

December 13
Lesson 2 (NIV)

CALLED TO BE IMMANUEL

DEVOTIONAL READING: [Isaiah 42:1–9](#)

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: [Matthew 1:18–25](#)

MATTHEW 1:18–25

¹⁸ This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: 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. ¹⁹ 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.

²⁰ 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. ²¹ 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.”

²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³ “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”).

²⁴ When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. ²⁵ But he did not consummate their mar-

riage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.



Illustration © Getty Images

KEY VERSES

“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 1:20b–21](#)

CALL IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Unit 1: The Beginning of a Call

LESSONS 1–4

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. List the choices Joseph faced in his dilemma.
2. Explain the meaning and significance

of the name Immanuel.

3. Write a prayer of thanksgiving for the gift of Jesus.

Josephus Jo-see-fus.
Judean Joo-dee-un.
Nazareth Naz-uh-reth.

Sephoris Sef-uh-ris.

Tiglathpileser Tig-lath-pih-lee-zer.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

A. Not What Some People Would Think

B. Lesson Context

I. Facing the News (Matthew 1:18–19)

A. Unexpected Pregnancy (v. 18)

B. Private Planning (v. 19)

II. Seeing the Big Picture (Matthew 1:20–23)

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Following “God with Us”

III. Accepting the Call (Matthew 1:24–25)

A. A Marriage (v. 24)

I Could Never Do That!

B. A Birth (v. 25)

Conclusion

A. “Yes, You”

B. Prayer

C. Thought to Remember

HOW TO SAY IT

Ahaz Ay-haz.

Assyria Uh-sear-ee uh.

Assyrians Uh-sear-ee unz.

Babylonians Bab-ih-low-nee-unz.

Immanuel Ih-man-you-el.

Galilee Gal-uh-lee.

Herod Hair-ud.

Isaiah Eye-zay-uh.

Introduction

A. Not What Some People Would Think

Several years ago, the president of a small chain of savings and loans received a polite but firm letter from an account holder. The letter stated his desire to withdraw all funds immediately. A quick review of accounts revealed that this would be a significant loss: the investor in question had more than \$5 million in assets. Alarmed, the president called the disgruntled man to see what was wrong.

The customer was an older gentleman who had retired as a multimillionaire by age 60, but very few people were aware of his true net worth. This was partly because the man continued to take care of his own farm, drove an older pick-up truck, and preferred boots and work overalls as clothing.

On a recent occasion, he had gone into a branch of the bank in another town to cash a check. Not knowing him and seeing his rough appearance and dirty hands, the tellers had treated him with disregard. He left feeling that he did not like the way that bank’s employees treated “average working people,” hence the reason for the letter’s stated intent to close out his accounts.

“I guess,” he said as he hung up the phone, “I’m just not what some people would think.”

It’s easy to conclude that someone who dresses or talks a certain way, works at a certain kind of job, or drives a certain type of vehicle must necessarily be a certain kind of person. Judging the Joseph of today’s text based on appearance might have led his contemporaries to conclude that he had no special place in God’s plans. How could he be the type of person who would be called to raise the promised Messiah?

B. Lesson Context

Today’s lesson focuses on the unlikely hero Joseph of Nazareth. Joseph’s background was unremarkable in a number of ways. First, his place of residence, Nazareth ([Luke 2:4](#); [4:16](#), [22](#)), was a tiny village well off the beaten path. In Joseph’s day the town was so insignificant that it is not mentioned in contemporary sources outside the Bible. Even the first-century Jewish historian Josephus didn’t include Nazareth in his list of Galilean villages subdued by the Romans during the great Jewish revolt of AD 66–72. The majority of the inhabitants of Nazareth would have worked as subsistence farmers or day laborers, living the peasant lifestyle typical of Rome’s occupied provinces (compare [John 1:46](#)).

Second, even within Nazareth, Joseph’s social standing would have been nothing special. In [Matthew 13:55](#), its residents were dismissive of the adult Jesus, calling him “the carpenter’s son”— a reference that

reveals Joseph’s trade. The Greek word often translated “carpenter” could refer to a skilled woodworker, boutique craftsman, or construction worker.

