

## Out of the Pit



Gary Wilkerson October 7, 2013

When I was a teenager, I spent my summers helping out on a ranch in east Texas. The ranch manager, Jimmie, was a big, strapping guy who had limited eyesight but knew how to do all kinds of things. Jimmie taught me how to mow and haul hay, for instance, and how to insert pills in cows' parts. (Yes, Jimmie knew a lot about a lot of things.)

One day we were shoveling dirt together in a six-foot-deep hole for a well. During a water break, Jimmie misjudged where the deep hole was and stepped toward it. My mouth was too full of water to warn him — and Jimmie dropped in. I was afraid he might have broken a limb from the deep drop. I scrambled to help — but when I looked up, Jimmie was casually climbing out of the hole. It was as if nothing had happened. He didn't even brush himself off; he just waved to me to get back to work.

That was Jimmie's life. He was a guy with several pits in front of him daily: Jimmie wasn't just losing his eyesight — he was also losing his hearing. Yet Jimmie climbed out of every pit he fell into and kept moving ahead *as if he had expected it all to happen*. To me, Jimmie is an example of faith for everyone in Christ's body. We each have pits we fall into — that's just life — but God's Word shows that as Christians we are to face our pits through eyes of faith.

Maybe you're stuck in a pit right now. It could be a difficult relationship, a financial hole, an illness — something you've been caught in for a while — and you wonder if you'll ever be able to climb out. Your once close walk with Christ seems like a distant dream. But God has something powerful to say to you about your present pit.

Joseph's story in Genesis contains everything we need to know about the pits we fall into. Two words recur throughout the Genesis narrative regarding Joseph: "dream" and "pit." Almost every time Joseph had a dream, it led to a pit. Some pits are dug by others who want to see us fall or to cut us down for some reason. That happened to Joseph: His brothers had it in for him, and they threw him in a literal pit hoping to see him die.

A second type of pit is the kind we create for ourselves. We may fall back into an old sin habit or unhealthy life pattern that keeps us going in circles. We find ourselves drifting, wandering, moving farther away from the abundant life God has provided. Other Christians may say we deserve the pit we're in, since we created it.

It doesn't matter what kind of pit we're in. Our merciful Lord makes a way for us out of every one of them: "Which one of you who has a sheep, if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not take hold of it and lift it out?" (Matthew 12:11). Jesus says, "It doesn't matter if you created your pit. Even the law won't stop me from coming to lift you out of it."

Some pits are simply forced on us. Maybe you come from a dysfunctional home where chaos reigned. Joseph's story reads like an episode of "Cops." One of his brothers was a rapist. Others were murderers who tried to kill Joseph and eventually sold him into slavery. Even Jacob, his own father, neglected to step in when Joseph was tormented by his brothers. Joseph paid a penalty for his family's dysfunction, even though he did nothing to deserve it.

Does this describe you? You've been away from home for years but you still bear mental scars from your family's chaos. Or maybe your chaos is in the workplace, where others' willful sins affect you directly. That happened to

Joseph, when his boss's wife tried to seduce him. When Joseph turned her down, she lied about him vengefully and he was tossed into yet another pit, a death-row prison.

Yet Scripture makes it clear that with every pit Joseph fell into, God was at work.

A fourth pit is the kind that God orchestrates for what I call our "accelerated greatness."

This kind of pit is a "holding ground." God places us there to accelerate his holy work in our hearts with great intensity. Each time Joseph was thrown into a pit, it sped up the process of God placing him in a position to achieve his kingdom purposes. I hear God saying of him:

"I want someone who's willing to endure every test faithfully, so I can strategically position him to save my people. I choose Joseph for this job. And the fastest way to make him a leader in Egypt is to put him in a pit so he'll be sold into slavery. He'll then be promoted to Potiphar's house. Then he'll be thrown into another pit. I will reposition him again, this time as my voice to Pharaoh."

Think about the incredible trajectory of Joseph's life. Here was a teenage shepherd who within a few years was second-in-command of the world's greatest empire. It makes me want to pray, "God, throw me into that kind of pit! Take me out of my comfort zone. I want to see you work your purposes in my life."

