

Fil-Am Community Church

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HOW TO DEAL WITH INTERRUPTIONS

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Key verse: Matthew 1:18-25

Are you ready for Christmas? All the kids say, "**Yes!**" All the adults say, "**No!**"

That reminds me of a little boy who had been asking for a watch. Finally his dad said, "If you mention it one more time, you're not getting it!" One night around the dinner table, his dad said, "Let's all share our favorite Scripture." When it came to the little boy, he said, "My favorite verse is Mark 13:37 *"What I say to you, I say to everyone: 'Watch!'"*

In three weeks, we'll be celebrating Christmas. Are you ready for Christmas? Some of you are saying, "I have presents to buy. I have presents to wrap. I have meals to prepare. "Some of you wonder whether you could ever survive another Christmas. Prices have gone up. You lost your job. You're sick or you have a sick loved one. Your child is on drugs. You don't have a special someone. You have someone but no longer special. **How will I survive another Christmas?**

Let me help you. We're starting a new series called "**Surviving Christmas and Beyond.**" We all look to the Christmas season to be a time of perfect peace, harmony, and joy—a time without turmoil. But the first Christmas was not that way. It was an interruption.

Interruptions can happen at any good time. They come when they are not supposed to come, like at Christmas time. Consider the timing of Joseph and Mary's interruption. Joseph and Mary were engaged to be married.

Like Christmas, engagements are supposed to be a magical time. Those of you who are married, I'm sure you still remember the excitement you felt when you became engaged. I'm sure Mary and Joseph felt the same way too. But it was during this time that a powerful interruption came along.

An angel appeared to Mary and told her that she would miraculously, as a virgin, conceive and give birth to the Son of God. What joyful news! Yet, what an interruption! How would she explain her pregnancy to Joseph? Would he believe her? If he did believe her, would he be willing to take on that responsibility? What of her plans for the wedding and the honeymoon? No honeymoon. This was not in her plans. And yet, she accepted it. I am fully convinced that she could have said, "No, Lord. Out of the question. I already have plans." But she didn't.

We know how Joseph responded. He didn't believe her. How could he? His plans for a happy home with the woman he loved were dashed before his eyes. His life, as well as hers, had been powerfully interrupted.

I remember eight years ago, during our first year of marriage, I was looking forward to spending a wonderful Christmas with my wife. I was excited and made some elaborate plans for Christmas eve. We were living in New York then and so I thought I would surprise her with a Broadway show, dinner afterwards and then exchange of gifts at the stroke of midnight.

But then I became sick a few days before Christmas. All my plans were interrupted. I felt dismayed and frustrated. We stayed home on Christmas Eve and my Christmas dinner consisted of soup and lemon tea. So, interruptions can come at any time. And we better be prepared. If we are not careful, our response to an interruption can send us down the wrong path.

Joseph nearly went down the wrong path. When he discovered Mary's pregnancy, he was devastated. He couldn't buy her story about a virgin conception. As much as he loved her and wanted to be with her, there was nothing to do but divorce her.

Their engagement which was called a betrothal was much more binding than today's engagements.

They were considered to be married already although they couldn't have honeymoon yet. Formal wedding comes after about a year. The only way out of one was divorce. Joseph had the right to have her stoned to death for infidelity. Yet because he was a good man, he did not want to harm her or even embarrass her. He would divorce her privately. This was Joseph's human response to a powerful interruption. But it would have been a grave mistake.

Now, let me give you three things to remember when you encounter an interruption.

1. PRAY FOR GUIDANCE

That's the first thing you do. **Pray** for guidance. The first thing to do when your life is interrupted is stop and pray. The problem is that's the last thing we do. Why do we do that? Because we treat prayer like a fire extinguisher. Use only in case of emergency. If it's not emergency, if it doesn't involve life and death, we rely on our own wisdom. And when things go bad, you ask, "What happened?"

What happened was that you failed to consult the person who, more than anyone else in the world, knows what's going on in your life.

The Bible says in Psalm 139:1-4 (NIV), "*O LORD, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar.*"

*You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways.
Before a word is on my tongue **you know it completely**, O LORD.”*

God knows all your burdens, God knows the interruptions in your life. He knows how to deal with your situation. All you need to do is bring it to him. He will listen and he will respond. Look at the last sentence,

“Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely.”

