

SMART Planning and God's Providence

Hey, thanks for joining us. I'm Allen Snapp, pastor of Grace Community Church and we're glad to have you with us this morning. If you want to find out more about GCC, you can go to our website at gracecornering.org. We can't wait to begin meeting again and hope it's soon.

Last week we looked at the God-centered side of Joseph; this week we're going to look at the practical side of Joseph. Joseph is a man who trusts God and who plans. And I believe both things, trusting and planning, play an essential role in Joseph's upward trajectory, and in our lives as well. Let's begin reading in chap. 41:1

41 When two full years had passed, Pharaoh had a dream: He was standing by the Nile, ² when out of the river there came up seven cows, sleek and fat, and they grazed among the reeds. ³ After them, seven other cows, ugly and gaunt, came up out of the Nile and stood beside those on the riverbank. ⁴ And the cows that were ugly and gaunt ate up the seven sleek, fat cows. Then Pharaoh woke up.

⁵ He fell asleep again and had a second dream: Seven heads of grain, healthy and good, were growing on a single stalk. ⁶ After them, seven other heads of grain sprouted—thin and scorched by the east wind. ⁷ The thin heads of grain swallowed up the seven healthy, full heads. Then Pharaoh woke up; it had been a dream.

⁸ In the morning his mind was troubled, so he sent for all the magicians and wise men of Egypt. Pharaoh told them his dreams, but no one could interpret them for him.

The cupbearer tells Pharaoh about this guy in prison named Joseph who could interpret dreams and Pharaoh sends for Joseph and tells him about his two dreams. Let's pick up in verse 25

²⁵ Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, "The dreams of Pharaoh are one and the same. God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do. ²⁶ The seven good cows are seven years, and the seven good heads of grain are seven years; it is one and the same dream. ²⁷ The seven lean, ugly cows that came up afterward are seven years, and so are the seven worthless heads of grain scorched by the east wind: They are seven years of famine.

The reason the dream was given to Pharaoh in two forms is that the matter has been firmly decided by God, and God will do it soon. Gen. 41:25-27,32

Joseph tells the Pharaoh God has revealed to you what he is about to do. There will be seven years of abundance in Egypt, followed by seven years of famine. God is about to do this and there's nothing you can do can change His mind, He gave you two dreams to underline He has firmly decided to do this.

Many of us remember the Indian Ocean tsunami that hit in the Indian Ocean on Dec. 26, 2004, killing almost a quarter of a million people.

On one beach in Thailand, hundreds of tourists watched in amazement as the tide suddenly rushed out, the water began to bubble, and boats on the horizon started to bob violently up and down. They stood there fascinated, all except one person, a ten year old named Tilly Smith from Surrey, England who had recently studied tsunamis and recognized the signs. She told her mom who spread the word. They were able to evacuate the beach moments before the tsunami struck. No one on that beach was killed because of Tilly's quick thinking.

Tilly couldn't have stopped the tsunami from hitting the beach, but she was able to mercifully change the effect of the tsunami on the lives of those tourists by preparing them before it hit.

Joseph says Pharaoh there's a tsunami of God's sovereignty coming and there's nothing you can do to change it. But there *is* something you can do to change the effects of it. *I've got a plan.* Verse 33:

³³ "And now let Pharaoh look for a discerning and wise man and put him in charge of the land of Egypt. ³⁴ Let Pharaoh appoint commissioners over the land to take a fifth of the harvest of Egypt during the seven years of abundance. ³⁵ They should collect all the food of these good years that are coming and store up the grain under the authority of Pharaoh, to be kept in the cities for food. ³⁶ This food should be held in reserve for the country, to be used during the seven years of famine that will come upon Egypt, so that the country may not be ruined by the famine."

Joseph says God's about to do this thing, Pharaoh, my suggestion is that you plan ahead. I love this chapter cause it balances God's sovereignty with our responsibility. Joseph knows his life and destiny is guided by the Providence of God, but that doesn't paralyze him from making plans.

Never think that it's somehow unspiritual to plan, or that it's spiritual not to plan, like not planning is a way of trusting God. Follow Joseph's example: trust God and plan.

Planning is one way we reflect the image of God. God is a planner. We see that here in this chapter. God has it penciled on His calendar: seven years of abundance, and seven years of famine.

God planned our salvation through Jesus before He created the world. Rev 13 says the Lamb of God, Jesus, was slain before the foundation of the world.

God has plans for our lives. Good plans.

For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Jer. 29:11

Planning is one way we reflect the image of our Creator cause God's a planner. Let's consider three components of Joseph's plan.

1. Joseph's plan aimed for the best possible goal

This isn't rocket science: there would be seven years of too much and then seven years of too little. Joseph said, let's leverage the good years to make the bad years as good as possible. The foundation of Joseph's plan is for Egypt's leaders to use their authority for the good of the masses, not the exploitation of the masses. Joseph's plan aimed for the best possible goal.

As a pastor, I have counseled a fair amount of people over the years. My first priority is to base my counsel on biblical truth and principles as much as possible. Call me a pragmatist, but my next priority is often (maybe not always, but usually) to help them aim for the best possible goal in their given situation.

