

Potiphar's Wife Attempts to Seduce Joseph

Genesis 39:7-12

Genesis 39:7-12 - *"And it came to pass after these things that his master's wife cast longing eyes on Joseph, and she said, "Lie with me." ⁸ But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Look, my master does not know what is with me in the house, and he has committed all that he has to my hand. ⁹ There is no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"*

¹⁰ So it was, as she spoke to Joseph day by day, that he did not heed her, to lie with her or to be with her. ¹¹ But it happened about this time, when Joseph went into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the house was inside, ¹² that she caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me." But he left his garment in her hand, and fled and ran outside."

Background Notes

Joseph was brought down to Egypt by Midianite traders and sold as a slave to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officials. But the Lord was with Joseph, and He blessed him, and it wasn't long before Joseph was elevated to a position of overseer of Potiphar's entire estate. *"So it was, from the time that he had made him overseer of his house and all that he had, that the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; and the blessing of the LORD was on all that he had in the house and in the field" (v5).*

So the Lord blessed Potiphar's household for Joseph's sake, and the blessing of the Lord was on all that he owned. But trouble was looming on the horizon. *"Joseph was handsome in form and appearance. And it came to pass after these things that his master's wife cast longing eyes on Joseph, and she said, "Lie with me" (v6-7).*

The event in these verses was probably not the first time that Potiphar's wife had tried something like this, and she probably had been successful with other men. Furthermore, because Joseph was one of Potiphar's slaves, she probably considered Joseph her property; and thought she could do whatever she wanted with him. But Joseph resisted, and he refused her suggestion. Unlike his brother Judah, and unlike King David later, Joseph did not sin in this area.

"So it was, as she spoke to Joseph day by day, that he did not heed her, to lie with her or to be with her" (v10). Notice that this temptation was not a one-time event. And Joseph didn't assume that because this situation had happened a number of times, "Well, I guess it must be God's will." Did you know that some Christians operate like that? If something happens enough times, even when they know it's wrong, they assume that "God must be speaking!" What kind of crazy

reasoning is that? Satan would love to have you think like that, because he comes again and again with the same temptations.

It appears that Potiphar's wife arranged a situation when no one would be in the house (v11), and she grabbed Joseph and said, "Lie with me!" But once again Joseph resisted and ran away - even though she had grasped his cloak and he had to leave it in her hands.

Notice that he didn't say, "OK, I tried to resist, but since you're my boss, I have to obey you." No way! Joseph knew that this was sin! It was sin against his own body, sin against Potiphar's wife, sin against Potiphar, and most importantly, sin against God (v9). So Joseph resisted in the strength of the Lord, and he fled from the sinful situation.

Doctrinal Points

1. The Bible *does not* teach "situational ethics."

"Situational ethics" (or "situation ethics") is a system of ethics in which actions are evaluated within a situational context, rather than by moral absolutes. Situational ethics says that you should always do the "most helpful" thing or the "most loving" thing (from your perspective) in any given situation. If ever God wanted to teach situational ethics, the Joseph story would be the perfect place.

This is the way situational ethics might reason in Joseph's situation: Joseph was far from home, now in his twenties, with seemingly no chance for marriage. As a man, Joseph had certain needs - and these needs were God-given, because God created us with sexual drive. And there was Potiphar's wife, apparently involved in an unhappy marriage, and she had certain needs, too. So why not go ahead? Wouldn't that be the "most **loving**" thing to do? No one would need to know, and no one would need to get hurt. Would it really be a sin, between two consenting adults - especially if Joseph was just taking orders from Potiphar's wife, who owned him as a slave? And after all, if he didn't consent he might lose his high position in the household, or even be thrown into prison.

So according to the "situational" system of ethics, certainly the "most helpful" and "most loving" action to take in this situation would be to go ahead and consent. Right? **Wrong!** The Bible does **not** teach situational ethics! This would be **sin**, regardless of the situation. Joseph had the right view, because he lived by **biblical ethics**.

Now what about us? Situational ethics is very appealing to human reasoning. Sometimes it seems that the most helpful thing to do, or the most loving thing to do, is to go against God's standards. Of course not all the time, we might say, but just in certain situations when there are extenuating circumstances. **Don't fall for that snare of Satan!** Obey God! **Keeping God's standards is always the most helpful and the most loving thing to do in all situations.** Adultery is never right, fornication is never right, immorality is never right. The Bible does **not** teach situational ethics!

