

Session 2

January 30, 2022

THE PITFALL OF TEMPTATION

Genesis 39:1-12

There are three sources of temptation that we all face. The *flesh* is our old sin nature that tempts us in the basest of physical desires (see Gal. 5:19ff). The *world* (or *cosmos*) tempts us in the area of personal pride; the desire for success, recognition, and praise from others (see 1 John 2:15ff). The *devil* tempts in the area of spiritual things. He is a murderer and the “father of lies” (John 8:44); the deceiver who masquerades as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14); and a fierce adversary who stalks us “like a roaring lion” (1 Pet. 5:8). Jesus was tempted in each of these areas not only in the desert (Mat. 4:1-11), but every day and in every way thereafter (see Heb. 4:15).

We all know that being tempted is not a sin. Jesus Himself was tempted by the devil himself and yet remained without sin. Our problem is not being *tempted to sin*; rather it's *giving in to that temptation* that gets us into trouble. Joseph's situation with Potiphar's wife was unfortunate, but not unusual.

The risk of success (vv. 1-6). Joseph's climb in status from slave to trusted steward is both ironic and providential. Potiphar was the captain of the guard (v. 1), likely in charge of Pharaoh's security. It's interesting to note that not only was the Lord with Joseph, but Potiphar—an Egyptian pagan—recognized that the Lord was with him and saw the successes that came with it (v. 2). The result? Joseph “found favor in his master's sight,” became his personal assistant, and was given control over his entire household (v. 4). The Lord's blessing then extended beyond Joseph to all that Potiphar owned (v. 5). As a result of all that, Potiphar “did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate” (v. 6). In other words, he was able to step back and let Joseph run *everything*.

While Joseph was a man of incredible integrity (as we shall see below), the circumstances of his success formed a subtle trap. In most cases, the rise to fame and fortune becomes a source of personal pride and reckless arrogance (see the case of Nebuchadnezzar in Dan.4:28ff). If our own pride doesn't knock us off our pedestal (Prov. 16:18), someone on his own quest for success is quick to take aim. And in every case, the devil lurks in the darkness and sin is crouching at the door (Gen. 4:7). For reflection: *Can you think of other times in Scripture when prosperity and success were the predecessors of sin? How might 2 Sam. 11 relate to this discussion?*

The risk of failure (vv. 6-12). Not only was Joseph successful in business, but he was physically attractive as well. For this reason, temptation came his way in the form of a temptress who also happened to be his boss's wife. This scenario had all the makings for a disaster. Joseph may well have been flattered by the woman's advances but was smart enough to see the scandal in the making. Not willing to lose all that he had gained (including and especially Potiphar's trust) He attempted to reason with her (vv. 8-9). But her temptation was one of the flesh, and we all know that in such situations, sound reasoning is no match for racing hormones! The answer to temptations of the flesh is not *to reason* but *to run* (see 2 Tim. 2:22). And since Potiphar's wife wouldn't run, Joseph had to (v. 12). But there was a problem. While Joseph had been successful in getting out of there, he left his clothes behind (v. 12). Unfortunately, Joseph's good intentions

were no match for the worst of circumstances. Any attempt to justify himself fell on deaf ears. Joseph had his integrity...but Potiphar's wife had his clothes. For reflection: *Why do you think God allowed the innocent in this case to suffer? What (if anything) could have been done differently?*