



# EXALTED AT THE PROPER TIME

SERIES: THE LIVES OF THE PATRIARCHS

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Through many years of training people for ministry I have often wondered why God sets aside some of his most gifted people for extended periods of time. Over thirty years I have seen some very gifted teachers, preachers, evangelists and leaders blossom in their early years. If it had been up to me, I would have given them a significant stage to exercise their gifts. But, following a season of success in using their gifts, many were set aside instead, their gifts silenced, their influence curbed. In a small number of cases this was due to sin, but in most instances it resulted from circumstances beyond their control. For some it involved issues like health, having children, unwanted divorce, injustice, or even the economy. When such times of being set aside grow in length, it's easy to question whether we will ever know the joy of using our gifts again, or whether we ever were gifted at all.

No one felt the force of these questions more than Jacob's son Joseph. Except for one occasion, his gift was locked up and forgotten for twelve years. But, though Joseph was forgotten on a human level, God never forgets, and in our text today he exalts his servant beyond his "dreams." This may have been the text that inspired the apostle Peter to exhort all Christians to follow his example: "humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you" (1 Pet 5:6-7). Our text from Genesis speaks not only to God's supreme faithfulness to his promises, it also gives insight into the mystery of what God was doing "in" Joseph, while he was painfully waiting for "the proper time." In hindsight, we are privileged to see exactly what God was doing, and therefore have an anchor of hope for our darkest times. It is much easier to endure the darkness when we can see the purposeful hand behind the crucible.

## I. Pharaoh's World Invaded By Dreams In the Night (41:1-7)

**Now it happened at the end of two full years that Pharaoh had a dream, and behold, he was standing by the Nile. And lo, from the Nile there came up seven cows, sleek and fat; and they grazed in the marsh grass. Then behold, seven other cows came up after them from the Nile, ugly and gaunt, and they stood by the other cows on the bank of the Nile. The ugly and gaunt cows ate up the seven sleek and fat cows. Then Pharaoh awoke. He fell asleep and dreamed a second time; and behold, seven ears of grain came up on a single stalk, plump and good. Then behold, seven ears, thin ["gaunt"] and scorched by the east wind, sprouted up after them. The thin ears swallowed up the seven plump and full ears. Then Pharaoh awoke, and behold, it was a dream. (41:1-7, NASB)**

Two full years have passed (lit. "two years of days," perhaps to emphasize two complete years, bringing the event once again to the time of Pharaoh's birthday) since Joseph had been forgotten. Now God invades Pharaoh's world with two dreams in the night, shaking him to the core. As Brueggemann writes, "The dream takes the initiative away from Pharaoh. The king is no longer the subject, but the object. He receives messages. He does not generate them or authorize them. Kings are normally protected and screened from unwelcome messages. They hear mostly good news. But the dream penetrates the royal isolation."<sup>1</sup>

The dreams strike right at the heart of Egyptian civilization—the fertility of the land, centered in the Nile basin. As Sternberg comments, "the Nile, reed grass, cows, and ears are all natural symbols of food."<sup>2</sup> They speak of Egypt's pride in her ability to feed the world, especially in times of famine (12:10; 26:1). And, as

Wenham suggests, "Cows were not simply the typical farm animal of ancient Egypt, but they symbolized Egypt, the primordial ocean, and one of the gods, Isis, among other things."<sup>3</sup> The two dreams are carefully linked around the number seven, while the two word pairs of "coming up/growing up" and "gaunt/thin" show the continuity between them. In contrast to the two dreams of the chief cupbearer and baker, which had vastly different interpretations, these two dreams are one and the same.

In the first dream, Pharaoh, standing by the banks of the Nile, sees seven well-fed cows coming out of the river and grazing among the reed beds. Then seven more cows arise out of the water and stand beside the first seven. In contrast to the first group, these cows are emaciated. Rather than feeding among the reeds, to Pharaoh's horror these become carnivores and eat the first cows. The shock wakes Pharaoh from his sleep, but he is soon slumbering again and captivated by a second dream just as ominous as the first. In this dream, seven plump ears of grain come out of a single stalk, but then another seven ears rise up as thin and "gaunt" as the cows of the first dream, and swallow up the good ears. So vivid are the dreams that Pharaoh doesn't realize he is dreaming until he wakes up. But though it was just a dream, it grips him with fear. He is confronted with a reality that he cannot control, one that will bring his empire to its knees. The one who was supposed to be a "god" is now surprisingly weak and fearful.

