

Pastor Kyle Mercer
How Not to Destroy Your Life

August 13, 2023
Series: Joseph
Genesis 39

BIG IDEA - HOW TO AVOID TEMPTATION AND WALK IN THE FAVOR OF GOD

You were created for community. You know that. It's not a nicety; it's a necessity. You know this about your kids. When your kids become adolescents and teenagers, one of the main things they try to figure out for the next decade or two of their lives is "Who are going to be my friends?" When you leave family, you have to find friends.

You know this too: your friends are going to determine the quality and direction of your life. When people come to church, guess what? They don't want a friendly church; they want friends at church. We want to help you find friends at church, and you'll do that through our Community Groups.

We have a lot of guests here today. Here's what I want you to know: we are not a church *with* Community Groups; we are a church *of* Community Groups. You go, "That sounds nuanced." Well, it's actually really important. Here's what this means. We didn't take this idea of Community Groups, which are these groups of 10 to 20 people that meet in homes... We didn't duct tape it onto the life of our church.

In fact, this is neat. You may not know this. You probably don't know this. How would you know this? Before we had a corporate gathering... So, we launched corporate Sunday services at Goler AME Zion in September of 2016, but before we launched these corporate gatherings, we had been meeting for three months as a launch team in Community Groups. We had eight of them.

So, here's what I want you to know: we have had Community Groups even before we had corporate gatherings. And why are they so important? Why do we do sermon-based guided discussions? Do we think the sermons are that good? No, we don't. The reason we do that is it creates alignment. Like, last week, if you were here, and then

you were in a group, everybody in our church was talking about the same thing: dysfunctional families and the providence of God.

Not only that. The number-one thing you need in your life is help applying the Bible that you already know. You don't need a lot more Bible information. We'll give it to you. The problem with the average Christian is your brain is massive and your hands and heart are small. The way we fix that problem, or try to fix that problem, is to get everybody in Community Groups.

So, here's what we're trying to show you in that video, guys. We don't have enough Community Groups right now for the people in our church. This is more of a family conversation, so if you're new, I'll get back to you in a second. This is for people who call Two Cities home. Our church has two lids right now that are affecting our ability to grow numerically, spiritually, and all of the different ways we want to grow.

The number-one lid is obvious. I mean, look around. It's this building. That lid is being removed. We hope around Christmastime we're going to be able to get into the new building. The second lid is Community Groups. Just to keep up with the current growth we're experiencing before we get into the new building, we need to launch 36 groups in the next year. That's a lot.

So, every once in a while (we don't do this often), we get up in front of the entire church (that's what I'm doing today) and say, "Could you help us launch a new group?" Here's how groups start. We don't split groups. The way we multiply groups... Please understand this philosophically. The way we multiply groups is by multiplying leaders. You heard it in that video.

Maybe when you saw that video your wife nudged you or you nudged your wife, or something like that, and said, "We could maybe do this." Here's how a new group starts: a leader leaves and starts a new group. Here's the best way a new group starts: two couples that are in a great group and love each other... One couple says, "We'll be the leader," the other says, "We'll be the host," and it makes up a great marriage that can handle all of the crazy kids of a Community Group.

So, we're praying that some of you would hear this need and step out. If you do, you can reach out to Nathan Milleson, and we are going to walk with you through this process to make sure you're ready. So, that's the word to those of you who could lead. The other word is some of you have gone to a Weekender and have not yet gotten in a group. We're going to do a Group Connect on August 27.

We cannot care for you, we cannot disciple you, we cannot invest in you like we would like to if you're not in a Community Group. For example, here's what happens every once in a while. Something terrible happens in one of your lives, and then you

call the office. That's the international sign you're not in a group. If someone is calling our office to tell us bad news, I am 100 percent sure they're not in a Community Group.

Guess what? We're still going to come to the hospital, but we're going to be looking up your name on the way, because we won't know you like you can be known. When trials and tragedy come, what you need is people who know and love God and people who know and love you. You're going to find that here in our Community Groups. Let me pray for us, and then we're going to dive into Genesis 39.

Lord, I'm praying for two types of people this morning. I'm praying for some leaders who could leave, who could say a gospel goodbye. When I see that video, I know how much Spencer, Ryan, and David love each other. In some ways, they would probably rather still be in group together, but they each left and started new groups.

I pray that we would see multiplication as a blessing. The first time in the Bible we're told to multiply, it's not a command; it's a blessing: "Be fruitful and multiply." Lord, I pray that people would see the blessing in their lives of being able to multiply all of the things you've given them.

I pray for another type of person, the one who needs to take their next step. They've gone to the Weekender, but they've not yet gotten connected to community. I pray they would fight for it. I pray they would find the right night. I pray they would prioritize it in their schedule. I pray even families with really young kids...

The greatest need of parents with young kids is for those parents to be in healthy, godly relationships where they can be invested in so they can be the husband, wife, mom, and dad they need to be. Would you strengthen our church? Lord, would you remove this lid? Would you grow more than 36 new Community Group leaders in the next 12 months? We pray this in Jesus' name, amen.

Guys, I am excited to talk to you about what I'm going to talk to you about today. I really believe that what I'm going to show you from Genesis 39 (you can type to or turn there) could change your life. I know that sounds dramatic. In one sense, any biblical teaching from Scripture that hopefully I give you, if applied, could change your life, but, I mean, this can change your life today.

