

INTRODUCTION

This is the third message in the series about Joseph called "Following God's Road to Success." In the Bible, the definition of success is finding and following God's will for your life. In the previous two messages we talked about paying attention to God's speed bumps, and how to survive the sinkholes of life. In this message I will address the topic of how to overcome temptation.

On God's road to success, there are plenty of directional signs. As you drive along the highway, sometimes road signs can be rather confusing. I saw one road sign that said, "Keep right" but the arrow was pointing to the left! Another road sign says, "Entrance only" but below the words "do not enter" appear! Or some road signs are dumb because they state the obvious. One road sign declared, "caution: water on road when raining." What else is going to on the road when it's raining? But my favorite road sign was actually painted right on the road. I'm sure the road painter meant to paint the word "stop" but what he actually painted was "SOTP."

Everyone understands what a stop sign means. Back in my wild teenager years we used to say that STOP stood for Screech Tires On Pavement. Of course, gasoline was a whopping 29 cents a gallon, too! It's a dangerous thing to run a stop sign. In the same way, don't ignore God's stop signs either. Whenever you face any temptation to sin, God puts up a huge stop sign. Joseph is a great model for us to use on following God's road to success. In Genesis 39:1-12 we read about how he reacted when he faced temptation:

Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. Potiphar, an Egyptian who was one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him there. The Lord was with Joseph and he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master. When his master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord gave him success in everything he did, Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned. From the time he put him in charge of his household and of all that he owned, the Lord blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph. The blessing of the Lord was on everything Potiphar had, both in the house and in the field. So he left in Joseph's care everything he had; with Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate.

Now Joseph was well-built and handsome, and after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, "Come to bed with me!" But he refused. "With me in charge," he told her, "my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her. One day he went into the house to attend to his duties, and none of the household servants was inside. 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.

As we examine this episode of temptation in Joseph's life, I want to point out three general observations about temptation. Then I want to give you three very practical principles on how you can resist temptation.

1. EVERYONE FACES TEMPTATION

How many of you struggled with a temptation to sin this past week? If you did, please raise your hand. Everyone should have raised your hand, because when I asked it, you were tempted to lie. If you raised your hand, you resisted the temptation and told the truth. If you didn't raise your hand, too bad, you gave in to the temptation to lie!

You don't have to feel embarrassed about *being* tempted—we are all tempted. It's not a sin to be tempted—the sin occurs if you give in to the temptation. Over the past 35 years I've been preaching I've had many people come to me who were struggling simply because they didn't understand the difference between temptation and sin. They may say something like, "Oh, Pastor, there must be something wrong with me because sometimes I have the most awful, filthy thoughts that run through my mind." They feel guilty because they face temptation.

Temptation is the mental suggestion to sin. It's the thought of the possibility of a sin. When it comes to understanding temptation, just remember the lesson of the birds and the bees. You can't keep the birds from flying over your head, but you can keep them from building a nest in your hair. You can't keep the bees from buzzing around you, but you can keep them from building a beehive in your ear! You can't keep tempting thoughts from flying around in your mind and buzzing around in your ear, but you can keep tempting thoughts from lodging there!

Last month, Cindy and I completed our study leave trip by spending three days in Barcelona, Spain. We were staying at the Hotel Arts, which is a beautiful facility operated by the Ritz-Carlton chain. One afternoon, I went down to sit in the hot tub to loosen my tired muscles. The hot tub wasn't one of those fiberglass jobs; it was like a miniature pool sunken in the ground. There was beautiful landscaping surrounding it. It was quiet and peaceful and I was the only one there—completely isolated. After I had soaked awhile, I happened to turn my head and my eyes caught flash of a sparkle. Upon closer examination, I saw that someone left two diamond stud earrings beside the hot tub. I'm not a jeweler, but each rock looked to be at least a carat in size. At that moment a tempting thought dashed through my head. I could take those earrings and nobody would ever know. In the next few seconds, my mind picked up the thought, "I could give them to Cindy for her next birthday, and she would never know." Or, "I could probably sell them in Texas and get enough money to buy a new set of golf clubs." Those thoughts rushed through my mind in about two seconds time.

So, upon looking around one more time, I picked them up and put them in my pocket. I dried off and walked away from the hot tub. I walked over the attendant who was in charge of the pool and hot tub and gave the earrings to her and told her that someone apparently left them at the hot tub. (I don't know what she did with the earrings, that's between her and God) Later, as I told Cindy about it, I remarked that I'm still amazed at how we never get to a point where we're beyond temptation.