In the first century AD, Galilean laborers like Joseph were employed on major construction projects funded by the Roman client-king Herod Antipas, where they worked with stone, wood, and other materials to build roads and public buildings. Joseph may have spent most of his life working on the new and elegant Roman colony at Sepphoris, a three-mile walk north from Nazareth.

Life was hard for poor laborers in that era, a fact that may explain why Joseph apparently did not live to see Jesus’ ministry. While he is mentioned as the father of the adult Jesus in [John 6:42](#), he last appears in the Gospels in [Luke 2:41–50](#), a story that took place when Jesus was 12 years old.

In ancient times, tradespeople like Joseph were not protected by labor laws or collective-bargaining contracts. As a result, they were subject to long workdays, dangerous conditions, and the typically high levels of taxation that Rome levied on its subjects. It is highly unlikely that Joseph had received any kind of formal education, and almost certain that he could not read or write with any level of proficiency. Were it not for his association with Jesus, Joseph would have been lost to the pages of history.

But despite his humble origins, Joseph stood out among his peers in at least two respects. First, Joseph was a descendant of King David (see [Matthew 1:1–16](#); lesson 1),

and thus a member of Israel's royal line. This fact explains why Joseph took his pregnant wife from Galilee to Bethlehem (a Judean village about six miles from Jerusalem) to register for the Roman tax census ([Matthew 2:1](#); [Luke 2:1–4](#)). Bethlehem was David's hometown ([1 Samuel 16:1](#)). David was widely understood to be the ancestor of the coming Messiah, who would rule Israel on David's restored throne ([2 Samuel 7](#); [Jeremiah 23:5–6](#)).

The second way Joseph stood out among his peers is part of today's lesson.

I. Facing the News ([MATTHEW 1:18–19](#))

A. Unexpected Pregnancy (v. 18)

18. This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: 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.

This verse summarizes a great deal of information that is discussed in detail in [Luke 1:26–38](#). Following the Jewish custom of that day, *Joseph* was probably considerably older than his bride-to-be, perhaps in his mid to late 20s while she was in her mid to late teens. Before their wedding, *Mary* was told by the angel Gabriel that she would soon bear a child—a human impossibility in view of the fact that she was still a virgin ([Luke 1:34](#)).

[Matthew 1:18](#) picks up Mary's story after her return to Nazareth from a three-month

visit with Elizabeth ([Luke 1:39–40, 56](#)). One can only imagine how Joseph felt upon discovering that his fiancée was *pregnant*. Any explanation from her that this was the result not of unfaithfulness but of the power of *the Holy Spirit* must have been mind-boggling, to say the least.

What Do You Think?

How can you help your church do a better job of extending grace to those experiencing out-of-wedlock pregnancies?

Digging Deeper

What guardrails would need to be put in place to prevent the appearance of condoning premarital sex?

B. Private Planning (v. 19)

19. 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.

Mary and *Joseph her husband* were not yet married, in the sense that they were not living together in the same household. But ancient Jewish custom considered betrothed couples to be legally bound to one another once their engagement had been announced and the dowry paid.

Joseph's presumed anger could have inclined him to demand the justice that the Law of Moses clearly prescribes. [Leviticus 20:10](#) and [Deuteronomy 22:22](#) both state that those convicted of adultery are to be executed (see also [John 8:5](#)). At the very least, Joseph could have publicly terminated the

engagement and kept the dowry. That also would have brought disgrace to Mary and her family. Such a move would have been completely justified, given what Joseph knew at this point.

What Do You Think?

Under what circumstances, if any, would you support the public shaming of someone? Why?

Digging Deeper

What passages in addition to [Matthew 18:15–17](#); [1 Corinthians 4:14](#); [6:5](#); and [15:34](#) inform your answer?

Yet in this case, compassion won the day. Realizing that the child was not his, Joseph decided to call off the engagement quietly. His attitude was reflected in the description of Joseph as *faithful to the law*. His faithfulness to the law was appropriately matched by his desire to be merciful.

What Do You Think?

How can you help your church do a better job of ministering to those who are divorced or are going through a divorce?

