

The Joseph Calling

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Joseph had a tremendous calling on his life that ultimately resulted in his becoming a physical and spiritual provider over nations. However, God had to do extensive breaking and preparation in his life to make him ready.

By 1994, I had a life that many people would have longed for. I had made enough money to retire at the age of 44; I was playing golf about three times a week, and my walk with God was “adequate” in my eyes—or at least not much different from any other Christian businessperson I knew. Then one day, my wife of 14 years announced that she wanted to separate. This led to a divorce three years later. At the same time, investments of more than \$500,000 disintegrated over a period of a few months, and I lost 80 percent of my business along with clients who failed to pay bills that added up to more than \$140,000. My world quickly changed from having a successful small business and family to having no family, little money and a shell of a business. My world had fallen apart, and I was devastated.

I had heard stories of other business people who had gone through difficult times and had always looked at them with a judgmental attitude, thinking they probably had made unwise choices and were reaping from those choices. My problems, though, did not stem from unwise choices. At least they didn't appear that way to me. I was forced to find answers.

So, for the next two years, I sought answers. I questioned what I had done wrong and why God had allowed this to happen to me. During the first year, a man came into my life who helped me to work on control issues related to my character. The next year another man came into my life who provided insights into what God was trying to accomplish in my life. Finally, two years into the process, someone sent me an audiotape from a Swedish businessman named Gunnar Olson, the founder of the International Christian Chamber of Commerce (ICCC).

In that tape, Gunnar talked about a phenomenon that he called the “Joseph Process.” He described how many people go through great trials in their business life as part of a calling by God to be a “Joseph” in their day. This piqued my interest a great deal, and when I learned Gunnar Olson was going to be in Washington, D. C., the next month to host the ICCC international conference, I knew that I needed to go and meet him.

I flew to Washington, D.C., and was able to arrange a meeting with Gunnar at his hotel. When I walked into his suite, Gunnar asked me to tell my story, and for the next few minutes I recounted my narrative in every gory detail. When I finished, he looked at his fellow board member, James Lockett, and began to chuckle.

I couldn't believe his response. At that moment, I did not know whether to stand up and leave or smack the guy. However, Gunnar immediately apologized and said,

“We are not trying to be rude to you. We have heard this story so often that it is simply uncanny to us. Be assured, my friend, you are one of God’s Josephs He has called.” From that moment, my life began to take on a whole new perspective. Learning about the Joseph Process was the first glimmer of hope in what I had viewed as a hopeless situation. It was as if a heavy weight had been lifted from my shoulders, and for the first time I saw my circumstances in a new light. I no longer saw the reason for my problems as something I had done to myself. Sure, I had not been perfect in my life, but the kinds of problems I was experiencing were much larger than the mistakes that I may have made.

Spiritual Boot Camp

In Exodus 2, we read how Moses had been on the backside of the desert for 40 years because he had tried to do God’s work in his own way. Moses had known back then that there was a call upon his life, and after he had murdered the Egyptian, “Moses thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not” (Acts 7:25). His God-given desire to free his people was mixed with his human methods of achievement—manipulation, violence and force. And because God never calls us to fulfill His plan in our own strength, He had to lay Moses aside for 40 years in order to “remove the Egypt” from his life.

In Scripture, Egypt always represents a place of slavery, sweat, toil and manipulation. And there is no better way to remove the Egypt from our lives than to remove us totally from the old system that taught us. There had to be a season of separation to change Moses’ paradigm. In the desert, he entered a new season of learning and usefulness in the hand of God. His failure was now going to be an instrument of wisdom to build something new in his life and in the life of a nation. Moses’ 40 years in the desert was a process of maturation that was required for him to become God’s man. The Bible says that Moses was the most humble man on the face of the earth (see Num. 12:3). Humility, obedience and faith are the traits God requires of those He uses in a significant way. Moses didn’t have all of these traits when he began. It required a divine encounter and then a process. God does the same with each of us.

