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The Secret of my Success Genesis 39

Have you ever sat on your porch on a warm summer evening and watched one of those eerie-glow bug zappers? All night long the bugs are drawn to the light and you hear the zaps of those who attracted to the tempting light get fried. One might think that after a while those bugs would see what happens to their buddy bugs, see their friends dead carcasses in the metal dish under the eerie glow light and wise up. You would think they would see that their friend before them just chose to fly into the blue light and got fried. Perhaps they would begin to think that taking a closer look at the big blue light is not worth it. Perhaps they think they are a stronger bug than the guy that went before them. Perhaps they think they are smarter and more clever enough to handle this strong attractive light. So they fly closer and closer. See it hasn't hurt me they think to themselves. Then all of a sudden. "Bzzzzzzt" they too are roasted.

I think many of us are just as dumb as those bugs when it comes to temptation. We are attracted to some area of temptation. It will be different for each of us. It may be the temptation for material things. We want what we don't have. We violate and sin against the provision God has given us. We want the thrill of a purchase, or gamble, or steal, or buy to feel good. Some of us are tempted by power, to be recognized, to be honored, to be in control, to get our way, to get a title or position or money. So we like a bug will get closer and closer to the zapper until we are willing to trade character for whatever power we can get. Bzzzzzzt. Many of us are tempted by the sensual, the sexual. It's all around us. Television shows, late night cable, billboards, magazine ads, the internet is the ultimate brown paper bag, flirtatious exchanges at work,

innuendo. Temptations like a blue-light bug zapper are everywhere around us wooing us in a very sensualized culture. Some of us right now are facing temptation. Some have already given in. Very few, almost none would be able to say, "I haven't a clue what you're talking about, I've never been tempted in my life" Temptation is an issue all of us face. We wish it went away and got easier as we get older, but it doesn't, it simply changes its face. Whether we are facing material, power or sexual temptation, what we are speaking of this morning applies to us. Chapter 39 of Genesis however is more specifically addressing the issue of sexual temptation. How can I stand strong in the face of temptation? We are bombarded everyday with potentially bug zapping destruction. How can I stand pure and strong and holy living in a world saturated with temptation?

Turn with me in your Bibles to Genesis chapter 39. Chapter 38 unveiled another son of Jacob and how he responded to temptation. Judah, fell badly when tempted. We learned negatively from Judah as to what not to do when tempted. The attitudes that led him to his fall where, "I don't need God. I don't need anybody else." "I can fix any problem I might have on my own." "I deserve it anyway". "No one will ever know." "As long as I still appear good to others, I can do what I want and not be bothered with the inconvenience of integrity." In Genesis 38 we learned from Judah the attitudes to think if we want to **fall**. In Genesis 39 we learn from brother Joseph, what **to do** if we want to **stand** strong in the face of temptation. It is only with God's help that we can stand strong in temptation. Some of us can withstand temptation on our own for a few days even a few weeks by gritting our teeth in sheer determination and will-power. I'm going to kick this thing and I'm going to get victory...only to fail again and again and again. Would you like to be able to walk in obedience more and more and more often? This morning we will learn from Joseph's example.

Reading from Genesis 39 (1-6) What was the secret of Josephs success? V.2 “The Lord was with Joseph”. We can only stand strong in the face of relentless temptation if the Lord is with us. We are not strong enough on our own to stand. If the Lord is with us that means that we will be aware of his presence in a very practical, daily even minute by minute realization. He is near. He is Immanuel. He is God with us.

Practice the presence of God no matter the circumstances.

Joseph had a ready awareness that God was always near. Joseph lived his life as if God were always nearby, standing right next to him, seeing all, hearing all, interacting with all his doings. Josephs did not relegate God to Sunday mornings at some church service. Joseph did not put God in a religion box to be brought out and admired or shown off when it seemed prudent to do so. Joseph practiced the presence of God when he got up and went to work, at lunch break, during the conference meetings, on the ride home. Joseph practiced the presence of God in good times and in difficult times.

Joseph was purchased on the slavery auction block by the head of the Egyptian CIA, the captain of the Pharoahs bodyguard. A man named Potiphar. V.2 The Lord was with Joseph. V.3 Potiphar could even recognize that fact. V.2 Joseph became a very successful man. In the months perhaps years he worked for Potiphar he was placed as Managing executive of Potiphars estate. Everything Joseph touched turned to gold and increased. So Potiphar gave Joseph complete control of his household finances, employees, investments. Joseph made all the major decisions for the household. The only thing Potiphar didn't have Joseph decide on was what Potiphar wanted to eat for dinner v.6.

Several thoughts here. When the Lord is with us, we will live in a place of blessing regardless of our circumstance. When the Lord is with us, others around us will notice and Gods blessing will pour out to those

people as well. Joseph lived with a ready awareness of the presence of God and so even though he was a slave, he was free. In God's presence Joseph knew he was never forgotten, never helpless or powerless. In God's presence Joseph was filled with purpose, knowing that the same God who was near was the God who was working on his behalf.

