

NO ORDINARY JOE

“MATTHEW 1:18-25”

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins." So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us." Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name JESUS.

I want to begin this morning's Bible Study with a Top Ten List. Here are the **Top Ten Characteristics A Woman Looks For In A Man...**

- 10) Handsome
- 9) Charming
- 8) Financially successful
- 7) A caring listener
- 6) Witty
- 5) In good shape
- 4) Dresses with style
- 3) Appreciates the finer things in life
- 2) Is full of thoughtful surprises
- 1) Is an imaginative, romantic lover

Now I need to qualify this list. For I've just read to you the **Top Ten characteristics a woman looks for in a man** when she's **22 years old**. When she turns 32 she has to alter her list and adjust her expectations. Here's the **Top Ten traits a 32 year old woman looks for in a man...**

- 10) Nice looking (with hair on his head)
- 9) Opens car doors, holds chairs
- 8) Has enough money for a nice dinner
- 7) Listens more than talks
- 6) Laughs at your jokes
- 5) Carries bags of groceries with ease
- 4) Owns at least one tie
- 3) Appreciates a good home-cooked meal
- 2) Remembers birthdays and anniversaries
- 1) Seeks romance once a week

But what about a 42 year old woman? What are the **Top Ten characteristics a 42 year old woman looks for in a man?**

- 10) Not too ugly (bald head okay)
- 9) Doesn't drive off until she's in the car
- 8) Works steady - splurges on dinner out occasionally
- 7) Nods head when she's talking to him
- 6) Usually remembers punch lines of his own jokes
- 5) Is in good enough shape to rearrange the furniture
- 4) Wears a shirt that covers his stomach
- 3) Has enough energy to twist the lids off jars.
- 2) Remembers to put the toilet seat down
- 1) Shaves most weekends

Of course, you know now where this train of thought is headed. **What characteristics does a 52 year old woman look for in a man?**

- 10) Keeps the hair in his nose and ears trimmed
- 9) Doesn't belch or scratch in public
- 8) Doesn't borrow money too often
- 7) Doesn't nod off to sleep when she is venting about her day
- 6) Doesn't re-tell the same joke too many times
- 5) Is in good enough shape to get off the couch on weekends
- 4) Usually wears matching socks and fresh underwear
- 3) Appreciates a good TV dinner
- 2) Remembers her name on occasion
- 1) Shaves some weekends

What does a 62 year old woman look for in a man?

- 10) Doesn't scare small children
- 9) Remembers where the bathroom is located
- 8) Doesn't require much money for upkeep
- 7) Only snores lightly when asleep
- 6) Remembers why he's laughing
- 5) Is in good enough shape to stand up without assistance
- 4) Usually wears clothes
- 3) Likes soft foods
- 2) Remembers where he left his teeth
- 1) Remembers that it's the weekend

Finally, **what is a 72 year old woman looking for in a man?**

10) He's breathing

1) He doesn't miss the toilet

Ladies, I hate to say this, but Joseph of Nazareth was not the type of man a woman looks for at any age... He wasn't *charming enough*, and *successful enough*, and *sexy enough* to catch the eye of a 22 year old. Not many 42 year old gals look for a blue collar, small business owner, from a tiny village, with no ambition to grow beyond a carpenter's salary. Joseph wasn't even a catch for a 72 year old woman. He didn't *live long enough* to have any golden years. He died before he could join the AARP.

Of course, everyone knows women like caring conversation. One of the *chief beefs* I hear about husbands is that they don't chit-chat enough. Well, neither was Joseph an engaging conversationalist. In the Gospel accounts he never utters a single word. *Joseph is Mary's silent partner.*

Joseph *did* come with a royal pedigree. He descended from the house of David, but at the time that was more of a hassle and an inconvenience, than a feather in his cap. Joseph's family ties forced a pregnant Mary to embark on a long donkey ride to Bethlehem to register for a census. And any man willing to camp out with his expectant wife in a stable – *even in desperate straits* – is not a fellow who's fond of candlelight dinners and weekend escapes. Joseph was more *pragmatic* than *romantic*.

