



How many of you here are planners? You like to have the details of your day planned out. You plan projects out to the detail. Your vacations are planned out. Your life is planned out. You have a plan for your kids' lives. For you, life just works better when it is somewhat scripted. Maybe you're not a hardcore scripter, but you like things to go as planned, without too many surprises. If you are at all like that—and I admit that I am—you have probably found that you struggle when things don't go according to the script.

There is obviously nothing wrong with planning things out. It's actually a good thing to do. I'm talking more about needing ultimate control of a situation or a person. The reason so many of us like to plan or script out our life is so that we can avoid situations that will cause stress or anxiety.

Realistically, I think that all of us to a certain degree want to have control of our life script. We inherited that from our first parents, Adam and Eve. Given the choice of allowing God to determine their life script or write their own, they chose the latter and we have inherited that desire, that intense desire to be in control.

For me, this week is a great example. Some of you know that I struggle with an anxiety disorder. I come across as pretty laid back on the outside, but on the inside at times, I'm a mess! So being in control to a certain degree is important to me and whenever I'm in a situation where the outcome is not completely in my control, I'm anxious. So you can imagine what this week has been like for me as I have been preparing to speak twice in front of hundreds of people over 18 years of age, something I rarely do. This is not an ideal situation for someone like me.

You see, the great thing about God is that He is in the business of rewriting our life script because he knows that left to writing our own scripts, we would leave out key scenes that are designed to bring Him glory and help draw us nearer to Him and experience all that He has for us. Let's face it, if it were up to us, life would go according to our plan and that plan usually includes smooth sailing and excludes a lot of challenges. I know that's my goal most of the time. The ultimate result in rewriting our script is God growing us in our faith so that we can in turn glorify Him with our lives and experience life as God desires us to.

Our faith grows when we allow God to put us in situations that require us to trust that He will show up. I'm not talking about putting ourselves in reckless situations. It's about allowing God to intervene in our lives in a way that will require us to fully trust

in Him and not in ourselves. To be willing to let go of total control. God desires to take each one of us ordinary folks and bring us to a place where we can have a kind of faith in Him that will allow Him to do extraordinary things in and through us. I know that I want that kind of faith.

So what does that kind of faith look like? Actually, it's a simple faith. The Bible characterizes it as childlike faith. This simple faith comes by being willing to daily let God rewrite our script, to let go of things that we hold on to for security.

Today we are going to look at an extraordinary example as a young girl's life script is rewritten by God and how she responds with simple childlike faith. We are going to look at the life of Mary, the mother of Jesus.

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her (Luke 1:26–38).

Gabriel and Nazareth

We see in verse 26 that, *"In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God."* If we look back in chapter 1, verses 5–13 we see that Gabriel has been a busy guy and already visited Zechariah, the husband of Elizabeth, who is Mary's cousin. He

tells them that in their old age they will have a son and to name him John. So now Gabriel is sent by God to Mary to deliver some good news to her. The “sixth month” refers to the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy. Mary had no idea her cousin was pregnant because verses 24 and 25 say that Elizabeth kept it to herself. She was enjoying God's blessing, and as the story goes, a mute husband for the time being.

It says he was sent, “To a city of Galilee named Nazareth.” You need to understand that Nazareth was a nothing town. Maybe a few hundred people in the middle of nowhere. It's like one of those towns that you just pass by on the way to somewhere. If you do stop there it's only to get gas, go to the bathroom, grab a Slurpee and get out as fast as you can, thanking God that you don't live there! In John 1:46, Nathanael says, *“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”* Obviously not a prime destination spot.

Mary and Joseph

Gabriel comes *“to a virgin, betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary”* (v. 27). So who are Joseph and Mary? A lot has been said and depicted about these two over the centuries. Today our best picture of them is what we see in nativity scenes. Let's look a little closer at who these two were.

Let's first take a look at Joseph. He was probably a teenager. In that day they married at 12–16 years of age. He's poor and probably works with his dad as a carpenter. Think of a junior high boy living in a small poor rural town. He probably met Mary while they were growing up.

What about Mary? We see in this verse that she was “betrothed” to Joseph. Betrothal was a pledge to be married. Kind of like we view engagement, but with a much more serious commitment level. Betrothal was so serious that to terminate a betrothal required a divorce. You can see in Matthew 1:19 that that is what Joseph was considering before the angel visits him. Mary was probably illiterate. Most women were back then, especially in small rural towns. What she knew about God she knew from going to the local synagogue. Think illiterate peasant girl, doing menial chores in dirty feet and sandals. She's most likely 12-14 years old, a junior high girl. Now that's a sobering picture, isn't it?