What I'm going to teach you today can save you from an enormous amount of heartbreak. This can help you have fewer regrets in your life. This can help you not wreck or shipwreck your faith or your marriage. What am I talking about? Temptation. Don't act like you're not tempted. I know we're in church. We're all tempted. Temptation is a universal experience.

Have you heard of that guy who prayed the prayer, "Lord, lead me not into temptation because I can find it all by myself"? That's us. And temptation is serious. We're going to laugh some today, but temptation is serious because it has taken down some incredible men and women. Today, we're particularly going to talk about sexual temptation.

Do you know who sexual temptation took down? The wisest man in the Bible, Solomon. Do you know who else sexual temptation took down? The strongest man in the Bible, Samson. Do you know who else sexual temptation took down? The most spiritually devoted man in the Bible, David. So, don't think you're going to be safe. We have to figure out how to deal with this.

Some of you are materialistic and consumeristic, and you're tempted to spend more than you have. Some of you are more prone to addiction and substance abuse. Some of you are more tempted to sexual sin, but all temptation really falls into three categories (you know this): the temptation to *have*, the temptation to *be*, and the temptation to *feel*. That's it.

Those are the temptations Adam and Eve experienced. Those are the temptations Jesus experienced. You could say it a different way: *Possessions, power, and pleasure. Sex, status, and salary.* They're never going away. You're always going to have them, so we need to see how to fight them.

Now, here's the great thing about Joseph: he is a model Christian. I told you last week there are a couple of things said about him early in his life. Nothing negative said about him from now on. In fact, he's going to be the wise statesman. We'll get there next week. He's the wise statesman. He's the great steward of God's resources. That's pretty awesome.

Today, before he's those two things, he's the man who knows how to say no to the adulterous woman. A lot of people consider the story of Joseph (this is interesting) the Wisdom Literature of the Pentateuch. The Pentateuch, written by Moses, are the first five books of the Bible. We don't get Proverbs until much later, but we need wisdom now.

The way the Bible often works is you get something first in story, and then later you get it in principle. So, here we get it in story. I mean, who's Joseph? Joseph is the person who knows how to say no to the adulterous woman. So, we need to pick up this story. Turn with me to chapter 39. We're going to look at verse 1 to start.

It says, "***Now Joseph had been brought down to Egypt...***" Picking up on chapter 37. "***...and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh...***" This guy gets a long description. "***...the***

captain of the guard, an Egyptian, had bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there."

Now, I've told you this before, but the main theme in the whole story of Joseph is providence. I won't do this every time, but let's just take one moment right now to do this. We need to see the providence in Potiphar picking Joseph. If Potiphar doesn't pick Joseph, he doesn't get to Pharaoh's house, he doesn't interpret the dream, Israel isn't saved, and Jesus can't come. It's like, "Wow! All of this down to one decision of 'Who's going to be my slave?'"

So, that's very interesting. He ends up in Potiphar's house, which he's probably not super excited about. He's like, "I'd rather be with somebody who doesn't have a lot of power and couldn't really hurt me." But, no, he ends up in Potiphar's house. The second thing I want you to notice is Potiphar is called an *officer*. That Hebrew word can be translated *officer* or (and a lot of people think it should be translated this way) *eunuch*.

You're like, "This story just got a lot more interesting." You're like, "Maybe I understand." That doesn't mean it was right. "Maybe I understand why Potiphar's wife was so desperate." It's a very interesting story. I want you to pick this up here. Let's look here. ***"Now Joseph had been brought down to Egypt, and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, had bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there."***

What I want you to see today with temptation is almost all of Joseph's temptation is going to happen at work. You need to know this about *your* life. Some of your temptation (maybe a *lot* of your temptation) is going to happen at work. It happens different places. There is temptation at your home when you're alone. There is temptation when you travel. There is temptation on vacation.

You're going to find in your life... You'll find temptation in certain people. You're like, "I can't be around him or her...my old friends or my drinking buddies or the country club guys. I can't be around them, because those people... I'm tempted there." Or sometimes there are certain places. For some reason, work is a place of massive temptation, especially today. Why is that? Well, I'll try to explain this to us.

It's because men and women who are not related to each other working together is 75 years old. Men and women working together is ancient. It's as ancient as Adam and Eve. "Subdue and have dominion." Husbands and wives, aunts and uncles, family members, daughters, fathers, sons, mothers, and all of that, working together for thousands of years, but good-looking girl and good-looking guy who are married to different people but work together 50 hours a week is new, and we're not doing well with it.

What is the #MeToo movement? What is sexual harassment? What is all of this? I gave this message, obviously, last night. I had two different people from the medical community come up to me and go, "This is a huge issue in medicine." They said it's this huge issue, for some reason, in the surgery rooms. It's like, "I wonder why." It's because many of the things that make a good romantic relationship and a good marriage are the same exact things that make for a good work environment.

"I trust you. What we're doing is exciting. We're setting goals. We're celebrating." If we don't have boundaries and barriers, we're traveling together and eating together all the time. You know what happens at work, right? The guy says, "This is really crazy at work, and my wife doesn't understand." Then the woman says something foolish like, "Yeah, and my husband doesn't understand," and that's the beginning of a lot of trouble.

So, Joseph's temptations happen at work. You have to realize, for some of you, some of your greatest temptations are going to be at work, and the worse things are at home, the more you're going to go to work. It's this terrible cycle that happens with people. So, we have to see what happens with Joseph. Let's continue on.

