

Rock Star Dad

Why The Church Has To Answer The Call of Joseph

December 13, 2015 // Trevor Atwood // Matthew 1-2 // Christmas

Well, if you were listening to new music in the 90's, you've heard the Stone Temple Pilot's about 10,000 times. They were one of the most influential bands of the Alternative Rock movement.

I was a high school freshman when their song "Plush" came out. In fact, from time to time, almost unconsciously, I find myself singing

**"And I feel that time's a wasted go
So where ya going to tomorrow? And I see..."**

You're welcome for that little trip inside my head. There's always a song in there.

The Stone Temple Pilot's lead singer, Scott Weiland led the stereotypical life of a rockstar. Full of sex, drugs, and alcohol addiction. But as long as he kept producing good music, fans didn't really care about that.

They also didn't care about his responsibilities as a father and apparently, he didn't either.

Last week, Scott Weiland, died and his ex-wife Mary, 15 year old son Noah, and 13 year old Daughter Lucy, wrote a letter to Scott's fans that was published in Rolling Stone magazine.

I'd like to share a couple of things they said.

"The outpouring of condolences and prayers offered to our children, Noah and Lucy, has been overwhelming, appreciated and even comforting. But the truth is, like so many other kids, they lost their father years ago. What they truly lost on December 3rd was hope.

I knew [Noah & Lucy] would one day see and feel everything that I'd been trying to shield them from, and that they'd eventually be brave enough to say, "That mess was our father. We loved him, but a deep-rooted mix of love and disappointment made up the majority of our relationship with him."

They have never set foot into his house, and they can't remember the last time they saw him on a Father's Day. I don't share this with you to cast judgment, I do so because you most likely know at least one child in the same shoes. If you do, please acknowledge them and their experience. Offer to accompany them to the father-daughter dance, or teach them to throw a football. Even the bravest girl or boy will refrain from asking for something like that; they may be ashamed, or not want to inconvenience you. Just offer - or even insist if you have to.

This is the final step in our long goodbye to Scott. I won't say he can rest now, or that he's in a better place. He belongs with his children barbecuing in the backyard and waiting for a Notre Dame game to come on. We are angry and sad about this loss, but we are most devastated that he chose to give up.

Noah and Lucy never sought perfection from their dad. They just kept hoping for a little effort. If you're a parent not giving your best effort, all anyone asks is that you try just a little harder and don't give up. Progress, not perfection, is what your children are praying for. Our hope for Scott has died, but there is still hope for others. Let's choose to make this the first time we don't glorify this tragedy with talk of rock and roll and the demons that, by the way, don't have to come with it. Skip the depressing t-shirt with 1967-2015 on it - use the money to take a kid to a ballgame or out for ice cream."

I cried when I read that article this week.

I cried because I felt the longing of his kids. They didn't need their dad to be a celebrity. They didn't need him to win over the crowds. They needed him at a BBQ. They wanted him to not be strung out on drugs at their school play. I cried because I realized my kids don't care how many people listen to me preach. They just want to know that I'm ready to listen to them.

I cried because in this letter, I knew everywhere that Scott Weiland failed his kids, that God was ready to fill in the gap. I cried because I heard from Mary Weiland the call of God, to care for the orphan and the widow, to take a fatherless child to the daddy-daughter dance, to take a kid without a dad out for ice cream or to a ball game, and I felt that compassion lacking in my own life, so I mourned it.

Let me tell you where we're going today.

I'm going to lay out a vision for our church. Some of which is already taking shape in some of your lives but we need to start going after this together and on purpose.

This is a vision for loving our city by caring for children and redefining who we call "our kids".

Matthew 1:18-25

Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

**“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall call his name Immanuel”**

(which means, God with us). When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

Matthew 2:1-3

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him;

Matthew 2:13-16

Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.” And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, “Out of Egypt I called my son.”

Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men.

Matthew 2:19-21 & 23

But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, “Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead.” And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel.

And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene.

Isaiah 9:6

**For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given;
and his name shall be called
Everlasting Father**

Today, I want you to see what it means that Jesus is called “Everlasting Father”. I want you to know that in all the ways your parents have failed you, and in all the ways, parents, that you’ve failed your kids, that Jesus is ready to step in and make it right.

