

# Dealing with Devastation

## Slide of Christmas Gift Price.

**Matthew 1:18** *Now the birth of Jesus Christ was this way (for His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph) before they came together, she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit.*

**Matthew 1:19** *But Joseph, her husband to be, being just, and not willing to make her a public example, he purposed to put her away secretly.*

*“Before they came together, she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit.”*

Matthew, in a rather matter of fact way tells us that Mary was pregnant before she was married to Joseph.

We know Mary was still a virgin and hadn't done anything wrong.

But Joseph didn't know what we know and upon hearing that news, he must have been devastated.

The woman he was engaged to be married, had gotten pregnant and that being the case, **there were some rather negative consequences for their relationship.**

I don't need to go into them, but **they were enough for Joseph to want to end the relationship and I don't blame him.**

**It would have been devastating news.**

**Devastating news is a relative topic in** our first world society.

What we consider **“devastating”** wouldn't be an issue for someone in a poorer country.

My job as an electrician often involves solving **“first world problems”** which are devastating to my clients when they call me.

One lady specifically told me she had a **“first world problem.”**

**She didn't have enough lights around her mirror in her ensuite** and she asked to me install some power for some “Hollywood lights” so she could put her make up on in the mornings.

**She was devastated she couldn't see to get herself ready for work.**

I know there will be **a few kids at Christmas time who will also be devastated.**

Not because they didn't get a present, but because **mum or dad bought the wrong one.**

**That will be devastating news** because they didn't get the exact present they wanted.

**What's devastating to someone else, may not be so devastating to us.**

**All jokes aside, 2023 has been a year when many people both in Australia** and around the world have had to deal with circumstances that were devastating and difficult to deal with.

**For example, inflation in this nation has been higher** and more enduring than expected. ...

When I pick up Daniel from boxing during the week, **I listen to money news on 2GB.**

The host of that program used to let his listeners know of...

- **Another interest rate hike**
- Another increase in the cost of electricity,
- Another increase in the cost of fuel

**After a while it got quite depressing,** so I used to listen to anything else on the way there.

The media can give us information, but **they can't really give us what that really means to some individuals.**

**There has been some this year who have been stretching their budget** to make ends meet.

Then the bank moved the goalposts again and they had to pay them more just to stay in the house you are paying off.

But then they raised it again and again, and finally **that person just can't make the mortgage payments anymore and they had to forgo their loan.**

### **That can be devastating news.**

**Or the rent goes up again and you can't afford to pay that,** so you have to find somewhere else, but you've got nowhere to go.

### **That can be devastating news as well.**

Some of you may have heard **what happened in Hawaii this year.**

*"In early August 2023, a series of wildfires broke out in the U.S. state of Hawaii, predominantly on the island of Maui. The wind-driven fires prompted evacuations, caused widespread damage, **killing at least 100 people and leaving four persons missing in the town of Lahaina on Maui's northwest coast.**"*

**That must have been devastating news** for those who lost homes and loved ones.

### **I don't need to speak about what's happening in Israel at present.**

**Those who have lost loved ones in that conflict have also been left devastated** by what that war has brought them personally.

**Devastation is something we probably all must deal with** on occasion.

If we read between the lines, we'll realise **Joseph was dealing with circumstances that must have devastated him as well.**

He didn't lose his health, property or someone died.

But the news Mary gave him must have left him numb and **unable to see a way forward.**

**I had a think about how different people deal with bad news** like Joseph was here.

## **A. Some live in denial.**

When someone asks this person how they're going out of genuine concern for what they've gone through, the response is, *"I'm fine."*

**This type of person tries to keep really busy.**

If they're hygienic they will clean everything that moves.

**If they're students they'll study even more than they're supposed to,** in order to avoid dealing with their loss.

**If you're working, you might throw yourself into your work** when instead you need to find a way to negotiate through what has happened.

**Living in denial doesn't deal with devastation.**

## **B. Some get depressed.**

You might deal with that depression in several ways.

