

7 Stages of a Call from God, Stages 1-3

Os Hillman • Discover Your Purpose

<http://www.intheworkplace.com/apps/articles/default.asp?articleid=68296&columnid=1935>

7 Stages of a Call from God

Os Hillman

When God calls you into relationship with His Son, there are distinct stages He will take you through in your journey with Christ. These seven distinct stages can be seen in most every believer throughout their lifetime. Understanding these stages can help us prepare for the future events God may bring into our lives. God's destiny for your life will involve stages that may question God's activity in your life. Nevertheless, they are needful to bring you into full maturity in your relationship with God. What are these seven stages? Let me introduce each of these stages before we begin.

Stage 1 - Salvation

Stage 2 - Preparation

Stage 3 - Crisis

Stage 4 - Testing

Stage 5 - Confirmation of Your Call

Stage 6 - Fruitful Stage

Stage 7 - Elevation by God

Now, let's discuss each of these stages.

Stage 1 - Salvation -- Called to Someone, not Something

"Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight," declares the LORD. [1]

Let me ask you a question. Can an egg fly? Certainly it was made to fly. However, in order for it to fly there has to be a transformation from being an egg to being a bird. It is one of the greatest transformations in nature. An egg becomes an eagle which can soar at great heights and accomplish great acrobatics in the air. Friend, God made you to fly. But until there is a transformation, we will never experience that transformation.

When God calls an individual He first calls them into relationship with himself. He is called to someone, not something. Many times we hear people talk about being called to a noble endeavor. And, certainly He does call us to things. But if we are not careful we fail to enter into the greatest of all callings - knowing Him.

The apostle Paul understood this concept. He understood his greatest call was to the Savior. "To know Him and the power of His resurrection that he might become like him." [2]The great prophet Jeremiah reinforced this relationship with God when he said, *"Let not the wise man boast of his*

wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight," declares the LORD. [3]

Moses came to understand this great truth when He was leading hundreds of thousands out of Egyptian slavery. God described Moses as a friend of God who could speak to God face to face. Moses had achieved great things through his relationship with God. However, the people of God rebelled when Moses took too long to return from the Mountain of God and built a golden calf. It was a crisis moment in the life of Moses. Moses realized that unless God's presence was with him every step of the way, then he would fail at any activity. He refused to move forward without God's presence. "Then Moses said to him, 'If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?'" [4]

God wants to bring every human being out of slavery. Slavery of sin and bondage to a promised land of purpose and meaning through a relationship with His Son, Jesus Christ. He has done this by providing His very own Son, Jesus Christ as the payment for mankind's sin. Paul explains this in Romans: *"For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation."*[5] This is why the Bible describes this as the Good News. The God of the universe wants to have a personal relationship with you and me. However, He is such a Holy God that there had to be a way for a Holy God to have a relationship with such an unholy people. Jesus became that holiness and became sin for us in order to bridge the gap to God. *"He is a God who is passionate about his relationship with you,"* according to Exodus 34:14 in *The Message Bible*.

What a wonderful thing. The God of the universe not only wants to give me salvation for my sins, He also wants to know me and become my friend. However, each of us must accept this invitation from Him because God gives us the freedom of choice. The Bible summarizes this best in the most quote verse of all time, *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son."* If you have never taken this first step, let me encourage you right now to stop what you are doing and ask Jesus to come into your life as Lord and Savior. Until you do this, the rest of this teaching has little relevance. Stage 1 represents the act of getting onto the train. The train will take us through the next 6 stages of our journey.

Convenience. Crisis. Conviction.

Convenience

I have observed that there are three ways people come to Christ. Heaven is a benefit that is easily reconciled in our minds once we conclude there is a God and there is a Heaven. After all, who would not want to go to Heaven? Many have come to Christ by responding to the greatest unique selling position there is - an opportunity to receive eternal life through Jesus Christ. Some of us

have come to Christ as young people. Some have come to Christ later in life. Usually those who come to Christ earlier in their lives do so out of this first stage - convenience. They reason that this decision is a logical decision.

The Bible speaks of two forms of the Gospel. The gospel of salvation speaks of salvation through Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, many people have simply taken out "fire insurance" and have not learned what it means to walk with God. The Gospel of the Kingdom speaks of the total aspect of God's Kingdom which includes salvation but also the bringing of God's Kingdom onto earth. In the Lord's Prayer Jesus prayed, "Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven." Jesus spoke more about the Kingdom of God than He did the Gospel of the Kingdom. The reason is that He wants to manifest His Kingdom on earth now. If He wanted only to bring salvation to mankind, then He would get us saved and immediately bring us to Heaven. But that is not what God has done. He left us on earth to impact others for the Kingdom of God. Those who come to Christ out of convenience often live a life with God that is based on asking God to "bless me Lord." This attitude results in a relationship with God that is not based on love, but on having our every need met by God.

