

Commentary

Session 12

Opportunity Knocks

God gives His followers opportunities to make a difference within His divine plan.

GENESIS 41:15-21,33-40

FIRST THOUGHTS

We know we should do God's will and that God's will is best for us; however, fear, timidity, and insecurity often keep us from seizing God-given opportunities. Whatever excuse we use, the real culprit is a lack of faith. We believe in our inability more than we trust His ability. By putting our faith in God, we can overcome our fears, honor Him, and make a difference in the lives of others.

(In PSG, p. 109) **Describe a time when you had a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and passed on it. What factors determined your response?**

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

GENESIS 40:1–41:57

Joseph had experienced a series of advancements and setbacks. As a teenager his father had granted him an elevated prestige within the family. Then his brothers sold him into slavery. He was transported far from home into the strange land of Egypt. One of Pharaoh's officials bought him. There he earned a leadership role within the official's household, only to be falsely imprisoned for a crime he did not commit. As a prisoner he acquired great responsibility. Still, being a jail guardian in Egypt was far less desirable than being the favorite son in Canaan. Nevertheless, God had not abandoned Joseph.

The jail in which Joseph was incarcerated also was where high-ranking royal officials were confined. One day Pharaoh arrested his chief cupbearer and his chief baker for an unidentified crime. While the two were in prison Joseph was assigned to be their personal attendant (40:1-4). Both men had dreams. When Joseph inquired about the men's distraught appearance the next morning, they divulged that no one was available to interpret their dreams (40:5-8a).

Joseph attributed interpretations to God and asked to hear each man's dream (40:8b). After listening to the cupbearer, Joseph predicted that in three days Pharaoh would restore him to his position (40:9-15). He then listened to the baker, but foretold that he would be executed in three days (40:16-19). Both predictions came true. Though the cupbearer promised to mention Joseph to Pharaoh, he quickly forgot about him (40:20-23).

Two years passed. Then one night Pharaoh had a disturbing dream. After the dream he awakened. When he went back to sleep he had another unnerving dream. None of the Egyptian magicians or sages could explain the meaning of his dreams (41:1-8). Only then did the restored cupbearer recall Joseph (41:9-13). Pharaoh summoned Joseph and shared his dreams with the Hebrew prisoner (41:14-24).

Joseph explained that God had revealed the future in the dreams (41:25-32). Egypt would soon experience seven years of unmatched productivity in its grain harvests. Then seven years of famine would ensue. Joseph also suggested a plan to handle this fourteen-year cycle of prosperity and famine (41:33-36). Pharaoh recognized

God's presence in Joseph and so appointed him second-in-command with orders to implement his plan (41:37-57). During this time Joseph married the daughter of an Egyptian priest. The couple had two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

A PROBLEM (GEN. 41:15-21)

VERSES 15-16

¹⁵ Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I have had a dream, and no one can interpret it. But I have heard it said about you that you can hear a dream and interpret it." ¹⁶ "I am not able to," Joseph answered Pharaoh. "It is God who will give Pharaoh a favorable answer."

Pharaoh must have realized that his dream related to something that threatened his kingdom's welfare and happiness. He first consulted "all the magicians of Egypt and all its wise men," but they could not interpret the meaning of his dreams (v. 8). The magicians were priests trained to read hieroglyphs and study magical spells. Among the texts they used were "dream books," which supposedly enabled them to interpret dreams. The wise men likely were academic scholars and royal counselors who, because of their skills, served as advisors to Pharaoh.

The chief cupbearer recalled Joseph's correct interpretation of his and the baker's dreams two years earlier (vv. 12-13). Therefore, he sought to alleviate Pharaoh's despair by referring the king to Joseph.

