

The Journey

What if...? series

by Bill Aumack

Welcome to this presentation from the Downey Seventh-day Adventist Church. We are located in the greater Los Angeles area at 9820 Lakewood Boulevard in Downey, California. We would love to have your worship with us any Saturday you are in our area.

Have you been up through Central California where all the farms and the orchards and everything is? Beautiful country. Joe was a migrant farm worker on the farms in Central California. And you know how the migrant farm workers work. They move from farm to farm during planting season and plant. They moved from farm to farm during the harvest season and harvest. But Joe didn't spend that much time in the fields anymore. Even though he had grown up... his parents had been working as migrant farm workers and I was a young man, he worked as farm workers. But Joe had a special knack. Joe could always fix the machines. And so whenever they moved to a new farm, it seemed like the farm manager would come up to Joe and tell him about the machines in the shop that needed Joe's special attention. And Joe spent most of his time in the shop, fixing and working on things. And he got pretty good at it. In fact, he got so good at it that several of the farms offered Joe a full time spot. Just come and work for me and keep the equipment working. It was a pretty tempting offer. Except for that five foot five, brunette. Maria,

Now Maria was easy on the eyes. Could carbonate your hormones. But beyond that Maria was just a kind, sweet soul. And she was just so kind. And so... Joe had never met anybody like her. And as they spent more and more time together, got closer and closer. Joe was able to save up enough money for a very modest ring. And then it took him forever to figure out how he was going to ask her. But eventually he did. They were engaged.

Well, now those offers to go work in the shops on the farms seemed much more enticing. Maybe, you know, a nice full time job would be good, you know. And he

and Maria would debate the future and what they should do and how that should go.

And then one day Maria came to him and she told him about a dream she had had. And this dream an angel came to her and told her that she was going to be pregnant and give birth to the Messiah. Joe didn't believe that for a minute. I mean, you know, he didn't have a college degree in biology, but they did work on the farm. He knows how this stuff works. And it doesn't happen in a dream. That night, Joe said that's it. I'm just going to pack up and I'm gonna go take that job and be gone. That night he loaded up this truck and he was going to be gone next day.

Except that night, Joe had a dream. Same angel came and talked to him and told him it was going to be okay. Now Joe had to go and tell Maria he was sorry. Apologize, eat some humble pie. And they begin to talk about what does it mean to be the parents of the Savior? How do we do this? How are we the parents of the Messiah? You can't go to the library and check out a book on how to raise the Messiah. And they wondered what their future held for them.

And as Maria's condition began to become more and more obvious, you know what happens. People point and stare. [whispers] Did you see? She got pregnant and they're not even married yet. And the hushed talking or when you walk into a room and everybody stops talking. People that used to be your friends don't talk to you anymore. And finally it got so bad that Joe talked to Maria and said, You know what? Let's get out of here. Let's go to Los Angeles and I will get a job working in an industry fixing their machines. I was on my phone. There's job openings down there for machinist and mechanics and welders. I can do all that stuff. So they talked about it for a while, and they decided that was probably the best course of action.

So they loaded up Joe's 1972 Ford pickup truck. Wasn't much to look at, but it ran real good. Joe was a mechanic. They loaded it up and took off to Los Angeles. Now from the Central California to Los Angeles. It's not that far of a trip. Unless you're a pregnant woman and you've got the bladder the size of a peanut because the baby's pushing on it right? All the women are shaking their head. Yes, they

remember. Bouncing down the road in a 1972 Ford pickup truck. They didn't pass too many rest areas and take lots of stops. But they were making it. Weren't too worried. Eventually they got to the Tahone pass and the truck made it up over the Tahone pass no problems. Down straight into rush hour traffic. They battled their way through the rush hour traffic over to kind of south eastern side of Los Angeles downtown is a big industrial area there. And Joe knew there was some areas there where they could park. They want to you know they had just a little bit of money saved up and they didn't want to waste that on a hotel room. So they were going to sleep in the back of the truck for a couple nights. So they drove around for a little bit, found a spot where there's some RVs and vans parked around. A place where it looked like maybe the authorities wouldn't bother them too much. There was a homeless encampment over there kind of down under the overpass a couple blocks away. It wasn't the greatest in the neighborhoods. But it looked like nobody was going to bother him there.

