

# YOUR COMEBACK

TONY EVANS



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*Part 1*  
EXAMPLES OF COMEBACKS



# THINK DIFFERENT

Apple hasn't always been the dominating tech company it is today, wrapping its brand around the world and penetrating diverse cultures. This innovation leader hasn't always been able to expect customers to stand in line for days before the release of a new product, sleeping in blankets on sidewalks just to secure that coveted first buy.

At one time, the media predicted Apple was destined for failure. They also assaulted its eccentric leader, Steve Jobs, with critical review after critical review. Those who followed stock advisers' sound advice to buy low and sell high could have bought plenty of low-priced Apple stock at one time.

In 1997, the future looked bleak for this unique computer company that targeted creative users rather than the typical upper-class demographic. IBM owned the general market and shaped the mindset for the computer savvy at the time. IBM's watchword, "THINK," had been rolled out in million-dollar campaigns

aimed at capturing the entire market for personal gadgets. In 1999, IBM would roll out yet another campaign, this time expanding its aim to small businesses with the tagline, “Solutions for a small planet.” Yet the price tag of that campaign wasn’t small, costing IBM more than \$40 million when all was said and done.<sup>1</sup>

But by then, it would be too late.

In 1998, Apple introduced the iMac. But many observers agree that it wasn’t primarily this revolutionary new product that transformed Apple’s reputation. Instead, IBM fell from premiere to paltry in many consumers’ minds because the previous year, Apple challenged the world to do more than “THINK.” Rather, they challenged each of us to “Think different.”

But how was this new? After all, Apple had always been different. Its history and founders were considered rebellious, arrogant, and ostentatious. That branding style had proven to be a negative in the past, so why would “thinking different” be so appealing now?

“Different” succeeded this time because some clever marketing minds helped us all to see “different” in a new light. They did this by couching “different” in the context of world-changing history. The campaign’s leader described his idea this way:

Martin Luther King was seen as a troublemaker before he was universally seen as a saint, the rebellious Ted Turner was laughed out of town when he first tried to sell the concept of a 24-hour news channel, and it’s been said that before Einstein was celebrated as the world’s greatest thinker, he was thought to be just a guy with crazy ideas. Of course in 1997, Apple was being called a “toy” that was only for “creative types,” and it was being chastised for not having the same operating

system as everyone else. But I felt this copy would speak to the fans and get people who weren't on our side to re-evaluate their thinking and realize that being different is a good thing.<sup>2</sup>

The “Think different” campaign creators had to think different just to get their oddball idea backed by Steve Jobs himself. Those in the inner circle later revealed that Jobs didn't even want to do TV ads when he first reached out to marketing agencies to somehow dig Apple out of its hole in 1997. But this agency managed to change his mind with their pitch. They told him they would script the ad based on the feel and energy of the popular film *Dead Poet's Society*. They would piggyback off lines in the film like these: “We must constantly look at things in a different way... Just when you think you know something, you have to look at it in a different way even though it may seem silly or wrong, you must try... Dare to strike out and find new ground.”<sup>3</sup> The impact of these words lasted much longer than the seconds John Keating (Robin Williams) took to speak them. They were pregnant with power and settled deep into the souls of many viewers, Steve Jobs included, thus shifting our mindset toward change.

Watch the original Apple commercial on YouTube. Notice the way the music playing in the background, the intonations of the narrator, Richard Dreyfus, and the black-and-white images of Einstein, Martin Luther King Jr., Thomas Edison, Gandhi, and others inspire you to believe.

Here's to the crazy ones—  
the misfits, the rebels, the troublemakers,  
the round pegs in the square holes,

the ones who see things differently.

They are not fond of rules, and they have no respect for  
the status quo.

You can quote them, disagree with them, glorify or  
vilify them.

About the only thing you can't do is ignore them,  
because they change things.

They push the human race forward.

And while some may see them as the crazy ones, we see  
genius.

Because the people who are crazy enough to think they  
can change the world are the ones who do.