## II. Joseph Is Remembered (41:8-13)

### A. The failure of the empire (41:8)

**Now in the morning his spirit was troubled, so he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt, and all its wise men. And Pharaoh told them his dreams [lit. "dream"], but there was no one who could interpret them to Pharaoh. (41:8)**

In response to his dream, Pharaoh calls upon all of Egypt's brightest and best to solve the pressing riddle. But no one in the land can interpret "them" for him. The fact that the "dream" is singular indicates that Pharaoh saw the dreams as essentially one, while the plural "them" suggests that all the magicians interpreted them unsuccessfully as two different dreams. Egypt is on the verge of a national disaster. No one is able to break the code and avert the crisis. At this most propitious moment, the cupbearer's memory is jarred, and the "forgotten" Joseph is finally mentioned to the king.

### B. Joseph remembered (41:9-13)

**Then the chief cupbearer spoke to Pharaoh, saying, "I would make mention today of my own offenses. Pharaoh was furious with his servants, and he put me in confinement in the house of the captain of the bodyguard, both me and the chief baker. We had a dream on the same night, he and I; each of us dreamed according to the interpretation of his own dream. Now a Hebrew youth was with us there, a servant of the captain of the bodyguard, and we related them to him, and he interpreted our dreams for us. To each one he interpreted according to his own dream. And just as he interpreted for us, so it happened; he restored me in my office, but he hanged him." (41:9-13)**

Pressed against the wall by the prospect of a national crisis, the unappreciative cupbearer finally owns up to his sin of failing to mention Joseph to the Pharaoh. He faithfully recounts his time with Joseph in prison, when he and the chief baker were invaded by dreams in the night. His description of Joseph as "a Hebrew youth...servant of the captain of the bodyguard," may be his attempt at explaining why this "dreamer" was so easily overlooked

and forgotten. In any event, Joseph's resume and experience appear to be a perfect fit for the hour.

### III. Joseph's Audience with Pharaoh (41:14-46)

#### A. Joseph is summoned (41:14-16)

**Then Pharaoh sent and called for Joseph, and they hurriedly brought him out of the dungeon; and when he had shaved himself and changed his clothes, he came to Pharaoh. Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I have had a dream, but no one can interpret it; and I have heard it said about you, that when you hear a dream you can interpret it." Joseph then answered Pharaoh, saying, "It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer." (41:14-16)**

The fact that Pharaoh responds with immediate action and no words reveals both the depth of his need and the gravity of the situation. The king's servants waste no time making Joseph presentable. He is bathed and shaved (it was Egyptian custom to be clean shaven, including the head) and given a new wardrobe. The Hebrew youth who was once stripped of his robe and thrown into a pit by his brothers, is now clothed with new garments for his presentation before the king.

The king explains his dilemma to Joseph, adding that he has heard about his ability to interpret dreams. But Joseph is quick to give glory to the One to whom glory is due. He says it is not him, but God alone who interprets dreams. This is not just a statement of humility on Joseph's part, but a bold declaration that cuts across the dominant Egyptian worldview. In all his years, Joseph never doubted his divine gift, and now he shows no fear in challenging the world's greatest empire to submit to his God. His next statement, that "God will answer the peace (or "well being") of Pharaoh," is ambiguous. It could mean that God will either answer Pharaoh "favorably," or he will answer "concerning the well being" of Pharaoh.

Pharaoh, too desperate to challenge the monotheistic theology of this Hebrew youth, immediately tells him his dreams.

#### B. Pharaoh recounts his dreams (41:17-24)

**So Pharaoh spoke to Joseph, "In my dream, behold, I was standing on the bank of the Nile; and behold, seven cows, fat and sleek came up out of the Nile; and they grazed in the marsh grass. Lo, seven other cows came up after them, poor and very ugly and gaunt, such as I had never seen for ugliness in all the land of Egypt; and the lean and ugly cows ate up the first seven fat cows. Yet when they had devoured them, it could not be detected that they had devoured them; for they were just as ugly as before. Then I awoke. I saw also in my dream, and behold, seven ears, full and good, came up on a single stalk; and lo, seven ears, withered, thin, and scorched by the east wind, sprouted up after them; and the thin ears swallowed the seven good ears. Then I told it to the magicians, but there was no one who could explain it to me." (41:17-24)**

In the narrative art of the Bible, variations in verbal repetition are highly significant. In addition to the original report of the dream, Pharaoh describes his feeling of horror upon seeing the emaciated cows, a sight so ugly he had never seen anything like it "in all the land of Egypt." As Alter suggests, this phrase "will become a verbal motif to indicate the comprehensiveness of the plenty, of the famine, and of the measures that Joseph adopts."<sup>4</sup> Pharaoh further elaborates on his revulsion, adding that after these emaciated cows had eaten the sleek and fat cows, they were still just as ugly! Without doubt Pharaoh's dreams have shaken him to the core.

