

Spirit-filled Discipleship

How God Prepares Christlike Disciples

David Fleming



Disciples Ignited

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SPIRIT-FILLED DISCIPLESHIP: HOW GOD PREPARES CHRISTLIKE DISCIPLES is the second book of the SPIRIT-FILLED DISCIPLESHIP SERIES.

SPIRIT-FILLED DISCIPLESHIP: HOW GOD PREPARES CHRISTLIKE DISCIPLES is a revised and updated version of section two of DISCIPLESHIP FOR A NEW GENERATION, published by the same author in 2000.

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This book is dedicated to my wife,

Carol Jean Fleming

who has loved me, stood by me, and ministered with me since 1975. Her passion for Jesus, prayer, and revival is unstoppable.

Together we are a force to be reckoned with!

Special Thanks

I am forever grateful to the Lord Jesus for His love and the help He has given me through so many people who have all played a part in helping me write this book.

To my wife, Carol, who has lovingly stood by my side since 1975. I am deeply indebted and thankful for her wholehearted love for Jesus, her powerful prayers, and her faithful service in the Kingdom of God. I am blessed that we are joined together in life and ministry.

To my parents, Mr. & Mrs. B.R. Fleming, who brought me up in the ways of the Lord. I am forever thankful to the Lord that He blessed me with such godly and wise parents.

To Apostle Joel Laurore who is responsible for the birthing and impartation of the truths I have sought to write about in this book.

To Dr. Roxanne Mitchell for her helpful comments and editorial assistance.

Preface

You may have just begun the glorious journey of becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ, or you may have been following the Lord for quite some time. Whichever is the case, I believe that you will gain much as you study the principles of discipleship presented in this series titled SPIRIT-FILLED DISCIPLESHIP. The series was written to help you gain insight into how God calls, prepares, and reveals Christlike disciples.

Unfortunately, as far as ministry is concerned, many in the Church make a big distinction between the ministers of the Church and the congregation. Such a mindset delegates all ministry to those who hold leadership positions in the Church. However, that wasn't the belief nor practice of the New Testament Church. When the Church first began all the disciples of Jesus ministered, in the Church and throughout the world they lived in!

The fact that God has called all disciples of Jesus to represent the life and ministry of Jesus is foundational to understanding true Biblical discipleship and is the approach taken in these books.

I originally published this book in 2000 under the title DISCIPLESHIP FOR A NEW GENERATION but I am now offering it as a series made up of three books.

- SPIRIT-FILLED DISCIPLESHIP: HOW GOD CALLS CHRISTLIKE DISCIPLES
- SPIRIT-FILLED DISCIPLESHIP: HOW GOD PREPARES CHRISTLIKE DISCIPLES
- SPIRIT-FILLED DISCIPLESHIP: HOW GOD REVEALS CHRISTLIKE DISCIPLES

The entire subject matter of the previously published book, *DISCIPLESHIP FOR A NEW GENERATION*, is contained in these three books but the content has been thoroughly revised and updated. I have also included questions throughout each chapter where I encourage you to *Pause & Reflect* on that which you just read.

Each book of this series will stand on its own. However, the series is meant to be read in sequence. I encourage you to read these books devotionally. Embrace the truths that are presented in each segment and ponder them until they permeate your heart and mind. Use the *Pause & Reflect* portion of each section to help you. I believe that if you answer the questions after each segment in a thorough, honest manner that you will be encouraged, challenged, and ignited to serve Jesus as did the early followers of Jesus who changed the world!

God bless you as you proceed.

Dr. David B. Fleming

Foreword

We are blessed and excited about David Fleming's book, **SPIRIT-FILLED DISCIPLESHIP: HOW GOD PREPARES CHRISTLIKE DISCIPLES!**

This is not just another book about discipleship. David Fleming has blessed us with a real, right, and relevant key word: **PREPARATION!** In his precise and concise book, he shares biblical truth and an example of practical discipleship preparation and in wisdom he gives us the opportunity to "Pause and Reflect" on that which is taught. This book is outlined simply but with a powerful anointing and is a precise source of empowerment to obey Jesus' command!

Hands down, David Fleming gives us a challenging must read book about discipleship preparation. Simply a masterpiece!

Karl and Angel C. Gayle
Pastors, Agape Covenant Temple / Broadcasters

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Chapter One

Prepared According To God's Plan

The Lord has a very specific plan for your life. In fact, the Lord knew exactly what He wanted you to accomplish before you were even born. The plan He has for you has been tailor-made just for you. Or to put it another way, you are being tailor-made and prepared to fit in His plan!

Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. How precious to me are your thoughts, God! How vast is the sum of them! (Psalm 139:16–17, NIV)

However you look at it, the Lord's plan for your life is a good one, and if fulfilled it will bring you the blessings of the Lord.

For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. (Jeremiah 29:11, NIV)

In order for the plan of God to be fulfilled in your life you must be fully prepared by the Lord on the “path” of His choosing. That “path” will be determined by the specific plan He has for your life. There will probably be some similarities between your preparation and that of another, yet there will be many differences. That’s why you shouldn’t compare your preparation with that of another. You can and should learn from the way God leads and prepares other disciples. But God’s plan for your life is unique. Therefore, the way that He chooses to prepare you will in many ways be unique.

One thing is for sure, and it can’t be emphasized enough ... preparation is a prerequisite for fulfillment! In other words, God’s plan for your life isn’t going to just happen. You’ve got to be prepared by the Lord to fulfill your destiny, and He wants your full cooperation. You’ve got to work with the Lord if it is to be accomplished. That means you’ve got to be willing to lay aside your plans and obediently submit to the Lord as He prepares you and begins to use you for His glory.

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. (Matthew 6:33, NIV)

For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self? (Luke 9:24–25, NIV)

The process of being prepared by the Lord will sometimes be exciting and full of adventure. Yet, it will rarely be easy and at times may be rather intense. But when you realize how wonderful God’s plan for your life is and what He will accomplish through you as you follow Him, you will willingly submit to the Lord as He prepares you, no matter how difficult the situation may become.

An excellent example of a person who was thoroughly prepared by the Lord is Joseph. The Biblical record of Joseph's life vividly portrays the plan of God, the process of preparation, and the path Joseph had to follow which eventually led him to fulfillment. Joseph was a man who was fully prepared to fulfill his destiny!

But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. (Genesis 45:7, NIV)

It wasn't an easy road for Joseph. Yet, the reward was far beyond anything Joseph could have ever imagined. As you look at Joseph's life more closely I believe it will become apparent why preparation is so necessary for every disciple of Jesus!

God's Plan Calls For You To Become Christlike

God's plan for each individual is different. However, God's plan for each of us has the same purpose: to exemplify Jesus Christ in our individual lives and ministries.

From the very beginning of creation God intended for mankind to represent and reveal the Lord Jesus Christ. This is easily seen in that God created man and woman in His image. Then He gave them, as a united pair, the responsibility to rule His Kingdom on earth, representing Him with full authority in their lives and ministries.

So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in

the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.” (Genesis 1:27–28, NIV)

Unfortunately, Adam and Eve rebelled against God and were therefore unable to fulfill God’s intended purpose for their existence. Yet, God’s purpose never changed. He still wanted mankind to represent Him.

Thankfully, Joseph became such a man. In fact, Joseph allowed the Lord to so work in his life that he became a prophetic revelation of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ! In his book, *Christ In All The Scriptures*, A.M. Hodgkin points out, “In Joseph we have a picture of Christ’s life and character. . . . We see him beloved of his father, sold by his brothers at the price of a slave, taking upon him the form of a servant, resisting temptation, condemned, bound, exalted to be a prince and a savior, giving the bread of life to the world.”¹

The Lord dealt with Joseph until he was changed from within. Gradually Christlikeness began to be seen in Joseph’s life and ministry. The Lord would never have been satisfied if Joseph had merely acted the part, the Lord wanted Joseph to become like Christ! Without that Joseph would never have been able to fulfill God’s plan for his life. God’s plan concerning His people is no different today. He wants to conform every disciple into the image of Jesus! Thus, the purpose of your preparation is to conform you into the image of Jesus which will enable you to fulfill your destiny in a Christlike way. That’s why the Lord takes such great care in preparing those who serve Him, just as He did Joseph.

However, Joseph was not always aware of his need for divine preparation. When God first spoke to him, he mistakenly thought that he was already prepared to fulfill God’s plan.

He said to them, "Listen to this dream I had: We were binding sheaves of grain out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright, while your sheaves gathered around mine and bowed down to it." ... Then he had another dream, and he told it to his brothers. "Listen," he said, "I had another dream, and this time the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me." (Genesis 37:6–7, 9, NIV)

Joseph was interested in what he was called to do and the achievements he was going to accomplish. But the Lord was interested in whom Joseph was going to "be". The Lord wanted the character of God to be seen in Joseph, not just the work of God to be done through him. It wasn't enough that God called Joseph to a task, he had to be prepared to fulfill it! Let me ask you ... who would you want to rule over you: Joseph as he was when God first "called" him (a bit immature, arrogant, and spoiled), or the man of God Joseph became after the Lord prepared him (a wise, humble, and mature man of God)? I'm sure that everyone would agree that it was a good thing that the Lord prepared Joseph before giving him the responsibility of being prime minister over Egypt! The Lord's dealings with Joseph show that God is interested in more than your actions and future achievements, the Lord is interested in the real you!

The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." (1 Samuel 16:7, NIV)

That's why the Lord dealt with Joseph in the way that He did. During the preparation process the Lord's desire was to build a solid relationship with Joseph and through that relationship to prepare Joseph's heart to represent His own. In the same way, the Lord wants you to represent His heart! But that's only possible if

you have a relationship with Jesus. It's through your relationship with the Lord that your heart will be changed, and the change in your heart will be reflected in your outward actions.

A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. (Matthew 12:35, NIV)

That's why, when the Lord wants to change the way a person acts, He deals with the heart, for a transformed heart produces a changed life. Unfortunately, people don't usually concentrate on their hearts but on the actions that are seen by others. That's one of the reasons why Jesus dealt so harshly with the Pharisees and the Sadducees, for although they appeared to be righteous, their hearts were no different from those they judged as unrighteous.

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness. (Matthew 23:27-28, NIV)

That's usually what happens when people start emphasizing their actions above their relationship with Jesus. They can appear to be doing all the right things while at the same time their relationship with Jesus is lacking. That's why Jesus focuses His attention on who you are (and are becoming) and not just on what you do. He knows that if your relationship with Him is good, Christlike actions will follow!

I began to learn this truth during a period of intense trial while I was being prepared by the Lord under my pastor. I thought, as did Joseph, that I was immediately ready to go off on my own and do what the Lord had revealed to me in dreams and visions. I asked the Lord why my dreams and visions were taking so long to be fulfilled. I thought my preparation was taking too long! So, I asked the Lord, "Why does it take so long to be prepared?" The Lord immediately replied in my spirit that He is more interested in "being" than in "doing". It was then that I began to understand that the Lord is most interested in who I am, for that will determine what I do.