Are you willing to say, "Lord, I'll gladly go wherever you want me. If I'm in this pit for your purposes, then give me eyes of faith to see it." I know many Christians who hunger for this kind of faith. They cry out, "Lord, there has to be more to this walk. I don't want to just occupy space on the earth. I want you to work your purposes in my life, to impact your kingdom."

Yet I know just as many believers who are afraid to dream in faith. Some would rather stay in their present pit than risk a move to higher ground. They know there's a cost to following God, a sacrifice that involves the unknown, and they tremble at having to pay it. Job's awful trials made him fear the dreams God brought to him: "When I say, 'My bed will comfort me...' then you scare me with dreams and terrify me with visions" (Job 7:13-14).

But the bigger our dreams for God's work, the larger our pit will be. If we believe God for a marriage that reflects his glory, we and our spouses will be tested beyond our limits. The truth is, faith throws us into a pit almost every time. If we dream of God using our lives, then we'd better prepare ourselves that a pit may be headed our way.

Let me ask you: Do you arrange your life so that you're never stressed or overwhelmed, never faced with more than you can handle? Are you avoiding God's pit of accelerated greatness? If you only want to hold your ground, I would advise you to do several things:

*Don't be loved.* Genesis 37:3 says, "Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his sons." Joseph's brothers resented him for this. But the only thing Joseph did to earn his father's love — and his brothers' resentment — was to love God and dream of greatness for his kingdom. It caused waves.

*Don't have a dream.* When Genesis 37:5 tells us, "Joseph had a dream," it doesn't mean a goal of human achievement. God spoke to Joseph directly in those dreams. And when Joseph experienced them, he didn't shrink back. He allowed the dreams to spark a godly ambition. Consider this fact: The word dream appears 113 times throughout the Bible — and over 30 of those passages involve Joseph. He believed God for great things — and so should we.

*Don't speak your dream.* Genesis 37:5 says, "When he told (the dream) to his brothers they hated him even more." Many of us are ashamed of the dreams God has put in our heart, and part of that shame comes from our fear of others' opinions. But until we speak our godly ambition, it will never be realized. Giving voice to our dream is itself a step of faith.

*Don't keep pursuing your dream the first time it's rejected.* For years I had a dream to lead a vibrant, alive body like The Springs Church. But when I voiced that dream I could see the doubt in people's eyes: "Who is he to think he can reach this city?" It would have been easy for me to wallow in their doubt; I had pastored only small churches before. Thank God, his Spirit encouraged me to keep saying "yes" to the dream he put in me — and to trust him to bring it to pass.

*Don't hold to your integrity.* There's nothing like giving in to licentiousness to destroy a God-given dream. Joseph could have given in to sin when Potiphar's wife tried to seduce him. But when you're living for God, you'll do anything to avoid grieving him. Yes, God will pick you out of a pit of iniquity — but if you keep choosing to sin, you'll drown out your love for him.

*Don't cause compromised Christians to feel convicted by your faithful pursuit.* Joseph's integrity is what enraged Potiphar's wife. "How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:9). He was speaking for righteousness when he turned her down.

If you're determined to avoid a God — orchestrated pit, you'll heed all the cautions I've listed here. But if you want his heart to delight in your faith, you'll face any fear just to be on his path to accelerated greatness.

It's time for you to pick up the dream God gave you long ago. You may be stuck in a pit — but what you see as a long trial may be God's holding ground for your honorable service to him. Do you fear to dream? Ask God to exchange your fear for faith. Do you come from a dysfunctional background? Trust him to lead you in spite of lingering scars. Are you afraid you've sinned for too long? Remember his promise to go after every sheep that has wandered.

God welcomes every sinner into the life of faith. And he will deliver every trusting servant out of each pit they fall into. He's looking for faith like the kind my friend Jimmie has — someone who falls but never stops looking ahead. Let nothing hinder the great high calling the Lord is summoning you to. He will lift you out of every pit — and desires to set you on an accelerated path that brings glory to his name.

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