

We Just Want to Be Loved

Kevin Heider

Hi, my name is Kevin Heider. I'm a singer, songwriter, performer, recording artists. I also work with video in graphic design. I have a passion for all things creative, and that is an aspect of the person of Christ that has really resonated with me more and more over the years. Jesus was a storyteller. Crowds would come from all over, from near and far, in swarms to hear Him preach and teach, and He often taught by telling parables, that He knew the power of a compelling story to touch the heart and move the mind to consider a deeper truth, a deeper way of living out the love of God.

I've given a few talks now for these Pray More Online Retreats, and if you've never seen or heard any of them, this is the style. In just a moment, I am going to disappear from the screen, and for the remainder of this video, we will be looking at and reflecting on a work of art, a painting. And if it seems a little cheesy to you, give it a chance.

Opening Prayer

I'd like to begin here with the prayer to Saint Joseph, so I invite you either to pray along with me or simply to listen. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen. "St. Joseph, Foster father of our Lord Jesus Christ, true spouse of the Virgin Mary, pray for us and those in agony today, Amen.

St. Joseph with the Christ Child

I originally planned on talking about this classic painting by Rembrandt. It's called "The Storm on the Sea of Galilee," and I love it. I think it's a remarkable work of art and I'm sure I'll end up doing a talk about it eventually, but instead, we're going to sit with and reflect on this painting. It's called "St. Joseph with the Christ Child," and it was painted by Spanish Baroque artists, Sebastian Martinez around the year 1650. Now truth be told, I still don't know much about Sebastian Martinez. He isn't as well known as the likes of Rembrandt or Caravaggio. The only reason I know this painting exists, is because several years ago, I stumbled upon it. In-person in a museum in Spain.

In 2015, a good friend of mine got married in Madrid, and I got to spend a whole week exploring Spain, leading up to his wedding. And one afternoon we visited the Prado, the main Spanish National Art Museum. It's located in Madrid, and it is considered one of the greatest art museums in the world. So, for several hours, I got to walk around and stand in the presence of the works of Francisco Goya, Diego Velazquez, Hieronymus Bosch, Titian, El Greco, Peter Paul Rubens. So many masters of the art form. So much history, so much sacred glory and beauty.

But the painting I remember most vividly, the one that really stood out to me, was this work by a lesser known artist an image of St. Joseph with the Christ child that portrays so simply, and

beautifully, and tenderly, the loving care with which fathers teach their children. This image blows open the concept that the word of God became flesh and dwelt among us. It forces us to ponder the implications of fully divine and fully human. That the God who commanded that we honor thy father and my mother humbly submitted Himself to that command. That the giver of all the delicious fruit in that bowl is about to partake of it himself when he stopped, and told, "uh huh you didn't ask, and we're about to have dinner." What a joyfully divine comedy.

By the time I stumbled upon this painting, I had wandered well away from the group I went into the museum with. I was just walking around by myself, immersing myself in the history of the works I was beholding. But when I turned a corner and entered the room where this painting was hanging on the wall, the moment I saw it, I smiled. I was in Spain, but my wife who's a huge fan of St. Joseph was back home in Ohio with our newborn, our first child, Ellie. She was about eight months old at the time. And I saw in this painting a glimpse of my future.

Just imagine this interaction today, St. Joseph grabs the arm of little Jesus as he's reaching into Grandma Ann's cookie jar to help himself to a treat. While our Ellie is six and a half now, kid number five is on the way, and I can't even tell you how many times in the last six years I've stopped a kid from sneaking a cookie or grabbing too many grapes off the counter before dinner. This painting resonated with me then as a new dad. And it resonates with me now, even more as a seasoned professional dad, but so far, all I've shared with you is my own personal experience with this painting and its resonance with me. But if we dive into the particulars, we find even more to appreciate.

St. Joseph's Staff

One thing to notice is what Joseph is holding in his right hand, it's long and straight, almost like a Shepherd's crook or an elder's staff. This is actually a pretty common symbol used in paintings and statues of St. Joseph. He's often depicted holding the Christ child in one arm, and a Reed or staff with white flowers in his other hand. Sometimes those flowers are lilies, which are often used as a symbol of purity, chastity, and a commitment to such virtues. But these flowers don't really look like lilies. So, what could this mean? Where did this symbol come from? And what does it represent?

