



Flee the All-Too-Convenient Evil

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Introduction:

Text: Genesis 39:13–23

Today is Sunday 2 in our Spiritual Adventure called *More than Survivors: What It Takes to Thrive Spiritually*. We are examining eight individuals in the Scriptures who point the way to thrive spiritually by their example. Two weeks ago we looked at Moses. Using him as an example, we have been examining the daily choices we have been making. We are exploring which choices are good ones, which aren't, and how they affect our spiritual walk.

Today we look at Joseph. If you haven't yet picked up a copy of the Adventure Journal, it's not too late. They are available in the foyer following the benediction. I would strongly encourage you to plug right in.

Joseph was trapped. Most likely he was tempted, too. Potiphar's wife was certainly a very attractive woman. But Joseph, Jacob's son (his second to youngest son) had been trapped before. Remember? Before going to work for Potiphar in Egypt, he'd been ditched by his jealous brothers, left in an abandoned well and then sold into slavery to a passing caravan.

He'd experienced God's faithfulness that first time, so when he was painted into a corner by this woman with mischief on her mind, he had reason to expect God to be faithful once again. And God was. If you look at this passage of Scripture on your own, beginning with verse 1, you will notice over and over again this phrase, "and the Lord was with Joseph."

It's a good news/bad news thing. The bad news is this: Temptations are sure to come. We are surrounded by all-too-convenient evil. That's a given for all those living on a fallen planet. And for those of you who think yourselves invulnerable, hear the words of the apostle Paul to the Corinthians: "So if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall." That's the bad news. But flip the coin. The good news is that when things are moving fast and furious and you're speeding down the highway of personal destruction and career-ending compromise, God promises an exit ramp. Paul's exhortation to the Christians in Corinth continues, "**No temptation has seized you except what is common to man, but God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it**" (1 Cor. 10:12–13).

Joseph was aware of this principle. That's how he could successfully escape the bounty hunter lying in wait for his body. He recognized the escape route God had provided for him to flee temptation. We can decipher his flight plan by looking briefly at the passage (Genesis 39:13–23).

I. Joseph kept himself pure by looking at himself in the mirror.

He liked what he saw. He was esteemed and valued by Potiphar. He was trustworthy. He was a proven leader. He had a great reputation. He recognized that God had prospered him. By reflecting on his personal wealth, he knew an illicit affair wasn't necessary to feed his self-esteem or fill some lacking need. He sanely saw how a one-night stand would damage the rest of his life. Because he had taken the time to do a self-evaluation, he knew what to do in the heat of the moment.

II. Joseph chose to recognize the hand of God in his life.

He knew his achievements were not the result of his own ingenuity or networking. The Lord's fingerprints were only too evident. If he had somehow seen his prosperity tied to pleasing people and making pragmatic choices, he might have seen caving in to the woman's advances as politically expedient. But, Joseph saw himself as simply a steward of God-ordained opportunities. How could he possibly sin against God by sleeping with this woman? Such a transgression would not only fly in the face of all God's blessings, it would be the ultimate expression of ingratitude.

III. Joseph ran for his life.

No need to try and retrieve his clothes, just get out of there as fast as he could. When you're blindsided by an attractive yet self-destructive opportunity, don't stop and evaluate your options. RUN! And it's a solution to temptation that is as appropriate in the first-century Roman Empire as in Pharaoh's Egypt. Nearly 1,500 years after Joseph, Paul writes to a young disciple named Timothy. He instructs him to "flee youthful lusts." It means – stay away from bad things.

For those of you who have journals – at the bottom of page 20 there is a practical plan to put today's message into practice. In addition to "critiquing our choices" each day, we want to be especially aware of how we are responding to temptation. Follow along as I read:

"Joseph knew what all-too-convenient-evil was. Potiphar's wife had sexual designs on him, and her intentions were quite clear. All-too-convenient evil is

prevalent in our culture as well. Unless we agree to flee, we probably won't."

Those who would thrive spiritually plan ahead. Consider the following FLEE acronym as a flight plan by which you can follow Joseph's example of purity.

- **"Feel the danger."**

Often we don't even realize when we're being tempted. A commercial comes on. You drive past a sexy billboard. We're so bombarded that we lose our sensitivity. Don't let that happen. Replace the batteries in your temptation alarm. Sound the alert when temptation comes your way. Recognize it for what it is and then . . .

- **"Leave the area."**

Turn off the TV or computer. If possible, get up and leave the room. Make a decided effort to change your environment. Resolve immediately to do whatever it takes to honor the Lord in this situation.

- **"Experience God's pleasure."**

Hurray! You have confronted temptation and won! God loves it when that happens. After Jesus was tempted, angels ministered to him. The delight of God's pleasure when you have overcome temptation is something more Christians need to experience.

- **"Establish protections."**

Is there anything you can do to shield yourself from such temptation in the future? Change your route to work so you won't drive by that porn shop? Get software that blocks out offensive websites? Get rid of some of your cable channels? Set up rules for your own behavior so you won't even come close to such temptation? Have a Scripture verse ready to read or quote? One great idea would be to find a friend who will check up on you, holding you accountable for your actions."

Great flight plan, wouldn't you say? In addition, you'll want to keep current with your daily journal pages and read chapter two in the Adventure Guidebook Soul Alert. Pray this little prayer each day this week:

"Lord Jesus, I live in a world with all sorts of temptation. The truth is, I'm not always sure I can survive—let alone thrive—in these situations. You taught us to pray, 'Lead us not into temptation, but

deliver us from the evil one.' Help me, like Joseph, to flee all-too-convenient evil. Amen."

Whoever would say that sexual temptation is more prevalent today than in Old Testament times hasn't spent much time in the Scriptures. Between the covers of our Bibles are numerous accounts of bedroom scenes and moral dilemmas of the kind we have read about this morning. Perhaps what is more prevalent today is the convenience of sexual allurements. In our culture, moral compromise is but a click away. If statistics are true, more than a few men in this congregation are trapped by an addiction to pornography on the Internet. The embarrassment of having to carry a *Penthouse* or *Playboy* from the newsstand to the checkout counter (which has hindered many a young man from giving in to this desire) is no longer a deterrent. The Web offers embarrassment-free valet service, although it doesn't advertise how entrapping the invisible strands of this particular web can be.

The initial sliding down a slippery slope of all-too-convenient evil can be so unexpected. A pastor in Chicago was doing research for a sermon. He typed in a general subject on a search engine, and what occurred on the screen astounded him. A pornographic website with explicit images appeared before him. Having battled an attraction to porn in the past, he was disturbed by what was going on and knew he must sign off immediately. His face blushed hot. He tried to close down the website, but it wouldn't disappear. Instead, it had been programmed to reveal other images and in hopes the viewer would choose to rabbit trail to related sites.

But it's not just the Internet. And it's not just men. Pornography undermines the spiritual health of men and women alike. Ours is a generation in which both boys and girls have been conditioned to view the opposite sex with an eye for curves and bulges. You who travel as part of your job know that you can watch sexually explicit programs and movies in your hotel room without anybody ever knowing. No longer is it necessary to risk the embarrassment of going to an adult bookstore to buy or rent material to fuel lustful passions. Just order premium channels as part of your cable system. Or call the 900 phone number that flashes across your TV screen in the early morning hours.

The "Mrs. Potiphars" in our lives are not always as obvious as what I've just described. Billboards on the interstate appeal to our sexual instincts while attempting to sell us perfume, soft drinks, or new cars. Music on our favorite radio stations includes seductive lyrics that subconsciously lower our standards and increase our appetite for physical gratification. Sitcoms on network television consistently rely on sexual situations for storylines. Our teenagers shopping at Abercrombie and Fitch have become immune to indecency by the provocative display advertisements that double as wallpaper. And how in the world does one end up on the Victoria's Secret mailing list?

If we rely on our response to visual stimulation, we are in deep weeds, my friends. Experienced pilots know they can't survive if, in compromised flight conditions, they are trying to steer by what they see. When you're surrounded by clouds, what are you going to do? Fly by the seat of your pants? When you've lost sight of the horizon, what are you going to do? Pretend you know what you're doing? John Kennedy, Jr. apparently thought he was flying parallel to the ground when in fact he was nose-diving at a perpendicular angle.

In 1 Peter 2:11 (one verse among the four we are attempting to memorize during the Adventure), we read: "Dear brothers and sisters, you are foreigners and aliens here. So I warn you to keep away from evil desires, because they fight against your very souls" (NLT).

Jacob teaches us this morning as an example that we are to keep away from evil desires. Let's make that our goal this week. They fight against your very souls. Feel the danger. Leave the area. Experience God's pleasure. Establish protections.

Be like Joseph—more than a survivor. Be someone who thrives spiritually. My brothers and sisters, you are God's holy nation, a kingdom of priests. God has called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Let's live there, let's run the race there, let's press on in this adventure – to win the prize.