

Responding to the unexpected in our lives

There are times in our lives when we are going about our lives without anything particular unusual or extraordinary in them when something suddenly happens that throws the normality of our lives into disarray. It could be something good or bad that happens. Either way a response is necessary. How do we respond to the unexpected in our lives?

Matthew 1: 18 – 25

1) Responding according to our own understanding

- Joseph was a righteous man according to the law.
- He wasn't a priest or any other dedicated minister in the service of God. He was a carpenter.
 - Matthew 13:55 Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas?
- Mary and Joseph were engaged. They weren't married yet. They were pledged to be married.
 - Although they weren't yet married in Jewish culture the engagement was as strong as marriage and could only be broken by formal divorce.
- According to the law of Moses in Deuteronomy 24 a man could divorce his wife and send her away if he found something disgraceful in her.
 - Joseph shows his integrity that he didn't want to subject Mary to public disgrace when he found out that she was pregnant.
- Joseph responded to the unexpected pregnancy of Mary in the perfectly correct way as a righteous man who lived under the law of Moses.
 - He responded according to his understanding of the law and what the righteous thing was to do in that case.
 - The problem was that he wasn't aware that God was doing something beyond his understanding at that time.
- He wasn't the only one who responded according to his own understanding when confronted by the unexpected
 - Moses was confronted by a bush that was on fire that never burnt up. God spoke to him from within the bush commanding him to go set the Israelites free from Egypt. Moses responded that he couldn't do it as he wasn't a good speaker.
 - Isaiah was called to be a prophet but his response was that he was sinful with unclean lips so couldn't do it.
 - Jeremiah was called to be a prophet but his response was that he was too young.
- These were all confronted by something unexpected and responded according to their own understanding, although those responses weren't sinful.
 - There are times when our responses are sinful, such as Judas' response to the temptation to betray Jesus for money.
- How many times have you been confronted with unexpected circumstances in your life thinking that there was sin involved, or blamed the devil, or looked at your own life and abilities, and responded accordingly without considering that God himself had brought those circumstances on you?
- Some examples of unexpected circumstances
 - A family tragedy
 - A loss of a job
 - Getting a job in a field that you would not normally have gone into
 - The call of God to do something that you weren't really considering
 - There are many other scenarios that we could cite.
- How did you respond to the unexpected in your life?
- Was it according to God's will or, as in Joseph's case, according to your own understanding which took you contrary to what God wanted to do in your life?

2) Clarity through God's Word

- God intervened by sending an angel to speak to Joseph before he could do the wrong thing and divorce Mary.
 - The angel explained that Mary's pregnancy was of God and that the child she had conceived was from the Holy Spirit. She had not committed adultery. He need not be afraid.
- So often fear grips us when we are faced with the unexpected in our lives.
 - Moses was fearful at the burning bush
 - Paul was filled with fear when he saw the bright light on the road to Damascus and Jesus spoke to him
- Fear is a natural response to the unexpected, but the Word of God is full of commands not to fear.
 - Knowing the perfect love of God casts out all fear.
 - 1 John 4:18 There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.
 - Paul encouraged Timothy by telling him that fear doesn't come from God.
 - 2 Timothy 1:7 God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.
- The angel gave him the truth of what was happening
 - Everything what was happening was God's doing according to His purposes and Mary and Joseph were central figures in those purposes.
 - Mary was going to give birth to Jesus the promised Saviour.
 - This was a planned event as per the prophecy by Isaiah: All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us").
 - This child was no ordinary child - He was God coming in flesh to save us from our sins.
- God's Word brought clarity to the situation causing Joseph to re-evaluate his response to fall in line with the purposes of God.
- Do we leave our responses as they are according to our own understanding or do we go back to the Word of God in prayer asking God to bring clarity in our unexpected circumstances?
- It is easy to miss the purposes of God by relying on our own understanding of our situations rather than on what God is saying to us.

3) Responding according to the will and purposes of God

- Matthew 1:24-25 When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.
- After getting clarity from God's Word of God's purposes in the situation Joseph made very very different decisions from what he first planned to do.
 - He wanted to divorce Mary at first, but he changed and married her according to God's will.
- Clarity of God's Word and His purposes isn't merely for the sake of knowledge, but transformation and obedience.
 - Knowing doesn't bring glory to God - obedience and changed lives do.
- Others who at first responded according to their own understanding also changed and submitted to God's purposes for their lives
 - Moses ran out of bad responses and submitted to God and set the Israelites free
 - Isaiah accepted that God cleansed him of his sin making him fit to accept his calling as a prophet
 - Jeremiah yielded to the fact that it would be God speaking through him regardless of his age and was able to fulfil his duty as a prophet.
- What is happening in your life where you have responded according to your own understanding and have to re-evaluate your thinking according to the Word of God, which will bring about a different response for the purposes of God can be fulfilled in your life?