

Don't Look Back

Holy Moments series Week 1

by Chris Famisaran

Roughly 25 years ago, my friend Asher asked me, do you want to go on a hike? I said, why, yes. I loved to hike at the time, still do. And so we got up super early. We got into his blue Volvo station wagon. Do you remember those? I think it was around the 87, 88 model. And we started to drive and up and up and up we went up the mountain to the Forest Creek trailhead. I was a little concerned because the road, it was a dirt road. It was rather rutted. Could his station wagon handle those ruts? Handled it well. And I remember, I think it was about 7 or 8 o'clock in the morning that we started. The sun had already been up and it was nice and cool because it would be a nice hot day that day. We got our packs on, walked maybe about a half a mile to where we got to the sign where it said San Gabriel Wilderness Area. You needed a permit to go beyond. Fortunately enough, we'd had the permit. Then we started to climb, climb and climb. We passed Jack Straw Springs, where there was a little place you could get water or if you wanted to camp, and continued on roughly about five miles until we got onto the top of the San Bernardino Divide. And there you could climb maybe less than 100ft up to the top of Anderson Peak.

Now, by that time I was a little famished. I was still a young man, and of course, I could eat a lot back then. I don't remember what I had, but I remember what Asher had for lunch because I was deeply, deeply envious. You see, the night before, he'd gone to Subway and already bought a sandwich and wrapped it in aluminum foil for this very moment, for him to enjoy. And I thought at first, well, how can I steal a sandwich? Because I was starving. I didn't really think that, but I was that hungry. I was hoping maybe he would be so generous that he would offer me a little bit. I remember my lunch not being as appealing as his sandwich was.

Now, that point, we'd only walked maybe five and a half, six miles, and we gained about 4,000ft of elevation. We went from about just under 6,000 to just over 10,000ft. And that's where the real walk began. We started to head west.

We went, I think we climbed east San Bernardino Peak and also the west one. And then eventually we got to what was called the Washington Monument. And a little bit further was what we call the limber pine bench. And it's this concrete or bench made out of rock that you actually can sit down and you can see all of Southern California. To the west, you could actually see to the ocean in Catalina. I looked down at Loma Linda. The hospital didn't look so big at that point. But I just remember being in awe in this expanse, this beautiful moment of being able to take in not only the beauty but the vastness of Southern California. If you look to the southeast, you could see Mount San Jacinto and Palm Springs. To the south, you could see Mexico. To the north, you could see the Sierra Nevadas. West, of course, you could see all of LA, the San Clemente island and Catalina. I savored that moment. I still can clearly see it in my mind.

I was also tired. Fortunately enough, we were going down. And so we started to go down and walk and walk and walk until we got to Manzanita Flats. Whole bunch of manzanita on this probably about a half mile stretch of walking. And then we turned right down a trace trail. You know what a trace trail is? It's a trail that barely exists. What you don't realize is that as soon as you start walking starts to hurt a little. Hurt a little bit more. I think at that point we had already walked maybe 15, 16, 17 miles at that point, gained over 4,000ft of elevation. Mind you, I was young, I was a teenager. I could handle it at that point until we got to the trace trail. And the trace trail was not a switchback. It wasn't wide and long. It was narrow, and in some points you could barely see it. In fact, we had to try to find the trail at some point. And all I remember at that point, everything, all that wonderful high that I had experienced on limber pine bench was the complete opposite on this trace trail. And I literally started to hate this trail because my knees and my legs were hurting. They were in such pain. I still remember that feeling.

Finally, after I think it was about two miles, we got down to this beautiful meadow called John's Meadow. You can actually camp there, except there was a ton of mosquitoes by that point. It was about, I think, 18 miles. We did not want to get mosquitoes on us, so we had to walk faster and faster. Not run, but walk faster. All told, my friend Asher and I had walked 20 miles that day. Memorable, memorable moments in my life.

