

Bible Studies for Life: January 30

The Pitfall of Temptation • Genesis 39: 1-12

By Paula Smith



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“We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5 ESV).

Those nagging thoughts... “You can have another bite.” “Go ahead. Look just one more time.” “Why not? Who would ever know?”

A friend’s Bible study for children helped me tremendously in how I think about temptation. She told the children to reach up above their heads and just “grab that thought” in their fist and take it captive and give it to God.

My co-workers and I discussed this and decided we needed to do that! At times in the office you could see one of us just reach up in the air above our heads and grab at something. When that happened we knew to pray because someone was taking a thought captive!

Joseph’s story, like my friend’s illustration, is so helpful when we are faced with the schemes of the evil one. It seems Joseph had a target on his back. The enemy was highly motivated. This really was not about Potiphar’s wife but

trying to totally destroy Joseph!

“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy” (John 10:10a ESV). The devil knew that God would use Joseph to preserve the line of Jesus, so he was working overtime to stop that possibility. This wasn’t a one-time temptation. Day after day after day after day, Potiphar’s wife pursued and tempted him.

James 4:7 (ESV) says, “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.” If Satan does not flee then we are to flee! Joseph RAN! He paid a price for his stand, but later God honored him.

Joseph and Potiphar were trusted friends. Did Joseph think through the scenario? What if he gave in to the temptation? It would break his friend’s heart, but it would also dishonor God! It appears that Joseph’s top motivation was not fear of consequences; he did not want to hurt his friend or dishonor God.

“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12 ESV). God is constantly working in His people. He is intervening, providing opportunity to stand up against the onslaught.

“No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it” (1 Corinthians 10:13 ESV).

We try many ways to escape the clutches of the devil. Some people think, “If I work hard enough, I will be rewarded with victory over temptation.” We might succeed for a while, but eventually we will become weary. That’s because our focus is on ourselves and not on the power of God’s grace.

Others may think we need self-preservation to overcome temptation, but this comes from a fear of consequences. The problem is that sooner or later rationalization kicks in. Oh! How often I have fallen for this! I start to devise little schemes to make the consequences smaller. This would give way to self-deception.

When we think we can bypass the natural laws of sin, temptation will win every time. "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall" (Proverbs 16:18 ESV).

It seems that Joseph was successful in resisting temptation not because he was disciplined, intelligent, or talented, but because he had love and gratitude for what Potiphar had done for him.

Love and concern for someone Joseph cared about allowed him to see beyond his own personal pleasure.

The consequences weren't just about him – they would destroy his friend. Our sin impacts others.

The most important help when temptation comes is God's grace. I begin to understand the cost, depths, power, and scope of God's grace. Being grateful for how God has redeemed us, transformed us, blessed us, and saved us is the highest motivation.

Joseph said it best: Not only do I not want to hurt Potiphar, but I don't want to sin against my God either. (Genesis 39:8-9 paraphrased) When temptation comes, gratitude for God's grace and love for God's people are the best ways to escape.

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