

# The sovereignty of God and temptation

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[ 0 : 00 ] Now the reading's on page 39, it's Genesis chapter 39. Now Joseph had been brought down to Egypt, and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, had brought him from the Ishmaelites, who had brought him down there.

The Lord was with Joseph, and he became a successful man, and he was in the house of his Egyptian master. His master saw that the Lord was with him, and that the Lord caused all that he did to succeed in his hands.

So Joseph found favor in his sight, and attended him, and he made him overseer of his house, and put him in charge of all that he had. From that time that he had made him overseer in his house, and over all that the Lord had blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake, the blessing of the Lord was on all that he had in house and field.

So he left all that he had in Joseph's charge, and because of him he had no concern about anything but the food he ate. Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance, and after a time his master's wife cast her eyes on Joseph and said, Lie with me.

But he refused and said to his master's wife, Behold, because of me my master has no concern about anything in the house, and he has put everything that he has in my charge.

[ 1 : 26 ] He is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except yourself, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?

And as she spoke to Joseph day after day, he would not listen to her, to lie beside her, or to be with her. But one day when he went into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the house was there in the house, she caught him by his garment, saying, Lie with me.

But he left his garment in her hand and fled and got out of the house. As soon as she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and had fled out of the house, she called to the men of the household and said to them, See, he has brought among us a Hebrew to laugh at us.

He came in to me to lie with me, and I cried out with a loud voice. And as soon as he heard that, I lifted up my voice and cried out. He left his garment beside me and fled and got out of the house.

Then she laid up his garment by her until his master came home, and she told him the same story, saying, The Hebrew servant whom you have brought among us came in to me to laugh at me.

[ 2 : 42 ] But as soon as I lifted up my voice and cried, he left his garment beside me and fled out of the house. As soon as his master heard the words that his wife spoke to him, This is the way your servant treated me.

His anger was kindled. And Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined. And he was there in prison. But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison.

And the keeper of the prison put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners who were in the prison.

Whatever was done there, he was the one who did it. The keeper of the prison paid no attention to anything that was in Joseph's charge, because the Lord was with him.

And whatever he did, the Lord made it succeed. Thank you very much. Thank you. Keep that passage open. Let me pray. Gracious Father, we ask that you'd give us humility today as we look at this issue of temptation and your sovereign purpose in temptation.

temptation. Please, we pray, would you speak to us very much in our hearts? Would you convict us, show us, change us, help us? We all of us long to be like Jesus.

[ 4 : 00 ] We long to be conformed to his image and be like him. Amen. So please, would you help us to see and to desire everything according to his ways? Be with us, we pray.

Amen. Well, we're looking at this issue today of sovereignty and sovereignty of God and temptation. And we're looking through the story of Joseph, as we have been over the last few weeks.

And as we start, let me preface it by being stark. We are in a war situation. We're all at war. And just like soldiers in a battle, we need to be alert.

What was Jesus' teaching to his disciples at the point of his greatest temptation? Do you remember when he was in the Garden of Gethsemane? And he was worried that he was about to go to the cross.

His sweat was like blood dripping down from his head. And what did he teach his disciples? What was his advice to them? It was watch and pray.

[ 5 : 03 ] Watch and pray. And in the face of temptation, Jesus was watching and praying. He was alert. And his disciples, they fell asleep.

And so often in the moment of greatest temptation, we're not watching, we're not praying, and we fall asleep. And Joseph, for us, is a fantastic example, as is the Lord Jesus, of being alert, of watching and praying so that we don't fall into temptation.

Now, I was thinking about this. And a good example of when someone is alert. Have you ever had this when you wake up in the middle of the night and you hear a noise in the house?

Have you ever done this? I remember a few years ago, waking up in the middle of the night and there was definitely a noise downstairs. And you don't wake up in that groggy state when you hear a noise.

You know when you wake up in the morning, it's like, oh, it's morning, I feel a bit groggy. When you hear a noise, you're instantly alert. It's like you wake up and you're instantly, you're gripped.

[ 6 : 05 ] And you lie bolt still. And your ears are attuned. And you're listening with heightened sensibilities. I remember this moment a couple of years ago.

