



No Regular ~Joe~

by Kris
Swiatocho

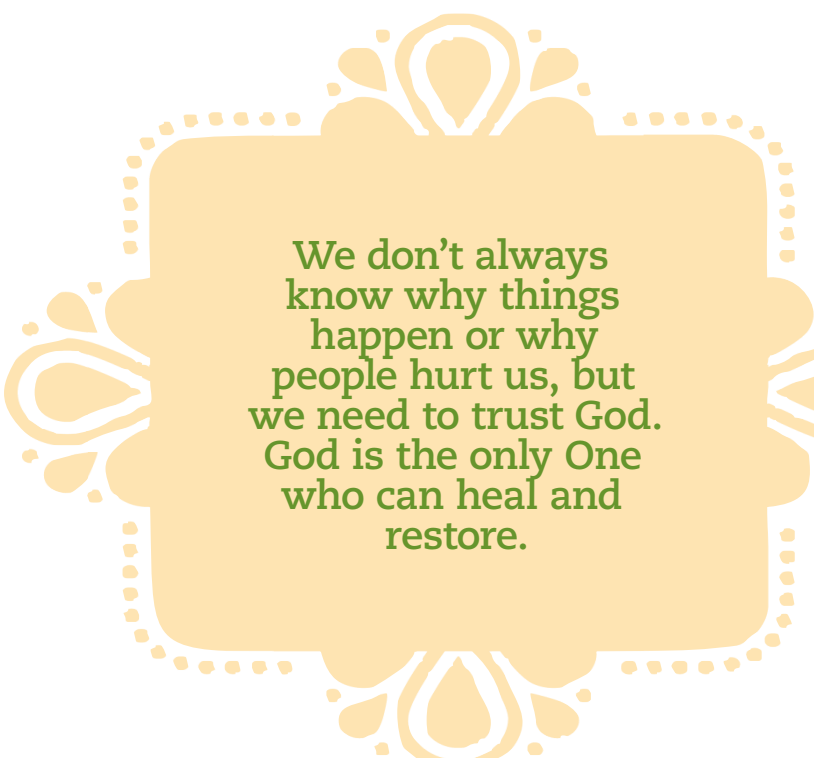
Life lessons from
the carpenter
God chose to be the
earthly father
of Jesus.

“Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep, if I die before I wake, I pray the Lord, my soul to take ... God bless mommy, God bless da ... God bless da ...”

When I was a young girl, I had a hard time praying for my daddy. I grew up with a father who was never home. He was in the military and was always traveling around the world. When he was home, he always seemed to be angry, tired, and restless. Neither my mom nor I and my brothers could ever do anything right. There were times that he would abuse us, verbally and physically. Times when he wouldn't come home after being out with the guys. Times when he just didn't come home. But to be honest, those were actually the best times. Times I didn't fear, didn't run or cry. I did pray, not for my father, but for God to bring me a real daddy.

I wanted a daddy who wore a three-piece suit instead of Army fatigues, had a briefcase, and came home every night because that represented a real dad to me. I longed for a daddy who would play with me, let me sit in his lap, and spend time with me. I needed a daddy who would tell me he loved me. I wanted a daddy I wasn't scared of, a daddy who didn't scream or hit. I wanted a daddy who didn't leave. I wanted a daddy who stayed no matter what I did.

GETTY IMAGES / JULIE DELTON



We don't always
know why things
happen or why
people hurt us, but
we need to trust God.
God is the only One
who can heal and
restore.

I didn't know if God would bring me a real daddy, like the ones I saw on TV. I would watch "The Brady Bunch" and ask, "God, can I have a daddy like Marsha and Greg have? You know the type that comes home every night, kisses his wife, hugs the kids, sits down to dinner together with his family, and gives thanks to God?"

Finally, after 15 years of marriage, my parents divorced. During this time, things were not only financially tough, but we also had emotional issues, as well. My mom had to work outside the home again for the first time since I was 4. We had to go without some of the basics and none of the extras. This new lifestyle not only tested my mother, but each one of us kids had to learn to take care of ourselves, cook, clean, and get along. That was easier said than done. I saw my mother come home so tired, so worn out. She shared with me how she knew she had made the right decision to leave my father and that things would get better as long as we stayed together. During that time, I also realized how lonely my mother was. She longed to be loved by a real man who could also be a provider for her and her kids. She was always praying for God to answer her prayer. What she didn't know was that I had also been praying for the same thing. But would God answer our prayers?

Then one day, while she was at work, my mom met a tall, handsome, bigger-than-life man who had also suffered his share of trials, sadness, loneliness, and a failed marriage. He started spending time with my mother, my brothers, and me. We grew fond of Henry. He was kind, gentle, and had a lot of love for all of us. A year later, Henry married my mom. Then Henry did one of the most sacrificial things a person can do. He proceeded to raise another man's kids even though he had already raised two kids. He took on all the baggage, the pain, the rejection, the abandonment, the sadness, and the fear. He took on the challenge of being our father even though legally he wasn't. His love for us was greater than anyone besides our mother. He showed us the kind of love that is second only to the love of Jesus Christ.

I remember one day prior to the wedding, he told me he loved me, and I thought, *Love me? You don't even know me!* He said, "I love your mother, and you're a part of your mother, so I love you."

