

Joseph 4 – Resisting Sin For God Alone

Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance.

7 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.

13 And so it was, when she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and fled outside, 14 that she called to the men of her house and spoke to them, saying, "See, he has brought in to us a Hebrew to mock us. He came in to me to lie with me, and I cried out with a loud voice. 15 "And it happened, when he heard that I lifted my voice and cried out, that he left his garment with me, and fled and went outside." 16 So she kept his garment with her until his master came home. 17 Then she spoke to him with words like these, saying, "The Hebrew servant whom you brought to us came in to me to mock me; 18 "so it happened, as I lifted my voice and cried out, that he left his garment with me and fled outside."

19 So it was, when his master heard the words which his wife spoke to him, saying, "Your servant did to me after this manner," that his anger was aroused. 20 Then Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison, a place where the king's prisoners were confined. And he was there in the prison. (Gen 39:6-20)

The true test of a man's character is what he does when he thinks no one is looking. Who we really are is what we do when we have no human audience, with no apparent human consequences for our actions. When are free to do whatever we want, what we want to do is one of the most revealing things about us.

Joseph was a man who was faced with temptation to sin with apparently no consequences. He was tempted in ways that probably most people would fall to. His responses show us that he was as Spirit-filled as we saw last week.

We might imagine Joseph feeling that he had come out of the worst of his trials. His faith, Spirit-filled living had led him to being promoted. Perhaps it took two or three years, but now he is in his twenties, and he is the manager of what was certainly an affluent estate. He might be a slave, but he had probably reached a place where it was as good as it gets for a slave. But, as so often happens, just when we begin to think that our trials are over, we can here the stretching and creaking of Satan's bow as he loads and aims another arrow at us.

In Joseph's case, it was the arrow of temptation. However far you are in your Christian life, however many battles you have won, you will never reach a place on this side of Heaven where you face no new temptations. Pastors and missionaries have fallen into moral sin in their seventies. Christians saved for thirty years have fallen into the traps of greed, drunkenness, or the sin depicted here: immorality. Paul warns us in 1 Corinthians 10:12: "Let him who thinks he stands, watch out, lest he fall." The only safe Christian is the one who is always aware of how unsafe this world is for a Christian, how much of his heart could be quickly led away into destructive sin.

The temptation for Joseph came in the form of an adulterous woman, Potipher's wife. Verse 6 tells us that Joseph was a handsome man, and so verse 7 tells us that she began to cast longing eyes on Joseph. Potipher had left everything in Joseph's hands, except his food, and his wife, But apparently, Potipher lacked the sense to know what kind of woman he had married, and what it would mean to leave her by herself in the house, with an army of servants, in the lap of luxury. Idle hands are the the devil's workshop and it is with good reason that Paul commands busyness for young women *13 And besides they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house, and not only*

idle but also gossips and busybodies, saying things which they ought not. 14 Therefore I desire that the younger widows marry, bear children, manage the house, give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully. (1Ti 5:13-14)

The wise man marries a woman he can leave alone at home without worry. **Pro 31:11** *The heart of her husband safely trusts her; So he will have no lack of gain.*

But the other side of this is that the wise man does not leave her alone at home repeatedly and with temptations mounting.

And we wonder if at first, it began 'innocently', she staring, Joseph catching her, and she looking away sheepishly. And then, with Joseph's work as the manager of the household, they would have worked together here and there, and you can picture the conversation becoming friendlier. Perhaps she begin to drop little compliments, little half-joking teases, which Joseph probably blushing brushed aside. Perhaps she began to complain about Potiphar with his concubines, and his neglect of her.

Archaeology has revealed that aristocratic Egyptian women were shameless and known to be adulterous. One story has a Pharaoh searching the entire kingdom looking for a faithful woman, and upon finding her, making her queen immediately. Being adulterous was part of the culture. We imagine her using her power to make sure she was near Joseph or with Joseph. And I picture the older servants in Potiphar's house seeing what was going on and saying to each other, "Looks like the Black Widow has found some new prey". They'd probably seen something like this go on before.