Sternberg comments on a more subtle difference, suggesting that in Pharaoh's retelling of his dreams, "he unmakes the symmetry that the narrator has taken such care to make. Within each vision, Pharaoh blurs the contrast between the units; and within the pair of visions as a whole he blurs the similarity."<sup>5</sup> This makes Joseph's ability to accurately interpret the dreams even more astounding, since Pharaoh has presented them as one dream with one interpretation, and the magicians, two dreams with two interpretations. But to the inspired Joseph there are two dreams with only one interpretation.

### C. Joseph explains Pharaoh's dreams (41:25-32)

#### 1. The unity of the dreams

**Now Joseph said to Pharaoh, "Pharaoh's dreams are one and the same; God has told to Pharaoh what He is about to do. The seven good cows are seven years; and the seven good ears are seven years; the dreams are one and the same. (41:25-26)**

Joseph first solves the riddle that Pharaoh indeed has had two distinct dreams, but they have only one interpretation. In both dreams the number seven signifies seven years. In the three different sets of dreams in the Joseph story, the interpretation of each pair is different, with no set patterns, so apart from divine inspiration there is no possibility of an interpretation. This robs Egypt of her pride and makes her schools of dream technicians illegitimate. Joseph then proceeds to give Pharaoh the interpretation.

#### 2. The interpretation of the dreams

**"The seven lean and ugly cows that came up after them are seven years, and the seven thin ears scorched by the east wind shall be seven years of famine. It is as I have spoken to Pharaoh: God has shown to Pharaoh what He is about to do. Behold, seven years of great abundance are coming in all the land of Egypt; and after them seven years of famine will come, and all the abundance will be forgotten in the land of Egypt; and the famine will ravage the land. So the abundance will be unknown in the land because of that subsequent famine; for it will be very severe. (41:27-31)**

Both dreams speak of seven years of abundance followed by seven years of famine. The famine will be so severe it will be difficult to even remember the good years when abundance was the norm. Pain will purge their memory of all that was good. This explains Pharaoh's horror at the appearance of the "gaunt" cows after they had eaten the "fat" cows. They still looked emaciated. It was as if they had eaten nothing. So much for the interpretation. But why then did Pharaoh receive the revelation in two dreams not one? Joseph gives the answer.

#### 3. The certainty and immediacy of the dreams

**"Now as for the repeating of the dream to Pharaoh twice, it means that the matter is determined by God, and God will quickly bring it about. (41:32)**

The repetition was to impress upon Pharaoh that God had determined this and it was irrevocable. There is nothing that either Pharaoh or his administration can do to avoid the famine. Secondly, the repetition was to impress upon him the immediacy of the situation. So if Pharaoh is going to act he must do so immediately.

Pharaoh makes no response. He is stunned into silence. At this point (the turning point of the text) Joseph makes a bold move, demonstrating his courage and faith. He gives Pharaoh a gift that goes beyond the dream: the gift of practical wisdom that outlines a step-by-step plan to preserve the nation through the crisis. In effect, Joseph is placing his resume on the table, leaving his name blank for Pharaoh to fill it in. In doing this he runs the risk of appearing presumptuous, but the consequences of doing nothing would have been more severe.