Digging Deeper

What difference, if any, should the distinction between a scriptural and an unscriptural divorce play in the ministry effort ([Matthew 5:31–32](#); [1 Corinthians 7:10–15](#))?

Though many men would have qualified to be Jesus' adoptive father based on being

part of David's lineage, Joseph's faith was of utmost importance for raising the Son of God. Joseph was clearly a man of remarkable faith and compassion. These traits come to the forefront of today's passage and are critical to Matthew's larger account of the circumstances of Jesus' birth and early childhood.

II. Seeing the Big Picture

([MATTHEW 1:20–23](#))

A. Through Dreams (vv. 20–21)

20a. But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream

Matthew's account of the events leading to Jesus' birth is filled with dreams. No fewer than five times, characters received divine revelation through dreams that significantly impacted the course of events. One of these dreams was given to the Magi to warn them not to return to the treacherous King Herod ([Matthew 2:12](#)), advice that may have saved them from imprisonment or death at the tyrant's hands. The other four dreams were all communications to Joseph, calculated to empower him to protect Mary and Jesus from harm ([2:13, 19–20, 22](#)).

While anyone would be awed by even one such experience, Joseph in particular must have been surprised by these revelatory dreams. In the Old Testament, very few people learned about God's plans in dreams; they include Abraham ([Genesis 15:12–16](#)), Jacob ([28:10–15](#)), Joseph ([37:5–9](#)), Solomon

(1 Kings 3:5), and Daniel (Daniel 7:1–27). Undoubtedly, there had been nothing in Joseph’s life to this point to suggest that he would be numbered with this select group.

20b. 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.

What Joseph shared with most others who experienced revelatory dreams in the Bible was faithfulness to God. And what he learned from his first dream was more significant than anything God had ever revealed to anyone before. Mary’s pregnancy was supernatural in origin, not the result of sin. Joseph was called to partner with God in caring for both her and her baby in order for God’s eternal purposes to be fulfilled.

The phrase *from the Holy Spirit* parallels the angel Gabriel’s announcement to Mary in Luke 1:35. Luke underscores the implication of the virgin birth by noting that Jesus, having no biological father, would be “Son of the Most High” (Luke 1:32). This title has less to do with the manner of his conception and more to do with Christ’s rights and authorities as the sole heir of everything that belongs to his divine Father (see John 1:14–18).

What Do You Think?

What procedure should Christians use to determine the Lord’s will when faced with a decision having lifelong impact?

Digging Deeper

Which Bible texts help you most in this regard?

21. 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.”

Ancient names were often symbolic, associating a person with an event or identifying an important attribute (examples: Genesis 17:5, 15–16; John 1:42). Following a similar pattern, *Jesus* is the Greek version of the common Hebrew name Joshua, which means “God saves.”

Joseph perhaps thought of the biblical hero Joshua, whom God used to lead Israel into the promised land. Joseph’s adopted son, Jesus, would not *save his people* from political oppression (as many Jews in that time expected of the Messiah), but instead would save them *from their sins*. In his death, Jesus saved the world from sin by becoming the ultimate sacrifice (Romans 5:8–11). But in order for Jesus to save people later, Joseph needed to protect Jesus right then by caring for Mary.

B. Through Scripture (vv. 22–23)

22. All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet:

Matthew pauses the story to remind his readers of a second way in which the significance of Christ’s birth and mission was revealed to the world: the ancient and public testimony of the Hebrew Scriptures. *The prophet* in view here is Isaiah (see Matthew 1:23 below).

Matthew quotes or makes reference to prophetic texts several other times in his account of Jesus’ birth (Matthew 1:23; 2:6,

15, 18, 23). These citations, combined with Jesus' genealogy (1:1–17; see lesson 1), work together to demonstrate that the circumstances of the Messiah's birth, although not what most Jews anticipated, were nevertheless consistent with what God had promised. Put another way, while many Jews and pagan religious experts like the Magi (2:1–2) would have expected the king of the Jews to be born in a royal palace, Matthew shows from Scripture that Jesus' humble origins are actually proofs of his messianic identity.

23. “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”).

