

# Three Temptations and a God Who Overcomes

Pastor Chris Baker // 09.30.18 // Centralia FBC

## Intro

Turn with me in your Bibles to Genesis 39. As we continue our look at the life of Joseph in Genesis 37-50 we rejoin the hero of the story this week. Last week's text took us on a detour into the life of Joseph's brother Judah, his sin, and its consequences and we learned that God both can and does accomplish His purpose through the shortcomings of His people.

When we last saw Joseph at the end of chapter 37 he had been taken to Egypt by Midianite slave traders and sold to an officer of Pharaoh named Potiphar.

There is an incredible beauty to this text. God wraps a story of spiritual success in the face of temptation within the grander narrative of what He's doing in human history to secure His promise of rescue that stretches all the way back to Genesis 3.

There, he promised in verse 15 that one day Eve's offspring would crush the head of sin and death forever. Later, in Genesis 12, He revealed that He would bring about that offspring through the family of a man named Abraham and that He would do it by growing Abraham's family into a great nation.

So, we know—because God is true to His promises—that He is going to turn this family into a great nation. Later in Abraham's life God told him this:

***13 Then the Lord said to Abram, "Know this for certain: Your offspring will be resident aliens for four hundred years in a land that does not belong to them and will be enslaved and oppressed."***

We've said before in this study that Joseph's story is the pivot point in this epic narrative. Joseph, through being sold into slavery by his brothers, becomes the first member of this family to become a resident alien in a land that does not belong to him.

Egypt becomes the safe harbor where the family of Abraham would grow into the nation of Israel. And it started with Joseph.

But within that great big picture of what God is at work doing in the family of Israel there is a ground level story of integrity and devotion to God in the face of some very real temptation.

We are going to look at this chapter in the light of three different temptations. One will be obvious. The other two, while less clear upon a first reading, I believe are very much present in the text and I think that all three are present in the lives of people in this room today. They are the temptation to forget, the temptation to give in, and the temptation to give up.

## **The Temptation to Forget**

Genesis 39:1

***Now Joseph had been taken to Egypt. An Egyptian named Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh and the captain of the guards, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him there. 2 The Lord was with Joseph, and he became a successful man, serving in the household of his Egyptian master. 3 When his master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord made everything he did successful, 4 Joseph found favor with his master and became his personal attendant. Potiphar also put him in charge of his household and placed all that he owned under his authority. 5 From the time that he put him in charge of his household and of all that he owned, the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house because of Joseph. The Lord's blessing was on all that he owned, in his house and in his fields. 6 He left all that he owned under Joseph's authority; he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate. Now Joseph was well-built and handsome.***

For all the agony Joseph went through in Genesis 37 from being stripped of his distinct robe, beaten by his brothers, tossed in a cistern and left to die, and then being rescued from the pit only to be sold as a slave, this section of his life actually turns out pretty well.

One of the core truths I hope we take from this study is that God is sovereign over every circumstance of your life. Even when you feel alone, God is not just with you but He is profoundly involved in the day-to-day events and small moments of your life. Joseph would

have had reason to feel very alone in this new context. He was ripped away from everyone and everything he knew and was spit out into the capital city of the most powerful nation on the planet at the time. They not only had a different way of talking, dress, and conduct, but they also would have worshiped a pantheon of different gods. Joseph was the only man in Egypt at the time who worshipped the one true God.

And while this would have been terrifying, painful, and lonely on a scale I can't even begin to wrap my mind around, these verses make two things very clear to us. First, God didn't abandon Joseph and second, Joseph didn't abandon his faith in God.

Author David Bowden said it well: ***God is often absent in the ways we most desire, but present in the way we most require.***<sup>1</sup>

The very fact that Joseph was sold to this man, Potiphar, shows us from the outset that God was present with Joseph right in the midst of the mess that had become his life. Chapter 37 calls Potiphar the captain of the guards. He was an important guy. At the very least, he was captain of Pharaoh's guard, but based on the word used to describe him in the original language and its usage elsewhere he may have even been the commander of Pharaoh's entire army. This guy mattered. And so he would have been very wealthy. Joseph went from the pit in chapter 37 to the palace in chapter 39.

There's no booming voice from heaven, no burning bush, but we do see clearly in the text that God was with Joseph—in verse 2—and therefore he became a successful man. Because God blesses Joseph so much in his work as a slave, Potiphar notices and puts him in charge of his entire household. Everything Joseph touched turned to gold to the degree that Potiphar decided he was better off letting Joseph manage it than managing it himself.

And here's where the temptation comes in. You have to rely on God to get you out of the pit. . . but when you're in the palace it's easier to forget who is with you. When everything in life is going great then the temptation is to think that it's going great because of something I did. We tend to think that because we work hard, because we are skilled, and because we're intelligent we are successful and the temptation is to forget that all our successes in life come to us because we have a good God who loves us.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/when-god-isnt-there>

Remember, we said the first week that Joseph is not the main character of his own story. That's why when he's in the pit, we don't see "Oh, whoa is me." And when he's in the palace, we don't see "Hey, look at me."

