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Series: *Joseph – Living the Dream*
Title: *Faithful when Tempted*
Preacher: Mark Adams
Scripture: Genesis 39:1-20a

On January 15, 2009 a flight bound from LaGuardia to Charlotte, North Carolina had 155 passengers and crew on board. It was scheduled to last 87 minutes. But it lasted only 4 minutes and 42 seconds and it didn't land in Charlotte. The plane ended up floating in the middle of the ice-filled Hudson River. The first 100 seconds of the flight, with the copilot at the controls, were routine. But then the captain, who we all know as "Sully" shouted "*BIRDS!*" And at that moment, the plane's engines ingested a flock of Canada geese and began to grind to a halt. Within ten seconds, the engines were completely silent. The plane had no power. At this point, Sully took over the controls of what was basically an 82-ton glider. Understand, they were at low altitude over one of the most densely populated cities in the world. The plane had no time to return to the airport and there were no viable emergency landing areas. But in spite of all this, Sully says he felt strangely confident. He immediately radioed "*MAYDAY*" and calmly told the air traffic controllers they were putting the plane down in the Hudson River.

We all know the rest of the story, Sully gently nestled the plane in the water. The crew did a perfect job of getting everyone off the plane. Boats came to get the passengers. Everyone got wet but there were no serious injuries. The entire thing became known as "*The Miracle on the Hudson*" Sully explained how he was able to do what he did by saying, "*For 42 years I've been making small regular deposits in the bank of experience, education, and training---and on January 14, the balance was sufficient such that I could make a very large withdrawal.*" He also said, "*I never knew in 42 years that there would be 208 seconds on which my entire career would be judged.*"

There is an even more important bank where we all make deposits or withdrawals; it's the bank of character. And we all face defining moments in which we make withdrawals from that "character account." Like Sully, our actions in these moments can indeed become the basis on which our entire lives are judged.

This morning as we continue our study of Joseph, our hero experiences a moment like that and his response, his "withdrawal", from his own deposits into the "character bank" is another opportunity for us to learn how to face tough times; specifically, those times we face temptation.

When we last left our study, Joseph had been sold into slavery in Egypt and bought by a man named Potiphar. Take your Bibles and turn to Genesis 39 and keep them open, we'll be studying the first twenty verses.

Of course, Joseph didn't want to be kept against his will hundreds of miles from his home. But instead of becoming bitter, he determined that he was going to make the best of a horrible situation. His diligence soon caught the attention of his master and he was given more responsibility, more respect. Potiphar discovered that Joseph, not only worked hard but he had leadership ability. He saw that Joseph was intelligent, likeable, and he knew how to delegate responsibility. So, Potiphar turned more and more of his personal affairs over to Joseph, and Joseph kept gobbling up those responsibilities, doing them well. Look at verse 2 again: "***The Lord was with Joseph and he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master.***"

This verse reminds us that the SOURCE of Joseph's success was God. We'll see this over and over again in his life story. It's proof that as Paul puts it in Romans 8:31, "***If God is with us, who can be against us?***" Well, this pagan police officer, Potiphar, NOTICED that God was with Joseph. I can't help but think of the response of the Sanhedrin in Acts 4 when they said of Peter and John: "***They were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.***" It's a wonderful thing when people can SEE by our behavior that we spend a lot of time with our Lord.

Look at verses 3 and 4, "***When his master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord gave him success in everything he did, Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned. With Joseph in charge, Potiphar did not even concern himself with anything except the food that he ate.***"

Things were going well for Joseph. He'd been promoted. He was prospering even as a slave. He had more responsibility and he had more perks and more challenge. In fact, he was moved from the slave quarters and given his own room in the mansion. Let me just stop and say, pinnacle of success times like this are when our adversary attacks. As Leslie Flynn puts it, *"So often after an unusual blessing or great achievement comes a strong solicitation of evil."* For Joseph, that solicitation came from Potiphar's wife. Look at verse 6, ***"Now Joseph was well-built and handsome, and after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph."***

The Hebrew here literally says: *"physically attractive in form and appearance."* Joseph's good looks were apparently in his genes because the same phrase is used to describe his mother Rachel. By the way, they are the only two people in Scripture to receive this double accolade.

