SESSION 4

OVERCOME HARD TIMES
The Point
God has a plan to see you through any crisis.

The Passage
Genesis 41:28-36,46-49

The Bible Meets Life
We have all been impacted by economic downturn. It could be as minor as paying more for food and gas or as major as losing a job or house. God is bigger than the economy or world markets. In the Book of Genesis, we see how God prepared and led Joseph in advance of difficult times. While our situation is different from Joseph’s, the Bible offers some principles in this story to help us overcome when we face hard times of our own.

The Setting
When Pharaoh had a perplexing dream, his restored official suddenly remembered Joseph. Fetched from prison, Joseph, again with insight from God, interpreted the dream: God was warning Pharaoh of things to come—seven years of abundance followed by seven years of famine. Joseph even laid out a strategy for leveraging the abundant years for survival during the barren years. Pharaoh appointed Joseph to implement that strategy, which he did.
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.
GET INTO THE STUDY

**DISCUSS:** Question #1 on page 103 of the PSG: “What is your number one survival tip to prepare for a crisis?”

**GUIDE:** Direct group members to “The Bible Meets Life” on page 104 of the PSG. Introduce the topic of hard times by reading or summarizing the text—or by encouraging group members to read it on their own.

**GUIDE:** Call attention to “The Point” at the top of page 104 of the PSG: “God has a plan to see you through any crisis.”

**ENHANCEMENT:** Use Pack Item 8, “Blueprints,” in order to supplement “The Point” of this session.

**ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL):** Expand on the reality of God’s plan by displaying a set of blueprints for your group to examine. This can be an actual set of blueprints, a printed sample from online, or Pack Item 8 (above). The idea is simply to help group members see the complicated design that goes into constructing any physical structure in the modern world—and then to compare that design with the incredible complexity of God’s plan for the world. Encourage group members to share their reactions after observing the blueprints for a few moments.

**Note:** Display the blueprints in whichever way is most appropriate for your group. Place it on the wall, lay it on the floor, distribute individual samples for each person, and so on.

**PRAY:** Transition into the Bible study by confessing, on behalf of the group, that you sometimes feel afraid of difficult circumstances. Affirm your desire to trust in God’s ability to see you through any crisis.

**TIP:** Look for “Live It Out” ideas the group can do together. Some group members will benefit from observing and participating with others.
Genesis 41:28-32

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.

RECAP: Use the first paragraph from page 106 of the PSG to recap Joseph’s story from recent sessions:

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.

READ: Genesis 41:28-32 on page 105 of the PSG. Read the text out loud or encourage a volunteer to do so.

DISCUSS: Question #2 on page 106 of the PSG: “What does God’s warning tell us about His character?”

TRANSITION: In Genesis 41:28-32, Joseph highlighted the problem about to be faced by Pharaoh and the Egyptians. In verses 33-36, he identified the solution.

ALTERNATE QUESTION: What are some of the ways God prepared Joseph for his audience with Pharaoh?
Genesis 41:28-32 Commentary

Joseph contended that the dreams were God’s way of declaring what He is about to do. He had already explained to the king that God had shown him what He was about to do (v. 25). Explaining this fact to the king twice emphasized the importance of the dreams. God was about to do something very important in Egypt. He gave Pharaoh two dreams that had the same message. He also gave Joseph insight and understanding to interpret the dreams so Pharaoh would be prepared. Joseph acknowledged God as the source of wisdom. Nowhere did he ever claim to be wise in himself.

Joseph’s statement also reflects a conviction evident in much of the Old Testament. God’s people strongly believed in God’s total sovereignty and His unlimited power. They attributed all things to His direct work. God’s people also strongly believed that God was the God of the whole earth. He controlled events in the land of Israel. He also controlled events in the nations of the world. What was about to happen regarding prosperity and famine was under God’s control.

Joseph began by giving Pharaoh the good news. Joseph previously declared that the seven good cows and the seven good heads of grain represented seven years (v. 26). In verse 29 Joseph declared that they represented seven years of great abundance. God revealed to Pharaoh that the land would experience seven years of overflowing agricultural prosperity. Then Joseph offered to Pharaoh the bad news—that the seven years of prosperity would be followed by seven years of famine.

