

Born to Win

The Undivided Man

by Ronald L. Dart

Do you suppose God would *ever* call a man to be a lawyer? Or perhaps, a governor? And no, I'm not about to tell a lawyer joke or talk about Arnold Schwarzenegger (who is commonly called "the Governator"). There's a funny thing about Christian thinking when it comes to a divine calling: We tend to think of God's calling having *solely* do with church-work or ministry; but is that the right view of it? There are two men in the Bible that caused me to think otherwise. They weren't called to be lawyers, but they were nonetheless called to a *surprising* vocation. Let me tell you their stories.

Once upon a time, there was a man named Jacob who had 12 sons. All of them were born to him while out of country. The last was born of the wife that Jacob loved—his name, Joseph (which means, by the way, "added" [Strong's H3130]). And they named him "added" because he was added to an already existing family (and well rather *beyond* the expected family). And because he was the son of Jacob's old age, and of his most-beloved wife, he was a favorite son. And Jacob made him the coat of many colors.

Now, when the lad was a mere 17 years old, he was bringing performance reports to his father that did *absolutely nothing* to endear him to his brothers. And when his brothers saw the favoritism (and beyond that, when they came to see him as a *snitch*) they hated him, and couldn't bring themselves to speak to him with any civility at all. And then something happened that could only make things worse: Joseph had a dream, and he had the poor judgment to tell that dream to his brothers. (I say poor judgment, but it will turn out that it was very important that he did tell the dream.) The story is in Genesis, chapter 37.

Genesis 37

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⁵ And Joseph dreamed a dream, and he told it his brothers: and they hated him yet the more.

⁶ And he said to them, Hear, I pray you, this dream which I have dreamed:

⁷ For, behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and, see, my sheaf arose, and also stood upright; and, behold, your sheaves stood round about, and made obeisance to [*bowed before*] my sheaf.

⁸ And his brothers said to him, Shall you indeed reign over us? or shall you indeed have dominion over us? And they hated him yet the more for his dreams, and for his words.

Notice it said "dreams", plural, because he...

Genesis 37

AKJV

⁹ [...] dreamed yet another dream, and told it his brothers, and said, Behold, I have dreamed a dream more; and, behold, the sun and the moon and the eleven stars made obeisance to me.

¹⁰ And he told it to his father, and to his brothers: and his father rebuked him, and said to him, What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall I and your mother and your brothers indeed

come to bow down ourselves to you to the earth?

¹¹ And his brothers envied him; but his father observed the saying.

Because Jacob, a man of God in his own right, knew that something was going on. Now, what we can take away from this story is that at this very early stage of his life—age 17—God has a *calling* for Joseph. And what he is seeing in this dream is the result, out far into the future, of what this calling is going to be and what its results will be.

Now, let me underline something important here: Historically, Christian people think of the gifts and the calling of God only for ministry or service to the church. And you'll find churches that will have whole "gift surveys" they hand out among their people, and they'll get together and have seminars on spiritual gifts, and they're thinking *entirely* about the work of the church. We've been taught for centuries that our spiritual life is on one hand and our vocation—our job, our work in the world—is on the other hand. We are divided in this way. It's a kind of dualism that has so shaped and formed our thinking that we are as unaware of it as a fish is unaware of the water in which he swims.

Now this man, Joseph, is going to prove a major corrective to that idea. At age 17, Joseph was called by God and notified—given kind of an early warning—of that calling in a dream. He wasn't given the precise nature of the calling, he wasn't told what the work to be done was; only that there *was* a calling, and it would have the results that he saw in the dream.

Now, Joseph being the youngest serves as an example of another (what shall we call it?) *proclivity* of God. The first shall be last; and the last first. Don't overlook this; this is fundamental in God's character. He often promotes the younger over the elder, and he takes the one that is in last position and puts him up front. Now, without a doubt, Joseph was a little cocky about this; but this was going to be corrected in short order. What follows in here is one of the great stories of the Bible, and the chances are you already know it. It is *such* a great story, it's been told *so* many times, that it's hard to become culturally literate without at least knowing about this story.

Well, Joseph was sent off to find his brothers and to bring back a report of how things were. So he put on his coat of many colors and headed off across the landscape. It was a *fateful* decision, because when his brothers looked up and saw him coming *way* off...

Genesis 37

AKJV

¹⁸ [...] even before he came near to them, they conspired against him to slay him.

¹⁹ And they said one to another, Behold, this dreamer comes.

²⁰ Come now therefore, and let us slay him, and cast him into some pit, and we will say, Some evil beast has devoured him: and we shall see what will become of his dreams.

