

RUF Bible Study – The Gospel in Genesis

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Genesis 39 – Potiphar’s Wife and Prison²

39:1 Now Joseph had been brought down to Egypt, and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, had bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there. 2 The Lord was with Joseph, and he became a successful man, and he was in the house of his Egyptian master. 3 His master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord caused all that he did to succeed in his hands. 4 So Joseph found favor in his sight and attended him, and he made him overseer of his house and put him in charge of all that he had. 5 From the time that he made him overseer in his house and over all that he had the Lord blessed the Egyptian’s house for Joseph’s sake; the blessing of the Lord was on all that he had, in house and field. 6 So he left all that he had in Joseph’s charge, and because of him he had no concern about anything but the food he ate.

Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance. 7 And after a time his master’s wife cast her eyes on Joseph and said, “Lie with me.” 8 But he refused and said to his master’s wife, “Behold, because of me my master has no concern about anything in the house, and he has put everything that he has in my charge. 9 He is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except yourself, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?” 10 And as she spoke to Joseph day after day, he would not listen to her, to lie beside her or to be with her.

11 But one day, when he went into the house to do his work and none of the men of the house was there in the house, 12 she caught him by his garment, saying, “Lie with me.” But he left his garment in her hand and fled and got out of the house. 13 And as soon as she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and had fled out of the house, 14 she called to the men of her household and said to them, “See, he has brought among us a Hebrew to laugh at us. He came in to me to lie with me, and I cried out with a loud voice. 15 And as soon as he heard that I lifted up my voice and cried out, he left his garment beside me and fled and got out of the house.” 16 Then she laid up his garment by her until his master came home, 17 and she told him the same story, saying, “The Hebrew servant, whom you have brought among us, came in to me to laugh at me. 18 But as soon as I lifted up my voice and cried, he left his garment beside me and fled out of the house.”

19 As soon as his master heard the words that his wife spoke to him, “This is the way your servant treated me,” his anger was kindled. 20 And Joseph’s master took him and put him into the prison, the place where the king’s prisoners were confined, and he was there in prison. 21 But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. 22 And the keeper of the prison put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners who were in the prison. Whatever was done there, he was the one who did it. 23 The keeper of the prison paid no attention to anything that was in Joseph’s charge, because the Lord was with him. And whatever he did, the Lord made it succeed.

Let me tell you my version of this story. Early in my sophomore year, before I had met Julie, I hung out in Wolper’s Hall at Mizzou with a gal whose name I don’t remember. I do remember her being a granola girl, and I liked her very much as I got to know her. She invited me to study together, and wanted to do this in her room. So I brought me books and sat in the chair she offered me. She sat on the floor across the room. After thirty minutes, she managed to stretch and move her way to sitting on the floor at the foot of the chair where I sat. This made me a little uncomfortable, but I wasn’t sure why, so I kept studying.

In another short amount of time, I started to feel my leg tingle. She had backed up to the chair and began to play with my leg hair, caressing my leg up and down with her fingers. I’ll definitely admit – it felt good. Not only physically, but also the attention I was getting from her as she put the moves on. I hadn’t expected it. I liked it.

But, I also thought of where I was. It was 10pm or so, in her dorm room, with no one around. I liked her, or at least thought she was attractive. She apparently, evidenced by her leg hair caress, liked me.

I shut my book, said something like, “Oh, look at the time, gotta run,” and bolted out of there. I don’t think I ever talked to her again, but I’m sure she didn’t think that that was quite what she had expected. Surely I could have handled things with more grace, and I may have been making too much of things, but at the time, all I can remember thinking is, “Flee temptation,” so I took it literally and went a fleeing.

In looking at Joseph’s story, we get here a chapter about temptation. I see three temptations here – Power, Sex and Career. I have somewhere in my library a book called *Money, Sex and Power*, and its thesis is that these three are major temptations to men in particular. I’m not so sure it’s true to differentiate between men and women in those categories. They may work out differently, but both women and men are tempted by money, sex and power. Let’s see how the Bible shows us these at work, as it presents God and humans together at work.³

Power Struggles

As we begin the chapter, we read that Joseph was bought by an Egyptian man named Potiphar and, through time, made “captain of the guard.” Joseph had been sold at age seventeen, and we can figure out through the other clues in the rest of the book that by the time the rest of the story picks up at the end of this chapter he is most likely 28. So, over eleven years of hard work,

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² Sources: Waltke, Kidner, Wenham, Alter, Calvin, Gibson and DeGraaf.