A Hebrew slave might have seen an audience with Pharaoh as an opportunity to gain his freedom. Instead, Joseph saw the summons as an opportunity to extol God. He immediately denied he possessed any special capability to interpret the two dreams. However, Joseph did not leave Pharaoh in a state of discontent. Instead, he categorically assured him that *God* would give him *a favorable answer*. The word *God* is emphatic in the text. God's answer to Pharaoh's inquiry would be complete and produce a sense of peace in the king's mind. Joseph recognized Pharaoh would soon receive a correct interpretation of his dreams, but desired God to receive the proper esteem rather than himself. So Joseph listened as Pharaoh shared his dreams.

VERSES 17-21

¹⁷ So Pharaoh said to Joseph: "In my dream I was standing on the bank of the Nile, ¹⁸ when seven well-fed, healthy-looking cows came up from the Nile and grazed among the reeds. ¹⁹ After them, seven other cows—weak, very sickly, and thin—came up. I've never seen such sickly ones as these in all the land of Egypt. ²⁰ Then the thin, sickly cows ate the first seven well-fed cows. ²¹ When they had devoured them, you could not tell that they had devoured them; their appearance was as bad as it had been before. Then I woke up.

The Nile flows 4,160 miles, making it the world's longest river. It originates in the highlands of East Africa and empties into the Mediterranean Sea. The annual monsoons in the African mountains wash fertile black soil into the tributaries of the Nile. These rains generate yearly flooding that leaves a layer of rich topsoil along the riverbanks in Egypt. These deposits made ancient Egypt one of the world's most bountiful agricultural regions. The productive land was a strip approximately six hundred miles long and ten to thirty miles wide. The Egyptians

were so dependent upon the annual inundation that they calculated the flood level must reach twenty-five to twenty-six inches above normal at the river's first cataract for the acceptable productivity of the land. Five to six inches lower would produce a 20 percent lower yield.

Cattle were a common domesticated livestock in ancient Egypt. Meat was not, however, a daily food in most Egyptian diets in ancient times. It commonly was reserved for sacrifices and festivals. Moreover, in Egyptian religion, cow goddesses were identified as sources of life and nourishment. One, Mehetweret, was associated with the yearly floodwaters. Here, the phrase *came up from the Nile* almost certainly connected the *seven well-fed, healthy-looking cows* with the annual rainfall on which Egyptian survival depended. At this point in his dream, the rosy appearance of the cows surely was reassuring.

However, the congenial dream quickly transformed into a horrifying nightmare. *Seven other cows* emerged out of the Nile. These animals contrasted glaringly with the first seven cows. Whereas the first seven were superior bovine specimens, the second seven were extremely diseased. They were worse than any livestock Pharaoh ever had seen.

Although the appearance of the second set of seven cows had been disturbing, their actions were even more shocking. Rather than grazing on the reeds growing along the riverbank, they *ate the first seven well-fed cows*. Cows are herbivores, not carnivores. Their cannibalistic behavior was unnatural.

Pharaoh's dreams are recorded twice in the biblical narrative. Genesis 41:1-7 describes the original dream sequence. Genesis 41:17-24 reports the story Pharaoh told Joseph. Only two variations occur in this second account. The first is the insertion of the descriptive analysis *I've never seen such sickly ones as these in all the land of Egypt* in verse 19. The second is the observation that *their appearance was as bad as it had been before*. Both stressed the evil nature of the seven sickly cows.

Pharaoh's nightmare came to an end when he abruptly *woke up*. He likely connected his dream to some yet unspecified aspect of the annual flooding. Consequently, lacking a worldview rooted in the one true God, Pharaoh unquestionably had reason to be disturbed.

Joseph depended on God for wisdom in stressful situations. Likewise, we can point to God as the source of wisdom when called on to address difficult situations.

How does God provide wisdom when you face difficult situations? Does He always provide in exactly the same way?

A PLAN (GEN. 41:33-36)

VERSES 33-34

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.