Because Joseph overcomes the temptation to forget God in the midst of comfort, not only is God glorified but he was so glorified that even Potiphar could see it. This man, who would have worshiped many false gods, saw in verse 3 that the true Lord was with Joseph.

Joseph took the comfortable circumstances God had placed him in and used them for His glory and God prospered Him.

But even though that's true, we can also see here that prosperity isn't the goal for Joseph. If God worked that way all the time, we'd be all in. But—thankfully—He doesn't. Because if God rewarded us based on our performance in light of His holiness we'd all deserve to spend an eternity separated from Him and in torment in a place called Hell. Prosperity wasn't Joseph's goal because, as we'll see in the next section, Joseph loses his prosperity but not his trust in God.

The first six verses are overall pretty positive, but at the end of verse six there's this hint of change coming and we see it clearly in the next section. Let's start with verse 6 again and then read on.

## **The Temptation to Give In**

***6 He left all that he owned under Joseph's authority; he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate. Now Joseph was well-built and handsome.***

***7 After some time his master's wife looked longingly at Joseph and said, "Sleep with me."***

***8 But he refused. "Look," he said to his master's wife, "with me here my master does not concern himself with anything in his house, and he has put all that he owns under my authority. 9 No one in this house is greater than I am. He has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. So how could I do this immense evil, and how could I sin against God?"***

***10 Although she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her.***

***11 Now one day he went into the house to do his work, and none of the household servants were there. 12 She grabbed him by his garment and said, "Sleep with me!"***

***But leaving his garment in her hand, he escaped and ran outside. 13 When she saw that he had left his garment with her and had run outside, 14 she called her household servants. “Look,” she said to them, “my husband brought a Hebrew man to make fools of us. He came to me so he could sleep with me, and I screamed as loud as I could. 15 When he heard me screaming for help, he left his garment beside me and ran outside.”***

Potiphar had placed his full trust in Joseph to manage his household affairs, even though he was only in his late teens or early 20s at the time. And just like his brother Judah in last week’s text Joseph is confronted with sexual temptation. But, unlike Judah, Joseph resists.

And he resists over and over again. If anyone were going to give in to this temptation, Joseph makes a prime candidate. Judah gave in almost immediately in chapter 38. Moses describes Joseph in this text as constantly fighting off the advances of this woman who, in reality, held all the power in this relationship.

Think about everything Joseph had been through! One commentator considering Joseph’s fight against this particular temptation put it this way: ***Add to this the fact that Joseph knew the dysfunction of a father’s favoritism (37: 3), the scorn of ten brothers’ hatred (37: 4-5, 8), the betrayal of being sold for profit by those responsible for him (37: 27-28), the disdain of a slave’s life as chattel (37: 36; 39: 1), and the dissolution of transplantation to foreign soil and culture (39: 1). With this as his bio, Joseph had every reason to be angry, bitter, resentful, cynical, fearful, self-serving, and self-pitying. . . . Joseph had every human reason to find fleeting solace in an illicit embrace— frankly, to “act out!”***<sup>2</sup>

So, with all those ready-made excuses in his pocket, how was Joseph able to withstand the temptation?

Well, he makes three reasons plain in the text. It would violate his master’s trust, it would be evil, and ultimately, it would be a sin against God Himself.

Notice, that the first reason is one that many would use as an excuse. He basically says, ‘Hey, Potiphar trusts me so much that I’m here and I’m unsupervised.’ Verse 8: “with me

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<sup>2</sup> Andrew Schmutzer, sourced from: Hughes, R. Kent. Genesis: Beginning and Blessing (Preaching the Word) (p. 463). Crossway. Kindle Edition.

here my master does not concern himself with anything in his house, and he has put all that he owns under my authority.”

Joseph fully had the freedom and the access to commit this sin, yet he held strong because he wouldn't sin against Potiphar. He then makes two definitive statements about the act she's asking him to commit. It's evil and it's a sin against the Lord.

Joseph was able to overcome the temptation to sin because he truly understood the consequences of his actions. He had been the victim of great sin and he refused to victimize someone else. His response to this temptation was steadfast.

There was no debate here. Joseph's morality was solid because it was founded on a serious relationship with God. He wasn't playing with sin here.

Too many times, we tiptoe toward the line of what is sin—especially when it comes to sex. And we need to acknowledge that we are playing with something is extremely dangerous. One of the most frequent questions I was asked by students when I was a youth pastor was when it came to relationships, what can I do, how far can I go down this road with my boyfriend or girlfriend before it's sin. We want to tiptoe the line of sin and here we have Joseph literally running away from it.

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 6:18a **Flee sexual immorality!** and in Philipians 3:13b-14 ***Forgetting what is behind and reaching forward to what is ahead, 14 I pursue as my goal the prize promised by God's heavenly call in Christ Jesus.***

We cannot pursue the prize if we are tiptoeing around sin because those two races are run in opposite directions.