Well, in the book of Numbers chapter 17 we read about Aaron, the first high priest of Israel and how his staff came to be placed in front of the Ark of the covenant quote ***"For safekeeping and as a sign to the rebellious." It reads, "The Lord now said to Moses, speak to the Israelites and get from them a staff for each ancestral house, 12 staffs in all. Then deposit them in the tent of meeting in front of the covenant where I meet you. The staff of the man whom I choose shall sprout. Thus, I will rid myself of the Israelites grumbling against you."***

"So Moses spoke to the Israelites and all their leaders gave him staffs 12 in all one from each leader of their ancestral houses. And Aaron's staff was among them. Then Moses deposited the staffs before the Lord in the tent of the covenant. The next day, when Moses entered the tent of the covenant, Aaron's staff representing the house of Levi had sprouted, it had put forth sprouts, produced blossoms, and born ripe almonds!"

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Attached to this passage in the new American Bible, there's a footnote that reads quote, *"The staff was not merely an article of practical use, but also a symbol of authority. The staff of a leader of a tribe was considered the emblem of the tribe"* end quote.

So here we have St. Joseph holding a staff as a symbol of his authority as a father. Like Aaron, he was chosen and like Aaron's staff, Joseph's staff has put forth sprouts, produced blossoms and has been placed in Joseph's hand before Christ the new covenant for safe keeping. His staff with blossoms is a sign that Joseph has been chosen.

Patience with Patience

So as the foster father of our Lord Jesus Christ, how does Joseph exert his authority? Here in this painting, we see with firmness, with confidence, but also with gentleness, the look on Joseph's face here is so authentic and relatable to me. He doesn't look mad, but he does look stern in a very loving way, almost with a slight smile. He's got his eyes and his eyebrows raised as if he's saying "son, we've talked about this. You can't just help yourself to the fruit." And the look on Jesus's face is so cute and innocent. It's a look I've seen a hundred times. It's a look that says, "Oh yeah, I forgot. It just looks so good I just saw it and got so excited, and I wanted to eat some." And in this beautiful human interaction, we see a father gently teaching a son patience with patience. Be patient, you can have some fruit, but not yet, it's not time, the hour has not yet come.

Diving even deeper in a little blurb on their website, the Prado Museum offers this description of the painting, quote *"St. Joseph grasps Jesus's arm to prevent him from taking fruit from the basket. This action is loaded with meaning, given the sacrificial and Eucharistic significance of both the child's violet tunic and the grapes and pomegranates that predominate in the fruit basket"* end quote.

A Deep Symbolism of Colors & Fruit

if you've ever paid attention to the liturgical vestments worn by the priest at mass, then you know that colors have a deep symbolism within the tradition of the church. How does Martinez painting the child Jesus in a violet tunic symbolize the Eucharistic sacrifice? Well, violet was both an ancient royal color and associated with pain and suffering and thus repentance from sin.

As for the grapes and the pomegranates filling the fruit basket, Joachim Jeremia's A 20th century German Lutheran theologian used a beautiful phrase. He wrote quote, *"Jesus made the broken bread a simile of the fate of His body, the blood of the grapes, a simile of his outpoured blood. I go to death as the true Passover sacrifice is the meaning of Jesus's last parable"* end quote.

I love that phrase. The blood of the grapes. Grapes are used to make wine. And this adds another layer of depth and meaning to the words I imagined St. Joseph's speaking earlier, "Be patient son, you can partake of the fruit of the vine, but not yet, the hour has not yet come."

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Now, grapes seem a little more obvious as a Eucharistic symbol here, but I'll be honest and say that the significance of the pomegranate rather escaped me. It took a little digging for me to realize just how often I've seen pomegranates in the sacred art, and simply missed the detail, including in several paintings where the word pomegranate is literally in the title of the painting. I just didn't know the title of the painting.

For instance, this 15th century painting by Fra Angelico, which is also at the Prado Museum is called the "Virgin with the Pomegranate." You can see here the Christ child sitting on his mother's lap, she's holding a pomegranate. The fruit has been plucked and torn open, which means that it's dead, but clearly visible are it's hundreds of seeds, which represent new life. So, Mary holds the fruit open in her hand, and as one art commentary noted quote, *"In this context, the fruit has a double meaning. In the Virgin's hands it refers to her chastity while by touching it, the Christ child prefigures His own death and resurrection."*

Here again, this panel of a triptych painted by Crivelli in the 15th century is known as "Madonna con Bambino" in the upper left corner of the painting above the angel is a pomegranate that seems to have burst open. This symbolizes seeds scattered and sewn. Or foreshadowing of the new life brought forth in Christ. At last, we understand the symbolism. It wasn't simply a bowl full of some random assortment of fruit used for acute meditation on the humanity of Christ via the relationship of St. Joseph and the child, Jesus. It is that and so much more the Christ child reaches for the grapes, the fruit of the vine that to this day human hands still prepare for our communion. He reaches for the pomegranates that prefigure His Eucharistic sacrifice. And St. Joseph tells him, "Be patient son, it's not time for those yet."

