

Women's Bible Study – Fall 2008

## **Overcoming: A Life Well Lived**

*The Life of Joseph from the book of Genesis*

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Overcoming Temptation – Genesis 39:1-20

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Introduction---(illustration---picture of a rosy apple next to picture of a piece of apple pie with ice cream). Which one looks more appealing to you? We know that the apple is a more healthy choice. But there is something about the look of the pie that draws us even though we know it has too many calories, too many grams of fat, and that we should reject this choice. Enter ----temptation---which should we choose? Should we choose what our mind tells us is healthy and good for us, or what is unhealthy, but will taste so “delicious” and satisfying?

Nothing much has changed since Satan tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden to eat a piece of fruit that God had forbidden. He still appeals to our physical nature (sight—seeing the fruit, and being hungry), our emotions (satisfying our inner desires), and our spiritual nature (to be like God and be in control of our lives). The deceiver as you will remember was a beautiful angel who rebelled against God and was thrown out of heaven. Ever since, he has spent his time contemplating revenge against God by using his deadly weapon of temptation to get people to sin and be separated from God. The good news is, God promises that Satan will be crushed by one of the woman's offspring, the Messiah (Gen 3:14,15).

Today's lesson---“Overcoming and Resisting Temptation” is a complex, diverse topic that is somewhat difficult to condense into one lecture. We will look at the life of Joseph and the principles he incorporated to overcome his temptations and apply them to the many temptations we face in the world today.

### **DEFINING TEMPTATION** ---

As we have mentioned before, Satan is still using the same strategies and tricks that he has used since Creation, so is somewhat predictable.

Temptation always starts in your mind, not in your circumstances.

*“Jesus said, ‘For from within, out of a person's heart, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, eagerness for lustful pleasure, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness. All these vile things come from within.’” Mark 7:21-23 LB*

*“...a whole army of evil desires within you.” James 4:1 LB*

What are the characteristics of temptation? First, Satan makes the temptation something that appeals to us - something we desire. Then he subtly disguises the truth and causes doubt in our minds - is this really wrong? Then we act on these thoughts in our mind and we behave in disobedience. We fall into the trap of “our own evil desires” that James warns about

*James 1:14-16 “...each one of us is tempted, when by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin.”*

Temptations are not a sin unless we give in to them and respond in disobedience.

Every temptation is really a test. In various scriptures we read that God does not tempt us - he cannot be tempted by evil

*James 1:13 “When tempted, no one should say, ‘God is tempting me.’ For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone.”*

Genesis 22:1 tells us that God tested Abraham. Satan tempts us in order to make us fall into sin. God tests us in order to confirm our faith or prove our commitment.

*Deut 8:2 “Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years. To humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands.”*

In the book the Eve Factor by Shirley Rose, ---“Just like exams we take in school, temptation comes in all shapes and sizes---but every temptation is a test. When we are given the opportunity and strong desire to act in a way we know we shouldn’t, our faith, our obedience, our character, our self-discipline, our devotion to God, and other aspects of our nature are being put to the test. What will we do?”<sup>1</sup>

Each day we are “confronted with little ‘pop quizzes’----the temptation to lose our tempers, be selfish or unkind, or neglect our time with the Lord. Some tests require great strength of character, steely determination, and the ability to do ‘hand to hand combat’ with Satan himself.” A little later we will discuss the many kinds of temptations we experience in our everyday lives and ways we can make the right choices to pass these tests.

Rick Warren in “The Purpose Driven Life”, says, “Every temptation is an opportunity to do good. While temptation is Satan’s primary weapon to

destroy you, God wants to use it to develop you. Every time you choose to do good instead of sin, you are growing in the character of Christ.”<sup>2</sup>

## **TEMPTATIONS OFFER US OPPORTUNITIES FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH**

**APPLICATION** - Consider areas where you are tempted or tested---How could your choices of responses bring spiritual growth? Ask yourself, “What is God showing me in this test?” What should be my response?

Last week Jann shared with us the lessons we can learn from Joseph’s losses in chapter 37. How many of you read chapter 38 which was not part of our study? The passage reads like a manuscript for a TV soap opera. The actions of Judah, Joseph’s brother, are in sharp contrast to Joseph’s godly responses and actions as he faced sexual temptation.