³ The use of Yahweh five times in 39:1-5 and Joseph six times in 1-6 signifies the divine and human partners. “The Hebrew *kol*, (“everything”), also repeated five times [in the same six verses], underscores God’s unrestrained presence with Joseph and the extent of Joseph’s exaltation.” Waltke, 518

Joseph became something like the CEO, COO of the household, in charge of the whole estate and property. Or he may have been the commander in chief of Potiphar's estate army.

The advancement didn't come quickly but took time and effort. Think about what Joseph wouldn't have known when he arrived at Potiphar's house through the hands of the slave traders – Egyptian commerce, art, industry, medicine, culture and language would have been foreign to him. He had to learn all those things. Instead of playing dumb, he put his mind, heart and body to it and the narrator is sure to mention several times that it was God who blessed his efforts.

This touches on career, but is here in the text and not exactly what we'll talk about later, so I want to mention it now. This is to be the Christian approach to success: please God and seek his blessing, and do this over a long period of time.

Joseph worked hard in the midst of his slavery to do the best he could. He wasn't a missionary or a minister, but the manager of a household and this is what God used to bring about the redemption of his people. While I hope that some of you will become short-term and long-term missionaries and others of you will do the RUF internship and go on to seminary and be RUF campus ministers and pastors, I want way more of you to seek to bring about redemption in all of the other fields of ministry. In economics, teaching, nursing, business, law, writing, linguistics, science, engineering, psychology, philosophy and all the others I didn't mention. That you would bless others as fathers and mothers, husbands and wives, elders and deacons, using your gifts in the church and to show the love of Christ to those not in the covenantal family.

Joseph used his gifts to bless others. That is the nature of Christian power. The Christian doesn't forsake power or run away from it. He or she uses power instead of being used by it. He wields it wisely instead of being co-opted by it.

That is not the way of the world. Potiphar's wife shows us how easily power corrupts. She seems to have everything at her disposal and yet wants more. We'll talk about the sexual temptation in a moment, but see how she uses her position to manipulate Joseph into trying to get what she wants? She commands Joseph. The translation of this is woefully inadequate. "Lie with me" just doesn't show the force. It would be more like "Sex. Now!" Hear the power play in her voice.

There is power in sex. I submit that more often than not, outside of a grace-centered marriage (and even then sometimes!) sex is about gaining power over someone.

Speaking in stereotypes for a moment, there is the raw power of the man, the physical presence of dominance. We see this most grossly evidenced in rape. You have something I want, and I will physically dominate you in order to take it from you. We looked at the wrongness of man-lust in chapter 38, where Judah's sexual sin was exposed.

But there is another kind of power, still physical, but more subtle. This is the power that women have over men, the ability to use their bodies to get what they want. This is evidenced most grossly by women who seek to get pregnant in order to make money from rich men. But it also connects to modesty and its absence - too much cleavage, the short skirt, the bathing suit, the dress. Women know that men are looking and they very often want them too so that they can feel good about themselves. Desirable. Wanted. Women will very often have sex with a man to keep him around. Or she will withhold it to punish him. The mantra becomes, "I will use him before he uses me." It's a dangerous game. Women want to be in power, but they have difficulty in controlling this well.

It's a confusing time to be a woman – to want to be considered sexy, but to have to tow the line because you don't want to give off the wrong impression either. Naomi Wolf quotes a woman in her thirties in her book, *Promiscuities*, who says: "Since the sexual revolution, there's license, and there's terror, and we're living under both."⁴

This threat is real. Many people say that sex doesn't matter so much, that it's no big deal. Is that true? Read the papers. The news is filled with crimes of passion, people killing lovers and rivals or using others for sex. Has this gotten "better" since we moved away from a more Biblical culture? Are people more tolerant of others? I don't think so. Either we are still not quite there yet on understanding that sex doesn't matter, or else it really, really does and people cannot stifle what their heart says despite what they profess to believe. Sex has a power over us, and there are rules to this game we play.

