



From the Manger to the Cross, the Men in Christ's Life: Joseph, Stepfather of Jesus

by Kris Swiatocho

Editors note: This is a part of a series.

My stepfather is only one example of a man who has impacted my life as a result of his relationship with Christ. Throughout this series, I want to share with you about some of the other men who have impacted my life solely because of their relationship with Jesus. I believe as I share that you, too, will connect with them and discover for yourself how God has always had a plan for you, is working it out in your life and will never leave you.

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 little girl, I had a hard time praying for my daddy. You see 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 seemed to always be angry, tired, and restless. Neither my mom nor me and my brothers could ever do anything right. There were times that he would abuse us, verbally and physically. Times when he would not 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. A daddy who wore a three-piece suit instead of army fatigues, had a briefcase and came home every night (this represented a real dad to me). A daddy who would play with me, let me sit in his lap, and spend time with me. A daddy who would tell me he loved me. I wanted a daddy who I wasn't scared of. I wanted 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 could have ever done.

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

Finally after 15 years of marriage my parents split. During this time, things were tough not only financially but emotionally 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 not to mention any extras. This new lifestyle would not only test my mother, but each one of us kids as we had to learn to take care of ourselves, cook, clean and above all get along. That was easier said than done. I could see how my mother would come home so tired, so worn out. She would share 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. How she longed to not only be loved by a real man but have a provider for her and her kids. She was always praying, 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 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 very 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 himself had already raised two kids. He took on all the baggage, the pain, the rejection (that never seems to go away), the abandonment, the sadness and the fear. He took on the challenge of being our father even though legally he wasn't. His love was far greater than anyone besides my mother. He showed us the kind of love that is only shown by the love of Jesus Christ. I remember one day prior to the wedding he told me he loved me and I was like, love me, you don't even know me! He said, I love your mother and you are apart of your mother and 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 and sat down with his family for dinner, giving thanks to our God?



Henry, "my dad," reminds me of another great man of God. His name is Joseph. Jesus' dad or rather step-dad. Yes, you read right, step-dad. I don't think people really ever think of Joseph in this way. Joseph knew all along that Jesus was not his real son. Yet, he loved him and raised him as if he was. Joseph was betrothed to Mary, mother of Jesus. We all know the story. He found out that she was pregnant. Now we all know he could have divorced her, in fact he had intended to, but quietly. In those times Mary could have even 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 was not unfaithful to him but was in fact, pregnant by the Holy Spirit with God's child. Well, this changed everything. Joseph went ahead with his marriage to Mary and raise Jesus as his own son. In fact, 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.

This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. 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. But after he had 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 him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"—which means, "God with us." 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. And he gave him the name Jesus.

— Matthew 1:18-25

What I Have Learned About Joseph, Step-dad of Jesus:

1. Joseph has taught me honor and respect.

Joseph had every right to leave Mary. In fact, he felt he had to considering she was pregnant with another man's child. I don't even 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 still turn the other cheek? Would you continue to give to them? Or would you want everyone to know what he or she did to you? Well, 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, why people hurt us, but we need to trust God. God is the only one that can heal and restore.

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

2. Joseph has taught me about trust, faith and obedience.

Wow, Joseph had to really trust God. An angel came to him in a dream. A dream. I don't know about you guys, but I would have wanted a second opinion. So what kind of faith do you think Joseph had to have to accept a message in a dream? Not just any message but one that would affect his entire life. Did Joseph talk it over with his friends, his parents, his siblings or Mary? No, he just obeyed. Folks, only a person who has a deep relationship with God could have been willing to do what God asked him to do without question. Joseph had a deep faith, a deep conviction and a deep relationship with God. Joseph taught me that in order for me to have peace about the things that God wants me to do, I have to deepen my relationship with Him. It is only through that relationship that I will understand God. Understanding produces trust and trust produces action.

But after he had 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 him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

— Matthew 1:20

3. Joseph has taught me about sacrifice and letting go.

When Joseph married Mary, he sacrificed what He wanted for the sake of Christ. His firstborn would not be his son. He would have to keep the secret of who Jesus was, even when it was time for his consecration, a presentation to God (a custom of that time when each family would offer their firstborn son to God). And ultimately, he would have to be willing to let Christ go when it was time. This time would come quicker than he was prepared for when Jesus went missing after a yearly trip to Jerusalem. Jesus would state "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?"

