

LIFE GROUPS

Genesis 41:1-40

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

ICE BREAKER QUESTION: Describe a time when God worked in your life through difficult circumstances. What was that experience like at the time? How did you respond to what God was doing? How did God show Himself faithful to you?

Difficult situations often become teachable moments that God uses to prepare us for harder situations to come. This is seen in Genesis 41 with Joseph's story of suffering. God was with Joseph in prison, as demonstrated by his ability to interpret the two prisoners' dreams. God is again with Joseph through a promotion brought about by the interpretation of Pharaoh's dream (Gen. 41). As Joseph's life story continues to unfold, it becomes evident that God uses suffering and adversity to prepare His children for extraordinary service to Him.

Read back through the passage before going through the questions.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. **What is your biggest takeaway? How was your experience with the Life Tool's this past week?**
2. **Read Genesis 41:1-8. After two years without a change in Joseph's difficult circumstances, what might he have been tempted to doubt or question? What promises or truth do you think Joseph clung to in this time?**

Joseph, having given the accurate interpretation of his fellow prisoners' dreams but still finding himself forgotten, spent two more years in prison. In this period, Joseph was further tested and refined in terms of patience, trust, and faith in God's promises.

Joseph's trust in God had been further tempered and deepened. Joseph had become a radically God-centered man who believed that his God-given dreams would come true in God's good time. God would remain at the center of his vision through everything that was to come. At last Joseph was ready for the great work of his life.¹

But Joseph was not standing alone because Yahweh was with him just as he had been with him in Potiphar's house and in prison (cf. 39:2, 3, 21, 23). Though God is not mentioned here, God was the convener. God had orchestrated the exquisite timing, first through the forgetfulness of the cupbearer and then through the cupbearer's self-serving recollection. Had the cupbearer's selective memory chosen to function earlier, it would likely have been lost on Pharaoh.²

3. Read Genesis 41:9-36. What does Joseph's response reveal about his relationship with God? What does it say about Joseph's character that he continued using his gifts while in prison and did not seek recognition for interpreting dreams?

Genesis 41 describes a turning point in Joseph's life. Up to that point, his life had been characterized by slavery, wrongful imprisonment, and broken family relationships. But when Pharaoh called upon Joseph to interpret his dream, the trajectory of Joseph's life changed in an instant. Three specific things we can learn from Joseph in this story:

Hurry up and wait upon the Lord. Had Joseph gotten out of prison earlier, he likely would have stayed a slave. God's timing is best, and through our patient waiting He is transforming us into who we need to be.

Bless the One who blesses you. Who we are and what we have is all thanks to God, so worship Him.

Remove the hidden idols in our lives. We all struggle with idols, like power, approval, comfort, and security. It's when the pressures of these idols press in on us that our true character is revealed.

Joseph's 13 years of hardship had taught him to depend on God's guidance. He had practiced his faith while serving Potiphar, resisting Potiphar's wife, and while living in prison. Pharaoh's

¹ R. Kent Hughes, [*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 475.

² R. Kent Hughes, [*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 477.

statement that Joseph could “hear a dream and interpret it” prompted Joseph to give credit to God.

Joseph was again tempted to accept the glory and recognition for interpreting dreams, but faithfully did not.

The humility and faith of Joseph thus come through in the chapter. Because God had given Joseph the special gift and because God had singled out Joseph for this special interpreting ministry, it was Joseph’s duty to give glory to God for the revelation and the meaning and to take none of the glory for himself. Those whom God calls to special service must make it a point to inform the unbelieving world that any success or ability that they have comes from God. When they explain God’s revelation to the world, they must confront the world with God. The servants are not greater than the master.³

4. What does the magicians and wise men’s inability to interpret Pharaoh’s dream and Joseph’s response teach us about earthly powers and ultimately who is in control?

Similar to the cupbearer and baker in Genesis 40, Pharaoh dreams and despairs. His troublesome dream, given by God, could only be interpreted by someone who knew God personally, and was thus able to seek, discern, and share His truth with others. The Lord had begun to speak and work in Pharaoh’s life, and until Pharaoh could understand it, he would not be at peace.