The last half of verse 30 underscores the severity of the coming famine. The famine would be so severe that people would forget the prosperity of the previous years of abundance. The severity of the seven-year famine also is stressed by the statement that the famine will devastate the land. The root of the Hebrew word translated will devastate is found over 200 times in the Old Testament. The root word means “to accomplish or finish.” In this context, Joseph asserted that the land would be “finished” as far as productivity was concerned. Unlike what would happen in the abundant years, the land would not produce much that could be harvested in the lean years. It would be consumed by the famine.

Joseph stressed again the importance of the warning by telling Pharaoh, “The abundance in the land will not be remembered.” He asserted that the giving of two dreams to communicate one message stressed the certainty that the message was true or authentic and that God would quickly bring it to pass. God enabled Pharaoh to see what the coming 14 years would bring. He provided an accurate interpretation through Joseph at the precise time when Pharaoh could prepare adequately for the devastating famine headed Egypt’s way. By depending on God’s guidance, Joseph was able to help Pharaoh understand fully the difficulties he faced.

God has a plan to see you through any crisis.
Genesis 41:33-36

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.”

READ: Genesis 41:33-36 on page 105 of the PSG.

GUIDE: Use the second and third paragraphs of the commentary on page 129 of this Leader Guide to explain the basic elements of Joseph’s plan.

RECAP: Highlight the third paragraph on page 107 of the PSG to identify the source of Joseph’s wise 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.

DISCUSS: Question #3 on page 107 of the PSG: “When has God given you a clear picture of what to do?”

Note: This is a situation in which it may be best for you as the leader to answer first. If group members seem hesitant to respond—or seem hesitant to reveal something that feels like bragging—consider offering your own story as an example to other participants.

TRANSITION: While 41:33-36 highlight Joseph’s solution to Pharaoh’s problem, we get to see Joseph implementing that solution in verses 46-49.
Genesis 41:33-36 Commentary

Pharaoh had asked Joseph to interpret the dreams, but Joseph went a step beyond just explaining the dreams. He proposed a plan to deal with the coming famine. He showed courage in this, but he no doubt felt the Lord leading him. Even Pharaoh later said that the Spirit of God was in Joseph (v. 38). The word now indicates a shift to the “bottom line” in Joseph’s presentation. He already had told Pharaoh what his dreams meant. Now, he was telling him what to do about them. In light of what was to come in the next 14 years, the king needed to find a discerning and wise person and put that person over the land of Egypt. The Hebrew word translated discerning means “to consider, perceive, distinguish” and indicates someone with true insight into things. A wise person would be someone with the capacity for constructive action and sharp in administrative affairs.

The man Pharaoh chose would need to be able to see the issues clearly and act effectively. Pharaoh was to set him over the land of Egypt, giving him authority over the entire country’s grain supply. Such broad powers at that time were limited to Pharaoh, but Joseph counseled Pharaoh to delegate this important task. Then Joseph outlined a plan. Pharaoh should appoint overseers to work under his administrator and have them take a fifth of the abundant harvest during the first seven years. This fifth would amount to a 20 percent tax on all Egyptian grain harvesting. The administrator would direct these overseers to collect one-fifth of the grain (a general term for any kind of grain) and store the surplus grain by royal directive and under the king’s protection in designated cities until the need arose for the food. The word store means “to heap up,” indicating the vast quantities Joseph had in mind.

A large store of food would be needed to enable the people to survive the severe, extended famine. The food held in reserve during the seven years of abundance would save Egypt from disaster. The Egyptian authorities would hold this one-fifth of the harvest in reserve for the land. The Egyptian people would then have food available to them during the good years and during the seven famine years that would follow the seven good years. Through such foresight and planning, the country would not be wiped out by the famine. Later in the story we learn the plan saved not only the Egyptians but also people of other lands—including Joseph’s father and his brothers.

Famines were common in that part of the world. Sometimes God used a famine as an act of judgment, but apparently this famine was not. God used all of these events that involved Joseph to bring Jacob’s family to Egypt to save them from the famine. He also provided a place that protected them from the evil influences of Canaan while Jacob’s descendants grew and multiplied and became God’s nation. Joseph led Pharaoh and his nation to work in harmony with God’s plan that ultimately involved providing the way to bring redemption to the world through Jesus Christ, a descendant of Jacob.