Anyway, it's understandable that Joseph would catch Mrs. Potiphar's eye. I mean, Joseph caught EVERYONE'S eye.

- He was his father's favorite.
- Then he became Potiphar's favorite.
- Later on, he becomes a prison warden's favorite.
- Eventually he becomes the Pharaoh's favorite.

People were attracted to Joseph. People just naturally liked him. I mean, not only was he good looking, he was fun to talk to and be with. Plus, as I said, with God's help, he was good at whatever he did.

In fact, I think that at first Joseph was unaware of Mrs. Potiphar's intentions. I mean, he was used to people liking him, being kind to him. Other people were. So, he wouldn't have thought her advances were odd. He was blind to the fact that she was flirting with him. And that probably made him even more attractive to Mrs. Potiphar. I mean, he was a challenge. He had strong, moral convictions. He was not flirting back. There was a naïve purity about Joseph that Mrs. Potiphar probably found intriguing.

Plus, he was always around. Remember, he had moved ***"into the house."*** I have to say, that was a foolish decision on the part of Potiphar. It's always dangerous to have two, unrelated people who are not married to each other living under the same roof. Pardon the pun, but that's flirting with temptation.

Well, one day it became very clear to Joseph that Mrs. Potiphar didn't JUST like him. She wasn't interested in a friendship. No she pulled Joseph aside and blatantly said, ***"Come to bed with me."***

As shocking as this was, it must have been a strong temptation for Joseph. He was in his late 20's, a bachelor with normal drives and instincts. For ten years, he'd been saturated with Egypt's moral values or lack thereof. The training he'd received as a child must have appeared very unenlightened at this point. Plus, what a tremendous ego boost it would be as a slave to receive advances from his master's wife! He might have reasoned, *"I'm a slave. Slaves aren't allowed to take a wife. Since I'm in charge, I can command privacy. No one needs to know. It will be 'safe sex.' And this is the boss' wife. It's a good idea to stay in her good graces or you could lose your job."*

If he were to somehow draw on 20th century psychology Joseph could find even more reasons to succumb. *"My father was over-indulgent with me. My mother died when I was a little boy. My brothers abused me. I'm in a foreign country. The morals here are atrocious. I'm repressed as a slave. I'm lonely."* But he doesn't look for a reason to say "yes" to his desires. No, he draws on his character bank account and says, "NO."

And to help Mrs. Potiphar realize that "NO" means "NO", he gives two reasons. Look at verse 8: ***"With me in charge, my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife."***

I find it interesting that Potiphar had told Joseph to steer clear of his wife. I think he knew the balance in HER "character account" was low, he knew that she would probably throw herself at Joseph.

More about that later.

Note that Joseph has enough wisdom in his *"wisdom account"* to realize the consequences of yielding to her advances. He knew he would destroy the trust Potiphar had put in him. The principle we should embrace here is that when tempted to sin sexually, we should stop long enough to think about someone other than ourselves. We must think of the consequences to others.

- Your spouse will be crushed.
- Your children will be hurt. They will lose confidence in you and will be more likely to copy your behavior.
- You will lose the trust of your friends.
- Your Christian witness will be at least temporarily destroyed.

Worst of all your relationship with God will be damaged and Joseph realized this. He said, ***"How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?"*** There's an old story that says at this point, Mrs. Potiphar flung her skirt over the bust of a "god" that stood in the house and said, *"Now God will not see."* But Joseph knew the one TRUE God ALWAYS sees. He knew that as Solomon would one day write: ***"The eyes of the LORD are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good."*** (Proverbs 15:3)

Joseph KNEW that his actions would be sin. Unlike the world that always pushes us to redefine sin as something acceptable, Joseph had a Godly wisdom and a courage to call it for what it was; SIN, a clear violation of God's standard.