I was in the house and I heard this noise downstairs. And I listened in bed just for that moment. It might just be a noise, you know, a bit creaky in the house. But then I heard the noise again. And it was unmistakable.

That sounded like someone. And so I, like as quiet as I could, crept out until the landing. And I held my head over the stairs.

And I could feel my heart pounding in my chest. And I was listening so carefully. And then I heard the noise again. And I realised, actually, it's alright.

At the end of the day, there was a bloke who was drunk. Who had come to our house and was outside the door. Fumbling with keys. Trying to get in to our front door.

[ 7 : 01 ] And I had to go down and explain to this poor bloke that actually he didn't live here. And he was at the wrong house. And it took him several minutes to kind of get himself. But for a moment there, there was a real tension.

I don't know if you've ever had that. My heart was beating. My ears, I was listening so carefully. I was the ultimate watchman. Okay. I was the ultimate watchman for a moment.

I was watching. I was alert. I was ready. And that is what Jesus wants us to be about temptation. Are we watching? Are we alert? Are we ready?

Spiritually, instead of being at war, instead of soldiers in the battlefield, we're like soldiers in a battlefield. We're just kind of wandering around as if we're not at war. The devil, our adversary, is like a prowling lion, Peter tells us in his epistle, waiting to grab us.

And we're walking around like we're in a field with a lion, as if, oh, there's some lion, I don't know. We're not alert. We're not at war. Temptation comes upon us. It grabs us.

[ 8 : 05 ] And we just never even noticed. And I'd love to encourage us tonight with the example of Joseph, who is a faithful, faithful servant in God's house.

Just like the greater son of Jacob, Jesus, who himself was tempted in every way and was without sin. Because he was a watchman. Joseph was a watchman.

And when that moment of temptation came, it didn't catch them unsurprised. They were there. They were ready. And they knew exactly what to do at that moment. And I think he's a wonderful example to us, as is the Lord Jesus.

We're not going to look at most of this account. I just really want to focus in, just to zoom in, if you like, on this idea of this moment of his temptation. Let me read from verse 6 of chapter 39.

Potiphar left all that he had in Joseph's charge. And because of Joseph, Potter had no concern about anything but the food he ate, the ultimate servant.

[ 9 : 02 ] Off you go, delegate the whole lot. Because he's so trustworthy. Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance. He's in his twenties at this point.

And after a time, his master's wife, she cast her eyes on Joseph. And she said, Joseph, lie with me. But he refused.

He said to his master's wife, behold, because of me, my master has no concern about anything in the house. He's put everything that he has in my charge.

He's not greater in this house than I am. Nor has he kept back anything from me. Except yourself. Because you are his wife.

How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God? And she spoke to Joseph day after day.

[10:03] But he would not listen to her, to lie beside her or to be with her. But one day, when he went into the house to do his work, and none of the men were in the house, she caught him by the garment, saying, lie with me.

But he left his garment in her hand, and he fled. And he got out of the house. Three things to think about with temptation. Three points tonight.

The second is the longest. Here's the first. I want to think about the nature of temptation. What is temptation? James, in his letter in the New Testament, says this.

Each person is tempted when he's lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire, when it is conceived, gives birth to sin. And sin, when it's fully grown, brings forth death.

So different things in there. There is temptation. There is desire. There is sin. And there is death. Let me try and show you it in a diagram. I like diagrams. I'm a diagram kind of guy. Let me show you it in a diagram.

[11:04] There's a neutral external object. In this case, a pretty woman. Now, a pretty woman is neither good nor bad. She's just a pretty woman. She's a neutral object, if you like.

The devil or the world will tempt us. The devil or the world will speak to us. Oh, look. There's a pretty woman. Fancy her. Have an affair with her. And because of the evil desires in our hearts, we listen to what the devil or what the world says to us.

And we think, oh, yeah, I fancy a bit of that. Or I deserve a bit of that. Or I'm good enough. Or I'm flattered. Or whatever it is. And we believe the lie. Because of the evil desire in our heart.

