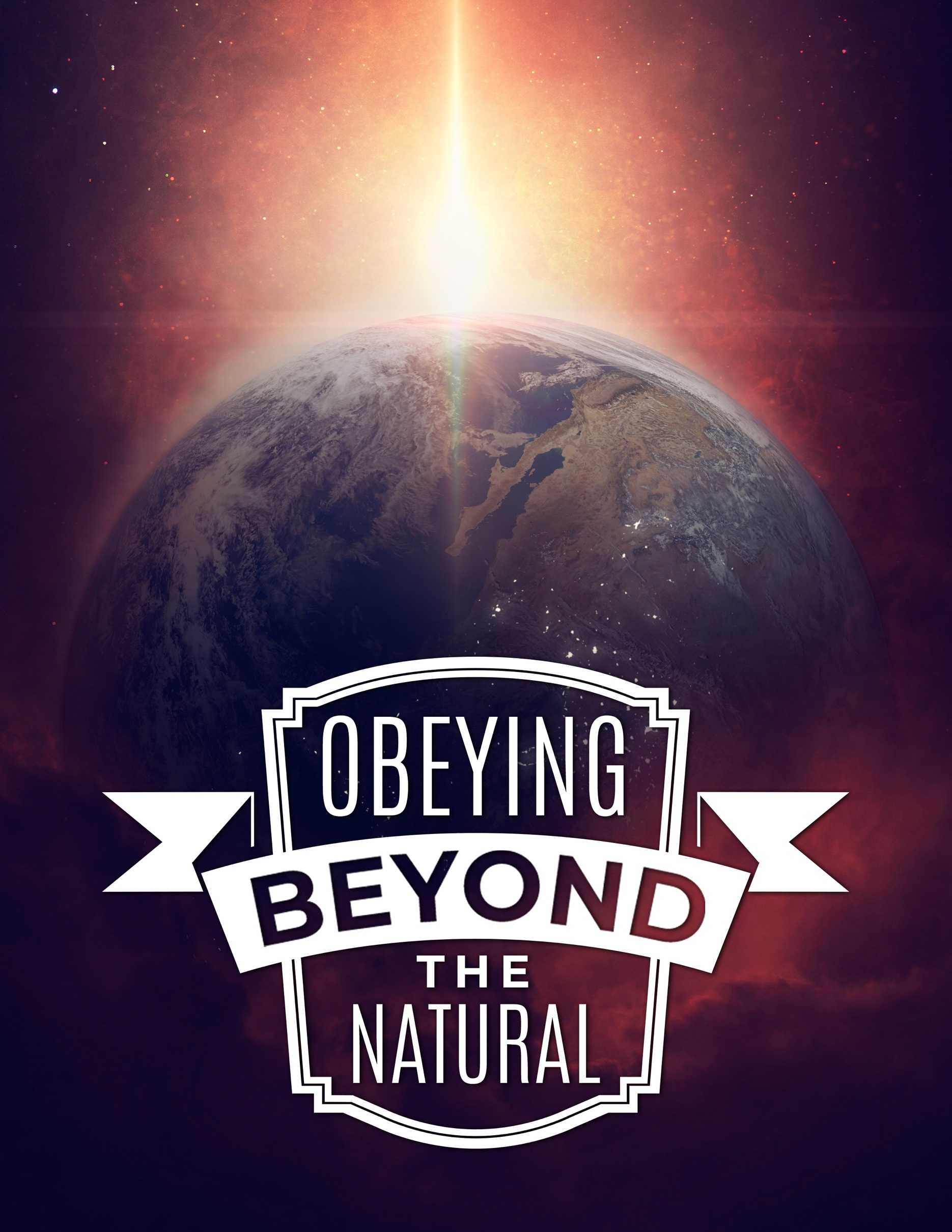
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**Obeying Beyond the Normal: *Laying Down Our Will for God’s Will***

**Big Idea of the Series:** This 3-week serieswill cover the great example of two very faithful people in Scripture. Joseph and Mary. They are tasked with a great call of God – to raise His Son. They had to have faith and obedience beyond what is normal because of the supernatural happenings in their lives.

