

# HOW WE DEAL WITH DISAPPOINTMENT!

SUNDAY, MAY 17, 2009

TEXT: MATTHEW 1:18-25

## INTRODUCTION:

Life brings disappointments, and if not approached from a Christ centered perspective they can really derail us. We all know that disappointment occurs when our hopes or expectations are not met, no matter how selfish or even unrealistic they may be. We have the ability to meet life's disappointments by following Christ example, the leading of the Holy Spirit, and the examples found in the Bible. One of those examples is here in Matthew chapter one, as we look at the life of Joseph and his disappointment with Mary's pregnancy. There is a great lesson to learned about how he dealt with this disappointment by—<sup>[1]</sup>BEING MERCIFUL; <sup>[2]</sup>BEING PATIENT; <sup>[3]</sup>KEEPING FOCUSED ON GOD'S PLANS. Sounds simple doesn't it? But not easily identified and applied in the middle of a circumstance that may be bringing some of the greatest disappointment in life.

Most of us have heard of Murphy's Law! I have come to the conclusion after almost 60 years of life, and 32 of those years spent in full-time ministry that there are, what I have come to refer to as Murphy's Many and Diverse Laws. Here's a sampling of some of Murphy's wisdom...

\* Nothing is as easy as it looks; everything takes longer than you think; if anything can go wrong it will. \* Murphy was an optimist. \* A day without a crisis is a total loss. \* The other line always moves faster. \* The chance of the bread falling with the peanut butter and jelly side down most often happens when on carpet. \* Inside every large problem is a series of small problems struggling to get out. \* If it is broken, it will be more so when I try to fix it. \* No matter how long or hard you shop for an item, after you've bought it, it will be on sale somewhere cheaper.

\* Any tool dropped while repairing a car will roll underneath to the exact center. \* The repairman will never have seen a model quite like yours before.

\* You will remember that you forgot to take out the trash when the garbage truck is two doors away. \* Friends come and go, but enemies accumulate. \* The light at the end of the tunnel is the headlamp of an oncoming train.

Now, when it comes right down to it, Murphy's Laws are really not so much wisdom to live by, as they are ways of preparing ourselves, and insulating ourselves from various disappointments that naturally occur to every human being.

As you probably know, disappointment occurs when our hopes or our expectations are not being met in the way we think they should be met. Individuals can disappoint us, circumstances can disappoint us, and groups of people can disappoint us. Disappointment is something that every one of us faces—not just once, but throughout our lives.

Let me suggest a helpful remedy, if you read a chapter from the Book of Proverbs every day for one year you will gain some of the most profound wisdom for dealing with the disappointments of life. Since there are 31 chapters in the book of Proverbs, I suggest that you match each chapter with each day in the month, and read that Proverb chapter on that particular day. It is a good spiritual exercise, and one that I recommend to any young person, or older person who wants to gain Godly wisdom.

## I. DESCRIBING DISAPPOINTMENT!

Depending on your personality type and your emotional maturity, there are a variety of typical reactions to disappointments...

**1. ANGER.** "I don't like what's happening. Circumstances are not meeting my expectations. I'm ticked off. I'll blow my top and lash out at the cause of my disappointment, and probably do something socially and inappropriate as a believer."

**ILLUSTRATION:** In the spring of 1894, the Baltimore Orioles came to Boston to play a routine baseball game. But what happened that day was anything but routine. The Orioles' John McGraw got into a fight with the Boston third baseman. Within minutes all the players from both teams had joined in the brawl. The warfare quickly spread to the grandstands. Among the fans the conflict went from bad to worse. Someone set fire to the stands and the entire ballpark burned to the ground. Not only that, but the fire spread to 107 other Boston buildings as well.

*Daily Bread, August 13, 1992.*

Don't ever delude yourself into thinking that anger has no consequence.

**2. WITHDRAWAL.** Other personality types deal inappropriately with disappointment by withdrawing from the situation or the people who seem to have caused the disappointment.