Pharaoh fell back asleep after his first dream had awakened him (vv. 5,21). However, his slumber brought no respite. A second dream interrupted his night's rejuvenation. This dream involved agriculture. Heads of grain replaced cows. Bread was the primary staple of the Egyptian diet. So once more, the survival of Egypt's population seemed threatened. Again, two sets of the number seven were conspicuous. Like in the first dream, the unhealthy consumed the robust (vv. 22-24).

Joseph realized that God was revealing the future to Pharaoh. The meaning of both dreams was identical. An abundant harvest would characterize the next seven years. Then seven years of bleak famine would follow the

seven plentiful years (vv. 26-27). The occurrence of two distinct dreams indicated the matter was final. There would not be any variation from the two dreams' prediction.

After interpreting the dreams that pointed to seven years of prosperity followed by seven years of famine, Joseph outlined a plan that would make it possible for Egypt to endure the years of famine. Joseph's plan demonstrated wisdom that only God could supply. First, Pharaoh must appoint a single individual with specific qualifications to govern Egypt during the coming fourteen years. Although the biblical text does not use the title, the narrative likely implies Joseph referred to the office of Vizier. It is unclear if that office was vacant, or if the current Vizier should be replaced, or his role needed modifications. The Vizier was second in authority only to Pharaoh himself. His authority encompassed all of Egypt and by law all administrative business was part of his dominion. Joseph's proposal possibly allowed for a second Vizier responsible only for the administration of the food supply. However, the first historical reference to dual Viziers was nearly four centuries later and the authority was divided geographically, not according to task.

The Vizier was chosen by Pharaoh. Joseph recommended that he be *a discerning and wise man*. The Hebrew word rendered *discerning* refers to the ability to perceive the best selection between more than one choice. Such discernment is a gift of God, but it must be developed by persistent diligence. True wisdom comes from God. A wise man is one who uses his knowledge appropriately. Hence, Joseph described a man who could distinguish the best options in the coming crisis and make decisions in best interest of Pharaoh and his subjects.

Joseph's plan consolidated all authority in one individual. However, he recognized one individual could not do everything necessary for the plan to succeed. Therefore, the second component of the plan involved an additional level of officials under the new Vizier who would implement the scheme over the entire nation. The term *overseers* is a derivative of a verb meaning "to exert supervision over a subordinate." The title itself designated a subordinate who exerted supervision over other subordinates. These overseers would supervise the implementation of the program and report its progress directly to the Vizier. The Vizier would select the men who held these intermediary offices, but they held office by pleasure of Pharaoh. Thus, they possessed Pharaoh's full authority to accomplish their assignments.

The *fifth of the harvest of the land of Egypt* was the tax rate placed upon every field in Egypt. At the time, Egypt employed the barter system since money was not yet in use. Accordingly, the collection of resources was common for taxation. More notably, collecting grain was indispensable to preparing food later. Notice that the high tax rate applied only for a fixed period, *the seven years of abundance*. Its function was the salvation of the very ones paying the tax and not to increase the finances of Pharaoh.

VERSES 35-36

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."

Three verbs in verse 35 summarize the responsibilities of the overseers. The first is *gather*. They were to collect the taxes. Here the "fifth of the harvest" (v. 34) is called *the excess food*. Joseph based his tax rate upon a harvest twenty percent greater than normal. The collection prevented both wasting the surplus and exploiting overabundance for extravagant profits. The second verb is *store*. They had to construct storage facilities at designated collection points. Likely they erected these warehouses in towns where the district government administration was located. The third verb is *preserve*. The grain was to be available for distribution to the population when famine struck. The designation of the grain as food here accentuates the function of storing twenty percent of the harvest.

The program was not voluntary. *Under Pharaoh's authority* indicates it was law. In Egyptian society, this implied far more than a civil code. Ancient Egyptians believed Pharaoh was an incarnate deity. Therefore, most Egyptians likely perceived the collection as both a government edict and a religious obligation.

