

# When God's Plan Doesn't Make Sense...

## Genesis 41:41-49 (Pentecost 11)

People have made plans on how to reopen or to operate their churches, businesses, events, and schools safely during this pandemic. They spend hours putting together what they think to be the best plan for their situation in an effort to do things as safely as possible. Those plans often include some of the same features - social distancing, limiting capacity, closing certain things off, frequent cleaning, and perhaps even asking people to wear masks to some degree. I would say a lot of what I see in regards to operating plans makes sense. Yet sometimes a part of a plan or maybe even the whole plan just doesn't seem to make sense at all. Sometimes from our perspective it either seems a little excessive or just doesn't do enough. Now I'm not trying to spark a discussion about the best preventative measures, nor do I want to discuss the effectiveness of masks. Those kinds of discussions could divide us. I mention it to make this point: We often find ourselves critiquing the plans people make based on our own observations, the subjectiveness of our emotions, and the opinions we have based on the "facts" we think we know. Eventually we might just come out and say it. "That doesn't make any sense!"

God has promised us that he continues to care for and provide for the people of his world. As Christians we trust that he will provide for our daily needs - food, clothing, and shelter. Yet when we look at what is happening all around us with a struggling economy and unemployment that has been on the rise, and perhaps even looking at our own life, we struggle to see how God is keeping that promise. We wonder what kind of plan God has in mind, because quite frankly the one we see doesn't make any sense. As a result instead of trusting him, we question him and doubt his promise to provide. So when we think God's plan doesn't make any sense based on what we see, how we feel, and our own opinions, what do we do? Perhaps to answer that we take a look at the plan God had for Joseph, a plan which we might say makes no sense. By looking at Joseph, we begin to see how God continues to care for and provide for us.

Joseph was sold as a slave by his brothers because they hated him. He ended up in Egypt. God was still with him and blessed all that he did there, but this didn't make sense. How could all of this be good. Joseph could have despaired of God's care and love. Yet, in faith, Joseph trusted in God to provide for his needs and for his future. Year after year went by and God did just that raising Joseph from the depths of prison to dizzying heights of power. After many years of waiting, God's plan to care for and provide not just for Joseph but for thousands of people became clear.

Today, we see him given that position of great power and authority. Let me set a little more of the scene for you. With God's help, Joseph had just interpreted the dreams of Pharaoh. In one of those dreams Pharaoh saw seven fat cows being eaten up by seven thin, ugly cows. In the other dream Pharaoh saw seven good heads of grain swallowed up by seven withered heads of grain. Joseph said concerning those dreams, **"Look, seven years of great abundance are coming throughout the whole land of Egypt. Seven years of famine will come up after them, and all the abundance in the land of Egypt will be forgotten. The famine will consume the land, and the abundance will not be remembered because of the famine that follows, for it will be very severe."** (Genesis 41:29-31)

Joseph didn't interpret just the dreams, he offered a plan to save and provide for people during those seven years of famine. **"Let Pharaoh, therefore, look for a man who is wise and discerning, and set him over the land of Egypt...Let them collect all this food from these good years that are coming. Accumulate grain under the authority of Pharaoh to provide food for the cities, and let them store it. The food will be a reserve for the land against the seven years of famine that will take place in the land of Egypt so that the land does**

**not perish because of the famine.” (41:33,35-36)** Pharaoh was pleased with that plan and thought Joseph was the perfect person to carry it out. So Joseph became a ruler over all of Egypt second only to Pharaoh himself.

Joseph was clothed like a ruler and received the things a ruler would have including the fanfare. Joseph started to put his plan into action, spending the next seven years storing up the surplus of grain, but this was all God’s plan for Joseph, a plan to provide and care for people. Through the good planning and work of Joseph, who oversaw the storing up a portion of the grain surplus in those years of abundance, God was providing through that work.

Yet even this part of the plan required Joseph to trust God was going to keep providing the abundance of grain each year just as he promised. Without God blessing the crop of the fields as well as the labors of Joseph, this plan would not work. God’s promise would not have been kept. But we see God blessing everything. Through Joseph, God was providing in tremendous ways. Listen to how the Scriptures recount for us the events of those seven years of plenty. **“During the seven years of abundance the earth produced plentiful harvests. He (Joseph) collected all the food during the seven good years in the land of Egypt, and he stored up the food in the cities. In every city he stored the food from the fields that were around the city. Joseph stored up a huge amount of grain, like the sand of the sea. Finally he stopped keeping track, because it was too much to measure.” (41:47-49)**

God’s plan to provide for the needs of Joseph and so many more didn’t seem make much sense, but Joseph kept trusting that God had a plan to keep providing and caring for him as well as many, many more despite the famine. God did it in a wondrous way by causing the crops to grow in abundance, but also by working through Joseph.

