

“Like Father, Like Son”

June 17, 2018

Through the Eyes of a Child series

What was Joseph like? What would he have said about his place in Jesus’ story and our salvation story? We don’t know, but there are many who have attempted to bring his story to life so that we can learn from him.

DRAMA - Interview with Joseph, Jesus’ earthly father

It’s interesting to imagine how Joseph felt about raising Jesus. Looking at the Scripture we have, we don’t know much at all about Joseph. We have no words or speeches from him. There’s nothing recorded except that he was a righteous man and that he paid attention to God’s call on his life, especially in his dreams. Perhaps that’s enough, and maybe that’s where we start when it comes to learning how to parent our children.

We may not consider Joseph’s role very often, but his place in the life of Jesus is vital. The beginning of Jesus’ birth story in Matthew makes it clear that Joseph’s role is crucial; it’s plainly stated that he’s “a righteous man.” Righteous is an archery term - having right aim at the target - or in this case, right aim before God.

Joseph seeks to treat Mary well even as she is pregnant (with a child that isn’t his biologically). Right away, we see someone whose character is clear even before he knows her side of the story. Besides being righteous, Joseph pays attention. He is attuned to the ways in which God speaks to him - not just before Jesus was born, but afterward, too - as he and Mary take Jesus to Egypt as a refugee family and then when they return to Nazareth where it’s safe for Jesus to grow up.

Joseph gives up his practical plans – his logical plans – to follow God’s plan. You heard it in the interview – Jesus upended his life! Joseph trusts in what God is doing. He risks everything. He doesn’t leave Mary or Jesus. He stays with them and takes on the role of Jesus’ earthly father. Just like Mary, Joseph is a servant of God who dares to stand on God’s promises.

Our focus has been on looking at faith through the eyes of a child. We’ve been challenged to hear Jesus’ words of welcome to children knowing that children were the most vulnerable in Jesus’ world - just as they are today. We’re encouraged to consider what child-like faith looks like and acts like, and today we’re looking at how Jesus would’ve learned what it meant to be faithful from his earthly parents.

Certainly Mary and Joseph were faithful Jews who would've followed God's directive from Deuteronomy to pass on God's teachings to their children.

SHOW SLIDE - Deuteronomy 11:19 (TNIV) *Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.*

But can you imagine how Joseph and Mary felt - teaching Jesus even as they knew he was the One who would save the people from their sins? We know that they were faithful - visiting Jerusalem during Passover – because that's the story we have from Jesus' young life.

The film *The Nativity Story* made me think about Joseph's perspective in a way I hadn't before. There's a moment when he and Mary are talking about Jesus' birth, and he says, "What can I even teach him?"

I wonder if Joseph and Mary struggled with parenting. Did they ever feel inadequate or doubt their ability to be good parents? Did they wonder about God's plan for them to be a part of Jesus' early life and to be role models of faithfulness? Did Joseph tell bad "dad jokes?" Did he tell Jesus to "knock it off" when he saw bad behavior? Did he tell him to "shake it off" when he was upset? Abigail Shrier calls that "Dad-style parenting." I wonder what their conversations were like.

We assume that Jesus worked with Joseph learning carpentry skills from the time he was able probably from 9 or 10 years old, though we don't know how long Joseph lived. Joseph was a carpenter - the word is *tehton* in Greek, which is a woodworker. Most homes were made of stone or mud brick, so Joseph would've likely built doors, chests, tables, and other furniture - and maybe farm tools. He probably did repair work, too.

How many of you work with wood or know someone does? Think about the skills needed, the work ethic, and character traits like patience - all of them needed to do good work as a tekton. Consider what Jesus would've learned from watching Joseph work and how Joseph modeled humility, hard work, and using the gifts you have to glorify God. We know Jesus learned from Joseph because when Jesus goes back to Nazareth to the synagogue and begins speaking in public ministry, the people identify him as "the carpenter's son."

So it was both faithfulness to God and the practical stuff that Jesus learned from Joseph. Spiritual training and life skills, and perhaps Joseph came to a place where he realized that he did have influence. **SHOW SLIDE** - Proverbs 22:6 (TNIV)

Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it.

We assume a lot about Joseph, but we know a lot, too. Joseph was faithful from the beginning - faithful to God and to his family. He risked the social stigma of staying with Mary - even embraced it - in order to follow God and be Jesus' earthly father. His life and work formed and shaped Jesus as a young man.

He was a humble man who was ordinary in the sense that he had no special credentials, but was called to an extraordinary task. His social position and experience aren't important, but his willingness to serve God is. Joseph is thrust into unexpected circumstances, and he travels a journey that's unexpected.

And I'll be honest. I kept thinking of Joseph, Mary, and the infant Jesus as I saw pictures of families seeking refuge and a better life at the border. Friends, Jesus was a refugee child, and Joseph and Mary were refugee parents - escaping violent King Herod who wanted to kill their son, displaced, asking for help, and depending on the mercy of others. We must see Christ in the faces of those who are seeking help and hope, and we need to advocate for reform to our immigration system.

Maybe we don't always claim it, but Joseph is like us - ordinary, but called to extraordinary things with God's help. Joseph reminds us of the influence we have as parents and family. Perhaps we can see ourselves in him.

For me, Joseph models who I want to be when it comes to caring for others. He's a model for all of us - whether we're raising children or connected to children as family members or friends. Our role as parents and caregivers is vital because children need us and learn from us.

So we don't know much about Joseph. He was a righteous man who was faithful. He faced difficult circumstances that he didn't control and made decisions about how best to care for the people he cared about. He did what he could to keep his family safe from violence and harm. He had to risk his own reputation and forget about the approval of others in order to follow God. He embraced the role of earthly father to Jesus sharing his faith, teaching him carpentry, and modeling godly character.

We don't know much about Joseph, but we know enough. We know that God calls us to be righteous in how we guide our families - having right aim and doing the right thing. God calls us to have integrity - that our words and our actions match up so that children who see us know what it means to "walk the talk." God calls us to pay attention to what God is calling to do.

I'm grateful for Joseph as I think about my dad today. Certainly my parents were the first influence on me as a child, but there are others, too. How did your dad or a positive male figure in your life shape you? How is it a part of their legacy? How are we shaping kids to know God? That's what Joseph did - even for the Son of God.

Pastor Adam Hamilton reminds us, "We're not tasked with raising the Son of God, but we're tasked with raising children of God." What a responsibility! What a calling! May we seek God's help.

Thanks be to God. AMEN.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE - SHOW MEDIA - need intro!

No video can show the myriad of experiences of parenting, but we pray this is a reminder of the ways that we seek love one another and care for one another as parents and caregivers.