Crisis

Many people have come to Christ out of a crisis in their lives. I have not idea what percentage of people come to Christ out of a crisis, but I can only guess that it is a high percentage. The reason I believe that is mankind is generally rebellious and seeks its own way. It is only when we discover our way does not work that we are willing to consider alternatives. Someone once said, "There is a place of obedience for every person." What this statement says is God can place us in situations that motivate obedience. "Foxhole Christianity" is another way of saying there is place of obedience for all of us when the kettle gets hot enough. There primary motivation is "help me Lord." That is why salvation through crisis sometimes does not produce a salvation that lasts because once the heat is off, many times the individual returns to his old life. He was never really serious about a relationship with God, only deliverance from their pain.

Conviction

The conversion that I believe God enjoys most is when a child comes to Him out of conviction. They are deeply sorrowful for the life of sin and separation they have lived and repent in humility before Him. The person usually enters into a life of conviction with God. Their attitude is, "have me Lord." They begin moving down the funnel of obedience that is based on knowing God personally (see diagram below). They are motivated by love, not shame or guilt.

Those who come to Christ through conviction are often those who experience the supernatural aspect of God more in their lives because they seek to know God. As a result, God reveals himself to them. The early disciples experienced God at this level. Their lives exemplified a life of signs and wonders. And they did them in public where the rest of the marketplace could see them, not in the temple. *"The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's Colonnade."*^[6]

Extraordinary versus Ordinary Calls

Once we come to know Christ we need to realize there are ordinary calls and extraordinary calls. God sometimes calls individuals to a work that is going to have major consequences to His Kingdom. Abraham, Moses, Joseph, David, Paul and many others had extraordinary calls. God calls each man to a specific work. Jesus was called to a specific work. That work is determined by God. I have also observed that the depth and width of a person's call is often proportional to the faith experiences God brings into their lives. When God parted the Red Sea through Moses, it changed Moses' life forever. It was a demonstration of God's power in ways no other human being had experienced. God framed Moses' life through that experience. It gave Moses spiritual authority to lead a nation. Such is the case for an *extraordinary* call. "When you obey the call of God, the first thing that strikes you is their *relevancy* of the *things you have to do*," says Oswald Chambers. Each of us must realize it's not **what** you do, it's **how well you know** the one who calls.

This does not mean that God does not call every individual to a specific task. However, it does mean it might be through the natural skills and gifts God gives that individual. He may call you to be an entrepreneur or a nurse or a construction worker simply to meet the human needs of mankind. This too is a holy calling from God.

So, my friend, the first stage in your journey involves the most important stage - being called to *some-one*, not *some-thing*. Our lives are to be played out for an audience of one - Jesus Christ.

Stage 2 - Preparation

"In the beginning we do not train for God, we train for work, for our own aims; but as we go on with God we lose all our own aims and are trained into God's purpose. Unless practical work is appointed by God, it will prove a curse."^[7]--- Oswald Chambers

How did God disciple the twelve in whom he invested three years? There are four distinct stages I see. Let's consider the life of Peter. Peter first met Jesus on the seashore. He became a follower of Jesus for three years. He was **evangelized** by Jesus to be one of the key leaders in a movement that would change the world. After the initial stage of meeting Jesus personally, Peter simply spent time with Jesus. For three years he walked with Jesus, observed, questioned, argued, made stupid mistakes and became the leader of the church after Jesus was gone. During this time he was **equipped** by Jesus to become a leader. He gained knowledge and information. However, that knowledge and information was not enough for Peter to become a spiritual leader of others. There had to be another phase of development in the life of Peter.

I appreciate the heart of Peter. He is often criticized for being impetuous. However, keep in mind he was the only one willing to step out of the boat to come to Jesus on the turbulent sea. He was a risk-taker. He said things that were out of order at times. But Jesus saw the heart of Peter. And that is why Jesus chose him to lead the church despite his imperfections. Peter's third stage is what I call his **empowering stage**. That may seem like an oxymoron when we think of what Peter did in this stage. He denied Jesus three times during the time of Jesus' betrayal. Jesus let him see his heart. It was a crisis moment for Peter. He thought he was a faithful follower. But he realized his faith was on one inch deep. Peter's heart had to be circumcised. Circumcision is always painful, bloody, and personal.