Often that is the way that God continues to provide for us. It would seem to make more sense from our perspective if God just provided the way Jesus fed the five thousand. It would seem to make more sense to give us a surplus of what we need for a prolonged period as he did with Joseph, but God doesn’t always have that in mind. Sometimes we look at our own lives and we wonder, “If not that way, then what is your plan to provide, Lord? I’m struggling to make sense out of your plan.” Yet God does care for and provide for our needs in some way, not necessarily in supernatural ways like Jesus feeding the five thousand, but in what we call natural ways.

It is God who gives us the abilities to work the various jobs we have or have had in our life. In fact even the jobs that we do have are from God giving us the opportunity to use those abilities so that through our own labors, God provides. Yet we cannot forget that even though it is you and I doing the work, it is still God providing for us through us. Moses said to the people of Israel five hundred years later after Joseph, **“You might say in your heart, ‘My ability and the power of my hand have earned this wealth for me.’ But then you are to remember that the Lord your God is the one who gives you the ability to produce wealth, to confirm his covenant that he promised to your fathers with an oath, as he does to this day.” (Deuteronomy 8:17-18)**

Along with God providing for us through the abilities he has given to us and opportunities we have to work for our needs, he also gives us the ability to make wise use of all he has given us. Joseph had a wise plan for the surplus of grain each of those seven years. God gave Joseph that ability to plan and use wisely what he was providing. So God gives us the same wisdom to look at what he has given us and, in our thankfulness, use it wisely, always looking to be good stewards of all that is in our possession. God’s plan to provide for us often includes working through us in some way. But let’s pull back a little bit and see the bigger picture that God also provides for us and blesses us through the work of others too.

In Egypt God didn't just provide for Joseph by placing in his ruling position and causing the surplus of grain to grow. God's plan to provide as much as it may not have made sense at the beginning was much bigger than just Joseph. His plan included providing for all the people of Egypt, a people who didn't trust him. It was also the way God provided for the people in the surrounding areas including Joseph's family back in the land of Canaan.

Sometimes God uses others in his plan to provide for our needs. He uses people in various fields of labor so that we have what we need. There are many examples of this, but let me throw one out there. Think about the way food gets from the seed to our table. Companies provide seed to the farmer. The farmer plants the seed and harvests the crop. The crop is delivered to places where it is processed or sent to distributors for the stores. Grocery store workers put it on shelves for us to put in our shopping carts to take home. Various means of transportation give us the ability to go to those stores and buy that food. Inventions like refrigerators and freezers preserve food until we are ready to eat it.

Yet in order for any of that to happen, God has to be the one blessing those labors. He is the one who ultimately gets the glory. Joseph's plan was a great idea on paper, but in order for it to work God had to send the rain and cause the crops to grow that bumper crop not just for one year but for seven years! That's exactly what he did. In the same way, God is still the one blessing the abilities, the knowledge, and the wisdom of people so that his plan of providing is carried out through them.

God's plan may not always make sense based on what we see, what we feel, or our own opinions. Yet it makes perfect sense to God. That was the case with Joseph and yet God's plan to care for and provide began to become clearer when Joseph rose from prison to ruler in Egypt all to provide not just for Joseph but for thousands of people. A couple of times in the years that followed we see Joseph putting God's plan into perspective in speaking with the same brothers who sold him into slavery years earlier. **"Now do not be upset or angry with yourselves for selling me to this place, since God sent me ahead of you to preserve life." (45:5)** And then years later after their father, Jacob, died, Joseph said, **"You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring this to pass and to keep many people alive, as it is this day."** (50:20) Perhaps this week in your personal reading you could take a look at all of Joseph's life and see how God turned something horrible into a blessing not only to provide for people but also preserve the line of his promised Savior.

When we look back at our lives, we might see God's plan a little more clearly too. We see how indeed God blessed and preserved and provided for us. Whether you see it or not right now, God still has a plan to keep his promise to care for and provide for you. So when God's plan doesn't seem to make any sense what do we do? Answer: We keep trusting him and in faith confess that trust. Like the psalm writer we say, **"The eyes of all look eagerly to you, and you give them their food at the proper time."** (Psalm 145:15) My friends, give thanks unto the Lord for his good, for his mercy endures forever. Amen