The fact is, **God knows** even what you’re going to pray about. But he wants you to pray anyway. Because he longs to commune with you, to have an intimate talk with you.

When Joseph was faced with a future-threatening situation, I’m certain that he went to God to ask for guidance amid his troubles. If that were not the case, he could have acted in an ungodly manner. Verse 19 tells us, *“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.”*

This verse tells us a lot about Joseph's character. Here was a man, gravely offended, but he did not respond in a way that would also offend another person. I’m sure that he still loved Mary despite what happened and that’s why he could still be gentle to her. How many of us can act as humbly and responsibly as Joseph did when faced with a trying circumstance? He knew that God gives grace to the humble and that's why he could act in humility. That takes a lot of character and strength of will.

We, too, must come to God whenever we’re carrying a burden. We cannot carry them ourselves for our strength is not enough. Jesus says in Matthew 11:28, *“Come to me all you who are **weary and burdened** and I will give you **rest**.”*

We must ask God for guidance and direction whenever things just seem so confusing. And God will show us the way. This is why we should try not to make any major decisions in the heat of the moment. Let's wait for our emotions to calm down before making any important moves. Let's make sure that our decisions are based on sound reasoning, not on shallow emotions. And we will spare ourselves a lot of trouble if we do that.

When you look to God **He will help you**. When you encounter an interruption, whatever it may be, don't react according to your own feelings and thoughts. Seek God's direction.

Remember Proverbs 3:5-6, "***Trust in the LORD*** with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight."

When interruptions come, pray for guidance. Then, the second thing you can do is

2. PUT IT IN THE PROPER PERSPECTIVE

You ask questions like, "How bad is it really? How long will it actually be important? What difference will it make in eternity?"

Many of our interruptions are just like that, interruptions. It means they are temporary in nature. They will also go away in time. In most sports, like baseball or tennis, the game is stopped when it is interrupted by rain and then resumes when the rain stops. But in football, you keep on playing even when there's rain, even when the snow is falling. The show must go on, so to speak.

Our perspective about interruptions is supposed to be like that in sports. We stop for the time being, maybe to reflect, gather our wits, get more information, or we keep on going on in the midst of the interruption. But never should we stop playing. We must understand that life continues despite interruptions. Life is like a game where you aim to finish well.

The key to handling an interruption is to get **God's take on it**. We really cannot understand the purpose of an interruption unless we see it from God's perspective. Sometimes that's hard because we can't accept the fact that our plans have changed. We want to do it our way and so when God speaks to us, we cover our ears and ignore him.

Joseph was not that kind of guy. I can imagine Joseph, having learned of Mary's situation, tossing and turning in bed, trying to decide what to do. Because he was a righteous man, as the Bible says, I'm sure he did pray about his situation. God didn't answer him right away tho'. In the end he decided to divorce her privately. Having decided, he finds enough peace to get to sleep. Then, God's answer came in a dream. While he is sleeping, God surprises him, an angel of the Lord appears to him in a dream and says (vs. 20-21) , *“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. 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.”*

Joseph awoke with a changed mind. He would not divorce Mary. He would take her as his wife and help raise this miraculous child. He had gotten God's perspective of his interruption.

So, he **prays for guidance**, thinks that he has the right solution but God speaks to him and tells him the best course of action. You see, interruptions come to our lives for a purpose. God allows them in order for him to work in our lives.

I believe this is what he accomplished in Joseph's life. You see, God could have given him the news about Mary's pregnancy at the same time he gave it to Mary. But God decided to withhold the news from Joseph. He let Mary break the news to him.

I believe God was testing Joseph's character. He tested him, not to trip him up and watch him fall, but to deepen his capacity to obey God. To develop his character.

God was **molding** him to become the father he wanted him to be. You see, the salvation of the world was at stake.

The child Jesus had to be raised by someone whose integrity and character were beyond reproach.

You see, just as fire refines ore to extract precious metals, God refines us through difficult circumstances. The same way he refined Joseph. And I'm sure God let him go through other trials in order to extract the best out of him.

When interruptions come, we can complain, or we can try to see how God is stretching us to develop our character. So, when we are tested, we can either become bitter or better. God asks us to wait on him and not to complain. And as we wait on him, to do the right thing.