#### D. Joseph places his "wisdom" on the table (41:33-36)

**"Now let Pharaoh look for a man discerning and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt. Let Pharaoh take action to appoint overseers in charge of the land, and let him exact a fifth of the produce of the land of Egypt in the seven years of abundance. Then let them gather all the food of these good years that are coming, and store up the grain for food in the cities under Pharaoh's authority, and let them guard it. Let the food become as a reserve for the land for the seven years of famine which will occur in the land of Egypt, so that the land may not perish during the famine." (41:33-36)**

Joseph the prophet doesn't just pronounce judgment on a pagan empire and simply walk away. No, he sees a powerful link between divine sovereignty and human responsibility. Though imprisoned in Egypt for years, he still cares deeply for the welfare of that society, and therefore offers a solution for life. Though God has determined events, this does not mean that the empire is doomed to death. As Brueggemann points out, "The in-

tervention of God does not end royal responsibility, but sets it in a context where a new course of action is required. God's purpose is not the end of human planning but the ground for it. That God's 'plan' is above human 'plans' (Isa 55:8-9) does not mean there should not be human planning. It means that it must be responsive and faithful to God's plan.<sup>6</sup>

Joseph's plan is ingenious. Like a good statesman he reminds Pharaoh that severe crises call for severe measures. He proposes to put the whole nation under a strict food-rationing program, storing twenty percent of the food supply in each of the good years. This suggests that the good years will yield such abundance that approximately one and a half years' supply from the good years will be enough to feed the nation (and the known world!) through seven years of famine. Joseph then proposes that the program be administered in a quasi-military fashion,<sup>7</sup> dividing the land of Egypt into regions, with overseers over each region all reporting to one supreme vizier. The overseers are charged not only with the task of collecting and distributing the grain, but also with protecting it during the famine years. The goal, Joseph concludes, is "that the land may not perish during the famine."

Here is one who was once the victim of the injustice of royal "power" offering his services to it for the public good. As Brueggemann asserts, "Joseph is the model for those who are born to rule."<sup>8</sup> Roop adds, "For Joseph, royal power is dangerous, but not evil. He lives sometimes as victim and sometimes as agent of that power. Nevertheless, for all its force, royal power does not control the future. The power of dreams exceeds the power of Pharaoh."<sup>9</sup> May God make us instruments for "life" in times of crisis! So often today, Christians view their role in the world merely as prophets to condemn the immoral actions of the "empire." So few are like Joseph, caring enough to offer their services "for life," within the very institutions which they condemn.

Pharaoh's response to Joseph is as surprising as the patriarch's initial imprisonment. It is difficult to imagine what pent-up emotions Pharaoh's words released in Joseph that day. How amazing, that the human channel to open prison doors and fulfill Joseph's dreams wasn't just the chief cupbearer, but Joseph himself, too!

#### E. Pharaoh's exaltation of Joseph (41:37-46)

**Now the proposal seemed good to Pharaoh and to all his servants. Then Pharaoh said to his servants, "Can we find a man like this, in whom is a divine spirit?" So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has informed you of all this, there is no one so discerning and wise as you are. You shall be over my house, and according to your command all my people shall do homage; only in the throne I will be greater than you." (41:37-40)**

So impressed is Pharaoh with Joseph's performance that he lauds him as one who stands head and shoulders above anyone in his court. Then he acknowledges the God who is behind Joseph's gifts of divine inspiration, wisdom and understanding (Isa 11:2-3). He is so appreciative of the gifts that Joseph has brought to bear in the present national crisis that he immediately elevates him to second in command, without even taking consultation. It is always an amazing moment in salvation history when the world pauses to applaud God's servants as praiseworthy according to its own highest standards.

The stunned Joseph cannot speak, just as Pharaoh was unable to speak following the interpretation of his dreams. So Pharaoh further elaborates.

**Pharaoh said to Joseph, "See I have set you over all the land of Egypt." Then Pharaoh took off his signet ring from his hand and put it on Joseph's hand, and clothed him in garments of fine linen and put the gold necklace around his neck. He had him ride in his second chariot; and they proclaimed before him, "Bow the knee!" And he set him over all the land of Egypt. Moreover, Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Though I am Pharaoh, yet without your permission no one shall raise his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt." Then Pharaoh named Joseph Zaphenath-paneah; and he gave him Asenath, the daughter of Potiphar priest of On, as his wife. And Joseph went forth over the land of Egypt. (41:41-45)**

Brueggemann sees in Pharaoh's proclamation five stages of enthronement, demonstrating that Joseph went through a proper litany of installation. These five stages will shape Israel's future royalty. They are: "(1) The royal proclamation (V. 41; cf. Ps 2:6); (2) the insignia of office (V. 42; cf. Luke 15:22-23); (3) public acclamation (V. 43; 1 Kgs 1:25, 39; II Kgs 9:13; Phil 2:9-11); (4) a royal name (V. 45; cf. Matt 16:17-18; Phil 2:9-11); (5) legitimacy by marriage (V. 45; 1 Sam 18:20-29)... this beloved son of Jacob (is) now the beloved son of the empire."<sup>10</sup> Imagine the elation of this former Hebrew slave and prisoner of the empire, now escorted through all the land of Egypt in "Air Force II," hailed by shouts of "Bow the knee"! But Joseph is not caught up by all the accolades. He immediately tours the entire land to assess the national inventory. Fame is meaningless when the life of a nation is threatened.