I'm certain most women would not have been satisfied if they had been in Mary's sandals, and discovered they were pledged to be married to a man like Joseph. They would think, "**I can do better. I deserve more.**" **I know this, because it seems to have been the Church's response!** Rather than appreciate Joseph for the man that he was – down through the centuries the Church has attempted to embellish his nondescript resume. We've taken a humble man – a simple man – a nothing flashy, *Joe the Plumber-kind of man... and tried to make him larger than life...*

In Roman Catholicism Joseph is the patron saint of families, and pregnant women, and travelers, and immigrants, and craftsmen, and engineers, and workers in general, and even the war against communism. He's also the saint who stands against doubt and hesitation. He's the patron saint of the New Word... As well as countries like China, Canada, Mexico, Austria, Belgium, Croatia, and Vietnam. Roman Catholics believe he prays for cities like Florence, Italy – Buffalo, New York - Baton Rouge, Louisiana – Sioux Falls, South Dakota, etc... *Joseph gets around!*

All sorts of towns, and rivers, and churches, and hospitals, and universities are named "*Saint Joseph*." In fact, the most common place name in the world is "**San Jose**" – that's Spanish for "**St. Joe.**" That means Burt Bacharach's 1968 hit song, "**Do you know the way to San Jose?**" was actually named after Joseph, the step-father of Jesus. Hey, references to Joseph keep popping up all over the place. And not only *popping up...* You're also liable to find Joseph by *digging down...*

Whenever America goes through a decline in the housing market, ads start to appear on TV for St. Joseph statues. It's supposedly the sure cure for selling your house... *Joseph is also the patron saint of home sellers...* For \$13.95 you can purchase an 8" statue of Joseph. You bury it

upside down in the dirt in front of your house, and it's supposed to insure its sale. For an added \$7.50 you get the book, "[St. Joseph, My Real Estate Agent.](#)" Hey, *I agree Joseph was a down-to-earth guy, but this is ridiculous.* Over the years a lot of attention has been given to the humble carpenter from the village of Nazareth. Joseph has become a source of superstition and veneration – *and he'd recoil at both...* I'll bet a nose-to-the-grindstone-guy like Joseph doesn't even care if he *knows the way to San Jose!*

One year I spoke on Joseph at the CCSM Ladies' Christmas Tea, and Kathy kept advising me, "[Just make it simple.](#)" Well, that's not a difficult task when you're talking about Joseph of Nazareth. He was a simple man. Actually, I see *Joseph and Mary* as polar opposites.

Mary was barely out of Middle School. She was *a young girl, with an old soul.* There was a depth to her relationship with God that transcended age. Luke describes her reaction to the angel's startling news. "[The Spirit will overshadow her. She'll conceive the Son of God. He'll be great, and called the Son of the Highest. He'll sit on the throne of David.](#)" This was a Jewish girl's dream come true! Mary had been chosen to *mother the Messiah.*

And how did Mary react? This news will alter *her life forever*, and *her wedding plans at present* – yet she never shows the slightest hesitation. Mary is willing to go with the flow. She gets caught up in the miracle. I'm astonished by *the immediacy of her acceptance* - and *the totality of her surrender.* She tells God, "[Let it be to me according to Your Word.](#)"

On the other hand, a pragmatic Joseph had to think this all through. Joe wasn't as caught up in the *romance* of the news as he was stung by the *reality* of its implication. "[How can I believe such a preposterous story? Why did Mary betray me? Who's the Child's father? Did Mary lie when she said she loved me? How could I have been so wrong about this girl?](#)" It was a brutal few weeks for the patron saint against doubt and hesitation.

Joseph was a craftsman by trade. His partners were a level and a builder's square. The carpenter's motto is "[measure twice, cut once...](#)" And you can be sure, Joseph *measured* his next move. He had to work through what had happened. It could never be ignored or forgotten. After a season of contemplation, justice and mercy shook hands on a solution... Rather than stone Mary, he would just send her away to another town where she could begin a new life with her child... start over privately.

And that's what Joseph would've arranged had his good intentions not been interrupted by another miracle. This time an angel spoke to Joseph. [Mary's story was preposterous... but it was also true!](#) And God was enrolling Joseph in the miracle. He was part of this mission impossible.

As you well know all marriages are teams - *made up of equal partners with separate and diverse roles.* This is true of every husband and wife. But this was especially true of *the Joseph and Mary team.* In the Christmas story Joseph's role and Mary's role are very different. Mary focused on the spiritual, miraculous aspects of the first Christmas. When she journeys to the hills of Judah to visit her cousin, Elizabeth, it's an emotional time from the second she arrives. The special baby Elizabeth is carrying leaps in her womb. She's filled with the Spirit and blesses Mary.

Mary in turn erupts in a song! She praises and magnifies God. Mary sees the *mystery and marvel* of Christmas - whereas Joseph sees the *sacrifice and service*. Mary gets *giddy* about Christmas. Joseph grows *gritty*. Mary is full of *rejoicing*. Joseph ends up grounded in *responsibility*.

Joseph would've never been cast to play the leading male in a romantic comedy. He was a bit boring at times. But God turned Mary's world on its ear. He knew Joseph's rock-solid steadiness was what she would need. One more time, here's what a 22 year old woman looks for in a man... Handsome – Charming - Financially successful - A caring listener – Witty - In good shape - Dresses with style - Appreciates the finer things in life - Is full of thoughtful surprises - Is an imaginative, romantic lover... And Joseph doesn't match up to a single characteristic on the list.

