

Accused
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Allen Power

Genesis 39:7-22

“Don’t even go there!” That phrase became popular over the last 25 years. What does it mean? Why do people say it? That phrase will take on new meaning as we study Genesis 39. This text teaches us about resisting the temptation to sin and doing what is right instead. It also addresses the frustration of being punished for doing the right thing.

Speaking of “Don’t go there,” here’s another way to implant this in our minds. We’ve all heard Henny Youngman’s corny old joke: *“Doctor, I broke my leg in two places; what should I do?”* The doctor replies: *“Don’t go to those two places.”* Don’t go there!

In this text we will see that giving in to the temptation to sin is really a “flee problem.” Now before you blame your sin on your dog – I spelled that “f-l-e-e” NOT “f-l-e-a.”

1 Corinthians 10:13 (ESV) — 13 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.

The point: Sinning against God and others isn’t just about temptation; it’s about what we do WHEN we are tempted. Avoiding sin requires deciding in advance to flee when temptation shows up and better yet, not to go where temptation is likely to be lurking.

God’s chosen servant Joseph DID NOT have a “flee problem.” He also didn’t have a problem with “denial” (not the river, though he WAS in Egypt). Okay, no more puns!

When we last left Joseph, his brothers had sold him into slavery. The slave traders took him to Egypt and sold him to a high government official named Potiphar. Verse two of chapter 39 says, *“God was with Joseph, so he succeeded in everything he did”* as a servant in Potiphar’s house. Observing this, Potiphar put Joseph in charge of everything in his household. All Potiphar had to think about was what to have for dinner.

Unfortunately, that wasn’t Potiphar’s only worry. There was the sleezy, scheming original “Housewife of Egypt,” Mrs. Potiphar. Look at the last sentence of verse six:

(NLT) 6 Joseph was a very handsome and well-built young man, **7** and Potiphar’s wife soon began to look at him lustfully. “Come and sleep with me,” she demanded. **8** But Joseph refused. “Look,” he told her, “my master trusts me with everything in his entire household. **9** No one here has more authority than I do. He has held back nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How could I do such a wicked thing? It would be a great sin against God.” **10** She kept putting pressure on Joseph day after day, but he refused to sleep with her, and he kept out of her way as much as possible. **11** One day, however, no one else was around when he went in to do his work. **12** She came and grabbed him by his cloak, demanding, “Come on, sleep with me!” Joseph tore

himself away, but he left his cloak in her hand as he ran from the house. **13** When she saw that she was holding his cloak and he had fled, **14** she called out to her servants. Soon all the men came running. “Look!” she said. “My husband has brought this Hebrew slave here to make fools of us! He came into my room to rape me, but I screamed. **15** When he heard me scream, he ran outside and got away, but he left his cloak behind with me.” **16** She kept the cloak with her until her husband came home. **17** Then she told him her story. “That Hebrew slave you’ve brought into our house tried to come in and fool around with me,” she said. **18** “But when I screamed, he ran outside, leaving his cloak with me!” **19** Potiphar was furious when he heard his wife’s story about how Joseph had treated her. **20** So he took Joseph and threw him into the prison where the king’s prisoners were held, and there he remained.

- Verse seven doesn’t just say Mrs. Potiphar suggested an affair; what does it say?
- We’re not told if Mrs. P. was attractive, but even if she was hideous and had bad breath, what kind of pressure would Joseph have felt to give in to her seduction?
- In today’s lexicon we would say she had the “position of power” over Joseph.
- Verse eight: What are the first three words in that verse (in every translation)?
- What does that tell us about Joseph’s character?
- Verse nine: What reasons did he give for refusing her?
- God had not given the Ten Commandments yet. Joseph didn’t have a copy of the KJV, NIV, or ESV, so how did he know this would be a “*great sin against God?*”
- Step one to avoiding sin: Know what is and is not sin. How can we know that?
- If we’ve trusted Christ as Savior and Lord our sins have been forgiven. However, as long as we live we still have a natural inclination to sin. Those sins don’t wipe out our salvation in Christ but they can lead to tragic consequences.
- It appears that young Joseph understood this danger and tried to avoid it.
- Verse 10: Mrs. P. kept “pressuring” Joseph. He not only refused her propositions, the KJV says “*he hearkened not unto her*” the NLT: “*he kept out of her way as much as possible.*”ⁱⁱ In other words he “*didn’t go there!*”
- Last year Susan and I visited the Grand Canyon for the first time. One of the things that shocked Susan was the lack of guardrails at the cliffs of the Canyon.
- We’re told: “*The Grand Canyon National Park does not have extensive guardrails or safety barriers along most of its rim, as it aims to preserve the natural beauty and accessibility of the park.*”ⁱⁱⁱ However, this lack of physical barriers also means visitors must exercise caution and personal responsibility when exploring the canyon’s edge.”^{iv} The warning signs say: Don’t GO THERE!
- There is a Bible verse for that: “*Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.*” (1 Corinthians 10:12, ESV)
- Mr. Potiphar had installed no guardrails where Joseph was concerned, but Joseph was wise enough to not even go near the “cliffs” of temptation. This is the problem with many who struggle with sin. They get too close to the cliffs.
- That “take heed lest you fall” verse comes right before the verse about escaping temptations (1 Cor. 10:13). I joked that Joseph didn’t have a problem with “denial.” Sometimes we think we are too strong to give into temptation, so we go too close to the cliff. Joseph KNEW BETTER and DECIDED not to “go there!”