Within 12 months of the campaign's launch, the value of Apple stock had tripled. The "Think different" campaign would come to be known as the marketing that saved Mac, and it is frequently included in conversations about the best marketing campaigns of all time.<sup>4</sup>

Being willing to "think different" can change a lot of what we do and how we produce. And when it comes to your personal comeback, thinking different affects everything. After all, that's what faith is. Joshua had to think different when God told him how to tear down Jericho's walls: March around them, blow trumpets, and shout. Gideon had to think different when he raced out with a skeleton crew and some trumpets, jugs, and torches to face a huge enemy army. Mary had to think different when the angel told her she carried the Son of God in her womb. Martha had to think different when Jesus told mourners to roll the stone away from her dead brother's tomb.

Faith is all about thinking different, about taking God at His unconventional word. In fact, one of the greatest patterns that shows up in Scripture and in life is that God Himself thinks a little different too. He asked Abraham to kill his son, the one who carried the promised blessing, even though God prohibited murder (Genesis 9:5). He delivered food to Elijah using ravens—animals He called unclean. He chose a prostitute, Rahab, in her brothel to hide Israel's spies so they could conquer Jericho. He blessed Solomon with great riches and even greater wisdom even though his parents' relationship began with an illicit affair.

Again and again, God thinks different. That's one reason walking in faith is sometimes so difficult—simply because what God asks us to do is often so different it makes no human sense at all.

Such was the case in the story of the great comeback we are going to explore together in this chapter.

A man named Naaman faced a seemingly irresolvable situation in his life, a problem that just never seemed to get better. Naaman wasn't facing this challenge because of any terrible thing he had done. In fact, we read in 2 Kings 5:1, "Naaman, captain of the army of the king of Aram, was a great man with his master, and highly respected, because by him the LORD had given victory to Aram. The man was also a valiant warrior."

Now, great men are hard to come by. So hearing that Naaman was a great man grabs our attention from the start. We're also told that he was highly honored and that the Lord had used him to deliver a great victory to the army in His name. Naaman had rank, reputation, respect, and religion. No doubt he also had great riches as well. The man was on top of the world.

That is, until we come across the next word in verse 1—"but."

The verse says, “But he was a leper.” This small addendum to Naaman’s description speaks volumes.

We find a thorough description of leprosy in Leviticus 13. The disease would begin as a spot on the skin that would soon start to spread—not only wide but also deep, rotting the skin from within. Leprosy was an incurable disease. And unlike skin cancer, leprosy was also highly contagious. That’s why when leprosy reached a certain stage, people inflicted with it were required to be separated from their family, friends, and coworkers. And so a stigma was attached to leprosy. Lepers were social outcasts.

That explains why that side note about Naaman is so significant. Sure, he had a lot of accolades and only one thing wrong. But that one thing was a whopper. Because eventually, if the disease progressed, Naaman would lose everything he had, and then he’d die.

Naaman’s story shows us why we need a comeback. He could do nothing to fix his problem. It was an incurable disease that all the money, power, and influence in the world could not overcome. Maybe that sounds familiar to you. Perhaps you are struggling with something, and you don’t know how a solution could possibly come about. If that is you, then you are perfectly situated for God to pull off a comeback in your life.

## **Big Advice from a Little Girl**

An unnamed person in Naaman’s story played an important role in his comeback. In Scripture, she is simply called “a little girl.” She was captured when an army invaded her land (2 Kings 5:2), and now she served Naaman’s wife. The little girl made a simple comment that brought about a huge change. She said to her

mistress, “I wish that my master were with the prophet who is in Samaria! Then he would cure him of his leprosy” (verse 3).

This young girl most likely did not have an education. She certainly didn’t have any social status or economic standing. She had nothing that would make the world stand up and take notice, but somehow, she came up with a vital piece of advice for one of the most important people in the land.

Why is that significant? Because in Hebrews 13:2 we read, “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it.” That’s a powerful truth for us to incorporate into our lives. We must always be careful to keep our eyes and ears open and to treat others with respect because you never know when God will send a messenger—an angel—to help you on your way. Or you never know when He will use what we consider to be humble means—or humble people—to bring about big changes in our lives.

God can bring specific answers to your questions or your problems, and He’s likely to do it in a way you would not expect. Who would have thought a little servant girl would hold the key to Naaman’s cure? When you have an incurable problem, look for God to speak in unusual ways.

