

Life Lessons from Potiphar's Wife

Genesis 39:7-23

Online Sermon: http://www.mckeesfamily.com/?page_id=3567

If you were offered an opportunity to sin and you knew no one could find out what you had done would you indulge in the sin? What if it was a sin that you had done before and got great pleasure from it or a sin that you have seen or heard from others that they are reveling in and getting intense gratification? As recovering sinners, we know that our wounded condition, one of self-blindness, comes from the pride of worshipping creation and the evil desires of our own hearts, rather than the Creator (Romans 1:25; James 4:13-15). We also know that sin drives a wedge between us and God for what does darkness have to do with light (1 John 1:5-9), especially when His own refuse to give up living like pagans (1 Peter 4:3) to embrace the holiness God requires (1 Peter 1:16)? And is it not sheer utter foolishness to think a “secret” sin could ever exist when God knows and sees everything (Psalms 139)? Despite knowing all of this to be true, how many Christians everyday buckle under the weight of their temptations? Living in a fallen world where accountability is shunned, absolute truth can only be found in the eye of the beholder and pleasure seems only to be limited by one’s imagination; how can a Christian remain holy in such an environment? Today’s sermon is going to review Joseph’s encounter with Potiphar’s wife and in doing so suggest that while setting life boundaries in accordance with God’s word and avoiding and hating sin will invite persecution from this world, it is worth it for in doing so one will obtain favor from God whom will enable one to be holy as He is holy!

Temptations (verses 7-12)

After Joseph was sold by his brother to the Midianites, they in turn sold him to a man named Potiphar (37:12-36); one of Pharaoh’s officials, the captain of the guard.¹ Upon learning that God caused everything Joseph touched to flourish, Potiphar placed him in charge as head administrator of all “that was done in the house and field.”² Due to either his success³ or his rugged good looks,⁴ Potiphar’s wife⁵ soon “took notice,” lusted and daringly and shamefully⁶

¹ John H. Walton, *Genesis*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 670.

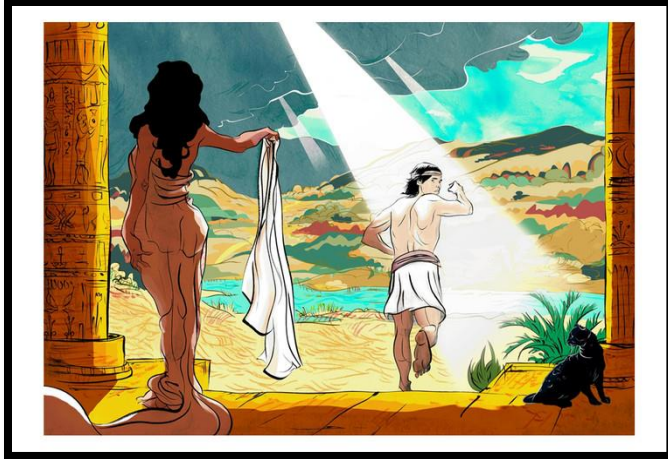
² John E. Hartley, *Genesis*, ed. W. Ward Gasque, Robert L. Hubbard Jr., and Robert K. Johnston, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012), 320.

³ John E. Hartley, *Genesis*, ed. W. Ward Gasque, Robert L. Hubbard Jr., and Robert K. Johnston, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012), 320.

⁴ D. A. Carson, ed., *NIV Zondervan Study Bible: Built on the Truth of Scripture and Centered on the Gospel Message* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 93.

⁵ I mean no disrespect in calling the lady in this story as merely Potiphar’s wife. This is the way the Bible addressed her and far as I know here name is known with certainty, merely suggested in Jewish literature.

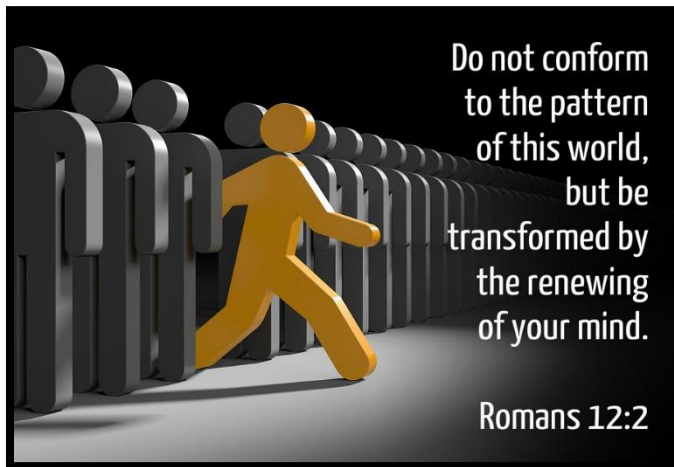
⁶ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 80.