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For seven years the nation would enjoy harvests that exceeded its sustenance necessities. Twenty percent of the harvest would be collected annually and preserved in cities located throughout Egypt. When famine struck in the eighth year, the stored grain would be sufficient to feed the Egyptians and also sell some grain to neighboring populations.

Joseph concluded his proposal with a summary statement: *Then the country will not be wiped out by the famine.* Since Pharaoh's two dreams were revelations from God, and God put Joseph in a position to interpret them and gave him wisdom to conceive a plan to feed people during the years of famine, this statement reflects God's purposes. God had placed Joseph in Egypt at that moment to save human lives (Gen. 45:5). Ultimately, God desired the Egyptians know that He alone was God (Ex. 7:5; 14:4). Believers can recognize times when God places them in a specific situation to represent His interests.

In what difficult situation do you find yourself now? How can you best represent God's interests in this situation?

A PLACE (GEN. 41:37-40)

VERSES 37-38

³⁷ The proposal pleased Pharaoh and all his servants, ³⁸ and he said to them, "Can we find anyone like this, a man who has God's spirit in him?"

Pharaoh recognized the wisdom of Joseph's plan. Pharaoh was head of state and possessed absolute authority. His servants included a vast number of government officials. The second-in-command under Pharaoh was the Vizier, Pharaoh's prime minister. Pharaoh delegated the administrative operation of government to him. Consequently, Pharaoh selected proven men to hold this powerful position. The Vizier sat in judgment in a special hall in which no other official could conduct business. His powers generally were rigidly defined by historical regulations. Neither the biblical text nor archaeological artifacts provide sufficient evidence to prove absolutely this was the titular office Joseph held. Nevertheless, the textual description of his duties best fit this role.

The text does not specify all who were with Pharaoh but unquestionably enough of the most prominent leaders were present to provide reliable advice. All agreed that Joseph's plan was good.

We don't know exactly what Pharaoh meant by *God's spirit*. Still, Pharaoh clearly grasped that the interpretation of his dreams set Joseph apart from other men. Joseph retained a special relationship with his God that endowed him with unique wisdom.

VERSES 39-40

³⁹ So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one as discerning and wise as you are. ⁴⁰ You will be over my house, and all my people will obey your commands. Only I, as king, will be greater than you."

Pharaoh repeated Joseph's description of the potential man to oversee Joseph's plan. *Discerning and wise* were the same terms Joseph used in verse 33. Pharaoh unambiguously acknowledged that the interpretation of the dreams and the farsighted plan were direct revelations from God. We cannot analyze Pharaoh's spiritual status. The ancient Egyptians were extremely polytheistic. Their pantheon of deities was so fluid and expanding that even determining the number of gods and goddesses is virtually impossible. As they encountered new religions, they easily incorporated its deities into their own collection. The term *God* designed Joseph's God, the one true God. So God was honored through Joseph as he moved into this new role.

Pharaoh assigned Joseph the task of overseeing the implementation of the proposed plan. This statement strongly suggests Pharaoh appointed him Vizier. Joseph's life had experienced many strange developments, some good and some bad. Each one equipped him for his assignment from God for the future. He had gone from the eleventh son of an obscure shepherd to one of the most powerful men on the planet. Believers can be confident God will equip them to accomplish His purposes in their lives.

What are some experiences that have shaped your life? How might God use them for His purposes?

KEY DOCTRINE

God the Father

God as Father reigns with providential care over His universe, His creatures, and the flow of the stream of human history according to the purposes of His grace.

BIBLE SKILL

Use history (either print or on the Internet) to learn more about the world in which Joseph lived.

Read articles about the Middle Kingdom and/or the Twelfth Dynasty in Egyptian history, doing an internet search or at a local library. Identify events and customs in the Genesis narrative about Joseph. How does this information help you understand Joseph's story? How can this knowledge assist in identifying opportunities God gives us today?

BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR

For additional context, read "QuickBites: Ancient Egypt: From Farm to Table" in the Winter 2018-19 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Available at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator.com.

Discipleship Guide

SESSION 12

OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS

Genesis 41:15-21,33-40

FOCUS ATTENTION

GUIDE: Write the title of today's session (*Opportunity Knocks*) on the board. As the group arrives, invite them to share examples of ways we might use that expression and what we mean when we say it. Direct attention to page 101, and lead the group to discuss the question: *Describe a time when you had a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and passed on it. What factors determined your response?* (p. 101). Invite the group to name some of the reasons why we might miss out on (or pass on) an opportunity that comes our way.

EXPLAIN: Remind the group that last week's session ended with Joseph being thrown in jail after Potiphar's wife falsely accused him. Explain that in today's study, we will see how God sends an opportunity to Joseph inside that jail cell.

TRANSITION: Call attention to **Pack Item 2** (*Outline of Genesis*) and **Pack Item 7** (*Handout: Genesis Time Line*) to help show how today's session fits into the study of Genesis. Direct attention to the major outline points. Summarize Understand the Context (p. 101), briefly reviewing what happened to Joseph in Genesis 39 (last week's session) and filling in any needed information from chapter 40. Say: *Notice how dreams are a part of Joseph's life once again here in jail. Let's examine how God's opportunity showed up in the form of a dream.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud Genesis 41:15-21, while the group listens for how Joseph gave God the credit in interpreting the dreams.

- (41:16) A Hebrew slave might have seen an audience with Pharaoh as an opportunity to gain his freedom. Instead, Joseph saw the summons as an opportunity to extol God. He immediately denied he possessed any special capability to interpret the two dreams. However, Joseph did not leave Pharaoh in a state of discontent. Instead, he categorically assured him that God would give him a favorable answer. The word *God* is emphatic in the text. God's answer to Pharaoh's inquiry would be complete and produce a sense of peace in the king's mind.

HIGHLIGHT: Point out that Joseph had been in prison (after the false accusation from Potiphar's wife) for more than two years when Pharaoh came to him asking for help. Note that Joseph's first response to Pharaoh's request for help in understanding the dreams was to point to God as the source of his wisdom. Call attention to **Pack Item 5** (*Poster: Dreams in Genesis*) to aid your discussion of dreams.

DISCUSS: *After being accused of rape and imprisoned, Joseph could have selfishly taken the credit, feeling as if he was due. What excuses do people give for not giving God the credit He deserves?* (p. 103)

EXPLAIN: Use the information in the paragraph that begins "Out of Joseph's experience . . ." (Day 1, p. 105) to discuss the four applications made about Joseph's encounter with Pharaoh (*First, the world's wisdom, as wise as it may be, doesn't have all the answers. Second, in times of adversity, we must keep on serving the Lord. Third, God rewards faithfulness. Fourth, we can point to God as the source of wisdom when called on to address difficult situations.*) Invite the group to underline the four applications as you identify the applications. Encourage them to return to this study on Day 1 following group time.

SHARE: Invite them to recall a time in their lives when they have experienced one (or more) of these four applications we see in Joseph’s story. Encourage them to jot down their experience in the margins. Call for volunteers to share their examples.

DISCUSS: *How can the way we look to God as the source of wisdom in difficult encounters or situations be a witness to those around us?*

TRANSITION: *Joseph pointed to God as the source of his wisdom. That same wisdom is available to us today. Now let’s see what became of Joseph’s opportunity to interpret Pharaoh’s dream.*

READ: Briefly summarize what happened in verses 22-32, as Joseph interpreted the dreams, pointing to seven years of prosperity followed by seven years of famine. Use **Pack Item 13** (*Handout: Famine*) to help explain famine and its role in the Bible. Then call for someone to read aloud Genesis 41:33-36, as the group listens for the details of Joseph’s plan.

