

Lessons From Lilies

Genesis 39:1-20

This past week I went up to spend a little time with my Dad. That usually means some work that he needs done. Along the sidewalk next to his house he has some lilies growing in front of some shrubs. These lilies grow quite tall and in time fall over part of the sidewalk. Because he is already a fall risk, those lilies became a tripping hazard for him. So he wanted them removed. As the saying goes, he would rather be safe than sorry and quite frankly we agree. A couple of weeks ago a lady from his church came out and dug up a bunch of them, but there was still work to be done. It doesn't take much for them to grow back quickly. Could I bring our little Mantis rototiller?

The first thing I had to do was dig out the rest of the plants and bulbs, then take the tiller to the soil. If you have ever dug up lilies you know that one plant can have 8 or 10 bulbs. You can't just grab the base of the stalk and give it a pull. It was quite a bit of work to dig out all those bulbs. Even after I tilled up the soil more bulbs were unearthed.

As I was digging, I got to thinking how temptation is a lot like those lilies and their many bulbs. They aren't easily uprooted and they take a lot of work to keep them from springing up. You might think you nipped temptation in the bud, only to find that part of the root was left behind to grow. And like those lilies, temptation can appear to be beautiful, but in the end they can trip us up.

It didn't take much imagination to think about the correlation with Joseph and what we see in **chapter 39**. His example serves to illustrate how we should respond to the relentlessness of temptation to sin. Temptation is no respecter of persons. We see in Scripture that temptation we find the likes of Eve, Noah, Abraham, Lot, David, Daniel, Elijah, even Jesus Himself. I might even go so far as to say that the more you desire to walk with God, the greater the temptation will be. **John MacArthur states that "without any question at all, the biggest problem that Christians have is temptation. if you can eliminate temptation, you can eliminate sin."**

One dictionary simply defines temptation as "the desire to do something wrong or unwise; a thing or course of action that attracts or tempts someone." Another dictionary is a bit more descriptive and defines it as enticement, allurements, baiting, coaxing, seduction, urging, desire, impulse.

The gym where I work out is now open with restrictions. I went this past Thursday and found that the bike I use had a sign that said this piece of equipment is practicing social fitnessing, select another machine. Every other piece of equipment in that row had that sign. Now there was no one else working on any of the other machines in that row. As a matter of fact, there were only five of us there to work out. I was tempted to move the signs so I could use that one machine, the only one I wanted to use, but I refrained. But I sure wanted to. Would that have been wrong of me?

In the context of our passage today, temptation is the urge or inclination to sin. Let's be clear that the temptation is not sin, it is giving in to that temptation by acting on it that becomes the sin.

We can learn a great lesson about temptation from a dog. It's master put some food on the floor and told the dog "don't eat that" but the dog ran over and ate it. The master gave the dog a swat. He put another piece of food on the floor and told the dog not to eat it and the dog ran over and ate it. He got another swat. After a while the dog learned that eating the food meant a swat so it decided not to eat so he wouldn't get the swat. Here's how the dog overcame the temptation to eat the food. He wouldn't look at food. The dog evidently felt that if it looked at the food the temptation would be too great. So instead of looking at the food the dog would look at the master's face and the temptation never caused a problem.

You are with me in **Genesis 39** where we resume our account of Joseph. In the end of **chapter 37** Joseph's brothers, who had a jealous hatred of him, sold him to some Midianite merchants as a slave. In **chapter 38** there was an interlude in the story of Joseph to deal with the issue of Judah and his incestuous relationship with his daughter-in-law

Tamar through whom, by the way, would come the Messiah. We resume the account of Joseph in **chapter 39**. Let's notice first Joseph's plight.

I. JOSEPH'S PLIGHT – v. 1

Here's something to keep in mind every day of your lives. It's a promise to claim as a reminder of God's sovereign plan, a plan we sometimes question because we don't have the full scope. If we had any part of God's plan it wouldn't be faith. So Joseph had to trust God.

Jeremiah 29:11-14 “**For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. You will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with all your heart. I will be found by you,’ declares the Lord.**”

The Message “**I know what I'm doing. I have it all planned out—plans to take care of you, not abandon you, plans to give you the future you hope for. When you call on Me, when you come and pray to Me, I'll listen. When you come looking for Me, you'll find Me. Yes, when you get serious about finding Me and want it more than anything else, I'll make sure you won't be disappointed.’ GOD's Decree.**”

Joseph is in a pickle. He is in a dangerous, difficult and unfortunate predicament. **Verse 1** tells us about his plight. First we see his bondage.