asked Joseph to “come to bed” with her (verse 7).⁷ Joseph immediately refused her request on the grounds that it would not only break “the trust his master had placed in him but that in doing what she commanded he would be sinning against God.”⁸ Day after day she asked him to have sex with her and Joseph not only refused her request but refused to “pay attention”⁹ or be in the same room with her (verse 10). In hopes that secret opportunity would entice adultery,¹⁰ she masterfully setup a final ambush¹¹ and sent all the servants outside. When

Joseph came into the house to perform his duties, she commanded him to come to bed with her and forcibly grabbed his cloak. So “terrified with the possibility of his integrity being compromised,”¹² Joseph immediately pulled away and ran from the house despite doing so meant he was leaving without his cloak!

One of the “life lessons” we can learn from this incident is that “temptation is not a part-time experience of the believer.”¹³ If he



who “prowls around like a roaring lion” (1 Peter 5:8) cannot get you to sin today he will simply try again Tomorrow and the next day. Just because one has become a born-again believer does not mean that the “old self” no longer entices that person to give into the evil desires that still exist in his/her heart (James 1:14; Ephesians 4:22-14)! The threat to holy living comes from “this world whose ways and thoughts can

⁷ K. A. Mathews, [Genesis 11:27–50:26](#), vol. 1B, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2005), 734.

⁸ William David Reayburn and Euan McG. Fry, [A Handbook on Genesis](#), UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1998), 893.

⁹ William David Reayburn and Euan McG. Fry, [A Handbook on Genesis](#), UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1998), 894–895.

¹⁰ Matthew Henry, [Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 80.

¹¹ Derek Kidner, [Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 1, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1967), 202.

¹² John E. Hartley, [Genesis](#), ed. W. Ward Gasque, Robert L. Hubbard Jr., and Robert K. Johnston, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012), 321.

¹³ K. A. Mathews, [Genesis 11:27–50:26](#), vol. 1B, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2005), 734.

easily impinge on the child of God.”¹⁴ In wrestling with sin Apostle Paul asked the following question: why is it that the good I want to do I cannot and the evil I don’t want to do I do all the time? When we enter the world, we enter a spiritual battlefield of the mind. To overcome temptations Paul says to take “every thought captive to the obedience of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5). This is accomplished by taking temptations to God in prayer daily so that one’s mind can identify and surrender the depravity of the old self (Romans 1:28) that characterizes this world (Ephesians 4:23). It is by renewing the mind in the truth concerning God daily that one can not only resist constant temptations but one can see the Devil flee from one’s presence (James 4:7)!

Another life lesson that we learn from Joseph’s temptation is that the reason why we avoid sinning is not to be based on the probability of our sin being made public but due to a genuine desire to remain in a good relationship with God. Even though 74 percent of males surveyed would commit adultery if they thought they could not be caught does not make



adultery right in God’s sight.¹⁵ Joseph knew that even though there was no one else in the house to witness adultery he refused to have sex with Potiphar’s wife since God would see the sin and it would grieve and offend Him (Psalms 51:4)!¹⁶ Why would we think that He who rewards us for good deeds done in “secret” (Matthew 6:4) would not see and punish us for sins done in “secret”? The profound truth is the only secrets possible are those that are hidden from creation. When it comes to God nothing is a secret for, He is indivisibly present

everywhere (Psalms 139) and His spirit communes with our spirit and knows our very thoughts (Romans 8:16)! Our motivation to not give into temptation then is not to be based on the probability of being caught, for that is a 100 percent guarantee, but a genuine desire to please God whom sent His Son Jesus to purchase us at the cost of His very life (1 Corinthians 6:19)! Those whom truly love God follow His commands and are not scared to ask God to search them for when sin is found they can repent, be cleansed (1 John 1:9-10) and continue to walk in the footsteps of their Savior (Colossians 1:9-14)!