But this limitation too was part of God’s plan for using symbolic dreams rather than direct verbal communication. (See also the reasoning behind the parables in Matt. 13:10–17). God used an Israelite slave to confound the wisdom of Egypt, just as he later used another captive from Zion, Daniel, to explain the dreams to Nebuchadnezzar. God employed such communication to show that, no matter how powerful and prosperous these nations were on the face of the earth, they were still subject to his sovereign control.⁴

Thus, to Pharaoh’s face Joseph asserted that his God was superior to and sovereign over the gods of Egypt. Joseph’s theological knowledge rose high against the face of worldly power.⁵

As Walter Brueggemann explains, “The future in Egypt does not depend upon Pharaoh. He does not get to decide. In fact, Pharaoh is irrelevant and marginal to the future of the kingdom.... Joseph has calmly announced to the lord of Egypt that the future is out of his hands.... In Gen. 41, it is clear that Pharaoh can cause no future. Nor can he resist the future that God will bring.”

³ Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 641–642.

⁴ Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 640.

⁵ R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 479.

Thus we are here confronted with the premise upon which all biblical history rests: Kings do not make history. Rather, God uses them to effect history. The prophet Isaiah would give this truth grand expression in Isaiah 45:4–7, where the Lord explains that the pagan king Cyrus was brought to power to bring about God’s purposes for his people.

*For the sake of my servant Jacob,
and Israel my chosen,
I call you by your name,
I name you, though you do not know me.
I am the LORD, and there is no other,
besides me there is no God;
I equip you, though you do not know me,
that people may know, from the rising of the sun
and from the west, that there is none besides me;
I am the LORD, and there is no other.
I form light and create darkness,
I make well-being and create calamity,
I am the LORD, who does all these things.⁶*

We must remember this in these uncertain days—when evil regimes thumb their noses at justice, and millions cheer them on—when dark kings prevail with seeming impunity, and righteous people are engulfed by the night. Remember that these kings do not make history, but rather God uses them to effect his purposes.⁷

5. In what specific ways has God been preparing Joseph for this assignment? How has God been preparing you?

From Palestine to the Sinai to Egypt—and truly around the world—Joseph’s defining virtue was his massive concept of God. Joseph’s view of God exceeded that of anyone on Planet Earth. And we must lay this to heart: God’s choice servants have always been informed and defined by their view of God.⁸

The king concluded that only a person who possessed the “spirit of God” in measure could have discerned the significance of the dreams (cf. Daniel, e.g., 4:5; 5:11). In effect Joseph’s blueprint for the chief administrator was his own résumé. “Wise and discerning” is the same phrase used by Joseph (vv. 33, 39). So farsighted was Joseph’s plan the king realized that no one but God could have made “all this known,” making Joseph exceptional in the kingdom⁹

⁶ R. Kent Hughes, [*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 480.

⁷ R. Kent Hughes, [*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 481.

⁸ R. Kent Hughes, [*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 482.

⁹ K. A. Mathews, [*Genesis 11:27–50:26*](#), vol. 1B, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2005), 761.

- a. **What are some practical ways we wait upon the Lord? Why is it so hard for us to practice patience, especially when it comes to God’s plans and His timing? How can we grow in this area? (See 1 Peter 5:6-7.)**

6. We see evidence of God’s sovereignty and providence through Joseph’s story. How do you see evidence in your own life?

While Moses keeps Joseph center stage in [Genesis 37–50](#), the main actor is God himself. The story isn’t just about how Joseph fulfills the Abrahamic promises, but about how Yahweh keeps his covenant and fulfills his promises *through* a rejected but royal seed. The covenant is secure in the hands of the God who can sovereignly orchestrate the actions of evil men for his good purposes ([Gen 50:20](#)). Through Joseph, God is reversing the curse and fulfilling his promises to Abraham.

The Joseph story is not just the last item in Genesis, but the *resolution* of the Genesis story. Genesis takes readers on a journey from fratricide to forgiveness, from famine to feast, and from promise to fulfillment.