That then gives birth to sin. And we act upon our evil desire. And then it leads to death. A lifestyle of sin leads to death. Notice a few things.

Temptation is not sin. Temptation and sin are different things. When you're tempted to do something, the evil desire in your heart says, oh, I could do that.

[12:08] And then you do it. Temptation and sin are different things. You're not sinning by being tempted. Jesus was tempted in every way and yet was without sin. But temptation isn't actually the problem.

The problem really is our hearts. Because if we had pure hearts and we were tempted, we wouldn't be bothered by it. We just wouldn't do it. Let me show you a couple of ways in which temptation hits us.

The first is that temptation plays on our sinful desires. That sin in our hearts. The devil, the world, never tempts us with things that we, you know, I'll go and stick some pins in your eyes.

It's not a very tempting thing to us. He will lure us, the world will lure us, with things which we desire, which in our evil hearts we want. And the devil's not stupid.

He knows your heart. He knows exactly what you want. Joseph was a young man in his 20s. He was a slave. And Potiphar gave him authority over everything in his house.

[13:11] He could do anything he wanted to. And there he was, on his own, with Potiphar's wife. A guy in his 20s. Good looking guy. He was a slave. He didn't have a girlfriend. He had natural desires.

Natural desires. And there was this woman, a luring woman, and he could have just done it. It would have been easy. No one would have known he had the power. Evil desires.

Temptation. Temptation plays on our sinful desires. But secondly, temptation is persistent. It never gives up. Did you notice in verse 10, Potiphar's wife spoke to Joseph day after day.

Lie with me. No. Lie with me. No. Lie with me. No. Lie with me. No. Day after day after day.

I don't know about you, but if I'm honest, when I was thinking about this, I am the most vulnerable when I'm successful with temptation. Did you hear this? You might go through periods where actually you're godly.

[14:14] You pray to the Lord, you're watchful, you're alert, and you don't succumb to temptation. And do you know what I do? I get proud. I think, look at me. Come on. I've licked this one.

I've got this one sorted. And as soon as I'm arrogant, as soon as I'm self-confident, that's when the devil comes in once again, just again, and then I fall.

That's always when I fall. Guys, there will be never a day when in this life, before the return of the Lord Jesus, that you will not be tempted. It will always happen. There will never be a day when temptation stops.

Don't be surprised. It will keep going. We need to keep persisting. It doesn't matter how young you are or how old you are. It will always come. And it will come in different forms and in clever forms. Are we watchful? Are we alert? That's the nature of temptation. Let me spend a bit longer thinking about how we fight temptation, how Joseph fought temptation. Several things. First of all, and it's obvious from what I've been saying, he was a watcher.

[15:14] Joseph watched for temptation. In other words, when it happened to him, he wasn't taken unawares. When Potiphar's wife came to him and said, lie with me, he wasn't sort of, oh, I'd never thought about that.

He wasn't caught unawares. He wasn't sort of kind of flattered. You know, well, she's an attractive lady and, you know, my master gets to sleep with her and that would be a real position that would be really honourable.

And while she finds me attractive, of all people, he wasn't caught unawares. No. He knew it was going to happen. He was watching. One of the battles I face every day in temptation, and I'm sure many of you face this, is first thing when I wake up in the morning, when I get up and I pray, and the devil, my flesh, always says to me, go on, just another 15 minutes.

Just press the snooze button. Do you face that temptation? I face it every day. And when I fail in that temptation, it's always because I've not even spotted that I'm being tempted. It just catches me unawares.

And there I am later in the day thinking that when I look back at my sin, I think I hadn't even spotted that I was in a moment of temptation. Do you do that? If only I thought first thing in the morning, go on, another 15 minutes.

[16:29] Hang on. Whoa. This is a moment of temptation. And if I was self-aware, as Joseph was self-aware, if I was watching, it would be as much, I'd just say no, no to that.

Earlier on when we prayed in our prayer of confession, and we had 30 minutes of quiet there. 30 minutes, 30 seconds of quiet. That'd be a long period of quiet, wouldn't it? What were you praying for? What sin have you done this week that you know that the Lord's convicted you of?