But here's what Joseph did bring to the table... love, commitment, honesty, loyalty, sacrifice, protection, faithfulness, responsibility, *obedience to God*... In fact, obedience was Joseph's hallmark. After Joseph's dream and the angel's instruction, we're told, "Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife." Listen to the words, **Joseph did as "the Lord commanded him..."**

Eight days after the baby was born, Joseph and Mary took their baby boy up to the Jewish Temple to have Him circumcised and given a name. Again, Joseph followed orders to the T. He resisted the urge to go with "Joey, Jr.," and named his son, "Jesus" – as the angel had instructed.

Later when King Herod's hatred began to boil – and violence was in the air - Joseph had a dream-warning... *Get out of dodge and flee to Egypt*. Even though he'd just signed a new lease on a house, he and Mary's first home together – he never flinched... Joseph immediately obeyed. A few years later when Herod died and danger had passed, again the angel contacted Joseph and ordered him back to Nazareth. Joe *woke up, packed up* his family, *filled up* his tank, and was on the road in 24 hours.

Granted, Joseph was no *Hugh Grant*. Never in a thousand years would he have starred in a chick flick – yet we'd all agree Joseph had a strategic part in the greatest drama in the history of man. **Earthly father of God** is a pretty heavy role. In fact, there's no grander gig in the Christmas story. Joseph wasn't sexy, or charismatic, or charming, or suave, or articulate, or witty, or funny - yet God found a man who listened to heaven - then did as he was told. In God's eyes that made Joseph... **no ordinary Joe**.

Joseph loved Mary. Even more so, he loved God. And he blended the two loves of his life. Joseph loved God by loving Mary - *even when it was inconceivable, and it was inconvenient, and they seemed incompatible*. Joseph's love and commitment to his wife took shape in a couple of profound ways... **Joseph covered Mary** and **Joseph carried Mary**...

In 1Peter 4:8 God instructs us, "**And above all things have fervent love for one another, for love will cover a multitude of sins.**" **Love covers**. This means love can shelter us from the effect and impact of either *real sins*, or *perceived sins*, or *forgiven sins*... Love is merciful to sinners. Love fights against the stigma associated with a perceived sin. Love will try to minimize the consequences of a forgiven sin.

Love **covers** a multitude of sins... Mary suffered for a lifetime from *a perceived sin*. Everyone outside her circle assumed Jesus was illegitimate. She bore this unwarranted stigma. Over 30 years later, Jesus is in the Temple, when his enemies mention His questionable parentage. Mary was innocent, yet the stigma of her pregnancy had cast a shadow over her reputation that never vanished. The only relief Mary received was Joseph's willingness to take her to be his wife - give *her* Child *his* name - and take them into his family. You don't treat *an adulteress* with that sort of kindness. Joseph covered her shame!

And Joseph's **love carried** Mary in more ways than one... *Down the aisle to be his bride... on the back of a donkey across harsh terrain... from the burro to a bed of straw... up Temple steps to meet Simeon and Ana... through the front door of a Bethlehem home that would entertain Magi... to a refuge in Egypt and back... He even carried her to Jerusalem where they realized they'd left their 12 year old in the Temple...* Joseph's firm resolve and unwavering devotion carried this woman in his heart - *until* that heart stopped beating and his arms dropped limp. Jesus' adopted father never saw his Son walk through the door of history and begin His ministry, yet he carried Jesus to its threshold.

Love isn't always cutesy, and cuddly, and creative, and conversational. And it almost never stacks up to the glamorized and romanticized notions we place on it... but *love covers* and *love carries*. *Real love is Joe love* - rooted in responsibility, and lived out in deeds.

Annually Merriam-Webster's Dictionary checks their website for the most commonly searched words. They release a *"word of the year."* In 2010 - *"austerity."* The 2009 - *"admonish."* The top word for 2008 - *"bailout."* It seems Webster's *Word of the Year* has become *a sign of the times...* And the *"word of the year"* for 2011 is **"pragmatic."** The editors at Webster's think that in light of the logjam in Congress and the inability to lower the nation's debt – the public is looking for *pragmatic leaders*. Practical, how-to people who know how to get tangible results.

If that's the case, *then Joseph of Nazareth is the man of the hour!* Joseph wasn't flashy or a smooth talker. He wouldn't have done well in a debate... But when God needed a man to take care of His Son and Jesus' mother, he chose a pragmatic, down-to-earth, manly man like Joseph. He chose a guy who could get the job done - who was all about the results. A man who knew how to obey - no matter the circumstances. None of Mary's pals would've mistaken Joseph for a heart-throb. But no one was more committed to God's will. He **covered** and **carried** his family. Joseph was **no ordinary Joe...** God trusted him to get the job done.

