

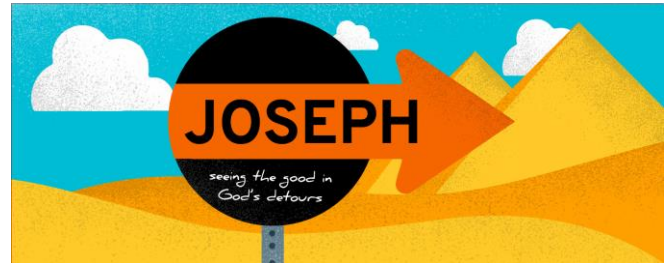


VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

Joseph: Seeing the Good in God's Detours

Part 3: God: He is Everywhere You Need Him to Be
Tim Badal | October 16, 2016 | Genesis 39:1–20



Let's turn to Genesis 39 as we pick up Joseph's story again. Even if you aren't especially knowledgeable about Scripture, you probably know about this story—maybe from the Broadway show about Joseph and his coat of many colors, and about the favoritism of his father. The past two weeks we've looked at the chaotic back-story of Joseph's dysfunctional family, where his father's favoritism created all kinds of hatred and envy among his brothers.

We learned last week that their anger and jealousy really began to foment. What began as mockery and slander moved to hatred in action. Last week we found Joseph sent by his father to check on his brothers, to be sure all was well with them as they were pasturing their father's flocks. But the Scripture says that while he was still far off, the brothers began to conspire to kill him. Such an unthinkable thing, that a group of brothers, even if they did hate him, would go so far as wanting to end his life!

But after a while they decided that wasn't the best course of action, so they threw him into a pit. As he is screaming for help, perhaps injured by his fall into the pit, they sit down to a meal, enjoying their food and camaraderie. Then at just the right time and place, a group of traders happen to come by, and the brothers realize they have someone to sell. So they sold him for 20 shekels of silver—which was the price for an injured slave in that day, giving us another reason to think Joseph was in fact injured in his fall.

So Joseph is turned over to these traders, probably put in chains and made to walk behind an animal, enduring the long trip to Egypt. That's where we pick up the story today—and it doesn't get much better. Although for a while things seem to be looking up, at the point when it begins to be good, Joseph is again thrown into another kind of pit. Turn now to Genesis 39.

Now Joseph had been brought down to Egypt, and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, had bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there. ² The Lord was with Joseph, and he became a successful man, and he was in the house of his Egyptian master. ³ His master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord caused all that he did to succeed in his hands. ⁴ 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. ⁵ From the time that he made him overseer in his house and over all that he had the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; the blessing of the Lord was on all that he had, in house and field. ⁶ 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. ⁷ And after a time his master's wife cast her eyes on Joseph and said, "Lie with me." ⁸ 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. ⁹ 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?" ¹⁰ And as she spoke to Joseph day after day, he would not listen to her, to lie beside her or to be with her.

¹¹ 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, ¹² 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. ¹³ And as soon as she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and had fled out of the house, ¹⁴ she called to the men of her 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. ¹⁵ 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." ¹⁶ Then she laid up his garment by her until his master came home, ¹⁷

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.”¹⁸ But as soon as I lifted up my voice and cried, he left his garment beside me and fled out of the house.”

¹⁹ 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.²⁰ 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.

Today’s overarching theme is this: God is everywhere you need Him to be. That’s a play on words from one of the most influential ad slogans in my life experience. In the mid-80s, VISA came up with a slogan that has been part of their marketing theme since: “VISA—we’re everywhere you want us to be.” Masterfully, in one quick phrase, VISA communicates the idea that if you use their card, you can confidently trust that wherever you are—in America or a far-flung place in the world, for good times or bad, in emergencies or moments of spending excess—when you place that card on the counter, you can be sure it will accomplish what you need. And who hasn’t experienced that comfort when you’re out of cash? Maybe you have a flat tire or a broken vehicle, or your furnace breaks during a polar vortex, and it sure is nice to know you have credit available to pay that unexpected bill. Or maybe you’re with your spouse enjoying a special meal for which you don’t really have cash—but you have that credit card, and you think, “I’ll take care of this later, but this is too nice a moment to miss.” VISA understands they can be someone’s “ace in the hole,” whenever or however you need that sort of assurance.

