

SESSION 4

OVERCOME HARD TIMES



*What is your number one survival tip
to prepare for a crisis?*

QUESTION #1

#BSFLhardtimes

God has a plan to see you through any crisis.

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

"The house is on fire!" That's the first thing my friend heard after receiving a phone call from his wife on an otherwise normal day.

Two hours later, firemen escorted my friend and his wife into what was left of their home. In that brief time, their lives had been unbelievably impacted, their needs became dramatic, and their foreseeable future was unsure.

Sometimes we can see a crisis looming in the distance. Yet other times we're caught totally off guard by something huge that changes our lives in a moment. Thankfully, that's not the case for God. No matter how shocked we may feel in moments of crisis, He's never surprised or unprepared.

The Book of Genesis records how God prepared and led Joseph to make provision for the people of Egypt during the hard times they were about to experience. The life of Joseph demonstrates that God does what He says He will do—and that even in the face of a problem, God has the answer we need.



WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Genesis 41:28-36,46-49 (HCSB)

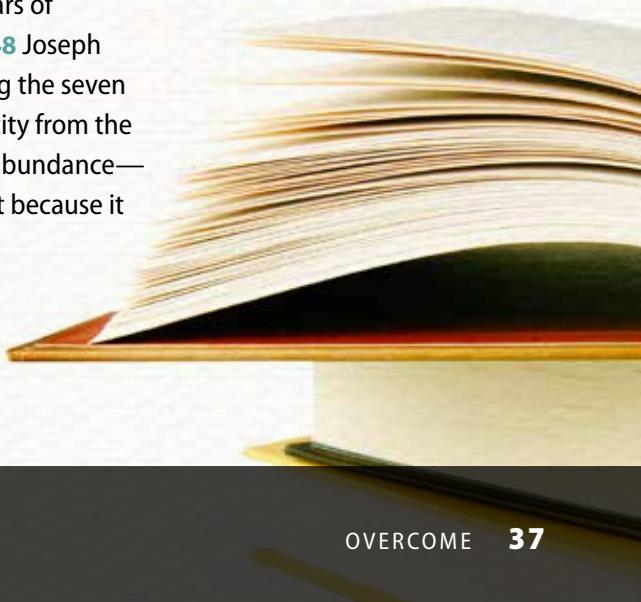
28 “It is just as I told Pharaoh: God has shown Pharaoh what He is about to do. **29** Seven years of great abundance are coming throughout the land of Egypt. **30** After them, seven years of famine will take place, and all the abundance in the land of Egypt will be forgotten. The famine will devastate the land. **31** The abundance in the land will not be remembered because of the famine that follows it, for the famine will be very severe. **32** Since the dream was given twice to Pharaoh, it means that the matter has been determined by God, and He will carry it out soon.

33 “So now, let Pharaoh look for a discerning and wise man and set him over the land of Egypt. **34** Let Pharaoh do this: Let him appoint overseers over the land and take a fifth of the harvest of the land of Egypt during the seven years of abundance. **35** Let them gather all the excess food during these good years that are coming. Under Pharaoh’s authority, store the grain in the cities, so they may preserve it as food. **36** The food will be a reserve for the land during the seven years of famine that will take place in the land of Egypt. Then the country will not be wiped out by the famine.”

46 Joseph was 30 years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Joseph left Pharaoh’s presence and traveled throughout the land of Egypt. **47** During the seven years of abundance the land produced outstanding harvests. **48** Joseph gathered all the excess food in the land of Egypt during the seven years and put it in the cities. He put the food in every city from the fields around it. **49** So Joseph stored up grain in such abundance—like the sand of the sea—that he stopped measuring it because it was beyond measure.

Key Words

Discerning (v. 33)—The Hebrew word translated “discerning” means “to consider, perceive, distinguish” and indicates someone with true insight into things, as distinguished from “wise,” which indicates sharp administrative skills.





Genesis 41:28-32

Remember Joseph's backstory? He was thrown in prison when Potiphar's wife wrongly accused him of attacking her. Even after interpreting the dreams of Pharaoh's chief baker and cupbearer, Joseph remained forgotten in prison for two years. It wasn't until two other dreams needed interpretation—dreams Pharaoh himself had—that the cupbearer remembered Joseph (see Gen. 41:1-14). In a moment, Joseph went from being a forgotten man in prison to standing before all the splendor of Pharaoh.

Notice that Joseph acknowledged God as the One who would supply the meaning of Pharaoh's dreams. He didn't attempt to grab the credit for himself. Pharaoh's two dreams involved seven healthy cows followed by seven weak, sickly cows; and seven healthy stalks of grain followed by seven withered, dry stalks. Under God's direction, Joseph showed that these dreams pointed to seven years of abundance followed by seven years of famine.

Joseph identified two challenges for Pharaoh. The first was how to make the best use of the time of prosperity on the horizon. The second was to find a way to avoid the destruction of Pharaoh's people. God would provide a time of great prosperity, which can also be translated "great satisfaction"—but it was to help them prepare for the dark and difficult times ahead. The time of famine would be so difficult that the emptiness and hunger of the people would replace the great satisfaction they had once enjoyed.