A. His Bondage – v. 1a

Sold for 20 pieces of silver by his brothers, Joseph found himself in bondage in Egypt. It's a foreign land with strange customs and a different lifestyle. He was used to the open plains and foothills of the land of Canaan. He had freedom to walk out his tent door and determine what he was going to do for the day. Yes, he had responsibilities given to him by his father, but he could choose the order he did those things. He was free. But here he is tethered to a train of camels marching down to Egypt. We aren't told so we can only speculate that there are others

who were also to be sold as slaves.

One moment Joseph was enjoying the splendor of favoritism by his father in the position of inheriting the estate, free as a bird and the next moment he is stripped of everything and treated as nothing. He had no rights, no privileges, no status. They didn't care about his home problems or that where he came from he was considered a prince. He was now just an object worth a profit on the slave blocks.

Think for a moment about what was ahead of him going down to Egypt.

He didn't know the language.

He didn't know the customs or culture.

He was nothing more than a commodity.

Thrown in with who knows how many other slaves, he would have to fit in and adapt or lose his life, which as a slave didn't amount to much. In the household of a new master he would have to start from the bottom, doing whatever menial tasks he was told to do and do them without question or hesitation. If you rebelled or tried to run away, you might get flogged or perhaps even death. There was no hope of escape.

Now go back and ponder for a moment those words from **Jeremiah 29:11** “**I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.’”**

Maybe like Job, similar words resonated within his heart “**Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised.’ In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.” (Job 1:21-22)**

In our most severe trials do we believe that, can we give praise for God's plans for us even when it includes some kind of pain?

Joseph went from prince to prisoner.

If his bondage wasn't enough, consider next his boss.

B. His Boss – v. 1b

Keep in mind that this is all providentially orchestrated. There isn't any happenstance to it. It wasn't by chance that of all people, Joseph should be sold to a man named Potiphar. We learn from the verse that he is the captain or officer of Pharaoh's guard. The Hebrew word can be translated eunuch. In some cultures, men in a position such as what Potiphar held went through a voluntary procedure that would render them incapable of reproduction. It was done for a couple of reasons.

The first was to ensure loyalty by the individual pledging allegiance to the throne.

The second was to deter any possibility down the road of a person like Potiphar from instigating a coup against the king and establish his own dynasty through his offspring. Potiphar may have consented to the procedure to elevate his status. His wife may have married him for social or financial reasons. If he was in fact a eunuch, that may explain why she was prone to commit adultery as we will see.

Something else we should note about Potiphar is that as captain of Pharaoh's guard, he was in charge of the king's prisoners. These were political prisoners and as chief guard he was also chief executioner.

In spite of Joseph's plight there is hope. It's found in **verses 2-6a** where we note Joseph's preservation.

II. JOSEPH'S PRESERVATION – vs. 2-6a

I am grateful for these opening words of **verse 2**. They tell us about his protection by God.

A. His Protection By God– v.2a

Underline those opening words of **verse 2** “**The Lord was with Joseph.**” Highlight it. Put some exclamation points behind it. Never forget it. Mount it as a plaque in your home. Tape it to the dashboard of your car. Have it scroll across your computer screen at work or in your home office. Make it a screen saver on your phone if need be. Insert your name for Joseph and repeat it often. “**The Lord is with you.**” **Hebrews 13:5** “**I will never leave you nor forsake you.**”

Psalm 23:4 “**Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me.**”

Isaiah 41:10 “**Fear not, for I am with you.**”

Matthew 28:20 “**I am with you always, even to the end of the age.**”

In the horrors of the concentration camp echoed the rallying cry that sustained Corrie ten Boom, who along with her family had been thrust in prison for harboring Jews. Huddled in the same barracks as her sister, they endured together until her sister Betsie died. But earlier she would resonate the hope of God and His abiding and sustaining presence with these words: “**There is no pit so deep that God is not deeper still.**”

Whatever is your pit
 Whatever is your bondage
 Whatever is your Egypt
 Never forget that the Lord is with you.
 Though everyone else around forsakes you
 Though circumstances seem to stack up against you
 Though it seems as if God is silent or absent, never doubt His presence, never doubt His plans, never doubt His preservation because He is with you.

I was reading something this past week that I want you to keep in mind. When God lights the match that brings the fire you are currently in, remember that the fire is not meant to consume you but to refine you.

God's plans are never thwarted by man's actions so no matter where you are, you can expect that if God put you there He will protect you because He is with you – ALWAYS. The question remains as to whether or not we choose to believe it. We can wallow in our misery and question God and His love or plans or we can accept it as what God has allowed for our good because we are called according to His purpose choosing to love Him. (**Romans 8:28**)

Not only do we see Joseph's protection by God, we see his prosperity through God.

B. His Prosperity Through God – vs. 2b-6a

“The Lord was with Joseph and he prospered.”

Before I go any further let me make two things clear. Just because a person prospers does not mean the Lord is with him and just because a person isn't prospering, doesn't mean the Lord is not with that person.

Yes, the Lord was with Joseph.

Yes, the Lord prospered Joseph.

That was His plan for Joseph.

Based on what we read about his character, I assume that after the shock of what had happened to him, Joseph decided that God had a purpose in it all so he determined to be the best slave he possibly could. He did everything with excellence, but I want you to understand something here because it's important for us. It wasn't just in how he did his work, it was why he did it.

I Corinthians 10:31 offers a sound principle for how we are to work. **“So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.”**

Colossians 3:17 **“And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.”**

Simply put do everything as if you were doing it for God. I think that became Joseph's mode of operation.

Our text says that one day Potiphar noticed the kind of work Joseph was doing. I think he noticed both his attitude and actions. I think he noticed his integrity and he thought to himself, there's a slave I can trust.

Jesus put it this way: **“Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!” (Matthew 25:23)**

Notice though that it wasn't just that Potiphar saw his work, he saw that the Lord was with Joseph and the gave Joseph success. John Phillips put it accurately **“Joseph behaved as a believer should.”**

Potiphar saw loyalty, trust, integrity, strength, leadership, responsibility and good, hard work. Put that kind of effort and attitude into your work every day and you will be noticed. As a result we read that Potiphar made Joseph his attendant. Think of him as a personal secretary booking appointments, keeping track of his schedule, arranging transportation and meetings, overseeing all his business transactions. The choice of words used here indicates that Joseph wasn't only in charge of Potiphar's assets, he was in charge of everything he accrued. He was in charge of all the other servants as well. He ran the entire operation and we read that the Lord prospered Potiphar on account of Joseph. **Verse 6 “So he left in Joseph's care everything he had; with Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate.”** That may mean there were dietary restrictions that Joseph couldn't do because he was not Egyptian.

Let me encourage you from the example of Joseph that whatever your hands find to do, do it with all your might as if doing it for the Lord.

We have seen Joseph's plight. He was sent to Egypt in bondage bought by a boss who was close to Pharaoh.

We have seen Joseph's preservation. He was protected by God and prospered through God. In the remainder of our passage we see Joseph's problem.

III. JOSEPH'S PROBLEM – vs. 6b-20

“Now Joseph was well-built and handsome.”

Only three others in Scripture bear that description: Saul, David, and Absalom.

Picture if you will a cross between someone on GQ and Muscle magazines. Maybe he had the face of Donny Osmond and the body of Tarzan. He was toned and tanned. Chiseled abs, muscular arms and legs flexed whenever he moved. What a man. Potiphar not only noticed him, but so did his wife but for different reasons and they were far apart. Potiphar noticed Joseph for his hard work. His wife noticed Joseph for his handsome body.

Potiphar saw an opportunity for prosperity.
 His wife saw an opportunity for promiscuity.
 Potiphar saw Joseph as one who could contribute.
 His wife saw Joseph as one to conquer.

She made a desiring offer.

A. A Desiring Offer – vs. 6b-7

It's subtle to begin with. She started hanging out longer wherever Joseph was working. She asked him to do more things. She looked for excuses to be around him. There was the look in her eye as she watched him leave or enter the room, or the touch of her hand as she gently grazed his arm when taking something from him, or the tone of her voice as she talked with him that was soft but seductive. But we read that her request wasn't very subtle.

“Come to bed with me.”

Now keep in mind that she is the wife of the boss and he is still just a slave and while adultery, even in a pagan culture, was looked on with disfavor it was also often looked over. She was in a position to get what she wanted, and she wanted this slave for nothing else than the purpose of pure, unadulterated lust and pleasure. She could have had any slave, but she wanted this slave. Maybe all the others were too easy or too willing, but Joseph was a catch, he was different, he was worth the pursuit. Lust abounds and can be easily gratified. It isn't just lust for physical gratification as it is here. It can be a lust for power, a lust for things, a lust for fame. The carrot of temptation dangles closely.

Chuck Swindoll makes this observation worth our consideration: **“With greater success comes greater measures of trust, which, by the way, lead to greater times of unguarded vulnerability.”**

Our enemy lurks close by where the door of success swings open. As I said earlier, everyone of us is prone to temptation. We read in **I Corinthians 10:13** that temptation is common to man. That means it's a characteristic of everyone. That it's common means that we will never have a unique temptation that someone else somewhere in the world hasn't also already faced. The word can also

mean usual or typical. There are no one of a kind temptations. They are common and inclusive. You aren't the first one and you aren't the only one.

Here's a handsome, well-built young man being enticed by the wife of his boss. He was all alone, he was away from home, others were doing it, why shouldn't he. Life had treated him rotten so far, so why not take advantage of this desiring offer? Besides, it might just enhance his career a little. He had every conceivable rationalization to give in to this enticing temptation, but that's when we see a dissenting objection.

B. A Dissenting Objection – vs. 8-10

I Corinthians 10:13 gives us two helpful reasons for our ability to overcome temptation.

It tells us first that God is faithful. He won't give us anything we aren't able to bear.

Second is that He always gives us a way of escape. That means our escape is divinely positioned. God enables us to resist the temptation because we can't resist it in our own strength. Going back to the earlier illustration of the dog, as long as the dog was looking at the master, he could resist the food. So folks, if you want to resist temptation keep looking at the Master. He has given us the means of escape.

The Phillips Translation: “No temptation has come your way that is too hard for flesh and blood to bear. But God can be trusted not to allow you to suffer any temptation beyond your powers of endurance. He will see to it that every temptation has a way out, so that it will never be impossible for you to bear it.”

The Message: “No test or temptation that comes your way is beyond the course of what others have had to face. All you need to remember is that God will never let you down; He'll never let you be pushed past your limit; He'll always be there to help you come through it.”

What escape did Joseph have? Our text tells us that he first refused and gave her two reasons for his objection to her request.

First, it would go against the trust of his master who

had put everything under his charge.

Second, it would be sinning against God. When you put this verse together with **verse 2**, our deterrent to temptation is knowing that God is with us and that we will not prosper if we give in to temptation by sinning. It wasn't just a break in trust or sinning against his master, Joseph knew that ultimately all sin was against God. Despite her constant badgering we read that he continued to refuse her advances.

There is an old story that says when Joseph refused because of God knowing and seeing, she threw her skirt over an idol and said that God can't see now.

Jeremiah 23:24 **“Can any hide himself in secret place, that I shall not see him,’ saith the Lord. ‘Do not I fill heaven and earth,’ saith the Lord.”**

David asks a rhetorical question: **“Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? (Psalm 139:7)**

Joseph gives us a clue about how to handle temptation – refuse to give in. **Taking a phrase from Nancy Reagan – “Just say no.”**

Joseph gave a dissenting objection, but sometimes no isn't enough. You have no doubt heard that **“hell knows no fury like a woman scorned”** and that's what we see next in a disturbing outrage.

C. A Disturbing Outrage – vs. 11-18

In the story about David's son Amnon who raped his half-sister Tamar, it says that the hate he hated her with was greater than his original love for her. To say it bluntly, Mrs. Potiphar is hoping mad. Notice a disturbing outrage.

If we weren't reading it from Scripture, it might be the manuscript for a trashy novel or soap opera, but it isn't. It's the pages of God's Word. **Verse 11** just simply starts out by saying one day. It's not any particular day, just one day, any day, this day, that day. One day Joseph was all alone in the house. Maybe Mrs. Potiphar sent all the other slaves out on errands so that Joseph would be intentionally alone. One day Joseph came in to take care of some duties and she cornered him and grabbed his shirt. Notice how she moved from being flirtatious to being

forceful. She would not be denied this time.

But he ran out the door and left his cloak with her.

Joseph gives us two very important principles in overcoming temptation no matter how strong they are. The first is the refuse and the second is to run.

II Timothy 2:22 **“Flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord with a pure heart.”**

In **I Corinthians 10:13** the way of escape is recognizing that God will see us through it. Paul's urging is to run away from it.

If you are out hiking in the woods and you see a bear your first inclination isn't to go up and pet it, it's to run. Joseph ran because it was the right thing and the only thing to do. She could not be reasoned with, so run from it.

John Phillips writes **“It was an absolute moral and spiritual impossibility for him even to contemplate the kind of action she urged. It would have been imprudent socially and impossible spiritually. What the woman suggested was utterly repulsive to him as a believer.”**

Galatians 6:1 gives us another principle for overcoming the enticement of temptation.

“Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.”

Watch yourself so you aren't tempted. Know your vulnerabilities, your weaknesses. If you are on a diet don't keep driving by the donut shop or taking your cart down the cookie aisle.

Jesus told the disciples to watch and pray so they wouldn't be tempted.

So I see four principles for overcoming temptation.

Refuse to give in

Run away from it

Remember that God is with you and given a way of escape

Request His help through prayer.

Joseph ran but he left his coat behind and since she

couldn't have him, she would get him through revenge. She screamed and some of the other slaves came in to see what was wrong. Some scholars suggest that it wasn't a scream of rape but of rage. She moved from infatuation to infuriation. She went from flirtation to force to framing Joseph by accusing him of taking advantage of her and she had the proof in her hand.

Notice her sense of nationalism by using the term Hebrew. He was a foreigner mocking them and her personally and when Potiphar came home from a long day at the office she fed him the same fabricated tale of Joseph's sordid effort. She even went so far as to pass some of the blame onto Potiphar, that it was his fault for bringing this Hebrew into their happy home to make fun of them and after all he had done for this slave.

Let me finish the text with one final point where we see a distraught owner.

D. A Distraught Owner – vs. 19-20

Verse 19 says “**he burned with anger.**” But it doesn't tell us who he was angry with. Was he angry with Joseph after promoting him to top slave entrusting him with everything in the house only to be spurned in this way? Was he angry at his wife? Did he know her character all too well as someone with very loose morals? After all, we read earlier that he saw the Lord was with Joseph in everything he did. He was different than all the other slaves in conduct and character. He probably knew in his heart that Joseph was innocent, but he couldn't accept the word of his wife over the word of his slave or even of any of the other slaves for that matter who also probably knew the truth. At this point Potiphar had two options. As chief executioner he could put Joseph to death and had every right to do that based on the testimony of his wife or he could throw him in prison, which he did insinuating that he knew the character of both and wanted to spare Joseph's life. Her story was probably not convincing to him.

Let me wrap it up with a few thoughts. Everyone will face temptation and Joseph gives us a great

example of how to be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might (**Ephesians 6:10**) to stand against it. He had decided long before this incident that he was going to refuse temptation and if it persisted, he would run from it. We must have a plan on what we will do before it comes, that's why the Lord tells us to watch and pray.

Swedish diplomat Dag Hammarskjold once said “He who wants to keep a garden tidy doesn't reserve a plot for weeds.”

Temptation will be persistent and we have to determine now how we will respond when those circumstances arise.

I have given you four ways to overcome temptation. There is one more that needs to be mentioned because it's key. Jesus taught us this principle in the wilderness when He was tempted.

Respond with the Word of God. **Psalm 119:9, 11** says to hide God's Word in your heart so you don't sin against Him. His Word is a way of escape.

God gave Joseph a way of escape. The result was all part of God's plan to put Joseph in the place where he will be noticed by someone else.

So how about you? Are there any temptations you are allowing to linger at your doorstep? Have you been avoiding the way of escape? Do you need to remember that God is with you?

Refuse it.

Run from it.

Remember God's presence.

Request God's help by prayer.

Respond with God's Word.

When it comes to temptation, will we watch or waver?

Decide now how you will respond before it starts knocking.