So, as you pray about God's plan for your life, understand that His plan calls for you to have a strong, solid, abiding relationship with Him. Because out of that relationship a Christlike life and ministry will begin to develop which will enable you to fulfill the unique mission He has just for you!

Pause & Reflect

1. God has given all people the same purpose. What is it?
2. List some of the ways in which Joseph of the Old Testament was a prophetic revelation of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.
3. What is the Lord's purpose in your preparation?
4. Most people are concerned in what they accomplish while the Lord is more interested in something else. Explain what that is and why it is more important than your accomplishments.
5. What does Matthew 12:35 have to do with the Lord's work of preparation in your life?
6. Why did Jesus deal so harshly with the Pharisees and the teachers of the law? (Matthew 23:27-28)

7. What is meant by the statement, “Jesus is more interested in ‘being’ than in ‘doing’?”

The Revelation Of God’s Plan

When the Lord began to speak to Joseph about his destiny, he apparently was already an active follower of the Lord. The same principle applies today. Jesus always gives guidance to those who follow Him and are fully submitted to His leadership. Even when Jesus called His first disciples and began to reveal to them His will for their lives, it was with the understanding that they were to be His followers and fully submit to Him.

“Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” (Mark 1:17, NIV)

The Lord can reveal His will to anyone. He has spoken to many in the past who were not His followers, and He will continue to do so. However, there is a special link between following Jesus and receiving specific guidance concerning His will. In fact, following Jesus is the key factor involved in receiving His guidance. But those who follow Jesus will receive much more than just guidance. They will also receive the preparation needed to accomplish that which they have been told to do. Therefore, the key towards accomplishing God’s plan for your life isn’t found in just seeking His guidance, but in seeking after and pursuing the Lord Himself! Those who do so will never lack the revelation of His will nor the preparation that is needed to accomplish it.

When the Lord Jesus starts revealing to you the plan He has for your life, He will usually do so in stages as you follow Him and grow in spiritual maturity. Think of divine guidance in light of the principle revealed in Psalms 119:105.

*Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.
(Psalm 119:105, NIV)*

There are times when the Lord gives you a broad revelation about the plan He has for your life. That's comparable to having enough light to see the whole path. Such was the case when the Lord revealed to Joseph that he would become the patriarch of the family. However, most of the time the Lord will only give you enough light to take the next step. That's when His revelation is like a lamp to your feet. He does this for a reason. The Lord wants to draw you closer to Himself by making you completely dependent. By giving you only enough revelation to take the next step, the Lord is putting you in the position where you must daily seek Him, trust Him, and walk by faith as you depend on Him for everything. Thus, His emphasis is on building a relationship, not just getting you to where He wants you to go. This type of "step by step" guidance was what Paul and his traveling companions experienced during their second missionary journey.

*Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us."
(Acts 16:6–9, NIV)*

However, when the Lord does give you a broad revelation of your destiny, it's often because your preparation is going to be very difficult, and the Lord is giving you a promise to hold on to! That's

one of the reasons why the Lord gave Joseph the dreams of his destiny. He was giving Joseph a promise that would motivate him to persevere through the difficulties of his preparation.

The revelation that God gave Joseph was very general, yet it was also very clear. The Lord had chosen Joseph to be the patriarchal head of the family!

Then he had another dream, and he told it to his brothers. "Listen," he said, "I had another dream, and this time the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me." (Genesis 37:9, NIV)

Although this dream might not be as clear to us, there was no doubt that Joseph's father and brothers knew what the dream meant!

When he told his father as well as his brothers, his father rebuked him and said, "What is this dream you had? Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?" His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind. (Genesis 37:10–11, NIV)

The fact that the Lord repeated the dream twice (although in two different forms) reveals that the matter had been firmly decided by God!²

Why did the Lord reveal Joseph's destiny to him at such an early age? Didn't it cause more problems than good? No, the revelation that the Lord gave Joseph only caused problems because of Joseph's immaturity in bragging about it. Joseph had yet to learn that there are some things that the Lord will show you that are not to be openly shared, at least not until the Lord specifically tells

you to. However, the Lord used the whole situation to put Joseph on the path that would lead him to the fulfillment of his destiny. And although Joseph's brothers meant to do evil against him, "we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."³

The Lord may also, for a season, keep you in the dark concerning certain aspects of His plan for your life. That's how the Lord dealt with Joseph. The Lord told Joseph many positive things about his destiny, but He didn't tell Joseph that he would be sold as a slave and put in prison during the process of being prepared! In fact, when you compare the promises God made to Joseph in the beginning with that which Joseph began to experience it didn't make sense, at least not in the natural. The Lord could have forewarned Joseph about all the hardships he would have to go through, but the Lord didn't. The Lord was teaching Joseph to trust Him, no matter what, while the plan of God was being worked out in his life.

Although Joseph received revelation from the Lord and correctly understood that he would one day rule over his family, there were many things that he misunderstood. Joseph not only had the Lord's timing wrong, but he also thought that the Lord was going to raise him up to leadership without any major changes in his life! For instance, wasn't he the one in the family who was being groomed by his father for leadership as seen in the gift of the richly ornamented robe? Such robes were usually full robes with long sleeves and those who wore them weren't expected to do any heavy work. Instead, they were the ones to oversee the laborers who did the work. But more importantly, the robe symbolized Joseph's favored position in the family and the one chosen to receive Jacob's favored blessing.⁴ As such the robe was a prophetic declaration of God's plan for Joseph's life! So, when Joseph received the revelation from God that one day everyone in his family would bow down before him, it certainly made sense to him! Joseph didn't understand at first that it was going to take years to prepare him to fulfill his destiny.

So, when the Lord speaks to you and reveals awesome things that He's going to use you to accomplish, don't become prideful! Remember, the Lord often, "calls those things that do not exist as though they did" (Romans 4:17b, MEV). Just keep your eyes on Jesus and follow Him with humility and obedience as He begins to prepare you to fulfill your destiny!

Pause & Reflect

1. What is the key to accomplishing God's plan for your life?
2. Comment on what Psalm 119:105 teaches concerning divine guidance.
3. In Psalm 139:16 (NIV) we are told, "all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be." That being the case, why doesn't the Lord give you all the details concerning His plan for your life at the beginning of your journey with Him instead of leading you step by step?
4. Romans 4:17 (MEV) says that the Lord, "calls into being things that were not." Why is it vitally important to remember this truth when God speaks to you concerning your destiny?

The Impartation Of God's Plan

The Lord may reveal His plan to you through supernatural means, but He may also reveal His plan to you by giving you the desire to accomplish what He has already planned for you to do. Abram had a desire for a son. Joseph had a dream of leadership. Moses had a burden to deliver the Israelites from their bondage. All of these ... the desires, the dreams, and the burdens were put in their hearts by the Lord Himself. The Lord is still putting desires, dreams, and burdens in His children of destiny today!

Sure, there are many people who have desires and dreams that are not God-given. So, how do you know the difference? The key is found in whom you're following. If you're following your own selfish pursuits that is an indication that you're not being inspired by God. However, if your one desire is to follow Jesus then it's easy for the Lord to plant in your heart the specific desires and dreams He has for you.

... for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose. (Philippians 2:13, NIV)

The saying, "follow your heart" is good advice if your heart is totally sold out to Jesus!

Pause & Reflect

1. Explain your understanding of Philippians 2:12b-13 (NIV), "—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose."
2. Since you have been following Jesus are there any desires, dreams, or burdens that you believe have been given to you by the Lord Himself? Write some down and share them with your mentor.

God's Plan Is Full Of Promise

When the Lord reveals something to you concerning His plan for your life, He's not only giving you instruction ... He's giving you His promise! In other words, the revelation of God's plan is His promise! The Lord is showing you what He will accomplish in and through you as you follow Jesus. In fact, whenever the Lord gives

you a promise concerning His plan for your life it implies two major things:

- God is able to accomplish His plan for your life.
- Fulfillment will probably look impossible in the natural.

You can rest assured that the Lord will do everything necessary to help you fulfill your destiny. Even before the Lord started speaking to you about His plan for your life He started working out all the details and accounting for all the variables; all He needs is your obedient cooperation.

... being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. (Philippians 1:6, NIV)

To your natural mind the Lord's plan will probably seem impossible to achieve. In fact, hindrances will probably start getting in your way that will make fulfilling God's plan seem hopeless. That's why you've got to remember that when God speaks to you about your destiny He's giving you His promise! So, don't fret about the impossibility of it all; don't be overwhelmed by the seemingly insurmountable obstacles. The Lord has everything under control!

Look at what happened to Joseph. The Lord gave dreams to Joseph that were not only prophetic, but they were also God's promise of what was going to be accomplished in Joseph's life as he remained faithful to the Lord. Yet, soon after Joseph received the prophetic dreams he was sold as a slave by the very brothers he was supposed to rule over! In the natural Joseph's circumstances didn't seem to match the prophetic dreams that he'd been given by the Lord. So, what did he do? Thankfully Joseph continued to walk with the Lord by faith and held on to the promise of God until he saw it come to pass.

The same thing happened to the Apostle Paul. When Paul got saved he was immediately given a prophecy concerning God's plan for his life.

Then he said: "The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth. You will be his witness to all people of what you have seen and heard." (Acts 22:14-15, NIV)

When Paul received this prophecy the Lord was doing more than giving Paul a revelation of his destiny, the Lord was giving Paul a glorious promise to hold on to during the difficult times ahead when he would be tested, persecuted, and even rejected by other believers.

Therefore, when the Lord speaks to you concerning your destiny, remember that it is also His promise that you'll be able to fulfill it. So, no matter what you have to face, whether it be the flesh of men, the powers of darkness, or feelings of your own inadequacies, you need have no fear, for the Lord has given you His plan and empowered you with His promise ... and Jesus never makes a promise that He can't fulfill!

God is not like people. He tells no lies. He is not like humans. He doesn't change his mind. When he says something, he does it. When he makes a promise, he keeps it. (Numbers 23:19, GW)

But nothing is impossible for God." (Luke 1:37, GW)

For the Lord Almighty has purposed, and who can thwart him? His hand is stretched out, and who can turn it back? (Isaiah 14:27, NIV)

Pause & Reflect

1. What two major things are implied when the Lord gives you a promise concerning His plan for your life?
2. In what way has the Lord put His “hand to the plow” concerning His plan for your life? (Luke 9:62, NIV)
3. Comment on your understanding of Philippians 1:6 (NIV), “being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”
4. What circumstances did Joseph experience that seemed to contradict the divine revelation he had received from the Lord?
5. Acts 22:14-15 is a prophecy given to Paul that reveals his destiny. In what way was this prophecy also a personal promise from God?
6. Concerning God’s plan for your life, how can Numbers 23:19 and Luke 1:37 help you when you encounter hardships and hindrances that seem to hinder you from fulfilling your destiny?

God’s Plan For You Involves Others

The plan that God has for your life must be understood in its relationship with the Body of Christ, both past and present. Whenever the Lord reveals His specific plan to a person, that plan is actually part of that which has been promised to others. For instance, the plan that God had for Joseph was directly related to the promise that He had previously given to Abraham.

