

Noble Doss played football for the University of Texas and appeared on the cover of *LIFE* magazine with his teammates. He intercepted 17 passes while playing for Texas and won two NFL titles with the Philadelphia Eagles. He served in the Navy during WWII and was happily married for over 60 years. Despite all of his success, Doss has one big disappointment in his life. When talking with the new Texas coach, Doss told him about the ball that he dropped 50 years earlier. It was in 1941 in a game against Baylor. Texas was leading 7-0 when a wide open Doss dropped a pass that would have given Texas a 14-0 lead. Baylor was able to rally and tie the score, costing Texas their #1 ranking and a bid to the Rose Bowl. Memories of dropped passes fade slowly. Doss said, "I think about that play every day." He feels like he let his team, his coaches, and the fans down even though his name is listed on the Longhorn Hall of Honor.

It is far too easy for us to live in fear of disappointing others. How many parents will spend money they don't have, run up bills on their credit cards that they can't afford to repay, just to keep from disappointing their kids this Christmas? How many other people are not looking forward to Christmas day because they know that they will not be able to put the presents under the Christmas tree that they want to this year? Then there are the countless people who won't take a chance, who won't try to do something they may have failed at in the past, because they might fail again and disappoint others. This can be a real challenge when people have high expectations for themselves or for others.

I think Joseph was a man of high expectations. The Gospel of Matthew tells us that Joseph was a "righteous man." In Joseph's day being a righteous man meant he tried to do the right thing. And he was doing the right thing. He was a carpenter. So he had a trade that would enable him to support himself and his family in the future. He was engaged to a young woman by the name of Mary. They were both "saving themselves" for their wedding day. Joseph was busy building a house that would become their first home. Everything seemed to be falling in place for Joseph.

But that all changed one day when Mary told him that she was going to have a baby. Joseph knew that he was not the father. Mary told him that she had been visited by an angel of the Lord who told her that she would conceive a son by the power of the Holy Spirit. She was to give her son the name of Jesus because He would save people from their sin. Joseph had never heard anything like this before. He knew and believed that God was going to send the promised Messiah, but he didn't know that his fiancée was going to be the mother of this child.

Joseph had to decide what to do. He didn't want to disappoint Mary, his family or God. He had three basic options:

#1. He could publicly divorce her, the only way to end an engagement in those days, and place Mary at the hands of the religious authorities who could stone her to death for committing

adultery. But Joseph loved Mary and didn't want any harm to come to her. So he decided not to do that.

#2. He could go ahead with the wedding and raise Mary's son as his own. But then the people of the town would talk and his family would think that Joseph had broken God's laws. He didn't want to suffer the disgrace or disappoint his parents. But what if Mary was telling the truth? He didn't want to disappoint God.

#3. He could quietly divorce Mary so that she could have the baby and go on with her life. He would be exonerated and free to go on with his life. Joseph would be able to save his reputation and Mary's life at the same time. If the baby was really the promised Messiah, the child would be safe, too. It seemed like the right thing to do.

This was the option that Joseph was considering before God stepped into the picture. An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and told him, ***"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 1:20-21) That changed everything for Joseph. Instead of being afraid of what others might think or say, Joseph listened to the message of God's angel and took Mary as his wife. He did the right thing.

Sometimes I think we are afraid of disappointing God, fear of our sinning God's patience. That happens when Satan fools us into thinking that there is a limit to God's grace, that we can only ask God to forgive us a certain number of times for the same thing. If the devil succeeds, then we can be deceived into believing that the account of God's grace can grow empty and our access to that grace is denied. When that happens we live in fear of God instead of trusting in His love and forgiveness. When we are afraid because of our sin, we try to hide from God.

But there is no limit to God's grace. Jesus told a paralyzed man, ***"Be encouraged, my child! Your sins are forgiven."*** (Matthew 9:2 NLT) Before Jesus heals the body, he treats the soul. Jesus connects courage with forgiveness. He gives us the ability to take the focus off of ourselves so that we can focus on Him. Joseph had to stop worrying about himself before he could obey God. God got Joseph to focus on Mary, her unborn son, and God's promises. He wants to do the same for us.

Jesus loves us too much to leave us in doubt about His grace. Sometimes we get the feeling that God could not love us or forgive us. Our guilt can get the best of us. If that ever happens to you, take these words from 1 John 3:20 to heart, ***"Even if we feel guilty, God is greater than our feelings, and he knows everything."*** God loves us and forgives us. He will never turn his back on us because of the things that we do or say. So don't be afraid of disappointing God. After all, Jesus came to save us from our sins. He already loves us. Nothing is ever going to change that. Amen.