This prophecy from [Isaiah 7:14](#) was delivered during a particularly dark period in Israel's history. Isaiah lived in the eighth century BC, about 200 years after the split between the northern and southern tribes following the death of Solomon ([1 Kings 11:41–12:24](#)). Sometime in the 740s BC, the northern kingdom, Israel, allied with Aram and invaded the southern kingdom, Judah ([2 Kings 16:5](#)). During the ensuing siege of Jerusalem, Isaiah met with the Judean King Ahaz to encourage him, promising that God would overthrow his enemies. Isaiah even invited him to ask for a divine sign that victory would come ([Isaiah 7:1–11](#)).

Feigning piety, King Ahaz refused, saying that he did not want to test God ([Isaiah 7:12](#)). In fact, he had already decided to seek protection from an earthly ally: he had sent ambassadors to negotiate with the Assyria's King Tiglathpileser, padding the offer with a large quantity of gold and silver taken from the

Jerusalem temple. Assyria responded by attacking and subjugating Israel. As a gesture of thanks, the king of Judah built an altar in the temple, patterned after one he had seen in the Assyrian capital, Damascus ([2 Kings 16:10–18](#)).

While these actions seemed politically expedient at the time, Isaiah recognized the faithlessness of this strategy. He responded by offering the king of Judah a sign quite different from one the wicked king might have requested: as evidence that God himself would deliver Judah from its enemies, a child named “Immanuel” ([Isaiah 7:14](#)) was to be born. Before a certain child reached age 12 or 13 ([Isaiah 10:16](#)), the nations of which the king was so terrified would cease to exist. After the Assyrian defeated those nations, they would “get theirs” at the hands of the Babylonians, who destroyed tiny Judah in 586 BC.

It's unclear whether Isaiah himself saw this prophecy about “Immanuel” partially fulfilled through the birth of his own son the following year ([Isaiah 8:1–10](#)). Matthew definitely saw the fullest significance of Isaiah's words in the birth of Jesus. But in the long term, this sign referred to the coming of the Christ, the ultimate “Immanuel ... God with us” ([Matthew 1:23](#)). The Bible emphasizes the importance of God being “with” his people (examples: [Genesis 26:3; 31:3; Exodus 3:12; Isaiah 43:2; John 14:3; Revelation 3:20](#)). This is more than a figure of speech. In Jesus it has become a fact: “the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” ([John 1:14](#)).

Isaiah’s more detailed promises in [Isaiah 9](#) were also fulfilled—see [Matthew 4:12–16](#). Through Jesus’ ministry, God would indeed be with his people in an unprecedented way.

FOLLOWING “GOD WITH US”

“You’re bringing a baby here?!” The aid worker’s eyes were wide with disbelief. We were about to land in an African refugee camp in a politically and militarily volatile region. Malaria, typhoid, and yellow fever were active in the area. Far away from any urban amenities, we would start by building a mud hut to live in. What in the world were we thinking, going there with a child?

We were trying to follow Jesus’ example. He was Immanuel, God with us. The Word became flesh. He talked face-to-face with people from all kinds of backgrounds, and he loved them.

Our son took his first steps in that camp. He played with children while we visited with their parents. We lived our lives side by side with the refugees, whose language had never been written down and most of whom did not know Christ. How can you follow the one who is “God with us” in your circumstances?

—D. G.

III. Accepting the Call **([MATTHEW 1:24–25](#))**

A. A Marriage (v. 24)

24. When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded

him and took Mary home as his wife.

Any doubts Joseph may have had were settled by his remarkable dream. Consistent with his faithful character, he did not question what God showed him or hesitate to act (contrast [Luke 1:18](#)). Instead, he immediately proceeded with the marriage. It’s not difficult to imagine that Joseph moved the date of the wedding to ensure that Mary would be cared for during her pregnancy.

I COULD NEVER DO THAT!

As a college student, I was painfully shy. I dreaded walking between classes, not knowing how to interact with people I passed. I sat alone in the cafeteria. On Sunday morning, I would leave the service the moment it ended. Sometimes I’d even start trembling if a lot of people were around.