²¹ And Reuben [*one of the elder brothers*] heard it, and he delivered him out of their hands; and said, Let us not kill him.

²² And Reuben said to them, Shed no blood, but cast him into this pit that is in the wilderness, and lay no hand on him; that he [*Reuben*] might rid him out of their hands, to deliver him to his father again.

That was his motive. He would get him thrown in the pit; and later, when the boys were out of the way, he'd come back and get him and let him go.

Genesis 37

KJ2000

²³ And it came to pass, when Joseph came unto his brothers, that they stripped Joseph out of his coat, his coat of many colors that was on him;

²⁴ And they took him, and cast him into a pit: and the pit was empty, there was no water in it [*for he would have drowned*].

²⁵ And they sat down to eat bread: and they lifted up their eyes and looked, and, behold, a company of Ishmaelites came from Gilead with their camels bearing spices and balm and myrrh, going to carry it down to Egypt.

And I imagine all of us can envision this because of the number of times in movies where we have seen caravans, with camels and Arabs making their way across the sand dunes.

Genesis 37

KJ2000

²⁶ And Judah said unto his brothers, What profit is it if we slay our brother, and conceal his blood?

²⁷ Come, and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites [*At least we'll get some money out of it.*], and let not our hand be upon him; for he is our brother and our flesh. [...]

Which...it really seems kind of strange for him to say this. Hypocritical, perhaps.

Genesis 37

KJ2000

²⁷ [...] And his brothers were content. [*“Okay, that’s a good idea.”*]

²⁸ Then there passed by Midianites, merchantmen; and they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit, and sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver: and they brought Joseph into Egypt.

Now, here’s what you need to know about this story: This had to happen. The longer-term plan that God is working here is *very* complicated, and a lot of *bad* things have to happen to get to the ultimate purpose of the plan. There is no way to get from here to there without some pretty uncomfortable circumstances for our boy Joseph, and for when his calling would finally be revealed.

Now, there is a “stop and think” point in this story—right here. Someone wrote that to be discontent is to covet against God. What they meant by that is that God has his plans and we have ours; and when we moan and groan about our lot in life, we are running contrary to what God may be trying to do with us. Now, Joseph had *every reason* to think that God had deserted him. That was emphatically not the case, but he surely had plenty of reason to be discontent. His brothers had grabbed him, and stripped his coat off of him, and threw him in a pit. And then finally, when they *did* drag him up, they sold him off as a slave to a bunch of Arabs. So, as I said, he had plenty of reason to be unhappy about this. But there was, in all of it, a purpose.

So Joseph was brought down to Egypt. And a man named Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh (captain of the guard, in fact), an Egyptian, bought him off of the Ishmaelites—the Arabs that brought him down there.

Genesis 39

AKJV

² And the LORD was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian.

It kind of sounds funny, doesn’t it? The man is a slave and he’s *prosperous*. Well, what happened was that...

Genesis 39

AKJV

³ [...] his master saw that the LORD was with him, and that the LORD made all that he did to prosper in his hand.

Now, this is *crucial*. His master saw that God was with Joseph. Now we're talking, though, not about spiritual things; we're talking about managing the affairs of the captain of the guard of Pharaoh. This would involve logistics, personnel, economics, weapons—all manner of *military* issues. Now, why would God call a man to manage such matters? What would his objective be? Well, we do know that Joseph went *way* beyond this to manage an entire country; but the road from here to there is still very rough.

Genesis 39

AKJV

⁴ And Joseph found grace in his sight, and he served him: and he made him overseer over his house, and all that he had he put into his hand.

⁵ And it came to pass from the time that he had made him overseer in his house, and over all that he had, that the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; and the blessing of the LORD was on all that he had in the house, and in the field.

⁶ And he left all that he had in Joseph's hand; and he knew not ought he had, save the bread which he did eat. [...]

You know, this was *so strong* that he left everything he had in Joseph's hand. He didn't even know what he had beyond the bread that he ate on his table. Good grief! Think about it: A man with the kind of responsibilities he's got...he gained such trust in Joseph that he can *go fishing*. He doesn't have to think about it, doesn't bother looking at all the reports. He doesn't have to worry about logistics, doesn't have to worry about finance. He just turns it all over to Joseph and goes and has a good time. There was, however, a problem: Joseph was a good-looking guy.

Genesis 39

AKJV

⁶ [...] Joseph was a goodly person, and well favored.

⁷ And it came to pass after these things, that his master's wife cast her eyes on Joseph; and she said, Lie with me.