But Joseph didn't JUST say "NO." Look at verse 10, ***"And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her OR EVEN BE WITH HER."*** But Mrs. Potiphar did not give up. She was relentless. She sought him out day after day. And eventually, like a spider spinning a web, she set a trap. Verse 11 says, ***"One day [Joseph] went into the house to attend to his duties, and none of the household servants was inside."*** I'm thinking Mrs. Potiphar sent all the servants away on errands of some sort. Verse 12, ***"She caught him by his cloak and said, 'Come to bed with me!' But he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house."***

This was not a time for Joseph to try and reason with her. That had not worked. All he could do was RUN. And, I think his sprint out of the house was a pre-meditated decision on Joseph's part. He realized Mrs. P was becoming more and more aggressive and so he came up with a plan. He thought, *"What am I going to do if she exposes herself? If I stay and I look at her when she's not fully clothed, I will not be able to resist that temptation. I had better run."* In other words, he decided ahead of time that he wouldn't even trust himself to look. He would just flee. And that's what he did. Joseph got out of there, leaving his robe in her hands.

This made her furious! I don't doubt that as verse 15 says she screamed, but I think it was not a scream for help, but rather a scream of rage. A familiar quote comes to mind. *"Heaven has no rage like love to hatred turned, nor Hell a fury like a woman's scorn."* (William Hargreve)

Mrs. Potiphar had been scorned. Her ego was wounded; her desires were frustrated; so, her infatuation with Joseph turned to wrath. Bob Russel says, *"There comes a time where vice hates virtue that will not change."* In her rage, she retaliated by falsely accusing Joseph of raping her. Look at verse 13, ***"When she saw that he had left his cloak in her hand and had run out of the house, she called her household servants. 'Look,' she said to them, 'this Hebrew has been brought to us to make sport of us! He came in here to sleep with me, but I screamed. When he heard me scream for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house.'"***

I think the servants, knowing Joseph and knowing her thought, *"Oh sure..."* But it was Joseph's word against hers. He was the slave; she was the owner. Well, verse 16 says, ***"She kept his cloak beside her until his master came home."*** And at this point we should call the academy because her performance was surely worth an Oscar.

Let me set the scene. She sits there disheveled, pale, sobbing, and with a trembling voice and quivering lips she says, ***"The Hebrew slave you brought came to me to make sport of me, and as soon as I screamed for help he left his cloak and ran out of the house."*** (Vs 17) Did you note, she kind of blames Potiphar for what happened, like Adam did God when he explained his sin by saying, ***"This woman you gave me..."*** Verse 19 says, when his master heard the story, ***"he***

burned with anger.” But I wonder WHO the anger was directed at. I mean, Joseph was a slave. Potiphar was the head of the Pharaoh’s private police force, his chief executioner. He could have killed Joseph right then and no one would have said anything. He would have been justified under Egyptian law. But he didn’t. Instead he put him in a specific prison, the one where the king’s prisoners were confined. I think Potiphar doubted his wife’s story. Maybe he put Joseph there in case other information were to come to light that would allow him to free him. I think he was angry because his wife’s foolishness had cost him a valuable employee.

In any case, once again, SUDDENLY Joseph’s good times disappear. One moment he is the number 2 man to one of the most powerful guys in Egypt, the next he’s in an Egyptian prison.

Okay, what can we learn from this chapter in Joseph’s life? (I am indebted to Bob Russell for my outline today).

1.) LESSON ONE – God’s standards are PERMANENT.

Joseph knew that God never changes, so of course His laws don’t either. They are the same yesterday, today, and forever. They are just as valid in Egypt as anywhere. This is a principle we must remember for as Jesus said, **“Heaven and earth may pass away, but My Words will never pass away.”** (Matthew 24:35) God’s standard of morality does not change even though our culture’s moral standards do and remember since this is a fallen and FALLING world, our culture’s “morals” have a tendency to get WORSE not better, to get further from God’s loving laws.

