

GENESIS CHAPTER 39

OVERCOMING TEMPTATION

To say that life is filled with trials and temptations is, as sportscaster Howard Cosell used to say, to have "a marvelous grasp of the obvious." To realize, however, that these trials often come on the heels of our greatest successes may be to understand the very essence of what makes life so hard.

It's probably true that how we handle success says as much if not more about us as how we handle failure.

In Genesis 39, we see the saga of Joseph's life take a fascinating turn. He had become the property of Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh and the captain of the guard. It is here that Joseph, as a servant, would learn how to be a leader with all of its ups and downs. Read Gen. 39:1-6

Joseph distinguished himself as a young man of skill and ability, but it became clear that those talents were not the key to his life. Genesis 39:2 gives us the real key: The Lord was with Joseph." God's presence was the difference.

Although he was far from home, the presence of God was very real in his life. In fact this is the theme of Genesis 39 (see vv.2-3,21,23), and it had a dramatic impact on Potiphar. He could not help but recognize the presence of God in the life of this remarkable slave. Imagine how strong Joseph's testimony had to be for Potiphar, who was a pagan, not only to recognize and admire Joseph's character but to attribute it to God rather than to Joseph.

The clear implication of the text is that Joseph was not bitter toward his brothers nor enslaved by his circumstances. He was content in the presence of God (Heb. 13:5-6 and Phil. 4: 10-13). He didn't mourn his disappointment but became useful where he was. And God used that heart of faithfulness and contentment.

Potiphar recognized God's presence with Joseph (39:3), and he made this young slave the overseer of his entire household (vv.4-6). Joseph now supervised all the other servants, handled public relations, oversaw finances, and was responsible for the provisions for the household (valuable training for a later assignment Joseph would receive). Everything Joseph touched was blessed. Now, perhaps 10 years after being sold into slavery, Joseph was on top of the world. And now he was more vulnerable than ever to temptation.

THE POWER OF TEMPTATION

Notice the closing words of Genesis 39:6, Joseph was handsome in form and appearance." He was good-looking and well-built.(Read vv7-12)

His master had entrusted him with much, and Joseph refused to violate that trust for a moment of pleasure. He also looked beyond the immediate to the ultimate, recognizing the consequences that such sin would have on his relationship with God (v.9). He was

concerned spiritually, because he understood that all sin is against God. The offer of sensual pleasure is not worth the price tag attached to it. He had the right strategy. He avoided contact with her. Joseph realized that he had to be aware of the lure of sin and avoid its opportunities. He had to be alert!

When Potiphar's wife finally got Joseph alone, he ran as far as he could as fast as he could, leaving his coat behind. He fled, keeping the courage of his convictions and his integrity intact.

He exemplified Paul's advice to Timothy: "Flee . . . youthful lusts" (2 Tim. 2:22). He didn't flirt with sin, argue with it, or reason with it. He fled from it.

Joseph resisted. How?

- He recognized that he belonged to God.
- He recognized sin's effect on others.
- He recognized sin as defiance against God. This young man's godly character was continuing to be shaped. Life in a fallen world seldom rewards right living.

THE POWER OF REVENGE

Have you heard of the fury of a woman scorned? Joseph lived it. He was ruled by principles, but she was ruled by passion. And when she was rebuffed, her passions exploded in anger. She had her own strategy-revenge.

Joseph was lied about to the men of the house (39: 13-15)-the second time a coat had been used in a lie about Joseph.

Joseph was lied about to Potiphar (vv.16-18).

Joseph was imprisoned again (vv.19-20), and again it was undeserved.

The comfort of God's presence (vv. 21-23)

It's possible that Potiphar knew that his wife was lying. At the very least, he knew that such an accusation was out of character for this young man. But desperate to save face, he had to do something. So he imprisoned Joseph.

Joseph ended up in jail for doing the right thing. We protest, "It isn't fair!" And that's true. Often life isn't fair-but our responsibility is to do right and leave the consequences to God.

Now what of Joseph? He responded properly to his enslavement and to his temptation as well. How would he respond to this imprisonment?

THE PRESENCE OF GOD

Once again he found comfort in the presence of his God: "The Lord was with Joseph and showed him mercy" (v.21). It would have been easy to ask, "Why be good and do right if I end up here?" But Joseph didn't. He rested in God's presence, and God blessed him, even in prison (w.21-23).

Once again, Joseph began to learn what it means to overcome. He was learning from the pains, problems, dangers, and tests of life. All these things come into focus when we view them through the lens of God's sovereign purposes. Then we can trust His will and know

His mercy.

Joseph's character was under construction as he was shaped by adversity, punished by men, and honored by God. Genesis 39 ends the way it began-with Joseph in bondage. Yet through it all, his solid faith in God's control had helped him overcome.