Eventually though, the sinful temptation grew enough in her heart, that in verse 7, we read her making the indecent proposal, "lie with me".

Now I want you to think about the kind of temptation that Joseph has here. As a young single man, he is being offered that temptation most tempting to men, particularly in this stage of life. There is the sheer physical appetite that is luring him – the lust of the flesh.

He is also being offered probably someone who is beautiful. An aristocrat like Potiphar would have chosen a beautiful wife, so she may well be very attractive herself – the lust of the eyes.

Third, he is being singled out from all as the object of her attention. We can imagine Joseph feeling flattered, that a woman of such high birth, of so much wealth, of so much power, found him attractive – the pride of life.

I think of another young Man, alone in the wilderness. There He is offered by the most seductive Tempter of all three acts of vindication to prove that He is the Son of God. Bread for his body – to break his fast unnaturally – lust of the flesh. The kingdoms of the world without the Cross – only through allegiance to the prince of this world – lust of the eyes. Immediate recognition in Jerusalem that He is Messiah – by demanding the supernatural preservation of Messiah when throwing Himself off the Temple – pride of life.

But apart from those three, consider all the things that made this temptation so much easier.

First, it was considered normal in this culture. Women were adulterous. Joseph would have known that her behaviour was not extraordinary for an Egyptian wife. From a cultural point of view, this was average.

Second, Joseph was anonymous in this culture. No one knew him. As far as he knows, his family thinks he's dead. He had no father or mother, no wife or children, no one from his Hebrew family who would regard this behaviour as scandalous. He is single with no ties.

Third, no one will find out. As the manager of the household, and with she being the wife of the master, everything can be arranged in such a way that no one of importance will find out. Potiphar

will never know. There are no consequences.

Consider that this is the kind of temptation that the Internet has put into everyone's pocket. Immorality is now normal in our culture. It's on every magazine cover, portrayed or hinted at in almost every ad, joked about in every sitcom, and portrayed in varying degrees of graphicness in every movie. And now with the web, with tablets, laptops and phones, you can go on the web and be anonymous, and no one will ever find out what you are looking at, what you are doing – no consequences. You can load onto your phone or your tablet whatever R-rated movies or TV series you like, and watch them in your room with no one seeing. It is the illusion of sin without consequences, stolen pleasure that will never haunt us.

For that reason, it's ravaging the church. The amount of professing Christians exposing themselves to some form of visual immorality is staggering. A 2014 survey showed that among Christian men between 18 and 30 years old, 77 percent look at pornography at least monthly, 36 percent view pornography on a daily basis. Among Christian men (ages 31 to 49) 77 percent looked at pornography while at work in the past three months, 64 percent view pornography at least monthly. With that comes sky-high level of sexual sin before marriage, during marriage, outside of marriage. We are meeting men in their twenties unable to adjust to marriage because they were ruined by porn. We are drowning in immorality.

Back in Israel's time, the Canaanites had the high places. There people went and performed acts of immorality, while others watched. We look at that, and say, 'how sick!' It just so happens that our culture has improved upon the high places. We hire actors to perform immorality, and then we enable everyone on Earth to come and watch. If God destroyed the Canaanites for those abominations, what do you think our world is storing up for itself? The book of Revelation calls it 'the wrath of the Lamb'. The problem is, like Israel, too many Christians go to the high places. We just don't have to travel – it's on our iPads and phones and laptops and satellite decoders.

Is it possible to emerge pure in a world shovelling filth at us, every second of the day? I want you to see what Joseph did.

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?"

I can see four ways that Joseph remained pure.

First, Joseph affirmed the true ownership of his body and hers. Joseph repeats what the narrator told us back in verses 4 and 5. Joseph had full control over everything to use as he pleased, except of course Potiphar's own wife. He could not do this, because he did not have rights over her. Joseph understood what belonged to whom. He knew that this kind of sin was a sin of stealing – taking what was not his.