A lot has been made of Mary throughout history, especially among the Roman Catholics and Orthodox Christians. They tend to make way too much of Mary. Make no mistake though, Mary was a young woman of simple faith. She was willing to give up her reputation, her marriage and security so that she could serve God. So Mary should not be the **object** of our faith, but she should be seen as an **example** of faith.

So what we see so far is that the angel Gabriel is sent from God to deliver a message to what the world would consider a nobody girl living in a nothing town. Isn't that just like God to turn logic on its head and instead of announcing the birth of the King of kings to a refined woman living in a palace fit for a king He goes to a nobody living nowhere.

I find the fact that God so often chooses the foolish things of this world to confound the wise very refreshing. We need to be reminded that God is not waiting for us to get our act together and “be somebody” before He will use us for His glory.

Favored by God

And he came to her and said, “Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you! “But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end” (verses 28–33).

In verse 28 he calls Mary “favored” one. He is saying that she has found favor with God; He has chosen her. This word “favor” is the root word used for grace, for undeserved favor and unmerited love. It's the word that describes how we are saved and loved by God. We can't earn it and we don't deserve it. It's something we receive from God because He is good. That's what Christianity is all about. We don't have to get cleaned up to get God to love us unconditionally. He just does because that's who He is. What a great picture this is. God taking a nobody from nowhere and bestowing His grace on her because He is good.

Many people have a hard time with the message of grace. From the time we are young we are told that we have to be somebody and to make something of ourselves. We get so into self-reliance that we ignore the fact that we are in such deep need of saving. Are you aware of your deep need of grace this morning?

Grace is that undeserved favor that makes us completely forgiven by God and pleasing to Him, which means that we don't have to fear failure. We are totally accepted by God, which means we don't have to fear rejection. We are deeply loved by God, which means we don't have to fear punishment by God. We are also complete in Christ, which means we don't have to live in shame. Because of Jesus, the same favor bestowed to Mary is bestowed to us! That's good news! And I love how in verse 30 Gabriel says, “Don't be afraid.”

In verse 31 he tells her to name the baby Jesus, which means “Savior” or “God saves me from my sins.” Her son will be her savior. In verse 32 the question is answered as to whether Jesus

is the Son of God. It says that He will be called, “Son of the Most High.” It also says that he will fulfill the prophesy in 2 Samuel 7:13 of reigning as King of glory. What a wild message to receive.

Mary's Question

Next we see Mary's reaction to Gabriel's announcement. In verse 34 she says, *“How will this be, since I am a virgin?”* That's a fair question. Mary is not showing unbelief here, unlike her uncle, Zachariah, a few verses back who in saying, “How can this be?” expresses disbelief. “We are old.” “That's not possible.” Mary understands that without the assistance of a husband she will conceive a child. She just wants to know how it's possible.

Have you ever had questions as to why God is allowing something or how He is going to accomplish something when the odds are against it? There's a big difference between wondering how God is going to work and not believing that He is going to work. There's a big difference in believing that the Bible is true and that Jesus is your savior and not believing those things.

You might be sitting here saying, “I believe in Jesus. I believe that He died for my sins and rose to life. I know that He is my savior. But I have questions. There are some things I just don't understand about God and Christianity. Am I truly a Christian?” The answer is yes. Christianity/God is big enough for your questions. Bring them to Him. Bring them to others in the church body. Ignore your pride.

God of the Impossible

And the angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For nothing will be impossible with God” (verses 35–37).

Gabriel tells Mary that it will be a miracle. God will make something out of nothing. He can take an elderly and barren woman and open her womb. He can take a nothing virgin from a nowhere town and through her conceive the Savior of our sins. He can sacrifice that son in our place for the punishment of our sins. He can raise him from the dead. He can save us from our sins. He can hear our prayers. He can heal our hurts. Nothing is impossible for God. Nothing!

Do you believe that? I think that so often we look at our life's circumstances and our first reaction is, “How in the world am I going to fix this?” Or, “What am I going to do?” “How am I going to make it through?” Simple faith acknowledges that with God, nothing is impossible; that when I put my complete trust in Him, I can know that nothing will happen to me that isn't for His glory and my good.

A Simple Faith

“And Mary said, ‘Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.’ And the angel departed from her” (v. 38).

So, how does Mary respond to all of this? Here's a simple woman from a simple town with a simple faith. She believes what God says. It's not that she didn't have plans of her own. It's not that this new direction for her life wasn't a big deal. I'm sure that Mary had her script somewhat written for her life. “I'm gonna have a wedding, I'm gonna marry Joseph, we will have a family and live life out in our little town.”