You see, at that point, I was strong. I thought I was invincible. My family and I had gone camping earlier in the year and I was deeply frustrated because I knew I was so much stronger. I wanted to keep going. I wanted to go up the high Creek. On one particular hike, backpacking trip, I was slowed down. Y'all were weighing me down. And this trip was kind of a realization that, no, I was stronger than I thought. But just because you're strong doesn't mean that there's going to be consequences. Because the next couple of days I was sore. You know what the doms are? Blade onset motion, muscle soreness. You see, you might feel it about 24 hours, but really it's 48 hours after very hard physical exertion is where you really feel the pain. And in this moment of having the doms, I thought, I'm never going to do this again. But you know what's amazing about pain? Even when you do something awesome, after you get through that pain, what do you start to argue with yourself? It wasn't that bad. I want to do it again. Now it's been over 25 years. I don't want to do it again. But it's a lasting memory. I learned that day that I could go much further than I had expected. But it was tiring, it was miserable, it was painful. Those last three miles, it was hard to keep putting one foot in front of the other to keep going. But I knew if we didn't get to the car, then I'd be stuck on the mountain. And we had no food and we barely had any water. So the thought of having food kept me going.

Memories. How do you measure time? Do you remember time by years, by dates, by memories? Think about the time. What are some memories? Moments in your life that you were fond, that you look back fondly, or maybe not so fondly? I remember the day that I got married. I could explain that to a T. I'm not going to do that today. I remember my 13. I remember when I turned 13 years old. That was a big day in my life. Y'all remember your first day of school? Do you remember meeting your best friend? Do you remember meeting the love of your life? How do you measure time?

Today I want to go to the book of Matthew, chapter one. Okay, Matthew one. And so I want to read a Little bit of Matthew 1. And as we read, Overall, I want you to ponder what is the most memorable moments of your life? Okay, what is the most memorable or one of the most memorable moments of your life? Moments can be good, they can be challenging, they can be bad. Which is easier? Is it easier to remember the good memories or the bad memories? I

tend to remember the bad memories. Unfortunately, it's harder to remember the good memories and memories, especially you know, memories can fill us with satisfaction or they can give us nightmares.

Now, over the next couple of weeks, we're going to be looking at Jesus life. There's going to be certain moments in Jesus life or those around him who are going to experience interesting memories. One of these today that I want to first go to is in the life of Jesus, Father Joseph, starting at verse 18, actually, chapter 1, verse 18. This is how the birth of Jesus, the Messiah came about. His mother Mary was pledged. His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph. But before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit.

That's an awkward conversation. They were pledged, essentially, they were engaged. They were technically married, but they had not lived together nor consummated the marriage. And she has to tell Joseph that I'm pregnant. How do you think Joseph felt? Excuse me. Or somebody who say, excuse me, I don't recall anything happening. And says, it's by God. How many of you seen that movie, that meme as well? Where? Well, I'll show that for another day. Joseph has to be kind of scratching his head. Now, Joseph, as it will say, he's a good man, right?

But verse 19 says, Because Joseph, her husband, was faithful to the law and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly because she got pregnant and it wasn't Joseph's baby. What could they have done to Mary? They could have stoned her, they could have killed her. And we know he was a faithful man. He could have handed them over, handed her over to be stoned. But he doesn't. And so what does he try to do? He tries to quietly divorce her. Joseph, at this point, this moment in his life, he has to make a decision. Now, later on, God intervenes.

Starting at verse 20, it says, but after he considered this, 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. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give his name, Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins. Can you imagine the dream that he has from God? This is changing his life.

Who was Joseph? We know, for instance, that Joseph was a carpenter. And a carpenter was not a glamorous job back then. It was hard work. And he probably most likely did not make a lot of money. But we also know, as we read in verse 19, he was a righteous and faithful man. We also know that he was a descendant of David. Of course, he was Mary's husband and Jesus' earthly father. There's some great things about Joseph, but Joseph is given a difficult task, a difficult assignment directly from God. He's told, I'm going to give you the responsibility of caring for a son that is not physically even your own. And what he's going to find out is this is not going to be an easy task, let alone it's challenging enough just to be a parent. Amen. Parents. Can you agree with that? Can it be. It's not always roses. There can be challenging moments. But it's not even his son. And not only that, it's the Son of God. How many of you would like to carry and care and raise the Son of God? That's a tall order. Sounds kind of scary, right? And so Joseph has to make a decision. I think some of us would like, think I'm going to take a pass on this God. But Joseph doesn't. He accepts the responsibility.