Every follower of Jesus must realize how deep his faith is. In 1994 I went through the greatest crisis of my life. I had major financial losses, a family crisis, and lost 80% of my business --- all in three months time. The crisis would last seven years! In the early two years of that crisis my faith was tested to the point of suicide. It was the greatest crisis of belief I have ever known. I had to come to grips with the adversity and determine if God was still God when I could not reconcile the events taking place in my life. The grace of God led me to stand firm and seek Him with my whole heart. I saw nothing positive in my life during those first two years. But I kept pressing in. Finally, Jesus made Himself known to me through several unique divine encounters. He revealed to me that He was not going to deliver me at that time, but He would walk through the trials with me - and He did.

This crisis period took my foundation much deeper than I could ever imagine. God gave me a verse that described the process He was taking me through. *"I will give you the treasures of darkness, riches stored in secret places, so that you may know that I am the LORD, the God of Israel, who summons you by name."*^[8] You see, He was creating a more intimate relationship with me and He was revealing riches in secret places so that I could encourage others. I wrote *TGIF Today God Is First* devotionals during these dark periods. Thousands around the world are being encouraged by these messages each day.

Every believe needs to have their faith tested to see how deep their faith really is. It will ultimately define their walks with God and their usefulness in the Kingdom.

Finally, the fourth stage is the **engagement stage**. This is the stage God begins to use you for His purposes. God raised up Peter and gave him authority to lead. He confirmed his call through signs and wonders. The fruit of his relationship with Jesus was now being evident to others.

Now a word of caution to many of you. I find that many people try to walk through these stages without stage three - the empowering or circumcision stage. Unless someone's faith is tested they will begin to walk in their own strength. They will birth spiritual things in their own strength, the one thing our Lord never did. Much of Christian enterprise today is Ishmael, doing things in our natural strength. Like Abraham and Sarah, they begin to maneuver and help God fulfill what they believe God wants. They end of birthing an Ishmael. Ishmael was a bad idea that looked like a logical solution from Abraham and Sarah's perspective. After all, this was an acceptable custom during their day and they were beyond child bearing years. So, Abraham would lay with Hagar in order to birth the "promised son". We have been suffering the consequences ever since.

God wants to know us and to use us for His Kingdom. In order to do that, He takes us through these first two stages. These two stages may take a long time of preparation. It is often a continual process but the adversity is dependent on our cooperation and His purposes for our lives.

Stage 3 - The Crisis Stage

Have you ever had a divine interruption? The apostle Paul had one on his way to Damascus. Joseph had one that led to 13 years of pain and sorrow. Moses had to flee Egypt for his life and later had a divine interruption with God at the burning bush. Job had one that devastated his life. Jacob had a divine interruption when he was forced to leave his family due to the crisis with Esau. David was forced to flee his employer, King Saul when he placed a bounty on his head. These divine interruptions were not pleasant occurrences. When God interrupts your world it is not

always pleasant or orderly. I don't think this is always God's first choice of strategy to get his people's attention. However we see this in Psalm 81:

*"If my people would but listen to me, if Israel would follow my ways,
how quickly would I subdue their enemies and turn my hand against their foes!" [9]*

When the people did not listen to God He decided to orchestrate things in order to get their attention.

If you study the scriptures you will find a consistent pattern -- God interrupts the lives of people He calls into mission with Him. It doesn't always have to be a negative encounter, but often it is. It often involves being separated from your current way of life. It often removes you from an ability to control your environment so that you are placed in a totally dependent mode with God. For many of us controllers, this is a scary place. This desert place is where God separates you from your old way of doing things and you wonder if He has abandoned you.

The word desert comes from the Hebrew word Dahbar which means "to speak." God often places us in a position where we are quiet enough and hungry enough to listen. C.S. Lewis said, *"God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world."*^[10] You see, it is a sign of immaturity that requires God to shout. Sometimes God has a real difficult time getting the attention of his kids. So, he starts with a gentle nudge ... then a push . then a slam ... then an all-out assault. Take a look at this very disturbing verse in Isaiah. *I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the LORD, do all these things.*^[11]

Surely God does not do this intentionally, you say. He most certainly does! Why? Because God is more concerned about making you more like Him than giving you a comfortable life. The goal of the Christian life is not life, it is death! - death to your old way of living so that Christ can live supremely in and through you. There is a dying world out there and God is more concerned about bringing in as many of those lost people than meeting your comfort needs. And sometimes it requires getting the attention of his self-sufficient Church to wake up to His mission. We need to get back to a biblical gospel. *Jesus learned obedience through the things He suffered.* ^[12] If that is the way Jesus learned obedience who was the perfect Son of God, what do you think that means for us kids?

