

# Fleeing Temptation


 JOSEPH


*She caught him by his garment, saying, 'Lie with me.' But he left his garment in her hand and fled and got out of the house."*

**Genesis 39:12**



## DEVOTIONAL

Potiphar's wife does not abandon her desire to seduce Joseph after first making the brazen demand for Joseph to sleep with her (Gen. 39:6b–9). Instead, she softens her request in an attempt to get around Joseph's forthright refusal to be with her. "Day after day" she speaks to Jacob's favorite son, begging him to "lie beside her" or "be with her," a seemingly innocent request that he spend time with her without doing anything improper. However, Joseph is smart enough to know better (v. 10). He knows that to put himself where he might find temptation is to play with fire, and so he wisely determines not to listen to the "smooth words" of this adulteress (Prov. 7:4–5).

Nevertheless, as today's passage indicates, this woman will get her way, or else! No one is around one day when Joseph goes to work in the house, and Potiphar's wife seizes him by his garment in her lust to have him (Gen. 39:11–12a). Joseph would have been wearing the typical garments of the day: a long-sleeved shirt and shorts that come down to the mid-calf. For him to flee and leave these behind would mean Joseph engaged in a forceful struggle with the woman to escape—since the clothes could not normally be removed so quickly (vv. 12b–13). Joseph is honorable and would rather leave a valued piece of clothing behind than to sin against the Lord. His flight from evil is a response all believers do well to imitate (1 Tim. 6:11).

God promises to bless those who obey Him and resist transgression (Deut. 28:1–14; Matt. 5:10), yet this episode in Joseph's life reveals that the reward is not always immediate. In fact, faithfulness often brings persecution. Joseph's rapid exit would raise many questions, and so Potiphar's wife acts quickly to avoid any blame. She appeals to the basest instincts of the other servants and emphasizes Joseph's foreign heritage to cast him as an outsider and as a threat to the household (Gen. 39:14). Moreover, she lies outright, accusing Joseph of her actions by saying "he left" his garment (vv. 15–18), terminology that implies he willingly disrobed instead of struggling to escape her. Potiphar's wife shows how sinners attempt to corrupt the way others see us when they cannot entice us to follow their schemes.

## CORAM DEO (In the Presence of God)

Matthew Henry comments: "It is better to lose a good coat than a good conscience." In other words, Joseph would rather lose his possessions or even his reputation on account of Potiphar's evil wife than transgress the Lord's commandments. There are times when we may have to choose between what others might think

of us and doing the right thing. Even if others lie about us now, our righteousness will be rewarded in the age to come (Matt. 5:11–12).<sup>1</sup>



### OPEN IT

1. What food are you unable to pass up? What is it about that particular food that is so appealing?



### READ IT

**Genesis 39:11–38**



### EXPLORE IT

2. Who purchases Joseph in Egypt? What position did he hold?
3. Why type of servant was Joseph?
4. Who makes advances towards Joseph?
5. What happens when he flees the temptation?



### APPLY IT

What a radical change has taken place in Joseph's life. He who was the object of the loving attention of a doting dad is now the object of curiosity to people in the market for a slave. The dreamer hits the dirt. Now that's dramatic. Joseph is about to discover that although he is a long way from everyone and everything that represents security, he is still hemmed in "behind and before" by God, and the hand of God still guides him and holds him fast (see Psalm 139:5, 10). "Potiphar, an Egyptian who was one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard, bought [Joseph] from the Ishmaelites" (Genesis 39:1). This suggests a slave auction, an event that could not have been anything but ugly, distasteful, humiliating, and cruel for Joseph. Paraded on the slave block in full view of a leering crowd, perhaps stripped bare, he was offered for sale. There he

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/fleeing-temptation/>

stood, a teenager subjected to the proddings of his potential master. Exposure to this kind of humiliation would have ripped into the core of Joseph's being.