When I mention that we all face temptation, I mean *everyone*. Even Jesus had to deal with temptation. We read in Matthew 4 and Luke 4 where He was tempted by the devil after spending 40 days in the wilderness. In the book of Hebrews Jesus is described as being our high priest. The Bible says, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin." (Hebrews 4:15) Jesus faced every temptation that you'll ever face—and yet He remained sinless.

2. TEMPTATION CAN (and should) BE RESISTED

Our hero, Joseph, faced a powerful temptation. Mrs. Potiphar wasn't coy about what she wanted. It wasn't easy for a young, virile man to say "no" when a woman was throwing herself at him. Mrs. Potiphar made several attempts to seduce Joseph. Then we come to the three most powerful words in this passage. They're the first three words in verse 8, "But he refused." He had no control over Mrs. Potiphar's behavior, but he *did* have control over his decisions.

His refusal should teach us there is a big difference between facing temptation and falling into temptation. When Jesus was praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, he gave some instructions to His disciples that teach us there is something we can do so we won't fall into temptation. He said, "Watch and pray that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak." (Mark 14:38)

We need to be on guard and we need to pray because temptation can arise at any moment. Sexual temptation is one of the hardest to resist. The human sex-drive, especially among young people can be a powerful force.

It's obvious Joseph had already decided he would not give in to sexual temptation. If he hadn't already decided it would have been a tough choice when Mrs. Potiphar was seducing him. Young people, God's will for your life is that you remain sexually pure until you are married. You must make that decision in a moment of sanity when you're aware of the consequences. If you try to have a debate with your sex drive when you're in the back seat of a car with the windows steamed up, you're asking for trouble. Decide now! Adults, God's will for your life is that you stay sexually faithful to your mate.

Bible believing churches are the only place where you hear that message today. Thank God there are many thousands of Christian teenagers who have made a decision, that like Joseph, they are going to resist sexual temptation.

Let me introduce you to Crystal Michelle. She is a beautiful teenager who lives in Bigelow, Arkansas. She wrote an essay entitled "Extreme Intimacy: For Marriage Only." She writes about how sexual temptation is real, but she and many of her friends have made a commitment to stay sexually pure until marriage. In part of her paper, she writes about how she already has a response ready when guys pressure her to give in to sexual temptation. When the guy says: "Real men are sexually active." Crystal says, "So is my REAL dog." When the guy says: "Everybody's doing it." Crystal's response is: "Wrong. I'm somebody, and I'm not doing it." If the guy says, "If you love me, you'd let me." Crystal says, "If you love me, you wouldn't ask me." If a guy

ever says, "But I won't get you pregnant." Crystal is ready with, "That's right because you aren't going to touch me." If a guy asks her, "Have you ever done it?" She's going to ask him, "Have you ever made the wonderful discovery of knowing Jesus Christ?" If the guy pouts and says, "If you won't let me, I'll find somebody who will." Without hesitation, Crystal replies, "It was nice knowing you." Finally, if a guy demands, "But you owe me!" Crystal says, "Yeah? I'll get you a key chain or something." We need more young people like Joseph and Crystal Michelle!

3. GOD ALWAYS PROVIDES A WAY TO ESCAPE FROM TEMPTATION

If you live near the Gulf Coast, hurricanes are just a part of life. Hurricane Dennis recently slammed into the Gulf Coast near my hometown, and even now, hurricane Emily is spinning in the Caribbean. People in South Texas are keeping their eyes on this massive storm.

When a hurricane approaches the Gulf coast, the residents are asked to evacuate to safer ground. Along many of the highways near the coast you can find road signs that say, "Evacuation Route." These signs mark the route people in the path of a storm can follow to escape harm. God has done exactly the same thing for us. Whenever we face a storm of temptation, God has provided an escape route. The most powerful promise in the Bible dealing with resisting temptation is found in 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 up under it."

The Bible says every temptation you face has already been faced by others. And you can never say, "The temptation was just too great!" God is so faithful that He will not let you be tempted beyond your ability to resist it. But the best part of that promise is that God always gives you an escape route from temptation. In other words, whenever you are being tempted to sin, look around. God has posted several evacuation route signs for you to follow to overcome that temptation. There are many escape routes, but let me mention three escape routes from sin.

Temptation Escape Route #1: Quote scripture!

In Matthew 4 and Luke 4 we read the account of how Jesus was tempted by Satan after spending forty days in prayer and fasting. Jesus was hungry, so Satan suggested he turn stones into bread. He said, "man shall not live by bread alone," (Deuteronomy 8:3) Satan showed Jesus all the riches of the world and promised He could have it all if He would only bow down and worship Him. "Worship the Lord your God and serve only Him." (Deuteronomy 6:3) Jesus hadn't started His earthly ministry yet, so Satan suggested a huge publicity stunt of jumping off the pinnacle of the temple. Then Jesus said, "Do not put the Lord your God to a test." (Deuteronomy 6:16) In each case Jesus defeated Satan by quoting a scripture from Deuteronomy.