Kenny Luck rightly says that many Christians today have become what he refers to as *“sexual atheists.”* In other words, they believe God has nothing to say to them on this subject. He writes, *“It is the ultimate oxymoron. A person who at once believes in a wise, sovereign and loving God Who created them and all things can also believe simultaneously He should not inform their thinking or living sexually.”*

This is a reminder for us to obey Romans 12:2 where it says, **“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—His good, pleasing, and perfect will.”**

Here’s a second thing this part of Joseph’s life can teach us.

2.) LESSON TWO – EVERYONE can be tempted.

We tend to think that sexual temptation is something OTHER people have to deal with, not us. We think we would never be in a situation where we might be tempted to sin in this way. I’m sure Joseph thought that. But that is a foolish way to think. Just like all areas, this temptation is **“common to man.”** (1st Corinthians 10:13) Even the Godly, people seeking to put God first, are vulnerable in this way.

Bruce Larson tells of an old priest who was asked by a young man, *“Father, when will I cease to be tempted by the sins of the flesh?”* And the wise, old man said, *“Son, I wouldn’t trust myself until I’d been dead for three days.”*

No matter how good you are, no matter how long you live, you live in a fleshly body and you will find temptation appealing.

It can happen to you.

It happened to the wisest man in the Bible, Solomon. It happened to the strongest man in the Bible, Samson. It happened to the **“apple of God’s eye”**, David. And if we’re not alert it can happen to us. The Bible says, **“If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!”** (1st Corinthians 10:12)

Thirty years ago Gordon McDonald was one of the most respected Christian writers and lecturers on marriage in America, but he was tempted and he succumbed. He had an extra-marital affair. He has since repented and experienced God’s amazing grace and restoration. And not long after his repentance he was speaking in a forum with some other Christian leaders. He said, *“Several years back, I was asked in a forum what was the one area of my greatest strength,*

what area would I not have to struggle in?" I said, "Without question, moral purity. I really believed that. But then Satan took an unguarded strength and it became a double weakness."

Everyone can fall in this way. Let me repeat 1st Corinthians 10:13, **"No temptation has seized you except that which is COMMON to man."**

3.) LESSON THREE – There is a way out—RUN.

That's what Joseph did and when we are confronted with this temptation, we can do.

You know a popular phrase in Christian circles is, *"God won't give you more than you can bear."* That phrase is not in the Bible. In fact, the Scripture says we WILL be given more than WE can bear. But WE are not alone, we have God with us, and by relying on His strength we can, as Paul puts it, **"do all things."** (Phil 4:13)

This flawed popular phrase comes from the rest of that verse from 1st Corinthians that I just quoted. It says, **"And God is faithful; He will not let you be TEMPTED beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can endure it."**

That way out is often something as simple as the door and we must RUN through it. This is the idea behind what Paul said to young Timothy, **"FLEE youthful lusts."** (2nd Timothy 2:22) This is what he told the church at Corinth, **"Flee from sexual immorality!"** (1st Corinthians 6:18) There is a way to escape---RUN---FLEE.

A reporter asked an African safari guide, *"Is it true that ferocious jungle animals won't harm you if you carry a torch?"* The guide said, *"That depends on how fast you carry it."*

Some temptations we are told to resist, but sexual sins are best dealt with by running from them. J Oswald Sanders wrote, *"The flames of passion are so hot that the only escape is a clean pair of heels on the King's Highway."* Don't flirt with sexual temptation. Don't get close to it. And if it gets close to you, as it did to Joseph, flee. Whatever garment you have to leave behind, it is well-worth it.

4.) LESSON FOUR – Rewards for fleeing are NOT IMMEDIATE.

I mean you don't get a trophy as you sprint past the "finish line." Joseph was thrown into prison for running, for doing what was right. Think of it. The innocent man, the man who did right, who resisted temptation and then FLED, languished in a prison cell while the guilty temptress was lounging in luxury.

Being wrong doesn't mean you're going to be punished the next day. Being right does not always mean you're going to be treated right.

AW Tozer said, *"The wheels of God's justice grind slowly, but they grind exceedingly fine."* Things were hard for Joseph for a while, but soon God would bless Him beyond measure and he would have missed out on that if he had yielded. I'll close with Galatians 6:7 where it says, **"Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."**

Will you pray with me?