I noticed in the OUDaily just yesterday⁵ that the Oklahoma Legislature was passing a law that said that no teacher or professor may have sexual relations with anyone younger than 21 years old. Interestingly, this was being bumped up from 18 years old, which had previously been bumped up from 16 years old. The stated reason is that students are too impressionable and that teachers use their influence (power) over students to get them into sexual situations.

Doesn't this strike you as odd? What happened to the catchphrase "consenting adults." Is 20 years and 10 months not an adult? If two people are 20 and 40, are they not consenting? The legislature isn't saying that this behavior is a bad idea – it's saying it's ILLEGAL. If you agree with the sexual freedom manifesto – everything is okay as long as no one gets hurt and its between two consenting adults – then you should protest vigorously against this. But everyone knows that this is an appropriate law. People do manipulate others (be aware that students can do this to professors too). We read in the papers of sexual predators. Mary Pipher states in her book that her opinion is that it is best for girls to not have sex until after they're 18. Is 18 the demarcation of adulthood? The Oklahoma legislature seems to be saying that it is now not until 21 that you are able to make wise sexual decisions. Why 21? It used to be 16. Could we say that no one should have sex with anyone he isn't married to? Oh no, that would be imposing religion on things.

A recent article in Sports Illustrated recounted a girls' basketball coach who began sleeping with the girls. He was turned in, was about to go to trial, and killed himself in his cell. Sex can destroy us.

⁴ p. 81

⁵ http://www.oudaily.com/vnews/display.v/ART/2005/02/08/4208926ccd517?in_archive=1

All that to say: Will you use your power to bless people or to use people? Will you use your power to bless others or only to benefit yourself? Let's spin this out in a few examples.

When you start making money and begin to think about buying a house, you'll go to the bank and share your income figures with the banker. She'll tell you how much of a house you can afford. Let's say you take that figure, find a house that matches it and buy it. Pretty soon, you'll realize that it's tough for you to do some things that might be important – tithe, show hospitality, etc., because all of your money is tied up in the mortgage. You see, your banker doesn't factor in that you might have a different priority. She thinks that you have two – to yourself and to the bank. Living in the biggest house you can is what we all want, right? But your ability to bless others will be severely hampered if you take this approach. You must consider how you spend your money and how that shows how you view your power.

Your positions can be for yourself or for others. You can take credit for others' victories and blame them for your failures, or you can give them credit when things go well and blame yourself when things go wrong.

Those of you with a quick wit can turn a conversation into only serving yourself; you can talk circles around people and talk them into things. Or you can use your tongue to bless.

We can use our bodies to bless others or to use them. We can gain physical satisfaction in the moment or we can bless by using our bodies to protect and honor each other.

Sexual Struggles

It's no surprise that women are being used and that some are fighting back by using men. Dr. Mary Pipher describes many scenarios in her famous book, *Reviving Ophelia* in which she talks with adolescent girls about growing up and how confusing it is. In one, the girl has gotten pregnant from a loser boyfriend, another in a long string of the same type of guy. In counseling, Pipher says, "Could we at least set some criteria for what needs to happen before you have sex with a guy?" "Like what," the girl asks. "You need to decide for yourself."⁶

We applaud Pipher for the first steps of talking with these girls, and I recognize that I'm not at all dealing with the same type of person. But "you have to decide for yourself"? Argh. No. The Bible has something to say.

The narrative says: "*Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance.*" These are the same words that describe his mother, Rachel, and they are the only two in OT to be "awarded this double accolade."⁷ "Amid Joseph's many fine characteristics, he suffers from one endowment too many, stunning beauty."⁸ Have you ever thought of beauty as a bad thing, as a hindrance to doing well?

Joseph was noticed by Potiphar's wife and she wanted him.⁹ The text indicates that this was an ongoing thing for quite awhile. She wanted him to have sex with her, but then it appears that she attempted to soften her request to "lie beside me," thinking that, hey there isn't anything wrong with that, is there? Just on the couch for a little bit. Nothing will happen, Joseph, don't be such a prude. It can't be wrong if it feels so good?