Now it's important we define the best possible goal in light of biblical values, not worldly values. So hypothetically if a husband and father came to me and said they had an opportunity to double their salary but they'd have little time left to spend with their families, we'd want to define the best possible goal by biblical values. Making bank isn't going to be the most important thing in this scenario.

But the Bible doesn't paralyze us by saying "don't make any plans unless you're 100% you've gotten

them from God.” No, it says, make your plans and commit them to the Lord and He’ll establish them (Prov. 16:3).

I heard a Christian leader who’s been used by God to bear much gospel fruit say that when he makes decisions, he doesn’t need to be 100% convinced it’s of the Lord. He just needs to be 51% convinced it’s what the Lord is leading him to do. More convinced it is the Lord than not. That might surprise you. It surprised me. But I think he’s onto something. If we wait for 100% certainty we’re probably gonna be paralyzed from making decisions. And not making a decision is a decision.

Over the years I’ve had a number of entrepreneurial types come to me with start up business plans in order to get my input. I’m not sure why they come to me, since I’ve never been a businessman. So it’s possible coming to me might be their first mistake. But my calculus isn’t super complicated:

- are their skills and talents and passions a good fit for the business start up they’re considering?
- Can a viable living be made (is there a market for it)?
- Are the risks manageable, are the rewards worth the risk, do you have some sort of fallback plan if things don’t work out?
- Are they sensing the Lord leading them? (I encourage them to bath it in prayer – but I think the 51% principle applies).

For what it’s worth, if those things line up fairly well, I’m probably going to encourage them to step out. I guess what I’m saying is plans don’t have to have some kind of spiritual halo around them before we can think they’re of the Lord. They can just be good plans that aim for a good goal.

Whether it’s a start up, navigating COVID-19, growing spiritually, building healthier relationships, exercising, organizing your life, sharing your faith, aim your plans for the best possible goal, commit your plans to the Lord and go for it!

2. Joseph’s plan was SMART

In his book *The Hand of God*, Alistair Begg uses the acrostic SMART to describe Joseph’s plan. I’m not going to spend a lot of time on this, but as you plan, consider whether it includes these components:

S – specific. Joseph outlined specific details to Pharaoh of what was going to happen, what they needed to do, and who needed to do what.

M – measurable. Joseph didn’t say, let’s put aside *something* for the future or *a lot* for the future. He identified a measurable amount: 20% of their abundance. They could measure if they were hitting the mark or not.

A – action-oriented. Everyone, including the Pharaoh, had a job to do.

R – realistic. Joseph’s plan was doable, it was realistic.

T – time frame. In this case, it was a seven-year plan of collecting, followed by a seven year plan of wisely dispensing and rationing.

I have found that plans often start out a bit vague as God puts an idea or a vision in our heart, but for that to become a reality, we need to take the time to draw edges around it. Getting specific, setting measurable goals, taking action-steps, etc.

3. Joseph’s plan aligned with God’s plan

37 The plan seemed good to Pharaoh and to all his officials. 38 So Pharaoh asked them, "Can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the spirit of God?"

39 Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. 40 You shall be in charge of my palace, and all my people are to submit to your orders. Only with respect to the throne will I be greater than you."

Did you know that there really is something called 3D chess? To me it sounds way too complicated to be fun. A rook moves through the six faces of a cube. A bishop moves through the 12 edges of a cube. A knight can control 24 different cells from the center of the board. Gives me a headache!

God's plans are 3D chess, and our plans are an amateur level of 1D chess at best. God's plan was accomplishing several levels at once. God set things up so that not only Egypt would be prepared for the famine, but Joseph would be promoted to second in command – not a part of Joseph's plan, but always a part of God's 3D plan. But Joseph didn't plan apart from God, he didn't plan against God, his plans aligned with God's plans.

Hudson Taylor noted that there are three ways to plan: We can make our best plans and try to carry them out in our own strength. We can make careful plans and ask God to bless them. Or, he writes,

"Yet another way of working is to begin with God; to ask His plans, and to offer ourselves to Him to carry out His purposes." – Hudson Taylor

Is there some situation, some relationship, some dream, some trial, that's pressing on your heart and life right now? Get alone with God, bow your knee, ask Him to give you grace to trust His Providence, and wisdom to plan. Plans that aim for the best possible goal, plans that are SMART, and most important, plans that are aligned with His beautiful will.

But knowing if our plans are aligned with God's plans aren't always easy to know. What if we get it wrong? What if we miss God's plan?

Remember the Christian leader that said if he's 51% convinced he moves out? He was asked in the interview, what if you get it wrong? He admitted he had missed it more than once. He looks at it this way: God knows He can trust him to step out in faith when he's convinced God is leading him. Even if he's wrong, God can work with a heart posture that's ready to trust Him and step out.

Let me remind you that the greatest tsunami of God's sovereignty has already hit this tired old world. God so loved the world He gave His Son. And as Jesus hung on the cross, he absorbed a tsunami of God's judgement for our sins. And on the cross Jesus unleashed a tsunami of God's love, mercy, and grace on the world.

For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. John 1:16

God isn't sitting up there waiting to pounce on you the minute you make a mistake. He sending a tsunami of love and grace - grace upon grace. Wave after wave after wave of grace.

So we are free to plan and risk and fail and succeed all the while confident that our lives are safe in the strong love and sovereign hand of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.