God has a plan to see you through any crisis.
Genesis 41:46-49

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.

READ: Genesis 41:46-49 on page 105 of the PSG.

RECAP: Use the final paragraph on page 108 of the PSG to summarize Joseph’s work in carrying out God’s plan: “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.”

DISCUSS: Question #4 on page 108 of the PSG: “When we don’t have a clear picture from God, how can we actively pursue His solution?”

DISCUSS: Question #5 on page 108 of the PSG: “How is God preparing our group for present and future challenges?”

DO: Direct group members to complete the activity “Your Plan” on page 109 of the PSG. If time allows, encourage volunteers to share their responses.

Use the space 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?

__________________________________________

__________________________________________
Genesis 41:46-49 Commentary

Joseph took a risk in telling Pharaoh what needed to be done. Fortunately, Pharaoh himself was wise enough to recognize a good plan. Pharaoh also showed wisdom in recognizing that no one was more qualified to be the administrator of this plan than Joseph. He did not stand out because of his superior intelligence or natural abilities. He stood out because Pharaoh and all his officials, just like Potiphar before them, recognized that God was with Joseph. Pharaoh even acknowledged that the Spirit of God was on Joseph. Exactly what Pharaoh understood about the Spirit of God is hard to know. Pharaoh would have believed in many false gods and goddesses, but on that occasion Joseph’s God had his attention. This is one of many Bible examples in which a pagan spoke words of truth beyond his own outlook on life. He was correct to associate the Spirit of God with godly wisdom. He told Joseph, “There is no one as intelligent and wise as you” (v. 39).

Having recognized Joseph as the best man qualified to administer the plan, Pharaoh proceeded to give him authority to fulfill this assignment. Joseph was to be over Pharaoh’s house. This means more than his household; it refers to his realm (v. 41). Joseph was second only to Pharaoh, who alone reigned on the throne. Pharaoh gave Joseph the outward signs of his new authority. He gave him his signet ring, dressed him in fine clothes, caused him to ride in the second chariot, and told the people to bow down (vv. 42-44). He gave him as a wife the daughter of one of the powerful men in the land (v. 45).

Joseph was 30 years old when he was installed as Egypt’s chief administrator, meaning he had spent 13 years in slavery or in prison in Egypt (37:2). He immediately implemented the plan he had outlined. Joseph traveled throughout Egypt to oversee the gathering of food during the seven good years. He kept records as to the quantity of grain he stored, but eventually he stopped measuring it because it was beyond measure. God had blessed abundantly, just as He had revealed through Joseph that He would. Egypt’s silos overflowed.

After the seven years of plenty ended, the long-dreaded famine began. Not only Egypt but also neighboring countries suffered its effects. Because of careful preparation under Joseph’s supervision, Egypt had abundant food. Joseph began to sell the grain reserves. People of neighboring areas came to purchase food, setting the stage for our next session.

In God’s redemptive plan, Joseph endured some very hard times. Yet the Lord did not expect him to overcome those hard times in his own strength. Today, when we cooperate with God in His work, He gives us insight and stamina sufficient for the situation. When following God presents us with hard times, we can overcome them, knowing God has a plan to see us through any crisis.
**GUIDE:** Direct group members to page 110 of the PSG. Encourage them to consider the following suggestions for trusting God in all situations:

- **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.

**Wrap It Up**

**TRANSITION:** Read or restate the conclusion from page 110 of the PSG: “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.”

**PRAY:** Once again, affirm your desire to trust God even in hard times. Also proclaim your willingness to action and make choices in order to follow God’s plan to see you through.
My group’s prayer requests

Additional suggestions for specific groups (women, men, boomers, and singles) are available at BibleStudiesForLife.com/blog.

And for free online training on how to lead a group visit MinistryGrid.com/web/BibleStudiesForLife.

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.

To continue reading “This Too Shall Pass” from Mature Living magazine, visit BibleStudiesforLife.com/articles.