### **JOSEPH’S TEMPTATION**--- Genesis 39:1-20 (Read)

As you studied this passage and as we just read, did you notice the reiterated phrase of “the blessing of the Lord was with Joseph and the Lord gave him success.”? All that Joseph has suffered at the hands of his family and his position of slavery could have caused him to abandon his faith, and be very discouraged. He could have been tempted here to indulge in self-pity. It seems in this passage that God is saying to Joseph, “I haven’t forgotten you, I know where you are, I will take care of you.” As Joseph hangs on to God and trusts Him completely, God encourages and rewards him with favor from Potiphar and “success in everything he does.”

It might help to have a little background about Egypt. At that time “Ancient Egypt was a land of great contrasts. People were either rich beyond measure or poverty stricken. There wasn’t much middle ground. Joseph found himself serving Potiphar, an extremely rich officer in Pharaoh’s service. Rich families like Potiphar’s had elaborate homes two or three stories tall with beautiful gardens and balconies. They enjoyed live entertainment at home as they chose delicious fruit from expensive bowls. They surrounded themselves with alabaster vases, paintings, beautiful rugs, and hand-carved chairs. Dinner was served on golden tableware, and the rooms were lighted with gold lampstands. Servants, like Joseph, worked on the first floor, while the family occupied the upper stories.”<sup>3</sup>

“Joseph came to live in Potiphar’s house at a time when he was making a transition from being a favored son of a wealthy Israelite (Jacob) to a favored slave of a powerful Egyptian. He had to learn a new language, a new culture and lifestyle. He was far away from his family who mistakenly believed he

was dead. He no doubt was lonely and this young handsome man was very vulnerable, a prime target for Satan.

“The moral climate of Egypt in Potiphar’s day set the stage for Joseph’s temptation. Art and literature of this period of Egyptian culture were excessively explicit and suggestive. Archaeological findings suggest that immorality was even more pervasive then than it is today!! Egypt was the most liberal nation on earth.”<sup>4</sup>

### **Let’s look at the progressive steps in this strong temptation.**

#### **PROGRESSION-----**

- ◆ It was a natural temptation---appealing to his sexual nature  
Potiphar’s wife invites Joseph to “come to bed with her.” Joseph could have rationalized his situation ‘Joseph, you are now 27 years old. You are not a child anymore, and you certainly have a man’s rather than a child’s appetites. You have been a slave for 10 years. You’re unmarried; you are lonely. Don’t you have a right to a sexual relationship? This is your chance, your opportunity. Maybe God is even putting it in your way. Certainly it can’t be wrong if it feels good. There is nothing more natural than that you should have a relationship with this attractive and infatuated woman.”<sup>5</sup> How often do people today succumb to these same lies and deceptions?
- ◆ It happened when he was away from home---Someone has said a “good home acts as a restraining influence on the behavior of its children.” Joseph was far away---who would know? His family was not there to counsel and warn him.
- ◆ This was an important woman---To please her could secure possible advancement for Joseph. How many men and women today use this reasoning for adultery?
- ◆ This temptation came after an important promotion—Joseph had just become Potiphar’s personal attendant and business manager (verse 4). He could have reasoned that he had reached the top and now he could indulge in the fruits of his position. (All of us need to beware when we have experienced a spiritual victory we can be certain a temptation of some kind is bound to follow----be on guard !)
- ◆ This temptation came repeatedly----Notice vs. 10 “And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her.” One of Satan’s chief strategies is to bombard us over and over again to wear us down and cause us to give in and sin.

- ◆ The temptation was at the perfect opportunity---Notice vs. 11“One day he (Joseph) went into the house to attend to his duties, and none of the household servants was inside.” Potiphar’s wife probably arranged for the other servants to be out of the way on the day she launched her greatest attack. But at the same time, she saw to it that they were near enough at hand for her to call them to see Joseph’s garment. Satan watches for the most opportune moment to catch us “off guard”.

## **Now let’s look at Joseph’s response to these progressive steps of temptation.**

### **RESPONSE**

1. He refused the sexual advances because of Potiphar’s trust in him for everything in his house and all he owned.

*Gen 39:8 “But he refused, ‘With me in charge. My master does not concern himself with anything in the house, everything he owns he has entrusted to me.’”*

2. He refused because she was the wife of his master.

*Gen 39:9 “My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife.”*

Even though the 10 Commandments would not be written for another 400 years, Joseph knew it was morally wrong to sleep with another man’s wife.

3. He refused because this was a sin against God.

*Gen 39:9 “How could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?”*  
Joseph knew that any sin is ultimately against God. He loved God and had been so blessed he did not want to destroy this relationship by sinning.

4. He ran----Joseph knew that the only thing to do was to remove himself bodily from the source of the temptation, so he ran away.

