

**Sermon Series:** Overcome: Living Beyond Your Circumstances

**To be used with:** Session Four: Overcome Hard Times

**Sermon Title Possibilities:**

Defying Difficulty, Crisis Subverted, Promises = Plans

**Scripture:** Genesis 41:28-36, 46-49

**Connection to Unit Theme:** *Overcome: Living Beyond Your Circumstances* is a character study on the Old Testament hero, Joseph. In spite of periods of significant opposition and personal crisis, Joseph's faith led to international leadership and the preservation of God's people. He is an amazing example from Scripture of what it means to overcome difficult circumstances.. These sermon outlines cover the same topics and scripture passages as are being studied in small groups. This will allow you as a pastor the chance to reinforce what learners encounter in small group Bible study and influence the growth of your church body.

Session 4 is called "Overcome Hard Times" and reminds participants "God has a plan to see us through any crisis."

### **Introduction:**

Take half an hour and scan your social media outlets. Facebook and Twitter are overflowing with first world problems. First world problems are the momentary issues that plague our psyche and incite complaining and the occasional social media rant. They are the ones that we might do anything to avoid but would be begged for by anyone who has ever endured real crisis like hunger, abuse, or war. They are the ones we are ashamed of when we learn about disease and dirty water, poverty and human trafficking.

In some ways, a message like today's can only be misinterpreted, because many of us don't understand the level of crisis that faced the world Joseph lived in. The newly appointed governor of the most powerful nation of his day, Joseph was charged with ensuring they made it until tomorrow. While few of us can likely fathom that level of crisis, our problems are no less real.

Job loss. Unemployment. Prodigal kids. Aging parents. Depleted savings. Medical expenses. Marriage mishaps. Political pressures. Professional stalemates.

We all weather storms. God has a plan to help us overcome hard times. The onus lies with us to recognize and trust God's plans in those seasons. Hindsight is 20/20 but foresight is of greater value. Today, we continue our journey with Joseph.

When we last left our hero, he was incarcerated for an affair he did not have. Through the favor of God and his own faithful service, Joseph was leveraging his leadership and his gifts even in his difficult surroundings. It is when we can learn through trials that we are most prepared for the next greater challenge in life. The situation facing Joseph in today's episode is one where he needed all the preparation, and certainly all the faith and divine favor, he could get.

### **I. God is in the business of revealing himself and his plans to man. [Genesis 41:28, 32]**

The king of Egypt was more than a king. He was Pharaoh. In Egypt that meant he was lord of two lands and priest of all temples.<sup>1</sup> He had political, military, and religious power in Egypt. He was the supreme commander of the powerful world nation and representative of their entire span of gods. And in the Joseph story, Pharaoh had a dream. [Genesis 41:1-7] None of the magicians and wise leaders of the land

could interpret the vision. [Genesis 41:8] How troubling? To be divinely appointed as leader of the land, reigning supreme over an entire body politic and the intricate religious landscape and come up empty!

In this manner of metaphor, you and I are our own tiny pharaohs of our own tiny kingdoms. We live in a free world where we are told we control our own destinies. In high school, donned with caps and gowns, we're told that the future is ours for the taking. The American dream proposes that we make something of ourselves. We herald the rags to riches empire and crown the self-made man. All hail the pharaohs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. And yet, we don't hold tomorrow.

For Pharaoh, an uninterpreted dream was a mark of his truly finite nature. Enter Joseph, a man with a history of interpreting dreams. Pharaoh, who was accustomed to revealing his plans for the world was now at the hands of an almighty God who was revealing heaven's plans instead.

And Joseph was clear. Verse 16 states it. Verse 25 confirmed it. Verse 28 assured it. Interpretations did not belong to Joseph. They belonged to God. Why? If you haven't before memorized Proverbs 19:21, now is as good a time as any. "Many plans are in a man's heart, but the LORD's decree will prevail." Know those words like no other. They will guide your understanding of all scripture and all life well. God is in the business of revealing His plans and Himself to the world. Dreams. Visions. Verses. Incarnate Son. All opportunities for people to know and understand the purposes of a Holy God who holds everything in His hands. Many our plans may be, but it's God's purpose that prevails.

## **II. God is in the business of using people to accomplish his plans. [Genesis 41: 33-36]**

Name anyone in scripture that mattered. Noah. Abraham. Of course Joseph. Moses. Joshua. Samuel. David. Solomon. Daniel. Mary. Peter. James. Paul. Some of those folks were really flawed. David committed an awful act of adultery only follow it up with murder. Solomon married enough foreign women to populate a small town and worshipped as many false gods as he had wives. Peter denied the savior he promised to protect. Paul was responsible for unbelievable persecution among early believers. Yet, each was used by God in unbelievable ways; so remarkable that we are still talking about them today. And not just us. Have you considered Hollywood today? The Biblical narrative has not faded from view.

Joseph's advice to Pharaoh was to select a discerning and wise leader to serve Egypt and enact a plan, based on God's revelation, that would save the nation. Whom did they choose? Joseph of course. How else would the young Hebrew ever be in a position for bails of wheat and heavenly stars to bow before him? Now, Joseph could put his educational arch into real use. Remember, he's managed a household and a prison. Now, he must manage a country. How? God uses people to accomplish his plans.

## **III. We can trust God's plan fully no matter the gravity of the situation. [Genesis 41:47-49, 53-54]**

And God does that when His plans seem silly. Sometimes we don't understand the significance of what God might really be up to. He also uses people when it seems like there could be a better way. Why use flawed people to finish His good works? Our folly illustrates His greater glory.

Read Genesis 41:47-49 and also verses 53 and 54.

The situation was far worse than morning traffic or a few out of stock items. It wasn't elevated gas prices or a failing science grade. It was famine. Famine was a recurring theme in scripture. The Hebrew word for famine, *ra'ab*, appears 101 times in the Old Testament in 17 different books.<sup>ii</sup>

Famines wiped out communities. Famines wiped out countries. Genesis 41:36 supposes that without stockpiling during the seven years of plenty, the country would have been wiped out by the following famine. There really could have been no more fatal situation for Pharaoh to face. And in the middle of it, God's plan and God's person could be trusted.

### **Conclusion:**

Take Joseph's ongoing saga as Lasik surgery to your mind. May it continue today to clear up your perspective and the way that you look at day-to-day life, especially when that life presents a problem.

Consider your greatest struggle. Perhaps it is physical. Perhaps it is emotional. Perhaps it's relational. Perhaps it's professional. Perhaps it's marital. Perhaps it's parental or even prenatal. Perhaps you can't even name it because you don't understand it. Perhaps it's even nonexistent and life right now is breezy. Get ready because for you, trouble is one day coming. When it does, we can all rest certain that God has a plan that can always be trusted.

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<sup>i</sup> Web Source: <http://www.ancientegypt.co.uk/pharaoh/home.html>

<sup>ii</sup> Web Source: <http://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/hebrew/nas/raab.html>