A.W. Tozer said, "It is doubtful whether God can bless a man greatly until he has hurt him deeply." In 1994 I was allowed to enter a seven year "Joseph pit experience." I went through a marriage breakup, lost a half million dollars, 80% of my business and had several "Judas betrayals". It was a devastating time in my life. It made no human sense at the time. I had been walking with the Lord. I was not in a backslidden state. I had marriage challenges, but my spouse and I were seeking to work them out. Still, the storm came and it took me to an utter depth of soul experience.

During those dark days I experienced such pain it is hard to express it in words. For a year I could not talk to someone without breaking down in tears. My life was totally destroyed from a financial perspective. I had lost relationship with my only daughter. I was forced to pay large amounts of alimony and child support for seven years while my business deteriorated.

At the same time during this period God quietly began a rebuilding process in my life. I sought God out of the pain of the situation and over time I began to discover secret treasures from God. I would discover Isaiah 45:3: *I will give you the treasures of darkness, riches stored in secret places, so that you may know that I am the LORD, the God of Israel, who summons you by name.* He also spoke to me through Hosea

"Therefore I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her. There I will give her back her vineyards, and will make the Valley of Achor (which means trouble) a door of hope. [13]"

Three years into the adversity I began to reflect on some of the things God was showing me. I began to write a daily email devotional called *TGIF Today God Is First*. Every day for nine months I would write one message and send it to friends and associates. Soon it got up to several hundred people who received it. When I missed a few days in a row I began to get emails asking where their devotional was. It revealed to me that it was helping people. By January 2004 it was going to 75,000 people a day and 1,000 new subscribers were being added a month. It goes all over the world and I get letters testifying of the comfort they receive from these simple messages of encouragement. It was the adversity in my own life that allowed me to connect with so many others around the world at their point of need.

Depth and Width of Your Faith Experience

I have learned that the depth and width of your faith experience often determines the level of call upon your life. What do I mean by this? God frames our lives through our life experiences. Those experiences are the platform from which God speaks His life through our life. When Moses came to the Red Sea God performed a miracle that is still talked about. Moses would forever be associated with that miracle. His authority to lead was associated with that miracle. If God is going to use you to speak to a large number of people, He will sometimes create experiences in your life that will be used to speak to others in order to give you a platform and the authority to speak so others will listen. It is like a mouthpiece that gives you a platform from which to speak and minister to others. You can see this pattern in other characters in the Bible such as Abraham, David, Jacob, Paul, and Peter. God brought them into insurmountable challenges that required the intervention of God which ultimately brought glory to Him.

I often wonder about some of the dialogue Moses must have had when God told him to take this particular route to the Red Sea. I am sure they knew that the route they were taking ended at the Red Sea. There were no bridges to cross. There were no hotels by the sea. Let's face it. It was simply a dead end. And if the soldiers from Egypt decided to change their mind about letting the people go, they were an easy catch. Imagine hundreds of thousands of people leaving Egypt to travel to a dead end. YES, GOD LED MOSES TO A DEAD END. Does that destroy your theology?

God often leads his people to a dead end in order to demonstrate His glory. You see, it is not about us, it is about Him. He is all about gaining glory for Himself. So, many times we are faced with situations in our lives that can only be solved by God.

At times it appears as if God has not only forsaken His Word, but has deliberately deceived us. Such was the case when Moses kept obeying God by delivering His message to Pharaoh. However, each time he delivered God's message the people of Israel were persecuted more.

Moses felt like God was simply setting him up for failure. But, there was a process God was taking Moses and the people through. It was designed to bring greater glory to God.

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his officials so that I may perform these miraculous signs of mine among them that you may tell your children and grandchildren how I dealt harshly with the Egyptians and how I performed my signs among them, and that you may know that I am the LORD." [14]

Oswald Chambers understood this process. He was known as the pastor of the haphazard. One does not realize the journey God had Oswald on until you read his biography and realize it was a life full of uncertainty and change.

"No matter what revelations God has made to you, there will be destitution so far as the physical apprehension of things is concerned. God gives you a revelation that He will provide: then He provides nothing, and you begin to realize that there is a famine-of food, or of clothes, or money-and your common sense says, 'Abandon your faith in God.'" [15]

Death and Resurrection

This process is designed to bring death to our old life and resurrect a new life in Christ. Without the cross and the resurrection, there is no victory. There are two key passages that reveal insight into the death process and the resurrection.

Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints. .you have freed me from my chains." [16]

If we died with Christ, we believe we will also live with him. [17]

Both of these passages affirm the need for the death, but also reveal the next step is resurrection and freedom in Christ.

Seven years to the month the Lord brought me out of my "Joseph pit experience" with a remarkable sale of one piece of property that allowed me to retire all of my debts and become debt free in my business and personal life. During the latter part of the seven years he began a restoration among my relationships with others. I was remarried in 1998 to a wonderful woman, Angie. God gave me my daughter back and I was able to watch her come to know the Lord in a remarkable way. Truly the Lord showed his faithfulness in restoring me.

Does God always restore? It is clear in scripture that God does not always restore in the physical realm or in our lifetime. We see in Hebrews 11 the following passage that tells us that some will not receive their inheritance until we get to heaven.

All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country-a

heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them. [18]

What determines whether you are one in whom God might restore in the physical realm? I believe it is really an issue of God's mission and purpose for your life. I have seen many Godly people not receive a physical restoration of things lost. But, I have also seen many more receive abundantly more than what they lost in their pit experience. I can only believe the reason for a lack of restoration is that God is using even this for a greater purpose that we do not understand, just as our friends in Hebrews 11 experienced. If He does restore I believe it is for the express purpose for encouraging others and bringing glory and honor to His name. [19]

If our testimony is weak, it is because we have gone through no crisis with God; there is no heartbroken emotion behind it. It is essential to go through a crisis with God which costs you something; otherwise, your devotional life is not worth anything. You cannot be profoundly moved by doctrine; you can only be profoundly moved by devotion" says Oswald Chambers.[20]

7 Stages of a Call from God, Stages 4-7

Os Hillman • Discover Your Purpose

Stage 4 - Testing -- God Tests Your Call

"Much of modern Christian enterprise is 'Ishmael.' Born not of God, but of an inordinate desire to do God's will in our own way - the one thing our Lord never did." Oswald Chambers

One of the greatest tests you and I will have in our spiritual journey is in allowing God to be our deliverer instead of us. We must avoid *helping God* fulfill the vision He has for our lives. The temptation to deliver ourselves will always be there. Many of us do not go on in our spiritual life because we prefer to choose what is *our right* instead of relying upon God to *choose for us*.

When we are in the place of the valley, our temptation is to seek to deliver ourselves. We must be careful not to deliver ourselves before it is time. This requires spiritual maturity to learn the difference between self-deliverance and God's deliverance of us. Otherwise, we may miss the supernatural deliverance He has planned for our lives. Moses could have gone around the Red Sea. He could have chosen not to take them to the dead end. His obedience allowed him to experience one of the greatest miracles in the history of mankind.

God encourages us to place our total trust in him and avoid sweating and toiling for outcomes. *Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain. In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat- for he grants sleep to those he loves.[21]*

God calls each of us to learn how to receive from Him based on obedience, not sweat and toil. A mentor told me the way he implemented this practically in his life was to almost withhold his natural gifting to insure God was in it. This means we don't force situations that God has not opened. It means waiting for God's timing. It means breaking open things in the Spiritual so the

physical can be manifested. The entire process is designed to create a greater measure of humility and dependence upon God.

Bob Mumford said, "Beware of the Christian leader who does not walk with a limp." He understands the process of preparation. That process must take away all that depends upon our strengths. God works through weak things, not strong things. Weak things reveal greater measures of His power and grace. "Many of us do not go on in our spiritual life because we prefer to choose what is *our right* instead of relying upon God to *choose for us*."^[22]

Abraham's Test

When Abraham allowed Lot to choose the land he wanted to move to when they determined the land would not support both of the families and their livestock, it showed the faith of Abraham. Some would think this showed weakness in Abraham. He chose not to exercise his authority and seniority. However, what is interesting is that the place he moved to was a place called Mamre, which means "place of strength." His weaker position became his strength. Sometimes taking such actions feels like suicide. Sometimes God requires *suicidal faith*, just like Abraham's obedience when he was prepared to kill his only son. It would only be saved through a resurrection from the dead by God.

Your Inheritance Will Be Attacked.

I will never forget my first meeting with a mentor who has become a vital part of my spiritual journey. I had just shared with him how I was in the midst of some difficult struggles in relationships that were very painful to me. He looked across the table and said, "Oh, you should know that Satan will always attack in the place of our inheritance. Your inheritance is in relationships. God uses you to bring others together for Kingdom purposes. Like Abraham, you will always have to take the higher ground in order to receive your inheritance. You will need to be keenly aware of maintaining relationships." I have been aware of this principle ever since.

Where is your inheritance? What has God placed in you for the furtherance of the Kingdom of God? Beware that Satan will seek to steal that inheritance by setting you up. He sought to set up Peter when Peter denied Jesus three times. He sought to set up David by tempting David with Bathsheba. Satan won that battle. God forgave him but it came at a great cost of continued family strife and sexual struggles within his family.

Satan set up Judah when he was tempted to lie with a prostitute and it was actually his own daughter-in-law, Tamar. Satan does not want you and me to receive our full inheritance in the Lord.

Finally, some of you reading this right now need a breakthrough in your life. You need to cast your life upon the life of God. You need to become dead to your own ends. When you come to this place, God can resurrect what is needed in your life. Until that happens He will allow you to go along in life trying to solve your problems in your own strength.

Stage 5 - Confirmation of Your Call -- Personal Revelation of Your Call through Signs and Wonders

So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders. [23]

We live in a day when the Church is moving further and further away from its origins. A major denomination has approved the ordination of homosexuals. More and more denominations are questioning the inerrancy of God's Word. The Bible is becoming simply another book to be studied for historical value only. And, some denominations do not feel that miracles occur today.

This is causing a greater separation between those who take God's Word literally and those who don't. Those who take God's Word literally know and experience the power of God. The apostle Paul understood that the gospel broke through in the early days of the movement not because of his preaching and reasoning with the people, but it was due to the power of God. *"My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power."*

[24]

Even in the early church we see a polarization beginning between those who wanted to have a religion and those who wanted to move in the power of God.

The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's Colonnade. No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people. Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number. As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by. Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by evil spirits, and all of them were healed. [25]

God has called you and me to have more than a religion. He has called us to have a two way relationship which sees evidence of a miracle-working God. We live in a technologically advanced and skeptical society. People question the motives of anyone claiming to represent themselves in any way that seems out of the ordinary.

However, this does not change truth. The Bible is clear that if we will follow Jesus wholeheartedly, we will experience even greater miracles than what Jesus did. That is a very profound truth.

I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it. [26]

If we are going to get the attention of the world for the sake of the Gospel, it will not be done by great preaching. It will be done by people experiencing something personal in their lives that cannot be reasoned. It was the power of God that broke through the religious spirit of Jesus' day. It will be the same today. It is difficult to deny the power of God when it affects you personally.

We need to experience the power of God in the place where we are called. I believe we will see more miracles in the workplace than in the local church as men and women become aware of God's presence in their daily lives. We are getting lots of reports of this throughout the world as we enter a new move of God among His people in the workplace.

The Bank President

I have a friend named Chuck Ripka. He lives in Elk River, Minnesota. Chuck began a bank in 2003. Chuck has learned to hear the voice of God in his life. He has learned to walk in obedience. In the first eight months of the bank's opening, Chuck and his staff have seen forty-one salvations inside the bank and numerous physical healings. They offer prayer to their customers in their board room. They often pray for those who come through the teller window. Each day in the bank there is excitement about what God is going to do that day.

The Cab Driver

There was a cab driver in the Philippines who got radically saved. He was taught that he had the power of God in his life to transform his community. Since he had no prior religious training he had not learned yet from the church that the Bible did not really mean what it said. So, he believed what the Bible said about prayer and miracles. He was told the best way to win the lost was to begin to bless them, pray for them, and serve them. Then, when you have gained their trust, share the Gospel with them.

He decided that the best mission field for him was the local bar in his neighborhood. He began to visit this bar to find the most qualified sinner he could find to minister to. He met the bartender and determined this was his most qualified sinner because he was gay drug addict that was a pimp to 35 prostitutes. He was a "grade A sinner."

The cab driver visited the bar regularly and had a Coke at the bar. He got to know the bar tender. The Lord used the cab driver to win this man to Christ. The power of God moved greatly over this man and he became delivered of his homosexual lifestyle. This man began to radically change his life. He began to share Christ with the prostitutes and all 35 of them came to Christ. They began meeting in the bar for Bible study. Soon the owner of the bar began to notice the change in these people. He got saved. The bar got changed into a church. Then they began 10 cell group churches in the neighborhood. Now that is transformation! That is the power of God breaking through the darkness! That is the normal Christian life that was spoken of in the book of Acts that we have lost in our society. [\[27\]](#)

The Man from Cypress

In 1998 I was invited by my mentor to come to Cyprus to attend a leaders meeting. I was in a very difficult place in my life. I could not afford to travel anywhere, much less half way around the world. I laughed when I got his email invitation.