But herein lies the problem. Far too many of us have learned, as Joseph is going to learn, that there are situations and times of need where no credit card can help us. I have spoken several times in the past couple weeks about the death of my brother. I want you to know that no credit card could have brought him back. About a year and a half ago I was sitting in an office with a group of doctors who told my wife she had cancer. I couldn’t put my credit card down and say, “Run that through again. There’s a lot of credit on my card. Let’s talk through this.”

I was watching a biography of Steve Jobs, one of the richest men in the history of the United States. At one point they said he was worth more than \$500 million—more than all of us combined, right? But it wouldn’t take away the cancer that was eating his body. You see, we have problems in our world, and while VISA says, “We’re everywhere you want us to be,” it’s a fallacy. At the end of the day, there are things credit can’t buy. There are moments in our lives when nothing in this world can resolve the situations and struggles we find ourselves facing.

At the beginning of Genesis 39, Joseph found himself in an impossible situation. But seven times in today’s Scripture passage we find the phrase, “God was with him.” God is announcing to Joseph, and to us today, that whether we’re in situations of trouble, triumph or temptation, God is there. But whether or not you believe and grab hold of that is up to you.

God wants us to know that He is with us and will help us walk through our trials, if we are willing to give Him room to do so. Seven times in five verses (2, 3, 5, 21 and 23) God announces that He is with Joseph. This raises an important question. As good students of Scripture, we see these words in black and white and really can’t dispute their truth. We have to believe that in fact God was with Joseph.

You might be thinking, “You don’t know what I’m dealing with right now, Tim. You don’t know the struggle, pain or sorrow in my life. I’m not so interested in knowing about a man who lived thousands of years ago. I want to know if God is with me. Is He beside me in this? Is He walking through my struggles with me?”

You’re right. While Scripture says God was with Joseph, that doesn’t answer the question, “Is God with us?” So the question we must also ask is this: Whenever we look at a passage of Scripture, especially stories in the Old Testament, we must ask, “Is what I’m reading descriptive or prescriptive?” Descriptive writings tell us about someone’s life. In this case, we’re specifically reading about Joseph in Genesis 39. God is telling us how He’s interacting with Joseph. But based on that, it is hard to prescribe for ourselves that just as God was with Joseph, He’s also with us. So if someone tells you that God is with you, on the basis of Genesis 39, you could rightly respond, “I need more evidence. Just because God was with one person doesn’t mean God is with all people, let alone me.”

So we’re reading a descriptive story about a person. But as we look at this question, “Is God with me?” in light of Joseph’s story, we should also ask, “Was He with anyone else?” Throughout the Bible, we can see that God was with multiple people. God was with Enoch. He walked with Enoch (Genesis 4–5). God was with Noah as he built the ark (Genesis 6–8). God was with Abraham (Genesis 17–50), the great-grandfather of Joseph. God was with Isaac (Genesis 17–35) and with Jacob (Genesis 25–49), Joseph’s own father.

God was with Joseph. And long after Joseph is gone, we learn that God was also with Moses in Egypt. And then after Moses’ death, when Joshua takes over Israel’s leadership, we read in Joshua 1:5, God tells him, *“Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will*

not leave you or forsake you." Later we read that God was with Gideon and Samuel and David and Solomon. God was with person after person.

"Okay," we say. "God has been with other people. But it still doesn't tell me that He is with me. At the end of the day, when the going gets tough, I want to know I can turn and find God alongside me. While Scripture makes it very clear that God was with Joseph and with many others, what about me?"

Turning to the New Testament, Jesus tells His disciples just before His ascension to heaven, "I want all of you to go make new disciples, baptizing them and teaching them all I've taught you." He then says, *"And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age"* (Matthew 28:20). Jesus sends them out to do ministry, and He warns them that it will be hard. We know from history that the apostles faced incredible persecution, but Jesus personally tells them, "Just as My Father was with Joseph, so I am with you, and I'm with you to the end of the age. No matter what your circumstances are, I am with you."

In Romans 8:38–39, we are also told that as Christ followers, nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. No heights, no depths, nothing present or in the past or yet to come, nothing in this earth or outside this world—nothing. Nothing our minds can come up with can separate us from the love of Christ.

