

# Character 4

# JOSEPH

**Scripture Passage:** Matthew 1:18-25

**Attribute:** Compassionate Righteousness

When we see Joseph, we have to see a guy who must have experienced so much conflict (both internally and externally) during Mary's pregnancy. Can you imagine the conversations he had?

*"No, Cousin Hezekiah, it wasn't me that got her pregnant. No, it wasn't another guy either. Who was it? Uh . . . [mumbling, clearing throat] The Holy Spirit . . . I said, the Holy Spirit . . . Why are you laughing?"*

We can only imagine how trying this time must have been for Joseph! Yet, right out of the gate he demonstrates his great capacity for compassion and righteousness. When we read in verse 19 that Joseph wanted to divorce Mary quietly, so as not to put her through shame, we see a revealing glimpse into his character. **Joseph's plan to divorce Mary was completely in accordance with Jewish Law.** But look at how Joseph planned to exercise his rights in verse 19.

See what honor and compassion and understanding Joseph showed. When Joseph planned on divorcing Mary "quietly," he was essentially saving her life. The penalty for adultery was death. If Joseph had made a big deal, Mary would have been in extreme danger. **I'm no expert, but I don't think the Jewish religious leaders would buy the "pregnant by the Holy Spirit thing."** At the point where we see his plan, before the angel revealed the truth, Joseph was demonstrating an amazing amount of compassion

*But how things changed in just a few verses!* The message Joseph received was that Mary had not been unfaithful. Mary was, instead, intended to be a special vessel. Joseph was told to take Mary to be his wife in full confidence of her fidelity.

**Still, Joseph found himself in a tight spot.** Did he trust God and risk facing the scorn of his friends and family? Or did he bow to cultural pressure and divorce Mary? Of course we know that Joseph made the right decision. And we know that the rest of the story is even more powerful than the love Joseph showed for Mary! But it was how he planned to exercise his *previous* plan that is so instructive for us today.

Joseph would've been right in divorcing Mary. **But how often do wield our "right-ness" as power?** How often are we judgmental or prideful in confronting others? It's easy to do. We're sinful people.

**But Joseph shows us that there is a way of expressing a Christ-like compassion in confronting someone else in their indiscretion.**

## Food For Thought . . .

1. Why is it so easy for us to fall into the pattern of really reveling in letting others know they were wrong? Or that they wronged us?
2. As you think about the students you lead, can you come up with a few good reasons why it's important to correct with compassion?
3. What are some of the alternative effects? What happens when we aren't compassionate and understanding when we point out someone's (especially a student's) wrongdoing?
4. Think back on your life: When was someone very harsh to you when they were correcting you, or showing you how you had wronged them? What did that feel like?
5. Can you think of a time when someone did the opposite? Was there any difference in your long-term behavior based on the two different responses you experienced?