



We had a big storm in Virginia Beach a week ago and here's one of the results: a 570-foot-long ocean-going barge washed up on the beach, right in front of a big resort (the six story condo is at the right). The picture really doesn't do justice to the size of the thing—if you notice the tiny little police SUV down by the fishing pier (the pier is about 15 feet high) you'll get a better idea of how big it is.

The tow lines snapped in the fierce winds of hurricane Ida, and with no one on board to guide it and no propulsion system of its own, it simply blundered onto the shore and got well and truly stuck. It's a good analogy for the journey leaders must navigate to reach their calling.

Right now I am in the throes of doing in-depth interviews with several dozen leaders about their calling journeys. It's a fascinating process. As I get into their stories, I hear amazing parallels—in many ways, they are fighting the same battles and traveling down the same roads. This morning I heard from a friend, an excellent leader, who just got ejected from a long-time role that was really a great fit for him.

That might sound like a total bummer, but my first response was, “I’m really excited about his future!” It’s because I see a pattern in how God develops us that leads me to think he is right in the middle of God’s plan for his life.

Over the last three weeks, I’ve heard the stories of ten different leaders from around the world who are in what I call the “releasing” stage of their calling journey. Although ages for this season vary, the majority of contemporary leaders seem to begin this stage in their forties. One striking parallel is the number of leaders who were prepared within their area of calling (their early- to mid-life skill and character development happens in the same field they are called to) seem to sort of fall off a cliff in their forties. One missionary was ejected from the country she felt a life call to. Another couple had to leave a 20 year assignment and a huge organization they had built. A third found his business floundering in changing markets, while others were fired, demoted, or resigned due to fundamental conflicts within their organizations. A few individuals left on their own volition, or foresaw the end of their assignment and made plans for it, but nearly all were left wondering what happened and why.

The best example of this I’ve found in scripture is with Jacob. (Many of the major biblical characters, like Moses, Jesus and Paul, went through the preparation season outside their area of calling rather than inside, and their calling pattern is different). At this stage in his life, Jacob has spent 20 years with Laban, learning his trade, earning his wives and starting a family. When he loses favor with Laban over his prosperity, Jacob pulls up stakes and leaves while Laban is out of town. On the way back to Canaan, he has a big confrontation with Laban, wrestles with God, receives a new name (representing new identity) and a blessing (representing God’s favor for his calling), then still has to confront the brother who wanted to kill him. So Jacob’s transition involves several common factors:

- Ejection from a long-time role
- Relocating to a new area
- Change of job or career – he starts working for himself instead of Laban
- Deep dealings with God over some core heart issues like fear and manipulation
- A challenge to rise to a new identity and walk in it. I call this passage “believing in your call” At this point in life leaders undergo a change of identity from a preparing one to a called one—which requires you to take a deep breath and accept as your identity what God has made you for
- A big risk. God will often require the leader to take a huge risk for the sake of the call, which exposes any lack of belief in it

- Supernatural confirmation – God spoke to him several times and spoke to his adversary (Laban) not to lay a hand on him

It's easier to observe the symptoms than to understand what God is attempting to do through them. Here's what I've come up with so far on why God allows these leaders to be ejected from satisfying, productive roles in mid-life

1. God has much more for us, and we wouldn't life the comfortable place we are in without a push
2. Very often, when God wants to deal with us at the core being level, he reduces or eliminates what we are doing to make room for us to hear

God usually deals with the leader around this stage on laying down the call: to be able to truly say, if this dream never happens, you God are enough for me. If you never come to that point, your call becomes a mistress that steals the best of your affections and may eventually destroy you.

3. In long seasons of productive doing, our identity tends to get wrapped up in our work. That identity needs to be let go of to embrace the new identity of our calling.
4. God will not allow you to enter into your calling role with all your needs met. Risk requires faith and dependence on God; and those are non-negotiables for entering into your destiny.

One of my biggest takeaways from this project is seeing the effect of perspective on the pain level of these transitions. Much of the suffering we go through in this stage is because we don't understand what God is doing, or we don't think God is in what is happening. My dream for this next book is to help us understand the Calling Journey, so we can enjoy it instead of endure it.

*If this article touches you and you have a story you'd like to contribute to this project, feel free and type it out and send it to me at [tony@coachingpastors.com](mailto:tony@coachingpastors.com).*