Let's look at this temptation.¹⁰

It was a natural temptation in the sense that it appealed to a right and normal appetite. This isn't murder or lying. It was something that in fact, Joseph was made to do. He is a sexual being, created by God to have these feelings and urges. So, the fact that it is a natural temptation makes it difficult.

It came when he was away from home. There's a power to sin when it is disconnected from home. Why do so many business men stumble when on a trip? I'd add *in the dark* to this. Away from home, alone and in the dark = a bad recipe and you should beware. There is no more ultimate temptation than being away from home and stuck in a building with a thousand other people of the same age, with no supervision or rules. You are under constant temptation.

Vigen Guroian, a professor and father, writes of this in a recent article in *Christianity Today*.

Still, in most American college coed dorms, the flesh of our daughters is being served up daily like snack jerky. No longer need young men be wolves or foxes to consume that flesh. There are no fences to jump or chicken coops to break into. The gates are wide open and no guard dogs have been posted. It is easy come and easy go. Nor are our daughters the only ones getting hurt. The sex carnival that is college life today is also doing great damage to our sons' characters, deforming their attitudes toward the opposite sex. I am witnessing a perceptible dissipation of manly virtue in the young men I teach.

Nevertheless, my more compelling concern about this state of affairs is for the young women, our daughters. Since my student years, colleges have abandoned all the arrangements that society had once put in place to protect the "weaker sex" so they could say "no" and have a place to retreat if young men pressed them too far. And although even when these arrangements were in place, one could not always say with confidence that the girl was the victim and the boy the offender, the contemporary climate makes identifying predator and prey even trickier. The lure and availability of sexual adventure that our colleges afford is teaching young women also to pursue sexual pleasures aggressively. Yet, based on my own conversations and observations, there is no doubt that young women today are far more vulnerable to sexual abuse and mistreatment by young men than when I was a college student, simply because the institutional arrangements that protected young women are gone and the new climate says everything goes.

⁶ p. 217

⁷ Wenham, 374

⁸ Wenham, 374

⁹ "She, the mistress of the house, is a slave to her lust for her husband's slave!" She was covetous, shameless, persistent and scheming.

¹⁰ Using Boice's headings.

[After discussing a paper that one of his students wrote, Guroian continues, saying:] During the spring semester, this same young woman, who was enrolled in one of my classes, wrote a brief exposé on what goes on at Loyola College and other colleges. She explains the sundry distinctions today's young men and women make in relationships and sexual liaisons.

It may not be that dating is at the brink of extinction, but ... it has taken a back seat in the modern-day lives of students. Hooking up, going out, going steady, and dating, contrary to what some may think, are not the same thing. ... If you are "going out" with someone it means that you have a boyfriend or a girlfriend, you are in a "steady" relationship with that person. However, a couple needn't actually go anywhere [go on dates together] to be in this kind of relationship. Hooking up is basically dating without the romance. It has become customary for young adults to simply cut to the chase, the sexual ... part of a relationship. A hook-up can be a one-time thing, as it most often is, or it can be a semi-regular thing, but not a full relationship. Although it may take on the signs of one.

One might conclude that modern-day youth have simply gotten lazy and careless. Most ... are not looking for a romantic relationship; they see the new freedom and plethora of sexual opportunities and simply take what they can get. They get to college, and it's an amusement park with so many different enticing rides, one would be missing out on the whole experience to settle with the first one they tried. And why should they bother with the responsibility and formalities of a date when they have a better chance of getting immediate satisfaction after buying a few drinks at a bar?

I could have foregone quoting this young coed to cite any number of studies that describe these phenomena more "scientifically." These studies try hard to be "objective," but as a result they cannot convey the immediacy and passion of this young woman's narrative or the matter-of-fact manner in which she draws connections between the breakdown of courtship, the rise of a hook-up culture, and what we used to call pimping and prostitution. "Coed dormitories," she continues, "are they an ideal situation or a sad form of prostitution? You go out with your friends on your terms, after a few drinks you're both attracted. ... Interested and lonely, you go together, no obligations, no responsibilities, and no rules. Then there is that late-night 'booty call.' This has become such a custom of the college lifestyle [that] most have come to accept it, although maybe not respect it. If it were really the ideal situation, the walk home the next day [to one's own room] wouldn't be called 'the walk of shame.'" At Loyola College, the vast majority of students live on campus, and since the college has bought up a number of neighboring high-rise and garden apartments, after the freshman year the "walk of shame" need not even be made. It may be only a few steps from the boy's apartment to one's own, or better yet, from the boy's room to one's own.¹¹