What are you guilty of this week? Now rewind. What was the temptation that prompted that sin?

What was the thing that you believed that you said to yourself, oh, I could do that.

It wouldn't hurt or I deserve that or it wouldn't be a big thing if I did that? Now were you aware at that moment that you were in a temptation situation?

Were you watching? Were you alert? Of course I'm saying this so that next time you will be. It's a really helpful thing to stop and analyse your sin and think, what was I doing?

[17:32] Did I spot it? Know your temptations and watch for them. Secondly, Joseph hated seeing in his heart. I really admire Joseph because when Potiphar's wife came he said no straight away and I'm sure that partly that was because he already hated the sin in his heart.

Sexual immorality? That's disgusting. I wouldn't do that. How could I do this wickedness? Is the way he puts it. Let me put this in a stark way that's slightly over the top.

I apologise. How many of you are tempted by incest? If you are, please come and speak to me afterwards because I'd love to help you actually if you are.

Genuinely. But most of us and many of us are not tempted by incest because it's just frankly it's appalling. I mean the concept of sleeping with a brother or a sister or a mother or a father is just awful.

The reason I'm not tempted by incest is because in my heart I hate that sin. It's depraved. If only I thought that way about all sin.

[18:39] Because when I'd be tempted I would just be like ugh. And that's the way Joseph was with sexual immorality. How could I do this great wickedness? He says in verse 9. For him it's just ugh it's disgusting.

The fight against pornography is a difficult one these days. Pornography is a massive problem in our culture and it will be a problem here in this church no doubt. We just don't talk about it. And we can put up as many blockers and software and different things but the real problem that we have with say pornography is in here not out there.

We can try and put up things but the problem is in here. And if only we worked hard in our hearts so that if an image came up on our screen we'd look at that as if it was an incestual image of myself and my sister.

I don't have a sister. But I'd look at that it'd be disgusting. Disgusting. If only my heart thought that about pornographic images I would be able to cope with the temptation when it came.

What is the temptation that you succumb to? What is the sin that you struggle with? I want to encourage us all to be prayerful and ask the Lord by the Spirit of Christ who lives in us that we would hate that sin hate it so that when it comes up I would be appalled at it.

[ 19 : 55 ] That's what I pray. Now we know that the Lord is gracious to us and is merciful again and again and again so we can ask him for forgiveness but why don't we pray to him and ask him that he would help us hate the sin in our hearts.

Joseph hated sin in his heart. Thirdly he was serving God more than he was serving Potiphar. Let me read from verse 8 again. This is what he says to Potiphar Behold because of me my master has no concern about anything in the house.

Potiphar has put everything that he has in my charge. He isn't greater in this house than I am nor has he kept back anything from me except you because you're his wife.

How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against Potiphar my master? Now that would be right wouldn't it because it is a great sin against him but isn't it striking how Joseph says no I understand that my sin against Potiphar yeah it is sin against him but supremely it is sin against God.

All sin is at one level or another a sin against God. If you lie you're saying to God I know I'm your servant I serve you and I'm supposed to speak truth but it doesn't matter I can do what I want.

[ 21 : 14 ] If you hurt another person you're hurting someone who's made in the image of God you're basically saying to God stuff you when you're saying to a person stuff you. When you cheat on your spouse you're cheating on the person before whom God you'd said I would be faithful.

All sin at one level or another is sin against God. And I think the reason that Joseph is so aware of this and we forget is because actually in his life he serves God.

He's a servant of the living God. Yes he's a slave of Potiphar but he's a servant of God. I think in our lives it's easy for us to compartmentalise our lives. Do you do this? Go to church on Sunday but the rest of the week we can easily live like pragmatic atheists as if God's not there.

God sees literally everything. He knows the thoughts of our hearts and we often live as if there is no God which is mental. It's just blind and stupid isn't it?

I do. And Joseph really encourages me because he's a man who when he's serving Potiphar when he's pleasing Potiphar he knows God's watching him he's pleasing God.

[ 22 : 24 ] And when he's sinning against Potiphar God's watching him he's sinning against God.