The girl in Naaman’s case was referring to the prophet Elisha. Naaman heeded her words and asked the king for permission to go see Elisha, and the king of Aram sent Naaman on his way with the equivalent of more than a million dollars. The king valued Naaman so much that he sent the gifts to the king of Israel, hoping he would instruct his prophet to fix the problem for good.

Unfortunately, though, some of the problems we face can’t be fixed by money alone. In fact, the king of Israel thought the money

was a trick because he knew leprosy could not be cured. He replied to the letter and the money in no uncertain terms: “Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man is sending word to me to cure a man of his leprosy? But consider now, and see how he is seeking a quarrel against me” (2 Kings 5:7).

There was no cure for leprosy, regardless of how much money was offered. Naaman and his king had sought the wrong source for their solution, and many of us do the same thing today. Rather than “think different,” they used the same kind of thinking they had always used before: “Throw money at the problem, and surely that will fix it.”

Elisha heard about what was going on and summoned Naaman. When Naaman reached Elisha’s doorway, he discovered that the prophet had an entirely different plan. “Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, ‘Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh will be restored to you and you will be clean’” (verse 10).

What comes next shouldn’t surprise us. “But Naaman was furious” (verse 11). He was ticked off because this wasn’t how he expected to be treated. He was insulted. Elisha hadn’t even come to meet him in person—he had sent a messenger out to his very own doorway.

And the message had only made him angrier. This powerful, wealthy, successful man had followed the advice of a little girl, and as a result he was told to go dip in some water seven times, and that would cure his incurable disease. To say those instructions sounded ludicrous would be an understatement. Naaman was a man of great military conquests. He knew plans and strategies—how to make the most of his resources. Dipping in water seven times wasn’t going to change a thing, or so he thought. The Bible

tells us, “Naaman was furious and went away and said, ‘Behold, I thought, “He will surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, and wave his hand over the place and cure the leper”’” (verse 11).

The answer Naaman received wasn’t the answer he had expected. The prophet’s approach wasn’t the same as this great man’s approach. Because of Naaman’s history, background, experience, and resources, he didn’t buy what the prophet was selling.

Instead, Naaman *thought*. That was his first problem, and it’s often our first problem too. IBM encouraged everyone to “THINK,” and that’s what we naturally do. Yet Naaman’s comeback wouldn’t occur until he learned how to do more than think. He needed to learn how to let go of his normal beliefs and “think different.” Some people refer to this as thinking outside the box. If you long for a comeback, if you want God’s solution to your problem, one thing you need to get straight from the start is that you must do things God’s way. And God’s ways are often outside the box.

Naaman didn’t like that idea at all. He was offended that the king of Israel would not accept his money. He was insulted that Elisha sent a messenger instead of meeting him in person. He was upset with the prophet’s strategy: “Are not Abanah and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?” (verse 12). And he was frustrated that after a long trip with an already worn-out body, he seemed no closer to clean health than before.

Naaman didn’t turn around quietly and bid his farewell. No, Naaman “turned and went away in a rage” (verse 12). He stormed off, most likely yelling, stomping, and swearing at the messenger

who had come on behalf of the prophet. After all, this was Naaman's life. It wasn't just simple advice he wanted. He wanted an effective solution to a complicated and debilitating problem.

## Some Great Thing

Naaman was willing to pay for an expensive treatment for his leprosy. He must have thought that with a significant investment, he could buy the cure. But his servants—who were used to living on a lot less than Naaman and with fewer accolades—recognized Naaman's response for what it was: pride.

Naaman thought he knew better than anyone else what needed to happen. He thought he was somehow above “these people” and that he could buy his comeback. But he couldn't. That's why his servants “came near and spoke to him and said, ‘My father, had the prophet told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more then, when he says to you, “Wash, and be clean”?’” (verse 13). Naaman's servants hit right at the heart of the matter.

The solution seemed too simple.

We know this was the heart of Naaman's issue because the servants contrasted Elisha's simple cure, which Naaman rejected, with “some great thing,” which Naaman surely would have done. God will regularly put us in a position where we must choose: Will we protect our dignity and remain unchanged, or will we humble ourselves and get rid of our problem? That was the choice Naaman was facing. He felt that the simple solution offered to him was beneath him. He was too big, too important, too significant to trust in something so simple.

