

Week Three - *Joseph: The Skeptic*
Matthew 1:18-25

Spend FIFTEEN - Day One

1. Do you believe miracles are still possible today? Why or why not?
2. If a woman came to you and said that God had miraculously impregnated her, how hard or easy would it be for you to believe it was a miracle?
3. Read Matthew 1:18-25. How justifiable is Joseph's skepticism about Mary's pregnancy?
4. Jews in Joseph's time believed in the possibility of miracles. And yet, what was Joseph's response to Mary's news of pregnancy? Why do you think he so quickly ruled out the possibility of a miraculous event?
5. What was Joseph's response once an angel set him straight?
6. Even though Joseph started out skeptically, what was his ultimate response to a miracle in his life? Compared to Joseph's example, how open are you to believing that God can work powerfully in your life?
7. Close your FIFTEEN in prayer, thanking God for overcoming Joseph's skepticism. Ask God to be a powerful agent in your life and to help you rid yourself of any skepticism that might keep you from receiving His gracious work.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Two

8. Most of us do not witness miraculous pregnancies as Joseph did. And yet, our faith believes that God can and still does work miracles in this world. On a scale of "skeptical" to "completely convinced," how would you rate your own openness to God's miraculous action in your life?
9. What about ordinary, non-miraculous blessings? How open are you to God taking care of you in an ordinary way?
10. Take a few moments and read the most common prayer that our church body prays: Matthew 6:9-13. What does verse 11 mean to you, practically?
11. Franz Pieper, the great Lutheran systematician, had this to say about God's providence in our lives: "God actually preserves and governs the universe and all individual creatures through His omnipresence and His omnipotence." What do you think he means by this statement?

12. Does God *really* provide your daily bread through his omnipresence and omnipotence? Or did you provide your own daily bread by going to the grocery store and buying food with the paycheck that you earned yourself? What is the difference between these two things?
13. How does self-reliance prevent us from trusting God? How does it make us skeptical of relying on God for the everyday details of our lives?
14. End your FIFTEEN by giving God thanks for all the ways that He has provided daily bread for you. Whether that was through a loving family or the gifts and abilities with which He designed you, God is the source of all the good things in our lives. Thank Him for the ways He has given you everything you truly need in life.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Three

15. Have you ever experienced or witnessed a miracle? Has anyone you know seen a miracle?
16. How often do you ask God for miracles in your life?
17. Is there anything for which you're afraid to trust God in your life? What has happened to make you feel this way? Can you recall a time when you trusted God and you were disappointed in the outcome?
18. Even God's prophets can sometimes feel this way. Read the first part of Jeremiah's complaint in Jeremiah 20:7-8. How does Jeremiah summarize the results of his trust in the Lord?
19. It is a scary thing to trust God to show up, especially if we've never seen His miraculous intervention in our life. When you think about trusting God to actually show up, how does your feeling compare to what Jeremiah said in these verses?
20. Now read the rest of Jeremiah's speech. Look at Jeremiah 20:9-13. In spite of his experiences, how does Jeremiah describe his trust in God?
21. Read Philippians 4:7. Then finish your FIFTEEN by using these words to ask God to help you trust in His power in your life, even though you may not have seen it before. Ask Him to grant you the supernatural peace that comes from trusting in Him.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Four

22. One way to help us overcome our skepticism toward God's interaction in our life is to remind ourselves of God's promises to us. Without looking at Scripture, what divine promises can you name that God has made to you?

23. Look up 2 Peter 1:3-4. What promise has God made in this passage?

24. Now read the passage again, but this time, replace “us” and “you” with your own name. How does that change the feel of the promise to make it personal?

25. Go to Matthew 11:28-29. What promise does God give here?

26. Read these two verses again, substituting “you” with your own name every time it occurs. What burdens can you give up to God?

27. Read Isaiah 40:29-31. What words of encouragement are shared in this passage?

28. Read it again, replacing “those” and “they” with your name. How can you push back against the skepticism that says you shouldn’t trust in these promises?

29. Finish your FIFTEEN by thanking God for the promises that He has made to you. Ask Him to help you trust that His Word is true, and that we no longer have to be skeptics.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Five

30. We’ve spent this week pushing back against skepticism and looking at how God wants us to trust in Him. What is one area of your life that you would be willing to submit to God?

31. Overcoming skepticism is not easy. The difficulties of this world and the hiddenness of God can make it hard to trust. But read this exhortation from James 1:2-7.
 - a. What promise does James make to believers?

 - b. What cautions does James warn us about?

32. How does skepticism keep us from receiving the good things God wants for us?

33. James lists wisdom as something for which we can ask God. What is one trait you could ask God to provide in your life?

34. Close your FIFTEEN by confessing to God one thing you have not been willing to submit to Him in trust. Ask Him to give you faith and trust to ask boldly for His good gifts.