Joseph was a servant of God every day he walked with God and I want to encourage us to be people who walk with God who serve God in our workplaces in our homes when no one else is watching God sees all things and to be motivated to please him and be hateful of displeasing him and sinning against him.

Joseph hated sin and served God. Fourthly Joseph had fixed boundaries. See long before the moment of his temptation Joseph had clear in his mind what his boundaries were.

He knew that he had authority over everything in the house. Potiphar said do what you want in the house you've got authority of everything but in this one thing there's a boundary and that's my wife. Do you remember Adam in the garden? He could eat from any tree. Do what you like Adam go for your life but not this one not this tree. Joseph knew his boundaries and he fixed them and we struggle with that.

One of the Bible words for sin is trespass or transgression. You know what trespass is? It's going onto someone else's property that you're not supposed to go onto. There's like a line do not cross this line and that's what sin is.

[ 23 : 46 ] Adam crossed that line. He knew it was there and he went over it but Joseph knew that line was there and he set himself a boundary I will not cross that line. I heard this very well illustrated in a talk I heard recently by a man called Don Carson who illustrated it like this.

He had a talk he was being instructed in pastoral ministry for the church work and this was what this older kind of older guy from an old generation's advice was in pastoral ministry to him was this. 35 points I won't give you them all. The first point was this stay behind the desk. When the lady the pretty young lady comes in with a problem stay behind the desk.

Point two if she starts crying let her finish crying. Point three stay behind the desk.

Point four if she's still crying hand her a tissue from behind the desk. Point five stay behind the desk.

[ 24 : 52 ] Point six get your bible out. Point seven stay behind the desk. And it went on like this 35 points apparently and every other one was stay behind the desk.

And Don Carson tells us in this illustration that on his very first week in pastoral ministry this happened. A woman comes into his office similar age to him young lady crying problems and all he had in his head was stay behind the desk.

Brilliant advice because it went in. He had a boundary and he didn't transgress it. He fixed a rule in his life. There are no rules but he fixed a rule so that he wouldn't transgress that boundary.

Let me ask you on the area of sexual temptation where are your boundaries? Do you have boundaries? Where do you draw the line? Maybe it's physical touch.

Many people I'll beware of physical touch of the opposite sex. That's a rule some people set. Billy Graham I know he's a famous evangelist will never drive in a car just him and someone the opposite a woman never ever do it.

[ 26 : 04 ] Don Carson never has lunch just him and one other person the opposite sex. These are rules they set in place as boundaries so that they get nowhere near the point where temptation is a problem.

They set themselves rules and that's exactly what Joseph did. You know Jesus said it's better that you gouge out your eye and cut off your hand than fall into sin and go to hell.

And boundaries feel like they're painful. They feel like gouging out your eye. For me one of the obvious ones I have is I have software on my computer and I think everyone should have it as a Christian that means you can't see anything pornographic.

And it does it is a painful thing because I can't look at Facebook it blocks Facebook it blocks YouTube it blocks all sorts of annoying websites that surely can't be a problem. But do you know what not being able to see Facebook is not exactly gouging out my eye.

It's painful it's annoying but I thank God for that line that's been drawn there for me so that I won't transgress I won't cross that line. Joseph had pre-decided he pre-thought about the temptations that he faced and he drew himself a line so that he wouldn't go across it.

[ 27 : 18 ] And so I just want to encourage you what lines have you got for the temptations that you struggle with? And finally and the last one on this second point which is the longest point oh those are some sorry I've got some websites there you might those are some software that you can use I use one called Safe Eyes there's one called K9 there's one called OpenDNS come and speak to me afterwards I've got lots of advice on these sorts of software I really think every Christian should have it I really think every Christian it's an easy thing and they're free so I really think that's a good idea come and speak to me afterwards about that but the last thing is this Joseph fled he ran for his life do you remember in 1 Corinthians Paul says flee from sexual immorality and that's I think he's thinking of Joseph here a pastor of mine at another church had an illustration about this he had a friend who was in pastoral ministry and a lady comes into his office one day and drops her robe and she's standing there before him completely naked amazing and do you know what he did he ran out of the room he ran for his life

