

# ***“Joseph: Dealing With Temptation”***

## **GENESIS 39**

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As most of you know, last week we started a series of lessons on Joseph from the Old Testament book of Genesis, and last week we learned that Joseph grew up in what we might describe as a “messed up” family. And we learned that the trouble started early on, going all the way back to Joseph’s great-grandfather Abraham. The trouble continued with his grandfather Isaac and with his father Jacob (or Israel). The family had a history of favoritism, and violence, and sexual sin, and sometimes those three issues were all combined together in various situations. We learned from Genesis 37 that Joseph himself grew up in what might be described as the classic case of a dysfunctional family. The family was definitely not functioning as God had intended it. His spineless father was basically married to four women, the women were in a competition to see which one could have more children, several of Joseph’s older brothers had murdered an entire village, and one brother had slept with his stepmother. And through it all, the father did nothing but show preference to Joseph, which of course got Joseph into all kinds of trouble with the other brothers. To show his preference, dad gave Joseph a coat of many colors (similar to the kind of coat that a slave owner might have worn), and then he put Joseph in charge of tattling on the others. That didn’t go over very well, and so on one occasion, the brothers were about to murder Joseph, but at the last minute they decided to sell him into slavery instead, and they deceive their father into thinking that he had been killed by a wild animal. You might remember: They took that coat, ripped it up a little bit, and soaked it in the blood of a goat. What a bunch of loving brothers! In addition to this, Joseph himself was not perfect, but through it all, Joseph continued doing what he needed to do. He never blamed anything on his horrible family background. He never used his upbringing as an excuse.

All of this brings us to the next stage of Joseph’s life as it is recorded for us in Genesis 39 (p. 65), as Joseph deals with a very powerful temptation. By the way, we are skipping Genesis 38, but Genesis 38 is not really about Joseph. Genesis 38 is about one of Joseph’s older brothers who goes to see a prostitute, but the prostitute was really his own daughter-in-law. So you see, the family situation keeps on getting better, doesn’t it! So, we are skipping all of the gruesome details in Chapter 38 and getting back to Joseph in Chapter 39. If you will, then, let us please look together at what happens next as Joseph arrives in Egypt as a slave – Genesis 39,

***<sup>1</sup> Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt; and Potiphar, an Egyptian officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the bodyguard, bought him from the Ishmaelites, who had taken him down***

there.<sup>2</sup> *The Lord was with Joseph, so he became a successful man. And he was in the house of his master, the Egyptian.*<sup>3</sup> *Now his master saw that the Lord was with him and how the Lord caused all that he did to prosper in his hand.*<sup>4</sup> *So Joseph found favor in his sight and became his personal servant; and he made him overseer over his house, and all that he owned he put in his charge.*<sup>5</sup> *It came about that from the time he made him overseer in his house and over all that he owned, the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house on account of Joseph; thus the Lord's blessing was upon all that he owned, in the house and in the field.*<sup>6</sup> *So he left everything he owned in Joseph's charge; and with him there he did not concern himself with anything except the food which he ate. Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance.*

<sup>7</sup> *It came about after these events that his master's wife looked with desire at Joseph, and she said, "Lie with me."*<sup>8</sup> *But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Behold, with me here, my master does not concern himself with anything in the house, and he has put all that he owns in my charge.*<sup>9</sup> *There is no one greater in this house than I, and he has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do this great evil and sin against God?"*

<sup>10</sup> *As she spoke to Joseph day after day, he did not listen to her to lie beside her or be with her.*<sup>11</sup> *Now it happened one day that he went into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the household was there inside.*<sup>12</sup> *She caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me!" And he left his garment in her hand and fled, and went outside.*<sup>13</sup> *When she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and had fled outside,*<sup>14</sup> *she called to the men of her household and said to them, "See, he has brought in a Hebrew to us to make sport of us; he came in to me to lie with me, and I screamed.*<sup>15</sup> *When he heard that I raised my voice and screamed, he left his garment beside me and fled and went outside."*<sup>16</sup> *So she left his garment beside her until his master came home.*<sup>17</sup> *Then she spoke to him with these words, "The Hebrew slave, whom you brought to us, came in to me to make sport of me;"<sup>18</sup> and as I raised my voice and screamed, he left his garment beside me and fled outside."*