Then the writer of Hebrews puts it this way in Hebrews 13:5–6: *"Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.' So we can confidently say..."*—who? We who are Christ's followers. We can say, *"...the Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?"*

So while the story we're reading is descriptive, we can also ask, "Is this prescriptive for us as well? Is it prescriptive for others?" As we look through the rest of Scripture, I am here to tell you that just as God was with Joseph, so He is with every child of His who by faith trusts that He is there. So this shows you that it's not by proof-texting an incident in one person's life, but as we look throughout Scripture, through the words of many of its writers, we can know that this truth is real and is something we can hold on to.

But what does God being with us really mean? What are the benefits of this truth? One of my last memories of my brother was in my first days of high school. I was scared of what high school would bring to me as a freshman. Our school building had three long connecting hallways, and two of them met at a 90-degree angle.

Of course, I was running late for class—maybe because I couldn't figure out my locker combination, or let's face it, I was just late. But as I was running to make that turn, I hit what I believed to be a brick wall. I fell to the floor, looked up and saw one of the biggest, baddest juniors in the school. He looked down at me—and here's the problem: His books were all over the floor and he was not very happy.

So he picked me up (not very gently, I might add) and put me up against a locker. I saw him pull his right hand back and I knew exactly what was going to happen. I thought I was a dead man. I closed my eyes (that's what girly men do, right?) I knew I was done for. I didn't want to open my eyes—but he hadn't punched me yet. Wait a minute. I should have been knocked out by now. What was going on? And then I heard a familiar voice. My bigger, badder senior brother was saying, "You mess with him—you've got to mess with me first." Whooh! "That's right. Get your hands off me. You're lucky today, buddy."

I want you to know that as great as it is to have a bigger, badder older brother in your time of need, nothing compares to having God at your side. You might say, "Tim, life's going well right now. I don't need Him." But what we'll see today is that in a New York minute, as Don Henley says, everything can change. My family has experienced that. Two of the most pivotal changes in my life happened in a matter of moments. Everything went from being great to everything being terrible; everything being filled with joy to the utmost sorrow in a moment.

Think about Joseph's experience. I wonder if he was just enjoying his walk to Dothan. "God is good. My dad loves me. I'm going to go check on my brothers. Yeah, they don't think much of me, but life is good. I'll check on them and then when I get home my father's going to give me a hug. I'll hang out with my family. It's all fine. I'll grow up to be an old man, just enjoying life all the way."

It goes from that to men conspiring to kill him, to being grabbed, abused, mocked and beaten, thrown into a pit, left for dead, pleading for his life. Then a group of men he's never seen before, speaking a language he's never heard before, took him because his brothers have just sold him like a slave and now he's heading to a place he does not know—all in a matter of moments.

God help us, but there may be a day this week that will change the course of your lives forever. Let this message remind you that in that moment, God is with you. Whether you experience Him then or not is your choice. You've got to decide. Joseph did, and it changed the way he endured some of the greatest hardships anyone has ever faced.

1. God is with you in your times of trouble.

Genesis 39:1 states, *"Now Joseph had been brought down to Egypt, and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, had bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there."* We need to ask ourselves why Moses, who wrote this story, chose to duplicate the phrase, "brought him down." It speaks geographically, as Canaan is northeast of Egypt. But some scholars think there is also the implication that life is about to "go south" for Joseph. It's going to get ugly for him. He's going to go from a place of safety and satisfaction to a place of great turmoil and pain. He's going to be brought down low. We should notice that his troubles begin at the hand of people who are closest to him, his brothers.

For us as well, some of our hardest challenges come, if I can put it this way, within our "area code." They hit close to home. And often it's the people we are closest to who are able to hurt us the most. It might be a spouse or parent or child, or someone who should be looking out for us, but who instead brings us great harm.

You aren't alone when you are heartbroken.

We don't know the time that elapsed between Genesis 37 and 39. It may have been days or weeks. We know it was a 240-mile journey. If they walked ten miles a day, it would take over three weeks. We don't know if their travels went straight to Egypt or if they made other stops, but we might imagine it took at least three weeks or even a couple months.

During that time, imagine Joseph's heartache. He was pulled out of the pit, probably injured in some way, and these men started talking. Joseph had lived all his life in Canaan, so he might not have understood the language that was being spoken. I wonder if Joseph understood what his brothers were doing. "Okay, when are the cameras going to come out and say this is just a joke? I'm being punked. It's all part of a sick joke, right? Sometimes jokes go bad, but they didn't mean to hurt me. Maybe they're trying to teach me a lesson. Okay, guys, I've learned my lesson! I won't talk about my dreams. I won't wear that coat anymore. I'm getting the message, loud and clear. You've made your point."