I saw this movie once where **a young girl had broken up with her boyfriend.**

**This girl's friend gave some advice** how to cope with the devastation of the breakup.

*"Go to the local donut store, buy 12 donuts and keep eating."*

**She did that until the inevitable happy ending** the American romcom always gives the viewer.

All jokes aside depression if we're not careful **can become like quicksand.**

**You get sucked into it never to get out.**

**I used to watch Tarzan movies as a kid** and the bad guy would always end up being sucked under by the quicksand.

**Depression is often a consequence of a devastation that's taken place** and if we're not careful, it does become like a hole full of muck you get stuck in for a long time.

- **I don't know if Joseph was living in denial for a while**, getting stuck into his work as a carpenter trying to cover up the pain he was feeling.
- **I don't know if he slipped into depression** after Mary told him she was pregnant.

**Both responses are human** but its speculation to suggest that he experienced one or the other.

**But these verses tell us that God saw Joseph in his time of need** and gave him the perfect solution to the problem he was facing.

**Joseph was probably asking a lot of questions** before deciding to quietly divorce Mary.

As he went to sleep on the night the angel speaks to him in a dream, there were probably many questions running around in his brain.

But God saw this man in his devastation and gave him a message that I believe is relevant to anyone else who has been through the loss of a relationship or something similar.

What was the message God wanted to give this man, the future earthly father of Jesus?

**Matthew 1:20** *And as he thought upon these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take to you Mary as your wife. For that in her is fathered of the Holy Spirit.*

God obviously didn't say, **"Live in denial."**

**"You'll be right, just get on with it."**

That might be something I would say. Pastor Paul would never say that to someone.

**He didn't recommend that Joseph go down to the local donut shop** and keep eating until you feel better.

**That will deal with your depression.**

What God said to Joseph was the perfect solution to the problem he was facing.

## **Do not fear!**

Because when we experience a devastating loss such as Joseph did, it can be difficult to take courage.

**If you've been hurt in a relationship**, it takes courage to try again.

A singer called Pink once wrote a song called "Try."

- *Where there is desire, there is gonna be a flame. Where there is a flame, someone's bound to get burned*
- *But just because it burns doesn't mean you're gonna die, You've gotta get up and try, try, try*
- *Gotta get up and try, try, try You've gotta get up and try, try, try.*

I think there's a message there for all of us. If you've been through a breakup or a tough time in your marriage... **do not fear!**

**If you've been in business and you've gone belly up**, sometimes it takes courage to try again.

**Colonel Harland Sanders had a dream** to start a chicken business at the end of World War 2. He was in his 50s by this time. **His delicious recipe was rejected 1,009 times!** He had over a thousand rejections, yet he didn't quit.

**After about 500, I wonder where he got the courage to try again.**

Most of us are glad **he was brave enough to keep trying!**

**I don't know if the chickens out there agree with me.**

Maybe Colonel Sanders had a **"do not fear"** moment from God as well.

**In the sporting world you'll will often see an example** of someone who previously failed or was dropped from a team.

But circumstances dictated they had to be chosen again and when the time comes, they either kick the winning goal or score the winning try.

**There was an athlete called Eric Liddell** who won the 400 metres at the Paris Olympic games in 1924.

**He wasn't supposed to compete in the 400m**, but his Christian faith dictated he couldn't run in his favoured event the 100 metres because the heats were on a Sunday.

**Instead, he caused an upset** and won the 400-meter gold medal.

He once said, ***"And where does the power come from, to see the race to its end? From within."***

I would add it's when you know God has said to you in a difficult time, ***"Do not fear."***

**God could have said many things to Joseph in that dream.**

But what He did say **was so necessary for Joseph to hear at that time.**

For Joseph to do the right thing and move into the plan God had for him, **he needed to obey those three little words.**

***"Do not fear!"***

**The rest of this verse tells us what Joseph had to do** after he would overcome his fear of the situation, he was in.

**Matthew 1:20** *And as he thought upon these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take to you Mary as your wife. For that in her is fathered of the Holy Spirit.*

**Matthew 1:21** *And she shall bear a son, and you shall call His name JESUS: for He shall save His people from their sins.*

- **He had to go back to Mary** and tell her he still wanted to marry her.
- **He had to take care of the child growing in her womb** that he knew wasn't his.
- He had to do that because the angel told him **this was a special child with a special purpose that would impact many others.**

**He may have been feeling weak and fearful** when he went to bed that night.

But when he woke up, he knew he had to ***"take courage"*** and do what the angel had told him to do.