<sup>19</sup> *Now when his master heard the words of his wife, which she spoke to him, saying, "This is what your slave did to me," his anger burned.*<sup>20</sup> *So Joseph's master took him and put him into the jail, the place where the king's prisoners were confined; and he was there in the jail.*<sup>21</sup> *But the Lord was with Joseph and extended kindness to him, and gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer.*<sup>22</sup> *The chief jailer committed to Joseph's charge all the prisoners who were in the jail; so that whatever was done there, he was responsible for it.*<sup>23</sup> *The chief jailer did not supervise anything under Joseph's charge because the Lord was with him; and whatever he did, the Lord made to prosper.*

As we study this account of Joseph successfully facing temptation, I would like for us to notice four very basic lessons concerning temptation in our lives today. Even though the events of this chapter took place nearly 4,000 years ago, I think that we will be pleasantly surprised at some of what we can learn from Joseph as a very young man. He was sold into slavery in Egypt at the age of 17, and he finally stood before Pharaoh at the age of 30; so, the scene we are studying this morning most likely took place when Joseph was in his mid-20's.

- I. **As we think about this passage, I would like for us to notice, first of all, that when it comes to temptation, WE ARE TO BE ON GUARD AT ALL TIMES – and the reason is, sometimes the most effective temptations have a way of sneaking up on us when we least expect it.**

Notice what happened here: Joseph is sold into slavery. That right there would have a way of making a person at least a little bit bitter, I would imagine. Here he was, his father's favorite son, living a life of privilege, when he is suddenly placed in chains and led away to a foreign land. So, as we continue looking at this chapter, I would point out: Whatever happens, it is not because Joseph got all of the lucky breaks in this life. Instead, it would be much more accurate to say that Joseph did well in spite of what happened in his life. So he starts out in this chapter as a slave, and he is sold to an Egyptian by the name of Potiphar. Potiphar happens to be the captain of Pharaoh's bodyguard. Today, we might describe this man as the head of the Secret Service. Of course, in our modern and enlightened times, there would never be a sex scandal in the Secret Service – of course I am joking about that. Yes, even today, those responsible for protecting powerful people also have a way of getting in trouble. But the point here at the beginning is that Joseph was ripped away from home, ripped away from a very peaceful life of farming and shepherding, and taken by force into a very different life – a different language, a different culture, but in that new circumstance, Joseph thrives! In fact, due to his hard work and due to the fact that God was with him, Joseph does incredibly well. Almost immediately, Potiphar notices that God was with this young man and that everything he did seemed to prosper. Everything Joseph did was done better than it had ever been done before. And it was above and beyond what was humanly possible. Potiphar, therefore, was convinced that Joseph's success was due to the fact that God was blessing him. So with that in mind (in verse 6), Potiphar put his entire household under Joseph's control – his finances, the other slaves, everything but the food. We might get back to the food in a few weeks (the Egyptians had a hang-up with any foreigners messing with their food), but at this point, Joseph is now responsible for everything but the food. So here he is working for a boss who worships not just the sun, but just about everything else. I know sometimes we think, "If only my boss were a Christian, then everything would be great at work." And that might be true, but notice: Joseph does well, even working in a situation that was far from ideal.

And before we move on, notice something else that put Joseph in a unique situation. At the end of this paragraph, at the end of verse 6, the Bible points out, "**Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance.**" One translation says that Joseph was "**well-built and handsome.**" Joseph looked good! We might say that Joseph took after his mother. Remember: His mother was the pretty one in the family. Joseph, then, had the combination of a powerful position, the trust of his boss, and some killer good looks. When it comes to temptation, the circumstances are starting to add up.

