

Sin Starts With This Sneaky Thought

Oscar Wilde said, "I can resist everything except temptation." That's the problem with temptation. It's so tempting. But sometimes we unnecessarily put ourselves in its way.

In the Old Testament, we find the story of Joseph, someone who faced some heavy-duty temptation. Joseph's world suddenly changed when his brothers sold him to a group of traveling slave traders. Overnight he went from a life of relative comfort to a life of uncertainty.

Joseph was sent to Egypt, a pagan country filled with religious superstition. The Egyptians worshiped as many as 2,000 gods and goddesses, as well as animals, insects and the Nile River. And of course they worshiped the Pharaoh himself. They also were given over to gross immorality.

Here in this place of wickedness and idolatry, 17-year-old Joseph arrived on the scene. He was effectively a country boy coming to the big city. Joseph was purchased by a man named Potiphar, identified in Genesis 39:1 as "captain of the guard." This meant Potiphar was a high-ranking Egyptian official, head of the military police. He also was in charge of the royal bodyguard (a Secret Service of sorts) and was the chief of the executioners. In other words, Potiphar was one bad dude.

Joseph, however, wasn't intimidated at all. Why? Genesis 39:2a gives us the answer: "The LORD was with Joseph." Joseph was a classic example of Psalm 1, which says, "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night. He will be like a tree planted by the rivers of

water, that brings forth its fruit in its season; its leaf will not wither, and whatever he does will prosper.”

Potiphar was a hard guy to work for, but Joseph worked with complete integrity. Joseph was so successful at what he did that Potiphar made him his executive assistant. He was second in command in Potiphar’s household.

Sometimes when things are going well, we become more vulnerable. When we can’t always make ends meet, we’re sick or we’re having challenges, we are dependent on God. But when things are going well, when we have a little extra money in the bank and our health is good, that is when temptation will hit. That’s when it hit Joseph.

Genesis 39 tells us that “Potiphar’s wife soon began to look at him lustfully. “Lie with me,” she demanded (Gen. 39:7b).

But Joseph refused. He told her, “How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?” (Gen. 39:9c). Joseph’s no to Potiphar’s wife was a yes to God.

From that point on, Joseph did his best to steer clear of her. But then we’re told: “But it happened one day that Joseph went into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the house was there. She caught him by his clothing, saying, ‘Lie with me.’ But he left his clothing in her hand and fled and got outside” (Gen. 39:11-12).

That’s the way you deal with sin. You turn around and run. You put as much distance between it and yourself as you possibly can.

Maybe you’re living in an ungodly place right now. Maybe you’re the only believer in your family or the only Christian in your neighborhood. Maybe you’re the only Christian in your classroom or in your workplace. You know what it’s like to be in a wicked place. You’re thinking, “It’s hard. I’m surrounded by temptation day and night. I don’t know that I can stay pure

in a place like this.”

Joseph was able to. And his life shows us there is a blessing waiting for the man or the woman who resists temptation. I know it's hard in the moment. I know the pressure is on. I know it isn't easy. But say no to temptation, and you will be blessed. James 1:12 says, “Blessed is the man who endures temptation, for when he is tried, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.” That word “blessed” could just as easily be translated “happy.” Happy is the man or the woman who resists temptation.

Everyone will be tempted. But temptation isn't a sin; it is a call to battle. It can even be an indication that you're moving in the right direction. After all, Jesus was tempted at the beginning and the end of His ministry. If He faced it, why do we think it will be any different for us?

There are consequences to sin. Joseph understood that. No matter how clever someone thinks they have been in covering it up, their sin will find them out.

God's standards are absolute; they don't change. Even if what you're being tempted to do might be socially acceptable, even though everyone is doing it, it doesn't matter. God holds us to a higher standard.

Realize that all sin is against God. Our love for God should be our greatest deterrent against sin.

As for Joseph, he prospered. But that prosperity included spending some time in prison after Potiphar's wife falsely accused him of rape. It looked like a bleak scenario, but things worked out very well for Joseph in the end.

Maybe you've been considering something that you know is wrong before God. You've said, “I'm not doing it yet. I'm just thinking about it.”

Don't even think about it. It has been said, "Sow a thought, reap an act; sow an act, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny." It starts with a thought. Don't even start down that road.

Joseph lived a godly life, and you can live a godly life, too. God will give you the strength to be the man he wants you to be. {eoa}

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