Try to get a sense of the pain and confusion he felt as he sought to understand what was happening to him. He was a captive in a foreign country, unable to understand the words spoken to him. He could only try to read their eyes and so figure out what they were thinking and planning. Joseph didn't have to wait long to learn his fate. When the ordeal of the slave auction was over, he was taken—probably in chains and under guard—into the palatial home of Potiphar, a prominent Egyptian official. To put this man's position in a modern context, we could say that Potiphar was the chief of Pharaoh's secret police. He was in charge of dealing with political insurrectionists. People who plotted against the Pharaoh were taken into custody by Potiphar and his men, never to be heard from again. Potiphar's job was to remove threats to his boss. He was a powerful man and probably had the potential for cruelty. So it is an understatement to say that the circumstances into which Joseph was thrust were less than ideal.<sup>2</sup>

6. Take some time to think about all the emotions and feelings that seventeen-year-old Joseph experienced during his first moments in Egypt. What would it have been like?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
7. How might such experiences have hindered his transition into adulthood? How might they have helped?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
8. When have you experienced deep personal hurt and yet understood very clearly that God was with you? In what ways were you able to determine God's presence amidst such difficult times?

## THE LORD WAS WITH JOSEPH

Joseph had the sense that God was at work in his life preparing him for a special task yet to come. Joseph's body might have been chained, but his spirit was free. Somehow or other, I think Joseph realized that his dreams plus the disaster that had befallen him were leading somewhere. He was determined not to waste this trial. Joseph was not only protected, but God prospered him in his captivity. We read the straightforward report, "The Lord was with Joseph and he prospered" (Genesis 39:2).

Because Joseph was a young man of godly character, somewhere along the line he must have made the decision we talked about at the beginning of the chapter. He must have sat down and said to himself, I'm going to make the most of this. That's what God wants me to do, and He will enable me to do it. I want to suggest that the day Joseph made this decision was the day of his liberation.

And the same is true for us. When we can look around at the place where God has put us and say, despite the difficulties, "I'm going to make the most of this for God's glory," we are free. When Joseph made that decision, it impacted everything he did. He refused to do what would be expected of a captive in a foreign country, which is to do only the minimum necessary to get by. Joseph didn't go around saying, "Sorry, me no speak Egyptian. Can't understand what you're saying. Don't know what you want." Joseph must have

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<sup>2</sup> The Hand of God: Finding His Care in All Circumstances by Alistair Begg

reasoned, “Everyone thinks I’m Potiphar’s slave. But I’m actually God’s slave. And since I am God’s slave, serving Potiphar, I’m going to be the best slave Potiphar ever had.”

There is a lesson here we need to see. Joseph’s witness was not in protesting the paganism of Egypt or trying to reorient the culture in which he lived. Those options were not available to him. The only opportunity he had for witness was to be a good slave. Of course, there are times when protest must be made. And Christians must have a voice in shaping the culture. But for most of us, the real opportunity to impact our world comes when we decide to be the most diligent, obedient, reliable, industrious, and conscientious servants we can be where God has placed us. That’s the commitment Potiphar received from Joseph.<sup>3</sup>

9. Joseph finds himself in an impossible and hopeless situation. How do you respond to such situations in life?

Joseph was well liked by the people in Potiphar’s house, and in pagan, idol-worshipping Egypt, Joseph was a testimony to the true and living God. He was an honest and faithful worker, and the people he lived and worked with got the message. God took note of Joseph’s character and conduct and made him a blessing, and unknown to Joseph, God planned to fulfill the dreams He had sent him. “Do you see a man who excels in his work? He will stand before kings; he will not stand before unknown men” (Prov. 22:29 NKJV). But his faithful service wasn’t only a blessing to the household, it was also a blessing to Joseph himself. Had he stayed home with his pampering father, Joseph might not have developed the kind of character that comes from hard work and obeying orders. God’s method for building us is to give us a job to do and people to obey. He tests us as servants before He promotes us to being rulers (Matt. 25:21). Before He allows us to exercise authority, we have to be under authority and learn to obey.<sup>4</sup>

10. What is it about being an obedient and trustworthy employee that causes people to become more receptive to the gospel?