And so verse 22, it says, all of this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet. This wasn't something that was just given to Joseph as a responsibility. One day it was prophesied, it was talked about, the virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Emmanuel, which means God with us. Jesus, the Son of God, comes to this world as a baby.

Verse 24. When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him, took Mary home as his wife, but he didn't consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son and he gave him the name Jesus. So Joseph takes responsibility, cares for, nurtures, protects, feeds, clothes, provides for Jesus.

How many of you have ever been given a difficult assignment and wanted to say no, but you still said yes. Maybe your boss really talk to you and do it or didn't even give you the option. You're being voluntold. Have you ever been voluntold? Oh, it's so frustrating, right? I mean, why are you asking me when You can just tell me this is what I want. You may not like it, but if you like your job or if you want to keep your paycheck, you have to do it. Joseph is given this responsibility of caring for Jesus, the Son of God. And Joseph, he can choose

to accept this or he goes forward to faith. I look forward to the day that I'm going to ask him, how are you feeling in this moment? There's a lot of Uncertainty that Joseph is probably feeling. But he has to move forward. He has to live by faith. And living by faith means we don't always understand why things happen the way they do. Joseph probably didn't understand why, of all people, am I chosen again? I'm just a carpenter. There is no man knew how to raise kids, especially the son of God. We know he was a good man, he was a faithful man. That's why he said yes. But he has this dream and he's wondering, well, what am I supposed to do? So again, Joseph takes on the responsibility. And it's going to be a life that will be challenging because who knows what's going to happen at that point for Joseph.

Later on, we realize that Herod decides to do what? To get rid of all the young children, boys who are under two years old, to kill him. And what do they have to do? They have to flee. They cannot look back. They have to go forward in faith.

Those of you who are historians know that today is a very interesting day, infamous or sad day, because 83 years ago, Pearl harbor was bombed. And over 2400 service members and civilians were killed on this day. 83 years ago now, sometime prior, there was a nurse, I believe her name. What was her name? What is her name? Juanita. Juanita Redmond. She was a nurse on the island of Bataan in the Philippines. And In March of 1941, she received a gift. And she opened the package, she took out the paper that covered the gift, and out she pulled a black hat with a black veil on it. And she started to laugh because this gift was the most unrealistic gift that she could receive while in the Philippines. She was wearing her army. Army coveralls. There were no special events. And all of her friends, as they watched her open, they saw her pull this hat out. And they started to laugh and chuckle. In fact, other people came in to see, did you really get a black hat with a veil? And she started to chuckle and she said, yes, I did.

But it served as a memory of times that were good, that had happened before, because pretty soon life was going to get extremely difficult. Japanese invaded the Philippines, taking over. And have you heard of the Bataan Death March? People were forced to march many, many, many miles, many of them dying.

But the hat was a symbol of a good moment of things that they had experienced. Good dinners, maybe going out to a movie with friends, having dinner with their family. Simpler times. The road ahead would become much more difficult. When we think about memories and moments, what Memories and moments come to mind that you look back fondly. This hat was a representation of the things that during the hard times, they would experience, was a reminder of the things that they had in the past and could look forward to in the future.

Joseph had a moment where he probably was scared to death, thinking, I have to take care of the Son of God. But God, was he not faithful to Joseph, to Mary, preparing and caring for and guiding them? We know that they had to take off to go to Nazareth [Egypt] because their life was at stake. Now, do you prefer the comfort of certainty or the prospect of uncertainty? Would you rather take a job that is secure and will take care of your needs? Or how many of you are more adventurous and are willing to risk something in the hopes of gaining something more? If you're an entrepreneur, you know this very well. To start a business, is it easy? It is not. It's not a nine to five, 40 days, 40 hours a week. It's so much more, especially when you get started. But the reward is you get to be what? You get to be your own boss. You don't have to answer to anybody unless the government comes in and says you owe this much money being responsible to oversee your employees versus having to work for somebody. And if you don't like being told what to do, that can be challenging. But if you have a great boss, well, then it's awesome.