Verse 2: ***"The LORD was with Joseph, and he became a successful man, and he was in the house of his Egyptian master."*** This chapter is bookended (I'll show you this at the end) with the phrase *God was with him*. We say, "Oh, yeah, of course that's important," but it's important because he's alone and he's apart from his family.

We're all going to have this moment. Most of us have it for the first time when we go to college. You feel like, "I'm alone. I may be going to some university with 15,000 people, but I'm alone." Or you feel it the first time you get that great job, and you end up in some big city, and there are five million people, but you're alone and you're apart from your family.

What you have to remember when you're alone is that God is with you. Theologians talk about something called the *simplicity of God*. What is that? The *simplicity of God* basically says wherever God is, all of God is there. So, when it says God is with him, it means all of the attributes, all of the characteristics, and all of the personality of God is with Joseph.

Look at what happens. ***"The LORD was with Joseph, and he became a successful man..."*** Part of what you have to ask is...*What is the favor of God on your life?* What is the blessing of God on your life? Joseph had the favor and blessing of God on his life. We can't just say it is to be successful, although it's defined that way there.

One of the things, as I think about what God's favor is, what God's blessing is, and what God's anointing on your life is... You can think of it two ways. You can think of it

as *fruitfulness* and *fellowship*. It's fruitfulness in the sense that I believe if the favor of God and the blessing of God are on your life, across time...not overnight but over time...your life is going to be fruitful, fruitful in character, fruitful in impact on others, and you're going to have deep fellowship with God.

This is what has happened with Joseph. It happened so much it says his boss noticed. Look at verse 3. ***"His master saw that the LORD was with him..."*** I don't know how he saw it. I mean, Potiphar is not a Christian. I don't know if he could even articulate this. Sometimes an unbeliever can see something about you, know it's different, but not know what it is and not know how to communicate it.

"His master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD caused all that he did to succeed in his hands." What does it look like to have the favor of God on your life? Can other people see the favor of God on your life? I don't know how to flesh this out for you. I think this is what it means: you need to live a better life than your non-Christian coworkers. You need to live a better life than your non-Christian family members.

What does that mean? Your life can't be about the American dream. Please, not your next vacation and your new hobby. Please, no. It can't be about individual self-expression. All we have to give the world is "I'm going to live a better life, and I'm going to tell a better story. My story is going to be about God, and my story is going to be about a Savior who's better than my sin and bigger than my suffering."

So, this is what he does, and the man sees this. Verse 4: ***"So Joseph found favor in his sight and attended him, and he made him overseer of his house and put him in charge of all that he had."*** We tend to read verses 1-4, and we're like, "Man! That was fast. I can't believe Joseph gets to Egypt, and all of a sudden, he's #2 to Potiphar." Well, that's not actually how it worked.

If you put the whole timeline together... We begin to get the timeline when he gets to Pharaoh's palace. The timeline lets us know it has been about a decade that he has been working for Potiphar. Think about this. He gets to Egypt, and there's one problem with being in Egypt. He can't speak Egyptian, so he has to learn Egyptian. We don't get this whole story.

He doesn't start out... Nobody starts out being #2 in command. He starts out taking out the trash, being the dishwasher, cleaning the toilets, and reporting to somebody else. Here's what I want you to understand. How do you rise? This is another sermon on work, but a lot of people need help with this. How do you rise in a company, in an industry, in an organization? You find some job to do and some person to obey, and you do that.

How many people don't want to do that? How many young people...? Why are people unemployed? Well, that's a long answer, but one of the reasons people are unemployed is they think they can get jobs that are way above them, and they're too prideful and too arrogant to take their spot at the bottom of a hierarchy and say, "This is what I have to do. I have to make this salary. I have to have this little vacation. I have to report to this person. I have to do this type of menial work."

I heard a story. John Maxwell... Some of you know him. He's a great Christian leader in his 70s now. He said he was speaking at some massive event, and someone came up to him afterward and said, "I want to do what you do." He said, "I looked at him and said, 'Do you want to do what I did?'" Too often, people want to do what you do, but they don't want to do what you did. You know what I'm saying?

What we see with Joseph is... We don't know how it happens, but he rises his way up, slowly, to being second in command. It says, ***"From the time that he made him overseer in his house and over all that he had, the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; the blessing of the LORD was on all that he had, in house and field."***

Joseph teaches us an important principle that you need to know no matter where you are. You don't have to be somewhere else to be blessed. How many people feel like that? We feel like this in every stage of our lives.

Like, "When I get out of my parents' house, I'll be blessed. When I get out of college, I'll be blessed. When I get my first job, I'll be blessed. When I finally get married, I'll be blessed. When we have kids, I'll be blessed. When our kids leave, we'll really be blessed." Instead of saying, "Okay. Wherever I am, I want to be all there, and God can bless me exactly where I am."

Now, there are two other principles here on blessing. This word *blessed* shows up a lot. There are two interesting things here. First, Joseph saw himself as being blessed to be a blessing. Every time God blesses you, it's often for somebody else, not for you. So often, we're trying to be a cul-de-sac for blessing instead of a conduit or a catalyst for blessing.

Then there's another deeper thing, which will keep you humble. Sometimes you don't know why God is blessing you. Like, why did God bless Potiphar? God blessed Potiphar not because of Potiphar. God blessed Potiphar because of Joseph. I genuinely think that's the right way to think about your life.

The right way to think about your life, if you're being blessed in any area, is do not assume it's because of you. It'll keep you very humble. Who knows if God is not

blessing you because of your spouse? Who knows if God is not blessing you because of your parents' prayers? Who knows why God is blessing you?