There is something else that might or might not be a factor here, but I feel that I should point it out, and it goes back to the word used to describe Potiphar in verse 1. He is described as "**an Egyptian officer of Pharaoh.**" The word translated here as "**officer**" is normally translated as "**eunuch.**" It is possible, then, that Potiphar's marriage was simply arranged as a political expedient, and that the intimacy was seriously lacking in their marriage, to say the least. Again, I cannot be absolutely positive that this factors in here, but it is certainly interesting to consider, that Potiphar might have been a eunuch. If that was the case, that would have made Joseph that much more attractive as a handsome young slave in this household as Potiphar was apparently away quite often protecting the Pharaoh.

I am not exactly sure what role Satan plays in temptation, but it seems in this passage at least that things are coming together for a perfect storm – a young man away from home for the very first time, successful, handsome, trusted, and working in the home of a woman whose husband is quite possibly not able to meet

her needs. The lesson here at the beginning, then, is: Be careful! Be on guard! When things seem to be going well, look out and be aware of what is going on! We are to be on guard at all times. As the Bible explains, Satan is roaming around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Sin was once described as crouching at the door. We are to go through life, then, with our eyes wide open, always aware of the danger around us. When my wife and I got our concealed carry training last year, we learned that there are four levels of tactical awareness. Condition WHITE refers to being completely unaware, totally oblivious to any danger. This might be like going to an ATM on State Street at 2 o'clock in the morning and counting our cash out in the open, with no concept that there might be a problem. Condition YELLOW is the idea that a person is aware, and observant – we notice people and situations – we don't get surprised, because we can see various situations developing, because we are looking out for something to happen. If we go to that ATM, we keep our eyes open, and we look around us, aware that there might be some danger in the world. Condition ORANGE is where we identify a potential threat and we take steps to avoid it. Maybe we are headed to our car in a parking garage, and we see a man with a crowbar standing by our car – as soon as we see that, we turn around and get out of there. And then we have condition RED. We are fully alert and ready to fight. We are in survival mode at that point, and we do whatever we need to do to survive. Joseph, would tell us, I believe, that we are to live spiritually in condition YELLOW – we are to be aware, and we are to bump it up a notch or two if the situation requires it. We are to be on guard at all times.

**II. There is a second basic lesson we can learn from Joseph in this passage, and that is: Like Joseph, WE ARE TO RECOGNIZE SIN FOR WHAT IT REALLY IS.**

Here he is as a young man away from home who grew up in an awful family situation, he's even living roughly 500 years before the command ***"Do not commit adultery"*** will be written in stone, but Joseph knows that what he is being asked to do is wrong. It's wrong on three counts: First of all, it is wrong because it would involve sinning against Potiphar. It would betray the trust placed in him by his employer, by his master. In verses 8-9, Joseph explains this: With me in charge, my master does not worry himself with anything entrusted to my care. And so to give in to Potiphar's wife would have violated that trust.

But then notice, secondly, Joseph labels this as a ***"wicked thing," "How then could I do this wicked thing."*** The thing he was being asked to do was wicked. It was evil. It was simply wrong to sleep with another man's wife – even if he wasn't at home, even if she wasn't being satisfied, even if he would never find out, even if he thought he could get away with it, even if everybody else was doing it, even if whatever – doing this would have been a ***"wicked thing."*** ***"My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife."*** Joseph refused to violate God's marriage law that had been in place since the creation.

But then finally, this act was wrong because it would have been a sin against God Himself. In other words, Joseph could see beyond the temporary pleasure that this act would bring, and he made the decision that the act itself would be offensive to God, ***"How then could I do this great evil and sin against God?"*** Not only, then, would God see this act, but God would personally be offended by it. Of course today, very few people view sexual sin as being a sin against God, but it is. The Bible still teaches that the sexually immoral will not inherit the kingdom of God. So, here was a man alone with a powerful woman, she makes the offer, and Joseph says: No, ***"How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?"*** So many times when we sin, we fail to consider the long-term consequences. When we are in the heat of the moment, we fail to think in terms of offending God. We fail to think of what effect this decision will have on our children, on our spouse, on our career. Joseph, though, considered the consequences. He knew that if he gave in he would be sinning against Potiphar, he would be violating God's marriage law, and he would be sinning against God Himself.