**There are moments when we're devastated** and it's hard to plan our way ahead.

**Fear tells us to withdraw** and not try again.

But when that happens, we've got to be careful.

Because if we disobey those three little words from God, and ***"keep on being afraid,"*** **there are going to be a lot of people affected by that decision.**

**With this sermon, I want to tell you what happens, when we take courage** and do what God wants us to do.

With this sermon I want to tell you, according to these verses, **three categories of people we affect when we obey God's command, *"Do not fear."***

**Who do we affect when we choose not to fear, as Joseph did?**

## **1. Taking courage affects you.**

**Matthew 1:20** *And as he thought upon these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take to you Mary as your wife. For that in her is fathered of the Holy Spirit.*

As I said before, Joseph was probably a little shaken up when he heard the news of Mary's pregnancy as anyone would be.

His natural inclination was to divorce Mary quietly, before going home to lick his emotional wounds somewhere under the table at home.

He might have been thinking, *“Joseph, just do whatever it takes so that I don't get hurt like that again.”*

- I won't trust anyone.
- I won't get close to anyone.
- I will just live my life without emotional risk because if I got burned once, I will get burned again.”

I call that *“protection mode.”*

But you know as well as I do, **protection mode isn't a good way to live your life.**

Eventually you must **open yourself up to risk at some point.**

Allan has a saying that I really like.

*“You've got to risk it for the biscuit.”*

Wisdom out the mouths of babes and sucklings.

**There are times when you must be brave for your own good.**

There have been times at work this year when I've had to *“be brave”* and do something I didn't want to do/go somewhere I didn't want to go, but because I've done it, I've grown, and God has blessed me.

I was doing my accounts this week and I noticed a company I sub-contract to hadn't paid me for a day's work I did in the city for them back on Melbourne Cup Day, early November.

They realised their mistake and I got paid.

But that incident reminded me of how I felt that morning when I got out of bed, knowing I would have to drive into the city, find a park and work in an environment I didn't want to be in.

One of my jobs was to change a light fitting in the kitchen of a Chinese restaurant.

- The kitchen floor was covered with about 2 centimetres of water.
- I turned off the power leaving all the kitchen hands in darkness as they were preparing their food for the next mealtime.
- As I was installing the light, there were some other cables that were live and of course I ended up touching one and getting a shock.

But I managed to finish my work while everyone else upstairs were enjoying the Melbourne Cup Day celebrations.

After I'd finished my day's work, I loaded up my truck to go home, only to discover that I'd been fined about \$300 for parking illegally on the street.

Clover Moore in her infinite wisdom has banned street parking in the city on workdays, which means tradies have to park illegally when working in the city.

Sometimes we're caught, sometimes we're not but I happened to get caught so that was something else to deal with on a trying day.

But I do remember one thing about that day and **that was how I felt when I drove home.**

Because I overcame my fears that day, **I now have the confidence to do something similar in the future.**

I still don't like driving into the city, but I'll do it if I must.

Having the courage to do what the Lord tells us to do, does change us as people.

**No doubt Joseph was changed for the better that day** when he obeyed the Lord and took Mary for his wife.

If he hadn't, he'd have been emotionally disabled for a very long time.

## **There is courage and there is stupidity.**

Our family went to Treetops adventure park in the Cumberland State Forest in the spring.

One of the boys Allan wanted to try of course the most difficult of all the courses, which meant I had to follow him.

Not because I wanted to do that difficult series of zip lines as well, but because I knew that there is a thing in life called **“The Pump factor.”**

**That’s when your enthusiasm for a task is greater than your ability to do it.**

Allan was **“pumped up”** to do the hardest course zip lining from tree to tree but being only 11, he got into difficulty and dad on occasion had to help him out.

**But here’s the thing about our heavenly father.**

**There’s no pump factor with God.**

**He will never get you to do something you’re not able to do.**

Joseph was able to take on the responsibility of being a husband to Mary and an earthly father to Jesus.

That was his calling, but the devastation of the pregnancy had shaken that calling.