**Week 1**

**Text:** Matthew 1:18-19

**Topic:** Obedience & Faith

**Big Idea of the Message:** How can we have faith like Joseph and Mary when it defies all logic and reason?

**Sermon Ideas and Talking Points:**

1. **Elation, Anticipation, Humiliation:** *Matthew 1:18-19: “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.”*

* **Elation** - Mary and Joseph were betrothed to one another and this was as binding as marriage. Remember your elation when you were about to get married? (*Now you just look at them and say, “What was I thinking?”* 😉) To get a better understanding of the Ancient Jewish Wedding Customs, go here:

<https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/the-ketubah-text/>

* **Anticipation** - The Bible tells us that these took place "before they came together". You know they had great anticipation and they were both counting down the days until they could be together and live together in their own home as husband and wife.
* **Humiliation** - During this engagement period both the bride and the groom were to keep themselves pure physically for the other spouse. But Joseph discovered that his bride-to-be was pregnant and not by him. This would have been a source of great embarrassment and shame both to Mary and Joseph, as well as to their respective families.

1. **God had a Greater Purpose for Them:**  Just as He does all of us. His purpose for us is always far greater than the expectations that we or others have for us. Joseph had every dream shattered when this bombshell is dropped on his head. He finds out that his virgin promised wife is now pregnant. Why? Who? He had to have been torn and had doubts about the truth of what Mary explained to him about the visitation of the angel of God and the validation of the Holy Spirit coming upon her to impregnate her. How many of us, no matter how much we believed in God, would believe Mary without a doubt? The problem is, we look at everything from the natural. But by faith, we should see everything from a supernatural standpoint because God is always in control.

*There was a time when a man went to look for tile flooring and pointed out to the salesman as he was looking at a tile, “That is the ugliest tile I have ever seen”. The salesman looked at him with a perplexed look and said, “No, it is the most beautiful tile you have ever seen. You just have the wrong perspective. You are looking at it upside down. Turn it over.”*

Mary’s fear that Joseph, being a just man, might end their relationship, would have filled her heart with anxiety if not for her faith in God. Mary knew that God would vindicate her character. Yield yourself to Him for His purposes and leave Him to deal with any and all conclusions. It is His will, His outcome; we just yield and obey, and He will vindicate us because of His great righteousness. We will also be blessed beyond measure by it.

1. **Joseph was Righteous**: In his love for her and him being a righteous man, did not want to make her a public display. He could have done so; for, by the law, an engaged virgin, if she was an adulteress, was to be stoned to death. Joseph loved Mary but was crushed and wanted to get a bill of divorce into her hand - as quickly and quietly as possible. The virgin birth was difficult for people to believe back then, even as it is also doubted now by many. Who would have believed them?

Considering it impossible to go through with marriage to someone who (he thinks) has been unfaithful to him, Joseph decides to seek a quiet divorce. Remember that betrothal (engagement) was binding in Jewish culture, and one needed a divorce to break an engagement. Joseph her husband shows that even though they were not formally married, Joseph was still considered Mary’s husband by the engagement and by law.

That is life. We make all our plans and set things up just the way we want them to be, then some tragedy or circumstance takes place and we see our hopes, our plans and our dreams shattered. That may be hard for us to comprehend, but it is still how life operates in the fallen state that we are in. We must have the faith, the hope, the love and the obedience in God’s plan for our lives.

**Message LifePoint**: *Isaiah 55:8-9: “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,” says the Lord. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.”*

His plans for us are rarely what we would plan for ourselves, as all of us have experienced in life. But His plans are always the best, always right, and always perfect for us, even when they sometimes hurt us deeply. *Romans 8:28: “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.”* We may not like it when the Lord shatters our dreams and our hopes, but when everything has been said and done, we will see that His plan was the perfect plan all along!