I would have to conclude from this that Potiphar was probably spending too much time out fishing. But, in any case, Joseph refused:

Genesis 39

KJ2000

⁸ But he refused, and said unto his master's wife, Behold, my master knows not what is with me in the house, and he has committed all that he has to my hand;

⁹ There is none greater in this house than I; neither has he kept back anything from me but you, because you are his wife: how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?

Now, you have to understand this about Joseph: Joseph knew God. His faith in God involved the *whole* man, *all the time*. His life was not divided into the moral on the one hand and the secular on the other. It wasn't divided in the spiritual and the material. He was *an undivided man*. Joseph stuck to his guns; he never broke faith with God even under the greatest temptation. You'll want to make a special note of that.

Genesis 39

AKJV

¹⁰ And it came to pass, as she spoke to Joseph day by day [*She kept pressing on this issue.*], that he listened not to her, to lie by her, or to be with her.

But one day it caught up with him. He *had* to go into the house to do some business, and none of the other men of the house were there.

Genesis 39

AKJV

¹² And she caught him by his garment, saying, Lie with me: and he left his garment in her hand, and fled, and got him out.

Wow, left his coat. No way she was going to keep him in the house. Well, as Shakespeare said, “Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned.” And so when she saw what happened...

Genesis 39

AKJV

¹⁴ That she called to the men of her house, and spoke to them, saying, See, he has brought in an Hebrew to us to mock us; he came in to me to lie with me, and I cried with a loud voice:

¹⁵ And it came to pass, when he heard that I lifted up my voice and cried, that he left his garment with me, and fled, and got him out.

¹⁶ And she laid up his garment by her, until his lord came home.

¹⁷ And she spoke to him according to these words, saying, The Hebrew servant, which you have brought to us, came in to me to mock me:

¹⁸ And it came to pass, as I lifted up my voice and cried, that he left his garment with me, and fled out.

Well, what was the master to do when he heard the words of his wife, when she said all this stuff? Well, he was furious.

Genesis 39

AKJV

²⁰ And Joseph’s master took him, and put him into the prison, a place where the king’s prisoners were bound: and he was there in the prison.

Once again there’s a chance to break faith with God, and covet against God, to be discontent with where God had placed him. Joseph did not do that; he continued to be a man of God in all of his affairs. And something really fascinating happened. First of all, you have to understand that this step *had* to take place. It *had* to be done. There was no way to get from where Joseph had been to where God wanted him to be without going through this prison.

Genesis 39

AKJV

²¹ But the LORD was with Joseph, and showed him mercy, and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison.

The *next thing we know*, Joseph is *running* the prison.

Genesis 39

AKJV

- ²¹ But the LORD was with Joseph, and showed him mercy, and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison.
- ²² And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners that were in the prison; and whatever they did there, he was the doer of it.
- ²³ The keeper of the prison looked not to any thing that was under his hand; because the LORD was with him, and that which he did, the LORD made it to prosper.

Now, this is really staggering to consider. There's not a hint by the way, from the beginning to the end of this story, that Joseph ever engaged in anything we might call evangelism. He didn't engage in argument. He didn't engage in preaching. He didn't do any of those things. What he did was to live the life of a man of God. And because he lived that life, because he lived by the *principles* of a man of God, everything he did worked.

Now, through a series of strange dreams, Joseph is brought out of prison. Now, at last, he will arrive at his calling. But *even* Joseph will have *no idea* of the consequences of this calling. Pharaoh had a dream, and it was a very troubling dream. (You'll find this part of the story in Genesis, chapter 41.)

Genesis 41

KJ2000

- ¹⁴ Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they brought him hastily out of the dungeon: and he shaved himself, and changed his clothes, and came in unto Pharaoh.
- ¹⁵ And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, I have dreamed a dream, and there is none that can interpret it: and I have heard say of you, that you can understand a dream to interpret it.
- ¹⁶ And Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, It is not in me: God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace.
- ¹⁷ And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, In my dream, behold, I stood upon the bank of the river:
- ¹⁸ And, behold, there came up out of the river seven cows, fat and well favored; and they fed in a meadow:
- ¹⁹ And, behold, seven other cows came up after them, poor and very ill favored and thin, such as I never saw in all the land of Egypt for badness:
- ²⁰ And the thin and the ill favored cows did eat up the first seven fat cows [*Just ate them up!*]:
- ²¹ And when they had eaten them up, it could not be known that they had eaten them; but they were still ill favored, as at the beginning. So I awoke.

“It made me sweat, that dream. But then there was *another dream*”:

Genesis 41

KJ2000

- ²² And I saw in my dream, and, behold, seven ears came up on one stalk, full and good:
- ²³ And, behold, seven ears, withered, thin, and dried by the east wind, sprung up after them:
- ²⁴ And the thin ears devoured the seven good ears: and I told this unto the magicians; but there was none that could declare it to me.