The story of Joseph and Potiphar’s wife also stresses how important it is to have life boundaries set in accordance with God’s word so that the moment temptations arrive one can flee from Satan’s presence! Living in a fallen world that does not believe in absolutes makes standing on the truth concerning God very difficult (2 Timothy 4:3). Satan knows the “right” temptation to offer each person. Let me use getting into a swimming pool as an analogy. For some entering a pool is done by simply running headlong and jumping in. For those who are in

¹⁴ Everett F. Harrison, “Romans,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Romans through Galatians*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 10 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 128.

¹⁵ Taken from the following website: <https://investigationhotline.org/prevalence-of-infidelity-in-canada/>

¹⁶ D. A. Carson, ed., *NIV Zondervan Study Bible: Built on the Truth of Scripture and Centered on the Gospel Message* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 93.

love with the ways of this world (1 John 2:15) all Satan must do is offer the opportunity to sin and they are “all in” without giving any thought to how God would view such actions. For



others entering the pool is done by first putting a toe in, then a foot, then a leg and finally they take the plunge. Satan knows that many Christians simply will not plunge into the depths of sin until they have a toe in his kingdom! The battlefield is truly in the mind for Satan knows that the moment we lust after a sin we have committed the sin (Matthew 5:28). Since Joseph set boundaries in accordance with Gods’ word, he knew that merely lusting after Potiphar’s wife, flirting or spending time

indulging in sexual fantasies would have been a sin ... so the moment he was propositioned to commit adultery he fled! How much more faithful would Christians be if they would only run rather than indulge in their sinful fantasies?

Rewards for Obedience to God (13-23)



Humiliated by Joseph’s rejection of her sexual proposition,¹⁷ Potiphar’s wife summons the servants. Her lying tongue¹⁸ told them that his robe in her hand was evidence that Joseph disrobed in front of her and only took “NO” for an answer in fear that others might hear her screams.¹⁹ This was the second time one (see 37:31-33) of Joseph’s cloaks would be used to deceive others!²⁰ She even went so far as to suggest it was her husband’s fault for he was the one whom brought this Hebrew slave into their

¹⁷ John E. Hartley, *Genesis*, ed. W. Ward Gasque, Robert L. Hubbard Jr., and Robert K. Johnston, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012), 321.

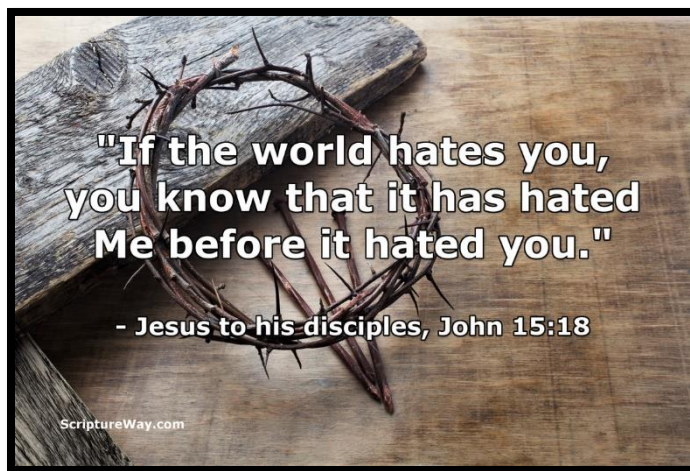
¹⁸ K. A. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, vol. 1B, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2005), 736.

¹⁹ John E. Hartley, *Genesis*, ed. W. Ward Gasque, Robert L. Hubbard Jr., and Robert K. Johnston, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012), 321.

²⁰ D. A. Carson, ed., *NIV Zondervan Study Bible: Built on the Truth of Scripture and Centered on the Gospel Message* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 93.

home!²¹ These lies were a cruel attack on the Joseph's unquestionable innocence²² of which Potiphar had no choice but to respond. He became angry, whether that was over losing the best attendant he ever had or over the possibility that his wife was lying and had lusted after other men before²³ or the possibility of Joseph trying to rape his wife; we simply do not know.²⁴ Potiphar put Joseph into the king's prison, a place for political offenders but the Lord was with Joseph and it was not long that this "patron of oppressed innocence"²⁵ was noticed by the warden for his trustworthiness and success and was placed in charge "of all the prisoners and what was done there."²⁶