I quickly blurted out, "OK, you can marry my mom." Oh, and did I forget to mention, he wore a three-piece suit, carried a briefcase for the next 14 years, came home the same time every day, sat down with his family for dinner, and gave thanks to God?

Called to Be a Stepfather

Henry, my dad, reminds me of another great man of God. His name was Joseph, Jesus' dad or rather, his stepdad. Yes, I said *stepdad*. I don't think people really ever think of Joseph in this way. Joseph knew all along that Jesus wasn't his biological son. Yet, he loved Him and raised Him as if He were. Joseph was betrothed to Mary, mother of Jesus. We all know the story. He found out that she was pregnant. He could have divorced her; in fact, he had intended to do just that, but quietly. In those times, Mary could have been sued, stoned, or put in prison, and Joseph would have been in the right. However, an angel of the Lord visited Joseph in a dream and told him not to leave Mary. For she wasn't unfaithful to him but was pregnant by the Holy Spirit with God's Child. That changed everything. Joseph went ahead with his marriage to Mary and raised Jesus as his own. No one knew the difference because Joseph didn't treat Jesus any differently. Joseph loved Jesus as his own son, just like Henry loved my brothers and me as his own children.

I've learned a few things about Joseph by studying Scripture.

1 Joseph has taught me honor and respect. Joseph had every right to leave Mary. In fact, he felt he had to leave her considering she was pregnant with another man's child. I don't think Mary would have argued with him. However, he was going to do it privately so that no one would shame Mary. Even though he felt she had betrayed him, he still loved and cared for her. If someone betrayed you, would you turn the other cheek? Would you continue to give to that person? Or would you want everyone to know what he or she had done to you? Most people, out of hurt and embarrassment, would want revenge. Joseph taught me there was another way — God's way. We don't always know why things happen or why people hurt us, but we need to trust God. God is the only One who can heal and restore.

"So her husband Joseph, being a righteous man, and not wanting to disgrace her publicly, decided to divorce her secretly" (Matthew 1:19).

2 Joseph has taught me about trust, faith, and obedience. Joseph had to trust God. An angel came to him in a dream. I think I would have wanted a second opinion. What kind of faith do you think Joseph had to have



All of us desire to be loved unconditionally no matter what we've done.

4 Joseph has taught me patience. Joseph had to wait to be with his wife, Mary, intimately after she gave birth to Jesus. As a single adult, waiting for God's best is often hard to do. Whether you're waiting to one day be married, waiting for a career direction, or waiting for someone you care about to accept Christ, it's all hard to do. Joseph knew from experience that waiting is a form of obedience, and obedience brings blessings.

"When Joseph got up from sleeping, he did as the Lord's angel had commanded him. He married her but did not know her intimately until she gave birth to a son. And he named Him Jesus" (Matthew 1:24-25).

5 Joseph has taught me about taking a risk for Christ. Joseph took a risk and married Mary. He took a risk despite what others might have said and done if they knew the truth. If people found out, what would he have said to defend his actions or Mary's actions? He risked their lives when they were running from Herod. Joseph was willing to do whatever it took for God, for His Son, Christ. What are we willing to risk for Christ?

6 Joseph has taught me about having direction. Joseph was obedient to God and married Mary. He would then go where God would lead him. Sometimes, he didn't know where they were going, where they would stay, or what their future would hold. He just trusted God. I believe God wants us to trust Him for the direction in our lives. It's when we don't always know where we're going that God can use us the most. Sometimes, we need to just go and let God worry about the rest. This means in all areas of our lives — our relationships, our work, and our finances.

7 Joseph has taught me unconditional love. Joseph loved Mary as well as Jesus. He loved Mary despite what he thought she might have done. He loved Jesus even though He was another man's child — God's Child. All of us desire to be loved unconditionally no matter what we've done. Joseph demonstrated unconditional love because his example was God, who sent His Son to die for us, the ultimate act of unconditional love. Christ died for us while we were sinners (See Romans 5:8).

8 Joseph, by example, has affirmed what a stepfather can be. Joseph shows me that not all stepparents are bad, selfish, or desire to separate a parent from his or her child. I think stepparents get a bad rap. My dad, Henry, is the greatest stepdad in the whole world. He never says he has four kids. He says he has six. I've always felt his love and acceptance as if I were his own child. Most people, unless they know me well, have no idea that Henry isn't my "real" father. Just like Joseph, Henry has always been referred to as my dad. His children are my sisters and brothers.

"Philip found Nathanael and told him, 'We have found the One Moses wrote about in the Law (and so did the prophets): Jesus the son of Joseph from Nazareth!'" (John 1:45).

9 Joseph has shown me the example of what I want in a husband and friend. Joseph loved Mary. He loved and cared for her because of his relationship with God. He was her friend, her companion, and her great love. We speak often of how amazing Mary was. How she was chosen by God to have His Only Son. However, we forget that Joseph was picked to be His earthly father. God knew who Joseph was deep in his heart: a man of faith, honor, respect, and a man who had relationship with God. It's through this relationship that Joseph was able to do what he did. He is our example of what we must do to live our lives as we all seek after Christ.

"And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ. We have now received this reconciliation through Him" (Romans 5:11). □

Kris Swiatocho is the president and director of TheSinglesNetwork.org Ministries and FromHisHands.com Ministries. She has served in ministry in various capacities for the last 25 years. Kris has a heart to reach and grow leaders.