

TAKING THE HIGH ROAD

Doing What's Right Even When Life Treats You Wrong

"How To Resist The Lure Of Temptation"

Genesis 39:1-21

It would be impossible to preach a series of sermons about Joseph without talking about the power and the pull of temptation. **Mark Twain** once said, *"There is a charm about the forbidden that makes it unspeakably desirable."*

H.L. Menken, the famous American journalist, once wrote, *"Temptation is an irresistible force at work on a movable body."*

William Shakespeare put it like this: *"Temptation is the fire that brings up the scum of the heart."* You know what he's talking about, don't you? All of us have to wrestle with this untamable beast that keeps lurking around our souls.

I used to think when I was a young Christian that the longer you walked along this journey of faith the easier it got. I can remember Christians singing back in those days:

The longer I serve Him, the sweeter He grows,
The more that I love Him, more love He bestows;
Each day is like heaven, my heart overflows,
The longer I serve Him, the sweeter He grows.

You just kind of floated up into heaven. Well, listen to what a seasoned saint wrote as he came to the close of his life. He said, *"Even on the brink of Jordan I find Satan nibbling at my heels."*

Thomas a' Kempis, one of the greatest theologians who ever lived, one said, *"There is no order so holy, no place so secret, where there will be no temptation."* Even Jesus had to battle with this fierce foe. And so, as I talk about the power and pull of temptation this morning, I'm talking about something every one of us must face and resist if we want to truly take the high road through life.

Jesus said that there are basically two roads you can travel on in life—

a high road or a low road; a broad way or a narrow way; an easy path that is popular and smooth and appealing or a difficult path that is sometimes tough and lonely and challenging. But here's the thing. The high road leads to life and blessing and peace while the low road leads to death and destruction and defeat.

And so I have entitled this series of sermons about Joseph's life: **Taking The High Road: Doing What's Right Even When Life Treats You Wrong.** Now here's what we have discovered. Because Joseph purposed in his heart to take the high road through life, God not only blessed Him but used him to bring blessing to his family and to his descendants and to anyone and everyone whom his life touched.

Now one of the most difficult stretches in this high road through life is in learning how to face and resist the lure of temptation. And so let's look at what happened and how Joseph responded when temptation came knocking at his door.

Please take your Bibles and turn to the **39th chapter** of the book of **Genesis**. We are going to begin reading with that very **1st verse**.

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 were 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. When she saw that he had left his cloak in her hand and had run out of the house, she called her household servants.

“Look,” she said to them, “this Hebrew has been brought to us to make sport of us! He came in here to sleep with me, but I screamed. When he heard me scream for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house.”

She kept his cloak beside her until his master came home. Then she told him this story: “That Hebrew slave you brought us came to me to make sport of me. But as soon as I screamed for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house.”

When his master heard the story his wife told him, saying, “This is how your slave treated me,” he burned with anger. Joseph’s master took him and put him in prison, the place where the king’s prisoners were confined.

But while Joseph was there in the prison, the Lord was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden.

Genesis 39:1-21

In one of the very last books of the Bible—the book of **James**—there is a special blessing that is promised to those who resist temptation. Let me read it for you word for word. This is the Word of God: *“Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been proved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love him”* (James 1:12 NKJV).

Here is how one of the more modern translations of the Bible puts it: *“God will bless you, if you don’t give up when your faith is being tested. He will reward you with a glorious life”* (CEV).

Isn’t that what happened with Joseph? Here it is almost 4000 years later and we’re still talking about this man named Joseph. You talk about a glorious life! God used him to bless and deliver and save a whole race of people—the children of Israel.

There may never have been a nation of Israel if it hadn’t been for Joseph and his influence in saving his people from starvation and demise during that awful famine. He is one of the patriarchs of the Jewish race—highly respected and honored and admired by practically all religious traditions. If you look in the Bible’s “Hall of Fame”—the great *Faith Chapter, Hebrews 11*—you will find Joseph’s name.

But what if he had succumbed to temptation? What if he had given in to these earthly desires? What if he had said, “Well, what’s the use? I try to do what’s right but everything turns out wrong! I deserve a little bit of fun and excitement in life.” I guarantee you, if that would have happened, we wouldn’t be talking about him today. He wouldn’t have had a glorious life. His name would have faded from history and memory quicker than the setting sun.

But, he didn’t give up when his faith was tested. He didn’t turn to the low road in the time of temptation. He took the high road and God rewarded him with a glorious life.

Now there are some important things we can learn about how to resist the lure of temptation from Joseph’s life and I want us to look at these and meditate upon these this morning.

Normally when temptation comes to us Satan will try to seduce us with three lies. Now here is why this story of Joseph is so important to us. His life proves that these 3 powerful suggestions that Satan plants in our minds are nothing more than lies.