Oftentimes, however, we move ahead of God. Although God says in his word, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," we stubbornly do

our own thing. And when we go on our own way, the result is always trouble.

The apostle Paul is one person who suffered different kinds of interruptions in his life. As he went about preaching the gospel, he was imprisoned, he was stoned, he was shipwrecked, he was whipped, you name it, he got it. But he knew that all these interruptions were nothing compared to the blessing and reward he will receive in the end. After making a list of things that he suffered, he says in 2 Corinthians 4:16, *“Therefore we **do not lose heart**. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far **outweighs them all**. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”*

Paul fixed his eyes on God who is unseen. He didn't focus on his temporary discomforts.

He knew that there was something beyond the earthly and physical. He was looking upward to heaven.

Someone said, **“The quickest way to lose perspective in life is to focus on the problem rather than the problem solver.”**

To deal with interruptions, you pray for guidance, then put it in proper perspective. And also, you

3. PLACE IT IN GOD'S HANDS

(Phone rings)

Excuse me, I have to take this call.

Hello? Oh, hi...I'm sorry but I'm in church and I'm in the middle of...I know this call is important but I have an obligation to all the people here...Is there a problem?...No problem?...But I have a problem?...Oh, yes, of course, my wife is sick but you cannot speak to her because she's at home. You can call her...you will not?

Can we talk later because people are getting distracted? You see, you have interrupted me and I don't know how to get back to my message now...some are ready to walk out...some look like they're going to throw tomatoes at me... I shouldn't worry and just place it in your hands? ...Oh yes, Lord, you are in control of the situation. Sorry, Lord, for a moment, I thought I was in control.

Ok, I'll place it in your hands and put my trust in you. And I won't worry about my wife because you're taking care of her, too. So, that's the reason you called me.

Thanks, Lord, for this blessed interruption. Nice talking to you. Bye.

Folks, keep in mind that God, in His providence, is still in control of your life. Nothing can happen to you without the leave and notice of your Father. He still has all of the hairs on your head numbered.

God knows what he is doing. He is your creator. He knows every little bit of what's going on in your life. So, you might as well leave everything to God. He will work out your situation. However impossible it may be, to God nothing is impossible. That's exactly what the angel told Mary when at first she wondered how she could be pregnant when she was a virgin. *"The angel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a*

child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God.” (Luke 1:35-37 NIV)

What’s interesting also is Mary’s response. In the next verse she says, *“I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May it be to me as you have said.”* (Luke 1:38 NIV)

I want you to underline those words in your Bible. That statement is the most important statement any of us can make in our lifetime. It is a statement of submission, of servitude, of surrender.

It’s saying, “Lord, I don’t have control of my life. You do. Whatever you want to make out of my life, I give you permission to do that.” You see, God cannot work in our lives **unless we let him**. He wants us to be totally, completely surrendered to him before he can change us and mold us to be the persons he want us to be.

Because Mary **surrendered** herself to God, she had the privilege of becoming the vessel which God filled with blessings. She had the privilege of becoming the mother of Jesus.

Is there **anything** in your life that you haven’t placed in God’s hands? Is there an interruption of sickness, of loneliness, of financial lack, of strained relationship, of whatever, that you haven’t placed in God’s hands?

I challenge you to commit them all to God and be amazed at how God will show himself strong for you. To deal with interruptions, **let God deal with them.**

Interruptions can at times redirect our lives in a new and positive way. This was true of Joseph and Mary. Their plans were interrupted, but what an interruption! Can you imagine a more wonderful privilege, or a more challenging responsibility, than to be the human parents of the Son of God? The direction their future took was not what they had planned, but it was so much better.

Have you ever considered that God could do that kind of thing in your life? Not that you would be made the parents of the Son of God, but that God would take what seems to be an interruption, an unforeseen problem, and use it to set your life on a new and better path.

Whatever interruption you may be enduring right now, why not look at it in a different light, and ask, “God, are you using this to do something great in my life?” Then begin to look for the marvelous things He will do.

Whatever interruption you may be experiencing this Christmas, there is one thing you can do—**stop and give thanks to God for Jesus**. And as you praise and thank God, even in the midst of difficult circumstances, something of the peace that Jesus came to bring will be yours.

Let us pray.....