*Gen 39:12 “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.”*

Joseph gave up everything for his faith and doing what was right, even though he knew there would be consequences. Potiphar took his wife’s side and Joseph was put in prison (verse 20).

Joseph is often referred to as a picture of Jesus Christ’s voluntary humiliation and suffering. God did not do anything to keep Jesus from dying a terrible humiliating death on the cross because he had a greater plan and purpose in mind---our salvation. God seemed to do nothing about keeping Joseph out of prison. Joseph was innocent and was suffering only because of his faith.

But, God had a bigger plan in mind, and even though he didn't change Joseph's circumstances, he continues to be "with him" and "bless him" (21-23).

Warren Wiersbe in his commentary points out that, "For the second time in his life, Joseph lost his garment, first in Gen 37:23 (when his brothers took his coat); then in Gen 39:12 (Potiphar's wife takes his cloak); but as the Puritan preacher said, 'Joseph lost his coat but he kept his character.' Since Potiphar was involved in the Egyptian judicial system, we wonder why he didn't try to put Joseph on trial even execute him. Potiphar knew that Joseph was the reason for the prosperity of his household, and he may have questioned whether his wife was telling the truth. After all, the 'evidence' was purely circumstantial; it was her word against Joseph's. One wonders how Joseph dealt with Potiphar and his wife a few years later when he was the second ruler in the land."<sup>6</sup>

Joseph was able to resist this temptation and escape because his heart was set on God and His principles. Joseph was demonstrating a promise from the New Testament that Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 10:13 *"God is faithful and will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way of escape so that you can stand up under it."*

### ***A HEART SET ON GOD CAN RESIST TEMPTATION***

**APPLICATION**—Keeping God and His Word #1 in our heart fills our minds with powerful ammunition to fight the enemy. Are you keeping your focus on God and learning Scripture so you will be prepared to resist temptation?

*Psalms 119:11 "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you."*

### **RECOGNIZING THE TEMPTATION AND THE ENEMY**

What are some of the key areas in which we face temptation?

- ◆ Our personal lives---- a critical spirit, anger, worry, negative attitude, jealousy, fear, influence of secular society, loss of focus (going in too many directions)
- ◆ Our habits----overeating, overspending (materialism), over activity (family, church, community), wrong priorities.
- ◆ Possible addictions ----drugs, alcohol, pornography (3 of the greatest areas of temptation in our society today)

- ◆ Areas of compromise---choice of friends and relationships, entertainment, parenting, sexual purity, finances and possessions (materialism).  
*1 Tim. 6:10 "...the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil."*
- ◆ Our spiritual lives---complacency, lack of church attendance or involvement and little or no prayer life, lack of discipline in reading God's Word.

The list could go on and on. We are faced every day with temptations of some kind and we must make choices and establish priorities. We need to learn to recognize what the temptation is and what the enemy is trying to do. He is trying to find our vulnerable weak areas so he can move in and create a stronghold and keep us captive to his deceptions, and thereby we will be defeated in our Christian life.

Satan will do whatever it takes to get God's people off track from the truly important things. He excels in causing us to focus on the trivial rather than activities with eternal value. He knows if he can keep us busy enough doing some "good" things, we will miss the "best" things God has for us---those things that bless others and use our gifts to the fullest for God's kingdom.

One of the ways to recognize the enemy and the temptation is to measure it against the weapons being used. I have a card in my Bible with the deadly "D's" listed which I check from time to time to see the ways he is trying to work on me. It shows me what to pray about.

### **The Deadly "D's"---the "Devil's Destructive Devices"**

An effective tool Satan uses against us.

**Distraction**---taking our eyes off God---to the problem

**Discontent**---I'm not happy with my situation

**Discouragement & Despair**---negative thinking

**Doubt**---will God really help me?

**Deception and lies**---shading the truth

**Distrust**---in God and others

**Disillusionment**---wrong perception of people or situation and what God is doing

**Despair**---my problem is hopeless

**Defeat and Destruction**---his ultimate goal to steal and destroy my witness for Christ

*John 10:10a "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy."*

**Illustration**---I don't presume to be an authority on this issue of temptation, but I would like to share with you some things that have helped me overcome the craftiness of the enemy. One of the temptations or tests that come to me often, is that of discouragement. You may be surprised at that since I am usually a very optimistic person. One of my spiritual gifts is that of encouragement and I love to encourage others.