“I didn't get it.” Joseph will now explain this dream to him, and out of it we learn what his calling really was.

What Joseph told Pharaoh was...this dream, because it was repeated twice and was established not very far on in the future. And what was going to happen was a sequence of events that would, if something

wasn't done, *destroy* the economy of Egypt. Because those seven good years that were coming—where everybody was going to get fat and there was going to be plenty of all the crops and cattle and everything else—would be times that would tempt people to overdo on nearly everything. But these were going to be followed by seven years that were *so bad* Egypt had never seen anything like it. And unless something was done, it would destroy the economy of Egypt.

Now, the story of how Joseph ultimately handled this is in the Bible; and I'll leave it to you to read it. But the upshot of it all was that:

Genesis 41

AKJV

³⁸ [...] Pharaoh said to his servants, Can we find such a one as this is, a man in whom the Spirit of God is?

³⁹ And Pharaoh said to Joseph, For as much as God has showed you all this, there is none so discreet and wise as you are:

⁴⁰ You shall be over my house, and according to your word shall all my people be ruled: only in the throne will I be greater than you.

⁴¹ And Pharaoh said to Joseph, See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt.

The pattern of Joseph's life is unchanged. He rises to be in charge. Now he is the viceroy of *all Egypt*. Egypt is probably the greatest power in the world at that time, and it is *totally pagan*, and there is not a *hint* of evangelism in anything Joseph does. He doesn't preach to the Egyptians; and if anyone was converted to God, it isn't significant enough to tell in the story. That's not why Joseph was there. Okay, so why *was* he there? He was there to save Egypt so Egypt would be a sanctuary for the family of his father Israel. His father and his brothers did indeed come and bow before him as the viceroy of Egypt. They settled there, they flourished there, until the times changed and they were made slaves.

Now, try to grasp the big picture: Joseph saved the economy of Egypt, making the country even stronger and more powerful than ever before. Then in a later time, the economy of Egypt came to be built on slave labor; making the Israelites serve in hard bondage—even killing their male children. So when the time came to bring Israel out again, God took away from them everything that Joseph and Israel had built. He destroyed their economy; he left it in a shambles.

It was Joseph who was called to lay the foundation and to make all this possible. And he was able to do this because he did not compartmentalize his life. He was a whole man, an undivided man, who served God in everything he did—from managing a division of infantry, to running a prison, and to running a country. And everyone *knew* why he succeeded; it was because God was with him.

Now mind you, Joseph knew *nothing* of the complexities that we would later call Judaism. Joseph would have been totally at sea with all the doctrinal niceties of Christian theology. But he knew the God who created *all things*, and he knew that God was *there*, and he managed his life according to what God was like.

Now, who was the other man I talked about? (Remember, I said there were two?) The other man's name was Daniel. Daniel was *also* carried away captive. Daniel was *also* sorely tempted to compromise, but he flat refused to do it. Yet he wound up in total favor with the man who was in charge of the division that he was in, in Babylon.

Now, how does this sort of thing happen? Well, it happens because of the kind of men these are. The kind of men they are are shaped by a sense of calling and destiny. They never coveted against God. They didn't complain about where God was taking him. They were humble and repentant for the things that they had done wrong (because there were plenty of those things), but they never complained about their lot. And once again, through a series of dreams, something similar to what happened with Joseph

happened to Daniel. Through this series of dreams, as God opened these things up to Nebuchadnezzar through Daniel, Daniel (like Joseph) ends up running a country—not just any country, the most powerful empire of the time, and one *pagan to the core*. And once again his role is not that of an evangelist; he is *a governor*. People came to know about God, not through the preaching or the arguments of these two men, but by their example—by a life lived before God, by a calling fulfilled by men of God; which goes to show that the calling and the gifts of God are not restricted to church work. These men did not *divide* themselves between God and their job; they were *whole*.

Now, we're not wrong to think of the calling of God as a call to salvation, but there can be *other* calls and *other* gifts. And some of these may have to do with church and ministry; and some may have to do with being a good manager of logistics, and not just for the church. Like Christians for nearly 2000 years, we have fallen into the error of dividing our lives and our thoughts into two separate channels: secular and spiritual. And we're going to have to start retraining ourselves to be *whole* men and women—not divided within ourselves. It's a great, old hymn [*Onward, Christian Soldiers*] where we sing, "We are not divided; all one body we." Well, when we sing that song, we need to understand the place to start is inside. People who are divided in their own hearts will find it impossible to remain undivided in the faith.

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