"Interruptions"

Matthew 1:18-25

STRENGTH for the Journey with Joe Stowell

Part of the RBC family of Ministries

Individual Study Introduction

After listening to the audio segment, use the following questions as your time allows. You may want to record your answers or jot down thoughts and notes in a personal journal. You may also want to use your journal as a record of your prayer time with God. Write out your prayer or simply record your requests and the areas of your life you are releasing to God. This written record will help you to watch God's movement in your life. You'll see more clearly the ways God is giving you "strength for the journey"!

Getting Started:

In this segment of Strength for the Journey, Joe Stowell continues to look at how the Christmas story represents a major interruption in the lives of Joseph and Mary.

- What do you like best about Christmas? What do you like least?
- Can you recall a Christmas that included a pretty significant interruption?

Strength through Scripture:

Read Matthew 1:18–25.

1. How do we see Joseph relying on the resource of the revelation of God?

2. What hints did Joseph receive that there was something divine going on in this interruption?

3. Do you remember hearing about Scott and Janet Willis and the way they responded to the loss of six of their nine children? Do you know of similar devastating interruptions where a believer's faith has brought great glory to God?

4. How are Christians like Scott and Janet able to have hope even in the depth of indescribable pain?

Notes:

"She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

Matthew 1:21

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5. How difficult is it for you to really believe that in the hands of God all things—even devastating interruptions—"work for the good" (Romans 8:28)?

Digging Deeper:

If you have enough time, answer one or more of these optional questions. But be sure to save time for the final two sections.

1. How tempting do you think it was for some of the key characters of biblical history to resist the interruption God brought into their lives—for example, Noah and building a boat; Abraham and a journey to an unknown destination; Joseph and his adventures in Egypt; Job and his suffering; Jesus and the cross?

2. How does the life of Job serve as perhaps the best illustration of the biblical perspective that God stands as the sovereign sentinel at the gate of our lives and permits nothing to occur that He will not ultimately use for His glory, the gain of His cause, and our good?

3. Can you recall going to God's Word in the midst of an interruption or problem and finding an option there that you hadn't thought of previously?

Strength through Reflection:

1. What is the most devastating interruption you can recall in your own life?

2. How prepared do you feel for the next major interruption? Read the "Call to Action" below. Are you willing to commit yourself now to surrendering to the interruptions that God will allow to come into your life this coming year?

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Strength through Prayer:

Spend a few moments in prayer. Thank God for the testimony and example of Christians like Scott and Janet Willis, who demonstrate how to sorrow—not as those who have no hope, but by taking the long, eternal view of life. And prepare your heart, through prayer, for whatever comes your way in the coming year.

You may want to begin your prayer with these words:

"Dear God, I stand in awe of the wonder of the Christmas story and of Your plan of salvation. Thank You for the encouragement that comes from biblical saints, like Joseph and Mary, and contemporary saints, like Scott and Janet Willis. As I enter this new year, I want to commit myself in advance to surrender to both the minor and major interruptions that You allow into my life. Help me to trust You. Help me to trust Your Word, which assures me that "all things work together for good."

Closing Call to Action:

Let your desire to surrender to and trust God be your first New Year's resolution, because you can count on the fact that God will bring an interruption into your life. The issue is not whether you will face interruptions, but how you will respond to them.

This year you may have to contend with impaired health, the loss of a loved one, the disappointment over a wayward child, a broken relationship, or a job loss or change. Will you be among those who have said, "OK, I surrender, and I will see what can be accomplished for God in this interruption and let Him do great things"? That takes faith. Can you trust Him when the interruption comes?

This also requires an understanding of what God's Word tells us about responding to those interruptions. Search the Word. Call a Christian friend or pastor when the interruption comes and say, "Can you give me anything to trust from God's Word in this moment?" And then kneel at the rock in Gethsemane with Jesus and say, "Lord, not my will but Yours be done." Surrender your life to God, and let the significance of what He is doing flow.

Notes:

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