So he found a place to pull in with his truck. Moves and stuff out of the back into the cab made up a bed for them to sleep on. Maria was getting pretty uncomfortable. She had been a trooper today been a long trip. He helped her up into the back of the truck and helped her try and get comfortable. And as Joe lay down. The last thought that kind of went through his mind before he drifted off to sleep was this could be a long night.

And I hope you come back next week to hear what happens next.

We're starting our new series called What If? What if the Christmas story was not just some history lesson of what happened 2000 years ago? What if it didn't just go in this ear and out this ear? What if there was something we were supposed to learn from this story that affected us today? And so for the next four weeks, we're going to look at the story kind of sectioned up into four parts and see what we can learn from that. Where we're gonna go with that. What's gonna happen? What if the story happened right here today? Because sometimes let's be honest, we look at the Christmas story and we kind of almost romanticize it a little bit. Oh, cute little baby Jesus in the barn with the animals. How sweet. Have you ever been in a barn? Not sweet. It's not like you know, the Hallmark movie channel where they get married in a barn. It looks all cool. That's not a barn. That's a

building that's been built that looks kinda like a barn. Barns smell bad. There's flies. There's mice. That's not good. I see our local person that works with the horses over there shaking their head yes.

So what can we learn from this story? And one of the things we learned from this story is that life is hard and following God doesn't make it any easier. Right? Life is hard. Let's face it, it is. And we are all going to face something that's difficult at one point in our lives. Maybe for some of us that's behind us. Maybe it was a childhood that no child should have had to endure. Maybe it's an illness that we're still dealing with, maybe it's relationship problems, maybe it's work problems, maybe it's money problems, maybe it's all of those problems. We all have stuff. And we are all going to go through that stuff at one point or another. Amen. Anybody here never had to go through anything just life's been grand. Nobody raised their hand.

We all go through it. But somehow we look around and we think everybody else has it together, I'm the only one that struggling. Why do we do that? Why do we think that I'm the only one that has it so hard. Everybody else has it so easy. Mary and Joseph had it hard. Right? This whole bit about Mary getting pregnant. Now, all right, I'm old. Okay. And when I was in high school, if one of the ladies, one of the girls at the school got pregnant, all of a sudden, she didn't go to school there anymore. I always wondered where they went. But they went somewhere and had a baby and then they'd be back next year. And like, we didn't know what happened, but that's what happened. I can't even imagine how sensitive they were to births outside of marriage 2000 years before that. Right. That was a big no-no. And I'm sure that they got ostracized by their friends and the people around them. And people whispered and talk to him. And it was hard. And while you understand the angel's words that we're having this special baby this Messiah, I don't think you really understand what that means and what you're supposed to do with it. Right. And they had a hard time.

And we had to go through the hard times, but yet we think we're the only ones. I remember some years ago that Linda's MS was starting to act up a little bit. We hadn't told anybody she had MS at that point. So not too many people knew. But she had reached a point where she was difficult for her to walk some her balance

was bad. So everywhere we went, she held on to my arm. People would say Oh, you guys are such a cute couple. She holds onto your arm. That's so nice. Yea, that's nice. One day, we bumped into some of our friends. And they said, Yeah, we were just talking about you. You guys have such a great life. Nothing ever seems to happen to you. And they went on to tell us about some drama that was going on in their life. And they didn't know that Linda had MS. And she's holding on to my arm so tight. I can't feel my fingers anymore. Right and she's holding on for dear life. And they're telling us you have a perfect life. You don't know what somebody else is going through. And you always think it's just me.