When I think about our church... I think most people would say, at some level, it feels like we've been blessed, and I'm not exactly sure why. I certainly don't think it has anything to do with me. I've had the thought before... Some of you know Pastor Dave. He's one of our pastors here.

His parents... They're godly. His dad is a pastor in Pennsylvania. They prayed for him, and they still pray for him daily. I've wondered, "Are we reaping the prayers and the blessing of somebody in Pittsburgh who has been praying for 38 years?" Who knows? The right way to think about blessing is, "It may have nothing to do with me, and it's not for me."

That will let you be unbelievably blessed and not become prideful or arrogant. The best homes are homes in which everybody asks, "What would it look like for me to be a blessing to this person?" And if that person is rightly oriented, they say, "Well, that was great. Maybe I'm blessed to..." It's the most exciting way to live.

Okay. So, it's all going well for Joseph. This is how it works, usually. He's #2. Everything is happening. He's second in command. Then look here. Verse 6: ***"So he left all that he had in Joseph's charge, and because of him he had no concern about anything but the food he ate."***

It's interesting. I was talking to a guy recently who's... He's not in our city anymore, but he's a very high-level executive, super high-level at all of these big companies. We were talking about his job and what he has done and how he got to where he is, and he told me this. It was providential that I'm now teaching on this.

He said, "Kyle, every job I've ever taken, I've had one thought: How do I make my boss' life easier?" Instead of being jealous of your boss, instead of being resentful of your boss, instead of wishing you had your boss' job, what if you oriented yourself...? It seems like Joseph did with Potiphar. "How can I make his life as easy as possible?"

You can see now Potiphar has rich people problems. He doesn't know where he's going to eat his next meal. That's what he's deciding. "Where are we going for happy hour?" That's the definition of a rich person's problem. "I have a lot of options for my next meal."

So, we're at the height of Joseph's life so far. Maybe he's starting to think, "My dreams are coming true." Now, you have to see this. Continue verse 6. ***"Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance."*** Some of you won't understand this, so I'm

going to have to explain. Some of you don't understand, like I do, the temptations of being very good-looking. Why are you laughing?

We're told that Joseph is very good-looking. The words there in the Hebrew are he is both... He takes his vitamins and does his push-ups. He's in great shape, and he's also very good-looking. Now, here's what we need to talk about. Sometimes Christians can try to be more spiritual than the Bible is. We say things like, "Internal beauty is all that matters."

Well, it is the most important thing, but the Bible talks a lot about physical beauty as well. In fact, there are a lot of women in the Bible who we're told were very, very beautiful. We're only told four guys were good-looking in the Bible. I don't know what this says about us guys. We're told Absalom was very good-looking (that's David's son), we're told David was very good-looking, we're told Joseph was very good-looking, and we're told King Saul was very tall and handsome. Only four guys.

Here's what I want to talk about just for a minute: physical and, connected to that, sexual attraction. We assume that Potiphar's wife, who we're going to meet in a minute, is also very good-looking. How do we know that? Because high-status men, in general, are married to very good-looking women. Have you ever seen a guy who's with a woman who's way out of his league? What do you think? You never think, "He must have a great personality." You think, "What does he do, and how much does he make?"

So, they're both very good-looking. Joseph is young. We don't know how old she is. This is a real thing. Maybe just be honest with yourself about this, but maybe with a close friend or something like that. You need to be honest. Is there anyone in your life who is not your spouse who you're attracted to? Attraction is very, very powerful.

You'll find somebody in your life, and you're very, very attracted to them. You won't even know sometimes why and all of the reasons why. If you're not careful, and if you're willfully blind, you'll find yourself putting yourself in environments to be around this person, and that's not a good idea.

One of the best things you can do is just tell one person. "Hey, there's this lady at work" or "It's my boss." If you'll say it out loud, I promise its power will begin to break as soon as you can say it out loud. We've all seen this, right? This is the story. Have you ever seen some guy, and his secretary is way, way too good-looking? Everybody is nervous.

It's like, "I'm sure he's a great guy, but I feel uncomfortable with how good-looking this person is. I'm worried about how much time they spend alone together, and they

travel together." We need to pay attention to these things, because you often have these gut feelings, and then later you're like, "I thought that; I didn't say it."

So, we have this attraction. I want you to see what happens here. Verse 7: "***And after a time...***" When is this time? After Joseph has arisen. He's on a mountaintop. There are certain temptations that come every day. We call those *besetting sins*. There are certain temptations that happen in the valley.

More of the substance abuse stuff happens in the valley. "I'm so sad, and I'm so hurt, and I just want to feel." A lot of the sexual temptations happen at the mountaintops. There are a couple of reasons for that. The first reason is when you're on the mountaintop, your guard is down and your pride is up, so you're very tempted.

There's another reason. This is interesting. If you go in your mind and think through CEOs or pastors or politicians or family members who fell, you'll have the same thought if you watch their life. They fell when they were at the top, and you go, "Why?" It's very spiritual. Satan is patient. He's waiting until he can bring the greatest reproach on the name of Christ, and then he lets that temptation be known, and then he lets that sin be noticed.

So, he's successful. Watch out when you're successful. "***And after a time his master's wife...***" This is Potiphar's wife. "***...cast her eyes on Joseph and said, 'Lie with me.'***" This is the first episode of *Desperate Housewives*. I've never seen that show, but it is interesting to me. I think that show went several seasons long. Don't tell me there aren't women like that.

