

Our Place at His Place

Master Desire

August 9, 2020

Welcome you to where we're learning to stand strong when being seduced by this world!



This goes for *anything* that tempts us to **compromise our character**, or **violate our conscience**, or **dishonor our Christ**.



But, we'll be using Mrs. Robinson – I mean, Mrs. Potiphar's – seduction of Joseph as our specific example. **EXPLICIT WARNING: the original audience was unblushingly comfortable discussing sexuality with spirituality.**



So, **what or who is your master desire?** The supreme desire that forces all other desires to fall in line behind it.



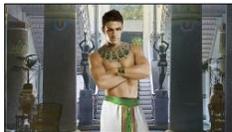
In Potiphar's palace (this is a lantern slide of the Shepheard's Hotel; it was destroyed in the Cairo riots in 1952), **Joseph faces the trials we all face: rejection, injustice, despair** (remember, his own brothers sold him into slavery because of his ego and their father Jacob's favoritism); but then came the **temptations that come with success and authority** when Potiphar puts him in charge of everyone and everything ... except *Mrs.* Potiphar.



But, of all his many trials, **Mrs. Potiphar's sexual temptation** is by far the most ... *entertaining*. Sorry Joe; just is. Plus, it offers us frank insight into standing strong in our faith when desire makes us weak in the knees. Know why she desired *him*? Because, he was very, *very*, desirable.



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



That's not a Scripture you really expect to see ... if, that is, you're unaware of the unabashed matter-of-frankness of God's Word. He designed us, then created us, and then gave us an owner's manual. And, just as Daniel's faith was tested in a lion's den, Joseph's is tested in a cougar cage! *Everyone's* tested. It's just a matter of when and where and how often. Scripture says **Joseph is super-handsome, not super-human**. This is *not* a story about a well built, barely dressed, good-looking guy who *can't* be tempted. Early twenties. Single. Fit. Lonely. Unwanted, but just promoted. And suddenly living with an seductive socialite who's **saying everything his aching heart's ever desired to hear**. This is about **a deprived man facing the toughest challenge of his life!**



After a while his master's wife **took notice** of Joseph [or, "cast longing eyes" (NKJ); or, "set her eyes" (WEB); or, "looked with desire" (NAS)] and ...



Those eyes were made-up to *show* it.





Modern Mascara was created to mimic ancient Egyptians. They used eye liner, lipstick, rouge, and whatever it *took*. Take a look at this 3,400 year-old beauty box that belonged to a gal named Merit. This is Merit's bedroom set, found intact, just as you see it. A bedframe painted white, with sheets and a fringed cover. Here's Merit's husband, Kha's bed. I just thought we should familiarize ourselves with the central elements of this story. So *anywho*, Mrs. P. ...

... said, "Come to bed with me." But he *refused*. – Genesis 39:7-8 NIV

I wonder what the tone of his voice was. We're told they went through this routine "day after day". (39:10) I'm very careful when assigning tone and emphasis. It can change the whole story. So talk to us, Joseph. Are you shocked? Offended? Flattered? Scolding? Diplomatic? Afraid? Rude? Polite? Condescending? Every tone alters the story. So how can we know? I know, let's vote!

Would a young, egotistical, hormonal, Hebrew bachelor, slave (having suffered much personal rejection), enjoy the ego-puffing fawning of a powerful, sensual, sophisticated superior?

Who votes for "YES!" and who votes for "Head-in-the-sand"?! But, **now combine that with self-preservation:** *she's* the master, *he's* the servant. **Insulting her puts him in great peril.** Sounds a lot like our current culture. **His future is hanging in the balance.** And he knows it. And, spoiler alert: he'll suffer greatly for doing the *right* thing, instead of giving in to his *own* desire. And he knows it. But, *this* is what makes his faithfulness in the face of her unfaithfulness so astounding.

"Day after day," his tone hasn't angered or offended her; in fact, it's allowed her to believe that she can wear him down; so she ramps things up! I'll read Joseph's final refusal in a moment; but, I want you to notice how he speaks with the candor of familiarity. They're *friends*. And, how he refers to God as though they've discussed the subject before. Which makes sense; because, we're told that *Mr.* Potiphar saw that Joseph's God was blessing them. (Gen 39:3)

And above all, remember that **Joseph is simultaneously faithful and tempted!** He's human. He *had* to notice *her* noticing *him!* He had to wonder if she *thought* what he *thought* she *thought!* And, **he's taken his own thoughts to the Lord.** Know how we know? **He has a very thoroughly prepared answer.** That alone requires thought and prayer. And, **he doesn't deny having sinful desires.** Instead, **he outlines five specific reasons it would be wicked to give in to this.** So, I see Mrs. Potiphar cornering Joseph. And I hear desperate, diplomatic, pleading, as he rejects his own ego-flattered desires, and stands resolved and faithful to the one true God.

[It violates the trust placed in him] "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. **[It jeopardizes God's blessing]** No one is greater in this house than *I am*. **[It desecrates the generosity shown to him]** My master has withheld *nothing* from me except *you*, ["You're off limits Mrs. Potiphar"] because you are *his wife*. **[And that's adultery!]** How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against *God?*" - Genesis 39:8-9 NIV

Our brain plays tricks on us when the heat's on; so **frontload it with your reasons for staying true, and recite 'em in the moment.** And if all else fails, *in the moment*, and you can't remember a *single* reason, tell 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!"

But, whatever weakness she detects, or conviction she discounts, when he's done, you can almost hear her say, "Well aren't you just *adorable?*"

And though she spoke to Joseph *day after day*, he refuuuuuuused **[When this verse is chanted in synagogues, "refused" is drawn out to suggest Joseph's struggle]** to go to bed with her or even be with her. **[Which is the *lead-in* approach, "Let's find a private place where we can just talk." "Sit beside me." "Rub my back."]** – Genesis 39:10 NIV



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 once they begin! Now, if you find yourself *inside* the cage, where's the safest place? *As far from the cougar as possible!*

Day after day she's engineering enticements, persistently doing what it takes to wear down his resistance. Makeup and perfume (like Merit's). Jewelry (like Merit's). Flattery. Compliments. Giggles. Touches. Whispers. Clothing (or lack thereof). This 4,200-year-old, Egyptian beadnet dress, from Joseph's era., (c. 2323–2150^{BC}) was worn with or *without* a slip.

Day after day, the cougar stalks him in her cage, purring the persuasive words of an adulteress on the hunt. Like the one Solomon warns about:

"I have covered my bed with colored linens from Egypt. **[Like Merit's 3,400-year-old bed 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." ... all at once he followed her like an ox going to the slaughter, like a deer stepping into a noose – 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.**

"Potiphar *neglects* me ... *He's* had affairs ... I love how you take care of us ... *You* deserve me more than *he* does ... *You're so muscley!* ... Stop *torturing* me ... *Who* appreciates you like *I* do? ... Nobody will *ever* know ... Just this *once* ... Just *picture* us together ... Am I not attractive? ... You think I'm *ugly* ... *You're* shoulders are *so* tense ... *You want* this as much as I do ... we deserve *some* happiness ... It's not a *sin* if you're obeying my *command* ... Why don't you *trusst* me? I *trusst* you."

Did I get one *your* "go-to"s? Good. And, day after day, Joseph refuuuuuuuuused ... but ... *how?!* **We often view self-control as *mainly* willpower.** Grunt, try, grunt. But Joseph doesn't focus on **suppressing his desire for sin**; but, **expressing his desire for God.**

His ultimate argument, with his *own* heart, 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. You see, **his** astonishing **self-control comes *not* through willpower, but *heart-power!***

Joseph had all the desires factory installed down here. Like you and me, he desired *many* things; but, *not* to the degree that he desired to please the *Lord*. **His master desire put all competing desires in line.** Not sayin’ it’s easy. Sayin’ it’s possible ... *if* we do *that*. Because, **without that master desire we’ll never master desire.** Look at our world. So many seem so satisfied allowing themselves to be mastered by whatever desire bullies the rest. Success. Money. Popularity. Political gain. Comfort. Convenience. Play Station. Notice how I slipped “political gain” in the middle there, to make it less obvious?

Self-control can’t just be willpower suppressing desire. You’re not super-human. It has to be all about **arranging our desires according to our supreme love.** *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!

And so we *know* and *rely on* the love God has for *us*. God *is* love. Whoever lives *in love* lives in God, and God in him. In this way, love is made complete – 1 John 4:16-17 NIV

You see, **when our desires are out of order, everything is.** And it begins and ends with God’s love. His for *us*. Ours for *Him*. Joseph said, “How then could I do such a wicked thing [substitute your own situation here] and sin against God?” He refused to let a *lesser* desire master his *master* desire. So, **what or who is your master desire?** Hopefully it’s a supreme *love* that captures your heart and mind in a way that naturally repositions all *competing* desires.

This is what Jesus wants – kind of even demands. And **it might require a new perspective on your part,** and pursuit, and determination to find them. For instance, guess why Jesus endured what He endured on the cross. **What do think kept Him going in the face of all that? You.**



[Therefore] let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance ... fixing our eyes on Jesus ... For the *joy* set before Him **[that’s you]** He 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 sinners, so that *you* will not grow *weary* and lose *heart*. – Hebrews 12:2-3 NIV

You see, **you were, are, and always will be Jesus’ supreme love.** You are your Master’s master desire. And **to the degree that you realize,** and really know, in your mind and heart, **that you’re His, you’ll make Him yours.** And if He’s not *that* to *you*, you’re missing out on the thrilling, fulfilling, delight that comes only from knowing, in the core of your being, just how *much* you are *truly* loved by your Creator. Many a marriage has failed because one or both partners were under the delusion that the *other* was somehow supposed to be their *master* desire and *supreme* love.

Joseph was able to endure Mrs. Potiphar and so much more, because **his deepest needs were being met through intimacy with God.** And this is where we have to close God’s story for today.