Then money gets transferred, and the grisly-looking traders grab him. They tie him up; hook him to a mule or camel. Even though it seems unreal, he knows he has to do what they say or he'll feel their whip on his back. It's real serious. It's a nightmare—but it's real life. He looks back, calling out to his brothers, "You can't leave me. What are you doing?" He pleads for them to stop, for them to return the money. But instead, he makes the long journey, knowing he'll never see his father or his younger brother Benjamin again. He'll never know the joy of being at home. He won't experience the love of his family. His homeland as he remembers it will be seen no more. I believe in my heart that there weren't many other Hebrew men in Joseph's position. He's all alone, in a foreign land. He doesn't speak the language—and he's heartbroken.

My father came here from Iraq in 1966. He said he only knew of four people in the Chicagoland area when he arrived who knew his language. At 17 years of age, he fell into a deep depression because he was in a land he didn't know; where people spoke a language he didn't understand. He says he had never felt so lonely and isolated than in those moments.

Joseph is heartbroken, because his life has taken a bitter turn and there is no one to turn to. At home, he would have run to his father for answers. In our times of trouble, we all have someone we can turn to. But here Joseph has no one to turn to; nobody cares about him. He's property. He must do what people tell him to do, and if he doesn't he will feel the pain that comes to an insubordinate slave.

You aren't alone when you are harassed.

Joseph was also harassed. After walking all the way to Egypt, he was sold as a slave, purchased with money as if he was property. Slaves were harassed, mistreated and abused, and given only the basic necessities to sustain life. There was no prime rib dinner on the way to Egypt. He ate like an animal. He wasn't given anything more than what was needed to make sure he was healthy enough to do the jobs that would be asked of him. His highest authority was the man with the whip, the man who held his life in the balance. He had to perform hard labor. He would be forced to do things against his will. There was no higher authority to which

he could appeal. There was no slaves' union, no AFL-CIO that could say, "This is unfair. You can't do this. This is inhumane." Whatever the boss wanted, he had to do.

But how about when he finally arrived in Egypt? The sights must have blown him away. We have good reason to believe that Joseph had lived only in a rural setting before, and now he arrives at the monstrosity of a city that Pharaoh had built. The mass of people, the commerce, the architecture, the vices that a major city would have offered; the multiplicity of gods around him—it would have been so overwhelming to him. He was a country boy. It would be like having the cast of *Mayberry* moving to south-central L.A. Culture shock at its finest!

But unlike a tourist, unlike a businessman who had arrived in Egypt for some personal or business reason, Joseph came to Egypt as a slave. The only thing he could expect to receive was humiliation. We're told in verse one that Potiphar bought Joseph in Egypt. Potiphar was the captain of Pharaoh's guard. What does that mean? That means he was Pharaoh's secret police general. He was the guy who ran the military police. He was important, the man who oversaw the executions. Great. Joseph is now the slave of a man whose job it is to kill people who don't obey Pharaoh. Good luck with that.

You aren't alone when you are humiliated.

Joseph was bought, but it probably wasn't a quick exchange of money. In Egyptian times, as has been true with all slave trade, slaves were never just bought by one buyer in a simple purchase transaction. The law of supply and demand meant that all the slaves would be brought to an auction. As we've learned in studying our country's own blight of slavery not so long ago, these slaves would be brought in and stripped naked.

So as a 17-year-old boy, Joseph would be stripped, forcibly washed to be made presentable, and given some oil or animal lard to put on his body so he would glisten. That way the definition of his muscles and his good looks would be pronounced. Then men and women of means would come to look over the group, and he stood there naked before them. They could prod or grope, or ask him to do whatever they pleased, to see if he would be worth the price they would pay.

Think about the thoughts in this teenager's mind in that scenario. He doesn't know what they're saying. Nowhere in Scripture does it say he knows their language. So everything is a chaotic mess. Finally, a dignified looking man, Potiphar, points to him and says, "I want him. Here's the price." They grab him and forcibly take him to a new place.

Joseph finds himself in times of trouble. As it says in verse one, he's "brought down there" to Egypt. But in verse two, Moses reminds us, *"The Lord was with Joseph."* Joseph experienced some of the worst moments of his life. He had thought the worst moment was when his brothers threw him in the pit. Yeah, that was bad, but now he's got nobody around him. At least with his brothers, he knew who he was being assaulted by. He could hear and understand what they were saying. But in Egypt, he has no idea what would be coming next. It was all new to him. And in that moment, God was with him, just as in our moments of trouble God is with us. When we don't know what's coming next, when we are still licking our wounds from past hurts, struggles and failures, God says He is with us.

C.S. Lewis, the great British theologian, once said, "God whispers to us in our pleasures, He speaks in our consciences, but He shouts in our pains." God wants us to know that when we are at our lowest, He is with us. We are told in Psalm 46 that God is our refuge and our strength, an ever-present help in times of trouble. As Christ-followers, we have at our disposal the greatest answer to our problem: God Himself. Not our money or credit cards, not even our parents or other people. We have God, Who will walk beside us. We will never walk alone.

God knows your pain, shame and sorrow, and He longs to minister to you in those times. He calls upon you to cast your cares upon Him, because He cares for you (1 Peter 5:7). God is with you when you're in the pit.

2. God is with you in your times of triumph.

Joseph is now in Egypt, in Potiphar's house. We read in verse two, *"The Lord was with Joseph, and he became a successful man, and he was in the house of his Egyptian master."* It sounds like things are turning around. This is awesome. Joseph finds that his life is getting back to a level of normalcy. He's still a slave, but somehow he's figured out that it's what he has to do. He knows that God is with him, so he does the tasks he's given to do. And God begins to bring him success.

I wonder if Joseph were to read this story today, if he were to read that the Lord made him “a successful man,” whether he would see it that way. “Are you kidding? I’m a slave. You call this success? I don’t get to do what I want, or go where I want, or live where I decide. I don’t get to decide what I eat or where I sleep. I don’t get to decide anything, and You have the gall to call this successful?”

We need to realize that God is the One Who defines our success. It’s not ours to determine. God said that Joseph was successful—as a slave. “While he may not have everything he wants, he has everything he needs, and I’m working out a great plan before his very eyes. Joseph is going to be successful.”

Notice how Joseph is successful. Verse four says he found favor in his master’s sight. Potiphar sees that the Lord is with Joseph, causing “*all that he did to succeed in his hands*,” so Potiphar “*made him overseer of his house and put him in charge of all that he had*.” The only thing Potiphar has to worry about is what he eats. Joseph takes care of everything else.

When life is good, remember it is God Who empowers your achievements.

How did Joseph “climb the ladder”? By faithfully serving where God had placed him. God often rewards our faithfulness with success. It is God Who empowers our achievements. I trust you will walk away from this message thinking, “Pastor Tim, what a great message. When I need God, He’ll be with me. I’ve got it. That’s awesome. But equally important, when I seemingly don’t need God, He’s with me then as well.”

We can sometimes forget that we need God even when everything is good—when the bank account is full, when our kids are safe, when the job is secure, when our marriage is strong. We can get the sense that we have everything under control ourselves. It’s only when something bad happens that we get on the phone, dial 911 and say, “God, You’ve got to come quickly. I thought I had this under control, but I really don’t—and now I need You.”

God wants you to know that just as He is with you in times of sorrow, so He is when you’re thriving. It is He Who is empowering your achievements. What is it that has allowed you to have that full bank account? What has allowed you to have a wonderful marriage, or to have your health, or to not be in a trial? All of these things come from God. He is the One Who gives you life and breath, Who enables you to earn your paycheck.

In my world, it’s God Who sustains the business I run. It’s God Who grows this church. God is the One Who allows any success. We need to remember that our part is to obey Him and our other authorities, to work as hard as we can, then to leave the results to Him. At the end of the day, all I can do is the best I can with the resources I have available and then trust God to bring the results He desires.

That’s what Joseph does. He works hard. He doesn’t complain or bellyache. He does what is set before him to do, and it is God Who causes him to succeed. So, business person, when you head out to work this week and that deal goes through, and your boss tells you, “Hey, we would have been lost without you. You’re the best salesman we’ve got—you locked in that deal,” you may thank him for the encouragement, but in your heart you say, “Thanks be to God. I couldn’t have done it without You.” As Jesus told us, “Apart from God, you can do nothing.” Each and every hour, we need Him. That doesn’t mean I don’t work hard—it means I work even harder, because I’m working as unto the Lord. I do my best, knowing that I still have to leave the results to Him.