“As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations.” (Genesis 17:4, NIV)

In fact, the plan and promise that God gave to Abraham was passed down to Abraham's sons and thus became part of God's plan and promise to them as well. This reveals a powerful principle concerning God's ways. The plan God has for you and the promises He makes to you will rarely end with you; they have a ripple effect that will touch many others! Notice how God's plan and promise to Jacob was passed down to Jacob's descendants.

Jacob said to Joseph, “God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and there he blessed me and said to me, ‘I am going to make you fruitful and increase your numbers. I will make you a community of peoples, and I will give this land as an everlasting possession to your descendants after you.’” (Genesis 48:3–4, NIV)

That's how God's plans and promises work! They have continuously been flowing from one generation to another. The plans that God has for His people today are directly related to the promises He made to the Patriarchs! It is even more awesome to realize that the plans God has for us today are actually fulfilling the promises that He made to His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ! One example of this is the prophetic promise found in Psalm 2:7-8.

I will proclaim the Lord's decree: He said to me, “You are my son; today I have become your father. Ask me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession.” (Psalm 2:7–8, NIV)

Hopefully this will help you realize how important you are in the plan of God. By fulfilling the will of God for your life you are helping to fulfill the promises that the Father has made to Jesus. In fact, you can't separate the plan and promises that God has for you from the plan and promises that He made to His Son. They are all united and working together for the glory of God in Christ Jesus!

Pause & Reflect

1. How was God's plan for Joseph related to the promises God made to Abraham?
2. In Psalm 2:7-8 God promised to give Jesus, His Son, the nations as an inheritance. How is that being fulfilled through the disciples of Jesus?
3. In what way(s) is God using you to help fulfill the promises that He made to Jesus?

The Revelation Of God's Plan Brings Responsibility

Whenever the Lord reveals His plan to a person it immediately makes that person responsible to work with God (in whatever ways the Lord specifies) towards fulfilling God's plan. One of the most striking verses that bears this out is found in Jonah 1:1.

*The word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai:
"Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me."
(Jonah 1:1-2, NIV)*

As you may know, Jonah didn't want to do what God told him to do and ended up running away from his God-given responsibility. Almost immediately Jonah suffered because of his decision. Why?

Because God had revealed His will to Jonah and therefore Jonah was responsible to obey or face the consequences! As Jonah was to find out, the Lord doesn't take irresponsibility lightly.

So, what are you supposed to do when the Lord reveals His will? How do you show yourself to be a responsible disciple? The first thing you need to do is become responsible in prayer. Start praying about what you feel the Lord has revealed to you. If you have really heard from the Lord He is going to start preparing you for its fulfillment. It seems that this is where Joseph made a mistake. Instead of praying about his prophetic dreams he told them to his father and brothers! There is a time to share God's plan for your life with others, but Joseph obviously missed the right timing!

I talk to so many people who tell me that God has called them to be a prophet, apostle, etc. Yet, they fail to realize that their first responsibility isn't to tell others what they think God has called them to do, but to pray! Through prayer the Lord will not only make clear what He is revealing to you, but you will be learning how to work with the Lord as you pursue your calling. It is in prayer that you must first begin to share in the responsibility of bringing to pass the Lord's plan for your life. Instead of boasting about what you feel God's plan for your life is, start asking the Lord to do in you whatever is necessary so that you may fulfill your calling! Then, as you continue to pray, faithfully follow Jesus day by day, doing exactly what He tells you to do along the way. It's that simple, but it is a life changing process. (This will be dealt with in more detail in the next chapter.)

When the Lord does make clear to you the plan that He has for your life, never view it as an option. The Lord doesn't reveal His plan so that you can "pick and choose" what you like or don't like. No, the plan of God is a divine command revealed to you, which He can and will fulfill through you as you obediently follow Jesus!

However, there are times that it seems like the Lord is expecting you to accomplish something that you can't do. In one sense this

is true ... you can't accomplish God's plan on your own, no matter how responsible you become. But, getting you to realize this may take a major work of God in your life. That's why the Lord may allow you to go through seasons of failure so that you will learn how needy you really are and that without God's help you can do nothing!

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." (John 15:5, NIV)

You can't make God's plan come to pass, only He can do that. You've got to trust the Lord to do what He has promised! Yet, at the same time you're responsible to do what He told you to do. In other words, fulfilling the plan of God for your life is a shared responsibility; the Lord will do His part and He expects you to do yours in obedience to Him. Simply put, follow Jesus and do what He tells you to do! Moses couldn't make Pharaoh let the Israelites go, but he could do what God told him to do. Joseph couldn't make himself the head of the family, it took the Lord to do that, but Joseph had to be faithful to the work he was given to do. Even Jesus put Himself in the same position that He puts His disciples in. He did what He was supposed to do, but He was totally dependent on the Holy Spirit to help Him do it. That was how Jesus accomplished His Father's will for His life and ministry. He accepted His God-given responsibility and submitted to and cooperated with the Father and the Holy Spirit!

Jesus gave them this answer: "Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does." (John 5:19, NIV)

That is part of the key to fulfilling God's plan for your life. Learn how to submit to and work with the Lord as you fulfill your duties in the present, for by doing so He is preparing you to fulfill your destiny tomorrow.

And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. ... Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, (Colossians 3:17, 23, NIV)

The Lord had a great plan for Joseph. He also has a wonderful plan just for you. So, "fix your eyes on Jesus" and pursue Him with all your heart, for you've got a destiny to fulfill!

Pause & Reflect

1. In 2 Corinthians 6:1 (NLT) Paul refers to himself as one of "God's partners". What does it mean to be a partner with God and how do you become a partner with God?
2. What's the first thing that you're responsible to do when the Lord reveals His will to you?
3. In what ways are you working with Jesus to ensure that His will for your life will be fulfilled?

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1. A.M. Hodgkin, "Christ In All The Scriptures" (Westwood, New Jersey: Barbour Books, 1989), p.14
 2. Genesis 41:32
 3. Romans 8:28 (NIV)
 4. Pfeiffer, Charles F. "The Wycliffe Bible Commentary: Old Testament" Chicago: Moody Press, 1962.

Chapter Two

The Process Of Being Prepared

Preparation is a process that is needed to develop Christlike character in you, which will at the same time enable you to fulfill your destiny. It is much like the metamorphosis process that a caterpillar must go through to become a beautiful butterfly. The potential is there, but the caterpillar will never become a butterfly unless it is willing to undergo the process of being in a cocoon. In the same way, disciples of Jesus Christ must also be put in a “cocoon” of preparation where they will be changed into Christlike disciples who exemplify Jesus in their lives and ministries.

Unfortunately, too many Christians want instant spiritual maturity. They want to be able to fulfill their destiny without having to go through the process of being prepared. Yet, the process of being prepared by the Lord to fulfill one’s destiny just can’t be rushed. There may be times that the Lord will deal with a person in such a way as to accomplish more in them in a shorter period of time, but it is still not an instant process! When it does seem that the Lord has done something instantly, you’ll always find that there was a great deal of preparation that preceded the event.

Preparation Takes Time

Before the Lord created man He established the law of time and then made man to function within its boundaries. Thus, nearly everything that involves man on this earth will involve the process of time. This is seen in the way that the Lord set up His creation. He linked time with the ability of His creation to grow, mature, and reproduce itself. For instance, the seeds that the Lord put in plants have the potential of becoming a full-grown plant or tree, but it takes time.

Jesus deals with His disciples in much the same way. Through repentance and faith in Christ Jesus you are given a brand-new start in life.¹ Like a seed you have been planted in Christ where you have the potential to grow and become tremendously fruitful in God's Kingdom. However, growth and fruitfulness are not automatic. As with God's creation it takes time. Therefore, it is important for you to begin to value and respect the time that the Lord will take in preparing you. Don't try to rush your preparation, or even worse, try to fulfill what you believe is your destiny without being prepared; to do so will always lead to disappointment and could even lead you to disaster.

A good example of this is seen in the life of Joseph. He would have been a miserable failure as the patriarch of his family and prime minister of Egypt had he not been fully prepared by God. It took a considerable amount of time to complete the process of preparation in Joseph's life.

When God first revealed to Joseph his destiny in life, he thought that he was already ready to rule over his brothers. At first Joseph didn't understand that such leadership required much more than a priestly coat and favored status with his father. It would require that he be changed from within if he was going to fulfill his destiny in a Christlike way. He needed to experience an inner metamorphosis orchestrated by the hand of the Lord. Thus,

the Lord put Joseph in a “cocoon” process of preparation that eventually led him to fulfillment.

Pause & Reflect

1. It takes time for God’s creation to grow, mature, and reproduce itself. How is this a spiritual object lesson to those who are being prepared by Jesus to fulfill their destiny?
2. Explain how it was a timely process for the Lord to bring Joseph to the fulfillment of his destiny?

The Right Attitude Towards Your Preparation

Instead of viewing the time that it will take to prepare you as a necessary hardship, the Lord views it with delight. He’s not in a rush to get you through the process. He enjoys the process of preparing His disciples and He wants you to enjoy it too! It is during the process of preparation that the Lord will draw you closer to Himself, and there is nothing better than that!

As a disciple of the Lord, it will be wise for you to cultivate such an attitude. Start viewing your “cocoon of preparation” as a special season in your relationship with the Lord. It will be a time of learning the wondrous ways of the Lord and receiving divine impartation. It will also be a time when you start learning how to minister to others using the ministry gifts the Lord gives you. You’re going to be transformed in the “cocoon of preparation”.

It’s unfortunate that some disciples never really enjoy their season of preparation; instead they just want to break out of their God-given cocoon. There is a time when that must happen, but it isn’t wise to get anxious about it. Those who wait until the process is complete are the disciples who will break out with the beauty of Jesus radiating in their lives and ministries. So, start

embracing your preparation with an attitude of gratitude. Jesus knows exactly what He is doing in your life!

I've seen so many disciples with a mighty calling of God on their lives choose to turn away from the very process of preparation that the Lord had for them. At first they would speak boldly of their commitment to a ministry and proclaim that they would be faithful. However, when the "cocoon" became uncomfortable they would leave and go elsewhere. Unfortunately, such people rarely grow beyond being spiritual caterpillars because they're always looking for an easier way to be prepared! Thankfully there are others who stay true to their commitment and become all that the Lord wants them to be. They are the disciples who like caterpillars experience a metamorphosis!

Joseph's spiritual "cocoon" of preparation was a time of great hardship and difficulty. But it was also life changing and fully prepared him to fulfill God's plan for his life. So, keep a good attitude during your season of preparation; it's all with purpose and the results will be "immeasurably more" than all you could ask for or imagine!²

Pause & Reflect

1. Why does the Lord view your time of preparation with delight?
2. What is your attitude towards your time of preparation as you look forward to fulfilling your destiny?
3. How can you cultivate a proper Christlike attitude as you prepare to fulfill your destiny?

Delays In The Preparation Process

While the preparation process can't be rushed, there is the possibility that it can be delayed or prolonged unnecessarily.