The next day I got a phone call from a man I had met sixty days earlier who was head of his church's missions focus. He asked me if I could go to the airport with him the following day and that he had a proposal for me to consider.

We got into the car and he began to explain that we were going to pick up a man who was flying in from Cyprus. "Are you aware of a conference that will be held in Cypress in March?" I told him that as of yesterday I was aware of the conference and was invited by my mentor to attend. The man went on to explain that he thought it would be great to take 25 workplace leaders to this conference and have me teach my workshop to these leaders. He would pay my way and pay me an honorarium. "Would you be interested in this?" I was amazed. How could God be this personal?

I was able to go to Cyprus. While I was there I led one of the morning devotional times. I did not share my personal story. I had lost close to a half of million dollars by this time in the last three years. A man came up to me after I talked and said he needed to talk to me. He looked at me and said, "The Lord wants you to know he had to remove your finances in order to reserve the reward He has for you in heaven." Now that got my attention. Here I was half way around the world and a man I have never met is speaking about a something very personal to me.

A few moments later we were having coffee. At the end of the coffee time the man said he was seeing a vision while we prayed. It was a picture of a tree that had a lot of ripe fruit on it. "You are the tree," said the man. I began to weep because that was the third such experience I had had in three years. Each time someone described a tree that was in different stages. God was telling me that He was aware of my struggles and that He was not going to deliver me yet, but that He was going to walk through them with me.

Higher Education

I had just come out of the church from a training class designed to help us hear the voice of God better in our lives. As I looked off to the side I saw a woman. The thought that entered my mind was "That woman has had a lot of education. I plan to use that in her life for my purposes." I walked over to her and asked, "Pardon me, but have you had a lot of education in your life?" The woman responded, "Why yes, I have two MBA degrees." I was so excited to share with her the second part of what I heard from the Holy Spirit. This does not happen to me a lot. I pray that it happens more so that I can be an encourager and transformer in my sphere of influence. That is the reason God wants us to be able to walk at a higher level than just our intellect.

I could spend the rest of my time telling you about miraculous stories of God's activity in my life and others. The important thing to realize is that miracles are for today. He wants to perform miracles as confirmation of His activity in your life. It requires faith, humility and obedience. These are the core ingredients to see the power of God released in your life.

Stage 6 - The Fruitful Stage

*And David knew that the Lord had established him as king over Israel and that his kingdom had been highly exalted for the sake of his people Israel. **[28]***

When you and I begin to walk in obedience to the Lord we will begin to see the fruit of our lives. One cannot manufacture fruit. It is a natural byproduct of a healthy plant. It does not know what else to produce because it was made to produce fruit. That is a picture of a healthy relationship with God.

When you begin to respond to the Lord out of obedience, God brings you into the destiny He has for your life. Nothing can prevent it from happening if you walk in obedience. *The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.* [29] God was the one who orchestrated David's advancement to be king of Israel. Now it should be noted that his preparation was not exactly the ideal training program. He worked for King Saul but then spent a great deal of time fleeing the sword of Saul.

Many times God's preparation comes through the fiery furnace of affliction and adversity. Joseph's preparation included thirteen years of slavery and prison. Preparation for the leader God calls can be difficult in the Kingdom of God.

John the Baptist was questioned about his role. Some asked him if he was the messiah. He knew his role. He was to prepare the way for the messiah. He gave the following answer to those who questioned him. *"A man can receive only what God gives him."* [30]

John understood a very important spiritual principle in the Kingdom of God. You and I actually have the ability to orchestrate outcomes that God never intended. We can try to be something God never intended us to be. John knew his role. He knew his inheritance. He did not try to be something he was not.

Many of us strive to be something we are not. We are not satisfied with the role God has placed us in. I had recently come back from a mountaintop experience. As I attempted to get back into my routine, I found a great cloud of oppression come over me. Each day I attempted to press through it, but with no success. Fear, anxiety, doubt, and unbelief were setting in. I knew I was fretting over my future. I had been in a long period of transition in my work life and was tired of the place of waiting. Yet I didn't understand the oppression. It was definitely spiritual warfare.

That night I was reading a book regarding our calling from God. The author made mention that we can become envious of others when we get into a place where we are dissatisfied. Suddenly, I realized I was guilty of envying where other workplace believers were in their lives. I was "subconsciously" angry that the calling God had placed on my life had such adversity. I had to repent.

