

OVERCOMING SEXUAL TEMPTATION

GENESIS 39

None of us have a consistent record of overcoming temptation. We are moved to pray daily, “lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” The struggle with temptation has been with us since our parents failed the test in the Garden of Eden. It is as much a part of life as sunshine and rain. You will never know a life without temptation on the earth.

The experience of Joseph is remarkable at this point—he overcame temptation. His experience is an encouragement to every struggler with temptation.

Joseph struggled with temptation in just one area of life at this time, but Chuck Swindoll has pointed out that there are others areas in which we experience temptation. It may come in the material area of life, which is a lust for things. Then there is personal temptation, which is the lust for power, fame, and authority. This is the temptation that we see so much in the political arena even though it is not limited to politicians. This experience of

Joseph confronts us with sensual temptation. With all of the national attention focused on the way our president succumbed to sensual temptation, this should be a timely word for us.

I. TEMPTATION MAY COME WHEN ALL IS WELL.

This strong temptation came to Joseph when everything was going well for him. He had been brought to Egypt by the nomadic traders and sold to Potiphar. Potiphar was an important leader in the government of the Pharaoh; he seems to have been in charge of the prisons of the king. He is called in the text “the captain of the guard.” Even though Joseph was a foreign slave in the house of Potiphar, the Lord was with him and was pleased to prosper him. It was then that he faced this sensual temptation.

1. When you are right with God.

Joseph had never been more right with God than when Potiphar’s wife began to proposition him. It may well have been the inner serenity that his walk with God brought to him that attracted the attention of the woman. It is true that he was handsome and physically strong, but he had more than this going for him. In his heart he was right with God.

The confrontation with temptation is not necessarily a sign of deficiency in your walk with God. There was never a moment when Jesus our Lord was not right with God yet he endured strong temptation. The temptations of Jesus surely included the temptation of the sensual since He was tempted in all points as we are.

2. When God is blessing you.

The blessing of God was upon the life of Joseph when the temptation came. The inspired record reads: “The Lord was with Joseph and he prospered.” In this context this probably indicates that Potiphar was so impressed with the work of Joseph that he began to reward him in different ways. Things had never been better for Joseph physically and materially since he left the land of Canaan than when the temptation came. This probably also contributed to his attractiveness to the wife of his master.

It is well to keep this in mind. The prosperity of God on your life does not make you immune to temptation. Temptation is not a sign of God’s disfavor on your life.

3. When you are doing your duty.

Joseph had never been more faithful to his responsibility than when the Mrs. Potiphar made her approach to him. In fact it was the pursuit of his duty that exposed him to her day by day. When she first invited him to her bedroom, he began to change the way he carried out his responsibilities to avoid exposure to her. But he never neglected his duties.

It is true that neglect of duties may expose you to some temptations. This was what happened to King David. He became involved with Bathsheba while he was taking a vacation from his responsibilities as the King of Israel. He should have been leading the armies of Israel into battle instead of resting on the house-top in the evening. But Joseph is a reminder to us that being faithful to your duties will not prevent temptation from coming your way. Many a servant of God has fallen into sexual sin while carrying out his responsibilities faithfully.

II. TEMPTATION WILL APPEAL TO YOUR BASIC HUMANITY.

This is the reason that the Apostle Paul labels temptations as being “common to man”. Every temptation appeals to something that is basic to our fallen humanity. We have in us desires that can be appealed to by an

external stimulant. The presentation of her body to Joseph to be used for his pleasure and hers by Potiphar's wife appealed to his manhood.

1. This makes it appealing.

We must not misread the record—Joseph did not overcome the temptation because his hormones were not working. He had the same hormones in him that David had and that Bill Clinton has. It was the presence of this in him that made her a temptation. When we remember that Joseph was about twenty years old, a normal red-blooded young man, we begin to understand just how strong this temptation must have been.

We need to ever be mindful that we have something in us to which temptation can appeal. You are not free from the basic nature to which the tempter can appeal. To forget this about you is to set yourself up for a fall.

2. This makes it a struggle.

This is where the rub comes in temptation—there is a struggle between the basic desire for sensual gratification and our own conscience. One side within pulls Joseph toward her bedroom, but the other side puts a restraint upon him. There is point in the experience when the struggle can go either way. But the struggle is real!

III. TEMPTATION MUST BE RESISTED.

This is the reason we are studying this chapter. Joseph overcame the temptation. It was instructive to us to observe how he did it. You can resist just like he did.