Bam! Que the angel. New script. And Mary's response is, “I'm the servant of the Lord, let it be to me according to your will. Whatever you want God. According to what we see here, the one criteria that God seems to be looking for in people he wants to use is simple faith, a faith that says, “Whatever you want Lord. I'm willing.”

I think it's important for us to fully understand what Mary was willing to deal with in order to understand her simple yet incredible faith. First, Joseph had the right to divorce her. She didn't know that an angel was going to appear to him to explain everything. Can you imagine what must have been going through her head as she rehearsed that conversation? She was willing to give up getting her identity from being Joseph's wife.

There was also the possibility that she would face extreme persecution and abuse. At that time there was a provision in the law that in order to make her an example to other young girls, they could take her to the town center, strip her naked, re-dress her in rags, abuse her verbally and physically, tie her up, call her a whore and leave her there so that others would get the idea that sex outside of marriage was unacceptable. Actually, Mary probably endured much abuse for the rest of her life, being called a tramp or a loose woman. Jesus, growing up, heard repeatedly, “At least we know who our mother is,” another way of saying, “You don't even know who your dad is.” Can you just see Jesus saying, “But my mom was a virgin!” “Yeah, right.”

Mary was willing to let go of her marriage, comfort, security and identity in order to serve God. She was willing to have her life script completely rewritten, not because she was a super saint, but because she possessed a simple faith.

Let me ask you something. Do you possess this simple faith like Mary? Are you willing to let God rewrite your life script daily in order to help you to attain this simple faith? To loosen the grip you have on controlling things? What does this simple, childlike faith that Mary had look like?

Faith Explained

Look at how the Bible describes it. Hebrews 11:1 says, *“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things unseen.”* In this passage, the author’s definition of faith is based on two things; assurance and conviction or certainty.

Assurance is a subjective knowledge that I am certain of something. I know in my heart that it is true. In this case, I know in my heart that God has revealed Himself to me through His word and in the person of His Son and I can trust in His promise in Hebrews 13:5 to *“Never leave me or forsake me.”*

Conviction is being convinced that the things we are unable to see are real. Convinced that our future is in God’s hands as he says in Jeremiah 29:11, *“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.”*

The priest, philosopher and theologian, Thomas Aquinas said, “Faith has to do with things that are not seen and hope with things that are not at hand.” This is why Jesus came. This is what we were saved for. Not to build for ourselves a safe life that is insulated from things that seem harmful or scary. But to give ourselves completely to God. To trust Him with simple faith so He can use us to do great things for His glory and for our good. And by great things I’m not talking about moving across the world or even changing jobs or having a big impacting ministry. It’s simply living by faith and letting God use you where you are.

Conclusion

Like I said earlier, this hits really close to home for me in terms of my anxiety disorder. If I were writing my life script, I would for sure delete this part. But what a gift to have something that drives me to Jesus time and time again and to have a simple faith that believes 2 Corinthians 12:10 where it says, *“When I am weak, then I am strong.”*

I have really felt God moving in my life this past year. Not just in the area of calling my family to the Dominican Republic but something much deeper. I have been sensing for a while now that He wants me to grow in my faith. You see, being called to live and minister in the DR is not a big stretch in faith for me. The

stretch for me is letting God take me places where I have to risk my sense of self worth, which for me means trusting less in my abilities and skills and doing what I know how to do and being more and more willing to be the person God wants me to be.

This was made very real for me a few years back. I left my job with Young Life thinking that I would get another ministry job right away. Well, script rewrite. The only job I could get was as a high school recruiter at Heald College. Not only did I have to deal with getting up in front of a new class of students on a regular basis, to talk about resumes and job interviewing skills, I had to live with the ache and stress of making very little money doing a job usually done by people at least 25 years younger than me and I had no idea how long it would last either. I was put in a place where I had to trust that God was still for me and this was His plan for me for the time being. I needed to learn to sacrifice my reputation or the image I would have preferred to have projected. I was forced to live with a simple faith that God had my back and this was for my good and for His glory.

God loves you and me too much to let us stay where we are in our faith journey. We are so short-sighted when it comes to where we should or could be in our faith and intimacy with the Lord. We get so complacent and forget how to live by simple faith. We think we are living by faith but in truth, we are just living out our script.

Simple faith comes by being willing to daily let God rewrite our script. Are you willing let God rewrite your script daily? Are you willing to let Him restore that simple faith that will allow you to experience all that He has for you? Do you want to have the same faith that Mary had? A faith that says, “I’m your servant. It’s not my life, it’s yours. Do what you want.”

If you answered yes to those questions, tell Him so everyday. Let go of control of your day and your life. Is it scary? Yes. Will God provide everything necessary for things to turn out for His glory and your good? Yes!

Remember, nothing is impossible with God!

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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