God as Father

Now, all this symbolism aside, the literal presentation happening here, a father teaching his son, affords us a unique opportunity to reflect on the concept of God as a father. I mentioned at the start that I had changed my mind at the last minute about which painting I'd be reflecting on. And a part of the reason why I changed my mind, was that I saw the list of talk titles offered in retreat, and one of them struck me. It was the talk by Jake Khym titled, "Healing the Mother and Father Wounds."

Now I can honestly say that I don't think I have any mother and father wounds, and I may be uniquely blessed in that I don't know, but I have heard so many stories over the years and had conversations with many people who for quite understandable reasons, have trouble with the concept of God as Father. How are people whose dads maybe weren't around or weren't present or abandoned the family or were just mean, and didn't seem to care and never showed any love to their kids, how are they supposed to understand God as a Father?

There are so many for whom some aspect of the relationship that they had, or maybe didn't have with their dad leads to a disconnect between the idea that God is love, and that God is our Father. Such experiences may well lead to the conclusion that those two ideas are incompatible. I had a father, and he was anything but loving towards me. Does that sentence seem unfathomable to you, or does it resonate? Do you know people personally for whom this seems to have been their experience?

Little Child Don't Cry

In the fall of 2006, I spent a semester living and studying and praying and playing in this 14th century, Carthusian monastery in the foothills of the Austrian Alps. It was the closest I've come to heaven on earth and late one night around 1:00 a.m, I found myself alone in one of the open rooms of the old monastery with my guitar and a notebook.

For whatever reason, I was thinking about this concept of God as a loving Father. And in about an hour, I wrote a song that to me was just a simple reflection on that theme. I titled the song, "Little Child Don't Cry" then I went to bed, but the very next day at the noon mass in the monasteries main church sanctuary the homily offered by the priest included several phrases that were word for word from the song I had just written the night before. I hadn't even had a chance to play the song for anyone yet. But the priest told the story of a class of kindergartners who were asked to write letters to God. And one of the letters he told us written by a young boy named Johnny was short and simple.

It read, "Dear God, I need more love, Johnny." Four years after this experience, I recorded my song and released it on an album. And shortly after I released it, within the span of one month, I received two different messages from people I didn't know, telling me that they were driving on the highway when they first heard the song and they had to pull over because they started crying so hard that they couldn't see.

One young man wrote to me that quote, "It speaks to the truth of the base and simple desire of every human heart. We just want to be loved" end quote. And the young woman who reached out to me said that the song quote, "Made me cry so much I had to pull over." She continued, "The past few months, I have been struggling immensely with my own decisions and endeavors in life. Realizing that I make so many things hard on myself because I expect perfection. I have also been experiencing the loss of my father in a very new way at this point, as a young woman, my dad died when I was three, and every day in different ways I have felt his abandonment because of God's doing. But recently I realized that I felt God the father's abandonment because of my own doing. God the father has been calling me back to be His daughter again."

And so, as we sit at this painting for a few more minutes, I invite you to ponder all of this sincerely in your heart. And especially if you need healing from a mother or father wound, or if like Johnny, for whatever reason you feel like you need more love, I offer this song as my prayer for you.

Everyone demands perfection
Sometimes it seems to you that child
You just wanna be loved , You just wanna be loved
You just wanna be seen As you're seen in our father's eyes, Our father's eyes
Nobody understands how you feel, You think you're all alone in this waste land
But you just wanna be loved, You just wanna be loved
Don't run away, Just run right onto our Father's hands, Our Father's hands
Little children don't you worry, About your little broken hearts

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If you wanna be loved, if you wanna be loved
Then just run back to our father's arms, Our father's arms, Our father's arms
Little child don't cry, Everything will be just like it never happened
Try to to be patient you'll be fine, These things ain't take a little time
Just give it some time, Just give it some time, Just give it some time
Don't grow up too fast, Don't grow up too fast, Don't grow too fast,
Don't grow up too fast, Don't grow up too fast