Now, because Jesus was God in the flesh, He could have easily have dispensed of Satan in a heartbeat. Satan was only a fallen angel. Jesus could have snapped His Divine finger and "poof" Satan would have found himself chained to an iceberg in Antarctica!

But instead, Jesus chose to converse with Satan and defeat him by quoting scripture. Why? Because He wanted to demonstrate to us HOW to resist Satan's temptation. I can't snap my

finger and send Satan fleeing, but I can do exactly what Jesus did. In all three of those temptations, Jesus simply quoted a scripture. If Jesus could defeat the devil with three obscure verses from Deuteronomy, what do you think we can do with verses from John and Romans!

The reason we all should be memorizing scripture is so we can quote it when we're tempted. The Psalmist wrote, "I have hidden your heart in my heart that I might not sin against you." (Psalm 119:11) When you're tempted, do you ever try quoting scripture? No? Then don't be surprised if you fall into sin.

What if I had a stack of several thousand-dollar bills up here? And after this service concludes, I said that I would give each of you \$1 for every scripture you can quote from memory. How would you do? Some of you kids who have been in AWANA or Bible Drill would have enough dollars to buy your folks some new furniture. But adults, if you got \$1 for every verse you could quote, would you have enough cash to buy lunch today?

There is a direct connection with studying and memorizing the Bible and overcoming temptation. That's why I've written in the front of every Bible I've had the last 20 years: This book will keep me from sin, or sin will keep me from this book! That's your first escape route.

Temptation Escape Route #2: Run away and stay away from tempting people/places!

Little Johnny wanted a cookie, but his mother said, "Absolutely not. It's too close to dinner and those cookies are for dessert." A few minutes later, Johnny's mother heard him in the kitchen. She said, "Johnny, are you in the kitchen?" He said, "Yes, ma'am." She said, "What are you doing in the kitchen?" Johnny called back, "I'm fighting temptation." That wasn't the best place to fight temptation. He should have gotten out of there! One of the best escape routes from sin is to simply run away from it.

Joseph couldn't quote scripture, because the Old Testament hadn't been written yet! It wasn't an option to him like it is to us. So, he took another escape route. He kept refusing her. And it says in verse 10, "he refused to go to bed with her, or even be with her." He stayed away from her as much as he could. Then she finally cornered him one day and grabbed his shirt. He did the right thing—he ran away.

One of the best escape routes from sin is to simply run away and stay away from tempting people and places. You may remember the old country comedy television show called "Hee Haw." The word "corny" was made for that kind of humor. In one of the short vignettes Doc Campbell is examining a patient with a broken arm. The patient said, "Doc, I broke my arm in two places." Doc Campbell says, "Well, stay out of those places!" It may not be very funny, but it does contain some truth. If you are a child of God who is trying to live a pure life, there are some places you need to avoid.

The Bible says, "Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart." (II Timothy 2:22) God says that you should run away from temptation like it's a bomb. But on the positive side, you should chase after faith, love and peace *with* other people who are calling on the Lord. That's why you need to attend a

church. There are people there who are calling on the Lord. There's no such thing as a perfect church, but it sure beats a bar or a casino if you're trying to get closer to God!

Teenagers, if you're struggling with the temptation to do drugs or drink, don't go to the parties where that's going on. Guys, if you have a weakness with internet pornography, don't go to those sites. Better yet, put a content blocker on it that can't be bypassed. You should run away and stay away from places and people who will make it easier for you to fall into sin.

Temptation Escape Route #3: Consider the high cost of sin!

I like the story of the burglar who broke into a house one dark night. He had been watching the house and he knew the occupants were gone. As he crept through the house he heard a voice from another room that said, "Jesus sees you." He stopped and stood still for a moment. He thought for sure everyone was gone. Then he heard it again. A voice said, "Jesus sees you." It sounded like it was coming from the kitchen, so the crook crept in that direction. When he got to the kitchen he pointed his flashlight and saw a parrot in its cage. The parrot said, "Jesus sees you." The burglar breathed a sigh of relief and said, "It's only a stupid bird." The burglar flipped on the kitchen light and saw there was a full-grown Doberman underneath the parrot's cage. The parrot said, "Sic' him, Jesus." That's a cute story, but it's actually true that Jesus sees us.