As if this were not enough, the next day the Holy Spirit confirmed my assessment in the most unusual way. That morning I turned on my computer to read my own TGIF devotional message that is sent to my computer. The message was on "Envyng Others" and included the same scripture reference as the author's in the book. Imagine God using my own words to convict me of sin! The nerve of Him! To make matters worse, at lunchtime I tuned into the local Christian radio station to hear an interview with the same author as he cited the very passage I had read the day before. I was shocked to realize how the Holy Spirit could be so precise in His ability to convict and give proof of His activity in my life.

Sometimes we get calling mixed up. We are first called to Someone, not something. The "something" is a great deal farther down the line than the "Some-one." In fact, I would go so far as to say that our calling could be accomplished through a number of different vocations. We needn't get hung up on thinking that we must be in the "perfect" job. We can think this way if we realize the main thing is being called to Him and modeling our relationship with Him is the most important thing.

Brother Lawrence, who lived in the 1600s was a monk who washed dishes for a living, He made the following assessment of calling. *"For me the time of activity does not differ from the time of prayer, and in the noise and clatter of my kitchen, while several persons are calling for as many different things, I possess God in as great a tranquility as when upon my knees at the blessed Sacrament."***[31]** You see, he is saying it was not what I do that allows me to fulfill my purposes in God; it is how well I know the One who made me. He found no urgency for retreats, because in the common task he met the same God to love and worship as he did in the stillness of the desert.

God will bring His servants into their destiny as they come to know him and reflect His life through there's. It is a byproduct of the life in God.

Stage 7 - God Elevates Those Who Obey Him

*"So David's fame spread throughout every land, and the LORD made all the nations fear him."***[32]**

How did a small shepherd boy become the man described as one who seeks after God with a whole heart? David was a warrior. He never lost a battle. He did his vocation well. He had his failures morally. He had many conflicts in relationships. He made many bad choices in his life. Yet, the seed of David became the seed of the Messiah.

The Lord was the orchestrator of the events of David's life. Once David set himself to be a worshipper of God, the rest was up to God. David had to respond to God in obedience. But once he did, God became the conductor to bring him into his destiny. God was the primary publicity manager and promoter of David. The Lord made all the nations fear him. When God wants to put you in a place of authority and position, nothing can prevent it unless you try to orchestrate it yourself. That is a surefire way to prevent it.

I mentioned earlier that my mentor once said "You almost have to withhold your natural gifting to insure God is in it." Sometimes that means holding back our natural skill to insure that God is directing the operation. When we watch God do it, we know that we are not the reason for the success.

I have witnessed this in my own life. For seven years I simply sought God through a difficult period of my life. Midway through the seven years I woke up one day and realized God had placed me in the center of a movement in which he was making me a major leader. I never sought after that position. God gave me that position. I have had to learn what role I am to play and what role I am not to play in the calling. I realize some are called to one aspect of the movement. If I try to fulfill their role and my role too, I have moved into an area God will not give me spiritual authority to be successful. As long as I respond to God in the area where I am called, I will not have to worry about receiving the authority to accomplish my destiny.

Moses had the authority to lead his people. One day God told him to speak to the rock. Moses struck the rock out of frustration with the people and dishonored God in the process. The result was Moses still achieved the objective of getting water for the people. However, it was at the cost of not entering the Promised Land personally.

God honors those who honor him. Jesus honored His father by completing the work God gave Him to do. *"I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do."***[33]**

When David was at the end of his life, he made an incredible speech to his people and to His God. David reveals the nature of his heart and how he tried to live his life for the Lord. We see several ingredients for having a proper relationship towards God in the following prayer.

David praised the LORD in the presence of the whole assembly, saying,

"Praise be to you, O LORD, God of our father Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, O LORD, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all. Wealth and honor come from you; you are the ruler of all things.

In your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all. Now, our God, we give you thanks, and praise your glorious name. "But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand.

We are aliens and strangers in your sight, as were all our forefathers. Our days on earth are like a shadow, without hope. O LORD our God, as for all this abundance that we have provided for building you a temple for your Holy Name, it comes from your hand, and all of it belongs to you.

I know, my God, that you test the heart and are pleased with integrity. All these things have I given willingly and with honest intent. And now I have seen with joy how willingly your people who are here have given to you.

O LORD, God of our fathers Abraham, Isaac and Israel, keep this desire in the hearts of your people forever, and keep their hearts loyal to you. And give my son Solomon the wholehearted devotion to keep your commands, requirements and decrees and to do everything to build the palatial structure for which I have provided." [34]

David recognized where his success came from. He recognized what He was giving to build the new temple came from the hand of God. He acknowledged God's favor in his life for what he had accomplished.

May we each understand that our ultimate destiny is achieved as we grow in our knowledge, love, intimacy and obedience to our Lord. Amen.