1. By a firm refusal.

The record is clear—“but he refused.” It was a firm and decisive move on the part of Joseph. Even though she was his master’s wife, and was very attractive, and the hormones in him desired to respond to her invitation, he refused. He said, “No!” He did not ask for time to think about it. He did not say, “Maybe some other day.” Rather he firmly refused.

This is the only way to overcome temptation. When we give in to temptation, it is because we fail to take decisive action. When there is the least awareness of temptation, “no” is the word. This was the way Jesus our Lord overcame the allurements that the enemy put before him in the desert. It is a no to the temptation and to the pull of your nature toward the sin.

2. Because of a prior commitment.

In his response to her Joseph makes his prior commitment clear. He had a prior commitment to be faithful to his master Potiphar. “With me in charge my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns has entrusted to my care. No is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?” He had already decided that it would be wrong to do anything that was disloyal to his master or anything that betrayed the trust his master had placed in him. The other thing he had decided ahead of time was that he would not be guilty of wickedness and thus sin against God. In the understanding of the will of God he had received from his fathers, he knew that adultery was wickedness. It would not only be a sin against Potiphar, it would also be a sin against God. Long before the Lord gave Moses the Ten Commandments on the mount, God had already revealed to His people the importance of sexual purity.

Jesus followed the same pattern. Long before He faced the temptations in the wilderness, He had decided that the heavenly Father was the One in whom He trusted and the One that He obeyed. Anything that threatened this was to be refused.

What are thing things that you have decided you will not do? I really applaud the True Love Waits commitments that youth are making across this country. This is an important step toward overcoming temptation. I was deeply impressed with what Paul Watson, who worked with us as an intern this summer, and his bride did at their wedding. They brought the evidences of their True Love Waits commitment with them to their wedding, and laid them on the altar before the Lord. What a wonderful witness to the value of the prior commitment!

I came across a letter to Ann Landers that illustrates this:

“Dear Ann Landers:

I'm a 16-year-old girl who didn't think your advice to teenagers who were having sex was either "square" or "unrealistic." I thought it was right on. I have a steady who is very good looking, very smart and very tempting, but we have established some guidelines so we won't get into trouble. We both believe that if two people really care about each other, they will not risk one another's health, reputation and future for a few minutes of forbidden pleasure.”

Is this not a wise word?

3. With a readiness to flee.

This is an important point in this inspired report—Joseph was ready to flee in order to escape the temptation. When the wife of Potiphar really put the pressure on, having finally got him alone in the house, “he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house.” Even though this step would put his position in jeopardy and would result in his being falsely imprisoned, he did the right thing. Regardless of the immediate consequences, it is always better to flee than to be ensnared in temptation.

This was the counsel that Paul gave the early Christians and to us, “Flee from sexual immorality”. (I Cor. 10)

IV. OVERCOMING SEXUAL TEMPTATION BRINGS BLESSINGS.

This is probably the most debatable statement that I have made all night, but when you consider the action of Joseph in the light of eternity—he was blessed. You too will be blessed if you overcome temptation. Every temptation resisted leaves the life blessed.

1. The blessing of divine favor.

This is the wonderful part of the story—even though he did end up in prison, the Lord was still at his side. The blessing of the favor of the Lord was still on his life. Compare this with the experience with that of David. His prayer

in Psalm 51 reveals a man who has lost the divine favor. He is pleading with God for the restoration of the divine favor. There is nothing worse than the loss of the divine favor, and nothing better than the enjoyment of the divine favor.

Do we dare compare this to the spectacle of our President having to face his family and the nation disgraced? How would you evaluate the shame that has been upon him in recent days?

2. The blessing of developed character.

This Joseph, who would have character enough to occupy the highest place in the land of Egypt, developed that character by resisting temptation. Every temptation resisted builds strength into the character. The opposite of this is true—every time you yield to temptation character is eroded. It goes without saying that this was not the first sexual temptation the President had faced.

This is the reason that the character question is an important question in the realm of political leadership. Some indicated that it did not matter what a man did in his private life when we elected Mr. Clinton president of this country. Now we know that it did matter. His inability to resist sensual temptation in the past had so weakened him that he could not resist such

temptation even when he knew that he put the whole country in a vulnerable situation.

Temptations are as certain as life. Overcomers are rare! But you can be a Joseph.

If you are to overcome, you must not be surprised when temptation comes.

You must be prepared by an understanding of your own humanity. You must be decisive in your rejection of the temptation. Then you will know the blessings that come to the overcomers.