In the same way, *Mean Girls* was a movie that became a Broadway show because it's real. In the same way, for a show to go eight seasons long and be a cultural phenomenon... There are desperate housewives, for sure. What we see with Potiphar's wife... I want us to learn a couple of things about temptation.

First (you know this about temptation), temptation speaks to you. I mean, it comes first, maybe, as a feeling. Temptation always attacks your emotions and your feelings, that's for sure. The second thing it does in attacking your emotions is it will make arguments toward you. And you know this.

The reason you keep giving in to the same temptation even though you journaled about it, even though you told God you'd never do it again, even though you're not even sure... Maybe you recommitted your life to Christ. You're not sure. You got in some desperate moments, and you said, "I will never," and then you did it again. It doesn't happen in a moment; it happens with an argument.

Normally, what happens is you're broken into two, sometimes three, different people internally. It's a weird experience. The best part of you... And hopefully that's a lot of you, but sometimes it's not a lot of you. By the way, it's too late to get ready for temptation when you're in temptation. You want to strengthen yourself beforehand.

What happens a lot of times is the best part of you is like, "I shouldn't do this. I don't want to sin against God," and you say all of these kinds of things, and you mean it. Then there's another part of you. Is it Satan? Is it the flesh? Is it whatever? It always says basically the same things.

By the way, we find the number-one reason people give in to temptation... They did a nationwide study, not with Christians. "Why do you give in and do things you know are wrong?" "I need an escape." That's what people do: escape. You'll hear some version of... It's usually something like this: "You deserve this."

It depends on how resentful you are. If you're resentful, you know, "Your wife put on all that weight." "Your husband travels way too much. No one can handle taking care of three kids like this all the time. You need to drink too much. How else are you going to cope with all of these things?"

Joseph had a lot of excuses. Joseph is tempted. He could have said, "You know what? My brothers abused me." People play the victim card all the time. "My brothers abused me. My mom died when I was 6. I'm a slave." He could have said something like we'd probably say to ourselves.

"I'm a young man. I have desires, and I have urges. I'm a slave, and the chance that I'm getting married is zero. Another opportunity like this may never come knocking at my door again." Then all of the other lies we believe too. "Nobody will find out. It won't make a difference. It won't corrupt my character." Somehow, in an amazing ability, Joseph says, "No." Look at what he does in verse 8.

"But he refused and said to his master's wife, 'Behold, because of me my master has no concern about anything in the house, and he has put everything that he has in my charge. He is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except you, because you are his wife.'"

Notice, also, temptation always wants that which is forbidden. The only temptation for Joseph was the one thing he couldn't have. You need to know this. Lust wants what is forbidden. The reason people get in... You know this about yourself. The reason you can get in dark holes sometimes, and you start going, "How did I start using *this* stuff? How did I start going *here*? How did I start looking at *that*...?"

What happens is once you've crossed the line with temptation, temptation only says three things to you: "More. Better. Different." Temptation always needs novelty. So, you start looking at things you could never imagine you'd be looking at. The reason is you crossed a line, and you need something more and more and more forbidden. So, I want to show you in that passage I just read four things Joseph does that I think genuinely... This is so practical. This can help you with temptation. And you're going to need it, and I need it.

Here's the first thing: Joseph is grateful for all that he has. Did you notice that? He just starts saying all of the things God has done in his life. He's really grateful to be second in command. He's really grateful for all that Potiphar has allowed him to do and have. See, a lot of people, when they struggle with sin... See if this isn't true in your life. You normally think there's one thing you struggle with.

It's different for everyone. You know, "I just spend too much. If I didn't spend too much, I'd be a great person." "I just drink too much. If I didn't drink too much, the rest of my life is pretty organized." The Bible says, actually, the number-one problem with somebody who spends too much or drinks too much or looks at things they shouldn't is not that they spend too much, drink too much, or look at things they shouldn't. It's that they don't have a grateful heart. It's like, "Yikes!" That's the root problem.

We know that from Romans 1. Romans 1 talks about idolatry and false worship, but at the beginning it says, "They did not acknowledge God, and they were not grateful." I don't know anything more practical I could say to you today than the moment you start feeling tempted, you need to start being grateful.

You could get super-spiritual and super-theological. You could say, "Lord, I'm thankful for the substitutionary atonement of Christ," but you may just need to say, "Lord, I'm thankful for pizza. Thank you, Lord. I'm thankful for a warm home on a cold day. I am thankful for a spouse. I'm thankful for a job. I'm thankful for my health." You watch the effect. It is impossible for sin to dwell in an actively thankful heart.

I have a friend who says when he starts feeling tempted... He goes, "Kyle, I just start blessing the Lord." That's what he says. He says, "Whenever it is, I just say, 'Lord, you are with me. Lord, you are a great God. Lord, you created the world. Lord, you made me. Lord, we're going to be in heaven together.'" He just starts turning his praise upward to God and being thankful.

The first thing is being thankful. The second thing is counting the downside. I read a book recently, and I'd recommend it to you. It's not a Christian book, but it's a good business book. It's called *The Road Less Stupid*. Some of you go, "I need that book." It

has 40 or 50 chapters in it. They're really short. There are a lot of helpful, what I'd call, *common grace principles*.

A very successful business guy writes the book. I don't think he's a Christian. Anyway, he says the problem in business... He says, "How do people make stupid decisions in business?" He says here's what they do. Every business guy and gal does this. They count the upside, and then they count the downside, but he says they don't have an honest conversation with themselves to go, "Can I live with the downside if it happens?"