God entrusts our children, our parents, our siblings, our work, the earth and our possessions to us. Sometimes God wants us to be willing to let go of the things we are so desperately clinging to. Personally I recently gave up a close relationship with a family member for the sake of my ministry. Despite what my heart was feeling, I felt my obedience to God and my calling was worth more. I know God's purpose for my life is to have a relationship with Him and to glorify Him. As a result of this relationship, I am to share my life with others, the message and ministry of Christ. If this means, I leave my family, my friends, my home, etc., it is worth it for the sake of Christ.

She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

— Matthew 1:21

When the time of their purification according to the Law of Moses had been completed, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord", and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons."

— Luke 2:22-24

Every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover. When he was twelve years old, they went up to the Feast, according to the custom. After the Feast was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you." "Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand what he was saying to them.

— Luke 2:41-49

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 are waiting to one day be married or waiting for a career direction, or waiting for someone you care about to accept Christ, it is all hard to do. Joseph knew from experience that waiting is a form of obedience and obedience brings blessings.

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. And he gave him the name 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? Our possessions, our pride, our lives?

When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him." So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son."

— Matthew 2:13-15

5. 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 exactly, where they would stay or their future. He just trusted God. Folks, I believe God just wants us to trust Him for the direction in our lives. It is when we don't always know where we are going that God can use us the most. Sometime 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.

So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: "He will be called a Nazarene."

— Matthew 2:21-23

6. 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 loves Jesus even though he was another man's child, God's child. All of us desire to be loved unconditionally. Loved no matter what we have done in the past or in the present. Joseph shows us unconditional love. He shows us this because his example was God, who sent his son to die for us, the ultimately act of unconditional love. Christ died for us, while we are sinners.

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

— Romans 5:8

7. 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 its child. I think stepparents get a bad rap. My dad, Henry is the greatest step-dad in the whole world. He never says he has four kids, he says he has six. I have always felt his love and acceptance of me as his own child. In fact, 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 about whom the prophets also wrote — Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

— John 1:45

They said, "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I came down from heaven?'"

— John 6:42

"Where did this man get these things?" they asked. "What's this wisdom that has been given him, that he even does miracles! Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him.



— Mark 6:3

8. Joseph has showed 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 picked 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 best of all a man who had relationship with God. It is 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.

So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God because our Lord Jesus Christ has made us friends of God. — Romans 5:11

****NOTE:** My biological father left my life over 30 years ago and never returned. Henry not only raised me but my brothers as well. He has been married to my mom for almost 28 years. They have a marriage that all of us would treasure. A marriage based on love, care, respect and Christ. A marriage that I would love to have one day if it is God's will.—John 13:34

Kris Swiatocho is the President and Director of TheSinglesNetwork.org Ministries and FromHisHands.com Ministries. Kris has served in ministry in various capacities for the last 20 years. An accomplished trainer and mentor, Kris has a heart to reach and grow leaders so they will in turn reach and grow others. She is currently working on her third Bible study, From the Manger to the Cross: The Men in Jesus' Life. Her second Bible study, From the Manger to the Cross: The Women in Jesus' Life, was published last fall and is available on her websites. Her first book, Singles and Relationships: A 31-Day Experiment, was co-authored with Dick Purnell of Single Life Resources.

TheSinglesNetwork.org Ministries helps churches, pastors and single adult leaders evaluate, develop and support their single adult ministries through high-energy speaking engagements, results-oriented consulting and training and leadership development conferences and seminars. Click here to request a FREE "How to Start a Single Adult Ministry" guide.

FromHisHands.com Ministries is Kris's speaking ministry. If you've ever heard her speak, you know that Kris is the kind of speaker who keeps the crowd captivated, shares great information and motivates people to make a difference in the lives of those around them! She speaks to all church audiences on everything from "first impression" ministry to women's topics to singles and young adults. She can speak on a Sunday morning, at a woman's retreat or for a single adults conference. Bring Kris to your church today!

Singles and Relationships by Kris Swiatocho and Dick Purnell

Many singles are Christians who wonder if God will ever bring a mate their way or if they should just stop focusing on a future with a marriage partner and live the single life to the fullest. Kris Swiatocho and Dick Purnell offer solid biblical answers for singles in this newest title in Dick's popular 31-Day Experiment Bible study.