The narrator concludes this scene by describing Joseph's faithfulness in carrying out his plan during the seven years of plenty (46-49) and the seven years of famine (53-57). So successful is Joseph's administration, he not only brings life to "all" of Egypt during the famine, but "all the earth came to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph, because the famine was severe in all the earth (57)." The severity of the famine will set up the next scene, where Jacob's family is forced to make a visit to Egypt for their own survival.

Between these two descriptions of Joseph's administration during the years of plenty and famine, the narrator describes the grace of God to Joseph, with the gift of two sons. In the naming of these two boys, Joseph gives voice to his profound appreciation to God as he grapples with the significance of his exaltation.

#### IV. Sons For A New Era (41:50-52)

**Now before the year of famine came, two sons were born to Joseph, whom Asenath, the daughter of Potiphar priest of On, bore to him. Joseph named the first-born Manasseh, "For," he said, "God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's household." He named the second Ephraim, "For," he said, "God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction." (41:50-52)**

As is typical of God in these narratives, he graces his servants who have been deeply wounded with not one but two children. Their highly significant names speak of what God's exaltation of Joseph has done to his soul. The first name, Manasseh, is a pun on the verbal root "to forget." With his exaltation in Egypt, God makes Joseph forget his painful past associated with his father's household.<sup>11</sup> Joseph's old life is over. A new era has begun. Though the years of pain may grind upon us ceaseless sorrow, God's salvation breaks upon us in a moment, and his vindication can erase even the most painful accumulation of memories.

Joseph names his second son Ephraim, a derivative of the verb "to make fruitful." Here the patriarch celebrates God's blessing and future hope that he is able to embrace even in the context of terrible afflictions. As Brueggemann states, "The first son affirms discontinuity of Joseph from the old troubled history of Jacob. The second name sharply contrasts this family of blessing with the kingdom of curse."<sup>12</sup> This story did much to strengthen Israel's faith in a God who is faithful to his promises and works all things according to his inscrutable will. But in a more subtle fashion it gives an insight into the divine mystery of what happens to the human soul during the dark days of waiting.

#### V. The Significance of Joseph's Humiliation and Exaltation

##### A. It shaped Israel's spirituality

Joseph's humiliation and exaltation became a consistent pattern, one that shaped Israel's future as a nation and shaped many of her leaders. Before Moses was recognized as a leader among his people, he lived in a wilderness for forty years. Before Israel enjoyed the fruits of Canaan and being lauded by gentile rulers for her wisdom during Solomon's reign, she wandered in the desert for forty years. Before David was embraced as the true king by all Israel, he endured years of being hounded by a demonized king, hiding in caves at times and surviving solely by his prayers. But just as each one endured severe humiliation, God was faithful and exalted each one at the proper time.

## B. It became a type of Christ

So significant was Joseph's exaltation it not only shaped Israel's spirituality, it became the paradigm for God's Son. As Paul writes in Philippians,

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus *every knee will bow*, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil 2:5-11)

## C. It is the exemplary model for the Christian

And because of Christ's example, humility is enjoined upon every believer. As Peter writes, the gateway to exaltation is humiliation; there is no other door. Therefore all believers are encouraged to be like Joseph, to "humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time" (1 Pet 5:6). Humiliation is not optional, but exaltation is guaranteed. This is the obvious thrust of this text that glories in the sovereignty of God at the highest level. The Joseph story grants us the liberty to cast ourselves with reckless abandon into God's care even in the darkest of times. Though the world stands against us, though we face betrayal and abandonment, God will not forget us. He is faithful. Peter adds that while Christians are waiting they are exhorted to cast "all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you" (1 Pet 5:7). We do not have to wait alone, nor do we have to wait without heavenly comfort.