I'll imagine the woman standing there like brilliant praise God he fled and that's exactly what Joseph did he got caught in a situation it was him and her no one in the house she grabs his coat and he didn't think twice he bolted for the door he ran for his life let me just be stark about this because it might be that someone in this room is you know if you're in a field this maybe has never happened if there's a bull in a field you don't go up to it and stroke its nose you run for your life and I wonder if there's anyone in the room at the moment who's stroking the nose of the bull of adultery at the moment if you are let me just say this I don't know are you getting too close to someone of the opposite sex that's not your husband or wife at the moment emails text messages little chats that are kind of a bit personal maybe you're sharing stuff that you haven't shared with other people having jokes with someone maybe you're finding yourself one on one in situations with that person maybe you're brushing past them and there's already bits of minor physical contact maybe when

you're with that person you feel really loved and really cared for or really admired and really respected and you're finding yourself spending more and more time with that person you're beginning to get drawn to them wake up and run for your life do not tickle the nose of that particular ball this is what the proverbs say

I think this is so striking with much seductive speech she persuades him with her smooth talk she compels him come and all at once he follows her as an ox goes to the slaughter as a bird rushes into the snare he does not know that it will cost him his life and if you see that right now if you see it in any way even the beginnings of it do what Joseph did and run for your life one last point as I finish God was sovereign over Joseph's temptation that's what we're looking at in this whole series God led Joseph into a place where he would be tempted to strengthen him for his good now God doesn't test us or tempt us in the way that the devil does the devil tempts us because he wants us to sin but God has given us life on earth where there are temptations like a father lets a child get into a situation that's going to be trying for them so that they're tested and as they come through that testing they come out stronger

God has given us just as a father would a child preparing that child letting them know it's going to happen forewarning them helping them think about boundaries training them in their heart to hate it but then letting them into that situation so that when it happens they resist and when they resist it's at that point that their godliness is proved it happened with Joseph it happened with Jesus the reason the reason we live in a world with temptation is because God is training us he's maturing us and as we face temptation and grow through it and say no to it by the power of the spirit of God in us we are sanctified God was training Joseph to be a man who he could put at the top to save the world under Pharaoh he did the same for Jesus and he's doing it for us he's training us so there will be rulers with Jesus in the new creation and we're going through this time of testing of trial for our good to make us people who will reign with Jesus sanctifying us if we were never tested we're never approved but God promises in 1 Corinthians 10 he says this that no temptation will be beyond what we can cope with

God is sovereign over temptation over Joseph's over Jesus's and over ours he's given us his spirit to help us he forgives us where we fail but he does it so that we're strengthened so that we come out stronger so that we come out sanctified I've said a lot of things here and I'm sure there's lots of questions we'll take questions later on afterwards but let me finish as I started guys we're at we're all at war we're in the midst of a battle God has led us into that battle to strengthen us and he's gone before us giving us an example in Joseph in Jesus he's equipped us with his spirit we can pray we have all the tools we need to fight temptation with our brothers and sisters to help us and he won't let the battle overcome us he will be with us so fight watch pray and fight are you in a position are you where a place in your life where you've stopped fighting stopped watching stopped praying let Joseph let Jesus be an example to us watch pray fight let me pray as we finish

[ 34 : 14 ] Lord Jesus we marvel at you for you were tempted in every way and yet you were without sin you know what sexual temptation is like you know what it is like to be tempted to gossip tempted to hate tempted to look after yourself and not die for the sins of the world and yet you faced every one of those temptations and you lived by the spirit we pray that by your same spirit Lord Jesus you would fill us and give us the strength and equipment to fight temptation father please would you make us wise we're so often don't even see it help us to see those moments of temptation help us to hate that sin in our hearts more and more give us the strength to set boundaries so that we won't fall into sin and forgive us where we fail for we do daily and Lord

Jesus we pray that as you fill us with your spirit as you strengthen and equip us you'd strengthen us and sanctify us making us more and more like you facing the difficulties of temptation as we do and yet overcoming them by the power of your spirit because of your grace in us be with us we pray Lord Jesus Amen Amen Amen Amen to Ready like test for sharing force verse by it