. Following God often requires us to risk rejection from family and friends

Matt. 10:27-39 “Well-meaning family members can be your worst enemies. If you prefer father or mother over me, you don't deserve me. If you prefer son or daughter over me, you don't deserve me. "If you don't go all the way with me, through thick and thin, you don't deserve me. If your first concern is to look after yourself, you'll never find yourself. But if you forget about yourself and look to me, you'll find both yourself and me.” (Message)

1. Risking your reputation is one thing. I can tolerate people thinking I’m a bit strange / not understanding me or the decisions I make. I can even handle people disagreeing with me. BUT, rejection is a whole different issue. It’s deeper!
2. Sometimes when we follow God, we lose friends. People withdraw from us. Even family members may not want to spend much time with us anymore. I have lost many friends over years in order to follow Christ. WHY?

- They want to stay in the land of the familiar / they want it safe and predictable / they refuse to travel spiritually where God is taking me.
 - Sometimes if you choose following Jesus over your friendship, you risk losing the friendship.
3. This fear of rejection can be a powerful motivator that keeps us from following Christ completely. You may really desire to follow Christ with everything you have but what will this do to some of your relationships?
 4. Facing our fears of rejection forces the issue of where our loyalties lie. Will I be more loyal to my earthly relationships or to my relationship with Christ? Am I willing to follow Jesus even if it means leaving some people behind on my spiritual journey?
 5. These are not easy decisions. I don't want to make it sound like they are. BUT, I am here to tell you they are very real. Experiencing what God has in store for us comes with a risk...and this is a very real one.
 6. You may be faced with some of these issues right now. As God grows you spiritually, you begin to notice those around you who are not. They are staying the same. They don't look at life like you do. You see your priorities changing. How you want to spend your time begins to change.
 7. You hear Jesus calling you to follow Him, but in order to do that, you have to risk family and friends not understanding. Now you're faced with a choice.

There have been some risks in life I have regretted taking. They've been my ideas and my plans and I experienced my results. There have been others that I praise God He allowed me the courage to take those risks. Times when I heard God calling me to follow and I chose to do so despite the risks I perceived. Choices that allowed me to enter into more than I ever dreamed of experiencing with God. Today, God is calling you to do the same. Be willing to take the risks to follow Him.

- Willing to risk your reputation
- Willing to risk your security
- Willing to risk rejection

What is on the other side of these risks? A God who loves you and has a plan for your life He can't wait to show you.

As we close, where is God asking you to take a risk in following Him today?