

A Couple of Servant Leaders: Mary and Joseph

Issue #170, December 9, 2015

As we enter the Christmas season let's look at one of the most influential couples in history, Mary and Joseph. Both were great servant leaders and as a couple they were powerfully used of God to shape our world. In this issue, we'll look at Joseph and how he led as a servant leader. (Read his story in Matthew 1-2 and Luke 2.)

Joseph connected with God. It is clear that Joseph's relationship with God was strong. On at least four different occasions in the Christmas story God spoke to Joseph through dreams. He listened well and obeyed quickly each circumstance. We know Joseph also obeyed God as he took Jesus to the temple soon after the birth and when Jesus was twelve years old. *When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth* (Luke 2:39). Servant leadership flows out of union with Jesus. It is that relationship which makes servant leadership different from all other forms of leadership. Joseph reminds us to keep our relationship with God strong and active.

Joseph controlled himself. The first indication of Joseph's leadership is indicated with the words *"Joseph her husband was a righteous man"* (Matthew 1:19). Joseph's character was his primary strength. Servant leadership starts on the inside and flows outward. Character matters! Joseph's character is reflected in the way he controlled himself in two areas. First, Joseph controlled his tongue; he was a man of few words. In fact, we don't have a single recorded word that Joseph spoke! This is not to imply that servant leaders should not speak, but it is a strong reminder that the number of our words does not necessarily increase our influence! His actions spoke louder than his words. A second evidence of the fruit of self-control in Joseph's life is reflected in the biblical account, *"When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son"* (Matthew 1:24-25). Joseph was ready to be married and to enjoy the physical beauty of that relationship. But he controlled his passions and challenges each of us as servant leaders to look at our own lives to see if we are self-controlled. In our physical appetites, our sexual desires, the exercise of our bodies, our emotions, and the use of our tongue we are called to be self-controlled like Joseph.

Joseph cared about others. When Joseph discovered that his fiancée was pregnant, I'm sure he was deeply hurt. But his response showed a deep care and compassion for Mary. *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* (Matthew 1:19). Joseph did not focus on his disappointment; he was concerned for Mary. Joseph's focus was outward, not inward. He reminds us that servant leaders do not respond to pain by inflicting pain on others. Instead they absorb that pain and respond in love. Joseph also showed his care for others as he raised Jesus like his own son although he was not biologically the father. Servant leaders are called to shepherd with love those entrusted to them and they reach outside their own natural circles to embrace others with the love of God. That's the story of Christmas!

Joseph soon faded into the background; we hear very little about him after the Christmas story. But he reminds us that servant leaders are not concerned about becoming famous, they simply walk with God in humble obedience and love others. This Christmas season, the world can use a couple more servant leaders like that. Will you be one?

Until next time, yours on the journey,
Jon Byler

For further reflection and discussion:

- Read all of Joseph's story in Matthew 1-2 and Luke 2. What else do you learn from his example?
- Reflect on your relationship with Jesus. Do you listen well? Do you obey quickly? In what way does your leadership flow out of this relationship?
- Reflect on your tongue. To what extent is your tongue controlled? Do you speak too little or too much? Is your tongue building and encouraging others or discouraging them?
- Consider the following areas of your life and evaluate the extent to which each is appropriately under control: physical body, thought life, sexual appetite, use of time, temper/anger, emotions, and finances. Is God inviting you to make changes in any of these areas?
- In what ways has your leadership this week reflected love for others? Is there someone outside your natural circle of relationships that God is inviting you to show love to this Christmas season?

In the next issue we'll look at the more famous half of this couple, Mary, and the way she also led as a servant leader.

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A Couple of Servant Leaders: Mary and Joseph – Part 2

Issue #171, December 23, 2015

This Christmas we are looking at Mary and Joseph, both great servant leaders and together one of the most influential couples in history. In this issue we'll turn our attention to Mary, the better known of the two and the one often mentioned first. In Luke 1:26-56 the story of her encounter with the angel and her visit to Elizabeth is recorded. Let's observe what she did as a servant leader that gave her such great influence.

Mary humbled herself. Perhaps the clearest example of Mary's humility is her response to the angel's announcement, *"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said."* Then the angel left her (Luke 1:38). After her questions, Mary's response shows that she humbly surrendered to God's direction for her life. Servant leaders recognize that before they are called to serve others they see themselves as the "Lord's servant." Then they humbly walk in obedience to His instruction.

Mary honored God. Many people honor Mary but scripture makes it clear that she honored God above herself. *"From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me-- holy is his name"* (Luke 1:48-49). Mary recognized that she would be remembered by "all generations," which has indeed happened. Mary saw her destiny as great, but glorified God. Like Joseph, she is not looking for fame or monuments in her name; she turns all honor back to God. She continues with verse after verse praising God for what He has done. She, and all servant leaders who follow, turn the blessing of influence into opportunities to praise God. Servant leaders recognize that leadership is not about themselves; it is all for God's glory.

Mary helped others. Right after hearing from the angel Mary ran to see her relative Elizabeth. Both Mary and Elizabeth were chosen by God to fulfill a special part of the Christmas story and their experience of coming together still inspires all of us today. Certainly, for Mary, it was a precious gift to be with Elizabeth for the first months of her pregnancy. But Mary's visit also helped Elizabeth to be a better person. *"When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit"* (Luke 1:41). Mary didn't come to Elizabeth to build herself up or elevate her child over Elizabeth's. Rather, being who she was and sharing her own journey of obedience to God's call impacted the life of Elizabeth in a profound way. Mary's song of praise to God shaped the life of Elizabeth and countless others who read it later. That's what servant leaders do; they help others by lifting their spirits. Sometimes this is a deliberate process of using encouraging words, speaking affirmation and life into those we lead. At other times we help others simply by living our lives in humble obedience as Mary did. This inspires and helps others on their own journeys. Who around you this Christmas needs your help? Follow Mary's lead and reach out to someone. Share your story or sing your song as you extend your hand to the person God will allow you to touch for His purposes.

Individually Joseph and Mary led as servants. But together, as a couple, they walked in humble obedience and influenced not only their own generation, but the entire world. A couple multiplies the impact! This Christmas season, the world can use a couple more servant leaders. If married, will you join together with your spouse to ask God to make you doubly influential as a couple for His glory in the coming year?

Until next time, yours on the journey,
Jon Byler

For further reflection and discussion:

- Read the entire account of Mary's story in Luke 1:26-56. What do you observe from her life that can teach you as a leader? What was the secret of her lasting influence?
- Can your leadership be characterized as humble? Why or why not? What actions in the past week reflect your humility? Are there actions God is inviting you to make to humble yourself as a leader?
- In what way does God use your influence? What might be His purpose for your influence? How can you more effectively use your influence to honor God?
- Is your leadership primarily to help yourself achieve your goals or is it to help others? What action demonstrates this reality? Are there ways this season God wants to use your influence to help others?
- If married, in what ways does your relationship together multiply your influence? Are there changes you need to make to increase this influence? Talk about it and pray together, a great way to begin a new year!

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