But he obeyed the Lord, “did not fear” and when we’re in heaven, he will be the first to tell you **the courage he showed at that time initially changed him.**

When you obey the Lord and **“fear not,” that courage will change you also.**

**Taking courage affects you.**

## **2. Taking courage affects those we know.**

**Matthew 1:20** *And as he thought upon these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take to you Mary as your wife. For that in her is fathered of the Holy Spirit.*

**Matthew 1:21** *And she shall bear a son, and you shall call His name JESUS: for He shall save His people from their sins.*

When Joseph chose to **“take courage”** after he woke up, it didn’t just affect him in a positive way.

**The angel specifically mentions that Joseph is to take Mary as his wife,** and she will give birth to a son they will call Jesus.

So, Joseph chooses to **“fear not”** and **both those individuals, Mary his future wife and Jesus his future son are impacted by Josephs obedience to the angel’s message.**

- **Mary didn’t have to do this journey alone anymore.**
- **Jesus would be born into a family where there was a dad as well as a mum** to take care of him.

**But that might not have happened** if Joseph had shied away from that responsibility.

- **Mary would have had to try and give birth alone** without the support of a loving husband.
- **Jesus would have grown up** without a loving father.

When you choose to show courage because God told you to, **it doesn’t just affect you.**

**It affects those who know you as well.**

**There’s a story in 1 Samuel 11,** where an Ammonite king called Nahash threatens people from a town called Jabesh Gilead.

They were living in an area bordering Amon.

**The Ammonites didn’t like Israelites living so close to their territory,** so Nahash decided to remove one eye from all the Israeli residents living there.

**The people living in Jabesh Gilead sent out messengers** to the rest of Israel asking for help.

**They all liked the idea of living with two eyes** instead of one.

**Saul was king at the time** and when he heard of their dilemma, he got upset and sent an army to protect the people of Jabesh Gilead.

**They defeated the Ammonites** and the people of Jabesh Gilead are saved.

**Their story in the Bible doesn't end there.**

**Later in 1 Samuel 31, Saul and his sons are killed in battle** and their bodies are taken back to Philistine territory where they are hung on the city wall to be decimated.

**It was a disgrace for a king's body to be treated in such a way** and the Philistines were showing contempt for the leaders of their enemies.

**No one from Israel would go and retrieve the bodies** until this happens.

**1 Samuel 31:11** *And when they heard about it, the people of Jabesh-gilead, what the Philistines had done to Saul,*

**1 Samuel 31:12** *then all the brave men arose, and they traveled all night. And they took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Beth-shan, and came to Jabesh, and burned them there.*

**Why did the people from Jabesh Gilead go** and no one else to retrieve Saul's body?

I believe it was for the following reason.

Because Saul showed courage and went and fought for these people, **these people who knew Saul took courage when Saul needed their help.**

## **Our courage has a way of changing those we know.**

No doubt, Joseph's decision to "fear not" **affected Mary positively.**

Because Joseph took courage, **she received courage to go head with the journey to Bethlehem with Joseph at her side.**

**Courage has a way of changing those who we know.**

**When I started going out with Margit, I had to show some courage** to overcome miscommunication issues we were having when we first started going out.

**I asked her to join a team I was putting together to do a mission's trip into Russia** but for most of the time we were there, **we just weren't talking.**

**Another girl who was part of the team told me there was tension in the group** because there was tension between us, and I had to do something about it.

I knew I had to do something about it, but **I was really scared to approach her.**

**I remember walking across an old Russian school courtyard about 30 metres** to talk to Margit and try and resolve the issues between us.

**It was the longest 30 metres of my life.**

**Girls I think don't realise the courage it takes for a guy** sometimes to make a call or cross a room to talk to a female you like.

But I'm glad I had one of those "*fear not*" **moments and walked those 30 metres** to ask her where our relationship was at.

**Those issues got resolved and we've been together for the last 22 years,** 21 and a half of those as a married couple.

As we started to go out and get to know each other, it affected me positively and **it affected her as well, because we were both in love.**

Over two decades, three kids and a dog later **she has no regrets whatsoever being married to me.**

**Courage has a way of changing how our kids see us as well.**

I remember when Allan and I went to a father/son camp last year and one of the activities was a fear producing device called *“The Giant Swing.”*

It was a device where they strapped you to a harness, pulled you up a zip line until you reached the top.

**Then you had to pull a small rope** which would release you into a huge swinging motion that if you were afraid of heights, would scare the life out of you.