This is what Jesus did when He said to Satan, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." He was saying, the body is not autonomous – it belongs to God, and real life comes from Him and obedience to Him.

In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul tells us The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. (1Co 7:4) All sexual sin is an act of taking someone who is not yours, whether pre-marital, extra-marital, or some kind of perversion of sexuality – it is always stealing and defrauding someone.

3 For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; 4 that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, 5 not in passion of lust, like

the Gentiles who do not know God; 6 that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified. (1Th 4:3-6)

When the Bible is dealing with sexual sin, one of the first truths it wants us to affirm is who belongs to whom. *19 Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? 20 For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's. (1Co 6:19-20)*

15 Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? Certainly not! (1Co 6:15)

The first lie of temptation is to tell you that you are your own, it's your body, do what you want with it. But Scripture says, it's not yours. Since you have been saved, it belongs to someone else. So you only get to do with it what pleases the owner. And you do not get to take another whether actually, or in the lust of your mind, who is not yours.

I want you to see the second thing that Joseph did. Look at verse 9: *How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"*

Joseph saw God as the recipient of his actions. He did not say, how could I do this great wickedness against Potiphar? For Joseph, God will be the one offended, wronged, dishonoured by this action. He says this will be a sin against God.

Today, people will tell you that two consenting adults makes any act lawful. But if Joseph had consented, it would not have made it lawful. It is if God gives His consent that it becomes lawful. Here is Joseph in a pagan land, which does not know God. He is anonymous. He does not have to follow Jacob's religion. No one will find out. But what does Joseph know? What is right in front of Joseph? Joseph's chief concern is not if Potiphar finds out, it's not some physical consequence, disease or pregnancy. Joseph is chiefly concerned with, will this please God?

This is what Jesus did, when He replied to Satan's temptation to have the kingdoms of the world if he would just worship him, *it is written, 'You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.* (Luk 4:8) Jesus brought the focus back to God, allegiance to God, love for God.

If what keeps you back from a sin is the possibility that your wife will find out, or your boss will find out, that you could lose a position, or lose money, or lose a relationship, then the primary fear in your life is still man. You fear the consequences that man will bring upon you. And here's the thing, if fear of man is the only thing holding you back, then when you are sure that no human will find out, and that no human consequences will come to you, you will go ahead with the sin.

If no one will ever know, if no one will ever find out, if there is no chance of you getting caught or punished – will you cheat on the exam? Fudge your report at work? Pay the traffic cop a bribe when caught speeding? Will you watch that explicit show alone in the hotel room? Will you keep up the flirtation online or with a work colleague? Will you steal from your boss, call in sick when you aren't? If you are completely set free from human consequences, what will you do?

Joseph feared God more than man. He had truth in the inward parts. Joseph was dedicated to pleasing God when no one was looking. Joseph was dedicated to pleasing God even if no one found out. The second secret to purity and to overcoming temptation is your desire to please God with only Him as your audience. This is the way out of hypocrisy and double-mindedness and the path to integrity – being the same in the inside and the outside, the same at home and at church, the same in public and in private, the same in society and in secret.

God is my audience. The prayer of Patrick, the fifth century missionary to Ireland says, “Christ with me,

Christ before me,
Christ behind me,
Christ in me,
Christ beneath me,
Christ above me,
Christ on my right,
Christ on my left,
Christ when I lie down,
Christ when I sit down,
Christ when I arise.

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.

