

WALKING WITH INTEGRITY IN TIMES OF ADVERSITY

STUDY THREE

The Integrity of Moral Purity

Selections from Genesis 39

We come to the finest examples of personal integrity in the area of moral purity in the entire Bible: the account of Joseph and his victory over sexual temptation.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

In a series of Bible studies delivered to clergy in April 1937, German pastor and theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer gave this sobering description of temptation.

In our members there is a slumbering inclination towards desire which is both sudden and fierce. With irresistible power desire seizes mastery over the flesh. All at once a secret, smouldering fire is kindled. The flesh burns and is in flames. . . . Joy in God is in course of being extinguished in us and we seek all our joy in the creature. At this moment God is quite unreal to us. . . . Satan does not here fill us with hatred of God, but with forgetfulness of God.¹

When our “slumbering inclination towards desire” awakens, temptation’s appeal is strong, but it is possible to say no to the flesh. Joseph successfully resisted sexual temptation when he was most vulnerable. What shielded him from flesh’s flame? Let’s take a look at Genesis 39 and discover Joseph’s strategies for staying morally pure.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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PREPARE YOUR HEART

Thankfully, God does not leave us on our own to struggle against temptation. Read the following reminder of God's faithfulness and pray for insight from God's Word so you can overcome temptation in your hour of need.

The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you can endure. (1 Corinthians 10:13)



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Temptation strikes when we least expect it, often when we're doing well and our guard is down.

Although Joseph's brothers had mistreated him and sold him into slavery, the Lord was with Joseph in Egypt, and "he succeeded in everything he did" (Genesis 39:2). He became the personal attendant of the captain of Pharaoh's guard, Potiphar, who was impressed by Joseph's strong character and could see "that the LORD was with Joseph" (39:3). With this reliable and capable young man in charge of all his affairs, Potiphar "didn't worry about a thing" (39:6).

Just as the sunshine of success beamed over Joseph and it seemed his dark days of mistreatment and adversity had passed, suddenly, a scheming temptress entered the scene.



Observation: Uninvited Appeal, Untrue Accusation

The first step in *Searching the Scriptures* is to observe the passage carefully, noting here how the author develops the narrative's action and themes. The Lord was faithful to Joseph (Genesis 39:2-3), but how would Joseph hold up under pressure? Would young Joseph, who was far from home and alone in a city of decadent idolators, prove faithful to God under an extreme test of character?



The Integrity of Moral Purity

Selections from Genesis 39

The Test—Genesis 39:6–12

How does the author set the scene for Joseph's test in *Genesis 39:6*? What possible character flaws in Joseph could his situation have exposed?

What secret sin in Potiphar's wife led up to her propositioning Joseph, according to *39:7*?

When Joseph refused her, what reasons did he give, according to *39:8–9*? What did Joseph call extra-marital sex? Whom would the act offend?



The Integrity of Moral Purity

Selections from Genesis 39

What did Joseph do when Potiphar's wife kept "putting pressure" on him, according to [Genesis 39:10](#)?
What strategy for maintaining moral purity was Joseph modeling?

Put yourself in Joseph's place. With his promotions came privileges—greater trust, less oversight, and more privacy. What circumstances in [39:11–12](#) intensified the pressure on Joseph to sin? What rationalizations could Joseph have made to give in to temptation? Instead, what action did he take as the only recourse when tempted to commit sexual sin?

The Aftermath—Genesis 39:13–21

Joseph passed the test! Instead of a commendation, however, what "reward" did Joseph receive for keeping himself pure, according to [39:13–20](#)?



The Integrity of Moral Purity

Selections from Genesis 39

Once again, Joseph was mistreated without cause. Identify the rays of hope in [Genesis 39:21–23](#) that the author shines into Joseph’s cell. What phrases in this passage does the author repeat from [39:1–6](#) that reveal a central theme?

We read again and again that God was with Joseph. His hand was on him. God was there, seeing Joseph and protecting him. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Staying Pure in a Foreign Land

To decipher the meaning of a passage, we try to understand what the author (Moses) intended to communicate to his audience, the newly formed Hebrew nation. By recounting Joseph’s experiences in Egypt, Moses taught the people how they must follow God in their new homeland—decadent, idolatrous Canaan.

What truths does the account of Joseph in Genesis 39 teach about God—namely, His nature and His relationship with His people?



The Integrity of Moral Purity

Selections from Genesis 39

What dangers of living in a sinful world does the passage illustrate that overlap with our day?

What admirable character qualities did Joseph display as he was entrusted with higher levels of responsibilities and privileges?

What strategies from Joseph's example can you list for handling temptation and staying sexually pure in a morally decaying society?



The Integrity of Moral Purity

Selections from Genesis 39

Joseph did what was right, but he was wrongly treated. What principle was Moses communicating about the realities of living in a fallen world?

God is our almighty, holy, magnificent heavenly Father who always has the long view in mind. He had great plans for Joseph, some of which will only be understood through mistreatment. God never forgot Joseph. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: What Happens When We're Tempted

James takes us behind the scenes to show us how temptation works inside our hearts. Read [James 1:14–15](#).

What is the source of all temptation, whether we are tempted by material possessions, personal power, or physical pleasure?

According to 1:14, what are the two components of temptation, which we can illustrate with a bait and hook?



The Integrity of Moral Purity

Selections from Genesis 39

What are the consequences of temptation once it leads to sin, according to James 1:15?

In Joseph's case, Potiphar's wife enticed Joseph and would have dragged him into sin, but Joseph doused temptation's fire by focusing his desires on God and His righteousness. Joseph saw sin for what it was—a twisted, satanic misuse of what God created as good and an offense against those Joseph cared about. In addition, he feared the deadly consequences of sin and wanted nothing to do with it. **So, he ran!** Joseph modeled what Paul counseled centuries later: "Flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace" (2 Timothy 2:22 NASB).

Joseph did exactly what God says to do. If you're in a car, and the person you're with is making moves, get out of the car and run. If you're in an office, open the door and get out of the room. Don't play around, leave! —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Four "Must Nots"

What lessons from Joseph's example shine like stars to guide us in our morally dark world? Pastor Chuck offers four vital principles to light our way.

First, *we must not be weakened by our situation*. It's easy to violate the trust of others and allow our freedom to become an occasion for sin. We must constantly remind ourselves that our good gifts come from God (James 1:17), and we are accountable to Him.

Second, *we must not be deceived by persuasion*. What enticements does the temptress of our culture whisper in our ears? Recognize them for what they are: pathways to destruction and heartache. We need to train ourselves to recognize the falsehoods in these deceptive messages.

Third, *we must not be gentle with our emotions*. Joseph didn't give himself time to consider his feelings. He acted swiftly. Temptation must be doused immediately, no smoldering allowed.



The Integrity of Moral Purity

Selections from Genesis 39

Fourth, *we must not be confused by the immediate results*. Resisting temptation once doesn't banish it forever. Like Potiphar's wife, it comes around again even when we try avoiding it. So be on guard.

Look back over the principles from this study and build your own battle plan for overcoming temptation. What strategies do you find most helpful for you? What current situations in your life will these principles prove most helpful?

You might want to share your list with a trusted friend and ask him or her to hold you to your plan. When the desire ignites, you'll be prepared like Joseph to do the right thing.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for being with me when I'm tempted to sin. When I struggle to be faithful to You, Your faithfulness toward me never dims. As You promised, light my way for me to flee temptation. Help me see beyond my sin, that I might desire only You and Your ways and the sweetness of the good gifts You offer. In Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall and Temptation* (New York: Simon & Schuster, Touchstone, 1997), 132.