When '08 hit, when all of these things happened, when the real estate... When all that happened, the best guys and gals in the industry saw it as a potential, and they thought, "Well, I could live with it." They couldn't live with it. You want to be honest with yourself. What's the upside of giving in to this temptation? It's always the same. Immediate, impulsive, cheap, instant pleasure.

Then what's the downside? Especially if it gets ahold of your life and the worst parts of you are manifested in it, and then you have to have a... I really think this takes a while. I think you need to tell your husband or wife, if you're married, "Can I have a couple of hours tonight?" or "I'm going to get up early" or "Can I get away for half a day, because I need to think about these things?"

You want to scare yourself, because you need something to run toward and something to run away from. So, you want to scare yourself. You'd say, "Okay. If the worst parts of me were manifested and I committed adultery, what could happen? Well, I could end up in divorce court for two and a half years. Somebody else could raise my kids.

I'm going to have to walk into my kids' bedroom one night before they go to sleep and tell them what I did. I'm going to lose trust. It's going to be part of my legacy. My spouse may get remarried, and my kids may be raised by somebody else, and now I see them half the time."

You have to think about all this, and then you have to go, "Okay. That's horrible, and to experience pleasure for a few minutes doesn't feel worth it." So, you have to know the upside, be honest about "Here's why I'm doing this," know the downside, and then be honest with yourself. None of us want to live with the downsides.

The third thing he does is he calls sin what it is. Verse 9: ***"How then can I do this great wickedness..."*** When was the last time you thought you did anything wicked? We don't even use that word anymore. ***"How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?"***

You'll see this. Every time a CEO or a politician has some kind of moral failure, and then he has to address the public, what does he say? Well, the least possible. It's the same. I could write it for him. "Here, use this word: 'We all make mistakes.' Here, use this word: *missteps*. Here, use this word: *indiscretion*. Oh, this is a good one: *lapse in judgment*." We have all of these things. I understand why they're trying to do that...cover their image. I get all that.

Very rarely will we just talk about sin and call it *sin*. We call adultery *affairs*. We call getting drunk *having a good time*. We call pornography *adult entertainment*. We euphemistically name everything. In your own life, you can watch this. You'll do things you know are wrong, and you'll call them something else so your own conscience doesn't condemn you as much.

Where healing comes in is sometimes you just need to have a conversation with yourself, and you need to go, "I am looking at pornography," "I am a drunkard," or whatever it is. "I am a materialistic, selfish person." All right. Honesty is there so the healing can begin. You need to call what you're tempted to do what it is. Just say, "This is what this is. This is not just two coworkers hanging out, sharing their feelings. This is an emotional affair." You need to call it what it is.

The fourth thing (this is helpful) is Joseph is the first person in the story of Joseph to name God. Now, God has been talked about. God has been talked about a lot, but Joseph is the first human character in the story to say God's name. He said, "How can I do this and sin against God?"

Here's the principle: part of how you fight sin is by being a public Christian. You identify publicly with Jesus Christ, and it makes it harder for you to sin in environments where you do that. If at work, only you and Jesus know you're a Christian, it's going to be harder to be a Christian in those environments. It'll come with baggage too, but if you publicly identify with Christ, people will expect you to live differently.

It will be harder to sin with or in the presence of people to whom you've said, "Look. Jesus is my Lord. My faith is the most important part of my life, and I'm trying to live for him. This work is part of my larger calling to be a Jesus follower." You just fought half the battle. By the way, the longer you wait to tell somebody that, the harder it is. If you're seven years into work and you've never told anyone you're a Christian, it will be a lot more difficult, but you still need to do it.

Okay. Let's continue on. Let's see what happens here. Verse 10: ***"And as she spoke to Joseph day after day..."*** This is going to be discouraging, but you need to know it anyway. Some temptations are never going away. That'll be the joy of glorification, of

being in the presence of the Lord, of being in heaven, that we will be in the sinless state and will no longer be able to be tempted.

A lot of people think in their life, "Man, I'm going to get to a place where this is not going to be a temptation anymore." I do think we can grow, and I think God is gracious. I think things might, across time, tempt us less if we've avoided them and grown in personal holiness and warned ourselves and created thankful hearts, but I just want to tell you, the temptation to have, the temptation to feel, and the temptation to be are never going to go away.

Some of you need to hear this, because you think, "When I get older, I won't be tempted with sexual temptation anymore." It's never going away. How do I know this? What's the number-one age demographic that has the largest number of STDs? The elderly. I know you didn't want to know that. I didn't want to know that either. You're like, "Kyle, you ruined my weekend." I'm trying not to be too graphic here.

You think about what's actually happening. What's happening is a bunch of 55-and-older communities are being built because the Boomers are very wealthy, they're retiring early, and they have a lot of discretionary income. So, they move to places like The Villages. Google that.

The Villages is the largest senior citizen housing in the world, I think. It's a bunch of people who are unhappy, a bunch of divorcees, and a bunch of singles. I'm trying to tell you, particularly with that one area... You think, "Oh, it'll go away because old people..." Nope. Old people do.

Okay. An encouraging note is we need to know the difference between temptation and sin. Just really quickly on this. Most of you probably know this, but temptation is not a sin. Jesus Christ was tempted. C.S. Lewis said Jesus Christ was tempted more than any of us, because we say yes to temptation, so we give in really easily, so we're never tempted to the max amount like Jesus was. Jesus was tempted to the max.