11. How do people view you in the workplace? What might they say about God in light of what they see in you from 9–5 each day?

12. Joseph’s exemplary character resulted from his hard work and his obedience to orders. What does knowing how to obey have to do with knowing how to lead?

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<sup>3</sup> The Hand of God: Finding His Care in All Circumstances by Alistair Begg

<sup>4</sup> Be Authentic (Genesis 25-50): Exhibiting Real Faith in the Real World (The BE Series Commentary) by Warren W. Wiersbe

Notice also that Joseph didn't have to tell Potiphar there was blessing on his life. "[Potiphar] saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord gave him success in everything he did" (Genesis 39:3). Potiphar found himself saying, "You know, there's something about this Hebrew kid we picked up in the market. I've had many slaves, but this young man is something special." Oh, to be that kind of person in the marketplace of life! The favor of God rested on Joseph. When God's blessing is on your life, you won't have to telegraph the news. It will be apparent—even, as in Potiphar's case, to the pagans. I came across four lines that express this point succinctly and well: "It isn't the style or the stuff in the coat, nor is it the length of the tailor's bill. It's the stuff in the chap inside of the coat that counts for good or ill."<sup>5</sup>

13. There are those who spread blessings to others no matter where they go. Who around you fit this description and what enables them to live and work in such a manner?

### **THE TEMPTATION OF JOSEPH**

The account of Joseph and the lustful advances of Potiphar's wife sounds as though it was taken from yesterday's newspaper or last night's prime-time television program. It has an immediate and striking relevance in that it deals with issues that confront all of us. But there is an equally striking difference between this story and the sorry sagas of many modern-day celebrities and leaders—namely, the way it ends. Joseph dealt with the advances of Mrs. Potiphar the same way he dealt with the temptation to bitterness or self-pity. He faced it head-on and emerged victorious in the power of God. Temptation is an enticement to evil or to sin. It is something all of us face, even the Lord Jesus Himself (Matthew 4:1–11). Therefore, it is not a sin to be tempted. It is our response to temptation that leads us down the path of righteousness or into the dead end of disobedience.

14. Our text says that Mrs. Potiphar "cast her eyes on Joseph." What things both explicit and implicit within the text would have caused her to take notice of him in such a way? What are some of the things that cause people today to "cast their eyes on someone else"?
15. What causes temptations to linger within us so much that we feel their allure day after day? What does this tell us about ourselves?
16. Joseph addresses the allure of temptation by addressing both the practical and spiritual ramifications that will come by indulging. What were they for him? What others may be true for us today?

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<sup>5</sup> The Hand of God: Finding His Care in All Circumstances by Alistair Begg

In view of what's happening to the values in our own society, this segment of Joseph's life is probably one of the most relevant to our lives today—particularly as men. Sadly, I've seen some of my closest friends give in to sexual temptation. In some cases, it has destroyed their entire families. It startles me every time it happens and makes me realize how weak most of us are in this area of our lives. It serves as a “wake up call”!

17. How can following in Joseph's footsteps help us to fight against the temptation of sin that is all around us?

18. What lessons can we learn from this scene involving temptation? What steps do you need to take so that sin doesn't have victory in your life?

Potiphar's wife's attempts at seduction had failed. Joseph had lost his cloak but not his character. He had kept his purity, but was about to lose his position. He had previously been dumped into a cistern by his brothers, and now he was about to be thrown into a dungeon by his boss. Having had the run of Potiphar's house, he was now being run out of the house! The one who had been in charge was now being charged with a terrible crime.

19. What should we make of Potiphar's response to the accusation of his wife? In what ways was he wise and in what other ways was he foolish? What lessons can be learned about discernment in moments of “He said /She said”?

20. The text says nothing of a defense by Joseph about this wrongful accusation. Why do think Joseph didn't defend himself? When and where is it right to fight when you have been wrongfully accused?