But it's not just us. And the Bible is full of people that had this happen to them. David has been anointed by God to be the next king but the current king is trying to kill him. Esther and her people are about to be killed by a king's decree. Daniel and his friends try and follow God and ended up in captivity. And then when they try and follow God in captivity, they get thrown into a lion's den and thrown into the fiery furnace. Following God doesn't make it easier. Hosea, God tells him to marry a prostitute. Jeremiah is a hot mess. Joseph goes from favorite child to slave to a prisoner. Mary and Joseph have it hard. Jesus had it hard. We all have hard. We could almost every character in the Bible you could go through, they went through it. Okay.

But I want to look at a couple real quick this morning. I know I don't have a lot of time. And I'm not going to spend a lot of time on the stories. Because I think we probably know these stories. These are popular stories that are pretty well known. If you don't know these stories, please ask me or ask somebody else. We'll help you get familiar with these stories. Maybe this is your first time in church in a long time you're like, I don't know who you're talking about. Okay, we'll help you. Alright, so don't be afraid to ask. But today, we're not going to spend a lot of time on the backstory and hope that most people know these stories.

So the first one is Noah in about Genesis 7 we start getting introduced to Noah. And right in the story of Noah, the world is so wicked, that God is going for a mulligan. Anybody know what a mulligan is? Got any golfers here? A couple... Yeah, what's a mulligan, Mark? Do over, right. That shot was so bad. I'm just you know, we're gonna pretend that didn't happen. I'm gonna get another ball out of

my pocket. We're gonna try it again. Okay, God's going for the Mulligan. Just take out the earth and start over again. But Noah finds grace in the eyes of the Lord. God tells you to build a boat. And Noah says yes. And just like that his life got harder. He spends the next 120 or so years building a boat. His sons probably help him maybe they hire some other people, I don't know. But they go on and on and on. Building this boat. And the story in Genesis doesn't tell us that Noah preached. But the New Testament tells us that Noah was a preacher of righteousness. And so it's likely to assume that people came to see the kook who was building a big boat in his backyard where there was no water. And he was talking about rain. And it had never rained in the world before. Remember, this is a perfect world. It got what's water from the dew coming up at night. They didn't need rain. And all of a sudden this kook is build the boat. And he's talking about rain and a flood. These people didn't even know what these words meant, we had to define what was going to happen to them. This guy is Looney Tunes. Of course, we know the story of what happened. But I wonder in that 120 years, did Noah ever wake up one day and go I just can't go work on that stupid boat again today. I'm so tired of that boat. I don't ever want to see that boat again. That's it. I need a two week vacation. Everybody load up, we're going to Cancun. I wonder, right? We don't know maybe it's okay to take a vacation maybe he took a vacation at some point in time. He needed a break. I don't know. But we know we stuck to it. And he got it done.

And what we learned from that is that God provides enough stamina to make it through the hard bits. God provides enough stamina to make it through the hard bits. And God provided enough stamina for Mary and Joseph to make it through the hard bits. And God will provide enough stamina to you and me to make it through the hard bits.

Our next story is Abraham, and even before he was called Abraham Abram in about Genesis chapter 12. And he lived in the lands where his ancestors had lived, which was what you did, right? People weren't as mobile then as we are now right? Some of us here used to live in different countries and we've moved countries. Back then you kind of lived where you lived, and that's where you lived. Right? And God says, I want you to move. And Abram says to where? God says that way. Well, where that way? I'll let you know when you get there. And now

Abram has gotta go tell his wife. He's trying to convince his nephew Lot and his wife and family. He's got some people that work for him that watch the flocks. He's got to convince them. Can you imagine the discussions around the dinner table?