III. **All of this leads us to the next paragraph and another lesson from this account, and that is: JOSEPH DID WHATEVER WAS NECESSARY TO AVOID FALLING TO THIS TEMPTATION.**

We've already noticed that Joseph tried to reason with Potiphar's wife – he tried a little bit of logic, he tried to explain his position. He wasn't rude, but he argued that it wouldn't be right. Apparently, though, she continued to press him for a relationship, *"...she spoke to Joseph day after day,"* and so we find in verse 10 that he *"did not listen to her,"* he did not give in under constant pressure. He abandoned the logic, and he basically did the best he could to just stay away from this woman. Sometimes the best way to stand up to temptation is to stay away from it in the first place. Sometimes arguing with temptation does no good at all. And so, if I am tempted by alcohol, I will not hang out at a bar. If I am tempted to gossip, I will stay away from people who like to gossip, and so on.

And yet by the time we get to verses 11-12, we find that she waited for a time when they were home alone, she grabs him by the coat, and Joseph decides that he needs to run. He runs, and he leaves his coat behind. This, by the way, is the second coat that he's lost now under less than ideal circumstances! This is the second coat that is used to perpetrate a lie about Joseph. We certainly remember Paul's words to the young preacher Timothy (in 1 Timothy 2:22), *"Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart."* Some of our young people will occasionally ask about "going too far" when out on a date. Going too far is anything you would not want your parents to know about. Going too far is anything that requires a dark and lonely place. Going too far is anything that makes us feel ashamed or guilty. But notice: Here is Joseph confronted by this temptation, and he decides to run. He did not make this decision after kissing for half an hour. He did not make this decision after several drinks at a bar, but he made the decision sooner rather than later. He ran. He ran for his spiritual life. I feel like this is something that Katherine might have said, but I remember hearing it somewhere, "When you flee from temptation, do not leave a forwarding address." Whoever said that was wise!

And I know sometimes we get tired of always running. In fact, there is something known as "evacuation fatigue." It is the idea that forecasters will get people all worked up about a storm, people will leave home, and then the storm fizzles or turns a different direction. When this happens enough, some people start to ignore the warnings. Certainly there is a danger here when it comes to hurricanes and storms like the one that's getting ready to hit the east coast right now, but there is also a much greater danger in a spiritual sense. There is a danger that we will get used to hearing the warnings and that one day we might not run when we really need to run. Joseph, though, was ready to run, and he ran.

IV. **There is one more idea I'd like for us to consider when it comes to temptation, and that is: IN THE AFTERMATH, HAVING FACED A TEMPTATION SUCCESSFULLY, DO NOT BE CONFUSED BY THE IMMEDIATE RESULTS.**

And I say this, because sometimes we are not rewarded for doing the right thing. In fact, sometimes we are punished for doing the right thing. I remember the first time a teacher violated my trust. On the way to junior high school, my friends and I were throwing those little snap cap things at each other. They're like wadded up paper, and they explode when they hit something. We were having a blast. Today, we would probably be serving time at Guantanamo Bay. But back then a teacher saw us coming, and he gathered us all around at the bike rack, and nobody was giving up anybody. So, this social studies teacher said, "I will close my eyes, whoever has any snaps left put them in my hand, and this is the last you'll hear of it." Well, I was stupid enough to fall for it. I had one left, and I put it in that man's hand. Well, we all breathed a sigh of relief and got on with the day. Sometime mid-afternoon, I was called into the vice-principal's office. This woman was the

enforcer. Her only job was to make kids miserable. She had me step into her office, and as soon as I stepped in that room, I knew I was dead. There was nothing on the walls, there were no window coverings, there was nothing but a desk with a chair on each side, and in the middle of that huge empty desk was one little snap. At that point I knew that my life was over. But the point is: We are not always rewarded for doing the right thing.