Practicing the presence of God is about relationship not competition:

I think so often we look at the face of temptation and think, I've got to grit my teeth and beat this one. I've got to get victory. I've got to get success. I hate failing and falling all the time. But the secret to Joseph's success was this. It was not about competition, winning and victory. It was about relationship...it was about obedience. When we say, "I was defeated by that temptation." Its almost as if we are saying, "some force outside of myself got the best of me and I lost. That's competition. Relationship. One who is practicing the presence of God will begin to look at temptation in a totally different way. When he fails he will think, "I have been disobedient. I have hurt the One who loves me. I have broken trust." We tend to think first of our own victory or defeat when I believe God wants us to think first of our own relationship with him.

It's in success we are most vulnerable to sexual temptation

Look at v.7 "and it came about after these events" that Potiphars wife looked at Joseph with desire. He must have been quite handsome. V. 6 says not only was his body ripped and chiseled but he was also very easy for the eyes to look at. She was not subtle in her approach, "go to bed with me". Temptation came on the heels of great success. "It came about after these events." This should be a great warning for those of you who have had a successful season in your business or received a promotion

or been handed a complement or reward. Or perhaps you have had a season of things seeming to all work out well for you. Enjoy that season as a blessing from God, but don't let it cause you to let down your guard against sexual temptation. Success can breed pride and pride is a fertile ground for the seeds of sexual temptation to find their root. For every hundred men who stand strong against temptation in the face of adversity, there is only one man who will stand strong in prosperity. We long for prosperity, leisure, retirement, relaxation, vacation, but the temptations that accompany prosperity are far greater, far more subtle than those that come with adversity. V. 7 "and it came about after these events, " after Joseph's time of great success that he faced a torrent of temptation.

Potiphar's wife noticed the handsome, well built, successful estate manager. There is nothing wrong with being handsome and having a strong or beautiful body. But be aware, if God has given you these traits, like success, know they will demand a greater and unique temptations. The more beautiful, the more handsome, the more successful you are the more you will be called on to face sexual temptations. The beauty God gave you will at times feel like a curse. Do not view it that way. Be asking God why did you make me this way. What do you want me to do about it to bring glory to you and further your kingdom. Joseph did not receive the glory showered on him, he reflected it back up to God that is why others around Joseph knew the Lord was with him. I believe Joseph was very careful to let them know the secret of his success was not in his charisma or management skills, but because the Lord was with him.

Practice the presence of God in the face of temptation:

Let me read (READ v.8-21) When we are practicing the presence of God **we realize we are never alone**. V8 My master has put great trust in me. I'm in charge of his entire estate. He has given me v.9 anything I

desire except for his wife. How could I possibly do this great evil and sin against God. Do you see how Joseph stood strong against temptation? He lived with a ready awareness of God's presence.

An old story not in the Bible tells how when Joseph began to talk about God to the temptress, she flung her skirt over the statute of a god in the chamber and said, "Now God will not see." But Joseph answered her, "but my God always sees." Would you be better able to stand strong in the face of temptation if your good friend was standing just behind your shoulder while you surfed the internet? Would you be able to better stand strong if your wife was with you in your hotel room on that business trip? What if you knew your husband was listening in to your telephone conversation or sitting next to you in the break room? Would you be better able to stand strong in temptation? How about if Jesus were in the room, listening to your conversations, watching you eyes and even knowing your thoughts. We might not live like it but the truth still stands, "Our God always sees." When we live with a practical awareness that our God is with us, it will help us to stand strong in the face of temptation.

We practice God's presence by seeing our sin correctly.

Did you notice in v.9 how Joseph calls sin out for what it is? Joseph tells her what you are proposing is a great evil and its sin against God. We can only see sin correctly when we see it as against God and sin that breaks relationship with God. Too often our motives for right behavior is more self-centered than God-centered. Too often we are driven or despairing by our own success or failure rather than our devotion to God and the relationship we may have damaged. King David saw his sin correctly in Psalm 51:4 after he had sinned with Bathsheba and murdered her husband, he wrote a shocking statement, "Against Thee, God and Thee only have I sinned and done what is evil in Thy sight."

When we practice the presence of God we begin to see our sin for what it truly is and how our sin primarily is damaging and injuring our relationship with God. We become more concerned with avoiding anything that might further damage our relationship with God, even more than offending other people. Joseph was not avoiding offence when he called her proposition, a “great evil and sin against God.”

When we practice God’s presence, we look beyond the immediate to the ultimate reward.

In refusing her advances, Joseph knew it would cost him. If you refuse temptation it will cost you. You may lose your boy friend. You may lose your job. You may get excluded by the “group.” Refusal was going to cost Joseph big time. He was in a lose-lose situation. If he fell for the temptation, he knew he would be zapped like a bug tempted by a blue-light. If he refused he might lose his job, even his life.

The temptation was very real. He was a red-blooded mid-20’s bachelor. She was probably a very beautiful well connected, wife of a rich man. It might have been easy for Joseph to rationalize giving in. I’m just a servant, she is my employer, I’ll do what she asks to keep my job. She is lonely Potiphar is rarely home and is not meeting her needs. She is well connected in society perhaps this is how God wants to vault me to prominence in Egypt.