There's a difference between temptation and sin. Some people... Some of you do, because in a room this large, of course. Certain people have a more sensitive conscience, and they feel like, "If I'm tempted, it's just as bad as if I did it, so I might as well..." In some kind of weird logic, "I might as well just give in and do it."

We have many brothers and sisters in Christ who struggle with SSA (same-sex attraction). It's one thing to be tempted in a direction. That's temptation. It's another thing to cross the line into fantasy or to do something with your body. So, be encouraged that temptation is never going away, but temptation is not the same as sin, and you can say no to it.

Look at what happens here. This is really important. This is another principle of fighting temptation. The second half of verse 10: "**...he would not listen to her...**" So, that's the first thing he wouldn't do: he wouldn't listen to her. "**...to lie beside her...**" I mean, could you imagine? I guess she says something like, "We won't do anything, but why don't you come lie down with me?" Yeah, sure. "**...or to be with her.**"

So, three different things. Here's the principle: it's easier to stay out of temptation than to get out of temptation. I think most people don't jump into hell. They hang around the edges, and then they fall in. A lot of people think, "I want to get as close to sin as possible without sinning."

Here's something I think is very true. When it comes to Christians, Christians can handle more suffering than they think, and they can handle less temptation than they think. So, I want to encourage you. You can handle more suffering than you think. You watch somebody, and you go, "I don't know if I ever could. If I lost somebody, if I got cancer, I don't..." No. By the grace of God, you could.

I've watched people. By the grace of God, people are much stronger than you think they are, and they can handle a lot more than they think they can. So, the encouraging thing is when it comes to suffering, you can actually handle more than you think. The warning is when it comes to temptation, you can handle way less than you think.

I know this doesn't work in every environment, especially in the egalitarian society we live in today, but I think, as a general rule, as much as you can, not spending time alone with somebody who's not related to you and is of the opposite sex is good for you. This is what's called the *Billy Graham rule*.

Billy Graham was very famous, a good-looking guy, traveling the world. He and his close friends made four commitments. I won't go through them all, but one of the commitments they made for the purity of their ministries was to never be alone in a room with a woman who was not their wife with the door closed.

That's also very important because, we're going to see at the end, nothing could happen, but you could be falsely accused, which is exactly what happened with Joseph. So, it's easier to *stay* out of temptation than to *get* out of temptation, which means you need to have some type of guardrails in your life.

Sometimes they're extreme. When someone is really deep in a sin, the first thing you do is extreme measures. You're like, "All right. Well, no Internet at your house. Give me your smartphone." "No alcohol in the house ever again." "No traveling alone ever again." You have to make those hard... They're called *guardrails*.

"I have these guardrails in my life that don't ever put me in a place where I know I'm going to compromise, because if I get under that much temptation, my passion overrides my will." For some of you, that has been the story of your life again and again and again, and you think you're going to get stronger. Sometimes the strongest person knows where they're weak and doesn't go there.

So, we have to stay out of temptation, because it's easier to stay out of temptation than to get out of temptation. Look at verse 11. ***"But one day, when he went into the house to do his work and none of the men of the house was there in the house..."*** I wonder who organized that...Potiphar's wife. ***"...she caught him by his garment, saying, 'Lie with me.' But he left his garment in her hand and fled and got out of the house."***

When all else fails, you need to flee. That's the principle. This is exactly what the apostle Paul says to a young pastor named Timothy. He says, "Flee youthful lusts." We're told to resist the Devil. If you come home tonight and the Devil is standing on your front porch, you just stand up to him, you quote Scripture, and you say, "Get out of here."

If you come home tonight and your ex-girlfriend is on the porch, you run. You run as far and as fast away from that as you possibly can. You have to put your Nikes on. You have to get out of there. You have to flee. I knew a guy who, when he was tempted with sexual temptation, which would often happen at night when he was by himself... He made a commitment to himself. "When this happens, I'm leaving my house, and I'm going to share the gospel with somebody."

It was both of those things: leaving the house and publicly identifying with Christ. Martin Luther, that famous monk, said when Satan would tempt him, he would get rid of him with a fart. He was like, "I'm going to go into his life, and I'm going to insult him." He was a goofy guy. Don't fart...flee. That's the principle.

He runs away. Now she has the garment. Look here. ***"...she caught him by his garment, saying, 'Lie with me.' But he left his garment in her hand and fled and got out of the house. And as soon as she saw that he had left his garment in her hand..."*** He's always leaving his clothes somewhere, isn't he?

"...and had fled out of the house, she called to the men of her household and said to them, 'See, he has brought among us a Hebrew to laugh at us. He came in to me to lie with me, and I cried out with a loud voice. And as soon as he heard that I lifted up my voice and cried out, he left his garment beside me and fled and got out of the house.'

Then she laid up his garment by her until his master came home, and she told him the same story, saying, 'The Hebrew servant, whom you have brought among us, came in to me to laugh at me. But as soon as I lifted up my voice and cried, he left his garment beside me and fled out of the house.'"

I've talked about this before. Men and women both struggle with this, but this is classic reputation destruction. A more interesting question to ask is...*Why would she turn on him so quickly?* We don't know all of the answers. We're trying to sometimes read between the lines. It's probably two things.