- (41:33-34) Joseph’s plan demonstrated wisdom that only God could supply. First, Pharaoh must appoint a single individual with specific qualifications to govern Egypt during the coming fourteen years (also known as a vizier). Joseph recommended that he be a discerning and wise man. Joseph’s plan consolidated all authority in one individual. However, he recognized one individual could not do everything necessary for the plan to succeed. Therefore, the second component of the plan involved an additional level of officials under the new vizier who would implement the scheme over the entire nation.
- (41:35-36) For seven years the nation would enjoy harvests that exceeded its sustenance necessities. Twenty percent of the harvest would be collected annually and preserved in cities located throughout Egypt. When famine struck in the eighth year, the stored grain would be sufficient to feed the Egyptians and also allow them to sell some grain to neighboring populations.

GUIDE: Invite the group to name aloud the details of Joseph’s plan for surviving the famine. Stress that God supplied the wisdom for Joseph’s plan.

LIST: Ask: *When representing God’s interests, especially before unbelievers, what characteristics should we seek to display?* (p. 103) Instruct the group to jot down the words *Work, School, Community, and Social Life* in the margins. Encourage them to list what attitudes or actions they would want to display as Christ’s representatives in any of these places this coming week.

DISCUSS: Call for a volunteer to read aloud the paragraph that begins, “God sometimes places . . .” (Day 3, p. 106). Write these two headings on the board: *Opportunity* and *Distraction*. Ask: *How does a person discern the difference between an opportunity and a distraction? What is the difference between an opportunity and a distraction?* Record the group’s responses on the board, under the appropriate heading. Remind the group that we should not avoid the divine opportunities. Ask: *When we find ourselves in tough situations, how does it help to look for God at work in the circumstances?*

TRANSITION: *We see Joseph using the wisdom God provided to lay out a survival plan for the time of famine. We will see God’s hand on Joseph’s life in a bold way in these next verses we examine.*

READ: Call for a show of hands from anyone in the group who has ever been surprised by the ending of a book or movie. Note this part of Joseph’s story that we are examining today has a surprise ending. Direct a volunteer to read aloud Genesis 41:37-40, as the group listens to Pharaoh’s surprising response to Joseph’s proposal.

- (41:39-40) Pharaoh assigned Joseph the task of overseeing the implementation of the proposed plan. This statement strongly suggests Pharaoh appointed him vizier. Joseph’s life had experienced many strange developments, some good and some bad. Each one equipped him for his assignment from God for the future.

He had gone from the eleventh son of an obscure shepherd to one of the most powerful men on the planet. Believers can be confident God will equip them to accomplish His purposes in their lives.

SHARE: To help the group focus on ways God equips them, instruct them to discuss these questions with someone sitting next to them: *How can you see that God has used lessons you learned during challenging times in your life to prepare you for where you are today? How can you see God at work in those lessons you learned?*

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE

REVIEW: Lead the group to review and respond to the bulleted summary statements under Apply The Text (p. 104). Which evokes the most response from them?

RESPOND: Guide the group to discuss the second question set on page 104: *Discuss with the group ways of recognizing times when God places them in specific situations to represent His interests. List situations in which the group is representing or could represent God's interests. How can the group more readily represent God in these situations?*

PRAY: Close in prayer, praying that each person would gain more confidence in God.

AFTER THE SESSION

Follow up with any answers to questions the group had during today's study.

Teaching Plan

Session 12

OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS

God gives His followers opportunities to make a difference within His divine plan.

GENESIS 41:15-21,33-40

MEMORY VERSE: GENESIS 41:16

READ Genesis 40:1–41:57, First Thoughts, and Understand the Context. As you read Genesis 41:33-36, take note of Joseph’s plan and the way in which he presented it. How did he model godly humility in the presence of an influential leader? (PSG, p. 111)

STUDY Genesis 41:15-21,33-40, using Explore the Text. As you study, notice how Joseph responded to the opportunity God provided. Use the *Explore the Bible Commentary*, found in print and digital format at LifeWay.com, to aid your understanding of the passage.