Do you prefer comfort or do you prefer risk? You can take a chance, choose an adventure, go off, go climb in the mountains, go paddle down a river. How many of you, when you go on vacation, let's say, for instance, I'm just going to name a place. Italy. How many of you would rather go to Italy and take a tour or go to Italy and look everything up and do it yourself? Because with the tour, you're confined to going to these certain places. But if you do it on your own, there's a possibility of discovering something even better and not having to walk with a group. Do you choose certainty or uncertainty? And faith, unfortunately, sometimes means that life is going to feel a little bit uncertain at times. And those uncertainties can lead to things that are awesome, better than you could ever imagine. When Lisa and I accepted the call to come to

this church, I felt very uncertain because it was the first time I got to choose to go somewhere. And y'all could have been horrible to me, but you weren't. It was the best decision that we ever made together to come here. Okay. But I didn't know that I had to take a risk. Where in your profession, perhaps have you had to maybe take a risk. But yet, if you did take that risk and it turned out to be great, it could be better than you ever would have accepted. By the way, that's true. This year, being here was better than ever could have expected.

Uncertainty can lead to hardship because life as we learned, especially in job life, is not perfect. And sometimes there are hard things, horrible things that happen. Some of you, I'm sure, are aware of the shooting that took place at one of our sister schools a few days ago. While I'm grateful that the children are in critical but stable condition, they still need prayer. So please, as fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, not only pray for them, these children, but pray for the community that's reeling. Yeah, we know that in all things, we know that God is in control. We don't always understand why things happen the way they do.

Joseph didn't understand why perhaps things always happened the way they did. But yet, as it says, he was a good and faithful man. Life will continue to be adventurous and it will be challenging, but to be faithful and to obey God, at times there's a certain amount of perhaps, maybe we may feel uncertain, and that's okay. Did all of the people in the Bible believe with 100% certainty in God?

If you'd been here in our Doubt series, you'll know that the majority of the people at some point felt some sense of uncertainty or disbelief when they were following God. And I take comfort in the fact that there were people who did wonderful, great things for God. If that could happen to that person, how much more can God work in my life?

So when you're facing uncertainty. No, move forward. Be faithful. Be. Be obedient to God's leading. So, reflection. Where is God calling you to be more faithful in your walk with God? Not everybody is going to be a Joseph. God's not going to call people to be like Joseph. But God has placed something on your heart to be able to serve in some capacity. Where are the moments in your life where you see God leading and helping you, to take you on a path to

serving God and to do great things in the life of those around you and beyond your community.

This week, I want you to pray for discernment. Okay? I want you to pray for discernment. And when you feel you've received discernment, move faithfully forward, obeying God's leading. Move faithfully forward with God's leading. Can we do that? All right. Awesome memories, moments. Treasure those good memories and those great moments.

Let's pray. Father in Heaven, thank you Lord for the opportunity to gather together as we look at the life of Joseph. Lord, I'm sure that when you revealed to Joseph that he would care for Jesus, that had to be heart stopping. We all have moments in our life where we face uncertainty and in spite of that, Lord, help us not to look back, but to look forward with trust and more importantly, conviction that you will lead the way. Thank you for the many things that you're doing in our lives, Lord. We pray for the families of those who caught up in the situation earlier this week. We pray Lord, be with the children. Be with the doctors and the nurses and the technicians who are overseeing their care. We pray the Lord for the long term health and also this situation. Give them peace, give them understanding to know how to move forward, be with the school and their families. Be with us Lord as a community. Help us Lord, to be able to show the same compassion and empathy that you showed us and to love others well. In Jesus name everybody set. Amen.

Grace and peace everyone. We'll see you next week.