This is seen in the Israelite's journey from Egypt to the land of Canaan. The wilderness was supposed to be a place where the Israelites grew in faith and knowledge of the Lord's holy ways. It was to be the final place of preparation before the Israelites started possessing the land God promised to give them. However, what could have been a brief period of preparation lasting approximately two years turned out to be forty years! Instead of growing in faith the Israelites spent their first two years complaining and rebelling against the Lord and the leadership He had given them. Their actions revealed that they weren't prepared to fulfill their destiny. Thus, the generation that God delivered out of Egypt missed their God given opportunity to see fulfillment!

So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief. (Hebrews 3:19, ESV)

Since the first group of Israelites failed to learn the lessons that the Lord attempted to teach them in the wilderness, the promise of fulfillment was given to their children. But, before the new generation could possess the Promised Land, they had to learn the lessons their parents failed to learn.

Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. (Deuteronomy 8:2, NIV)

A whole generation missed God's best because they failed to learn what God was trying to teach them in the wilderness! However, delays in fulfillment don't have to happen. Joseph is an example of one who didn't delay the plan of God, even though the path of preparation was extremely difficult at times. Imagine what would

have happened if Joseph had yielded to the temptation to get sexually involved with Potiphar's wife. He would have initially kept himself out of jail, but he probably would never have seen the palace! Also, had Joseph delayed the plan of God it not only would have affected himself, but it would also have affected many nations. God planned to use Joseph to help feed the nations during a great famine, not to mention the fact that he was also God's chosen instrument to help preserve the people of God!

Such is the case with you today. Your willingness to be prepared by the Lord will rarely just affect you. The lives and destinies of others are vitally connected to the timely fulfillment of the Lord's calling on your life.

If you feel that you have already delayed the Lord's plan for your life, don't despair. The only one who fulfilled God's plan without any delays is Jesus Himself! So, don't allow your past delays to hold you back any longer. Jesus is willing and desiring to help you fulfill your destiny no matter how you may have failed in the past. Receive the Lord's forgiveness and mercy and start on the path of preparation today that will take you to fulfillment!

Pause & Reflect

1. What caused a delay in the preparation process of the Israelites while they were in the wilderness?
2. What can Hebrews 3:19 teach you concerning your preparation process?
3. What could cause a delay in your preparation process?

There Are No Shortcuts To Fulfilling Your Destiny

While the Lord didn't plan for the Israelites to be delayed in the wilderness, He didn't offer them a shortcut either. There were too many important lessons that the Israelites had to learn in the

wilderness before they would be ready to take the land that had been promised to them.

Notice how the Israelites viewed themselves and how the Lord viewed them when He started them on the path of preparation. When the Israelites left Egypt they viewed themselves as already prepared to possess the Promised Land. So, they wanted the shortest route possible to get there! Yet the Lord knew that they weren't quite ready to handle the battles that they would be required to fight in order to take the land.

When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them on the road through the Philistine country, though that was shorter. For God said, "If they face war, they might change their minds and return to Egypt." So God led the people around by the desert road toward the Red Sea. The Israelites went up out of Egypt ready for battle. (Exodus 13:17–18, NIV)

Too many disciples are like the Israelites in this regard. They want the Lord to take them to fulfillment without having to go through the process of preparation. But, to do so would most likely destroy them! Therefore, the Lord in His mercy and wisdom deals with His disciples in such a way as to prepare them for fulfillment. Such was the case with Joseph. It certainly would have been a shortcut if Joseph could have by-passed being a servant to Potiphar and a prisoner in jail. Why didn't the Lord just raise Joseph up as a mighty seer known throughout the nations as a great interpreter of dreams? He could have gone straight from his father's house to Pharaoh's palace! That would have cut out all the hardship that Joseph suffered, but it would also have taken away the needed preparation that Joseph had to go through in order to prepare him to be a godly leader.

The temptation to yield to shortcuts is certainly nothing new. That was one of the main temptations Satan brought before Jesus. Satan knew that Jesus had come as the King of kings, so he offered Jesus a shortcut to achieve it.

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. “All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.” (Matthew 4:8–9, NIV)

Yet, the price to be paid for such a shortcut was unthinkable. In fact, it would not have been a shortcut at all! To have yielded to such a temptation would have destroyed everything that God planned for Jesus to accomplish as a man!

Shortcuts are tempting, but they never work out. The only way to true fulfillment is to go through the entire process of preparation that the Lord has for you. Even if it includes such hardship as Joseph experienced, it will be worth it. So, while others may leave their God-given time of preparation preferring supposed shortcuts to fulfillment, you must say “yes” to the path that the Lord has laid out before you. The Lord knows what He is doing!

Pause & Reflect

1. Why won't the Lord provide you with a “shortcut” during the process of preparing you to fulfill your destiny?
2. In what way did the Israelites believe that they were ready to fulfill their destiny in the Promised Land, yet the Lord knew otherwise? (Exodus 13:17-18)
3. The devil tried to destroy Jesus by offering Him a “shortcut” to fulfillment. What was it? (Matthew 4:8-9)

4. Has the devil ever tempted you to take a “shortcut” to your destiny? If so, how did you deal with it?

The Preparation Process Centers Around The Cross

Christianity without a cross is not Christianity! Or as one author put it, “... real disgrace is not found on a cross. For a Christian, real disgrace is found off the cross.”³ One thing for sure, the process of preparation starts with the cross of Christ. That is probably the single greatest thing that the enemy is trying to get believers in Jesus to avoid. The enemy knows that if a disciple fails to embrace the cross they will soon cease to be a disciple. In fact, becoming a Christlike disciple starts with the cross of Jesus and continues with your own cross that Jesus said you must carry as you follow Him.

Then he said to them all: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.” (Luke 9:23, NIV)

The cross is, “the symbol of death to the self”.⁴ Another writer put it this way, “Cross carrying does not refer to an inconvenience ... It refers to a decision to place Jesus and His desires immeasurably far above our own.”⁵ To understand this truth is to understand the ways of God in preparing His disciples. By embracing the cross you have taken hold of the very tool that the Lord will use to change your life. Without it you will never be changed.

The cross of Jesus speaks to you of your salvation, but you must remember that you have also been called to carry your own cross. That is not to say that you can earn your own salvation. Yet, you have been called to enter into a fellowship with Jesus that makes you a partaker of His suffering. That is what carrying the cross is all

about ... sharing in the sufferings of Jesus so that you can become like Him in His death.

I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, (Philippians 3:10, NIV)

It is difficult to predict what the exact nature of your cross will be. The cross that the Lord uses to prepare His disciples will differ from person to person. Your cross may be hardships, hindrances, or even weaknesses in your life.

But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Corinthians 12:9–10, NIV)

Your cross may even be in the form of circumstances that seem to be the work of the enemy to destroy you. Yet, they will actually be the will of God to help prepare you for your destiny, as was seen in the case of Joseph. Who would have attributed all the hardship Joseph went through to the will of God? Thankfully, Joseph eventually did and even declared before others that his past hardships were a necessary part of God’s plan for his life.

You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. (Genesis 50:20, NIV)

That doesn't mean you should attribute all the hardships that come your way as being from the Lord. But it does mean that before you start "rebuking the devil" when your circumstances are less than desirable, you must prayerfully ask the Lord what He wants you to do. If the Lord is trying to teach you how to battle demonic forces and allows you to be attacked, then rebuke it in the name of Jesus. However, if the Lord shows you that He has some higher plan at work, you've got to be willing to bear your cross. That's what happened to Paul.

Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. (2 Corinthians 12:7-9, NIV)

Jesus won't not allow anyone to follow Him unless they are willing to embrace the crucified life. Why? Because the cross is the major tool Jesus uses to change lives and make disciples. Some of the lessons that you will learn as you carry your cross are ...

- **The Cross Will Teach You What It Means To Obey & Submit**

As a disciple carries his cross and begins to be prepared by the Lord for ministry, he is going to be taught the need for obedience and submission. To be obedient and submissive while you are on the cross is the true test of a disciple! When everything is going the way you want it to, it's easy to promise the Lord that you'll go where He wants, do what He wants, and say what He wants. But, when the going gets tough and the cross gets heavy, will you follow

through with your commitment? That will be the real test of your obedience. Look at the depth of the obedience and submission of Jesus as He prayed to His Father the night before His crucifixion.

“Abba, Father,” he said, “everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.” (Mark 14:36, NIV)

Joseph learned obedience and submission during his time of preparation, and most importantly, he stayed obedient and submitted to God throughout the whole time of his preparation. Even in the midst of his hardship he was unwilling to sin against God. To him, obedience and submission to God was not to be questioned, no matter what the consequences!

How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?” (Genesis 39:9, NIV)

- **The Cross Will Teach You What It Means To Sacrifice**

When Jesus told His disciples to take up their cross and follow Him, He was primarily calling them to a life of sacrifice, a life that was willing to lay aside all else to further the Kingdom of God. That is exactly the kind of life that Jesus lived and what He expects of His disciples.

The willingness to sacrifice your own will in order to accomplish the will of God is one of the major lessons a disciple must learn, yet it is also one of the hardest.

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice,

holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. (Romans 12:1, NIV)

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. (1 John 3:16, NIV)

You may also be called on to sacrifice your material possessions. Paul affirmed that he had enjoyed material prosperity while in the ministry, but he had also done without! “Living in plenty or in want” was not an issue to Paul. He was willing to sacrifice anything to spread the gospel.

... I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength. (Philippians 4:11–13, NIV)

During his preparation process Joseph was made to sacrifice in many ways. It could be said that most of the sacrifices Joseph endured weren't of his choosing, but were instead imposed on him against his will. That assessment would be true. However, the fact that Joseph didn't grow bitter during the hardships he suffered reveals that he was trusting the Lord through it all. In the same way, not all of the sacrifices you experience during your preparation process will be of your own choosing. Some will be circumstantially forced on you while other sacrifices will be those you choose to make in order to pursue your destiny. Either way, following Jesus will involve personal sacrifice. The sacrifices Joseph endured served a great purpose in helping to prepare him

for his destiny. The sacrifices that you'll experience as you follow Jesus will do the same in you!

- **The Cross Will Teach You What It Means To Forgive**

When Jesus hung on the cross the forgiveness of God was on full display before man. Never once on the cross did Jesus utter any retribution or judgment upon those who had insulted and crucified him. In fact, Jesus cried out in prayer on behalf of His tormentors.

Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." (Luke 23:34, NIV)

What a lesson that is for us today. When you are mistreated, misunderstood, and insulted what is your response? Without the cross your response will almost always be given with retribution in mind. Yet, Jesus both taught and showed us a different way. He offered forgiveness, and through His disciples Jesus is still doing the same thing ... offering forgiveness.

If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." (John 20:23, NIV)

For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins. (Matthew 6:14-15, NIV)

Joseph was also mistreated. Yet, the Lord so worked in his life that he was able to forgive. In fact, when Joseph became the ruler of Egypt under Pharaoh, there is no record that he sought any retaliation towards Potiphar or his wife, even though he certainly

had the authority and power to do so. Likewise, when his brothers were brought before him, Joseph didn't deal with them with fierce judgment. He dealt with them wisely, but freely offered them his love and forgiveness.