We're moving where? That way. Well, how far that way? We'll know when we see it. No! I'm not doing that. Right? I got book club on Wednesday night, we can't move. Kids are in karate. They got their friends here. They're in school, we can't move. That's nuts. All our family is here, all our friends is here. Everything we know is here. Why don't we want to move over there? Can you imagine? Abrams has been out in the sun a little bit too long. We have to give him some more shade, because going off the deep end. But Abram is faithful, and follows what God says. And of course, he goes on to be the father of the whole Israel nation. The father of our faith.

What do we learn is that God provides enough faith when we can't see what's happening. Abram couldn't see what was gonna happen. But he followed God anyway. And God provided enough faith. And Mary and Joseph didn't know what was going to happen. But they followed God's leading by faith, and God provided enough faith from to get through. And he will do the same for you and me.

Last story we want to look at real quick, is the one that I still to this day, barely can deal with because I just don't comprehend this story at all. This happens in the New Testament. And it's the story of Jesus calling the disciples to follow Him. Now, we know that the disciples were all kinds of different professions, there were fishermen, there was a physician, there was tax collectors, they just had all kinds of jobs, white collar, blue collar, whatever. And they are living their lives, earning in the money, taking care of the family, whatever it was that they were doing, getting ready to take over dad's fishing business. And up walks an unknown Jesus. Remember, Jesus is not famous, hadn't done any miracles. Maybe he started preaching a little bit, we're hearing a little bit of rumbling. But up walks Jesus he says, Hey, why don't you quit doing that and follow me? And they do it! No! Can you imagine sitting at work, you know, on your computer, you know, typing into that spreadsheet, and then somebody walks by and says, Hey, why don't you quit work and follow me? You got a paycheck? Nope? Staying here.

Right? I, I cannot imagine what would possess somebody to do that. It blows my mind every time I think of it. There must have really been something about that Jesus, dude. I mean, really been something about that guy make you want to do that?

What do we learn from that story is that God provides enough willpower, when we have the tough decisions or the tough actions to make. Hey, you are all... we are all going to face tough decisions, things that we have to do that are going to be hard. Maybe it's an action, we've got to go eat some Humble Pie and repair a broken relationship. Maybe you know, that you're looking at a disease that's going to affect you and wrack your body. I don't know. But there's there's tough things that are gonna happen. They're gonna be decisions you have to make. And we all want the easy way. Right? Why would I choose the hard way when I can choose the easy way? But God will provide enough willpower so that we can make it through.

What do we learn? Life is hard. It's tough, and it's scary to follow God's will and plan, but he doesn't leave us. He helps us get through the difficulties of our lives. He doesn't send a steamroller to pave the way and get rid of the problems. He sends help to help us get over the problems.

Are you relying on yourself? Or are you following God's plan, no matter how uncertain that may see. Right, and I can be super guilty of this, because, you know, God gave me a brain and God gave me hands and I'm supposed to do stuff. And so it can be tempting sometimes to say, God, don't worry about it, I got this one. Go help somebody that really needs your help. Because I got this, I know how to do this. Right? Have you ever been there? Rely on God. The best advice I ever heard was, pray like it depends on God. And work like it depends on you. Right, somewhere in there, there's a balance of getting both done. I think God does expect us to do some things. But I think we need to rely on God a lot more than we do probably.

Then our challenge, take that action that you have been feeling God is prompting you to take. I don't know what it is. But you do. You know what God's been prompting you to do? Maybe God wants you to talk to your neighbor. Maybe God

wants you to tell somebody about him. Maybe God wants you to, I don't know, start a ministry, do something. I don't know what it is. But take that action. Be like Mary and Joseph, and all these other people in the Bible that said, God, I'm gonna follow you and take that action.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, help us to be the kind of people that are looking towards you that we're relying on you. And even though that is scary, crazy, crazy, scary. And we like to know the whole future Lord. Help us to trust you with our future. Help us to do the things that will glorify Your name, so that more people can learn about you. Help us not to be concerned about us and what we need, but to be concerned about you and what you desire. Be with us this upcoming week, Lord, bring us back again. Jesus name, Amen.