**ILLUSTRATION:** October 7, 1969 the Montreal, Canada police force went on strike. Because of what resulted, the day has been called Black Tuesday. A burglar and a policeman were slain. Forty-nine persons were wounded or injured in rioting. Nine bank holdups were committed, almost a tenth of the total number of holdups the previous year along with 17 robberies at gunpoint. Usually disciplined, peaceful citizens joined the ruffraff and went wild, smashing some 1,000 plate glass windows in a stretch of 21 business blocks in the heart of the city, hauling away stereo units, radios, TVs and wearing apparel.

While looters stripped windows of valuable merchandise, professional burglars entered stores by doors and made off with truckloads of goods. A smartly dressed man scampered down a street with a fur coat over each arm with no police around, anarchy took over.

A school teacher lost her life savings in a business scheme that had been elaborately explained by a swindler. When her investment disappeared and her dream was shattered, she went to the Better Business Bureau.

"Why on earth didn't you come to us first?" the official asked. "Didn't you know about the Better Business Bureau?"

"Oh, yes," said the lady sadly. "I've always known about you. But I didn't come because I was afraid you'd tell me not to do it."

*Proverbs 1:7 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, But fools despise **wisdom** and instruction.*

*Proverbs 2:2 So that you incline your ear to **wisdom**, And apply your heart to understanding;*

*Proverbs 2:6 For the LORD gives **wisdom**; From His mouth come knowledge and understanding;*

*Proverbs 2:7 He stores up sound **wisdom** for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk uprightly;*

*Proverbs 2:10 When **wisdom** enters your heart, And knowledge is pleasant to your soul,*

*Proverbs 3:13 Happy is the man who finds **wisdom**, And the man who gains understanding;*

The folly of human nature is that even though we know where the answers lie--God's Word--we don't turn there for fear of what it will say. Here' the really unfortunate thing... just because they were hurt because it was decided that another publishing company's material was better than theirs, a huge group of children in that church lost out because those two excellent teachers were no longer teaching them God's Word.

Withdrawing is not a good way of handling disappointment, either.

**3. VENGEANCE.** A third way to deal with disappointment is to exact vengeance from the group or individual who disappointed you. Again, personality types will dictate what kind of vengeance is sought in certain circumstances. Some people will be sneaky about vengeance--we call that "passive-aggressive". Others will be violent. A popular phrase has been coined to describe this today. It's called "going Postal". Because of the several incidents involving postal employees who have shot co-workers and managers out of frustration and anger.

Illustration: There is a true story that came out of Scranton, New Jersey, just four years ago. It seems a young man saw a newspaper ad for "an almost new" Cadillac for \$150.00. The young man called the number listed and asked the lady, "Is this a misprint?" "No," she assured him, "it isn't." "Well, what's wrong with the car?" he asked. "Nothing," she replied. Mystified, the young man asked, "Why are you selling it so cheap?"

"Well," the woman responded, "my husband just died and his will specified I was to sell the car and give the money I got from the sale of the car to his secretary." So, that's what I'm doing.

That's one of those stories that make us laugh at vengeance. But most of us are very aware of what the Bible teaches about vengeance in...

*Romans 12:19 Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord.*

*2Thessalonians 1:8 in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

*Hebrews 10:30 For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. And again, "The LORD will judge His people."*

That's why vengeance can have no place in the life of a person who claims to be a follower of Jesus Christ. It is not an appropriate or godly way of handling disappointment. Vengeance is God's job, not ours.

## **JOSEPH'S DISAPPOINTMENT!**

Turn in your Bibles to Matthew 1, and look at verse 18..

Matt. 1:18 18 This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit.

Now, at this point of the story, Joseph and Mary were engaged to be married. They had had no sexual relations. However, in the Jewish culture of the day, the engagement period or betrothal period (which usually lasted a year), was considered to be the same as if the two people were married. They were even called husband and wife during this period of time. So, it took a divorce to end the engagement. Now, look at the next verse...

Matt. 1:19 19 Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

Can you imagine how disappointed Joseph must have been to find out that his true love—the woman he was planning to spend the rest of his life with—was pregnant...And he wasn't the father! He had trusted Mary! The future mother of his children looked to be a woman of low morals and "sluttish" behavior! Friends, let me tell you, that's disappointment.

But what I want you to grasp this morning is how this man, Joseph, the carpenter from Nazareth, handled this bitter disappointment. His example is a good one for us to follow as we deal with the disappointments that come in our lives.