Often our strengths can also become an area of weakness. Discouragement can turn into depressive thoughts and the downward spiral begins. At the first sign of discouragement I make my mind focus on

*2 Cor. 10:5b "...we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."*

Other verses of help---

*Isaiah 26:3 "You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind (imagination) is steadfast, because he trusts in you."*

*Isaiah 40:31 "...those who (wait) hope in the Lord will renew (means exchange in footnote) their strength."*

I pray and ask the Lord to exchange my weakness of discouragement and negativity for His encouragement and positive attitude. I call it my prayer of "exchange"---7 "E's"---God's Energizing, Enthusiasm, Encouragement, Enlightening of His Word, His Equipping, Empowering, and Enabling to do what He has called me to do. All that I am not---GOD IS, and His grace and provision are sufficient for every situation we may face. God offers us "Divine Deliverance" through His Word.

*Psalm 3:8 "From the Lord comes deliverance."*

*Matthew 6:13 "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."*

Remember the trial of temptation is won or lost on the battlefield of our minds. We are fighting "spiritual warfare" and our adversary is very cunning and crafty.

Another way I have learned to recognize the enemy is to consider my physical and emotional well-being at the time of the temptation. Am I hungry, angry, lonely, or tired? These are times when we are very vulnerable to the temptation to act in ways that are not Christ-like.

### **Illustration**

I'm sure all of you have experienced this scene----It's between 5 and 6 p.m.----everyone is hungry and irritable, you are trying to fix dinner and answer homework questions, or you are hurrying to drop someone off

or pick someone up from a sport activity, you are tired from a very busy day, and it's hard to be patient and loving. It's easy to follow the temptation to be crabby and take it out on everyone, setting a very poor example for your family of Christ-like behavior.

The Bible tells us that temptation is a common occurrence and happens to everyone. I Cor. 10:13 "No temptation has seized you except is common to man." It's a comforting verse---we are not alone. The Bible also contains the stories of men and women who struggled with temptation and are examples to help us stand firm in the faith. Some succumbed to temptation --- like Samson and David, while others like Daniel never wavered.

**DAVID**---2 Samuel 11-12 David was the King of Israel---loved by God (said of him "a man after God's own heart"). David sent his fighting troops back into battle and he stayed home (he was not in God's place for him) and was confronted with a sexual temptation while he was relaxing on his roof and saw Bathsheba bathing on a nearby rooftop. He saw her and desired her. Instead of "nipping that temptation in the bud", he sent a messenger to bring her to him. She slept with him and conceived a child. This complicated things and David tried to cover up his sin (one sin always calls for another). He had Uriah, Bathsheba's husband put in the front lines of battle so he would be killed. The baby she was carrying died causing great sorrow for them both. David sought forgiveness from the Lord for this grave sin---which we read about in Psalm 51:4, 9:

*"Against you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight...Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity."*

In David's temptation we see the steps of sin illustrated.

1. Contemplation - (letting the idea take root)
2. Rationalization - (listening to the deceiver's lies to please self)
3. Consent - (giving in to sin).

Remember---Sin always affects others. When we give in to temptation and sin, other people's lives are involved. It's like a pebble thrown into a pond - there will be many ripples.

A very important point to also remember is that God forgave David's sin and his relationship to God was restored. No matter what temptation you may have succumbed to recently or in past years - God offers you forgiveness and

restoration. He loves you and wants you to be in fellowship with Him so He can bless you and use you for His glory.

**JESUS**---was also tempted. The holiest Man to ever walk this earth felt every urge we feel. But he never gave in - He never sinned. Matthew 4 and Luke 4 tell us in detail of the temptation or testing Jesus faced right after his baptism by John. He recognized his adversary, Satan and the battle of spiritual warfare. Jesus defeated his enemy using Scripture verses from Deuteronomy.

*Hebrews 4:15 tells us that "we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin."*

*Hebrews 2:18 "Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted."*

These verses are a wonderful comfort for us. Jesus understands what we are feeling and the pressure of the temptation. His Word promises that our temptation won't be more than we can bear and God will provide a way of escape (I Cor 10:13). God allows temptation in our lives for many reasons. But as He does so, we have His promise that He places a limitation on the intensity of the temptation. God knows our capacity and endurance. When it comes to temptation, God begins with the end in mind. He already knows exactly how we can escape. We need to remember that when we face a temptation, God has already planned a way of escape for us - let us look for it.

*I Corinthians 10:13 "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. 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 stand under it."*

### **WITH EVERY TEMPTATION THERE IS A WAY OF ESCAPE**

**APPLICATION--** Consider the temptation you may be facing today----is God speaking to your heart right now about a way of escape?