Just remember, some will not be realized until Heaven. We can only step into the unknown when we trust our God Who knows all our unknowns. Like Joseph and Mary, have faith in the mighty power and all-knowing providence of God. He has built a great plan for our lives even though we may be months or years from the smoke clearing and the dust settling to see what the Lord has graciously done for us.

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**Week 2**

**Text:** Matthew 1:20-25

**Topic:** Obedience & Faith

**Big Idea of the Message:** We see Joseph’s true character revealed in this great test. What is revealed of us when we go through a trial?

**Sermon Ideas and Talking Points:**

1. **Our True Character is Revealed in Trials and Testing:** During this most difficult of situations, Joseph's true self is revealed. We are told that he was a "just" man. This means that he was blameless under the Law of Moses and that he walked by faith in the Lord. He was a man of God before these events befell him and what he was in his heart came to surface in this his greatest of trials. Important point: The times when life goes wrong (from our perspective) is the time when we can see our true selves. For what we are in the worst of times is what we really are in our hearts!

How you respond toward God in a time of crisis reveals the depths of your commitment and obedience to God and to His will. It shows your true self and your standing with God Almighty. We see this prime example in the Psalms of David. We see this mighty man of God and his heart for God pouring out for us to witness as he endures test after test.

**Joseph to make a choice:**

A.) He can publicly demean Mary because of what he perceives to be her immorality. This choice would most likely lead to her death under the Law.

B.) He can divorce her quietly and put her away, leaving her to raise the child alone in shame and poverty.

C.) He can marry her and raise the child as if it were his own. This last option would very, very rarely have been chosen by an ancient Jewish man.

Joseph wanted none of these choices, but he had to choose one of them. And choosing anything when we are wounded, can go very wrong if we do not seek the council of God for our decisions.

**We must choose, and we always do choose.** Often life presents us with choices that are less than enticing to our human nature doesn’t it?

We have distortions (called cognitive bias) that impact how we see life and they impact us in so many ways.

* **Our perception of truth - Perception of others - Perception of ourselves - Perception of the past - Perception of the future**

Because of our sin nature, without God, we are making decisions while looking through a distorted lens - is it any wonder why we make bad decisions that we later regret? Joseph knew He had to seek God for the right decision in this most difficult situation. Our duty in those times is to listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit and seek to do that one thing that He wants us to do in whatever situation we are faced with. Even if everyone is telling you otherwise.

1. **Joseph's Heart Is Revealed**: Joseph's decision is to react toward Mary in compassion. How we respond in a time of catastrophe reveals a great deal about the fellowship that we have with God. How we respond to those who have hurt us is also an indicator of the seriousness of our spiritual walk. *Ephesians 4:32: “And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.”* Something we really must notice here is that the Lord did not send Joseph the answer for direction he was looking for until after he made a heart decision on his own. God wants to see the choice we are going to make and yes of course He knows what choice we will make, but He allows us to make it, nonetheless. **This is not for God to see, but for us to see who we truly are. This shows us our true character.** God intervened and comforted Joseph with the truth.
2. **God’s Providence**: As these thoughts troubled the mind of Joseph, the Lord sent Gabriel to speak to him in a dream. Joseph was made to understand who the Child was that his betrothed carried. He was made to understand that this was really a miraculous work of God. Do you see how our vantage point and perspective can work for or against us!

The way we look at life is like watching a parade go by while standing between two buildings. You can only see the part of the parade that is passing directly in front of you at any given moment. You will have a memory of what has already passed, but you have no idea as to what is coming down the street. Or what has happened to what has just passed you. You must wait until it gets to you. However, if you were to climb on top of the building, you would be able to see the parade in its beginning, middle and the end all at the same time. God sees our entire lifetime, in real-time, all at the same time!

