

Reversing Your Course of Action

“Do not be afraid” is the most repeated command in the Bible. God said it to Abraham, He said it to Joshua, and Jesus said it to His disciples. But in the Christmas story, God chose a unique way to deliver this message to three people navigating a unique situation. What can we learn from the Messenger?



INTRODUCTION

God sent a messenger to Joseph with an important message, “Do not fear.” The message reminded Joseph not to fear when changing his course of action. God also has that message for us. He has a plan for us, and He is at work in our lives.

STARTER QUESTION

Can you remember a time when God rewrote your script, but it didn't seem that way at first?

INTO THE WORD

1. Pastor Dave mentioned that we only have the names of two angels in Scripture. Who else had a dilemma where a messenger comes to help? What was the dilemma and what was the message? Along with Joseph, what do these godly people demonstrate in their lives?
2. Read Matthew 1:18-25. Knowing the rest of the story, it's easy for us to conclude that Joseph made the right decision. But at the time, it may have been a very difficult choice to obey what seemed like an undesirable rewrite of his script. What do you suppose Joseph thought about before deciding to follow the instructions of the messenger?

APPLICATION

3. Joseph and Mary both submitted to a complete rewrite of their script, even at the risk of intense criticism or ridicule – or possibly even death. When you hear God “speak” to you or “nudge” you in a certain direction, how can you confidently move forward and know that you are making the right decision? Are there any verses from the Bible that come to mind, or perhaps examples of other believers who faced life-changing circumstances and stood strong in their faith?
4. What situations today cause us to struggle with similar issues and to seek God for guidance in our actions? What would God need to do to get your attention and breakthrough your plans, to change or reverse your course of action?

PRAYER

Lord, thank you for the lessons we can learn from the Christmas story. Thank you for telling us “do not fear” when the circumstances of life seem to be out of our control. Our Savior, help us to look to you for the dilemmas in our lives and remember that you have a master plan for us. We trust in you. In Jesus name we pray, Amen

SUGGESTED ANSWER GUIDE / MORE FOOD FOR THOUGHT FOR SELECTED QUESTIONS:

Question #1:

Possible people in Scripture include:

- Abraham and Sarah were childless. God sent an angel to tell them they would have a son. (Genesis 18)
- Daniel was in exile. God sent an angel to tell him about future events. (Daniel 8 and 10)
- Paul and Silas were in prison. God sent an angel to open the doors of the prison and set them free. (Acts 16)
- John was on the island of Patmos as a prisoner. God sent a messenger to show him the revelation of Jesus. (Revelation 12)

Each person needed to accept the angel's message, privately obey God, and openly proclaim His plan.

Question #2:

We can easily imagine that Joseph agonized over the ramifications of his dilemma; but knowing that he was a "just man" and a devout Jew, we should also surmise that he knew the Hebrew scriptures very well. Recalling the prophecies about the coming Messiah and understanding that God can work in mysterious and even miraculous ways, Joseph may well have thought about how favored he was (just like Mary) to be the husband of the mother of Jesus. While we are not told exactly what he thought, we do know that "he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him." (v. 24) In other words, he obeyed God without hesitating and demonstrated exemplary faith.

Question #3:

Anytime the Holy Spirit leads us, it is helpful to remember that He will never say or do anything that contradicts God's Word. Memorizing Scripture, as Joseph certainly must have done, can be a crucial part of standing strong in our faith and holding to our convictions when the going gets tough. Whether it's a Proverb or two, a short Psalm or an entire chapter of Philippians, there are many passages that can provide the confidence we need to persevere in troublesome times and follow the Lord, even into unknown territory.

Question #4:

Many of the same struggles come from unexpected pregnancy, drug addiction, forms of abuse, gender identity, or even pandemic-related actions. We should know that God can guide us through dreams, Godly messengers, Bible reading, and prayer.

Most importantly, we now have the assurance that Jesus is Immanuel, God with us.