And he kissed all his brothers and wept over them. Afterward his brothers talked with him. (Genesis 45:15, NIV)

Living a crucified life doesn't mean that you have to give people permission to sin against you. However, when people do sin against you (and they will) Jesus commands that you always respond with forgiveness.

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times." (Matthew 18:21-22, NIV)

The cross teaches you that the forgiveness you offer must not be a false forgiveness spoken flippantly to get someone out of your way. Jesus wants you to forgive others in the same way that He has forgiven you. In fact, He wants the forgiveness that you offer to others to reveal the depth of His forgiveness.

The ability to freely forgive others is impossible to achieve without being a "cross carrier". But the opposite is also true. Those who embrace the cross and carry it as they follow Jesus will find it impossible not to forgive! The cross will actually free you from all grudges so that you can freely forgive others as you have been forgiven.

- **The Cross Will Teach You What It Means To Live By Faith**

With all his disappointments Joseph still came through with tremendous faith! It would have been easy for him to doubt that God's plan for his life would be fulfilled when his brothers sold him as a slave. He could have doubted when he was falsely accused of sexual sin and Potiphar had him thrown in prison. He could have allowed his faith in God to be destroyed when he was left in prison after interpreting the dream of Pharaoh's cupbearer. Instead, Joseph kept his faith in God in every situation. His faith was tried and tested and proven to be genuine!

In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. (1 Peter 1:6–7, NIV)

An even greater example of faith is seen in the life of Jesus while He hung on the cross! When you look at Jesus on the cross you see one who had absolute confidence and faith in His Father. By looking at the circumstances one would have easily thought that there was absolutely no hope left. At least that is how His followers felt, but not Jesus! His faith wasn't based on what His present circumstances looked like, but on the promises He had received from His Father. That's why Jesus could tell the repentant thief on the cross, "today you will be with me in paradise." What faith Jesus had! In fact, if Jesus hadn't shown faith on the cross, the thief never would have believed. It was the faith of Jesus that enabled the repentant thief to believe in the first place! Truly, Jesus is the "founder and perfecter of our faith!"⁶

Genuine faith, as exemplified by Jesus on the cross, is needed by all who want to accomplish God's will. That's why the Lord allows your faith to be tested; it must be proven to be genuine. And that's exactly what your cross will accomplish in your life! The hardship and adversity that you experience through your cross will reveal whether your faith is genuine or mere "talk". That's one more reason why you can't be a disciple of Jesus without a cross. Your cross helps prove whether your faith is true or false!

- **The Cross Will Teach You What It Means To Live Selflessly**

The ministry that Jesus accomplished on His cross is a powerful revelation of His selflessness. Consider how Jesus was concerned about His mother while He was the one suffering on the cross!

When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, "Woman, here is your son," and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home. (John 19:26-27, NIV)

Jesus expects the same type of selflessness out of His disciples. But such selflessness is only possible by those who crucify their selfishness! That's another reason why Jesus commands His disciples to carry their cross. Unfortunately, selfishness is often the very thing that keeps disciples from carrying their cross and fulfilling God's plan for their lives.

To be selfish is to be concerned only with yourself. One of the Greek words that expresses this trait is *eritheia* that is translated in the New International Version as "self-seeking", "hostility", and "rivalries" and "selfish ambition". It was used to describe those who desired to promote themselves with little or no regard for

others. It is very sobering to realize that the consequence of living selfishly is complete separation from God!

The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. (Galatians 5:19–21, NIV)

Notice how the Lord includes selfish ambition with other sins such as witchcraft and sexual immorality! Obviously, the Lord is very serious about His disciples being free from selfishness. But how can you be set free from something that is so pervasive in the nature of man? The key is found in the cross of Christ. The cross of Jesus has the power to set you free from selfish ambition, and the very fact that you have chosen to follow Jesus with your cross proves that you have rejected selfishness in order to embrace the selflessness of Christ!

As was pointed out earlier, as a youth Joseph was spoiled which led him to become selfish in his thinking and actions. He had been catered to by his father and thus hated by his brothers.⁷ Therefore, when the Lord spoke to Joseph about his future he didn't think about how he could be a blessing to others, he thought about how others were going to be a blessing to him! Thankfully Joseph didn't stay that way. The Lord did such a work in Joseph's heart that he became a living example of the selflessness of Christ. Even after all the heartache and hardship his brothers caused in his life, Joseph was able to minister to them in a Christlike way!

You shall live in the region of Goshen and be near me—you, your children and grandchildren, your flocks

and herds, and all you have. I will provide for you there, ... (Genesis 45:10–11, NIV)

The work that God accomplished in Joseph can be done in you if you are willing to take up your cross and follow Jesus. In fact, whether you choose to take up your cross or lay it aside will determine whether you are bound by selfishness or set free to selflessly minister to others. Powerful and effective ministry awaits those who decide to take up their cross!

- **The Cross Will Teach You What It Means To Persevere**

It is going to require Christlike perseverance to accomplish the task God has for you. Thankfully, there are a multitude of examples in Scripture of those who had to persevere while accomplishing their God-given task. Jesus Christ is the chief example of such perseverance.

When he had received the drink, Jesus said, “It is finished.” With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. (John 19:30, NIV)

Jesus knew that He could have quit at any moment. He knew that if He asked to be delivered from the cross that His Father would rescue Him. Yet, Jesus wouldn't quit until the will of God was accomplished, even when it meant that He had to suffer disgrace and death on the cross!

“Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?” (Matthew 26:53–54, NIV)

In order to fulfill his destiny, Joseph also had to learn how to persevere, even when his circumstances got extremely difficult. As a young man Joseph had to learn how to persevere even though he was surrounded by brothers that hated him.

When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him. ... [Jacob] said to him, "Go and see if all is well with your brothers and with the flocks, and bring word back to me." (Genesis 37:4, 14, NIV)

Later, as a slave to Potiphar in Egypt, Joseph had to learn how to persevere in the midst of temptation. Thankfully, Joseph never ceased to persevere when his circumstances got harder. Even when he was wrongfully put in prison he continued to persevere and work diligently. He had learned to be faithful in the midst of hardship. He didn't wait until his "cross" got easier or his situation changed. At every level he proved himself willing to persevere ... with his father, with Potiphar, with the warden in prison, and finally with Pharaoh. That's one of the reasons the Lord was willing to bless Joseph as He did.

The Lord was with Joseph so that he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master. ... From the time he put him in charge of his household and of all that he owned, the Lord blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph. The blessing of the Lord was on everything Potiphar had, both in the house and in the field. (Genesis 39:2, 5, NIV)

The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care, because the Lord was with Joseph and

gave him success in whatever he did. (Genesis 39:23, NIV)

We too must learn how to persevere like Joseph. In fact, one of the main reasons Jesus commands us to take up our cross as we follow Him is to teach us to persevere through difficulty. So, take up your cross, for only those disciples who persevere with their cross in hand will fulfill their destiny.

- **The Cross Will Teach You What It Means To Trust In God**

There is no greater depth of trust revealed in the Word of God than that which is seen in the life of Jesus as He hung on the cross. No one has ever experienced what Jesus did on the cross. One moment He was in perfect fellowship with His Father, and the next He was receiving the divine judgment of God as He suffered for the sins of all mankind. Never had Jesus ever been separated from His Father ... they were one.⁸ Yet on the cross Jesus cried out as a man separated from God!

About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” (which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”). (Matthew 27:46, NIV)

That had to be the darkest hour of Jesus' life. Yet, He never ceased putting His trust in God! In fact, the last thing Jesus said on the cross was a proclamation of His undaunted trust in His Father.

Jesus called out with a loud voice, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” When he had said this, he breathed his last. (Luke 23:46, NIV)

It is with the same Christlike trust in God that you must serve the Lord. There may be times that you feel that God has forsaken you. It may seem as though Jesus is ignoring your time of testing, such as the time that the disciples despaired for their lives when Jesus was asleep during a raging storm.⁹ The cross you have been called to carry as you follow Jesus implies that there will be times of great trial. Yet, it is during such times that your trust in God must remain unshaken.

Joseph certainly knew what it meant to suffer hardship. It wasn't easy being hated by his brothers, or being thrown into prison for doing what was morally right. However, through it all he continued to put his trust in God.

Like Joseph, you are not always going to immediately understand why the Lord allows certain things to take place in your life. In fact, unless you learn to trust in the Lord in every circumstance you will probably become discouraged and could even become bitter. Yet, those who embrace the cross will be able to trust the Lord Jesus in everything, and therefore will not be offended by Him if they don't understand His ways.¹⁰ It is a sign of spiritual maturity when one can cry out as Job did,

Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him; (Job 13:15, NIV)

- **The Cross Will Enable You To Walk In Victory**

The ability to walk in victory over sin and satanic bondage has been made possible because of what Jesus accomplished on the cross. Just think, every sin and all bondages were overcome by Jesus on the cross and He has made us the recipients of His victory!

The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. (1 John 3:8b, NIV)

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. (Galatians 5:1, NIV)

The cross will also enable you to gain victory over your sinful nature, which will probably give you more problems than anything else, unless you “crucify” it on the cross.¹¹ By picking up your cross to follow Christ you are saying “no” to your sinful nature with all of its evil passions and desires.

Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. (Galatians 5:24, NIV)

However, no deliverance that has been received can be kept unless the cross continues to work in the recipient's life. That's why those who try to serve Jesus without carrying their cross daily will always end up losing the deliverance they initially received from Jesus. Laying your cross down will merely give Satan the opportunity to bind you once more to that which you were previously set free from.¹² Simply put, the cross of Jesus sets you free but you'll need to carry your cross if you want to stay free! So, embrace His and carry yours; they're both essential in preparing you to fulfill your destiny.

Pause & Reflect

1. Comment on the quote from Chris Altrock's book, *THE CROSS – SAVED BY THE SHAME OF IT ALL*, “... real disgrace is not found on a cross. For a Christian, real disgrace is found off the cross.”

2. What is the difference between the cross that Jesus died on and the cross that you must carry as you follow Jesus? (1 Peter 2:24 and Luke 9:23-24)
3. Why did Jesus respond to Paul the way He did when asked to remove part of Paul's personal cross? (2 Corinthians 12:7-10)
4. List several of the lessons disciples learn when they take up their cross and follow Jesus.
5. Why is it necessary for you to take up your cross to experience lasting victory over sin? (Galatians 2:20 and Galatians 5:24)
6. How has your own personal cross helped you follow Jesus?

The Process Prepares You To Use Authority Properly

Every disciple is going to need power and authority to accomplish the work of God. But power and authority put into the hands of someone who is not properly trained to use it can be deadly.