From this part of the story we learn that overcoming temptations often means receiving a tarnished reputation with this world. Because Joseph declined Potiphar's wife's command to sleep with her, she tarnished his good name to the servants, her husband and publicly by having



him thrown into prison. Jesus tells us since we do not belong to this world, they will not accept us (John 15:18) because our deeds point to the Light that exposes their darkness for what it is, evil (Ephesians 5:13; John 3:20). Christians who do everything right in the eyes of God then can expect their reputation in this world to be far from stellar! Those Christians who have a great reputation is not because the "world has become tolerant of us, but we have become far more tolerant of the world."²⁷ If Joseph had been like many of this world and slept with

Potiphar's wife he would have not only been tolerated but adored by her! Those Christians whom choose to not only read but obey God's commands (James 1:22-25) and let their light shine before others (Matthew 5:16) can expect sharp criticism from a world that hates the light and God's unwavering, absolute truth!

Living a life for Jesus also means being exposed to great persecution. While we are unlikely to go be thrown into a lion's den like Daniel (Daniel 6), a fiery furnace like Shadrach, Meshack and Abednego (Daniel 3) or asked to receive 40 lashes minus one like Apostle Paul (2 Corinthians 11:24); don't be surprised if God asks you to receive unjust treatment for righteousness sake (Matthew 5:10). "What made Joseph's imprisonment so terribly bruising is

²¹ John E. Hartley, *Genesis*, ed. W. Ward Gasque, Robert L. Hubbard Jr., and Robert K. Johnston, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012), 321.

²² John H. Walton, *Genesis*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 671.

²³ Ibid.

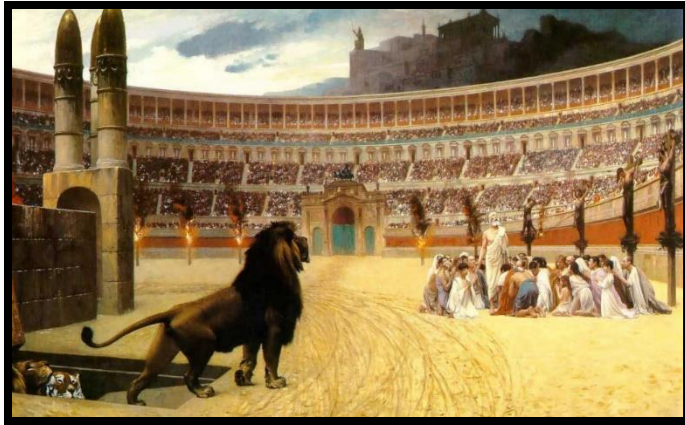
²⁴ John E. Hartley, *Genesis*, ed. W. Ward Gasque, Robert L. Hubbard Jr., and Robert K. Johnston, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012), 321.

²⁵ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 80.

²⁶ Ibid., 322.

²⁷ James Montgomery Boice, *Genesis: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 939.

that it was utterly, unequivocally, uncompromisingly unjust!”²⁸ Many Christians have



experienced public ridicule, lost job promotions, family and friends for merely mentioning the name of Jesus amongst those whom have been given over to their reprobate minds (Romans 1:28). While the insults and slandering of one’s name is in no ways near as unjust as standing in the arena and being torn apart by lions for one’s beliefs, it is still very painful to be scorned, ridiculed, mocked and told you an intolerant bigot merely because you believe in but one God! And yet it is precisely in the fieriest of injustices

that our light tends to shine the brightest for when we persevere in joy amongst pain the world can’t help but ask: what do they have that we don’t?

In conclusion the final thing that we receive for overcoming temptations is the favor of God. We are told that God was with Joseph and he became in charge of everyone and thing that



happened in the prison. God does not promise to reward those who preserve trials and tribulations with the things this world craves such as money, fame or power; but instead spiritual maturity (James 1:1-4) and crowns of righteousness (2 Timothy 4:8). Why would we as Christians settle for the trinkets and toys of this world that are but a fleeting and dismal source of pleasure when we can store our treasures where our eternal home lies (Matthew 6:19-21)? Our suffering and persecution are nothing in comparison to the blessings we will receive when Christ returns (Romans 8:18). Our

strength and heart will fail (Psalms 73:25) but nothing will separate us from the love and eternal relationship we have in our Lord (Romans 8:38-39)! So, the next time Satan seeks to devour you through temptation draw nearer to God, resist him in the power and name of Jesus and watch him flee from your sight!

²⁸ James Montgomery Boice, [Genesis: An Expository Commentary](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 934.