**Message LifePoint: How many things that you hoped and dreamed for in the past – how thankful are you that they never came to pass!?**

God is working out His perfect will in your life. Therefore, let us walk confidently in Christ, even when we cannot see the way or understand the why. He will bring us to the place where it all makes sense someday. From where I stand right now, I cannot see what God has placed in my future. But I know that down the road, in a place I have not arrived at yet, my questions are answered, and my needs are met. Walk with Him humbly by faith until He brings you to the place where He has already placed your provisions.

The beauty of God is that the Lord already has promises fulfilled, needs met and a future intact for His children even amid our rebellion! He has already gone into tomorrow and arranged our path, supplied our need and lifted our burden. Therefore, just walk, one step in obedience at time, each day at a time. It is His timing and not ours that matters.

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**Week 3 - Conclusion**

**Text:** Matthew 1:20-25

**Topic:** Obedience & Faith

**Big Idea of the Message:** How can we obtain the obedience toward God of Joseph and Mary?

**Sermon Ideas and Talking Points:**

1. **Joseph's Faith Reaction -** As soon as Joseph understands God’s plan, he reacts in faith by obeying. How often do we react to something in faith? Most of the time we react in our feelings, don’t we? Joseph reacts in total faith. He takes Mary into his home and heart as his wife. He doesn't know how things will work out, but he knows that God is enough for Him. True faith does not shrink from the call of God just because others do not want it or understand. True faith hears the voice of the Holy Spirit and simply does as it is told.
2. **Joseph's Humble Restraint** - Joseph lays down all his rights as her husband and he refrains from having sexual relations with her. He respects the plan of God and knows that she is to be a virgin when Jesus is born. This too is a response of faith. He willingly lays aside his rights so that the will of God might be accomplished! True faith willingly puts aside its own desires to do the will of God. Often, God's call on our lives will be hard to accept and hard to do, but faith doesn't seek the easier road. Faith says, *"Here am I, send me!" Isaiah 6:8*. When the time came and the baby was born, Joseph did the job of the father, he named the boy Jesus. Naming the child was the responsibility of the Father, (*Luke 1:63*).

Joseph is saying that he is willing to embrace the plan of God for his life, even though he doesn't fully understand it. He is willing to raise this child as his own, even though he knows the baby is not his son. What Joseph saw as a great tragedy, was in fact the greatest blessing of his life!

What if God is doing the same for us amid a great tragedy. If you love Him, He is working all things for your good. Plain and simple.

1. **Question**: When your dreams come up against God’s plan what are you doing about it? Some people try to fix it themselves. Believe me, it won't work! You will only make it worse. Some people just quit. That won't work either, because whether you participate or not, life goes on. Still others become angry at God and others and try to make them pay for their own hurts. The only person you really hurt is yourself.

In all of this, Joseph is an amazing example to other believers. When a life altering crisis arose in his life, he sought the Lord's face. Instead of reacting harshly and abruptly, Joseph reacted in faith; waiting on the Lord for guidance and direction, and then he was helped by God! As

*S. Gorman says, “Don’t waste this life trying fit into a role you were never created to play.”* The role Joseph presumed for his life was nothing like what the Lord had preordained for him! When Joseph received his call from God, he altered all his plans and put away all his dreams and simply went and did what the Lord said to do. OBEDIENCE!

**Message LifePoint:**

This is a lesson for every person who wants to serve the Lord. Our duty before Christ is to humble ourselves under God's mighty hand regardless of what it may involve. At times, God's will is not the easiest thing to do, the most fitting thing to do, and sometimes it is the last thing we want to do. However, doing His will is always the right thing to do!

We can never forget that it is from the wreckage of our greatest hurts that God often builds for us the greatest of blessings! Never let go of His hand. He may lead you through barren places, but He will never forsake you in any of them. **Remember, the prettiest route is not always safest route.** Wherever His path leads you, it is the best route and you can count on His grace to be enough for the need of the hour.