Now let me remind you that temptation comes in many different forms. Now usually when we think of temptation we think of the sensual—being

tempted to do what immoral, what is impure, what is evil and corrupt and wrong—sexual sin (as in Joseph’s case), surrendering to lust or to some addiction or to some wrong and wicked action. But you can also be tempted to give in to gossip or to give in to discouragement or to give in to bitterness or to give in to despair.

But anytime you are tempted to anything, I can guarantee you that Satan will plant one of three lies in your mind or in your heart.

Lie Number One, he will suggest to you, “**No one else has to go through what I’m going through.**” *No one else has to face what I’m facing. No one else has to struggle with what I’m struggling with. My case is different from everyone else.*

I remember meeting with a pastor who I found out later was having an adulterous affair. He was trying to justify to me why it was all right for him to end his marriage and annul, so to speak, the marriage vows he had made with his wife.

He said to me, “**I have always believed what the Bible has to say about divorce and faithfulness and commitment and marriage but my case is different.**” That’s one of Satan’s lies. When it comes to sin there are no “special” cases.

Listen to what God says to us in His Word – **1st Corinthians 10:13.** “**No temptation has seized you except what is common to man**” (NIV). Or, in other words, whatever you are facing others have faced it, others have overcome it, others have been victorious over it, others have been unyielding to sin and to this very temptation.

Satan will say to you, “**Other people don’t really understand, but your case is different, your circumstances are unique, you have a right to do this, it’s justified.**” Listen! There is never a right time to do a wrong thing.

I don’t care what the circumstances are. Joseph had been mistreated and mistreated and mistreated and mistreated. He had been wronged and wronged and wronged and wronged. He has been sinned against and sinned against and sinned against and sinned against.

But when he was tempted to take the low road and do what was wrong, what was sinful, what was evil, he refused. He said, “**How could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?**” *How could I treat my master that way? How could I violate his trust? How could I compromise my character and my integrity?* No way!

He refused to believe Satan’s lie and so can you.

Lie Number Two, Satan will suggest to you, “**The temptation is just too strong for me to resist.**” *It’s just useless for me to try to fight it. It’s just too big for me. It’s just too powerful for me.*

That’s a lie that Satan uses to keep multitudes and multitudes in bondage to sin. That was **Oscar Wilde’s** philosophy. *Do you remember anything about Oscar Wilde, the famous playwright, poet, novelist, who was known for his biting wit?* He once said, “**The only way to get rid of temptation is to yield to it...I can resist anything but temptation,**”

But that’s a lie. Listen to what God says – **1st Corinthians 10:13.** “**God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear**” (NIV).

One of my favorite books is a little book written by **Joseph Bayly** that is entitled “**Psalms of My Life.**” I bought a copy more than 35 years ago and so it is probably out of print now, but many times in the privacy of my office I will get out that little book and find encouragement in his words.

Let me read to you what he has written. It is called “**A Psalm While Packing Books.**” He writes:

**This cardboard box, Lord,
See, it says bursting limit 200 pounds per square inch.
The box maker knew how much strain the box would take,
What weight would crush it.
You are wiser than the box maker,
Maker of my spirit, my mind, my body.
Does the box know when pressure increases close to the limit?
No, it knows nothing.
But I know when my breaking point is near.**

**So I pray, Maker of my soul,
Determiner of the pressure within upon me,
Stop it, lest I be broken, or else
Change the pressure rating of this fragile container of Your grace
So that I may bear more.**

God knows just how much pressure, how much strain, how much stress you can withstand. He knows your bursting limit and He ***“is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear”***

You have to hold to that. You have to claim it. You have to believe it. You remember that when Satan wanted to tempt **Job** and test him and prove that the only reason he was serving God was because God was blessing him, God allowed Satan to tempt him—but he put a hedge around Job.

He said to Satan, ***“You can go this far—but there is a limit. You can destroy everything he has but don’t touch his life.”*** And then later, ***“You can touch his body, you can bring illness and suffering to him, but don’t take his life.”*** You see, God knew Job’s breaking point. He knew how much he could take and withstand and He was faithful to Job. He would not let him be tempted beyond what he could bear.

If Satan says to you, ***“This temptation is just too strong for me to resist,”*** just say to him, ***“You liar! God is faithful. He will not let me be tempted beyond what I can bear.”***

Lie Number Three, Satan will suggest to you, ***“There is no way out except to give in.”*** One of Satan’s most powerful weapons is to so surround us with pressure that we feel that the only option we have is to give in.

We see this tactic used so clearly in **King Saul’s** life. Saul was Israel’s very first king and he was an impressive leader in many ways. The Bible says that ***“he stood head and shoulders above the crowd.”***

But you may remember that he was tempted one day to do something that was explicitly wrong for him to do. He was supposed to wait for

the prophet Samuel to come and let him know what the Lord’s will was when it came to how they should proceed in an upcoming battle with the Philistines.

And so Saul waited and waited for the prophet to come. He waited one day, two days, three days, four days...seven days. The troops began to get restless and quake with fear. They began to scatter. And Saul began to get tired of waiting on Samuel.