And church, today is a call for us to care for children like Joseph cared for Jesus, not because it's easy, but because every act of protecting and caring for the weakest and most vulnerable in our society, is an announcement of how God is saving the world.

1) Dads are God's place holders.

When you think about the story of Jesus' birth, Joseph probably plays one of the most overlooked roles in the whole thing. In fact, most of us emphasize who Joseph wasn't more than who he actually was. We emphasize that he wasn't Jesus' biological dad, instead of talking about who he was to Jesus.

You know, in most nativity plays, you find Joseph kind of standing in the background as “all is bright, round yon virgin mother and child.” Joseph is no rock star. He's no celebrity. He's a blue collar carpenter from Nazareth. And while he's pretty quiet on the night Jesus is born, he plays a crucial role in Jesus' life, both in the womb and as a pre-teen.

Did you notice when we read Matthew's account of Jesus' birth, how many times Joseph's simple obedience to God's commands is what God used to bring about his will?

First, Joseph sticks around in Mary's life to care for her and protect her and to name the baby Jesus and that fulfills Scripture. Then, when he's told to flee Israel for Egypt. He does it and that fulfills the scripture. Then when he's told to go back to Egypt after Herod is dead, he obeys again and that fulfills the Scripture.

I want you to think about how important Joseph is for just a second. When Jesus was tempted in the desert by Satan, he quoted scripture from the book of Deuteronomy to fend off temptation. Who do you think taught him that verse? I know some of you may think that Jesus just came, like preloaded with the Old Testament in his brain, but he didn't. More than likely, Joseph taught Jesus that Scripture.

The only thing, the only thing that caused Joseph to stick with Mary when she became pregnant, was the call of God on his life. See, the easiest thing for Joseph to do would be to just call that visit from an angel “a weird dream.” He could of gone on with his life. No one would have blamed him for divorcing Mary. In fact, he would have been praised as a kind man for not having her stoned. He could have married a pious Jewish woman who didn't come with the “baggage” of a child out of wedlock. Joseph could have had his so-called “own” kids. And it's no easy thing to pick up and move to Egypt and then back to Nazareth. This likely meant losing a neighborhood business that had been passed down for generations to go start over in a foreign land.

Let's not forget, that he suddenly becomes an enemy of the state with a target on his head. For what? FOR WHAT? Why take the risk? Because he got an unmistakable call from a God that he loved and found worth it. So he humbly stepped into a role of protecting and providing for the Son of God.

I have some news for you. Joseph, in a thousand ways, was Jesus' real father. He may not have shared a strand of DNA with him, but he adopted Jesus and in so doing, somehow, in the crazy mind blowing way God works, God put the one who through whom the entire universe was created, under the care of a backwoods carpenter.

He chose to use Joseph to protect Jesus from the murderous King Herod, to put food on his table, to teach him a trade, and to train up Jesus to know and love his heavenly Father. That's being a dad.

Joseph didn't have fans. He had a family. And that's a million times better. Just ask Scott Weiland's kids. Dads, listen up. You may not be called to be a father to the Son of God, but you better believe God has called you to father His Children.

In Ephesians 6:1, 4, the apostle Paul instructed children to obey their parents in the Lord and told Fathers to bring up kids in the discipline and instruction of the Lord, to not provoke them to anger.

Dads, that means you are holding God's place for your kids. You are like training wheels. Your kids learn obedience to a loving authority from you. As you protect and provide for your kids, emotionally, spiritually, physically, you are teaching your kids how to love and obey God.

In Ephesians 6, Paul tells fathers not to provoke their children to anger. You want to know what that means? Just read Noah and Lucy Weiland's letter to their dad. When he stepped out of the role of caring for his kids, they ended up in their own words, “in deep-rooted disappointment.” Provoking your kids to anger is to remove yourself as placeholder for God, and insert your own interpretation of what a Father should be. It's to reject your role as a protector and a provider, and abandon your kids to protect and provide for themselves. Physically, emotionally, & spiritually.

I know many of you feel like you could of written that letter to your Dad. I know many of you have had dads that didn't help you see God more clearly, but instead distorted that image, like a hall of mirrors.