Frederica Matthewes-Green comments on this article with this response:

Bad behavior hurts, and eventually this becomes undeniable. Chastity has been such a fixture of human history that the current situation is wildly anomalous, and I expect it will eventually right itself, probably due to women realizing that promiscuity doesn't make them feel empowered, but endangered. It may even turn out, in a supreme irony, that the current phenomenon of transitory student lesbianism was just a strategy of desperation, the only way society currently allows young women to tell boys, "Go away, I'm not ready."

"God hates sin," some emphasize. But God hates sin like the parent of a leukemia victim hates cancer. God really does love the sinner. In order to reach the sinner we will have to love them, too, and offer ourselves humbly and authentically as examples of what God's power can do.¹²

It came from an important woman. This reminds us of our discussion of power, and also hints at our upcoming one of career, but sleeping with Potiphar's wife would, at least temporarily, raise Joseph's status in the house. He would be favored by her, and that would be good. People often justify short-term wrong for long-term good. And they also confer their own worth by the connection they have to others' worth. It wasn't just any woman who was asking him – it was a VIP.

It came after an important promotion. We must beware of our thoughts after something good happens. We may think to ourselves, I deserve a little pampering. I can let my guard down now, since I've been working so hard.

It came repeatedly. We can easily wear down over time.

Vice is a monster of so frightful mien
As to be hated needs but to be seen;
Yet seen too oft, familiar with her face,
We first endure, then pity, then embrace
- Alexander Pope

It was the perfect opportunity. No one will know Joseph. We can be alone. We're the only two here, our community isn't watching. We're not in public. Joseph may have thought, I can step out of God's will briefly and then step back in. No one will know but me.

And he didn't even have the internet. I think that we must acknowledge that the media plays a huge part in our sexual temptation, in ways that weren't as prevalent before. It's wrong to think that sexual temptation is a new thing, and even that the availability for sex is at an all-time high, but we should say that it is a different time for us now. Pornography is all around us. You cannot read a magazine without visual stimulation that is now considered tame but even fifty years ago would have been a centerfold in Playboy. We'd yawn at those centerfolds now. It used to be twenty years ago that you had to either work pretty hard or be pretty lucky to get pornography. Now, you can see any picture you want for as long as you'd like without anyone ever knowing about it. 24 hours a day piped into your dorm room. I was 24 or 25 when I first saw porn on the computer. Now a typical college freshman has seen thousands of images for hundreds of hours already by the time he shows up on campus. That affects people.

¹¹ Vigen Guroian. This article first appeared in February 2005 issue of *Christianity Today*. Used by permission of Christianity Today International, Carol Stream, IL 60188.

¹² Frederica Matthewes-Green, responding to the Dorm Brothel article

So what are we to do? How did Joseph resist this temptation?

First let's consider what you normally are told. I think you are normally told that you should not have sex before you're married because God said so. When that way of thinking is challenged you either – give it up and go ahead or else you keep it up and don't know why. This is a self-control approach. When you encounter something that is wrong, you look inside yourself and muster up the self-control to deny yourself that thing because it is wrong. This is the Just Say No and Why Wait approach.

But that's not sufficient. Besides failing all the time (trace those who took those pledges and see how they are doing), it also promotes incredible self-righteousness for those who follow through. Jerry Bridges has a book entitled, *The Discipline of Grace*, in which he discusses the Christian life as propelled by two wings of an airplane. The two wings are disciplines and a new and growing affection (or desire) for the gospel. We must have both of these in order to withstand temptation.

We must act differently.

Joseph obviously spoke about God; he raised his flag. Potiphar knew the Lord was blessing Joseph. He also talked with Potiphar's wife, using language that she would understand (he says "God" instead of "Yahweh"). If you don't say that you're a Christian right away when you meet someone attractive, you're asking for trouble (I'm not saying this has to be done in the first five minutes). You need to be upfront and open about your faith, not hide it away.