And here's the application of today's message and Joseph's life. There are two lessons I hope you take from today's sermon into this Christmas... **First, we need to appreciate the Josephs in our own life. Second, we need to be a Joseph in someone else's life.**

I think it's a sad truth that the world's Josephs get taken for granted. Think about it, Joseph is the unappreciated character in the Christmas story. All the kids in the Nativity Play clamor to be shepherds, and wise men, and even barnyard animals... *before they volunteer to be Joseph.* Our modern world is so hypocritical. It denies the virgin birth - then tries to turn Mary into a single mom. There're even Nativity Sets without a Joseph. It's as if Mary would've gotten along fine without a man in her life. That's certainly not God's perspective. Joseph played a crucial role.

This morning, I want to speak on behalf all the Josephs in the world – **the plodders**. *The Lord knows they would never speak for themselves...* I want to give a shout out to all the people who don't have to do a touchdown dance every time they score. The people who go

about the will of God - steadily and faithfully – without seeking or demanding a lot of attention. *These are the non-flashy folks.* People who just get the job done.

Understand the measure of a Christian isn't the number of verses you memorize, or the eloquence of your prayers, or even the visions you see. Mary had the *epiphanies* and erupted in the *doxologies*. We admire her spirituality. But Joseph made sure it all happened according to God's plan. He loaded up the donkey and got Mary to Bethlehem on time. Mary was *blessed by God*. Joseph was *obedient to God*.

Here's my question to you this morning... *Who are the Josephs in your life?* Your spouse? A friend? A pastor? A co-worker? A family member? Who are the folks who don't just talk about God, but obey Him?

Ladies, maybe **your husband** is a Joseph who *covers* and *carries* you. I know he doesn't read the articles in the women's magazines like you want him too... *"Tips for stimulating conversation..." "Keys to unlocking a wife's heart..." "Romantic anniversaries..."* But the old boy doesn't have the time... He's busy *holding down a job, paying bills, coaching Little League...* When he does read, it's usually *his Bible...* or *an instruction manual*.

It's not fair what women today expect from their husbands. They want it all! They desire a provider and defender - but with a soft, sensitive, touchy-feely side. What some wives really want is *a girlfriend with male parts*. I'm sure Joseph *"told"* Mary he loved her... *yet there's no record of his verbiage*. All we see in Scripture are his deeds. He sacrificed, and served and proved his commitment by loving actions. *This is how good men love*. They love by doing. They demonstrate love by getting the job done.

Whenever I think of Josephs I think of **my dad**. Like Joseph, dad isn't educated or wealthy. He's a blue-collar guy – even likes to work with wood. But my dad has always been there for me. He's never vacated his post. I also think of **my wife**. Over the years she's tolerated so much drama, yet keeps loving me unconditionally. She's a *pillar*, and I'm a *pinball*. There're also some **Joseph-like pastors** I know. They'd never *WOW* a crowd with their oratory, but they're faithful day in and day out to the work God calls them to do. *They're carrying their congregations to Bethlehem*.

This Christmas why don't you tell the Joseph in your life how much he or she is appreciated? *And then.. try to be a Joseph in someone else's life*. Be a hands-on, problem-solver. Do something practical to help another person get to where they need to be in the will of God – *to their Bethlehem!*

As we've noted, Joseph wasn't particularly talented or gifted. In one sense he *WAS* just an ordinary Joe. But when *convinced of the truth* and *called on by God* he stepped up. Without reservations Joseph stepped up. Ask God to show you a life this Christmas in which you can step up. Last week I read of a working man in Omaha who walked into a Kmart with three small kids. He was there to make a payment on the Christmas toys he had on lay-away. That's when an older woman stepped to the counter and paid his bill. She said when she was a child her dad put toys on lay-away at the local Kmart and could rarely pay them off by Christmas. Her name probably wasn't *Joseph*, but she acted like a *Josephine!*

This Christmas maybe you can step up and *befriend* a person who lacks a *friend*. They've run off all their pals by the selfish way they've lived. Maybe you can love them anyway. You can love them *Joseph-style*. When you find a person who's spotted and stained, and you **cover** them with mercy... When you find a person who's weak and vulnerable, and **carry** them to a *stable* place... you're showing God's love to them! The life of Joseph teaches us that **love covers** and **love carries**...

This Christmas prove that you are **no ordinary Joe**. Show the world that the love of Jesus is in you!... ***Be grateful for the Josephs in your life...*** and ***be a Joseph in the life of another person...***