

When Life Throws a Curve

FAMILY THEME: Life-altering Circumstances STUDY TEXT: Matthew 3:1-17; 14:1-12; 11:2-15
November 25, 2018

Matthew 3:1-17

Dream big, but understand that God may have different plans. What kinds of dreams (or plans) do you have? Some plan to spend time with their children and have big dreams for those children. Others dream of retiring from work and spending time with their spouse traveling the country and living a grand life together. We all dream. Imagine the dreams that Job, Joseph, Hagar, Naomi, and Ruth must have had. There are many examples of people in Scripture who had big dreams that did not come to fruition. However, you might say they did see those dreams fulfilled but in a different way. Yes, Job did lose his children, but he did find joy later in his family (Job 42:13-16). Joseph missed out on his young adulthood with his dad, but he did get to save his dad's life and reunite with him (Genesis 46). Hagar was sent away from Abraham (Genesis 21:14), but God made a nation out of Ishmael (Genesis 21:18). Naomi and Ruth survived devastating heartache (Ruth 1) but experienced inexpressible joy later in life (Ruth 4:13-17). What do you do (or will you do) if your dreams are dashed? Don't quit just because you have been thrown a curveball. Remember God causes all things to work together for good for His glory when we are devoted to Him. **Discussion:**

- When have you, or someone you know, had big plans that did not come to pass?
- How should we respond to such situations?
- Why can we always trust God's plan and what He is doing in our lives?

Matthew 14:1-12

Accept that we will have trouble in this life, but God is with us. Initially, it is difficult to see how John's plight applies to us today. However, in a way, anyone who has had plans and seen them dashed can relate to what happened to John. For example, a man has tried to honor God with his life, only to learn that he has a terminal illness like pancreatic cancer. He begins to realize he will not walk his daughter down the aisle at her wedding. He will never get to see his grandchildren (in this life) or go to their ballgames. He will not be able to travel with his spouse in retirement. His plans have been dashed. Similarly, parents who planned to train their child and watch him or her grow realize that because of the child's special needs he or she will never be able to mature like other children. They wonder what kind of life their child might have and worry about what might happen to him or her when they are no longer around. These kinds of situations are why we need to understand that difficult times will come (John 16:33), and to remember that God loves us and is always with us, no matter what comes our way (Hebrews 13:5-6). **Discussion:**

- What are some of the really difficult situations that people, including Christians, face in this life?
- How is it helpful to understand and accept ahead of time that we will have trouble in this life?

Matthew 11:2-19

Faithfully follow Christ no matter your circumstances. When plans are dashed we are often upset when we see others living the life we had planned for ourselves. They seem to have good health, even if they have not honored God with their lives at this point. Someone whose life has been altered because her child has some special needs may struggle not to be offended as she sees someone else with perfectly healthy children. If we are not careful, we can become bitter as our plans are changed or our dreams are dashed. It is hard to accept that God wishes to use this circumstance for His will and glory but we do not get to choose the track we run upon. We cannot run someone else's race (Hebrews 12:1-2). We must faithfully run the race God has set before us. If we will be faithful, it will be worthwhile in the end when we are with Jesus. In fact, the difficulty we experience in this life will make what happens in the next life even better. How are we to handle this? We must do as John did and talk to the Lord about our concerns. Too often we are afraid to talk to God when we are angry or disappointed—as if He is unaware of what we are thinking. We seem to think God only hears “pretty” prayers. John sending the messengers to ask a blunt question was like an ugly prayer. You can find other prayers that sound a bit ugly, like Psalm 44:9-14 where the psalmist felt as if God had rejected His people, or Psalm 13 where the psalmist felt like God had forgotten him and was hiding from him. As in any relationship, it is important to pray (even when we do not want to pray) to keep the lines of communication open. It is also interesting to see how God changes us and shapes us with our prayers. Job prayed prayers of complaint to the Lord, but when God finally revealed Himself and His glory to Job, Job realized that God Himself, and His plans, were beyond Job's understanding. He surrendered to God's great purpose (Job 42:1-6). **Discussion:**

- Why should we continue to trust the Lord when our dreams seem to be dashed?
- How has God demonstrated His love and faithfulness in your life?