We can always find ways to rationalize our giving in to sin. If that is what you are looking for, you will always find ways to excuse it. “If you do this it will show how much you care for me.” “We are completely alone, no one will ever find out.” “I have such strong drive that God gave me and I’m so lonely and God understands...that’s why he brought you into my life.” “Gods grace is so big, he can make something good come out of this.”

The one who practices God's minute-by-minute presence in their life will not make up excuses to enjoy the immediate pleasure of sin, but will look to the ultimate reward that God will give to those who seek Him and obey him. Now, most of us are saying, "uhhh. Did you see what reward Joseph got for his resisting temptation?" He ought to be blessed even more by God but instead he gets tossed into prison, what is with that? We must not only look beyond the immediate promise of pleasure, we must also look beyond the immediate results for the ultimate reward, and it may not come until heaven. Do not assume that because the immediate results are not favorable, that you did wrong and missed out. Our responsibility is to do the right thing and leave the consequences up to God. We cannot see the whole picture. Joseph was not able to read about Genesis 42 when he had been sitting in prison for 5-6 years. He was not privy to seeing the future and neither are we. WE may pay a price with people, but we will never pay a price with God for standing strong against temptation and doing the right thing. We are able to stand strong against temptation by practicing the presence of God; realizing we are never alone. Seeing sin correctly as sin against God that will damage our relationship with Him; looking beyond the immediate to the ultimate reward.

So let's get even more practical now. What are some tips we can learn from Joseph to keep us from biting on the temptation bait? When temptation starts to move in on us, practically what do we need to do?

1. **Recognize it** as a temptation to sin. It can be very, very subtle. See it and call it out for what it is. Joseph called it a "great evil". He called it out and cut it off early. Don't play with temptation. Don't let it hang around. Don't flirt with it. Don't think you are strong enough because you are not. Don't hang around for a greater understanding of the artistic value. Call it out for what it is and Cut it off early. FLEE!!! Get out of there!!! Joseph left without his coat.

2. **Be harsh with your own feelings.** We seldom “feel” like doing what we should be doing. Our emotions and feelings rarely guide us into truth or doing the right things. Its not that our feelings aren’t real, they are real, but so often they are real dumb. We don’t feel like getting out of bed to exercise. We don’t feel like reading our Bible and praying. We must exercise an almost “holy violence” to exercise that fruit of the Spirit called “self-control.” Don’t go soft with emotions. Joseph wasn’t when his body screamed, “satisfy me, gratify me” he exposed it for the lie with was, “a great evil” and applied the truth, “I cannot do this and sin against God.”
3. **Avoid verbal/visual stimuli.** If you are struggling with food then why would you walk down to the donut shop and press your nose against the window, saying to yourself, “I not going in there, I’m not going to eat any more donuts.” Avoid the shop, don’t’ even walk down that street. This is a “duhhh” If you want avoid giving into temptation, reduce your exposure to temptation. V.10 Joseph didn’t listen to her and could not even be around her.” You know in your mind right now what area you struggle. You know the times, the places, the people, the books, the shows so avoid it! Stop going there. If you know that after 11pm at night in the car is when you always mess up. If you know that when you are on the computer alone after 10. if you know that every time you have lunch with this person you fall then avoid it. Let him who thinks he stands beware lest he fall. The pride that thinks you will never fall paints a big red target on your chest.
4. **Expect a continual battle.** Don’t expect that if you resist temptation once it will go away. It won’t...in fact you may become an even bigger target. Mrs. Potiphar v. 10 came after Joseph day after day. She saw a challenge and wanted to conquer. She was used to getting things her way and did not like to be rejected. Expect the bait, just don’t bite. Know your weaknesses. Be

proactive be sure the evil one has studies where you are weak. Know where you could fall and stay far from that edge.

Those are some things we can work on to avoid as we battle temptation while practicing the presence of Jesus. What are some things we can engage in positively to practice the presence of God?

1. **Memorize scripture.** Ps 119:11 Thy word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against thee. If you are tempted in a certain area. Look up some verses that deal with that temptation and memorize it. II Timothy 2:22 “Now flee youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.”
2. **Pray.** Potiphar probably knew the Lord was with Joseph because he saw Joseph worship and pray, just like Daniel did not hide his faith...but prayed. Pray without ceasing. Don't segment God into a Sunday morning. Make him a part of your entire week, entire day.
3. **Get a friend you can be accountable to.** Remember Judah? One of his problems was he thought he didn't need anybody. He left his brothers. You can't do it on your own. Be real with someone you trust who can ask you the tough questions.
4. **Give glory to God.** In your success, make sure people around know that your success was because the Lord was with you, not because you're a really neat person. Give the glory to God. Start the day thinking of one thing you are thankful to God for. Family? Weather? Air we breathe? Health? Friends? Laughter? Then work that into as many conversations as you can that day. At the bank, “I'm so thankful to God for...” Give God the glory and you will be more aware of His presence. For the secret to our obedience is our ready awareness that our God is always with us, he always sees, we just need to start living like it. And when we do we will be better

able to stand strong when Mrs. Potiphar comes whispering in our ear.