Maybe one of these descriptions fits your dad:

- You had an **absent father**, who abandoned your family.
- You had a **passive father**, who never engaged with you, never led your family anywhere. Just kind of went to work, and chilled in front of the TV.
- You had **demanding father**, who expected you to be perfect and got angry when you didn't live up to his expectations.
- You had an **enabling father**, who simply gave you everything you ever asked for, who always bailed you out of trouble, and now you realize it ruined you, because you never felt the consequences of living in the real world, and you never learned to take care of yourself.
- You had an **abusive or angry father**, who was always hurting you, screaming at you, communicating in every way he could that you were worthless.

Now, when you hear the idea that God is father, it makes your stomach turn a little bit. Maybe, every mention of a male figure in authority causes deep-seated mistrust. Maybe you are rejecting God as Father because the one who was supposed to be a place-holder for him left that place empty or filled it with something ugly. I understand. But I have good news for you this Christmas.

Those who walked in darkness, have seen a great light. Those who dwelt in the land of deep darkness, on you a light has shone. For unto us a child is born, and his name shall be called "Everlasting Father".

While it may cause you to mourn when you think that your dad was supposed to be a place-holder for God, and he didn't do it. It should cause you to rejoice that,

2)Dad's are made to be replaced.

When you go to a concert, there's always an opening act. The opening act is a place-holder. They go out and occupy the stage before the band you came to see comes out.

Now, sometimes you have a good experience with an opening act. You end up liking them, downloading their music, telling your friends about them.

Sometimes, the opening act stinks. They're terrible. But you don't walk out of the concert until you've heard the headliner.

Dads, we're just the opening act for the headliner, God himself. If you're like me, I often feel like I'm not a very good opening act and that makes me really thankful that Jesus is going come out and rock the show in my kids' lives after I've blown it.

If you had a bad experience with your dad, you need to remember the headliner is still taking the stage. Don't leave the building because your opening act was awful.

Did you see in the passage we read in Isaiah that Jesus is referred to as "Everlasting Father?" Jesus is the protector and provider we've always longed for. Not only that, in Malachi 4:6a, this savior is prophesied to heal the relationships between fathers and their children. You know why that's important to Jesus? Because this child is born to fight the shadow of death, the deep darkness, this child is born to go to war with the brokenness and sin in this world, and nothing is a better predictor of darkness in a person's life than the role a child's father played.

63% of youth suicide victims are from fatherless homes
90% of all homeless & runaway children have no father in the home
80% of rapists with anger problems come from fatherless homes

Teens who have a poor relationship with their father are **68%** more likely to use drugs compared to teens who do have a good relationship with their dads.

Jesus cares about the presence of a Father, because he cares about shining light into the darkness. But even when Dad is gone. Even when he's not at the BBQ, even when he's checked out of your life, Jesus brings the presence, protection, and provision of an everlasting Father. Because every dad, even good dads like Joseph, are just place holders, just opening acts to the Headliner.

So let me show you how Jesus is the Everlasting Father. How he steps in everywhere your dad failed you.

First, in Jesus, God is better than your demanding father.

See, this Messiah's salvation comes as a gift. Unto you a child has been given. The Gospel is the announcement of a gift, not a demand for you to prove yourself to your Heavenly Father. It's the news that Jesus Christ has lived the life you were supposed to live for you and died the death you were condemned to die in your place, so that we can immediately be fully forgiven and accepted by God.

There's a story about Jesus in the book of John, where a woman caught in adultery is brought in front of Jesus. The crowd ready to execute her. Jesus looks at her and says, "I don't condemn you, now go and sin no more" He didn't say to her, "Once you prove yourself, once you live up to my expectations, come back and we'll see." No he said, I love you, I forgive you. Out of that forgiveness, you'll change. He doesn't say "Get better then I'll forgive you." He says, "the first step to changing is realizing you already have my acceptance."

Listen, I know kids who no matter what they do on a sports field, in a classroom, or on a stage, their Dad always comes back to them with "Here's the 6 things you did wrong."

Not the Everlasting Father! He says, "Trust me. I don't condemn you. Come to me with your worst, and you'll leave with my best."

