

Opportunity Knocks
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Genesis 41:1-40

Opening: Have you ever had a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and you passed on it? **What are some reasons people hesitate when opportunity knocks?**

Our Explore the Bible material sums up the problem:

“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.”ⁱ

- *“God loves you and offers a wonderful plan for your life!”ⁱⁱ* Those are the opening words of the little tract called the “Four Spiritual Laws” that Campus Crusade founder Bill Bright made famous.
- The fact is the twists and turns of real life can leave us asking, *“Does God really have a place for me in His plans and a purpose for my life?”*
- I’ve read Philippians 1:6 (ESV) ⁶ *...I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.*
- I know that Ephesians 2:10 (ESV) says ¹⁰ *...we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*
- Everyone who has been to a Christian bookstore has seen a hundred framed copies of Romans 8:28 (ESV) ²⁸ *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.*
- Right now I feel stuck in neutral wondering when or if I’ll move forward.
- Life’s delays and detours can make us feel forsaken and forgotten. But those delays and detours are really God’s “boot camp” to prepare us for the assignment He has in mind. How

we respond to Him during the pain will determine how prepared we are when God's opportunity knocks.

- There's no better example of this than Joseph's story in Genesis 41.

Big Idea: God can use our pain as preparation. By trusting His purpose and surrendering to His preparation we can be ready for our place in His plan.

- When we left Joseph in Genesis 39 he was being hauled off to prison falsely accused of trying to rape Mrs. Potiphar.
- In this minimum-security facility for "white collar" criminals from Pharaoh's court, once again Joseph quickly rose to a leadership role.
- Two of the inmates Joseph "attended" were Pharaoh's cupbearer and chief baker. We don't know why they were in jail.
- Both men had bizarre dreams and God used Joseph to interpret them.
- It was bad news for the baker but great news for the cupbearer who left jail promising not to forget Joseph. But, of course, he did. That is until two years later when Pharaoh had a couple of nightmares of his own.
- None of Pharaoh's magicians or sages could interpret the dream.
- Then Mr. Cupbearer had a "light bulb" moment and remembered Joseph, God's interpreter back in cell block two.

Genesis 41:14–16 (ESV)

¹⁴ Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they quickly brought him out of the pit. And when he had shaved himself and changed his clothes, he came in before Pharaoh. ¹⁵ And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I have had a dream, and there is no one who can interpret it. I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it."

¹⁶ Joseph answered Pharaoh, "It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer."

- Verse sixteen. **Why was Joseph's answer surprising given his situation? How might Joseph the prisoner have**

leveraged this opportunity? Why is Joseph's response a lesson for us?

- Isn't it interesting how thirteen years (age 17 to 30) have changed Joseph from coddled and cocky to humble and God-honoring?
- Ronald Reagan had a sign on his desk in the Oval Office that read, *"There is no limit to what a man can do or where he can go if he doesn't mind who gets the credit."*ⁱⁱⁱ Let's change that up a bit for followers of Christ.
- Lesson #1 in being prepared for God's plan: There is no limit to what God can do through us if we always give Him the credit.
- Having set Pharaoh straight that it was God and not him who would interpret the dreams, Joseph listened to the specifics.
- You've probably seen the musical. Seven big fat beautiful cows come up out of the river Nile, only to be eaten by seven scrawny cows. Weird!
- Cows are herbivores not carnivores much less cannibals!
- Dream number two: Seven healthy ears of grain grow tall only to be swallowed up by seven withered, blighted ears of grain. Strange!
- Pharaoh didn't understand the meaning but he knew it wasn't good news.

Genesis 41:25–32 (ESV)

²⁵ Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, "The dreams of Pharaoh are one; God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do. ²⁶ The seven

good cows are seven years, and the seven good ears are seven years; the dreams are one. ²⁷ The seven lean and ugly cows that came up after them are seven years, and the seven empty ears blighted by the east wind are also seven years of famine. ²⁸ It is as I told Pharaoh; God has shown to Pharaoh what he is about to do.

²⁹ There will come seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt, ³⁰ but after them there will arise seven years of famine, and all the plenty will be forgotten in the land of Egypt. The famine will consume the land, ³¹ and the plenty will be unknown in the land by reason of the famine that will follow, for it will be very severe. ³² And the doubling of Pharaoh's dream means that the thing is fixed by God, and God will shortly bring it about.

- God gave Joseph the specific interpretation then a specific plan.