## **II. DEALING WITH DISAPPOINTMENT!**

### **A. BY HIS EXAMPLE WE LEARN TO BE MERCIFUL WHEN DISAPPOINTED.**

As a Jewish man at that time in history, Joseph had two options: He could publicly divorce Mary and make a public spectacle of her (that's a form of withdrawal from the situation), or he could have her stoned to death (that's extreme vengeance) (see Deut. 22:23-24). Because she had presumably committed adultery, those were the two most common options available to him. But look at what Joseph chose to do instead...

Matt. 1:19 19 Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

Understand what Joseph chose to do—he could have vindicated himself by publicly withdrawing from the marriage, or he could have gotten his vengeance to salve his wounded ego.

But instead he chose to show MERCY. Mercy means, "a decision not to inflict harm, even when it is deserved."

#### ETERNAL -

*But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting On those who fear Him, And His righteousness to children's children, (Psalms 103:17, NKJV).*

#### BOUNDLESS -

*For Your mercy is great above the heavens, And Your truth reaches to the clouds. (Psalms 108:4, NKJV).*

#### PROLONGS LIFE -

*Through the LORD'S mercies we are not consumed, Because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness. (Lamentations 3:22, 23, NKJV).*

#### ENCOURAGES TO PENITENCE –

*So rend your heart, and not your garments; Return to the LORD your God, For He is gracious and merciful, Slow to anger, and of great kindness; And He relents from doing harm. (Joel 2:13, NKJV).*

#### FORGIVES SIN –

*But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, (Ephesians 2:4, NKJV).*

#### MAKES SALVATION POSSIBLE -

*But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, (Titus 3:4, 5, NKJV).*

**ILLUSTRATION:** There is a story about a mother who visited Napoleon on behalf of her condemned son. The emperor told the woman that her son had committed the same offense twice, and justice demanded the death penalty.

"But sire," she pleaded, "I don't ask for justice--only for mercy." "He doesn't deserve it," said Napoleon. "No, he doesn't," answered the man's mother, "but it would not be MERCY if he deserved it." "You're right!" said the emperor, "I'll grant your request and show him mercy!"

A righteous person handles disappointment with mercy—not justice, not vengeance, not withdrawal.

## **B. BY HIS EXAMPLE WE LEARN TO BE PATIENT WHEN DISAPPOINTED.**

The second thing we can learn from Joseph regarding handling disappointment is found in the beginning of verse 20...

Matt. 1:20 20 But after he had considered this...

How long Joseph considered this we don't know, but the implication is that he didn't make a quick decision. And that in and of itself is a second very good thing to remember from Joseph's life when we are disappointed—we should act patiently.

God never is in a hurry and neither should we. Often when we act hastily, we live to regret our decisions.

*Ec 7:8 The end of a thing is better than its beginning; The patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.*

*1Th 5:14 Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all.*

*Jas 1:4\* But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.*

*Jas 5:7\* Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain.*

**ILLUSTRATION:** We can't be like the preacher who quit the ministry after 20 years and became a funeral director. When asked why he changed, he said: "I spent 3 years trying to straighten out John and John's still an alcoholic, then I spent 6 months trying to straighten out Susan's marriage and she filed for divorce, then I spent 2 ½ years trying to straighten out Bob's drug problem and he's still an addict. Now at the funeral home when I straighten them out -- they stay straight!"

The natural human tendency is to want.. –a quick fix to life's disappointments... –to make a quick decision when we are disappointed... –to try to immediately rectify the situation that caused our disappointment. But Joseph's example tells us we need to give God time to work out His plans in our circumstances.

We need to have patience when we are disappointed.

### **C. BY HIS EXAMPLE WE ALSO LEARN TO FOCUS ON GOD'S PLANS**

No, look at the last part of verse 20...

Matt. 1:20b 20 ...an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

Friends, don't lose sight of the fact that all these things that were happening to Joseph were not in any way shape or form, the great "Jewish dream" that Joseph had planned for their future.