PLAN the group time using the ideas under Lead Group Bible Study and More Ideas. Consider creative ways to use the Suggested Music Idea that are appropriate for your group. Consult *QuickSource* for additional questions that you can use in leading the discussion and a possible Object Lesson idea for this week’s study.

GROW with other group leaders at the Groups Ministry blog (LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry).

GATHER the following items: Personal Study Guides. Prepare to display the following Pack Items: **PACK ITEM 2** (*Outline of Genesis*); and **PACK ITEM 5** (*Poster: Dreams in Genesis*). Make copies of: **PACK ITEM 7** (*Handout: Genesis Time Line*); and **PACK ITEM 13** (*Handout: Famine*).

LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

GUIDE: Write the title of today’s session (Opportunity Knocks) on the board. As the group arrives, invite them to share examples of ways we might use that expression and what we mean when we say it. Direct attention to PSG page 109, and lead the group to discuss the question: *Describe a time when you had a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and passed on it. What factors determined your response?* (PSG, p. 109). Invite the group to name some of the reasons why we might miss out on (or pass on) an opportunity that comes our way.

EXPLAIN: Remind the group that last week’s session ended with Joseph being thrown in jail after Potiphar’s wife falsely accused him. Explain that in today’s study, we will see how God sends an opportunity to Joseph inside that jail cell.

TRANSITION: Call attention to **Pack Item 2** (*Outline of Genesis*) and **Pack Item 7** (*Handout: Genesis Time Line*) to help show how today's session fits into the study of Genesis. Direct attention to the major outline points. Summarize Understand the Context, briefly reviewing what happened to Joseph in Genesis 39 (last week's session) and filling in any needed information from chapter 40. Say: *Notice how dreams are a part of Joseph's life once again here in jail. Let's examine how God's opportunity showed up in the form of a dream.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud Genesis 41:15-21, while the group listens for how Joseph gave God the credit in interpreting the dreams.

HIGHLIGHT: Point out that Joseph had been in prison (after the false accusation from Potiphar's wife) for more than two years when Pharaoh came to him asking for help. Note that Joseph's first response to Pharaoh's request for help in understanding the dreams was to point to God as the source of his wisdom. Call attention to **Pack Item 5** (*Poster: Dreams in Genesis*) to aid your discussion of dreams.

DISCUSS: *After being accused of rape and imprisoned, Joseph could have selfishly taken the credit, feeling as if he was due. What excuses do people give for not giving God the credit He deserves?* (PSG, p. 112)

EXPLAIN: Use the information in the paragraph that begins "Out of Joseph's experience . . ." (PSG, p. 112) to discuss the four applications the PSG makes about Joseph's encounter with Pharaoh (*First, the world's wisdom, as wise as it may be, doesn't have all the answers. Second, in times of adversity, we must keep on serving the Lord. Third, God rewards faithfulness. Fourth, we can point to God as the source of wisdom when called on to address difficult situations.*) Invite the group to underline the four applications in their PSGs as you identify the applications.

SHARE: Invite them to recall a time in their lives when they have experienced one (or more) of these four applications we see in Joseph's story. Encourage them to jot down their experience in their PSG margin. Call for volunteers to share their examples.

DISCUSS: *How can the way we look to God as the source of wisdom in difficult encounters or situations be a witness to those around us?*

TRANSITION: *Joseph pointed to God as the source of his wisdom. That same wisdom is available to us today. Now let's see what became of Joseph's opportunity to interpret Pharaoh's dream.*

READ: Briefly summarize what happened in verses 22-32, as Joseph interpreted the dreams, pointing to seven years of prosperity followed by seven years of famine. Use **Pack Item 13** (*Handout: Famine*) to help explain famine and its role in the Bible. Then call for someone to read aloud Genesis 41:33-36, as the group listens for the details of Joseph's plan.

GUIDE: Invite the group to name aloud the details of Joseph's plan for surviving the famine. Stress that God supplied the wisdom for Joseph's plan.

LIST: Ask: *When representing God's interests, especially before unbelievers, what characteristics should we seek to display?* (PSG, p. 114) Instruct the group to jot down the words *Work, School, Community, and Social Life* in the margin of their PSGs. Encourage them to list what attitudes or actions they would want to display as Christ's representatives in any of these places this coming week.

DISCUSS: Call for a volunteer to read aloud the paragraph that begins, "God sometimes places . . ." (PSG, p. 114). Write these two headings on the board: *Opportunity* and *Distraction*. Ask: *How does a person discern the difference between an opportunity and a distraction? What is the difference between an opportunity and a*

distraction? Record the group's responses on the board, under the appropriate heading. Remind the group that we should not avoid the divine opportunities. Ask: *When we find ourselves in tough situations, how does it help to look for God at work in the circumstances?*

TRANSITION: *We see Joseph using the wisdom God provided to lay out a survival plan for the time of famine. We will see God's hand on Joseph's life in a bold way in these next verses we examine.*

READ: Call for a show of hands from anyone in the group who has ever been surprised by the ending of a book or movie. Note this part of Joseph's story that we are examining today has a surprise ending. Direct a volunteer to read aloud Genesis 41:37-40, as the group listens to Pharaoh's surprising response to Joseph's proposal.

DISCUSS: *How did your responses to the questions on PSG page 115 change from when you first read it this past week to hearing it read aloud today?*

SHARE: To help the group focus on ways God equips them, instruct them to discuss these questions with someone sitting next to them: *How can you see that God has used lessons you learned during challenging times in your life to prepare you for where you are today? How can you see God at work in those lessons you learned?*

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

REVIEW: Lead the group to review and respond to the bulleted summary statements under In My Context (PSG, p. 117). *Which evokes the most response from them?*

RESPOND: Guide the group to discuss the second question set on page 117 in the PSG: *Discuss with the group ways of recognizing times when God places them in specific situations to represent His interests. List situations in which the group is or could represent God's interests. How can the group more readily represent God in these situations?*

PRAY: Close in prayer, praying that each person would gain more confidence in God.

PRACTICE

Consider your own life. Are you looking for the opportunities God brings your way?

Send an email, encouraging your group to seek God as their source of wisdom.

Follow up with any answers to questions the group had during today's study.

MORE IDEAS

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

To supplement today's study, in advance of the group meeting time, complete the Bible Skill (PSG, p. 112). Share the information you gather about the world in which Joseph lived, as you lead the group in examining today's Scripture.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

To supplement Genesis 41:15-21, write on the board “When God Gets the Credit.” Discuss: *How does it change the atmosphere when God gets the credit for the good things that are happening at home? at church? How does it change us when we look for ways to give God the credit for the good things in our lives?*

To supplement Genesis 41:33-36, discuss the question at the end of Understand the Context: *As you read Genesis 41:33-36, take note of Joseph’s plan and the way in which he presented it. How did he model godly humility in the presence of an influential leader?* (PSG, p. 111)

To supplement Genesis 41:37-40, point out that God used the pagan ruler Pharaoh to accomplish His purposes in Joseph’s life. Call for a volunteer to read Proverbs 21:1. Lead the group to discuss how we as believers should respond when ungodly rulers have positions of authority over us. *What should we do? What should we not do?*

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

Encourage the group to make time this coming week to read and complete the third question set under In My Context (PSG, p. 117): *Examine your life for areas where you lack confidence in God’s ability. What steps can you take to increase your confidence in God?* Stress that God is enough for any need we might have.

SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA

To supplement today’s study of Genesis 41, lead the group to recite the words to “Have It All,” by Brian Johnson. Challenge the group to trust God more in His plan for their lives.