Joseph didn't give in to sexual temptation because He knew God was watching him. When Joseph was tempted to commit sexual sin with Mrs. Potiphar, he knew if He gave in, there would be a price to pay. Joseph told Mrs. Potiphar *why* he wasn't going to have sex with her. First, he refused because of loyalty to his master. Potiphar had entrusted him with all of his household responsibilities. He would be violating the trust of his master if he had sex with her. In other words, he knew if he gave in to temptation and Potiphar found out about it, he would lose his job. But the main reason he resisted was because he knew God was watching. This isn't in the text, but there is a Jewish legend about Joseph and Mrs. Potiphar. In this legend, when Joseph talked to Potiphar's wife about God, the temptress removed her skirt and flung it over a statue representing the sun god of Egypt. She said, "See, God will not see us!" But Joseph answered, "But my God sees all things."

Before you give in to any temptation you need to ask yourself this question: How much is this going to cost? How much is this going to cost me? How much is this going to cost those around me? For years, I've been quoting a little verse that helps me fear sin. It says: Sin will take you farther than you ever wanted to go; sin will keep you longer than you ever wanted to stay; and sin will cost you more than you ever wanted to pay.

Can you think of another Bible character who *didn't* resist sexual temptation? There are plenty to choose from, but King David can be compared to Joseph. He was tempted to have sex with a married woman, Bathsheba. He fell into the temptation, and it cost him more than he would have ever imagined. When it comes to adultery, you may think the grass is greener on the other side of the fence—but you can't afford the water bill!

As a result of David's sin, Bathsheba became pregnant, and David murdered her husband, Uriah. If you study the next few years of David's life, it was a sad story of family rape, violence, and

murder. One act of sin is like a pebble dropped in a pond. It sends out ripples that touch everyone around you. But it's worse than a pebble and ripples. You should think of the consequences of sin like a huge tsunami that wrecks and destroys those around you.

A huge stop sign to sin should make you stop and ask yourself, "How much is this going to cost me? How much is this going to cost my family?" But when you face temptation, one other important consideration: What does my sin cost Jesus? You may think that question should be posed in the past tense, "What *did* my sin cost Jesus." No, leave it in the present tense. Because when it comes to Jesus' sacrifice for sin, there really is no time limitation. Do you think Jesus died for your sins 2,000 years ago? He did, but also the Bible says He is the Lamb who was slain before the foundation of the world. (Revelation 13:8) Past tense, my sins cost Jesus His very life-blood. The Bible says, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die sins and live for righteousness." (I Peter 2:24) When Jesus died on the cross, He provided forgiveness for all my sins, past, present, and future. Because of the timeless nature of the cross, I believe that if I sin today, somehow that adds to the suffering of Jesus 2,000 years ago. I know it adds suffering to His heart today because He is making intercession for me with the Father, and it is His desire that I be pure and blameless.

Do you need a good Bible verse when you're tempted? Try this one, "Jesus wept." (John 11:35) It's the shortest verse in the Bible. It's from John 11 when Jesus was standing at the tomb of His friend Lazarus. But there was another time Jesus wept. As He stood looking over Jerusalem, Jesus burst into sobs because of the sinfulness of the people. In other words, Jesus weeps over sin. He wept over their sin, and He weeps over my sin and your sin.

Whenever you face temptation, you should listen to hear what Jesus is trying to tell you through His Spirit. He'll be saying something, "I never sinned, but I know about the pain of sin. I know how terrible it is. I felt your sin when they lashed my back with a cat-of-nine tails. I felt your sin when they smashed that crown of thorns on my scalp. I felt your sins when they pounded those spikes into my hands and feet. I felt your sin when they gambled for my only possession. I felt your sin when I asked for a drink and all they gave me was vinegar. I felt your sin when my Heavenly Father hid His face from me. I felt your sin when they plunged that spear into my side." Jesus says, "Before you take that step, believe me, I know about the pain of sin." Let me put it another way. Whenever I sin, it's as if I am taking that spear and gouging it in the side of Jesus. Whenever I give in to temptation, it's as if I'm taking the hammer and pounding the nails into the hands of Jesus. So, remember, on God's road to success, there are plenty of temptations. Whenever you face one, God reveals a stop sign. If you want to experience the best of God's blessings, don't run his stop signs!

OUTLINE

1. EVERYONE FACES TEMPTATION

"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin." *Hebrews 4:15*

2. TEMPTATION CAN (and should) BE RESISTED

Jesus said: "Watch and pray that you will not FALL into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak." *Mark 14:38*

3. GOD ALWAYS PROVIDES A WAY TO ESCAPE FROM TEMPTATION

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 up under it. *1 Corinthians 10:13*

Temptation Escape Route #1: Quote scripture!

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

Temptation Escape Route #2: Run away and stay away from tempting people/places!

"Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart." *1 Timothy 2:22*

Temptation Escape Route #3: Consider the high cost of sin!

"He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness." *1 Peter 2:24*



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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes