

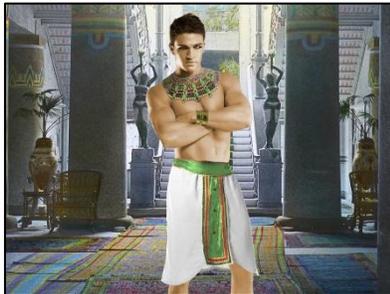
# The Story of Joseph

## *Master Desire*

Part 20 – July 22, 2012

Joseph faces three huge temptations in Potiphar's house. First is power. He's given power over everything and everyone Potiphar owns. But, he uses his power to bless others and glorify God. Enter temptation number two: forbidden sexual pleasure. His master's wife desired him, because ... he was very desirable.

Now Joseph was well-built and handsome ... – *Genesis 39:6b NIV*



I said, last week, that Daniel's faith was tested in the lion's den; and Joseph's is tested in the *cougar cage!*

Joseph is handsome but not *perfect*. This isn't a story about a man who *can't* be tempted. Single. Early 20s. Rejected. Some ego. Living with an experienced, seductive socialite, who says *everything* he's *ever desired* to hear. This is a story of a deprived man, facing the toughest temptation of his life!



Tomb of Kha, c. 1428-1351 BC

... and after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph [NAS says: "looked with desire", NKJ says: "cast longing eyes". As he passed, her eyes would follow, a leering smirk on her lips] and [she] said, "Come to bed with me!" – *Genesis 39:7 NIV*

This is a 3,400-year-old, Egyptian bedroom set from Joseph's era. It belonged to a woman named Merit, and it was found intact, just as you see it; a painted, white bedframe with sheets, fringed covers, and a headrest.



We likened Mrs. Potiphar to Mrs. Robinson. Her husband is a palace officer. And Mrs. Potiphar is the ultimate desperate housewife: a busy, absent husband, and a young buck in a big, empty, lonely palace.

Wealthy women in ancient Egypt enjoyed many freedoms and liberties. And morally, Mrs. Potiphar is probably on par with many of her status.

But he refused. [What's his tone of voice?] – *Genesis 39:8a NIV*

I'm very careful when assigning tone – and this was a *toughie!* Is he shocked? Offended? Flattered? Condescending? Scolding? Diplomatic? Afraid? Rude? Polite? Every tone *alters* the story!

So, how can we know? Let's vote! Would a hormonal, Hebrew, bachelor slave (having suffered much rejection), enjoy the ego-puffing flattery of a powerful, sensual, sophisticated superior? Who votes for "YES!" and who votes for "Head-in-the-sand"?! Now, combine *that* with self-preservation: *she's* the master, *he's* the servant. Insulting *her* puts *him* in great peril. His future *hangs* in the balance of *how* he handles this situation. And take into account, she's *not* angered by *what* he says or *how* he says it; in fact, she's *invigorated* to continue her pursuit! *And*, he speaks with the candor of familiarity, even referring to God as though they've discussed God before, which makes sense, because Potiphar saw that Joseph's God was blessing them.

Above all that, Joseph is simultaneously faithful *and* tempted! Joseph *had* to notice *her* noticing *him*! He had to wonder if she thought what he thought she thought! And, he most likely had *already taken* his own thoughts about this to God. Why do I say? **A)** He *immediately* has a *very thorough answer prepared*. He has obviously put a lot of thought and prayer into it. **B)** He *doesn't deny any desire!* Instead, he explains why it would be "a wicked thing", listing *five* ascending reasons. So, I see Mrs. Potiphar backing him into a corner. And I hear desperate, diplomatic, pleading, as he denies his own flattered desires and stands resolved and faithful to the one true God.

[No, no, no, no, no.] "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. [1] It violates the trust that's been placed in him] [No, no ... no,] No one is greater in this house than I am. [2] It jeopardizes the incredible position he's been given] My master has withheld nothing from me except you, [You're off limits, forbidden, prohibited] [3] It betrays the man who's helped him most] because [because] you are his wife. [4] It's adultery] [No, no, no,] How [how] then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" [I couldn't, I wouldn't, I can't, and I won't, there's just no way. No!] [5] His crowning reason: it tramples on his relationship with God] - Genesis 39:8b-9 NIV

Our brain plays tricks on us when the heat's on, so *frontload* it with your reasons for staying pure, and recite 'em *in* the moment. And if all else fails, in the moment, and you *can't remember* a *single reason*, you can say to yourself, "I know I'll remember 'em when this *passes!* I know I have a *whole list* of *great reasons* just *waiting* to be remembered!" When disaster flirts with *you*, do as Joseph did; introduce those who'd be most hurt into the conversation: "I'd *love* you to meet my wife!" "Want to see pictures of our *kids?*" "Do you go to church? I do! The-one-with-the-big-boat!"

Whatever his tone, whatever weakness she detects, or conviction she discounts, when he's done, you can almost hear her say, "Well now, aren't you just the *cutest little thing?* ... So, you're sayin' there's a chance!"

