

Self-Disciplined Joseph

Introduction

People who make a lasting impact have usually developed great self-discipline. For example the sportsman who can't control his diet and drinking won't last long in his professional sport and this indiscipline means that they will never reach their full potential.

The same is true spiritually. Most of the men who make an impact for Jesus are self-disciplined. Men like William Wilberforce (abolishing the African Slave trade) and Hudson Taylor whose lives were marked by their self-disciplined in their daily devotion to prayer, bible study and personal morality. God's seems to increase the spiritual gifting of those with the self-discipline to use it.

It is no surprise, therefore, to find self-discipline is very highly valued in Scripture. The Apostle Paul wrote in Titus 2:2 to teach the men to be self-controlled. Church elders are to be self controlled, 1 Timothy 3:2, Titus 1:8. Nowhere is self-discipline more necessary for Christians than in facing sexual temptation. One of the finest examples of such moral self-discipline is Joseph.

Four times we read in this chapter that God was with Joseph (v2-3;21,23), twice at the begging when he was honored and successful in Potiphar' house, and twice at

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then end when he was honored and successful in Pharaoh's prison. Joseph learnt that, wherever he was, through ups and downs, God was always with him. We too must learn that through the good and bad times God is always with us. Whether or not we understand what God is doing, He has His purposes in everything that happens to us. Romans 8:28-29 says *we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.* ²⁹ *For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.*

In Joseph's life there is a repeated pattern of exaltation, followed by humiliation then exaltation, just as there would be in the life of Jesus. The Son of God: exalted in glory before He became a man to be humiliated on the cross, but then rising to be exalted to rule of all. God's way is to exalt His humbled but faithful servants.

But critical to Joseph's qualifications to be Israel's savior was his early resistance to the temptation of Potiphar's wife, just as Jesus' resistance to the temptations of Satan at the beginning of His ministry. Joseph had to learn self-discipline if he was ever to be entrusted with greater responsibility. He had to learn to govern himself before he would be ready to govern the world.

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Genesis 39:1-6 *Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. Potiphar, an Egyptian who was one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him there. ² The Lord was with Joseph so that he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master. ³ When his master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord gave him success in everything he did, ⁴ Joseph found favour in his eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned. ⁵ From the time he put him in charge of his household and of all that he owned, the Lord blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph. The blessing of the Lord was on everything Potiphar had, both in the house and in the field. ⁶ So Potiphar left everything he had in Joseph's care; with Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate. Now Joseph was well-built and handsome.* The future of Joseph and the salvation of Israel would now depend on how Joseph resisted the temptation of Potiphar's wife just as the salvation of all Christians was dependent upon the resistance of Jesus to Satan's temptations to avoid the cross.

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Joseph was under the same pressures we face today to sin. He was probably the equivalent to the Brad Pitt of today, handsome man, with sexual needs and no obvious prospects of having a wife as he was a slave. He was far from home and no one was ever likely to find out what he did. He had been sold into slavery by his brothers so why should it matter anyway.

Genesis 3:7 *and after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, 'Come to bed with me!* Sexual favors were normally expected by Egyptian slaves. So in the culture no shame or guilt was attached to it. It could even be dangerous to refuse. Potiphar's wife was a powerful woman. It would not be wise to upset or offend her. She was seductive and no doubt sex with her would have been exciting. Joseph resisted her seduction with self-discipline: he refused. Self-discipline has the ability to say no!

The England rugby union and former Wigan rugby league star Jason Robinson is a committed Christian. In his autobiography, *finding my feet*, he describes the difference made by Christ to his life. Before he was a Christian he was wild and morally bankrupt, but after finding forgiveness in Jesus this all changed in his life. Quote – *people often think that because of my devotion to Christianity, my life must be restricted, but I feel freer*

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now than I ever have done. I can say yes or no – I couldn't say no before. With God's strength we can say no!