So he just decided to take matters into his own hands and he did that which was wrong in the eyes of the Law of God for him to do. He, not the man of God, not Samuel, not the prophet or the priest, but he—Saul—offered up the burnt sacrifices, the fellowship offerings, to God.

When the prophet Samuel arrived he said, ***“What have you done?”*** Now what I want you to really listen to is Saul’s excuse for his wrong doing.

Saul replied, “When I saw that the men were scattering, and that you did not come at the set time, and that the Philistines were assembling at Micmash, I thought, ‘Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought the Lord’s favor.’ So I felt compelled to offer the burnt offerings.” 1st Samuel 13:11-12 NIV

You catch his reasoning, don’t you? ***“What else could I do? I was trapped. I was pressured. I was compelled. I had to do wrong...there was nothing else left for me to do.”***

But God didn’t accept that for an answer because it isn’t true. Once again, listen to the Word of God that is found in **1st Corinthians 10:13**. ***“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”*** (1st Corinthians 10:13-14 NIV).

God had harsh words for Saul. ***“‘You acted foolishly,’ Samuel said. ‘You have not kept the command the Lord your God gave you; if you had, he would have established your kingdom over Israel for all time. But now your kingdom will not endure; the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him leader of the people because you have not kept the Lord’s command”*** (1st Samuel 13:13-14 NIV).

There is a way out...even when you feel trapped. Joseph said, ***“No!”*** And he kept on saying, ***“No!”*** Let me tell you something about temptation—it keeps coming back at you. Just because you say “no” once doesn’t mean that you’re through with it and that you’ve won the war.

The Bible says that Potiphar’s wife ***“spoke to Joseph day after day,”*** urging him to give in to temptation, to taste the forbidden fruit of life, to just give in to his urges, but ***“he refused.”***

You think he didn’t feel trapped? This was a person of power and influence and authority pressuring him to do that which wasn’t right. He knew it could cost him...and it did! But he also knew there was a way out—that he didn’t have to succumb to that which was wrong.

So what’s the key? How do you resist the lure of temptation?

Let me suggest four simple things that you can do that will help you to truly resist temptation.

Number One – Refuse in your heart and in your mind to be seduced by Satan’s lies. Jesus said, ***“If you hold to my teaching...then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free”*** (John 8:31-32 NIV). These three lies from Satan we’ve been talking about? Accept and believe that they are indeed lies. Don’t let Satan defeat you with something that is simply not true. Hold to the truth.

Number Two – Run from even the appearance of evil. That’s what Joseph did. The Bible says in 1st Thessalonians 5:22 that we should abstain from even ***“the appearance of evil.”***

Dag Hammarskjold, one of the philosophical, spiritual and political giants of the 20th Century, once wrote: ***“You cannot play with the animal in you without becoming wholly animal, play with falsehood without forfeiting your right to truth, play with cruelty without losing your sensitivity of mind. He who wants to keep his garden tidy doesn’t reserve a plot for weeds.”***

I think of that old Indian legend about that brave who was climbing a mountain when he suddenly came across a poisonous snake rustling in

the grass. He jumped back from the snake and took out his knife but before he could act the snake spoke to him.

He said, ***“Please help me, I’m about to die. It’s too cold for me up here on this mountain and I am freezing. There’s no food for me up here, so if I don’t freeze to death I will starve to death. Please put me under your shirt and carry me back down to the valley.”***

The brave said, ***“No. I know your kind. You are a rattlesnake. If I pick you up, you will bite me and your bite will kill me.”***

“No, no, no!” said the snake. ***“I will treat you differently. If you do this for me, I promise I will I will not hurt you.”***

So the brave resisted for a while but this was a very persuasive snake with beautiful markings. Finally, he swallowed his fear, tucked the snake under his shirt and carried him down to the valley where it was warm. Then he laid it in the grass...when suddenly the snake coiled, rattled and bit the young brave on his leg.

“But you promised,” cried the Indian brave.

“You knew what I was when you picked me up,” said the snake as it slithered away. Listen, we can’t trifle with evil or temptation. If it even has the appearance of evil or danger or wrong, leave it alone.

Number Three – Pray regularly to the Lord to keep you from evil. Jesus said, ***“Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation”*** (Matthew 26:41 NIV). ***“Prayer is striking the winning blow,”*** says **S.D. Gordon**. Satan trembles when he seeks the weakest Christian upon his knees.

Number Four – Fix your eyes on Jesus and be aware of His presence. When Joseph was tempted, the first thought that came to his mind was, ***“How can I do this to me Master? How can I violate his trust?”*** But then very quickly, he mind moved to even a greater, more profound reason for him to say no. ***“How could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?”***

When you are aware of the presence of God in your life—that He is with you—it changes everything. Someone has said it like this: ***“Temptations are everywhere, but so is the grace of God.”*** Please find new strength in that knowledge this morning.