2. The Bible *does* teach “situation testing.”

God allowed Joseph to be in this situation. Joseph was being tested. In reference to Joseph, Psalm 105:16-19 says, “[God] called for a famine in the land; He destroyed all the provision of bread. He sent a man before them — Joseph— who was sold as a slave. They hurt his feet with fetters; he was laid in irons. Until the time that His word came to pass, the word of the LORD tested him.” Notice that “**the word of the Lord**” tested Joseph through all of these circumstances. God allowed these severe tests in Joseph’s life. It was a test of Joseph’s faith, and a preparation for future service.

It is not sin to be tempted. Our Lord was tempted, and He never sinned. It’s when we **yield** to the temptation - that is sin! And God is not the author of temptation. Read James 1 in that connection, particularly verse 13. God is not the author of temptation, but God allows temptation to come into our lives as a test of our faith, and as a test of our faithfulness.

We can be sure that, as believers, tempting situations will come into our lives. It may be in the same area as Joseph’s test. A number of years ago, I was standing in the lobby of a large hotel, and an attractive woman came up to me. She said, “Sir, do you have the time?” I looked at my watch, and when I looked up she had put her fingers under the lapel of my jacket! Then she said, “How would you like to go to my room, and discuss the time?” [Interesting – for some reason everyone looked up attentively as I gave this illustration!] Well, guess what biblical passage flashed through my mind at that point? You guessed it - Genesis 39! So I instinctively grabbed my coat and quickly walked away. (And when I told Margie about this later, she said, “I’m glad you didn’t have to leave your expensive jacket behind when you ran away!”) I’m sure many of you could share experiences when God has allowed you to be in tempting situations. He may allow you to be tested in all kinds of areas. James 1 says that we are strengthened spiritually, as well as rewarded, when we pass the test. So remember, the Bible doesn’t teach situation ethics, but it does teach “situation testing.”

Practical Applications

1. It’s better to flee than to fall!

Joseph did the right thing. He fled, even though it meant losing his coat. This is the way we are to resist in the area of sexual temptation. 2 Timothy 2:22 says, “*Flee also youthful lusts...*” And 1 Corinthians 6:18 says, “*Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body.*”

Sexual temptation is a very powerful weapon in Satan’s arsenal, because it appeals to a natural God-given desire. But sexual activity outside of marriage is outside of the boundaries that God has defined as His standards.

Many Christian leaders have succumbed to temptation and fallen in this area because they didn’t flee the situation. They may have started to flee - but then they stopped running, and the temptation caught up with them. We should pray for our

Christian leaders, that God would give them the wisdom and the moral strength to flee compromising situations. This applies to every single one of us as well. We need to **flee** from these kinds of situations.

In fact, with temptation in **any** area of fleshly desire, the biblical principle of doing battle is to **flee**. No matter how strong you feel, or how mature you are - **flee!** The biblical way to resist temptation in this area is to run. Don't even hang around to "witness"! Notice Joseph didn't say "Well, let's sit down and I'll explain the gospel to you." No! You **flee!**

Notice, too, that Joseph began to practice this principle of "fleeing" even before the event when Potiphar's wife grabbed his coat. Look at verse 10: "*So it was, as she spoke to Joseph day by day, that he did not heed her, to lie with her or to be with her.*" He avoided her as much as possible!

Sexual sin is not irresistible. **Avoid** and **flee** is the biblical way to combat this powerful temptation. It's better to flee than to fall!

2. Maybe we should thank the Lord if we're ugly!

As I look around this congregation, I'd say you're a pretty good-looking bunch here at this church! But just in case you disagree, and you think that God has not blessed you with the greatest "form and features package," remember this practical application: "Maybe we should thank the Lord if we're ugly!"

Notice the end of verse 6: "*Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance.*" I can assure you that Potiphar's wife would not have tried to seduce an ugly Joseph. Agreed? I think you see the point.

Seriously speaking, a built-in vulnerability and a great responsibility go along with good looks and talent. If the Lord has given you a special talent, you can thank the Lord - but it's very important to recognize that you have a responsibility to use that talent for the **His** glory, not your own. And if the Lord has given you good looks, recognize that you may very well be tested in the same area as Joseph.

The good news here is that **we don't have to fail** when we're tested. In 1 Corinthians 10:13 the Lord says, "*No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.*" God will provide a means to resist and escape from every temptation, and to pass every test. We don't have to fail!

Yes, if we do fail, God can pick up the pieces (and maybe some of us have experienced some failures). But permanent scars will remain after failure. And when we think through all the personal sorrow and remorse, and all the sad fallout to others that comes with our failure - then maybe, just maybe, we should thank the Lord if we're ugly!