We need to prepare our defensive convictions long before temptation arises. For example if I am dating I have thought about and discussed guidelines about being alone together in her room or house and what is acceptable and not. Or thinking about what happens if I find myself alone with someone I could find attractive. What am I going to do, what am I not going to do. Why am I going away on holiday on my own with my boyfriend or girlfriend? Most battles with immorality are lost long before the actual opportunity for sin presents itself. We need to organize our resistance when we feel spiritually strong.

Ask other Christians what they do. We can ring out wives and husbands and let know where we are after work, we can block certain TV channels, put certain blocking software on our computers and phones that sends our accountability partner which websites we look at.

When the temptress came to Joseph, his defenses were ready. Genesis 39:8-9 *But he refused. 'With me in charge,' he told her, 'my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has*

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entrusted to my care. ⁹No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God? Joseph was well aware of his boundaries and privileges. He had considered the damage that would follow from Sexual misbehavior. We need to consider the damage that follows from sexual misbehavior.

Couples affected by adultery are devastated and so are the children. The guilt and misery in a Christian can be catastrophic. Sometimes there are STD's and pregnancies. Maybe if people considered the damage beforehand then they may avoid it like the plague.

Quite often failure is fuelled by alcohol. A couple of glasses of wine and their house, and then ... you finish the story. Alcohol reduces our inhibitions. It is madness to drink too much and try to resist temptation.

Joseph had recognized the sustained benefits of honoring his master. He also had an obligation to him and the ingratitude of abusing the trust shown in him by his master. It is worth remembering who else may be wronged by immorality. Lives are shattered by divorce. Joseph recognized that Potiphar would be wronged and it helped

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him refuse temptation.

Joseph refused to sin against God! He knew God had blessed him with this position and that he could not expect the blessing to continue if he rebelled against God. Neither can we. *How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?*

The Bible clearly teaches that sexual pleasure is for marriage. Outside of marriage it is wrong and an offense to God. Paul wrote what motivates us to say no as Christians in Titus 2:11-14 *For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. ¹² It teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, ¹³ while we wait for the blessed hope – the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.* Jesus died to redeem a people who want to do good. He doesn't want us to remain in immorality. His grace and kindness motivates us to say no! We live in a society today that isn't playing by God's rules. We need to be ready to protect ourselves and our loved ones.

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Genesis 39:10 *And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even to be with her.* Joseph tried to avoid her. He couldn't persuade her to leave him alone so he avoided her. Likewise we need to avoid the source of temptation, which will be different for each of us. Many people operate on the edge of trouble to see how close they can get. Playing with sin is as stupid as playing with a black mamba. We need to flee from it otherwise we will get bitten. That's what snakes do, that's what sin does. Never overestimate our capacity to resist sin.

Genesis 39:11-12 *One day he went into the house to attend to his duties, and none of the household servants was inside. ¹²She caught him by his cloak and said, 'Come to bed with me!' But he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house.* Avoidance was Joseph's first strategic response, running away was his fallback. Sometimes the only option is to run. Get out now. Get away fast.

Paul taught the Corinthian Church flee from sexual immorality. We need to learn from Joseph to flee certain situations, people, places and other things if we feel we could fall into sexual immorality.

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As a result of Mrs Potipher's false testimony Joseph was thrown into prison. Sometimes doing the right godly thing is costly. But God was waiting for him there and God continued to bless him and prepare him for greater things. He was so successful that that the prison warden put him in charge of everything there. Even if we suffer from the ungodly we will be blessed by God, in this life or the next. Eventually Joseph was promoted to the top man in Egypt below Pharaoh and more importantly saviour of God's people. God is looking for those people who are self-disciplined and self-controlled.

Just as Joseph had to resist temptation to seek pleasure for himself, Jesus had to do the same throughout His life.

Personal Study Questions

- ✚ How are people hurt by sexual immorality?
- ✚ How does God's grace motivate us to sexual self-discipline?
- ✚ How can we personally avoid sexual temptation?
- ✚ When do we need to run away from temptation?