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Battling Temptation

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TEXT: Genesis 39 (NASB)

Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt; and Potiphar, an Egyptian officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the bodyguard, bought him from the Ishmaelites, who had taken him down there. The Lord was with Joseph, so he became a successful man. And he was in the house of his master, the Egyptian. Now his master saw that the Lord was with him and how the Lord caused all that he did to prosper in his hand. So Joseph found favor in his sight and became his personal servant; and he made him overseer over his house, and all that he owned he put in his charge. It came about that from the time he made him overseer in his house and over all that he owned, the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house on account of Joseph; thus the Lord's blessing was upon all that he owned, in the house and in the field. So he left everything he owned in Joseph's charge; and with him there he did not concern himself with anything except the food which he ate.

Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance. It came about after these events that his master's wife looked with desire at Joseph, and she said, "Lie with me." But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Behold, with me here, my master does not concern himself with anything in the house, and he has put all that he owns in my charge. There is no one greater in this house than I, and he has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do this great evil and sin against God?" As she spoke to Joseph day after day, he did not listen to her to lie beside her or be with her. Now it happened one day that he went into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the household was there inside. She caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me!" And he left his garment in her hand and fled, and went outside. When she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and had fled outside, she called to the men of her household and said to them, "See, he has brought in a Hebrew to us to make sport of us; he came in to me to lie with me, and I screamed. When he

heard that I raised my voice and screamed, he left his garment beside me and fled and went outside." So she left his garment beside her until his master came home. Then she spoke to him with these words, "The Hebrew slave, whom you brought to us, came in to me to make sport of me; and as I raised my voice and screamed, he left his garment beside me and fled outside."

Now when his master heard the words of his wife, which she spoke to him, saying, "This is what your slave did to me," his anger burned. So Joseph's master took him and put him into the jail, the place where the king's prisoners were confined; and he was there in the jail. But the Lord was with Joseph and extended kindness to him, and gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer. The chief jailer committed to Joseph's charge all the prisoners who were in the jail; so that whatever was done there, he was responsible for it. The chief jailer did not supervise anything under Joseph's charge because the Lord was with him; and whatever he did, the Lord made to prosper.

Dear Friends:

Grace and peace are always for you from God, our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

I remember a married man who regularly attended our men's Bible study each week, always flirting with the waitress at the restaurant where we met. Many times he told me that he thought she was very attractive. Then one day, as we left the restaurant, he said, "Pastor, that woman has invited me to come by and see her new puppies just born at her house. Do you think I should go?" And I said to him, "John, that woman does not belong to you. You're married before God. Your love is pledged to your wife. That woman does not belong to you."

Temptation comes to us in a whole variety of forms, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the well-known Christian author from the World War II era, wrote a little pamphlet called *Temptation*. He writes:

In our members, there's a slumbering inclination towards desire, which is both sudden and fierce. With irresistible power, desire seizes mastery over the flesh. All at once, a secret, smoldering fire is kindled. The flesh burns and is in flames. It makes no difference whether it's sexual desire, ambition, vanity, a desire for revenge, fame, power, greed... Our joy in God is extinguished in us and we seek

all our joy in creature. At this moment, God is quite unreal to us. He loses all reality and only desire for the creature is real. The only reality is the devil. And Satan does not here fill us with a hatred of God, but with forgetfulness of God.

There are so many ways that we can be tempted, and in your life, I know you know those areas where you might struggle. We might even be tempted by good things in this world that mess up our priorities and push God to the side. Remember, Bonhoeffer said it's not a hatred of God, but a forgetfulness of God in the moment of temptation. Chuck Swindoll, in his book entitled "Joseph", says that there are three temptation categories: material temptation – a lust for things, personal temptation – lust for power or fame, or third, sensual temptation – a lust after another person; or more specifically, another person's body – a desire for one who does not belong to you legally or morally. Unfortunately, the news is almost always filled with stories of major Christian leaders falling into the temptation of sexual sin. And somehow society delights in focusing on the moral failures of these public Christian leaders, as if it sullies the truth of the message of the gospel of Jesus. It never, despite all those fallings and failures of major Christian leaders, it never negates the power of Jesus crucified, forgiving our sins and covering them with grace.

So we approach the story of Joseph remembering this father's favorite with the multicolored robe whom his brothers hated and was sold to the Ishmaelites into slavery, and then sold again in Egypt to Potipher, the captain of Pharaoh's guard. There in the far country, could he survive? He not only adjusted to that new place, new culture, Joseph thrived. And we learn the truth of why – over and over in the story, despite his major encounter with suffering, it says the Lord was with Joseph. The Lord favored Joseph. The Lord blessed Joseph. It was not unnoticed by Potipher that everything Joseph oversaw or had control of blessed and did so well, prospered beyond imagination. So Potipher kept promoting him until he was the head of the whole of Potipher's house.

Joe had the golden touch. He was enjoying prosperity right underneath the authority and power of Potipher. Beware! In times of prosperity, we can let down our guard and become vulnerable to temptation. Gordon McDonald, retelling the story of his own moral failure and how God restored his heart and rebuild his life in his book entitled, "Rebuilding Your Broken World", said this: "An unguarded strength becomes a weakness."

So in our story, Potipher's wife – and I find it interesting that she's never given a name – Potipher's wife saw and desired Joseph because he was handsome and of good form. And she's bold in her temptation: "Come, lie with me," she says. That's as direct as you can get. And never forget that Joseph was a red-blooded 20-something young man, and she didn't tempt him just one time, but day after day, over and over, she offered him, begged him, pleaded with him to lie with her.