He also kept busy. There is a Turkish proverb which says: "Men are usually tempted by the devil, but the idle man positively tempts the devil. If the devil finds a man idle, he'll try to give him work to do." If you have a lot of idle time, I would encourage you to find something to do. Volunteer to be with people, to serve them. Get in a Bible study. Do the stuff we offer on the weekends and then think of more to do with people.

He ran from sin when it became necessary. This can be terribly embarrassing. My friend, Matt, had a night class and got a ride home from a woman in his class who was a little older. One night at the stoplight, she put her hand on his knee. Not knowing what to do or what would happen, he opened the car door right in the intersection and ran home. I'm afraid that all too often, we in RUF would be the last ones to walk out of a movie or suggest that some show was inappropriate. We need to consume goodness, not trash and call it goodness. These things affect us. What we watch and listen to affects us.

Other things to do that Joseph didn't do? Dress modestly, ladies. Think about your brothers and what temptation means to them. Talk about this in a way that is edifying. Put on a porn blocker on your computer. I cannot understand why you would not do this. Every once in awhile it may block something that you wanted to see, but that is a small price to pay. Pornography is killing us, men *and* women, and we need to call each other on it and take steps to change. I estimate that 95% of all the men on campus, *all* the men, have consumed online pornography in the past month. 50-75% of all the men have viewed it in the last week. The Christians are the ones who feel guilty about it. Admitting our weakness and putting a barrier on your computer to help you is a good thing. If you don't have a problem (ha), consider that others might borrow your computer when you aren't there. Ladies, don't date guys who don't have blockers on their computers.¹³ One other thing to do is to decide that you will only do in private what you feel comfortable doing in public. Imagine yourself at RUF or in church or at the South Oval – and do that only. Some of you would be tremendously embarrassed if you employed this principle. You wouldn't want us to see you kissing that person that none of us know about.

We must think differently. You see, Joseph answered Potiphar's wife with a Christian world and life view. He didn't say, Dad says I shouldn't. Or my youth pastor says it's bad to do this. Or anything as lame as that. He said, "*Behold, because of me my master has no concern about anything in the house, and he has put everything that he has in my charge. 9 He is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except yourself, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?*"

Here's what Joseph is saying. He is saying, I believe in the Biblical sex ethic. That sex ethic says it's not only wrong to have sex with you because you're someone else's wife. That would be adultery. But it's wrong to have sex with you because you're not *my wife*. This is the teaching of the Bible – you are only to have sex with the person you are married to.

This is not the way you have been taught to think about sex. Everything around you contradicts this. But you must understand this. Marriage is the best protection you have for not getting used or using others. It is the best way for you to bless others with your power, your sexual power included. It is the best place for you to use sex as it is meant to be – like covenant cement. It is the thing that God has intended to unify you with another person in a way unlike anything else. God has intended for sex to help you grow in whole-life entrusment. That is why when you have sex outside of marriage it causes so much damage in your life and also hurts you – it weakens your ability to have whole life commitment with someone else. It hurts your ability to trust people, even when you should and have every reason to trust someone.

In its proper place, it brings two people together. But its proper place is within all the other whole-life commitments – legally unified, economically unified, socially unified, spiritually unified. In other words, don't separate the physical from all the other parts of you life. To do so is a monstrosity, it creates a deformed thing. It tears apart at integrity and unity. And that commitment is only assured when you stand in front of God and others and take vows to each other.

Marriage is in no way perfect. Sex within marriage is still a crazy thing. But it far worse and damaging to you outside of that commitment. You are being as vulnerable as you can when you have sex – the ability for you to be used and hurt is at its ultimate highest point. So you need to know you are loved and have commitment before you should do that.

¹³ I know this sounds uncharacteristically legalistic, but I think the women need to hold the standard up for the men to follow. This is a big issue and we cannot work on our hearts while we are watching naked women have sex on the computer.

That is what Joseph is thinking when he says that he would be sinning against God. Not just against Potiphar, that one is obvious (is it?). But against God.

Christ thought differently when he was combating the devil in Matthew 4. He wasn't just quoting Scripture back to Satan, but he *knew* the Scripture. He knew that there were greater things to be had than power and food. He told himself to hold out for the best and not settle for the good.

But he also loved God enough to take the knowledge and apply that to his heart motivation.