Jesus is also better than your angry Father.

Instead of walking on eggshells around him, praying he won't flip out and hurt you, you can come close and trust him.

Jesus is not a ticking time-bomb. He is slow to anger, full of compassion and mercy, abounding in love that doesn't quit. Yes, he brings things into our lives to discipline us, but it's not a flying-off-the-handle losing of his temper. It's always patiently for our good.

In fact, in Hebrews 12, we're told that God is disciplining us not out of anger, but out of a desire for our peace. See, this is the way a protector and provider who loves you works. He's always thinking about your good and **unlike your enabling or passive Dad**, he doesn't just sit back and watch things happen to you, nor does he swoop in and rescue you from all consequences. He's always allowing the right things, sometimes the hard things, into your life to shape you, so that you become more like him.

And **unlike the absent father or the passive father** who was emotionally checked out of your life, the Everlasting Father is emotionally engaged in your life. Through Jesus' death and resurrection, he gives us the gift of his Spirit. And while the Holy Spirit certainly moves us outward to love and care for others, he also testifies to us about our relationship with God. He is constantly whispering to you, "He loves you! You are his! He's adopted you! He's not leaving you as an orphan!"

Through the Holy Spirit, the Everlasting Father is engaged with your heart. He's not just putting food on the table and protecting you. He's pulling you close and whispering, "I love you to the cross and back!"

In Isaiah 9:7, a verse after this child who is called the everlasting Father is promised, Isaiah says "The zeal of the Lord will do this!"

Do you know what "zeal" is? It's literally jealousy. It also indicates the color your face turns when you have deep emotion. Do you know what that means? God doesn't just love you, he actually likes you. He's emotionally involved. When Jesus was born, it was a Father who saw his children ravaged by sin and was hot with jealousy for them, like a Dad with a kid ravaged by cancer.

He was so jealous for us, that he humbled himself in a manger, gave himself up on a cross, all to remove us from our sin disease by taking it on himself on a cross.

Some of you had fathers that you know they “loved” you, but only because it was in the job description. They never emotionally connected with you. They had no zeal for you. The everlasting Father is not that Dad. That was just a lousy opening act. This Daddy is coming on stage with zeal. This Daddy doesn't just love you, he's deeply emotionally involved, because he actually likes you.

Listen to me. I know some of you don't feel this today. I know that years of abuse and neglect are not overcome in a sermon and I'm not suggesting that to you today.

My wife grew up in a broken home with an absent Dad. Ten years after we were married, we were still feeling the effects of that. Two of my children were neglected and abandoned. We don't overcome that with one hug and some smiles for the camera. That kind of darkness buries itself deep in the heart. Joseph didn't look at Mary and say “I'm staying with you, to love you and care for this child,” and then everything was ok. They ran for their life!

But into the darkness, the light has shined.

Herod's dead and Jesus resurrected. Herod swept the land killing babies. Joseph listened to his Father and protected the Christ child.

Trust this Father.

Trust this everlasting Father is a better Dad than the one that failed you..., and I promise you, because he promises you, as you learn to walk with him, you'll grow more and more sure of his love for you, even if it doesn't happen in an instant and in the meantime,

3)The church should be answering the call of Joseph.

It's amazing to me, in some of the most climactic moments of the Bible, evil is threatened by children, so evil slaughters the children, meanwhile, God and his people are rescuing and preserving the children as they overcome evil. And every time, it's telling us about how Jesus will save us. Let me show you.

Genesis 3:15

The child of Eve is at war with the serpent. The serpent tries to strike a death blow to the child, because he is threatened by him, but he only clips the heel, meanwhile, the child smashes the snakes head.

This is the first gospel. It's announced to a dejected and disappointed Adam and Eve, that even though things were dark, that a Jesus would come and defeat sin and death, by receiving a clip on the heel from the serpent on a cross.

Exodus 1:15, 22

In Exodus, just before Moses the deliverer is born, Pharaoh orders the execution of all the Hebrew baby boys, because he is threatened by them. He thought he was going to lose his power because of God's people. But God protected Moses, in a basket floating down the Nile river. And through that child, delivered Israel from the hands of this murderer. Moses is showing us the way God delivers his people from the shadow of death, this time, not through a child in a basket, but in a manger.