Kent Hughes wrote ***The grand deterrent to Joseph's sinning was the awareness that God sees all and that a sin that no one knows about, committed behind locked doors in a dark room, is actually done in the presence of a holy God. Joseph believed this. And I am convinced that the personal realization and conviction of this truth is the strongest deterrent to sin that there is.***<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Hughes, R. Kent. Genesis: Beginning and Blessing (Preaching the Word) (pp. 463-464). Crossway. Kindle Edition.

And sometimes, fleeing temptation will mean that we suffer loss on this side of eternity. That's what happens to Joseph here. He literally runs out of his tunic to get out of this situation and Potiphar's wife accuses him of rape. Potiphar believed her, became furious with Joseph and had him imprisoned. And that leads us to the third temptation in this text:

### **The Temptation to Give Up**

***16 She put Joseph's garment beside her until his master came home. 17 Then she told him the same story: "The Hebrew slave you brought to us came to make a fool of me, 18 but when I screamed for help, he left his garment beside me and ran outside." 19 When his master heard the story his wife told him—"These are the things your slave did to me"—he was furious 20 and had him thrown into prison, where the king's prisoners were confined. So Joseph was there in prison. 21 But the Lord was with Joseph and extended kindness to him. He granted him favor with the prison warden. 22 The warden put all the prisoners who were in the prison under Joseph's authority, and he was responsible for everything that was done there. 23 The warden did not bother with anything under Joseph's authority, because the Lord was with him, and the Lord made everything that he did successful.***

So far, Joseph has been beaten, stripped, tossed in a pit, sold as a slave, falsely accused of rape, and now tossed in prison—and as best we can tell he did nothing wrong. In the beginning of chapter 37 we see that he gave what was probably a false report to his dad. Then, maybe he was a little arrogant about his dreams. . .but certainly nothing to deserve all this. Definitely, he has behaved honorably since coming to Egypt. So, why would God allow all this to happen to him? He went from pit to penthouse to prison—and in prison Scripture shows us he suffered greatly:

Psalm 105:17-19

***He had sent a man ahead of them—  
Joseph, who was sold as a slave.  
18 They hurt his feet with shackles;  
his neck was put in an iron collar.  
19 Until the time his prediction came true,  
the word of the Lord tested him.***

But through this testing, we know Joseph didn't give up. This is where it helps us to zoom the camera out, to really see what the Hand of the Lord is at work doing here.

There's some repetition in this chapter that should bring us comfort. When Joseph is a slave in verse 2 we see The Lord was with Joseph. When he's a prisoner in verse 21 we see But the Lord was with Joseph. The Lord was with Joseph in the darkest moments, just like he was with him at the brightest ones.

Over and over again, Joseph's life illustrated what is to come generations later when the promised Messiah arrives in the person of Jesus Christ—another man who would be falsely accused, counted among the prisoners, unjustly convicted, and sentenced. In fact, we find that when Jesus' birth is heralded to another Joseph in Matthew 1:20b-23

***“Joseph, son of David, don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because what has been conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”***  
***22 Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet:***  
***23 See, the virgin will become pregnant***  
***and give birth to a son,***  
***and they will name him Immanuel,***  
***which is translated “God is with us.”***

God was with Joseph through the temptation to forget, to give in, and to give up. And God guided Joseph's story as a part of a much bigger plan He had for all of humanity. Over and over again the echo in chapter 39 is “God was with Joseph.” The same is true of you and I.

I want to draw your attention again to the last eight words of chapter 39: *the Lord made everything that he did successful.*

Don't you wish that were true of your life? But what is success, really? I'm afraid that by our standard, Joseph's life wasn't successful at all. Beaten, stripped, thrown in a hole, sold as a slave, lost his whole family, falsely accused of rape, thrown in prison—those aren't the descriptors of success that most of us are striving for.

We need desperately to understand that success for you and I means obedience to the God who saved us. It doesn't mean a bigger house, a bigger office, and a smaller waistline.

The scale of what God was at work doing in Joseph's life—both in the moments he prospered Joseph and the moments Joseph's life utterly fell apart—the scale of what God was at work doing had implications for generations and generations. We have the privilege of seeing Joseph's whole story and knowing what God was up to. You don't have that in your life. But success still means obedience. God never guarantees that success for you means material prosperity. Sometimes it does, and we see that in Joseph's life. But sometimes it means prison.

John Piper said it well back in 2012. ***“God is always doing 10,000 things in your life, and you may be aware of three of them.”***<sup>4</sup> God's plan for your life is much larger than you will ever understand on this side of eternity. Don't limit your obedience only to things you understand or you will miss out.

The key to Joseph's success is not that he was good. It's that God was with Him. That is why Joseph overcame the temptation to forget, the temptation to give up, and the temptation to give in. Let's pray.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/god-is-always-doing-10000-things-in-your-life>