When life is good, remember it is God Who elevates us through advancements.

Joseph gets elevated from being a common house slave to being the general manager of Potiphar’s entire household. This advancement gives him new opportunities, new comforts and other benefits of being promoted. In our own places of achievement or advancement, we need to recognize that these are all from God. You’re where you are today because God saw fit to give you that role or opportunity. You must remember this. And when a promotion comes, you need to avoid thinking, “Wow, look what I have done.”

Can I just shoot straight with you? A couple months ago a major ministry came to me and said, “We’ve been watching your ministry at Village Bible Church. We want to talk with you about an opportunity we might have for you.” Do you know what came to my heart? “Wow, I’m glad someone finally noticed. I wonder what took them so long.” You laugh, but that’s exactly where my heart was. I felt like something special. Then I began to research to figure out how my name had been presented to them, and I realized it had nothing to do with me. I couldn’t have put it together if I was given a set of Lincoln Logs. It was all God.

We are told in Scripture that God puts us where we are and sets boundaries around us for our good. He places us where He needs us to be. So with every advancement—whether in education or vocation or ministry, wherever it comes about—we must never forget, “It is God Who has put me here.” Does it mean I don’t work hard? No, we must work hard and do the best job we can. But

when advancements or accolades or words of affirmation come to us, we need to say in our hearts, “God, apart from You I could do nothing.”

Joseph never could have done what he did on his own. But with God by his side, he could. God is with us in our times of triumph.

3. God is with you in your times of temptation.

We’ve heard Joseph’s story. It’s a story, by the way, that has been made famous—as if it needed that—in such movies as *The Graduate*. Mrs. Robinson is an older woman who attempts to seduce a younger, naïve, good-looking man who has caught her attention. That story line is thousands of years old, but it rings true today. Some of us have even experienced this story ourselves.

Joseph is working hard and everything is going well for him. “Yeah, life isn’t as good as it should have been, but it’s turning out okay. I’m making lemonade out of lemons.” I’m thinking the inspirational poster on Joseph’s wall in Potiphar’s house read, “Perseverance—I’ve done it.”

Instead of simply taking orders, Joseph is now giving orders himself. And what a great boss, because he understands the mind of the slaves he is overseeing. Everything done in the household and in the fields, according to verse five, is being blessed. Potiphar loves having this Hebrew boy in his house. “Where did we get this guy? Let’s go get a dozen more. Everything is awesome since he’s been here.”

As an aside, does your employer say that each week when you walk into the office? “Well, Tim, you just ruined this sermon for me.” When your boss looks at his payroll, would he say any of the following statements: “Man, we’d be lost without this guy or this gal. Look what they bring to the office—their hard work, their great example. They succeed in what they need to do. There’s something going on here. They’re hopeful and positive. Everything I want in my employees, they surpass it. Who do they have with them?” This is a great reminder as we head into a new work week.

But then everything changes. In a moment, when he’s not expecting it, all God has done in Joseph’s life seems to come to a screeching halt. “Hey, Joseph, you look mighty fine to me. Joseph, do you work out often?” Scripture says, “*Joseph was handsome in form and appearance.*” He’s good-looking.

When you are good-looking, temptation is going to come. Opportunities Joseph faced will come. The Bible is clear about that. So beware. And temptation comes on the heels of success. Isn’t that when it usually comes?

We spoke a few weeks ago on the subject of lust in our series on “The Seven Deadly Sins,” discussing the mechanics of it. So let me just share some thoughts and then close our time with this. In times of temptation, and in Joseph’s time of temptation, we clearly see our situation.

What an object lesson; what a case study. Mrs. Potiphar reminds us that we have desires. We are sensual creatures; we have hungers. There will be moments when our bodies will cry out, “I gotta have that!” Joseph does his job, not doing anything that should get him into trouble, but Potiphar’s wife sees him and says, “I gotta have that!” I don’t know what was going on in the marriage between her and her husband, but she sees an area of lack and how that lack can be taken care of. Temptation always tells us if we need something and we can’t get it out of our minds, the devil will tell us how we can accomplish it. So Potiphar’s wife thinks, *I’m not being loved; I’m being neglected.* And the devil says, “Mrs. Potiphar, all you have to do is grab that servant boy who is so good-looking and so well-built, and your problem will be solved.” This is a reminder to us—the devil takes areas where we see a lack and tells us how we can fill them apart from the will and Word of God.