- **1 Thessalonians 5:22 (KJV 1900) — 22** Abstain from all appearance of evil.
- Avoiding sin is the priority but Christ-followers need to even avoid the appearance of it.
- Verse 11: Though Joseph tried to avoid being alone with Mrs. Potiphar, he still had work to do and one day that put him alone with her in the house.
- She grabbed his cloak and He fled leaving it behind.
- Joseph didn't have a "flee problem." He knew when to RUN from a bad situation.
- 1 Corinthians 6:18 (ESV) warns us to "*Flee from sexual immorality.*"
- Proverbs 22:3 (ESV) says, "*The prudent sees danger and hides himself, but the simple go on and suffer for it.*"
- James 4:7 (ESV) tells us, "*Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*"
- Like Joseph, we all need to be training for a sprint so we can flee temptation.
- This might have been the first recorded "*he said, she said*" situation in history.
- The spurned Mrs. Potiphar used Joseph's cloak as exhibit "A" of circumstantial evidence to accuse him of attempted rape. She even added a racial slur ("that Hebrew slave") to her accusation.
- Mr. Potiphar was "furious" and had Joseph thrown in prison.
- Another lesson: Sometimes even if we do the right thing we can be falsely accused. The Psalms talk about this:
- **Psalm 35:20 (NLT) — 20** They don't talk of peace; they plot against innocent people who mind their own business.
- **Psalm 119:69 (NLT) — 69** Arrogant people smear me with lies, but in truth I obey your commandments with all my heart.
- Jesus warned us that if we serve Him we may be falsely accused (as He was!): **Matthew 5:11–12 (NLT) — 11** "God blesses you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers. **12** Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven. And remember, the ancient prophets were persecuted in the same way.
- Joseph attempted to do all the right things and yet he was falsely accused and imprisoned; but that's not the end of this frustrating story. Look at verse 21:

Genesis 39:21–22 (NLT) — 21 But the Lord was with Joseph in the prison and showed him his faithful love. And the Lord made Joseph a favorite with the prison warden. **22** Before long, the warden put Joseph in charge of all the other prisoners and over everything that happened in the prison.

- As unfair as Joseph's situation was, God was using it to orchestrate a much bigger story; but we're getting ahead of ourselves.
- The final point is that even if we are falsely accused or mistreated for doing the right thing, God will be WITH US and will use it for our good and His glory.
- Let's summarize what we've learned about avoiding sin from Joseph's experience in the house of Potiphar.
- Step one for avoiding sin: Know what is and is not sin by studying God's word.

- Step two for avoiding sin: Don't be in denial about the danger of giving into temptation. If we think we're "strong enough to stand," "take heed lest you fall!"
- Step three for avoiding sin: Stay far away from the cliffs! Don't go there!
- Sometimes even if we try to stay away from temptation it may show up. That brings us to step four for avoiding sin: Train for a sprint; know when to flee temptation.
- An important clarification: This passage isn't just about sexual immorality. We need to avoid ANY temptation to sin and we all have different weaknesses.
- Some of us need to flee opening our big mouth. Some of us need to flee anger, gossip, bitterness. Some of us need to flee impure thoughts. Some of us need to flee how we satisfy some unhealthy appetites.
- Whatever my weakness is I just need to not GO THERE!
- Step five: Sometimes we will be falsely accused even if we've done what is right. Remember, if we have TRULY tried to be obedient to God's commands in scripture, He will be WITH US and use our situation for our good and His glory.
- Other thoughts?

So, What's the Takeaway?

- Joseph was promoted for his proficiency, framed for his faithfulness, protected for his purity, but he was also used by God because of his integrity.
- Like Joseph, if we want to obey God and avoid sinful behavior we need to:
 - Know what sin is.
 - Know that we can be susceptible to temptation.
 - Stay as far away from the "cliffs" that could lead to a painful fall, and
 - Be ready to RUN when temptation comes looking for us.
- All those tactics must be DECIDED IN ADVANCE. When Mrs. Potiphar started coming on to Joseph we don't read that he went to his room, took out his Bible and asked God what to do. He already knew giving in to her proposal would be "a great sin against God" and had decided he would not "do such a wicked thing."
- **James 1:13–16 (NLT)** — **13** And remember, when you are being tempted, do not say, "God is tempting me." God is never tempted to do wrong, and he never tempts anyone else. **14** Temptation comes from our own desires, which entice us and drag us away. **15** These desires give birth to sinful actions. And when sin is allowed to grow, it gives birth to death. **16** So don't be misled, my dear brothers and sisters.
- But look back up to verse twelve of that passage in James. Here is the promise: **James 1:12 (NLT)** — **12** God blesses those who patiently endure testing and temptation. Afterward they will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.
- This week let's remember what Jesus said to his first disciples: "*Keep watch and pray, so that you will not give in to temptation. For the spirit is willing, but the body is weak!*" **Matthew 26:41 (NLT)**
- Let's be on guard for temptation and take every precaution to NOT GO THERE!

ⁱ https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/henny_youngman_164262

ii Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). [*Holy Bible: New Living Translation*](#) (Ge 39:10). Tyndale House Publishers.

iii <https://www.grandcanyonlodges.com/connect/5-myths-about-grand-canyon/>

iv https://tucson.com/news/local/no-safety-changes-planned-at-grand-canyon-following-recent-park-fatalities/article_4ba76065-68ad-5aae-9309-f93f7c97261d.html