The sovereignty of God is the underlying theme of this chapter, for the economy of Egypt—in fact, Egypt’s whole future—was subject to the Lord God of Israel. The Bible affirms that God raises up kings and sets them down; and he controls the destinies of empires in accord with his plans for his people. In this instance, he controlled Egypt’s life source, for God had determined that his wise servant would be the means of delivering Egypt.¹⁰

This revelation was not only the means to get Joseph to power it was also the means by which God would save Egypt and the world in the time of crisis, causing everyone to know that deliverance comes from God—if people would believe the Word from God and prepare accordingly. Wisdom literature advises that people should store up in times of plenty for times of need, which is just practical living (Prov. 6:6–11; 20:4). But here the entire event was part of God’s way of making himself known to the world. Because of the dreams and because of their clear interpretation, Pharaoh and his courtiers were convinced that it would happen.¹¹

And here is what fascinates: Joseph’s dynamic call to action was based on his knowledge of what God was about to do. So we see that the knowledge of what God is going to do does not

¹⁰ Allen P. Ross, [Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 637.

¹¹ Allen P. Ross, [Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 642.

produce passive resignation but aggressive action. The knowledge of God's purpose is not the end of human planning and action but the beginning of it. The fact that God has set the future is a mighty summons to action.

Today it is precisely this that undergirds the tremendous energy of world missions. We know how history is going to end—it will end with people redeemed from “every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages” (Revelation 7:9). So we pray and give and go!¹²

7. Why does God give us more details about Joseph's life than any other individual in Genesis? What does this story ultimately point to?

Genesis has an interesting structure. It zooms over the creation account like a rocket (about 3% of the book), soars over the millennia between Adam and Abraham like a jet (about 15% — dropping speed and altitude over Noah), and cruises over Abraham (21%), Isaac (8%), and Jacob (23%) like a helicopter, hovering here and there. Then it sort of drives down the road of Joseph's life, devoting to it nearly 30% of its content.

God is always intentional in his proportionality. *More* does not necessarily equal *more important* in God's word economy. The epistle to the Ephesians is much shorter than the narrative of Joseph's life, but it is not less important. However, *more* does imply *take note*. There are crucial things God wants us to see.

God has many reasons to drive us through Joseph's life, some more obvious than others. Let's look at one perhaps lesser obvious reason.

8. Who in your life may need help discerning God's promises and commands in order to receive peace, just like Pharaoh and Joseph's fellow prisoners? Who or what will you rely on to help discern them?

Robert Dick Wilson was one of the great professors at Princeton Theological Seminary. One of his students had been invited to preach in Miller Chapel twelve years after his graduation. Old Dr. Wilson came in and sat down near the front. At the close of the meeting, the old professor came up to his former student, cocked his head to one side in his characteristic way, extended his hand, and said:

“If you come back again, I will not come to hear you preach. I only come once. I am glad that you are a big-godder. When my boys come back, I come to see if they are big-

¹² R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 481.

goddess or little-goddess, and then I know what their ministry will be.” His former student asked him to explain, and he replied, “Well, some men have a little god, and they are always in trouble with him. He can’t do any miracles. He can’t take care of the inspiration and transmission of the Scripture to us. He doesn’t intervene on behalf of his people. They have a little god and I call them little-goddesses. Then, there are those who have a great God. He speaks and it is done. He commands and it stands fast. He knows how to show himself strong on behalf of them that fear him. You have a great God; and he will bless your ministry.” He paused a moment, smiled, said, “God bless you,” and turned and walked out.

Are you a “little-godder” or a “big-godder”? So much rides on your answer, because those who embrace the God of the Scriptures embrace the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Joseph and Moses and David and Daniel and Paul and Peter—and that makes all the difference!¹³

- a. **How can a believer’s Christlike endurance of suffering offer a testimony of hope to others?**

PRAYER

Close in prayer, asking God to help you and your group members be prepared to practice your faith in the challenging opportunities He places in your lives. Pray that you, like Joseph, live lives that offer a testimony of God’s power and hope to others.

Thank God for His sovereignty and faithfulness, and for the ways He is currently working on our behalf’s in ways and timing we cannot see or understand. Pray for greater faith to rely on His goodness and providence more strongly, and for the grace to humbly submit to Him with faithfulness. Pray also that others will see, like Joseph, that the Spirit of God is with us, in order to give God the true glory.



FURTHER STUDY

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/sermon/pit-to-pinnacle/>

¹³ R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 482–483.

<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/how-involved-is-god-in-the-details-of-your-life>

<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/joseph-remembered>

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/what-joseph-story-really-about/>