What does God's warning tell us about His character?

QUESTION #2

God always has a purpose to what He puts in our hands. Whether it's an abundant harvest of crops; success in the workplace; a bonus check; or additional skills, assets, or relationships; they each represent a way God is preparing us for what lies ahead.

Genesis 41:33-36

Joseph mapped out a survival plan for the next 14 years. He offered a strategy to prevent starvation and a plan to shield Egypt's prosperity from ruin. By setting aside 20 percent of the abundant harvest each year, empowering a capable leadership team, and building suitable storage facilities with appropriate safeguards, Joseph scripted a menu to feed the people for the seven lean years to come.

It was a solid plan.

Maybe God gave the plan to Joseph in that moment, and Joseph subsequently relayed God's message to Pharaoh and his court. Maybe the plan came out of knowledge God had poured into Joseph through his previous experiences growing up in a farming family, managing Potiphar's household, and administrating while in the prison. **Either way, the ultimate Source of the plan was God.**

In the midst of adversity, Joseph rose to the occasion, with God's help. When he was sold, he served faithfully. When he was betrayed, he bounced back. When he was humbled, he worked his way up. Joseph had learned how to match what he had with what needed to be accomplished. In this moment before Pharaoh, he put those God-given skills and experience to work.

We've all sat in classes or training where we've thought: "I am never going to need this." But God never gives us anything we don't need. If we keep our eyes open, He will provide us the opportunity to apply what we have experienced and learned.

Of course, the first part of Joseph's plan was to find an intelligent and wise person capable of carrying it out. Some interpretations say a "discerning" man—literally a man with understanding. The new guy, straight from the prison with a fresh bath and haircut, got right to the heart of the matter: "Pharaoh, if we are to survive this, we need a leader."

***When has God given
you a clear picture of
what to do?***

QUESTION #3



Genesis 41:46-49

Joseph, a prisoner, boldly gave the head of Egypt a plan of action. And Pharaoh wisely saw that Joseph was the very one to carry out that plan. Joseph was given complete authority over the nation of Egypt, second only to Pharaoh himself. He was given Pharaoh's own signet ring and a chain of gold, which can be interpreted from the Hebrew as a knitted collar of gold for his neck. Pharaoh also gave Joseph a wife with high social standing (see Gen. 41:37-45).

Joseph could have said, "Finally, the good life and a chance to sit back and relax." Instead, Joseph left the comfort of the palace and got to work. Verse 46 tells us "Joseph left Pharaoh's presence" and went to work. He wasted no time. He inspected the entire land of Egypt. He wanted to understand every resource he had at his disposal to accomplish the great task in front of him.

I have a friend who worked for years with Sam Walton, the founder of Wal-Mart. He told me Sam would often say, "Never lead from your chair." That describes Joseph. He was a doer who stayed focused and on track. All the hard work, planning, and storing weren't for the good times; they were for the future. This was their insurance in the face of the impending disaster to come.

Let me take you back to my friend whose house caught fire. Much of their house was burned, and what wasn't burned was damaged by smoke. They left on the night of the fire with nothing but the clothes they were wearing. If that were the end of the story, it would certainly be tragic. But it wasn't the end. My friend had purchased insurance. He had planned for the unknown—for potential crisis. And when that crisis hit, he was covered. The insurance company immediately went to work, and five months later, his family moved into a new house.

God directed Joseph to a wise plan for the nation, and Joseph worked that plan. As a result, Joseph was used by God to save a nation.

When we don't have a clear picture from God, how can we actively pursue His solution?

QUESTION #4

How is God preparing our group for present and future challenges?

QUESTION #5



"The best-laid schemes o' mice and men
often go awry."

— ROBERT BURNS

YOUR PLAN

Use the road map below to record your potential plans and goals over the next 20 years.



1 Year



5 Years



20 Years

What are some ways your plans can connect with God's continuing plan for the world?

LIVE IT OUT

Since we're best served by following God's plan during a crisis, what should we do in the meantime? Consider the following:

- ▶ **Look behind.** Make a list of the ways God has prepared you for where you are today. Be specific.
 - ▶ **Look up.** Set aside time this week to thank God for His provision in your life. Praise Him as the Source of your successes and of your ability to handle trials.
 - ▶ **Look around.** Make yourself available to others. Ask the Lord to lead you to someone this week who is in difficulty or crisis, and use your gifts to help in a practical way.



Lord willing, you'll never experience a house in flames. But you will go through hard times. You'll have to make decisions in the middle of a crisis. And in that moment, you'll do well to remember that God already has a plan to see you through.

This Too Shall Pass

Are you in a difficult situation? Is your patience being tried, giving new meaning to the word "exasperation"? If so, you are not alone. As the saying goes, there are three kinds of people in the world—those who are currently in trouble, those who have just come out of trouble, and those who are about to get into trouble.

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My group's prayer requests

My thoughts