When I counsel people who are struggling, this issue of

personal pride and dignity often comes up. People want to hold on to their personal esteem so much that they are not willing to humble themselves and do the simple thing God is asking them to do. It's beneath them. And so they continue to struggle and delay their comeback.

Thankfully, just as Naaman had listened to the little girl earlier, he listened to his servants now. A life-threatening illness will open the ears of almost anyone. In the very next verse, we witness Naaman going down to the river and dipping himself seven times, just as the prophet had directed him to. Keep in mind that God often uses the number seven in Scripture when bringing something to completion. Seven times Naaman dipped in the water. Seven times he swallowed his pride. Waist-deep in the water, in full sight of his entourage and other onlookers, this man with a flesh-eating disease lowered himself down and stood back up seven times.

I can imagine what he must have been thinking each time he came out of the water. His servants were probably holding their breath, watching for any sign of improvement in his skin. Nothing happened the first time, the second time...or even the sixth time Naaman dipped. That wasn't the instruction. Naaman had to dip seven times before experiencing a comeback.

One of the reasons many people don't experience a comeback in their situation at home or at work, in their health or in their finances, or anywhere else is that they go only partway. They will do half or two-thirds of what they know God wants them to do, and then when they quit, they wonder why they don't see the change they thought they would get. But *partway* isn't the instruction. The instruction from God is always complete obedience. God always demands full faith.

Abraham fully obeyed God's direction to sacrifice Isaac, his son. Of course, God eventually saved Isaac by providing a ram for Abraham to sacrifice instead. But notice that Abraham didn't see the ram until he raised the knife—until his obedience was complete. In the same way, your comeback is waiting for your full obedience to whatever it is the Lord is asking you to do. When your obedience is complete, you—like Naaman—can experience a complete comeback. We read about Naaman, “So he went down and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child and he was clean” (2 Kings 5:14).

Naaman didn't experience just one miracle when he dipped seven times—he experienced two. First, his body was completely healed of its disease. And then came miracle number two—Naaman's condition was actually reversed. We read that “his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child.” The implications of this double miracle are powerful. God turned back the hands of time. He rolled back the clock and restored to Naaman more than what his disease had taken away.

Friend, when you get your comeback, don't just look to God to turn your situation around. Instead, trust Him also to restore the years the locusts have stolen (Joel 2:25). That's how great God is. God is so incredibly awesome, He can not only fix what is wrong but also give you back what you have lost. That's why you should never give up hope, regardless of how long you've struggled. God can turn back the hands of time.

But before He can do that, He needs you to think different. Before God can give you your complete comeback—your double portion—He needs you to set down your pride, dignity, and

rationale. God needs you to seek Him and His Word concerning your situation so He can tell you what to do. And then He wants you to obey completely.

Are you struggling in your marriage? Has God asked you to surrender to your spouse or show unconditional love? Then do it. Fully. Are you facing challenges with your finances? Did God instruct you in His Word to honor Him with the firstfruits of what He gives you, even when things are tight? Then do it. Are you not yet living out your personal destiny? Do you feel as if you are wandering with no real intention on this earth? Then seek God and His kingdom first, and He will not only direct your path straight to your destiny but also give you the desires of your heart.

Your comeback is waiting for you to take action. Your comeback is waiting for you to do what God has instructed—and do it completely—even if it makes no human sense at all. Your comeback is waiting for you to think different... in faith.

## Reflection and Application Questions

1. Chapter 1 begins by looking at ways Apple chose to “think different” and to encourage others to do the same. Tony then offers biblical examples of God operating outside the box. In what ways did God “think different” in these three situations?
  - a. Read Genesis 22:1-14. What was different about God’s request to Abraham?

- b. Read Joshua 2:1-7. God incorporated Rahab and her home into His plan for Israel's victory at Jericho. In what ways is this different from how God had previously led His people?
    - c. Read Luke 7:36-50. How did Jesus's response to the sinful woman differ from what was expected in that culture?
  2. Walking by faith often requires that we let go of our preconceived notions and expectations.
    - a. Can you think of a time when you have had to do this? What was the situation?
    - b. What old ways of thinking might you be challenged to reconsider today?
  3. Read 2 Kings 5:2-3. What is surprising about the way Naaman's comeback began?