First, she really only viewed him as a sexual object. She didn't love him. She didn't want a life with him. She wanted a good time with him. But I think there's an even deeper thing here. I actually think she viewed herself, which is a big struggle of women in our society today... She viewed herself only as a sexual object, and the most important thing to her was "Am I desirable to men? If I'm not, my life is not worth it, and I'm not valuable."

How many women struggle with this today? They're telling on themselves with all of their social media posts. You look at it, and you go, "I don't know why you're posting that. I don't know if you're willfully blind or not, but you're completely objectifying your own body in this post."

So, Potiphar's wife gets to the place where she says something like, "If I can't have him, nobody can." This is also what happens when you idolize someone. When they go against you, then you demonize them. So, she goes from idolizing to demonizing. She's like, "I'm going to destroy this guy's life." Look at what happens. Verse 19:

"As soon as his master heard the words that his wife spoke to him, 'This is the way your servant treated me,' his anger was kindled. And Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined, and he was there in prison."

The question is...*Why is Potiphar angry?* Well, first of all, rape, or attempted rape, in that culture was a capital offense where you would get the death penalty. I mean, this guy is Potiphar. He's high up in the government, so he should have given Joseph the death penalty. Why didn't he give Joseph the death penalty? Because I don't think he believed his wife.

In other words, why is he angry? Because he has to live with his adulterous wife who he doesn't trust, he had to get rid of his best worker, and his life just got a lot more difficult. So, look at what happens as it ends. I told you it's bookended here. ***"But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the***

sight of the keeper of the prison." So, now Joseph is doing prison ministry from the inside.

"And the keeper of the prison put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners who were in the prison." It sounds a lot like what happened at Potiphar's house. He rises again. ***"Whatever was done there, he was the one who did it. The keeper of the prison paid no attention to anything that was in Joseph's charge, because the LORD was with him. And whatever he did, the LORD made it succeed."***

So, a couple of things. This story ends, and we'll pick it up next week. One of the things we learn about obedience, or faithfulness, is the rewards for faithfulness are enormous, but they're not immediate. Joseph has been falsely accused, and he has had his reputation destroyed.

This is an important principle that people need to learn, especially Christian leaders. You have to trust God for two things. You trust God for your salvation, and then you trust God for your reputation. Joseph lost his cloak, but he kept his character. It's a hard ending to this story, because we have Joseph suffering innocently for somebody else's sin.

I don't know. Whenever we read these stories, we tend to think, "Who am I in this story?" Maybe there's some of Joseph in all of us. I hope so. Maybe there's some of Joseph in us and we're able to say no to temptation. We're able to say no to the adulterous woman. We're able to do it even... Remember, Joseph doesn't even have any accountability and he's able to do this. It's amazing.

But most of us look over our lives and go, "Okay. I wish I was Joseph. I have not always been Joseph." I think we're two other people in the story. When you read this story, I want you to think, "I am Potiphar. Jesus, the greater Joseph, came into my life to serve me, and my whole house is blessed because of Jesus."

But I want you to think even more. Maybe you've never had this thought before. When you read this story, I want you to think... Do you know who we are? We are Potiphar's wife. Because what is Potiphar's wife doing? She's guilty of sin and trying to blame someone else. And how does the story end? It ends with Joseph (now think of Jesus, the greater Joseph), an innocent man, suffering for someone else's sin.

If you're new to Christianity or new to our church, I want you to know that's the actual very center of the gospel, and it's actually the hope of every Christian. The hope of every Christian is that Jesus Christ is the innocent, sinless man who said no to temptation, and then willingly suffered for your sin and mine.

I need to say this as well. I didn't talk about this a lot today, but obviously, in a room this size, there are some of you who have given in to temptation, and you're filled with regret. The Bible says there is grace, forgiveness, and restoration because of what God has done. We really want our church to be a church where people's lives can fall apart.

We don't want your life to fall apart, but we want to be the kind of environment where it's like, "This is a church where your life can fall apart." If someone's life fell apart and they just came to our church for the first time, we're not going to say, "I told you so. Haha." We're going to say, "We're going to help you. This is going to be a place of hope. This is going to be a place of help. This is going to be a place of healing."

I want to warn us, though, as we close that Satan is patient. If you have to deal with something, I want you to deal with it. I don't want you to think you're getting away with something, because he's just waiting for you to be second in command so he can bring a greater reproach on the name of Christ.

The second thing I want to tell you as we close, as we look at Joseph's life... You're not going to hear this anywhere else. I want you to know that purity is possible. We see it in the life of Joseph, a young man in his sexual prime, all alone, with a lot of temptation, and he's able to say no. The only way we can take the next step in any of this is we need to create the type of culture with just a few people where we can talk about our temptations and get the help and accountability we need. Let's pray.

Lord, we've talked about a lot today. We know temptation is coming. It's why there is the prayer in the Lord's Prayer, "Lead us not into temptation." Lord, would you give us the strength to be grateful? Would you give us the strength to count the downside? Lord, I want to give us a moment right here, if there's anyone in this room who, in their heart, just needs to confess, "This is a temptation I'm struggling with. This is a lie I'm believing."

Maybe there are a few in the room, and you just need to commit in your heart right now the next step you're going to do. I think one of the next steps for most people is they need to have one person in their life...just one...where they can talk about their temptations.

Lord, would you protect us? Would you protect us at work, Lord? We want work to be a place of worship and witness, not a place of sin and temptation. We thank you for Jesus. He's our great hope. Our great hope is not that we say no to temptation; our great hope is that Jesus Christ said no to every temptation, and his sinless life is our righteousness. We ask this in his name, amen.