Yet, I felt called to ministry. I talked to my professors about my dilemma. I continued studying. While pursuing a graduate degree, I heard about Bible translation. That sounded like a perfect mission for an introvert!

With every hesitant step I took, God went before me. An internship led to a career. I experienced community, met my future wife, and worked side by side with national translators as they brought God’s Word into their own languages.

Alone I could never have the ministry God wanted for me. Listen to his call, step out in faith, and prepare to be amazed at what he will do.

—D. G.

What Do You Think?

How does Joseph's obedience serve as an example and challenge to you?

Digging Deeper

How do texts such as [Exodus 4:13](#) and [Isaiah 6:8](#) influence your answer?

B. A Birth (v. 25)

25. But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

Joseph not only obeyed God's instruction to take Mary as his wife, but also went a step further by not consummating the marriage until Jesus had been born. God had not told him to do this, and the Law of Moses did not forbid sex during pregnancy. So Joseph's choice of abstinence most likely reflected his own sense of the gravity of the situation. This point is stressed to ensure that there can be no confusion about Jesus' paternity: Mary had not been sexually active *at any point* before or during her miraculous pregnancy.

Following the birth of Jesus, the couple clearly had a normal married life. This is evident from the fact that Jesus had at least four brothers and three sisters (see [Matthew 13:55–56](#); [Mark 6:3](#)). Two of his half brothers eventually became leaders in the church. They wrote the two epistles in our New Testament that bear their names: James and Jude.



Visual for Lesson 2. Use the visual to start a discussion about how students can best celebrate "God with us" during the Christmas season.

Conclusion

A. "Yes, You"

Matthew's account of Jesus' birth is a classic "Yes, you" story. Throughout the Bible, we see people who were surprised when God called them to do something, and who responded to the call with a "Who, me?" Consider Abraham and Sarah ([Genesis 17:17; 18:12](#)), Moses ([Exodus 4:13](#)), Isaiah ([Isaiah 6:5](#)), Jeremiah ([Jeremiah 1:6](#)), and Peter ([Luke 5:1–10](#)). All these people went on to play key roles in the story of salvation. But first they had to get over the "Who, me?" barrier.

Joseph and Mary lived out the classic "Who me?/Yes, you" storyline in a unique way. Neither was particularly outstanding as the world judges such things. But when called, they did what they were asked.

How tragic when God has a task but finds no one to respond (example: [Ezekiel 22:30](#))!

When we say “Who, me?” God typically responds, “Yes, you.”

B. Prayer

Father, help us remember what it means that Jesus was born “God with us.” Let your presence give us the confidence to be obedient whenever you call. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Faithful people trust God, especially in extraordinary situations.

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Enhance your lesson with [NIV Bible Student](#) (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the [NIV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition](#)).

Into the Lesson

Have this quote written on the board as learners arrive:

Life is a matter of choices, and every choice you make makes you. —John C. Maxwell

After a time of agree/disagree discussion, read aloud each of the following pairs of choices, and ask learners to indicate their choices by raising hands:

1—Eat vanilla ice cream or chocolate ice

cream.

2—Watch TV or listen to music.

3—Shop in a store or shop online.

4—Eat at a restaurant or eat at home.

5—Drink coffee or drink tea.

6—Dress up or dress casually.

Alternative. Distribute handouts (you prepare) with the choices listed above. Ask students to circle their choices, time limit of one minute.

After either alternative, lead into Bible study by saying, “The choices Joseph faced were far more important than any of these! Let’s see what his decisions can teach us.”

Into the Word

Recruit a student in advance to be interviewed as Joseph. Ask him to be ready to talk about the difficult choices he faced regarding the facts that (1) Mary was expecting a baby, but he was not the father and (2) an angel appeared to him with information and instructions.

Have students take turns reading [Matthew 1:18–25](#) aloud; then conduct the interview. Possible interview questions are as follows; modify these and ask follow-up questions of your own devising as appropriate. Help “Joseph” with advance preparation by furnishing interview questions to him ahead of time.

1—When you found out that Mary was pregnant, what thoughts other than those recorded in [Matthew 1](#) crossed your mind?