On Joseph’s side, we see that temptation comes out of nowhere. We don’t see it coming, and that’s why Jesus tells us to pray that God would not lead us into temptation but deliver us from evil. “Lord, you know there are temptations all around me, so lead me in a different way. Let me go a different course.” Temptation is strong and it comes out of nowhere.

In our text we see the subtle and steady onslaught of temptation. Some years back, I was preaching a sermon, and with no prior knowledge, I said, “Some of you are running into temptations, and where it began was with a man in your workplace who said he loved the smell of your perfume.” At the end of the service, a woman came to me and she was trembling. She said, “That exactly happened to me this week and I was tempted to go all in.” Temptation is subtle: a look, a word, a thought. What starts out as a spark turns into a fire that is set ablaze. An inferno begins to erupt. It starts with, “Hey, I think you’re really cute. I think you look great,” and finally, “Lie with me.”

Potiphar's wife grabs Joseph; she's got to have him. It's steady. It happened day after day after day. Some of us are dealing with temptations day after day after day. It doesn't end. We need to recognize that the devil will continually throw things at us, waiting for a moment of weakness in our lives. And then he pounces on us.

Our sin is serious. Verse eight tells us that our sin affects two areas in our lives. *"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. He is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except you...'"* Joseph was saying to Potiphar's wife, "I can use his car, I can use his summer house, I can eat his food, I can tell his servants what to do, I have free reign. There is one thing I can't do—I can't touch you. That's his." What a great reminder of when God said some years before, "You can do whatever you want in the Garden, but there is one thing you can't have."

So Joseph says, "Listen, I don't want to ruin my relationship with my boss." He didn't need to look at the staff handbook of Potiphar's house to know if he slept with his wife, he was done for. He knew that; it was common sense. We need to realize that temptations will ruin our horizontal relationship with others. If I fall into temptation, especially in this way, my wife will have something to say about it, as well as my kids, my parents, my father-in-law, the elder team, my friends. Do you think my relationship with them is going to be fine? No! Temptation leads us to ruin our horizontal relationships. Joseph said, "I don't want to ruin my relationship with Potiphar, so you're hands off."

But notice he goes on to say in verse nine, "Listen, the other reason this is so serious is that I can't do this great wickedness against God—this God who has been with me and watched over me. I cannot do this great evil." When you give yourself to temptation, you will ruin horizontal relationships and, more importantly, your vertical relationship with God as a result.

But God gives a sure way out. Potiphar's wife grabs Joseph, but instead of having a conversation about it, he runs. He leaves his garment. We don't know all the details, but she grabs his garment and he takes off. We are reminded in 1 Corinthians 10:13 that *"No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it."* Yes, she was pretty and powerful. Yes, he was a 17-year-old Canaanite man who had needs and desires. Yes, he could have said, "You know, I've had nothing but bad in my life, and here is one opportunity in a place where no one knows where I am. Nobody is going to know." But he runs for his life. He flees, and we need to do the same. God gives us a sure way out.

C. S. Lewis put it this way: "No man knows how bad he is until he tries to be good." Amen? That's a great line. Let me close with this—in times of trouble, in times of triumph, in times of temptation, God is with you. In order to experience it you have to be like Joseph. You have to walk in obedience and faith. You have to say, "God, in the good, the bad, and the ugly that happens in my life, I'm going to trust that You're with me. I'm going to follow Your will and Your way. I'm going to live my life to the best of my ability to bring You glory and honor. When people applaud me for it, I will give You the glory. When people cry for me, I will give You the glory. When I think I need things that Your Word says I don't, I will give you the glory for the way of escape that You give." And when you do, you can know that in those good, bad and ugly moments God is with you. And sorry, VISA, God *is* everywhere you need Him to be. Let that be true in your lives this week.

Village Bible Church | 847 North State Route 47, Sugar Grove, IL 60554 | (630) 466-7198 | www.villagebible.org/sugar-grove

All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

Note: This transcription has been provided by Sermon Transcribers (www.sermontranscribers.net).