Matthew 2:16

Then of course, when Herod is threatened by this newborn king, he kills the babies. Meanwhile, Joseph protects God in the Flesh. A picture of God's protection of his children through the son who will be called "The Everlasting Father"

Revelation 12:4b-6

And then, at the end of the Bible, in a metaphor, Satan is represented by a dragon, who awaits the birth of the savior child, the mighty warrior who will defeat him. He's waiting for this child to be born so he can kill him, but God protects. God prepares a place for the woman and the child, the Everlasting Father provides life in the middle of death.

This is unmistakable in Scripture. Where the culture of death and destruction feels threatened, it kills the weak and that's right where God steps in to provide salvation. You and I have hope because Joseph obeyed God and adopted Jesus. You and I can be adopted by God because Joseph adopted Jesus, and now, church, as the Body of Christ, it's time for us to step into our culture of death, and be Joseph.

First, we've got to do it in our homes.

Dads, if you are putting food on the table but not having real conversations with your kids, ones where you listen to them, so you can hear what's broken in their hearts., and help them with it, you aren't doing your job, you're provoking your kids to anger.

If you've provided a roof over your kids' heads to protect them from the weather, but you aren't leading them in loving and knowing Jesus to protect them from the serpent's lies, you aren't really protecting them, you are provoking them to anger.

Dads, if you know today you are failing in this area, don't despair. Your kids aren't looking for your perfection. They're just looking for you to point them to the God that is perfection. Because of Jesus, in all the ways you are failing as a father, you are already forgiven. So move forward in faith into being the placeholder you are supposed to be. Need help? Perfect. Dustin Walker is our family pastor here, he'd love to help you get started in leading your family well.

Second, we've got to take up Joseph's call in our neighborhood.

We meet for worship in a neighborhood that is full of single parents. Most of them are families without Dads. Many of you have jumped on board with our service of the school in our Neighborhood, Bradley Academy, and I'm thanking God for what he's doing through you. In fact, you all graciously donated items for their Holiday Market Place, and we got an email this week, that your generosity went even further than we expected.

Not only did families who can't afford a lot have a chance to get wrapping paper and Christmas decorations at Bradley, you gave enough that they shared with the Oakland Court and Franklin Heights Pre-schools, in housing projects for kids on free and reduced lunch, so they could give a present to their parents this Christmas.

City Church, you did that and you didn't even know it. Can you imagine if we actually started to serve these single parent homes on purpose?

What's that going to look like? I don't know yet, but I do know it's going to go beyond putting donations in a box. It's going to mean looking in the faces of these kids and their parents. It's going to mean being on the ready to help the single moms in this neighborhood. It's going to mean that we begin to think of these kids as "our kids"

Do you know today you can volunteer to be a lunch buddy of a child at Bradley academy? Where you go and have a conversation over lunch with a child once a week? That's a pretty simple place to start.

City Church. If we don't do this, then who is? As the body of Christ, we've got to step into their darkness, to bring light.

Finally, we've got to answer the call of Joseph to the world.

More children die from abortion than any other cause in this country. Herod killed babies because they threatened his Kingship. We kill them because they threaten our lifestyle. This is not a political issue. This is a culture of death that we are called to bring life into. Not to mention sex trafficking, abuse and abandonment.

There is nothing that is a more powerful statement of life in a culture of death than adopting a child. The Lord has already been doing that among our church, but I'm praying it multiplies. In fact, we have an adoption grant at our church available for any family who is seeking to adopt. But it needs to be fed. It needs to be padded. So, maybe you aren't called to adopt a child, but you can certainly give so someone else can.

Listen, Jesus doesn't live past the age of two if a Northern Galilean carpenter who had no responsibility to raise him, other than the call of God, doesn't step in and say "He's my child." Can you imagine if Joseph said, "I don't feel like this is the right time in my life to do that."

God couldn't adopt you if Joseph didn't adopt Jesus. But Joseph stepped up and Jesus stepped in.

See, there are some pretty high stakes in caring for kids who are missing one or both parents and as the body of Christ, we are going to answer Joseph's call.