And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he *refuuuuuuuuuuused* [When this verse is chanted in synagogues, the Hebrew word for "refused" is drawn out, to suggest Joseph's struggle] [her two repeated requests] to go to bed with her [More literal translations say, "to lie beside her", "Joseph, I can't sleep, come tickle my back."] or even be with her. [Which is either a euphemism for sex, or another lead-in approach, "Joseph, let's find a private place where we can talk."] - Genesis 39:10 NIV

If you find yourself in the cougar cage, where's the safest place to be? As *far* from the cougar as *possible*! Even if what she's asking him to do isn't technically a sin, he's smart enough see that she's too *sensually alluring*, and he's too *hormonally vulnerable* to stop what's bound to begin! Later, when she grabs him and he runs away, do you think he's fleeing more from what *she* might do, or what *he* might do?



So, day after day she's engineering opportunities to entice him. Day after day she's persistently trying to wear down his defenses and resistance. Makeup. Jewelry. Perfume. Flattery. Giggles. Touches. Whispers. Clothing ... or lack thereof. This is a 4,200-year-old, Egyptian net-dress, from Joseph's era. It was worn with or *without* a slip. Day after day, the cougar stalks him in her cage. Solomon warns of the persuasive words of the adulteress.

"I have covered my bed with colored linens from Egypt. I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes and cinnamon. Come, let's drink deep of love till morning; let's enjoy ourselves with love! My husband is not at home; he has gone on a long journey." – Proverbs 7:16-19 NIV

This is the type of intimate attack Joseph was facing day after day, as she alternately appealed to his ego and his empathy.

c. 2323–2150 BC

"Potiphar *neglects* me ... *He's had so many affairs* ... I love how you take care of us ... *You deserve me more than he does* ... *You're so muscley!* ... *stop torturing me* ... *Who has ever appreciated you as much as I do?* ... Come on, *nobody will ever know* ... Just this *once* ... Can't you just picture us *together?* ... Are you *not* attracted to women? ... You must think I'm *ugly?* ... You're *so tense*, let me rub those shoulders ... You *know* you want this as much as I do ... Don't we *deserve some happiness?* ... It's not a sin if you're *obeying a master's command* ... *Trust me* ... Why won't you *trusst* me? I *trussst* you ... *Trussst* in me, *jussst* in me, shut your eyessss and *trussst* in me – *hold still please.*"

Day after day, Joseph *refuuuuuuuuuuuuuuused* ... but ... *how?!* We often view self-control as *mostly* willpower. Grunt, try, grunt. But Joseph doesn't turn inside to *suppress* his desire for *Mrs. Potiphar*; he turns outside to *express* his desire for *God*.

His crowning reason, his ultimate argument, is the only one he *asks* as a question: "How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" This question holds the key. His astonishing self-control comes *not* through willpower, but *heart-power!*



Who was his mother? Rachel. How long did his father, Jacob, work to marry her? *Seven years!* That's a *long time*, a lot of self-control! And if there's *one thing* Jacob is *not* known for, it's self-control, so how'd he do it?! Flashback about 36 years ...

So Jacob served seven years to get Rachel, but they seemed like only a few days to him [How? Why?] because of his love for her. – Genesis 29:20 NIV

Jacob had the normal desires: leisure, freedom, wealth, a break from this grueling job. He desired *many* things, but *not* the way he desired *Rachel*. She was his *master desire* that put all *competing desires* in their proper place ... until she died.

Self-control isn't just willpower *suppressing* desire; it's *all our desires* being rearranged by, and according to, a *supreme* love, an *ultimate* passion and delight, an *undying, everlasting Rachel*.

*This* is what Joseph has! And if we fail to see how *forcefully* he's being tempted, we'll miss how *passionately* he loves God! **"How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?"** He's able to endure the desire of his master, because his eyes are on his master desire!

No one can live without delight, and that is why a man deprived of spiritual joy goes over to carnal pleasures. - Thomas Aquinas

Who or what is *your Rachel*, your master desire, the supreme love that captures your heart and mind in a way that reorders all your *competing desires* into a supporting position? This is what Jesus wants to be to *you*. And it might require new perspectives on your part and the determination to find them. But, there's a secret even Joseph didn't know. Why did Jesus, (God in flesh), *endure* the cross? What kept Him going in the face of all the sin and shame and opposition? ... *You* did.



Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him [that's you] endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. [power] - Hebrews 12:2-3 NIV

You are *Jesus'* master desire, *His* supreme love.

And to the degree that you realize, and really know, in your mind and heart, that *you're* His *Rachel*, He'll *become yours*. And if He's not *that* to *you*, you're missing out on the thrilling, fulfilling, delight that only comes from knowing, in the core of your being, how *much* you are *truly loved* by your Creator.

Single Christians tend to think, "If I was happily married, I wouldn't struggle with sexual temptation." Sadly, it's not true. I wish it was.

Marriage is a mere shadow of the real thing to which it points. And many a marriage has failed because one or both spouses were under the delusion that the other was somehow supposed to be their *master desire*, their *supreme* love, their *undying Rachel*.

Joseph was able to endure Mrs. Potiphar's carnal attack, because his *deepest needs* were being met through intimacy with God.

And this is where we have to close God's story for today.