Just as Moses had to spend 40 years in the desert before he could fulfill God’s call on his life, Joseph also had to go through a spiritual “boot camp.” Joseph’s spiritual boot camp was 13 years long and required a separation from his former life. It involved a breaking of his will and his ability to control anything. He was forced to choose to believe that God was still in control of the events in his life.

My friend Bob Mumford once said, “Beware of any Christian leader who does not walk with a limp.” It is often this kind of preparation that is needed to get the man or woman ready for God’s use. Like Jesus, Joseph suffered for those he would ultimately save. He was rejected by his own people. He provided spiritually for those he was called to serve. God invested a lot in Joseph for this special calling—a calling that would save an entire nation and the world from starvation. At the age of 30, Joseph was one of the youngest rulers in history, and God could not afford to have a man in this position with any pride. Joseph’s years of trials and testing were designed to remove any vestiges of pride in his life and to build an unshakable relationship with God.

Four Tests

God took Joseph through four unique tests. I believe that Joseph was required to pass each one successfully before he qualified for the next. When he passed the last one, he was finally elevated for the call that God ultimately had on his life.

Test #1: Loving Your Enemies

Joseph's first test involved his family's rejection. His brothers had sold him to slave traders. What could be worse than to have your own family sell you into slavery? It would be very easy to fall into bitterness toward your family and God if something like this happened to you. Betrayal is one of the most difficult tests in life, and it often comes from one's own family or those in the Body of Christ. Every day, you and I must work and live in environments that do not treat us in an honourable manner. Sometimes, it's downright cruel.

I believe some of these experiences are actually allowed in our path in order to find out how we are going to handle them. A. W. Tozer said, "It is doubtful whether God can bless a man greatly until he has hurt him deeply."³ Most leaders who are used mightily by God have experienced a Judas-type of betrayal at one time or another. Whether or not God later elevated them was dependent upon how they handled the situation.

I believe our response to betrayal is God's graduate-level course in our walk with Him. King David had a similar test when his closest companions created a source of pain in his life. We read of his struggle in Psalm 55:12-14, where he states, "If an enemy were insulting me, I could endure it; if a foe were raising himself against me, I could hide from him. But it is you, a man like myself, my companion, my close friend, with whom I once enjoyed sweet fellowship as we walked with the throng at the house of God." Bitterness and unforgiveness have disqualified many people from moving on in the kingdom of God. God will not elevate you if there is any root of bitterness in your life. If you have something against a brother or sister, you must forgive him or her if you expect God to bless your life.

I had a very close friend who had become a mentor to me. We were the best of friends. However, an issue arose in our relationship that turned out to be very negative. It was very painful, but God used the situation to show me exactly how Jesus must have felt when Judas, one of his closest companions, betrayed him. I decided to bless this man in very tangible ways even though he refused to resolve our differences. Five years later, he asked to reconcile our relationship. I believe that this would not have happened if I had not taken the initiative to "love my enemy." Are you willing to wash the feet of Judas, as Jesus did?

Test #2: Moral Purity

The second test for Joseph was in the area of moral purity. Joseph was living in Pharaoh's palace and he had not been around women for a long time. To make matters worse, his boss's wife began to make passes toward him, which can be a huge temptation for any man. However, Joseph did the only thing anyone can do to withstand sexual temptation—he fled. He passed the purity test.

Judah, however, did not. In Genesis 38, we read how Judah, one of the 12 sons of Jacob, allowed his purity—and his very staff—to be taken from him. Judah had just

lost his wife, and after mourning her death he went on a little trip to Timnah. His widowed daughter-in-law, Tamar, posed as a prostitute, and Judah succumbed to sexual temptation, having intercourse with his dead son's wife. The form of payment was supposed to be a young goat, but because Judah didn't have one with him at the time, Tamar asked for a pledge.

"Will you give me something as a pledge until you send it?" she asked. He said, "What pledge should I give you?" "Your seal and its cord, and *the staff* in your hand," she answered. So he gave them to her and slept with her, and she became pregnant by him (Gen. 38:17-18, emphasis added).

Judah gave up his staff—the one thing that represented his very life and work—to a woman who would later frame him with it. Sexual failure is like this. It requires everything from you. When you encounter sexual temptation, you must be like Joseph and flee. You cannot overcome sexual temptation any other way. Front Matter / 35 Men, especially, need to take heed and stay away from compromising situations. You do not want to be disqualified because of failure in this area. Even your computer can be a source of sexual temptation.

Test #3: Perseverance

The third test for Joseph was perseverance. Joseph had been in prison for many years. He had successfully interpreted a dream for some powerful people who could deliver him from prison. It is clear that Joseph had his hopes up, but he was not released. He remained in prison for another two years. Joseph was tired of being in prison, but there was something inside that kept him going. He persevered.

This is one of the most difficult aspects of the Joseph process, for it can take many years to get through this stage. Scripture tells us, "hope deferred makes the heart sick" (Prov. 3:12). Many will give up the fight at this point, and they may even consider taking their own lives. When my advertising agency was successful, I had a staff of seven people. When my world fell apart, I was by myself for five years—alone and forced to do the best I could to satisfy creditors and make ends meet. At times, it seemed like a never-ending treadmill. But God was doing a deeper work than I could see at the time. He was building character. He was removing pride. He was preparing me for something hand-tailored for me.

The test of perseverance is the one that many people cannot endure. All too often, they will move when God tells them to be still and wait. They will decide that they have been waiting long enough, so they set out to deliver themselves. This is a big mistake. If God has not completed the deeper work, He will take you around the mountain one more time—or even more if that is what is necessary to complete the inner work that He has begun in your life.

The depth and width of your calling is often proportional to the depth of the faith experiences in your life that come through adversity. A faith experience is any encounter you have with God that allows you to experience Him in a greater dimension. God frames your life through these experiences in order to speak to others. Moses' Red Sea miracle was a faith experience. Joshua's crossing the Jordan was a faith experience. However, if we short-circuit God's process in our lives by delivering ourselves out of our difficult circumstances, we will miss some

incredible faith experiences. Perseverance is of vital importance if we are to enter God's promised land for our lives.

Test #4: Stewardship

After 13 years of slavery and imprisonment, Joseph was finally freed from prison and elevated to the second highest position in Egypt. I wonder what that must have been like. Joseph performed well in his new role. He was a good steward. He passed the most challenging test of all—stewardship over prosperity.

When God began to change my difficult circumstances (after seven years), the funny thing was that it just didn't make that much difference anymore. I had learned to live in that difficult state and had become satisfied that I could live in it forever if I had to. In essence, I had finally "died." In Romans 6:4, Paul instructs us that we must die in order for Christ to be resurrected in each of our lives.

How can you tell when your adversity will be over? I believe your adversity will be over when it doesn't matter anymore. When Joseph was elevated to his high position, he was able to do it without fanfare, because he had learned to be content in his hard circumstances.

Four years into my Joseph Process, I began attending a new church. Now divorced and wondering what life would be like as a single 44-year-old Christian man, a woman sat next to me in church. She was pretty. She was single. To my surprise, God allowed a friendship to develop. Nine months later, I was married to Angie. And seven years after the start of my crisis, God allowed me to sell a piece of property that allowed me to pay off all of my debts and become debt-free. He had delivered me.

A Modern Joseph

My friend, Louisiana businessman Bill Hamm, went through his Joseph Process in 1999. Bill liked his life the way it was. He was a tithing churchgoer who was doing well in his work. Then the contracting business in which he held a 50 percent stake lost seven million dollars. The next three years were the most stressful of his life. He went into severe depression. He ended up selling off the division that had lost all the money and spent a million dollars on legal fees for three major litigations against his company. The experience brought Bill to the end of himself, and he learned to be totally dependent on God to meet all his needs. He recalls, "I used those years to 'sow in tears' as the psalmist exhorts us to do. Like Joseph, God made me fruitful in the land of my suffering."

During that time, God gave Bill a vision for bringing the Kingdom into the marketplace and a passion for helping people see their work as a calling and a ministry. To fulfill the vision, God led Bill in an unusual way. He had been introduced to the idea that God can give creative concepts to people—"witty inventions." A friend told him about an invention that had potential in the oil business. Through a series of developments that enabled him to invest time and money in the new technology, Bill was able to bring it to a worldwide market.

However, it was not back to business as usual. Bill set up a team of 18 intercessors to establish a prayer foundation for the business. They prayed for a year and a half

before they had the formation documents in place. Bill is convinced that without this prayer foundation, the company would have failed. As they transitioned into the implementation phase, this group of intercessors became a spiritual board of directors that continued to pray for the day-to-day business matters.

The five startup partners see their business as a ministry and a conduit for blessings to flow into the Kingdom. Although the oil company promises to generate massive returns, they believe the primary focus is how the Lord wants to use their company and the technology of which they have been made stewards. Bill's Joseph Process prepared him for his new venture.

Stewards of His Resources

As God's Josephs, we go through trials so that we can be fully yielded to His purposes. God has His way of taking us aside to get our undivided attention. For Paul, it was Arabia for three years; for Moses, it was 40 years in the desert; for Joseph, it was 13 years in Egypt.

God knows the stubborn human heart. He knows that if He is to accomplish His deepest work, He must take us into the desert in order to give us the privilege of being used in His Kingdom. In the desert, God changes us and removes things that hinder us. He forces us to draw deep upon His grace. If He had not allowed me to be plunged into a desert season in my own life, I would not have known what He was calling me to do. Even my unusual name, Os, turned out to be significant to the process. I am a third generation business owner. My real name is Omar Smallwood Hillman III. Quite a mouthful. My parents put the "O" and the "S" together to call me Os. No one in my family knows where the name "Omar" came from. We only know that "Smallwood" was the name of the doctor who delivered my grandfather.

During my desert season, one of my mentors challenged me to find out more about the meaning of my name. He felt it was important for me to know as I tried to figure out God's call for my life. He also wondered if my father had been distracted or deflected from pursuing a similar call, leaving me to pick up the reins. Throughout the Bible, we find that names were given as an indication of God's purpose for an individual. In some cases, names were altered to represent a significant change, as in Abram to Abraham, Saul to Paul, Jacob to Israel, or Sarai to Sarah. When I looked up the name "Omar," I discovered that it was Arabic for "first son" and "disciple," Hebrew for "gifted speaker" and German for "famous." In the Bible, Omar was a grandson of Esau (see Gen. 36:15), and another meaning of his name means "eloquent." Esau, as you will remember, had forfeited his birthright for a bowl of pottage.

What gave significance to this series of meanings was that both my father and my grandfather may have become distracted from God's calling for their lives, based upon the limited history I could piece together. It appeared that God was giving me a chance to fulfill this call. It was like putting a puzzle together, especially in light of the recent events in my own business career.

I was the first and only son of my parents. . . . I am a disciple of Jesus Christ. . . . I felt that God was calling me to public speaking. The puzzle pieces were beginning to come together.

Apparently, my Joseph Process included becoming a steward of God's resources for God's people in the workplace. Part of my job would be to help other descendents of Esau *recover their birthrights*, even though they may have sold their birthright for earthly pleasure and prestige or remained in Egypt as brick-makers instead of moving to the Promised Land. To make sure that I was an instrument fully yielded to His purposes, God had to break my vocation decisively, sending me into oblivion for a time, before He could bring me out and use me.

Someone once said, "God uses enlarged trials to produce enlarged saints so He can put them in enlarged places!"⁴ The desert is only a season in your life. When God has accomplished what He wants, He will bring you out. He has given you a mission to fulfill that can only be fulfilled after you have spent an adequate time of preparation in the desert. Don't fear the desert, for it is there that you will hear God's voice as never before. It is there that you will have the idols of your life removed. It is there that you will begin to experience the reality of a living God as never before.