Joseph, though, was truly innocent. He had done nothing wrong. In fact, he had done everything right. But as we know, Potiphar's wife falsely claimed that Joseph had attacked her. I find it interesting how she also puts the blame on Potiphar. It reminds me of the blame game in the Garden of Eden. Adam blamed the woman, and the woman blamed the serpent. Potiphar's wife, then, blamed her own husband for bringing Joseph into the house in the first place. But what I find very interesting here is how Potiphar reacts. As the head of Pharaoh's bodyguard, Potiphar would have also been the chief executioner. If you were the chief executioner and someone sexually assaulted your wife, what would you do? I know what I would do, but Potiphar didn't do it. The text says that Potiphar's **"anger burned"** (verse 19), but it doesn't say that he was angry at Joseph. The text kind of leaves it open – he might have been angry at his wife! In my mind, it almost looks like Potiphar can see through the whole thing. Some of you here this morning have served as police officers, and I imagine that over time you can probably judge rather quickly whether someone is telling the truth. We face this in the church office as we get calls asking for help on a regular basis. This past week, for example, someone called the church office. She said that she was passing through from somewhere out east to Montana, she was robbed in Philly and had no money, and now she and her boyfriend are in Madison and need a sack full of cash for a motel and food. Well, we've heard this story hundreds of times through the years, so I asked her if she had any church affiliation back home. Her answer was that she did go to church, but the church burned down and the pastor died. I asked a few more very simple questions like that, and she had the same kind of answer for every single one! So, I just stopped the conversation and said, "You need to stop scamming good people." She had no response for that but was basically speechless. Maybe in the same way, Potiphar knows Joseph is innocent – he can see through his own wife's accusation, and yet to save face, he throws Joseph in prison. This, by the way, is the first reference to **"jail"** or **"prison"** in the Bible.

But here's the point: We can do the right thing, and we can suffer for it. We can run from temptation, and our friends at school might not want to be around us much anymore. We can run from temptation, and our coworkers might start to get a little nervous around us. They did it to Joseph, they did it to Jesus, and they can also do it to us. Those who run away from temptation are rarely rewarded by the world. And so the encouragement here is: Let's not get discouraged when we run from temptation and something really bad happens! Because, in the much bigger picture, God is with us. Notice those last few verses: The Lord was with Joseph, and even though he was thrown in prison, it wasn't long until Joseph was running the prison! **"...the Lord was with him; and whatever he did, the Lord made to prosper."** In the long run, God does not abandon those who do the right thing – a good lesson for us today!

### **Conclusion:**

As we close our thoughts on this chapter in Joseph's life, I hope we have been encouraged by the word of God. And I certainly hope that we have been thinking about the passage that John read for us earlier, the promise that God made in 1 Corinthians 10:13, **"No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it."** God provided a way of escape for Joseph, and Joseph made a run for it. May we have the courage that Joseph had!

Thankfully, if we have slipped up, God still provides a way out. As Christians, when we sin, the Bible tells us to confess our sins and to ask God for forgiveness. If the sin was private, work it out privately. If the sin was public, if the sin is known to the congregation, work it out publicly. On the other hand, if you are not yet a Christian, the Bible teaches that we must turn away from sin and be immersed in water so that our past sins will be forgiven. The Bible refers to baptism as being our appeal to God for a good conscience (1 Peter 3:21). If you have any questions, we would invite you to study with us. If you need the prayers of this congregation, write it down and bring it to the front. And if you are ready to obey the gospel, you can also let us know by coming to the front as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: [fourlakeschurch@gmail.com](mailto:fourlakeschurch@gmail.com)