Genesis 41:33–40 (ESV)

³³ Now therefore let Pharaoh select a discerning and wise man, and set him over the land of Egypt. ³⁴ Let Pharaoh proceed to appoint overseers over the land and take one-fifth of the produce of the land of Egypt during the seven plentiful years. ³⁵ And let them gather all the food of these good years that are coming and store up grain under the authority of Pharaoh for food in the cities, and let them keep it. ³⁶ That food shall be a reserve for the land against the seven years of famine that are to occur in the land of Egypt, so that the land may not perish through the famine.”

- The plan was brilliant because it came straight from God. By gathering, storing, and later distributing the grain, Egypt would survive the famine.
- It's always easier to see God's plan in the rearview mirror!
- Why would God let Joseph's brothers sell him to slave traders who would take him to Egypt? Why would God let him be thrown in jail for something he didn't do? Why the same jail and same time as Pharaoh's cupbearer?
- Lesson #2 – God put Joseph in the right place at the right time so God could show Himself strong and save the people. As Joseph would later say to his brothers, “...*you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good...that many people should be kept alive...*” Genesis 50:20 (ESV)
- When God uses His people to aid those who are hurting and starving, it's not just charity for the good of the people, ultimately it's for His glory!
- God can use our pain as preparation. By trusting His purpose and surrendering to His preparation we can be ready for our place in His plan.
- Joseph was ready for his place in God's plan!

³⁷ This proposal pleased Pharaoh and all his servants. ³⁸ And Pharaoh said to his servants, “Can we find a man like this, in whom is the Spirit of God?” ³⁹ Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Since God has shown you all this, there is none so discerning and wise as you are.

⁴⁰ You shall be over my house, and all my people shall order themselves as you command. Only as regards the throne will I be greater than you.”

- What a plot twist! Thirteen years of pain had been preparation for promotion. From the prison to the palace - opportunity knocked.
- Verse 39: **Pharaoh was a pagan who believed in a multitude of gods, but what does verse 39 say he recognized about Joseph’s qualifications to be the second most powerful man in Egypt?**
- **Why wasn’t Joseph intimidated by this big job? What about us?**
- Lesson #3 – God will empower us with everything we need to carry out the purpose He has created for us, if we COOPERATE with His plan.
- People often disrupt God’s plan for them in two ways.
- How many times do people try to push and shove their way into a job they’re not qualified for because it’s THEIR plan and not God’s?
- How many people miss the blessing of being used by God by refusing to answer the door when opportunity knocks because they feel unqualified.
- It’s not about making yourself qualified for your plan; it’s about letting God prepare us for His plan custom created for YOU.
- The writer of Hebrews closed the book praying that God would “...equip you with all you need for doing his will.”^{iv}
- Notice that Joseph wasn’t lobbying for the Prime Minister’s job. Joseph didn’t have a sign outside his cell that read, “Dreams Interpreted Here.”
- He was just doing his best where he found himself – in prison.
- If most of us were in Joseph’s situation we would have thrown in the towel and just laid on our prison bunk sulking and reading comic books.
- During what seems like a delay we need to “bloom where we’re planted” and do our best in the situation where God has placed us.

- 1 Peter 5:6 (ESV) says, ⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you,
- Joseph spent years not knowing how or when God would deliver him, now his time had come.
- **Have you experienced a time when you don't see God's opportunity coming and out of nowhere He reveals it? Any stories?** [Examples: Our move to Atlanta; My becoming the teacher of this class.]

So, What's the Takeaway?

- We said: Life's delays and detours can make us feel forsaken and forgotten. But those delays and detours are really God's "boot camp" to prepare us for the assignment He has in mind.
- How we respond to Him during the pain will determine how prepared we are when God's opportunity knocks.
- Joseph clearly trusted God in the midst of a frustrating delay.
- Joseph learned the truth that there is no limit to what God can do through us if we always give Him the credit.
- Joseph recognized that God sovereignly places us in the right place at the right time so we can say YES to the role He has assigned to us.
- Joseph didn't run when God knocked, because he had learned God will empower us with everything we need to carry out the purpose He has created for us, if we will just COOPERATE with His plan.
- Finally, Joseph understood when God uses His people to come to the aid of those who are hurting and starving, it's not just charity for the good of the people, ultimately, it is for His glory!
- What is God calling you to do? Are you trying to pry the door of opportunity open ahead of His timing, running from His calling, or are you simply "blooming where you are planted" and trusting him to prepare you for when He knocks?

ⁱ Explore the Bible Leader's Guide – Lifeway 2018

ⁱⁱ <https://www.gotquestions.org/four-spiritual-laws.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/research/speeches/022988a>

^{iv} Tyndale House Publishers. (2013). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Heb 13:21). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.