### **RESISTING AND OVERCOMING THE ENEMY**

Now that we have looked at the ways to recognize our enemy we need to consider what we can do to resist and overcome. Someone has said, "Temptation is the tempter looking through the keyhole into the room where you're living; sin is your drawing back the deadbolt and making it possible for

him to enter. You can't avoid someone coming to your door or looking through the keyhole---but you DO control the deadbolt.”

It has also been said (I think it is a term in sports) “The best defense is a good offense.” What can we do to provide a good offense?

First, we should expect attacks. Because we are believers we are the enemy of the devil and he has declared war against us.

*1 Peter 5:8 “Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”*

Secondly, we should sharpen our discernment in spiritual warfare. When we not sure about a temptation and the enemy's attack on us we must measure it against the standard of truth, God's Word. Only through the power of the Holy Spirit through Scripture can we detect the falsehoods of the evil one.

Thirdly, we must stand firm in the faith protected by the “armor of God”---Eph 6: 1-18.

Ephesians 6:10-11 “...be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.”

As the devil takes aim with his flaming arrows we have to be aggressive and extinguish them with the shield of faith and resist his attacks.

So let's look at how we can be prepared for our battles. In The Purpose Driven Life, Rick Warren gives some ways to be prepared in the chapter on Temptation.

1. Recognize the temptation - know the areas where you are weak and could be vulnerable. (The Eve Factor, Resisting and Overcoming Temptation gives information in discerning weaknesses).
2. Request God's help—God never slumbers or sleeps, his answering machine is always on and his cell phone is good for any area code. The Bible guarantees our cry for help will be heard.

*Psalm 34:17 “The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles.”*

You cannot fight this battle in your own strength. The devil has thousands of years of practice----we need “heavenly help”.

3. Refocus on something else----Remember the battlefield is your mind - the trouble starts there. Shift your thinking away from your area of temptation or attack. Find a Scripture that will speak to your need. I have found that using the names of God to hurl at the enemy works.

*Proverbs 18:10 "The name of the Lord is a strong tower; and the righteous run to it and are safe."*

Like David when he fought Goliath, he prepared with 5 smooth stones to fight him in the "name of the Lord" in I Sam 17. I throw the stones of God's names to combat the "giants" that attack me - Fear, Discouragement, Anxiety, Worry, Health Issues, Failure, and Loss, etc.

4. Resist the devil through Scripture and Prayer---I have found Beth Moore's book PRAYING GOD'S WORD, very helpful to me. It has 14 different categories---with Scriptures put into prayer form.

*James 4:7 "Submit yourselves, then to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you."*

5. Run ----like Joseph, sometimes you have to remove yourself from the temptation or situation. It is not a cowardly thing to do. The sad testimony of many who have succumbed to sin's enticements is that they thought they were strong enough to remain in the midst of temptation and resist it.

We need to be careful to protect ourselves from influences that may lead us into temptation. I know a friend who doesn't keep any ice cream in the freezer because it's too easy to give in to temptation when no one is round. If "spending money" is a temptation---avoid shopping except for the necessities or when you are "prayed up" and prepared.

There are so many more important ways that you may be tempted or tested - but the same principles that Joseph used still apply –

Recognize the temptation;

Rely on God and His Word;

Refocus on God's provision;

Resist the devil through the Holy Spirit's discernment and prayer; and

Run from the enemy.

It seems in our world today that the enemy's attacks are accelerating. Rev. 12:12 says of Satan, "He is filled with fury, because he knows his time is short."

He knows the Word of God and the signs of Christ's return. But instead of being afraid of attacks, we must remember, Satan is already a defeated foe through Jesus' death and resurrection. Most of the power he wields is in bluffing and deception. Satan desperately wants to thwart God's plans to use our temptations and testings to build our character and transform us into the likeness of Jesus. God uses our experiences to change us - to enlarge our faith and understanding - to sharpen our focus, so that our intimacy and relationship with Him will grow and deepen.

So let us put on the Armor of God (Eph 6:1-18) and meet the enemy in the power of the Holy Spirit and the promises of Scripture.

*1 John 4:4 "Greater is he who is in you than he who is in the world."*

*Romans 8:37 ...we are more than conquerors through him who loved us."*

*Isaiah 41:10 "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."*

*Hebrews 13:5 "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."*

As we daily face the temptations and testings in our lives may we

**REMEMBER GOD'S GRACE IN FORGIVENESS**

**FAITHFULNESS IN HIS WORD**

**And**

**ETERNAL SUFFICIENCY IN EVERY SITUATION**