

Challenges!

Our trip to Papua New Guinea was a special blessing in my life and revelations continue to unfold as time passes. Along with the blessings came several challenges. When we left I was still struggling physically with a fever and tiredness which continued to plague me at times while on the mission trip. Other times I missed our children, grandchildren, friends, and church family making my emotions difficult to control. At times I was intellectually challenged as I tried to convey spiritual truths in a language containing only 1500 words. Spiritually I was often challenged as I felt lonely, unproductive, weak, or unspiritual. I learned much about the people of Papua New Guinea and perhaps even more about myself. Since my return, I continue to process daily and sometimes hourly all that occurred in Papua New Guinea and my reaction to challenges. Then I think of Mary and ponder the challenges she faced and her reaction to those challenges, discovering we can all learn to face challenges in God pleasing ways through her example. She was above reproach and set a standard we should take note of for ourselves in 2020.

First of all, she was not just a pure virgin, but she was morally and spiritually pure, untainted by the world and culture which was completely godless, filled with a mixture of truth and error. We must walk in that same purity, untainted by society, so when we face challenges we know we are safe and secure in the shelter of the Most High God. Secondly, she was humble as evidenced by her reaction of being troubled when the angel called her the “highly favored one.” Humility is a characteristic which will keep us close to God, a good place to be when faced with challenges.

Thirdly, she was submissive, yielded, and surrendered to the will of God in her life, knowing God and trusting Him above all else. She obviously valued her relationship with the Lord more than with man, not caring about the opinion of others, her reputation, or the disgrace pregnancy would bring upon her. Every day of Mary’s pregnancy would have been faced with cruel looks, rejection, and/or snide remarks thus she would need to be renewed daily as she awaited the birth of her Son. Luke tells us that Mary did not fully comprehend –she kept and pondered things in her heart and meditated on God’s work in her life,

and even without full understanding or having all the answers she continued to yield to God. Likewise, we must be submissive and completely surrendered to all the Lord has commanded of us, pondering the things of God in our hearts and meditating on His work in our lives, so that when challenges come our way, we are not doing our own thing independently, but submitted to our Lord.

The fourth reaction we see in Mary's life is her desire for God to receive all glory and honor rather than herself found in her prayer in Luke 1:46-55 upon meeting Elizabeth. Her prayer demonstrates joy, exultation, trust, and love found in God alone and in all He did for her which would bless future generations. When our desire is for the Lord to receive all the glory and honor, all challenges seem to lose any power they appear to wield over us.

Lastly, after Jesus is born the three of them need to flee to Egypt. How difficult would it have been for Mary to leave family, friends, their home and business? Did she understand what was going to happen to these other baby boys? She probably knew some of these women and little ones. What an incredible test and act of faith Mary set for us! Likewise, we can learn from her when God calls us to "Go" we must exercise our faith and do as He says knowing His grace is more than sufficient for us.

I plan to face challenges in 2010 with these same qualities God-willing: Purity, humility, submission, desire for God to receive all glory and honor, and faith!!!! How about you?

May you have a most blessed and revealing Christmas celebration as you ponder the things of God in your heart, and meditate on His work in your lives.