

# Answering a Divine Call

**CORNELL ALUMNUS JOE HOLLAND CHALLENGES STUDENTS TO WALK BY FAITH**

By Catherine Elvy, Staff Writer

For believers, God's calling is not an isolated event. Rather, it often plays out as part of an amazing personal movement.

Activist, attorney, and football legend Joe Holland offered that spiritual insight during an appearance on October 16 at his alma mater of Cornell University. The All-American football player spoke about the stages of fulfilling a divine commission during a public lecture in Friends Hall.

"It's not just something that happens, and that's the end," said Holland, Cornell '78, MA '79, Harvard Law '82. "It's a movement that God executes in your life."

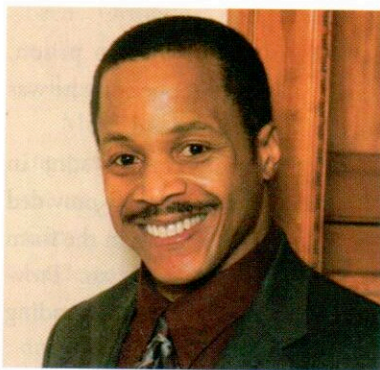
The author and ordained minister also told students to expect mystery and even misery to follow a missional call, but the venture often results in spiritual mastery. More than 60 students attended the lecture, which was sponsored by Chesterton House ([www.chestertonhouse.org](http://www.chestertonhouse.org)) and Fellowship of Christian Athletes ([www.cornellfca.blogspot.com](http://www.cornellfca.blogspot.com)).

Holland, a Cornell trustee emeritus, penned a captivating account of his own remarkable journey in his 2012 memoir, *From Harlem with Love: An Ivy Leaguer's Inner City Odyssey*. In the early 1980s, the young lawyer bypassed the lure of corporate America to relocate to Harlem, where he established a law practice and founded a homeless shelter.

In an effort to revitalize Harlem's once-glorious core, Holland

devoted his energies to real estate development, running small businesses, serving in government roles, and even crafting plays.

Earlier, Holland followed in his father's footsteps by attending Cor-



God's calling often crystalizes during an amazing personal movement, according to Joe Holland, Cornell '78, MA '79, Harvard Law '82.

nell, albeit as a transferring sophomore from the University of Michigan.

Jerome "Brud" Holland '39, Penn Ph.D. '50, a football All-American at Cornell and a member of the College Football Hall of Fame, was Big Red's first African-American football player. The elder Holland also served as a college president before becoming the U.S. ambassador to Sweden under President Richard Nixon.

Daughter Shelby Holland '18, a self-proclaimed sports lover, is studying economics and government at Cornell, where she recently sat in the back of the auditorium inside Friends Hall to attend her

dad's talk entitled: *The Movement of Divine Call*.

As for the practicalities associated with divine commissions, Holland told Cornellians to prepare for promptings and even moments of revelation by spending time in prayer, despite the ever-present stresses accompanying academic, extracurricular, and athletic loads.

"God will speak (to you) just as He spoke to Isaiah in a specific way," said Holland, referencing the supernatural commissioning of the prophet in Isaiah 6. "Cultivate a special relationship with Him."

With a sense of spiritual impartation, Holland pursued ministry options in Harlem, rather than the pathway of his Harvard classmates to the glories and riches of corporate success.

Not surprisingly, Holland said divine callings often come packaged with questions, especially during the early days of a commission.

"You're not going to understand what God is doing or saying," said Holland, referring to the stage he dubbed as the mystery phase. "That's why it's important that your faith be strong."

Later, following God's calling often brings seasons of misery.

"You have to be careful how you deal with God's calling," said Holland, noting Jonah's decision to flee God's command to preach repentance to the city of Nineveh landed him in the belly of a whale for three days.

Nonetheless, Jonah cried out to God, who directed the whale to vomit the reluctant prophet onto dry land. This time, Jonah responded by proclaiming warnings throughout Nineveh of its impending doom, and, surprisingly, the citizens repented, even donning sackcloth and covering themselves in ashes as measures of sincerity.

As a result, God showed compassion upon Nineveh, and such an account illustrates how God commands everything in His Creation to carry out His plans.

Likewise, spiritual diligence and even chastening also help pave the pathway for believers to demonstrate mastery in their callings and to reflect the sovereignty of the Almighty.

“If you don’t give up and persevere through the trial, you will...

learn the mastery,” said Holland. “God will bless you.”

For inspiration, Holland told students to examine the Old Testament account of Joseph, who remained committed to his spiri-

the money to preserve it for a future purpose,” Holland told students.

Even in impossible situations, God’s calling can serve as a motivator. It also can “take you to a higher level of service” said Holland.

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tual visions, even while in prison. “Grace came to him because he was obedient,” said Holland.

Likewise, early in his stint in Harlem, God miraculously provided rent money for Holland in the form of previously misplaced cash. “Providence prevented me from spending

Ultimately, for Holland, re-birthing a community – even one viciously blighted by the ills of poverty, violence, and drugs – has proven to be a rewarding life’s calling.

“If you have a sense that you have embraced God’s call, each day will be a gift from God,” he said. | **CU**