However, God in essence was saying to Joseph, "Joseph, trust me. Do it my way!" And that brings up the third thing we need to remember when disappointments come, *we need to focus on God's plans– rather than rigidly holding on to our plans.*

*There are many plans in a man's heart, Nevertheless the LORD'S counsel--that will stand. (Proverbs 19:21, NKJV).*

*"Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness And his chambers by injustice, Who uses his neighbor's service without wages And gives him nothing for his work, Who says, 'I will build myself a wide house with spacious chambers, And cut out windows for it, Paneling it with cedar And painting it with vermilion.' (Jeremiah 22:13, 14, NKJV).*

*Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit"; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. (James 4:13-14, NKJV).*

As a husband-to-be, I'm sure Joseph had plans to settle down in a cozy little house with a carpenter's shop in the back. He would run the carpenter shop and Mary would keep the books and watch over the household. They would raise a normal family in a normal little town, and someday his sons would take over the business.

But God had different plans. His plans were far greater than Joseph had ever dreamed. Joseph's plans had to be stopped (which led to disappointment) in order for God's plans to move forward.

Did you know that very often when God wants to do something significant in our lives, He will bring circumstances that stop us in our tracks, and can potentially lead to disappointment.

Henry Blackaby, speaks about this in his book, *Experiencing God*. He calls this a "Crisis of Belief." He writes, *"The crisis of belief is a turning point or a fork in the road that demands that you make a decision. You must decide what you believe about God.*

*How you respond when you reach this turning point will determine whether you go on to be involved with God in something God-sized that only He can do or whether you will continue to go your own way and miss what God has purposed for your life."*

In other words, when we come to that point of being disappointed, we have a choice: we have to choose between believing in God's sovereign and unconditional love for us and the direction His infinite foreknowledge wants to take things, or believe our human and finite view for our life and our circumstances.

Disappointment is often designed by God to help us stop and get the focus back on God's plans—rather than ours.

**ILLUSTRATION:** Have you ever watched a pigeon walk? They all walk the same way. And it's kind of comical. A pigeon walks the way it does so it can see where it's going. You see, a pigeon can't adjust its focus as it moves, so the bird actually brings its head to a complete stop between steps in order to re-focus. This is the way it walks: head forward, step; head back, step. Don't laugh—that's how it goes!

In our spiritual walk with God, we have the same problem as the pigeon does. Our lives become so hectic and frantic and self-focused that we have a hard time seeing where God is working and how He wants to use us in that work. So, disappointment is often useful to get us to stop and... –focus on where we are in our life's journey; –focus on what God wants to do through us; –focus on listening to God's call to join Him where He wants to work—not necessarily where we think it would be best for us to work;

So, disappointments are useful to get us to stop and fine tune our ears to hear the voice of God, and get us back on His agenda, rather than ours.

### III. DERAILING DISSAPPOINTMENT!

*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. (Romans 8:35-37, NKJV).*

*"Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you. "Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven." (Luke 10:19, 20, NKJV).*

#### A. Illustration: Defeated or Defeated the Enemy?

It was June 18, 1815, that the Battle of Waterloo took place. The French under the command of Napoleon were fighting the Allies (British, Dutch, and Germans) under the command of General Wellington. In those days, the people of England used a system of signals given from high points across the countryside, in order to tell the outcome of a battle.

The signals were spread from station to station by men waving flags. One of these signal stations was on the tower of a Cathedral in London.

Late in the day, the signal man in the cathedral tower started waving his signal flags: the message said, "W-E-L-L-I-N-G-T-O-N- - - D-E-F-E-A-T-E-D- -." As soon as those two words were signaled, a sudden fog cloud came rolling in, and made it impossible to see anything clearly.

So, the news of Wellington's defeat quickly spread throughout the city and the rest of the countryside, as the other signal men picked up the two word message. The whole country was sad and gloomy when they heard the news that their army had been defeated.

But just as suddenly as the fog appeared, it also lifted, and the signal man on top of the cathedral finished the message. You see, the message had four words, not two. The complete message was: "W-E-L-L-I-N-G-T-O-N- - -D-E-F-E-A-T-E-D- - T-H-E- - -E-N-E-M-Y!" It took only a few minutes for the good news to spread. Sorrow was turned into joy, defeat was turned into victory!

Friends, listen to me. Disappointment is going to come into your life. How you handle it will help determine the message of your life: DEFEATED...or ...DEFEATED THE ENEMY.

Being merciful; Being patient; and focusing on God's plans will help you and me DEFEAT THE ENEMY.