Third, Joseph refused to give himself opportunity to sin. Joseph, once he had it clear whose body belonged to whom, and that He would please God no matter what, did not toy with temptation. He did not hang around Potiphar's wife as she kept alluring him. He didn't smile at her jokes, or find ways to be near her when he wanted his ego flattered. He made a point of actually avoiding her company. In Proverbs, Solomon warns

Pro 5:8 Remove your way far from her, And do not go near the door of her house,

In chapter 7, he describes the foolish young man who *8 Passing along the street near her corner; And he took the path to her house (Pro 7:8)*

That young man went past temptation to see if it would happen to meet him. This is what Romans 13:14 calls making provision for the flesh. It is when you make sin possible and even likely by where you go, what you expose yourself to. If you surf the web, when you are bored, you are giving temptation your ear and eye. If a dating couple choose to be alone in a house or a flat, you are making provision for the flesh. If you watch TV or surf late at night, and you have no accountability, no filters, no software, you are making provision for the flesh. If you feed your mind with TV series and films containing enacted immorality, you are desensitising your own conscience, feeding your flesh, fanning into flame fires that will burn.

When we went through James, we learnt that we have a Trojan horse within us, our remaining sin nature, the flesh. And if you begin to feed it, it grows, and as it grows it becomes hungrier. Temptation is like the inverse square law in physics, that the force of attraction is inversely proportion to the square of the distance between them, in other words, as you reduce the distance, the attraction grows. You should treat temptation like that. The closer you get, the stronger it comes. The longer you stay, the harder it is to leave. Linger, toy, dabble, experiment, lurk, and from Heaven's perspective, you are a fly already caught on the outer edges of the web, it is only a matter of time before you end up in the centre.

Jesus refused to toy with temptation. When Satan said He should throw Himself off the Temple and be caught by angels, and so prove Himself Messiah to all, Jesus knew that this would be toying with temptation, fooling about with sinful ideas, making demands on His Father that were unlawful. That's why He said "It has been said, 'You shall not tempt the LORD your God1.'" (Luk 4:12)

If you know whose steward you are and what belongs to whom, if you are keeping God as the chief recipient for your actions, and if you give yourself no opportunity to sin, you will overcome probably the vast majority of temptation in your life. But occasionally, with all that, Satan will fire an arrow at you that is simply unavoidable.

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.

The fourth thing Joseph did was Joseph fled from temptation. When all else would not stop the sin, Joseph simply got out of there as fast as he could. He literally fled. He did in literal action what the New Testament commands:

18 Flee sexual immorality. (1Co 6:18)

22 Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. (2Ti 2:22)

This is what Jesus did when He said to Satan, “*Away with you, Satan!*” (Mat 4:10) Jesus could command Satan to flee, and there was a time for that to happen.

There comes a point where you need to remove yourself or radically remove the source of temptation altogether. Jesus said that if your right hand offends you, cut it off, if your right eye offends you, pluck it out. It is the idea that you may have to do without something dear to you, if that dear thing will destroy you. If there is something that may be harmless for others that is destructive for you, then flee. You may need to go back to a phone without Internet. You may need to cancel the subscription. You may need to ask your boss for a transfer. You may need to throw out the decoder. You may need to go off Facebook forever. You may need to change your number, or your email address. You may need to only go on the web when you are with your spouse, or make sure you have accountability software that runs on every device and cannot be disabled.

Now at this point, Potipher's wife has a dilemma. She made a last desperate attempt to ensnare Joseph, making it an all or nothing attempt to have him by physically grabbing him. Now she has a problem. First, Joseph is running outside just to get away, and the other servants are going to see that he is without his robe. They've all been put out the house, and if Joseph exits without his coat, it is a problem to explain this. An adulterer doesn't leave his coat behind.

Moreover, now she may fear that Joseph is going to explain his missing coat with the truth of her actions. Added to her fear is pure anger and revenge. If she cannot have Joseph, then Joseph will be punished.