2—When the angel appeared to you in a

dream, how did you know the dream was not merely an ordinary one? 3—What was the deciding factor that caused you to honor the angel’s instructions?

Be sure to fill in any gaps with information from the lesson commentary; encourage “Joseph” in advance to use his “sanctified imagination” to give reasonable answers when answers are not found in the text. After the interview, thank your “Joseph” and encourage reactions during whole-class discussion. (*Option 1:* Have “Joseph” wear Bible-times clothing. *Option 2:* Distribute copies of the “Joseph’s Options” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners work in small groups to complete as indicated.)

Ask a learner to read verses 22 and 23 again. Write “Immanuel” on the board. Give each student a sticky note as you say, “In no more than one minute, write on your sticky note why the name Immanuel is an appropriate name for Jesus.” Encourage thoughts deeper than the obvious meaning “God with us” from the text. Have learners affix their notes on the board. Read some or all of them aloud for whole-class discussion.

Into Life

Divide learners into small groups. Encourage each group to work together to write a prayer of thanks for the gift of Jesus. After a few minutes, ask each group to pray together the prayer they have written.

Option. To extend this activity, distribute copies of “Step Up Your Thanks!” from the

activity page as a take-home exercise. You have two options regarding words to be found: either include a list of the 13 to be found or don’t. The latter option will make the puzzle harder to solve and is recommended. To encourage completion, promise to call for results at the beginning of next week’s class.

To print the reproducible activity page, simply click the highlighted text below to create a pdf file on your hard drive. Then open the pdf file in Acrobat Reader and print.

[Activity Page \(December 13: Called to Be Immanuel\)](#)

CALLED TO BE IMMANUEL

Lesson 2, Matthew 1:18-25, NIV

JOSEPH’S OPTIONS

Matthew 1:18-25 implies some options Joseph faced. Work with a partner or small group to finish the chart.

The Situation	What Joseph Did	What Joseph Could Have Done
Mary was expecting a baby, but Joseph was not the father.	Took Mary as his wife.	
The angel told Joseph to take Mary as his wife.	Believed the angel’s message.	

STEP UP YOUR THANKS!

Step 1: Find 14 words applicable to today’s lesson in the puzzle grid.

Step 2: In the space below write a prayer of thanksgiving for the gift of Jesus, using all 14 words you discovered.

<p>Word List</p> <p>GOD JESUS GIFT GAVE LOVE BEST SON SINS LIFE FORGIVEN ETERNAL WORLD SAVE IMMANUEL</p>	<p>E K A I Z E O L N C S A J M S V Z H Q E T K I O A Z E K M L A Q S V G E H F V F S F Z C S G N O S N R V E M U P S I N S D L E T T N V P S A N G H L I V Z W P N A X B T R Z M N I W U W X S Z L S Q B F R G F S O Y M V W E W Y K G R A O R T F I G B G M G P O A D L B I M M A N U E L F K Z D X I O T E V J Q D P</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>
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A. Faith, Not Sight Revisited

With what spiritually mature person can and will you discuss your misgivings?

Paul's world was not a safe place. Cities could be impersonal and nasty. Villages could be hostile and dangerous for outsiders. Roadways always harbored the threat of bandits. Ships could be swamped by storms or attacked by pirates. Even in a case of assault or robbery, justice in court was often unavailable or corrupt. People needed to be ever wary and alert for danger. It seemed prudent to live just day by day in a self-protecting manner.

Even today we hear of incidents that scare us: "Widow bilked out of life savings by online dating." "Ten-year-old girl in a cross-walk struck and killed by texting driver." "Super-infection detected that resists any known treatment." It is easy to despair.

For many, life lurches from one crisis to another. To look beyond one's present sufferings seems impossible. But that is what Paul calls us to do. We are not to fear death. We already enjoy the peace and comfort of the Holy Spirit. Rather than our succumbing to despair, Paul challenges us to walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we must endure and manage life's crises as they come. But we do so knowing that God is in control and our future is sure. Take a minute to evaluate. Do you walk primarily by faith or by sight?

What Do You Think?

What concept in today's lesson is most difficult for you to see "faith walk" value in? Why?

Digging Deeper