- **Of course, Allan and all his friends** wanted to do it.
- However, that also meant the dads had to do that too.

Problem with dads is, they can't show their sons they are scared because men don't do that.

So because the dads who were scared of heights, weren't allowed to show their fear, only their courage, there was a lot of tension in the air.

One dad got on there and once halfway up the zip line he expressed what we were all feeling.

*“No! Put me down, put me down!”*

Unfortunately, it was too late, and he had to swing into oblivion like everyone else!

**But he committed the indiscretion of showing fear** and I remember seeing his son feel a bit embarrassed by his dad's antics.

**Then it was my turn.** They strapped me into the harness, and it was the last place I wanted to be.

**But then I saw Allan from this great height, and I knew that if I showed fear** like the other dad did, it wouldn't be a good example for him to see that.

So, he gave me the *“thumbs up,”*

**I pulled the rope and got released into an experience that scared the life out of me**

**But I had to “fear not”** for the sake of someone I knew, who I wanted to leave an example with.

**Will I do it again?** I have to because there's another one next year and **Timmy has two more to do as well.**

**Sometimes our actions of courage do have a positive affect on those we know,** those who are close to us.

God made sure Jesus had a good earthly father as well as a heavenly one.

Joseph may not have been charismatic, but when the occasion called for it, he was definitely courageous, and **that quiet courage must have rubbed off on Jesus as a boy growing up.**

When we *“fear not”* people close to us are watching...and learning from us.

**Taking courage affects those we know.**

### **3. Taking courage affects those we don't know.**

**Matthew 1:21** *And she shall bear a son, and you shall call His name JESUS: for He shall save His people from their sins.*

This baby Jesus who Joseph was going to help raise into a man **was going to be the saviour of the world.**

It didn't matter where you were from.

**If you chose to believe in Jesus, you would be saved from the sin nature** we've all inherited and receive a new nature that would enable us to overcome sin and live in eternity in heaven with the Lord.

So, Josephs decision to raise the boy as his own **would have consequences not just for Mary and Jesus, those who he knew.**

**Josephs decision to “fear not” and take on a new family** would have consequences that would change those he didn't know.

Some of us don't realise **what sort of chain reaction a courageous action can start.**

**It can have consequences for people we don't even know exist.**



**One of the seven wonders of the industrial world is the Bell Rock lighthouse** off the coast of Angus, Scotland.

**It is situated on Bell Rock** which is 11 miles off the coast of Scotland.

**Before it was built, Bell Rock was a reef** where many ships and lives had to been lost.

**But a young Scottish engineer called Robert Stevenson** believed a lighthouse could be constructed on the rock, even though it was covered by water most of the year.

It took him and his team three years to build the lighthouse.

- While leading construction, Stevenson lost one worker who was drowned at sea.
- Another lost his legs in an accident.
- **But the worst tragedy was that three of his children died** from whooping cough.

**But through all the personal trials Robert Stevenson and his team kept on going** until finally in 1810 the lighthouse was completed.

**It is so well built that the masonry remains intact and unaltered since construction** finished in 1810.

**Two hundred years on, the world's oldest standing rock lighthouse** still warns shipping away from the reef's razor-sharp rocks.

Its still there today, saving lives from that dangerous part of Scotland's coastline.

**Thousands of lives have been saved because one engineer in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century** believed it could be done, and had the courage to finish, even when things got difficult.

**People this engineer didn't even know were affected by this man's courage** to finish what he'd started.

**Things got difficult for Joseph,** Mary's finance.

**He was devastated by the news** she was pregnant, and he wasn't the father.

**But because he showed courage,** even those he didn't know were positively affected by what he did by taking on a family that wasn't his.

**Jesus was able to grow up, become a man** and eventually go to the cross to pave a way for us to have eternal life.

**But the difference is, Jesus knows everyone,** and He knows you.

Just as his earthly father Joseph showed courage, Jesus showed courage to go to the cross, because he personally loved me and you.

1. Taking courage affects you.
2. Taking courage affects those we know.
3. Taking courage affects those we don't know.

**This Christmas time let's take stock of where we are on the journey** and if necessary, choose to obey just as Joseph did... and do not fear!!!

**Amen!!!**