We must love differently. Some of you think that you have an adequate worldview and that the thing that needs to change is your circumstances. If I could just get rid of the internet, I'd be okay. If I could just get rid of Cinemax, I'd be fine. I would encourage you to take steps to that end. Or, once I get married, I'll be fine. As one who has been married for eleven years now, I assure you that that is not true. The matter mostly resides in your heart. You must take the circumstantial steps to distance yourself from temptation and eliminate the stumbling block, but the ultimate problem is your heart.

Our affections need to motivate us toward love and good deeds. Pure, raw discipline will only get you so far. Eventually you will stumble. You need a new direction, a new heart, a new affection. The picture here is Jacob and how he loved Rachel enough to work fourteen years for her. After the deal was struck for the first seven, the text says this in Genesis 29:20: *So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her.* It seemed to him but a few days. Imagine the hard work. Imagine how he must have felt like he was getting a raw deal. Imagine how he longed for her and how he must have been continually sexually frustrated. Imagine how tempted he must have been to give up and/or to fulfill his sexual longings somewhere else. And yet he kept going. Why? Because of the love he had for her.

Our affections must change for us to truly have victory. Our love for Christ should guide us to do strange things, to deny ourselves, to think differently. I can remember thinking that not having sex before marriage was so incredibly hard and seemingly stupid that there must be, there had to be, a good reason for that I just wasn't seeing at the time. So my affection for the future guided my actions of the present.

I must look on Christ. There have been times when I've been away from home, very tired and tempted to what felt like extraordinary amounts. The times I have had victory are the times when I started talking to myself. "Just five minutes. Let's just wait five minutes. In that five minutes, let's think for a minute. You love Julie, right. She is willing to fulfill your sexual longings. You need to picture yourself in her arms, in her bed. You need to picture yourself another way too – clothed with a robe, the robe of righteousness of Christ. He has his arms around you. Let's take a walk and see what happens as we continue to reflect on such things."

Freud says that all spiritual longings are actually misplaced sexual ones. He has it exactly backwards. All sexual longings are in fact spiritual frustrations crying out for someone to ultimately connect with, someone to be close to, someone to say I'm beautiful and lovely and wanted and desired. GK Chesterton wrote that every man who knocked on the door of a whorehouse was actually seeking God in his heart.

Beware the lies of the world offering pleasure when you really want spiritual wholeness. It is a lie and a trap and we need Christ instead to make us whole.

Here's a last illustration to show how sneaky and destructive temptation is:

"Several hundred years ago on the island of Cape Hatteras, off the shore of North Carolina, there were men whose business it was to get ships to run aground on the shoals just off the island. The men were "wreckers" who made their living gathering up the parts and cargo of such ships. With a lighted lantern fastened to the head of an old nag, a horse, these men of Nag's Head – for that was the name of their village – walked up and down the and back and forth. Out at sea in the darkness of the mid-Atlantic night, ships that were searching for a passage past the islands would mistake the bobbing light for the stern light of a ship they supposed had found safe passage. They would turn inland and come aground on Diamond Shoals. In the morning the wreckers would come and gather the timber for new houses, utensils for their kitchens, and money for their purses. It was a thriving business. In fact, even now, visitors to Nag's Head will be shown old houses built and furnished with the material taken from the more than twenty-three hundred ships that perished off this coast by either accident or treachery."¹⁴

Career Struggles

The last temptation Joseph encountered had to do with his career. This is an anti-American dream story. Horatio Alger (1834-1899) wrote 109 books that sold about 30 million copies, and they were nearly all the same – rags to riches stories. The American Dream told in story form. "It was Alger's contention (and the sole plot of his books) that in America it is possible by sheer hard work and personal integrity to rise from whatever low position into which one may have been born to a place of influence and wealth."¹⁵

But Joseph's story in chapter 39 was riches to rags. Think about it. He did nothing wrong. After being rebuffed for the final time by Joseph, Potiphar's wife finally has had enough. She grabs his cloak (again, deceived by a cloak) and cries out that he has attempted to seduce her.

She tells the story in such a way as to garner the most sympathy from her other slaves and from Potiphar, subtly accusing of him of being involved and partially to blame. She even employs xenophobia, making reference of "the Hebrew servant."