13 And so it was, when she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and fled outside, 14 that she called to the men of her house and spoke to them, saying, "See, he has brought in to us a Hebrew to mock us. He came in to me to lie with me, and I cried out with a loud voice. 15 "And it happened, when he heard that I lifted my voice and cried out, that he left his garment with me, and fled and went outside." 16 So she kept his garment with her until his master came home. 17 Then she spoke to him with words like these, saying, "The Hebrew servant whom you brought to us came in to me to mock me; 18 "so it happened, as I lifted my voice and cried out, that he left his garment with me and fled outside."

She now tells a lie – a lie that cannot be refuted, because she made sure there were not witnesses in the house. She accuses Joseph of attempted rape, and claims that the way she got hold of his garment was that he fled when she screamed for help.

So she keeps his garment as a material witness, and waits for Potipher to get home, and when he does, she shows him the coat and tells him the story. Notice she is partly blaming him with her lie - “the Hebrew servant you brought to us”.

Every time Joseph loses or changes a coat, it signal a big change in the story. He loses his coat of many colours or many parts, when it is stripped from him by his brothers, and he ends up going to Egypt, Now he loses garment in her hands, and it will mean prison for him. Later on, Joseph will

change his prison garments before he appears before Pharaoh.

19 So it was, when his master heard the words which his wife spoke to him, saying, "Your servant did to me after this manner," that his anger was aroused. 20 Then Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison, a place where the king's prisoners were confined. And he was there in the prison. (Gen 39:6-20)

Now there is something interesting here. What would a wealthy Egyptian, the captain of the guard, with men and swords and might at his disposal, typically do to a foreign slave who tried to rape his wife? He would have him executed. But in this case, he instead puts him in a prison, a particular prison for the king's prisoners. It may be that Potiphar believed his wife, but loved Joseph too much to have him executed. More likely, Potiphar knew what kind of woman she was, and understood something of what had gone on. Perhaps he questioned Joseph. But it was her word against his, and he was a slave. In that case, Potiphar would have been angry, not because he believed her, but because he had no choice but to have him arrested and confined, and he was now losing probably the best man he had ever had in his service. That's probably the source of his anger.

Witness the amazing sovereignty of God. In order to get Israel to be a powerful nation that can overwhelm the Canaanites instead of being assimilated by them, God needs to get them out of Canaan and into a land where they will be both segregated and blessed. That land is Egypt. To get the small family of Israel into the land and in a place of protected blessing, God needs a Hebrew in Egypt a place of power. To get Joseph in that place of power, he needs access to the court of Pharaoh to do something remarkable, such as interpret Pharaoh's dreams. To be known as someone who interprets dreams correctly, he needs to do it for someone close to Pharaoh. That someone close to Pharaoh has to be out of Pharaoh's court and with Joseph, which would have to be the king's prison. To get Joseph in the king's prison, when he is such an upright man, he needs to be working for one of the king's employees, and then falsely accused with no witnesses.

And now Joseph, just when things were looking up, is now bottomed out again. Surely at this point, Joseph is going to kick the furniture, and start saying, "Every time I do right, things go wrong! Why did I bother trying to be pure? For what? You try to please God, he is the only One who would have known if I had sinned, and when I resist temptation again and again, what happens? I get accused of rape! I am done with obeying God." No, he didn't say any of that. You know why? Because he didn't obey for selfish reasons. He didn't obey because he was trying to get something out of his obedience. He didn't obey because it was going to give him a better life, an easier way, more success, God's blessing on his business or family, a good luck charm on all he did. He obeyed because he loved God. And if the consequence of obeying God was false accusation, slander, and an unfair jail sentence, then he could put his head down on that stone floor at night and sleep with a clear conscience. He could be as Spirit-filled in that jail cell as he had been in the pit in Canaan, on the slave-block in Egypt, in the field, in the kitchen and in Potiphar's house.

We don't keep ourselves pure because it has some utility, some pragmatic rationale. We keep ourselves pure because we love God. We keep being Spirit-filled because we know we will remain useful to God, whether it is a promotion or a demotion in the eyes of man.

That's why we obey when no one is looking. Because at that point, only One is looking – the most important One.