I remember when I was in fifth grade I had a fascination with chemistry. It wasn't that I had any knowledge, but I enjoyed playing with my chemistry set as if I knew what I was doing. I had a vivid imagination that was fueled by watching too many movies where scientists were making secret formulas to save the world! Somehow a friend of mine got his hands on some hydrochloric acid. We decided that it would be great to mix the acid with my "secret formula" that I'd come up with by boiling several different chemicals together. So, I brought my "secret formula" to school, and he brought his hydrochloric acid. During one of our breaks, we went to the back of the room where there was a sink so that we could combine the two. Upon doing so there was an immediate

volume of smoke that started rising out of the flask of chemicals that filled the whole room with an obnoxious odor! Obviously it caught the attention of our teacher. Everyone was rushed out of the room to the school yard. In fact, if I remember correctly, the rooms adjoining ours were evacuated as well. We didn't mean any harm, but our scientific adventure could have killed us and our classmates! We had some powerful chemicals in our possession, but we didn't have any training in how to properly use them for the good of others.

Jesus has made His power and authority available to His disciples so they can advance God's Kingdom. However, having access to God's power and authority and knowing how to properly use them are two different things. To properly use God's power and authority you need to start learning about and understanding the Lord's Word, will, and ways! That's why Jesus took time to prepare His disciples on how to flow with His power and authority before He sent them out to demonstrate it! He'll do the same with you!

When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. (Luke 9:1-2, NIV)

After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God. Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it. (Mark 16:19-20, NIV)

It is especially important for those who will be leaders in the Church to be adequately prepared to use the authority that will be entrusted to them. That was one of the issues Jesus addressed while preparing His twelve disciples. They each had selfish

ambition mixed with their desire to follow Jesus. Obviously, any authority given to them with that type of attitude would have been misused. They had yet to understand that leadership authority in the Kingdom of God is synonymous with being a servant. That's why, when the mother of James and John asked Jesus to grant her sons special status in His Kingdom He responded with the following:

Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Matthew 20:25–28, NIV)

Joseph is an excellent example. He was given the authority to rule Egypt as a prime minister. Such authority could have ruined him had he not been prepared to use it wisely. A striking example of how Joseph used his authority in a godly manner was the way in which he dealt with his brothers after their many years of separation. The last time that he had seen them was when they sold him as a slave. He had the power and the authority to have them all killed, and no one would have questioned him. Yet, he had been prepared by God to use his authority to help others. Thus, he used his authority to minister mercy to the very ones who had shown him nothing but jealousy and hatred. Joseph's use of authority was Christlike in every way!

Pause & Reflect

1. Comment on the statement, "leadership authority in the Kingdom of God is synonymous with being a servant."

2. Comment on what you have learned about using the authority the Lord has given you as His disciple.

The Lord's Provision For Your Preparation

Jesus has already provided the three most important things that you need to help you prepare to fulfill your destiny.

- **The Word Of God**

The greatest gift that the Lord could ever give is Himself ... Jesus, the Living Word of God!

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14, NIV)

The Word is also given as the Bible, the written Word of God, which is the manual of discipleship for every follower of Jesus Christ.

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17, NIV)

Finally, the Word will be given to you as a specific revelation for a specific time. This is known as a “rhema” word. This is to be distinguished from the “logos” which speaks of the Bible as a whole. W.E. Vine wrote concerning the importance of the “rhema” word:

The significance of rhema (as distinct from logos) is exemplified in the injunction to take ‘the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,’ (Ephesians 6:17); here the reference is not to the whole Bible as such, but to the individual scripture which the Spirit brings to our remembrance for use in time of need, a prerequisite being the regular storing of the mind with Scripture.¹³

Jesus, who is the “Living Word” will use His written Word to speak to you and teach you concerning His will and ways. The Lord will also use His written Word to give you “rhema” words for knowledge, instruction, or a promise that you need for a specific time. The Lord may even give you a “rhema” word to use in spiritual warfare which Paul wrote about in Ephesians 6:17.

A “rhema” word was exactly what the Lord gave Joseph through the divinely inspired dreams he had. The Lord was giving Joseph knowledge of his destiny and a promise to hold on to through the rough days of preparation that were before him.

- **The Spirit Of God**

It is impossible for disciples of Jesus to accomplish the Lord’s work with their own power and ability. As the Old Testament prophet prophesied ...

‘Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,’ says the Lord Almighty. (Zechariah 4:6, NIV)

That is one of the reasons that the Lord Jesus has provided His disciples with His Spirit. The very same Spirit that enabled Him to accomplish all that He did as a man, now dwells in His disciples.

“Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.” By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. (John 7:38–39, NIV)

You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. (Romans 8:9, NIV)

The Holy Spirit lives in all those who are true disciples of Jesus Christ. He will not only teach you the ways of the Lord, but He will enable you to represent Jesus in a victorious and fruitful way. That’s why you need to receive all that the Holy Spirit has been sent to give you. You can’t do the work of the Lord in your own power. However, it’s just as important for you to know that the Holy Spirit will enable you to do everything the Lord tells you to do. There is no limit to His enabling power!

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, (Ephesians 3:20, NIV)

Joseph was recognized as a man in whom the Spirit was abiding. While it may be argued that Pharaoh wasn’t talking about the Holy Spirit, it was evident to him and everyone else that Joseph had something that they did not!

So Pharaoh asked them, “Can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the spirit of God?” (Genesis 41:38, NIV)

Joseph realized that it was not in his own power that he had been able to interpret dreams. He knew that he was only able to do this because God was with him. Truly, the Spirit of the Lord was on Joseph and had been with him as he was being prepared to be the prime minister of Egypt and the patriarch of a nation!

In order to fulfill your destiny, you must learn to flow with the Holy Spirit as He convicts you (John 16:8-11), strengthens you (Acts 1:8), teaches you (John 16:13), leads you (Romans 8:14), and gives you a greater revelation of Jesus (John 16:15). The Holy Spirit is your constant guide and companion, and is with you to enable you to fulfill the destiny to which you have been called!

- **The Body Of Christ**

The Lord has not only provided you with the Word and the Spirit to help you in the preparation process, but He has also made you a part of a universal Body of believers whom He will use to help prepare you. And it is within the Body that the Lord has placed leadership that is going to be vital to your preparation as a disciple.

So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (Ephesians 4:11-13, NIV)

Yet, it is not only leadership that will be vital to your preparation, but fellow believers will also play a significant role in your preparation. How will this be? This will happen partly as a result of the friendships that you make along the path of preparation as you follow Jesus. Also, as part of the Body of Christ you will learn how to function as a part of a body, instead of as a single entity.

*The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!”
And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!”
(1 Corinthians 12:21, NIV)*

*If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part
is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the
body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. (1
Corinthians 12:26–27, NIV)*

Equally important is the fact that whenever people work together, even disciples, you will find that there will be differences of opinion, personality clashes, and even times when you just don’t care for someone in the Body of Christ. If you were still a part of the “world” you would either try to destroy your foe or leave the uncomfortable situation. That certainly is not an option for a Christian, especially one who is serious about fulfilling his or her destiny. At times you may think, “Lord, do you really want me to be in this situation working with these people I can’t get along with?” Invariably the Lord will answer, “YES!” There is a very good reason for this, and it is found in the book of Proverbs.

*As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens
another. (Proverbs 27:17, NIV)*

Jesus will often use others to help shape you into the man or woman of God you are destined to become. Because you are called to love everyone, especially fellow believers, you can’t withdraw yourself from those you don’t like or can’t seem to get along with. What you will find is that the Lord is using them to make you more loving, compassionate, tender, and merciful. But you will be doing the same for them, for you’re probably just as difficult to get along with in their eyes as they are to you! Through

it all, you will be made into disciples that will be witnesses to the world because of the love that you have for one another.¹⁴

Of course, not everyone that you're joined to is going to be "iron" used to whittle away your "rough edges". There will be many who will be examples to you on how to function in the Body of Christ in a Christlike manner. Through it all you will find that the fellowship of believers that Jesus specifically joins you to is the exact thing you need to help prepare you for Christlike service in His Kingdom!

Joseph started being prepared to fulfill his destiny while he was still with his family in Canaan. The hatred that his brothers showed him can never be justified, but the Lord used it to help make him into a man of God. So, next time you're joined to fellow believers that you don't think you can get along with, remember that the Lord might be trying to teach you something! The Lord wants to get you to the point that you respond to those who try to hurt you in the same way that Joseph responded to his brothers.

You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. (Genesis 50:20, NIV)

Pause & Reflect

1. What are the three most important things that Jesus has provided to help prepare you to fulfill your destiny?
2. How does the Word of God equip you to do good works as a disciple of Jesus? (2 Timothy 3:16-17)
3. Compare the "logos" Word of God and a "rhema" word from God.
4. What are some of the ways in which the Holy Spirit will help you to fulfill your destiny?

5. What part does the Body of Christ have in helping prepare you for your destiny?
6. Concerning your preparation as a disciple of Jesus, why is it important for you to be a faithful and functioning member of a local church that teaches the Word of God in the power of the Holy Spirit?
7. Joseph viewed the hardships that he endured as part of his preparation. How are the hardships you are going through helping to prepare you to fulfill your destiny?

Throw Off Everything That Hinders

If you are going to make it to fulfillment you are going to have to get rid of everything that hinders you.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, (Hebrews 12:1, NIV)

The process involved in throwing off, “everything that hinders” is never easy. There may even be times that the very things that are hindering you are the very things that you don’t want to get rid of, and thus are hesitant to do so. When that happens, you have left the Lord no alternative but to strip you of them.

Such was the case with Joseph. He had to be stripped of that which would have hindered him from fulfilling his destiny. The first thing that the Lord dealt with was the multicolored robe that had been given to him by his father, Jacob. It has already been mentioned that the robe given him was an ornate robe symbolizing leadership. However, Joseph wasn’t ready for the

responsibilities of leadership that it symbolized. He had to learn how to labor before he could lead. Therefore, the Lord sent him to a place where he had to learn how to serve others.

Joseph was also stripped by God of his favored status. Unfortunately, Jacob spoiled Joseph, and as long as Joseph was with his father he was going to be pampered. Even as a young teenager Joseph was sent to oversee his older brothers instead of working beside them.¹⁵ Such specialized treatment would never have prepared Joseph to fulfill his destiny. Therefore, the Lord sent him to a foreign land where for many years he was nothing more than a slave.

Joseph also had to be stripped of the prideful opinions he had of himself. Although it was the Lord who spoke to Joseph, the fact that he boasted to his family that they would one day bow down before him makes it easy to understand why the Lord found it necessary to humble Joseph. He was already beginning to think of himself as a ruler in the family!

Then he had another dream, and he told it to his brothers. "Listen," he said, "I had another dream, and this time the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me." When he told his father as well as his brothers, his father rebuked him and said, "What is this dream you had? Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?" (Genesis 37:9–10, NIV)

Joseph was a leader in the making, but far from being capable of ruling in a way that would have accomplished the Lord's purposes. In essence, Joseph was stripped of his pride. As hurtful as the process was, it was a needed one, for the Lord will only raise up the humble to do His work!

Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. (1 Peter 5:6, NIV)

After being stripped of everything that would have hindered him, Joseph was ready to be properly prepared to fulfill his destiny. There was nothing left in Joseph but the vision that God had planted in his heart.

There may be things in your life that the Lord is speaking to you about, things that are hindering your preparation. They aren't sin, but they aren't profitable either. That's why you've resisted laying them aside; they aren't sin! What's important now is that you begin to view these things as the Lord is viewing them, as hindrances to your preparation. If you're serious about fulfilling your destiny, you have the option of either putting them aside yourself, or having the Lord "strip" them from you. In either case the end result will be the same. You will be free to run the race set out before you with nothing to hold you back! You will be emptied of yourself and made ready to be filled with Christ!

After Joseph had been prepared he was given back much of what he had been "stripped" of, but he was mature enough in God to be able to handle it. In the same way there may come a day that the Lord will once again allow you to take up the very thing you had to lay aside. Yet, it won't have the "hold" on you that it did before. You will find that the work of preparation that the Lord will accomplish in your life will give you the self-control that you didn't have before, and because you have been thoroughly dealt with by God, you'll be able to easily lay it aside again if you need to.

The process of preparation that the Lord took Joseph through was severe but necessary. Joseph started out like a "caterpillar", but he was transformed in the "cocoon" of preparation. Thankfully, Joseph was willing to be thoroughly prepared, thus the Lord was

able to use him to fulfill His destiny. It will be no different for all those who are serious about fulfilling their God-given destiny. The path of preparation is still “straight and narrow”. The process will at times be very intense, but for those who are willing to be prepared the end result will be worth it. Just ask Joseph!

Pause & Reflect

1. What three things does this book mention that the Lord had to take away from Joseph in order to prepare him to fulfill his destiny?
2. Is Jesus dealing with you about anything that is hindering your preparation? If so, briefly describe what you are doing about it.

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1. 2 Corinthians 5:17
 2. Ephesians 3:20 (NIV)
 3. Chris Altmann, "The Cross - Saved By The Shame Of It All" (Joplin, Missouri: College Press Publishing Company, 1998), p. 103
 4. John Stott, "The Cross of Christ" (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1986), p. 279
 5. Altmann, p. 103
 6. Hebrews 12:2 (ESV)
 7. Genesis 37:3-5
 8. John 10:30
 9. Luke 8:22-23
 10. Matthew 15:12
 11. Galatians 5:17 and James 1:14-15
 12. Luke 11:24-26
 13. Vine, W. E., Unger, M. F., & White, W., Jr. (1996). In Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words (Vol. 2, p. 683). T. Nelson.

14. John 13:35

15. Genesis 37:13-14

Chapter Three

Prepared For Promotion

During the process of Joseph's preparation, what often looked like a "step backwards" in the natural was actually a promotion in the sight of God. For instance, although Jacob did not do everything right in preparing Joseph, he did give Joseph a firm spiritual foundation upon which to build. Once that foundation was well established in the life of Joseph, it came time for him to be promoted to a higher level of preparation. Therefore, the Lord allowed Joseph to be sold as a slave to Potiphar. That certainly would not have been what Joseph was expecting! If anything, Joseph would have been expecting the Lord to make him "ruler" over his brothers. However, the Lord's ways are not man's ways. The Lord gave Joseph exactly what he needed ... a promotion in the process of his preparation!

Joseph Was Promoted To Potiphar's House

What a promotion! The Lord put Joseph right where he needed to be to fulfill his destiny. Little did Joseph know it at the time, but when he was sold as a slave to Potiphar (a very wealthy, powerful,

and influential man in Egypt at that time) he was one step closer to becoming the prime minister of Egypt!

Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. Potiphar, an Egyptian who was one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him there. (Genesis 39:1, NIV)

Potiphar was one of the native Egyptian officials at the Hyksos court, the ruling dynasty at that time in Egypt.¹ The Bible records that he was the captain of Pharaoh's guard. What that title meant has been debated among scholars, but it is generally agreed that Potiphar was either in charge of Pharaoh's personal bodyguard, head of the police, the chief executioner, or captain of the watch.² Whatever his exact responsibility was, it was a prestigious position that put him in close contact with Pharaoh.

It wasn't long before Potiphar noticed that Joseph was successful in everything that he did. Joseph obviously was a very good worker, but the real reason behind his success was the presence of the Lord in Joseph's life.

... his master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord gave him success in everything he did, (Genesis 39:3, NIV)

Thankfully, even in his hardships, Joseph had not forsaken the spiritual foundation he had received from his father. The comments of Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown on the spiritual condition of Joseph through this period of his life are well worth reading. "Though changed in condition, Joseph was not changed in spirit; though stripped of the gaudy coat that had adorned his person, he had not lost the moral graces that distinguished his

character; though separated from his father on earth, he still lived in communion with his Father in heaven; though, in the house of an idolater, he continued a worshipper of the true God.”³

Joseph would never have been promoted by Potiphar without the Lord’s blessing. On the other hand, the Lord would never have been able to bless Joseph as He did, had Joseph not been a good worker with a pure heart towards the Lord. Therefore, it was because Joseph was faithfully fulfilling his responsibilities, with the blessing of the Lord upon his life, that he was promoted to the position of attendant to Potiphar.

The Lord was with Joseph so that he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master. When his master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord gave him success in everything he did, Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned. (Genesis 39:2–4, NIV)

As Potiphar’s attendant Joseph was given the responsibility to manage Potiphar’s entire estate, with the exception of the daily menu. Joseph had begun with little responsibility at Potiphar’s house, but now had tremendous responsibilities. Joseph was learning that every promotion comes with greater responsibility! Every servant would now answer to Joseph. Every detail of the estate was now under the watchful eye of Joseph. In a way Joseph was now serving, in a greater capacity, in the type of position his father had tried to prepare him for at home. He had been given the responsibilities of a leader! Joseph had proven himself faithful with the responsibilities he’d been given and now he was ready to lead others.

With his promotion Joseph was given back that which had been taken from him. If you remember, Joseph had been “stripped” of everything that was a hindrance to him before he came to Potiphar. As a slave he was no longer pampered as he was by his father. However, when he was promoted by Potiphar, he was once again looked upon with favored status. Yet, this time Joseph no longer allowed his favored status to inflate his ego. He had been changed! He was now able to rule over others with humility. His time in Potiphar’s house was greatly beneficial in helping to develop the character of Christ within him.

Pause & Reflect

1. Why should the hardships Joseph experienced be viewed as part of God’s promotion process?
2. Joseph would have never been promoted by Potiphar without the Lord’s blessing. However, the Lord would never have been able to bless Joseph as He did, unless Joseph proved himself. What did Joseph do that brought him favor with Potiphar?
3. How was Joseph’s character different when he served under Potiphar than when he served in his father’s house?

Joseph Was Tested Before He Was Promoted Again

After Joseph had faithfully served Potiphar as an attendant the Lord wanted to promote him to a higher level of preparation, getting him closer to the fulfillment of his destiny. However, before that could happen Joseph had to be tested to see if he was ready. Joseph had proven himself to be a competent ruler, but was he a man of integrity? The test would reveal the answer! Would he yield to the pressures of a beautiful woman and give in to her sexual advances? Would he compromise his convictions?

... and after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, "Come to bed with me!" But he refused. "With me in charge," he told her, "my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her. (Genesis 39:7-10, NIV)

Notice that this test was not just a one-time ordeal, but a test taking place, "day after day".

And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her. (Genesis 39:10, NIV)

Joseph proved himself to be ready for promotion because he handled the situation in a godly manner. His refusal to sin revealed his integrity, but his refusal to be alone with Potiphar's wife showed something else ... wisdom! Joseph had proven himself an able man of God ready to be promoted to a higher level!

Pause & Reflect

1. Joseph's work ethic and ability to lead others was proven while he worked for Potiphar. Yet, before the Lord would elevate him again he had to prove himself to be a man of integrity. How was Joseph's integrity tested?
2. How do we know that Joseph's integrity was not just tested once, but was severely tested many times?

3. What did Joseph do (or not do) that revealed his wisdom when his integrity was being tested?

Every Promotion Requires A Greater “Stripping”

Before Joseph was promoted to a higher level of preparation, the Lord allowed him to be “stripped” again of everything that would have hindered him from fulfilling his destiny. Joseph had previously learned what it meant to die to self when he became a slave, but because of his promotion he had die to self to a greater degree. Joseph was going to be stripped not only of his position but of his reputation.

When she saw that he had left his cloak in her hand and had run out of the house, she called her household servants. “Look,” she said to them, “this Hebrew has been brought to us to make sport of us! He came in here to sleep with me, but I screamed. When he heard me scream for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house.” She kept his cloak beside her until his master came home. Then she told him this story: “That Hebrew slave you brought us came to me to make sport of me. But as soon as I screamed for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house.” When his master heard the story his wife told him, saying, “This is how your slave treated me,” he burned with anger. (Genesis 39:13–19, NIV)

Although Joseph didn’t have any control over the situation, he did have control over his attitude towards the situation and the people involved. He suffered unjustly, just as he had suffered before, but he continued to trust in God. Joseph had to be willing to “die” to his present position if he was going to be able to give birth to what had been promised to him by God. Although he

didn't know it at the time, Joseph was exemplifying the same attitude as seen in the Lord Jesus!

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, (Philippians 2:5-9, NIV)

Joseph's godly attitude and actions showed that he was once again ready to be promoted to a higher level in the process of his preparation.

Pause & Reflect

1. What did the Lord allow Joseph to be stripped of during his servitude to Potiphar?
2. God also allowed the Lord Jesus to be stripped of His reputation. Look at Matthew 9:32-24, Matthew 11:19, and Matthew 12:22-24 and comment on how Jesus was slandered.
3. What kind of attitude did Jesus exemplify in the hardships He had to endure in His service to God the Father? (Philippians 2:5-9)

Joseph Was Promoted To Prison

Joseph's master took him and put him in prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined. (Genesis 39:20, NIV)

The Lord allowed Joseph to be put in prison to get him one step closer to fulfilling his destiny. Once again, that which seemed to be a demotion was actually a promotion. Joseph's situation is an excellent example of the truth taught in Romans 8:28.

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. (Romans 8:28, NIV)

The prison that Joseph was put in was not an ordinary one. He was confined with the "king's prisoners". That meant that Joseph was incarcerated with those who had worked directly for Pharaoh. But that doesn't mean it was easy for Joseph in prison. It was anything but easy! Joseph later described his place of confinement as being a dungeon, which was nothing more than a dark cell, possibly even a pit.

... I have done nothing to deserve being put in a dungeon. (Genesis 40:15, NIV)

Yet, the Lord was with Joseph and blessed him. Just as Joseph had previously been in charge of Potiphar's estate, he was eventually given charge of his fellow prisoners, many of whom had been personal servants to Pharaoh.

Joseph's master took him and put him in prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined. But while Joseph was there in the prison, the Lord was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden. So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there. The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care, because the Lord was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did. (Genesis 39:20–23, NIV)

It was while Joseph was in prison that he met other officials besides Potiphar who had worked closely with Pharaoh. Joseph had an excellent opportunity to learn and see the needs of Pharaoh's government for himself! Truly that which seemed to be a divine mistake was the wisdom of God working in the affairs of men!