Potiphar is angry – but with whom? The text is ambiguous about this. Attempted rape was a capital offense, but the milder punishment suggests that Potiphar doesn't wholly believe his wife's story but still feels constrained to get rid of Joseph. Perhaps he even believes Joseph, but feels constrained to keep up appearances, so he has to sentence him to jail.

¹⁴ Boice, 912-913 quoting Charles Durham from *Temptation: Help for Struggling Christians*, 15-16

¹⁵ Boice, 907

What questions would you be asking if this were you? Wouldn't you at least wonder about the apparent injustice from God? Would you ask the question that has been asked many a time in many a movie or book: "If this is the reward I get, what's the use in being good?"

Let's ask it again a different way. Many of you know the OU Wrestling coach, Jack Spates. Coach Spates would tell you himself of his sinful lifestyle for years and years until God grabbed his heart (literally, through a heart attack) and he repented. He is a changed man. One day, as we were walking, he asked me this question: Now that I've turned my life around, will I win a national championship?

The theory is that God blesses the godly. That isn't just a theory, but a promise, right?

Yes, that is true, but it has to be nuanced enough to admit in that our ideas of what that blessing might entail are rather often short-sighted and selfish.

1 Peter 5:6-7 says: *Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, 7 casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.*

Through all of Joseph's acting rightly, he ends up in this chapter getting thrown into prison. But we have a perspective on Joseph's life that he doesn't have yet. "God orchestrates the most unlikely set of circumstances into an astonishing change of events that moves unerringly to redeem his elect."¹⁶ "In managing Potiphar's house, he was being prepared to rule all of Egypt. But had he remained Potiphar's manager, he might never have met Pharaoh's cupbearer in the royal prison and been elevated to the court. His present disgrace was a necessary preliminary to his future glory."¹⁷

Joseph has to get into a place where he can meet people who know the Pharaoh. He's apparently not going to the right parties or social events to do that. He hasn't rubbed into anyone at the market place or spear shop. So, guess what – into prison he goes.

Dr. James Boice, in his commentary on Genesis, talks about the motto of one of the schools he attended. *Character over career*. That made an impact on Boice. Do we care about our character? Would we sacrifice our careers for our character? It must be awfully tempting to lie just a little to get ahead. It must be awfully tempting to sleep with someone to advance up the ladder. It must be tough to resist the subtle implication by your boss that fudging on the reports will put you in good favor. It must be awfully tempting to forget about your employees in order to please the shareholders and pad your own accounts.

None of us wants to go to jail. But God – GOD – put Joseph there. It's hard not to think of Paul, who wrote in Philippians 1:12-14: *I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel,* ¹³ *so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ.* ¹⁴ *And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.*

There is a temptation to think that the end justifies the means. There is a temptation to draw conclusions that are not accurate when things don't go your way. There is a temptation to fall away from God when things are tough. "You must let suffering draw you closer to the Lord. It can do the opposite; it can draw you away. It can embitter your heart and produce a complainer in you where there should be a victorious Christian."¹⁸

Jesus was tempted and yet did not sin. He must have been tempted sexually. He continually held firm. He could have used his power for himself, and yet he continually blessed others. He could have wondered time and again why he was being led to suffering, but he still went. Why? He has a vision in his head, a person that captured his affections. You. He loved you despite your unloveliness. In order to be perfect, he resisted temptation in order to purchase your soul. To the extent that you see that you are Christ's Rachel, you will begin to see Him as your Rachel. Allow him to reorder and become your affections. Allow those affections to begin to work their way out into your life as you treat people in a new way, in a gospel way, blessing them with your power instead of using them for yourself. Allow this vision to keep you pure and lovely, refraining from evil in order to please the one who loves you, and treating others with respect, dignity and honor instead of using them for your own pleasure. Allow him to direct your career as he wills, for surely he knows what is best.

May we be able to sing this song, written by John Newton, with boldness and conviction:

Let us sing though fierce temptation
Threaten hard to bear us down
For the Lord, our strong salvation,
Holds in view the conqu'ror's crown
He, Who washed us with His blood,
Soon will bring us home to God

¹⁶ Waltke, 522

¹⁷ Wenham, 378

¹⁸ Boice, 946