It's a window for us to see how our enemy Satan tempts. He knows our vulnerability and he's relentless hammering us, like a boxer might pummel the midsection of his opponent in order to weaken him. And then, if Satan succeeds in getting us to fail, to commit sin, once we fall Satan the seducer becomes the accuser. He tells us God wouldn't want us anymore, or that God doesn't love us. It's a lie.

The beauty of our story is that Joseph is successful to resist the temptation. Joseph refused Potipher's wife's advances. Joseph talks about how Potipher has been so good, he could never do this against him; but then he ultimately says, "How could I sin against God?" Joseph knew that our lives are an open book to God and that our lives ultimately are in God's hands. Therefore, not only for Joseph, but even for us as we live as people of faith in the 21st century, all sin, however trivial or major, is a sin against God. It breaks our fellowship with God, it violates our trust, it breaks our conscious receptivity to His love, or the intimacy of His presence.

Potipher's wife doesn't take "no" for an answer – in fact, she plots an ambush of Joseph. So one day when Joseph comes, the house is absolutely empty. She's given all the servants the day off. Question for you: what do we do when the intensity of the temptation is such that no one would know if we gave in to the temptation? It is true that God always sees us, but what if we're tempted in a way that if we were to sin, there would be no fear of discovery and no consequence for the wrong? With the house empty, Potipher's wife grabs Joseph's garment and pulls them close, entrapping him in her lure. But Joseph wriggles free and runs – he just gets out of her presence, leaving his garment behind. He physically removes himself from the temptress.

At this point, we say, "Hooray for you, Joseph. God, I hope that you reward Joseph for his faithfulness. Joseph, you're the champion for us as an example of resisting temptation." Did God see to it that Joseph went right to the top and was blessed

because of his obedience? That isn't what happened, is it? William Congreve wrote this quote: "Heaven has no rage like love to hatred turned. Not hell a fury like a woman scorned." So Potiphar's wife tells her husband a lie. Talk about flipping the narrative! She accuses Joseph of attempted rape. Sadly, Joseph, who's faithful in resisting her allure and temptation, who is pure and innocent, is thrown into jail for a crime he never committed – just the opposite of what he did.

So I want to note for us the courage that it takes for us to be faithful: the courage of faithfulness. In this broken world, where people's hearts are sinful, and even evil, even if we do all the right things, we might still suffer. We might be perfectly obedient and yet face tremendous adversity for how we live. In fact, to be faithful to Christ means that we're going to swim against the cultural current. Faithfulness takes courage. It's hard to go against the flow of the cultural norm or our society's ethics, and yet remain respectful, loving and compassionate. I had a man from a previous church who regularly would say, "Any dead fish can float downstream." It's true, isn't it? It takes no power or will to just go with the flow of society's behavior or ethics, but it takes the power of the spirit at work within us and our lives surrendered to Christ's spirit's power to resist temptation and stay faithful to God.

So even as Joseph is thrown in jail unjustly, it says again, "The Lord was with Joseph and he found kindness and favor from the chief jailer and was put in charge of the whole prison." So I want us to remember that the enemy will always lie to us as he tempts us, and then he'll become our accuser and go on the attack. He will release the full fury of the cause/effect response to our stupid choices, our sins. It'll hurt the people around us. It'll violate relationships. Our lives will begin to unravel if we make poor choices in sinfulness. And in our minds, Satan also works that we begin to rationalize why we'd be OK to do the sin: "Well, my spouse doesn't appreciate me, or "no one will know," or "no harm, no foul," or "I have been so lonely," or "just this once."

How do we face temptation as believers in Christ?

- Well, first, never stop battling. Don't give in, don't stop fighting, resist the temptor and he'll flee from you, it says 1 Peter 5. Do battle, fight the temptation.
- Second, pray. Jesus said, "I'm with you always." Jesus taught us, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." Ask Jesus for His help.

- Third, memorize key scriptures that will be powerful touchstones for you in the moment of temptation. In Ephesians 6, it calls the word of God the “sword of the spirit.”
- Fourth, know yourself and know your weaknesses, and avoid people in places where you'll be at risk.
- Fifth, recognize temptation's allure, but also realize the consequences of your sin.
- Sixth, always realize there's a way out. In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul writes, “No temptation has overtaken you, but such as is common to man and God is faithful. He won't allow you to be tempted beyond what you're able, but with the temptation will provide a way of escape.”
- Next, make yourself accountable. You remember the game show where they said you could phone a friend? Tell a Christian brother or sister your area of struggle – ask them to pray for you about that, but also give them permission to hold you accountable about how that battle is going.
- And lastly, just like Joseph, run! In 1 Corinthians 6 it says, “Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, *flee* immorality.” Get out of there.

Finally, my friends, if you fall, if you fail, don't lay in your sin and guilt, get up and remember the cross of Jesus Christ. Jesus said, “Father, forgive them. They don't know what they're doing.” Jesus died for sinners like you and me. Jesus died so that we could rise up from our moment of failure and reaffirm that our faith is in Christ alone and in His promise to forgive us always. King David, after he fell into sin with Bathsheba and then murdered her husband Uriah to cover, said, “Create in me a clean heart, o God, renew a right spirit within me. Don't push me out of your presence. Don't take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation.” In an old communion liturgy, we confess together, “Wherefore we flee for refuge, seeking and imploring your grace.”

Friends, if you do fall as you battle temptation, rise up and walk in the forgiveness of Jesus Christ. Let go of your shame and guilt and embrace the promise that Jesus still forgives sinners. But keep battling temptation.

Amen.