

Finding Your Place in the World

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What's your major? What are you going to do with your degree? I'll bet you've asked, and been asked some version of those questions quite a few times. And it sure seems like at this point you should know the answers with ironclad certainty. Right? Well, what if you don't? Young men and women heading off to university generally fall into several groups. One group encompasses those few rare individuals who enter college knowing precisely what they want to do with their lives, select and complete the appropriate course of study, and then proceed to have their intended careers, never really deviating much from what they envisioned. That happens, but it's unusual. Many people belong to a second group, for whom the plan is more approximate and evolves with time. They enter college with a general idea of what they'd like to do, complete their university studies perhaps after switching majors once or twice, and then end up more-or-less in the profession they originally intended, fleshing out the details as they go. For another large group, things are even more uncertain. They go off to college and then discover they don't know what to major in, and can't decide what profession they should pursue. Although it may often seem as if something is terribly wrong if you are not in that first group, let me assure you that you don't have to have all the answers up front! ***But what you do need is faith.*** For a good example, consider Joseph's experience in Egypt, detailed in Genesis chapters 37 and 39-47.

It's a long story, but the Cliff-Notes version goes something like this: Joseph and his brothers were shepherds, and came from a family of shepherds. After a family fight, Joseph's brothers conspired to sell him into slavery while convincing their father that he had been killed by a wild animal. Joseph was ultimately sold to an Egyptian man named Potiphar, the captain of

the pharaoh's guards. Joseph was a servant in his house and he did his job well - so well that he was put in charge of running the whole household and managing all of Potiphar's property. We are told that Joseph was so effective that when Potiphar was at home his only concern was what he wanted to eat! Then Joseph was falsely accused of fooling around with his boss's wife, and Potiphar threw him in prison. After a while, the prison warden began to utilize Joseph's abilities and we are told that eventually the warden put Joseph in charge of running the entire prison. While he was in charge of the prison, Joseph interpreted some dreams that two other prisoners had. Dreams were taken very seriously in Egyptian culture because they were believed to convey important messages and predictions about the waking world, and there were professional dream interpreters in ancient Egypt. The Egyptians were perhaps not entirely off-base; the current scientific thought is that dreams are the manifestation of the mind (including the subconscious mind) continuing to analyze information and events seen during the day. When the mind solves a problem or puzzle during the night, the answer is sometimes communicated either symbolically or literally in a dream. Getting back to Joseph, a few days after he interpreted the two prisoners' dreams, one of them was released. He was the royal cupbearer, and two years later the pharaoh had strange dreams he could not understand. The cupbearer remembered Joseph and suggested that Pharaoh consult him. Joseph interpreted the pharaoh's dreams, which involved a coming famine, and made some very astute recommendations regarding preparations that should be made. Pharaoh was so impressed that he put Joseph in charge of running all of Egypt as second-in-command, subordinate only to himself. Eventually, the predicted famine did hit and it hit hard. Starvation was widespread, but Egypt was saved under Joseph's management. Joseph's was even able to be reunited with his family who believed him dead and the very brothers that had betrayed him when they came to Egypt trying to buy food. And so he saved all of them from starvation too.

Throughout his life journey, Joseph was steadfast in his faith and God used Joseph to save not only his own family, but an entire nation from a severe famine. I think that there are several lessons from this account that we can apply in our own lives. If you had asked the teenage Joseph what he was going to do with his life, he most likely would have told you he was going to be a shepherd like his father. He might have mentioned other jobs, but I doubt he would have listed head butler, prison administrator, psychoanalyst, or governor - and yet he would come to do all those jobs in a manner of speaking. My point is that as a young man, Joseph initially didn't have any of the right answers about his future, and that was OK! Joseph had faith, and God had the answers. And as time went on, Joseph learned the answers too. He discovered his interests and aptitudes, and found his place in the world. In Joseph's case, he had a talent for planning and administration that God wanted him to use. For you it may be other things, but it is important to remember that God made each and every one of us, and He doesn't make junk! It just takes time, and maybe a little trial-and-error, for each of us to discover ourselves as the unique and wonderful creations that we are.

Another noteworthy aspect of Joseph's story is how often he found himself in situations beyond his control. At one point he was a slave. Later he was unjustly imprisoned. But throughout, God was in control. He had a plan for Joseph, and during his life Joseph was presented with opportunities that allowed him to get where he was supposed to be. Some of those opportunities were blessings in disguise. Joseph was probably very apprehensive about being imprisoned, particularly since he was innocent, but I suspect that may have been the only way to get him away from Potiphar. Joseph was doing such a good job as his servant that I can't imagine Potiphar ever willingly letting him go otherwise. Joseph trusted God, and God used him to do great things. What I am trying to say is that even if you are totally clueless about God's

plan for your life, you will be presented with opportunities to get where God wants you to be. Of course, sometimes those opportunities may not take the form you expect.

Finally, it is encouraging to realize that God gives us the journey as well as the destination. We all have a tendency to focus on where we want to end up in the world, and that can be good - focus helps us achieve. But if somehow we were able to just skip to the end, we'd likely just fail when we got there. In Joseph's case, I very much doubt that he would have been able to run all of Egypt right after being taken from his father's flocks. Joseph needed the journey. It prepared him for his eventual profession of Egyptian governor, and gave him the skills he needed to accomplish the tasks God set for him. Joseph learned how to manage a single household working for Potiphar, and then learned how to administer a whole organization while in prison. Those experiences prepared him for the eventual task of running an entire country.

What I want you to remember is this: God has a plan for you, and it's OK if right now you don't know precisely what it is. Along your journey you'll discover the combination of gifts and desires that make you uniquely suited for your calling. Put your trust in Him, and he'll create opportunities for you to find your place in the world.