## D. Insight into the mystery of "waiting"

But there is a less obvious but equally powerful truth that the text suggests might help us penetrate into the mystery of "waiting." Peter says, "that He may exalt you at the proper time." We might well ask, What is that "proper time"? Is it merely the orchestration of world events, or is God also doing something "within us"? There is evidence in the text that both are true. God was not only having Joseph wait while he organized the stage of international politics, he also was accomplishing a work "within" Joseph.

We have seen Joseph engaged in three sets of dreams over a period of some thirteen years. In each case his "gift" as divinely inspired prophet/dreamer remains constant. The gift functions with perfect accuracy and consistency each time Joseph interprets dreams. He never lost confidence in the power of this divine gift to shape history. Joseph's gift does not change, but through his imprisonments there is a marked change in the "wisdom" with which he presents the gift. When he first shares his dreams with his brothers as an arrogant youth of seventeen, he imposes his dreams on them with no wisdom. He has no sensitivity toward them, and his immaturity inflames their anger and lands him in the pit.

The second occurrence of his "gift" happens after Joseph has experienced betrayal from the empire and served an unjust ten-year prison sentence. Now we observe him with a degree of wisdom, serving his prisoners with care and sensitivity. Then after he employs his prophetic gift, he humbly appeals to the chief cupbearer for the reciprocal kindness to mention him to Pharaoh after he is delivered. So the divine dreamer is now thoroughly human and in need of a touch of human kindness. His role as "prophet" no longer distances him for people. Humiliation has made him gracious towards others, and mutually dependent.

The third time Joseph uses his gift, his wisdom has developed to such an extent that after interpreting the dreams for Pharaoh, he has the courage to place his "resume" on the table as the solution for a national crisis. Pharaoh's response is to give equal praise to each gift, Joseph's divine inspiration and his wisdom (41:37-39). So the proper time for Joseph's exaltation was when

the "wisdom"<sup>13</sup> within his heart had equal footing with the divine gift.<sup>14</sup>

In the next scenes no dreams are reported, but Joseph functions with pure wisdom as he designs tests to prove the hearts of his brothers. On that stage of wisdom Joseph will find his dreams fulfilled.

This spirit of wisdom was so valued that it became the description that Isaiah used to describe the Messiah:

Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse,  
And a branch from his roots will bear fruit.  
The Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him,  
The spirit of wisdom and understanding,  
The spirit of counsel and strength,  
The spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. (Isa 11:1-2)

Perhaps this suggests what God may be doing in us when we seem to be set aside from using our gifts. Perhaps, like he did with Joseph, he is refining our character with the wisdom that gives us the ability to bring life to all of our relationships. He is creating a character in us to match the divine "gift." It is interesting that in the New Testament, divine gifts alone never commend someone for office in the church. Even Paul, who had the most amazing prophetic experiences ever (2 Cor 12:2-4), explains that those experiences did not commend him as a leader. Instead, he commends himself through the suffering he endured as a result (2 Cor 12:5-10). Examining the qualifications for elders and deacons, gifts are hardly mentioned (1 Tim 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9 - the only reference is "apt to teach," which can reflect a number of different gifts). The whole thrust regarding leaders in the church is character, shaped through the crucible of humiliation. As Paul writes, all divine gifts will someday cease, but "love never fails" (1 Cor 13:8). Love abides forever. This is what God is supremely seeking.

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1. Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), 326.
2. Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 397.
3. Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 16-50* (Dallas: Word, 1994), 390-91.
4. Robert Alter, *Genesis* (New York: Norton, 1996), 237.
5. Sternberg, *Poetics*, 399.
6. Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 331.
7. Alter, *Genesis*, 239, explains that the verb *hides* ("exact a fifth") is also used in military contexts ("muster") for "the arming or deployment of troops, and the idea here may be that Joseph is putting the whole country on a quasi-military footing in preparation for the extended famine."
8. Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 295.
9. Quoted by Bruce Waltke, *Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 538.
10. Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 333-34.
11. "All my trouble and all my father's household" - Waltke, *Genesis*, 535, sees this as a hendiadys (one concept expressed by two words), and quotes Sarna's translation as "all my trouble associated with my father's household."
12. Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 329.
13. Bruce Waltke defines "wisdom" (*hokmah*) as the "moral skill of living life."
14. We find the same truth illustrated in the book of Jonah. The whole thrust of the book is how God teaches his "prophet" to have the same compassion in his heart for lost souls as God does.