Pause & Reflect

1. How could Joseph have benefited by being incarcerated with the king's prisoners?
2. Comment on what Romans 8:28 has to do with Joseph's incarceration as told in Genesis 39:20-23.
3. How will Joseph's life help you to face the hardships you go through?

Minister Where You Are

Joseph's experience reveals that promotion in the Kingdom of God depends on whether you minister effectively and faithfully right where you are! You can't wait until you reach "fulfillment"

before you start ministering to others in Jesus' name. Take advantage of the opportunities before you right now! That's exactly what Joseph did! Notice how he ministered to two men who had once served Pharaoh.

Pharaoh was angry with his two officials, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker, and put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the same prison where Joseph was confined. The captain of the guard assigned them to Joseph, and he attended them. (Genesis 40:2–4, NIV)

Joseph's initial ministry to Pharaoh's cup bearer and baker wasn't interpreting their dreams, it was through serving them. Most likely, had Joseph not served them properly before they had their dreams, they probably wouldn't have been open to his ministry of interpreting their dreams. In the same way, your ministry as a servant will open the hearts of people so that one day you may minister to them in a greater way!

While Joseph served Pharaoh's cup bearer and baker they had plenty of time to observe his life. It was Joseph's life as well as his service that made them open to his ministry. This reveals a tremendous truth; if you are to have effective ministry to others, your life must represent Christ as well as your ministry! Thus, Joseph's godly life and his willingness to serve opened the door for his ministry to Pharaoh's cup bearer and baker.

"We both had dreams," they answered, "but there is no one to interpret them." Then Joseph said to them, "Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell me your dreams." (Genesis 40:8, NIV)

It is a testimony to the work of God in Joseph's life that you don't ever find Joseph feeling sorry for himself or getting bitter about his situation. Either one of these attitudes would have crippled his ministry. Instead, Joseph stayed faithful to the Lord and the work that the Lord had entrusted to him. Therefore, when the opportunity arose for Joseph to minister to Pharaoh's servants he was ready. In fact, the very reason Joseph was later given the opportunity to minister to Pharaoh was because he had been faithful to minister while he was in prison. Joseph didn't have any indication that his ministry to Pharaoh's cup bearer and baker would one day catapult him into the palace. To him it was just one more opportunity to share the greatness of his God. Little did he know that the seed he planted by ministering to those two men would one day change not only his life, but the whole course of history.

Pause & Reflect

1. What did Joseph do that caused Pharaoh's cup bearer and baker to be open to his ministry of interpreting dreams?
2. Joseph took advantage of the opportunities he had in prison to represent the Lord through service and ministry. What opportunities are you taking advantage of to represent Jesus and advance His Kingdom?
3. How would bitterness and self-pity have crippled Joseph's ministry?

Joseph Was Tested Again Before Elevation

Before the Lord would elevate Joseph to the place where he would fulfill his destiny, he had to be tested again. Had Joseph learned his lessons well? Was he ready to handle that which the Lord had for him? The only way to find out was to allow Joseph to be tested. There were several tests Joseph went through while in prison, but three were especially important.

- **Joseph's Willingness To Submit To Authority**

Joseph's willingness to submit to authority was thoroughly tested. He had been willing to submit to Potiphar, but would he be willing to submit to the prison warden? He would have to be humble in heart, as was Jesus, for only the humble can submit in the right way.⁴ This shows once more that no matter how much the Lord elevates a person, they still need a humble and submissive heart. This was a major lesson for Joseph to learn since he had already received revelation from the Lord that he would one day be a great leader. It was important for Joseph to learn that great leaders are great at submitting to authority!

Unfortunately, there are those who refuse to submit to anyone. They're the ones who say they won't submit to anyone but Jesus Himself. That may sound good, but it ignores the fact that the Bible teaches us to submit to one another, especially those in positions of authority. As we learn to submit to human authorities we are learning valuable lessons on submitting to the Lord Himself! Jesus values submission to such an extent that He will only elevate those who have learned this valuable lesson.

Thankfully Joseph proved that he was still willing to submit. He had worked hard under Potiphar and submitted to him and was thus elevated by him. He did the same with the prison warden and was once again elevated to leadership status.

- **Joseph's Patience And Endurance Were Tested**

After Joseph ministered to Pharaoh's cup bearer, he asked him to plead his case before Pharaoh.

But when all goes well with you, remember me and show me kindness; mention me to Pharaoh and get me out of this prison. I was forcibly carried off from the land of the Hebrews, and even here I have done

nothing to deserve being put in a dungeon. (Genesis 40:14–15, NIV)

Sadly, no sooner had the cup bearer been released out of prison by Pharaoh that he forgot all about Joseph, at least for the time being.

The chief cupbearer, however, did not remember Joseph; he forgot him. (Genesis 40:23, NIV)

For two whole years Joseph waited for some reprieve. This had to be a severe testing time for Joseph, but it was necessary to prepare him for the responsibilities that the Lord would later give him. Once again Joseph proved that he had learned to patiently endure difficult circumstances as he waited on the Lord.

- **Joseph’s Faithfulness To The Lord Was Tested**

Throughout his service as a slave to Potiphar and a prisoner in Pharaoh’s prison, Joseph had proven himself faithful to the Lord. But what would he do if he was allowed to stand before Pharaoh? Would he use his gift to interpret dreams as a means to “plea bargain” his way out of prison? Or would he take the opportunity to minister to Pharaoh and give God all the glory? That was the test!

Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I had a dream, and no one can interpret it. But I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it.” “I cannot do it,” Joseph replied to Pharaoh, “but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires.” (Genesis 41:15–16, NIV)

Joseph not only passed his test but showed a great amount of boldness in doing so. By answering Pharaoh as he did Joseph was telling Pharaoh that all the gods of Egypt did not have the power to interpret his dreams, but that the God of Israel whom Joseph served did!

There was no doubt that Joseph was ready to be elevated to the palace. He was ready to fulfill his destiny. All the hardship involved in his preparation was now going to be rewarded!

Pause & Reflect

1. What are three of the most important lessons Joseph was tested on while he was in prison?
2. Give your thoughts on the statement, “great leaders are great at submitting to authority.”
3. How was Joseph’s “patient endurance” tested while he was in prison?
4. What did Joseph say to Pharaoh that revealed both his boldness and faithfulness to the LORD?

Joseph Was Promoted To The Palace

... weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning. (Psalm 30:5, NIV)

For years Joseph had been “hidden” by the Lord, preparing him for the day that he would serve the Lord in the court of Pharaoh. The revelation he had received from the Lord and held onto throughout his years of preparation was now going to come to pass! But it was going to be greater than he could have ever imagined! Joseph was not only going to rule over his father’s

family (eventually), but he was going to rule over an entire Kingdom and have influence over other countries as well!

And all the world came to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph, because the famine was severe everywhere. (Genesis 41:57, NIV)

Joseph found out that fulfillment is always beyond your vision. While the Lord may share with you bits and pieces of what He has in store for you, He never reveals the whole thing. Jesus is always the God of the “immeasurably more”.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, (Ephesians 3:20, NIV)

The Lord also healed Joseph of all the pain and sorrow he had suffered during his preparation. That is seen from the name Joseph gave his first son, “Manasseh”, which means, “causing to forget”.

Joseph named his firstborn Manasseh and said, “It is because God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father’s household.” (Genesis 41:51, NIV)

Joseph received such an emotional healing from the Lord that he was never bound to the hurts he suffered in his past. Those who have been treated unjustly can attest to the emotional devastation that often permeates their lives. But thanks be to God who will even take injustice and turn it around for your benefit, and heal you emotionally too! The Lord did it for Joseph and He will do it for you! It’s just like the joy Jesus said a woman will experience after

giving birth to her child. She is able to forget the pain involved in childbirth because of the overwhelming joy that comes from the birth of her baby!

A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world. (John 16:21, NIV)

So, the Lord's not just going to promote you and bring you to the fulfillment of your destiny, He's going to heal you of all the pain you went through during the process. That means your memories won't be painful memories, instead they'll be memories of all the lessons that you learned!

Joseph had entered his time of manifest fruitfulness. All the preparation the Lord had taken him through caused his life and ministry to become abundantly fruitful. That's why Joseph named his second child "Ephraim", which means "doubly fruitful".

The second son he named Ephraim and said, "It is because God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering." (Genesis 41:52, NIV)

One day you too will enjoy fulfilling your destiny as Joseph did, if you are willing to be prepared. But you can only be fruitful to the extent that you have been prepared by the Lord. Therefore, hold on to the promises you've received from Jesus and let Him have His way in your life!

As it was with Joseph, so it must be with you. No matter what the cost, it will be worth it.

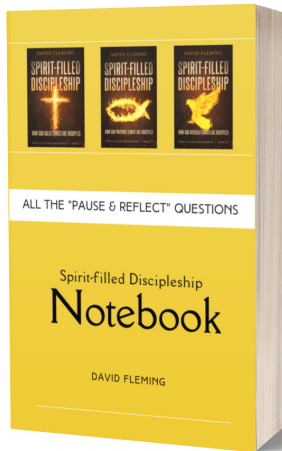
Pause & Reflect

1. Explain what Ephesians 3:20 has to do with the fulfillment of your destiny.
2. In what way was the naming of Joseph's first son, Manasseh, a proclamation of what God had done for Joseph?
3. In what way was the naming of Joseph's second son, Ephraim, a proclamation of what God had done for Joseph?

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1. Orr, James, John L. Nuelsen, Edgar Y. Mullins, and Morris O. Evans, eds. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*. Chicago: The Howard-Severance Company, 1915.
 2. Jamieson, Robert, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown. *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997.
 3. *ibid.*
 4. Matthew 11:29

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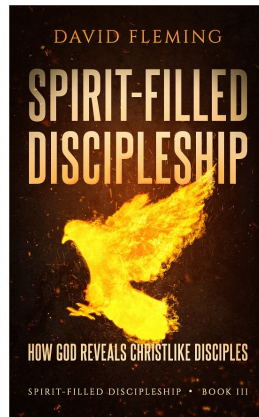
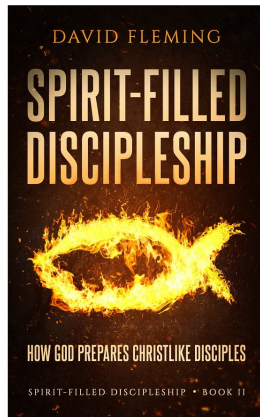
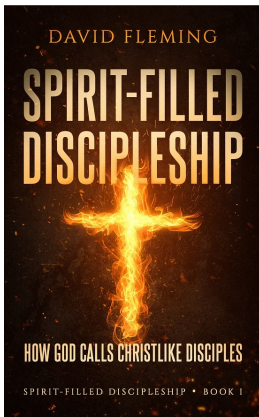
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