Week 4: *Genesis 39:6b-20*

Hook

Main Point: Flee from sin and maintain your integrity no matter the consequences.

It was 1963 and Duane Pearsall, a businessman and entrepreneur, was nervous. He had invested a sizable amount (including a second mortgage on his home) into a product that was designed to remove electrostatic charges in places such as photo labs and clean rooms – but the product wasn’t working.¹ During a test, Pearsall and his engineer realized that the ion detection meter on the product went haywire, but they didn’t know why.² Then they realized the strange readings only happened when the technician, a chain smoker who was indeed smoking that day, exhaled smoke near the fan inlet of the ion generator. The meter, they realized, was detecting invisible smoke particles. And so, Pearsall and his team had accidentally created an inexpensive method to detect smoke. Pearsall would spend the next 10 years developing and patenting SmokeGard, a smoke alarm that hung from the ceiling, was powered by a battery and would sound an alarm whenever it detected smoke. Soon enough, smoke detectors were in most homes in America.³

Break your Bible Fellowship into small groups and ask them to develop a list of five items for which they wish an alarm would be developed. These could be serious things, such as small movements in a home’s foundation, or casual things, such as an upcoming long conversation.

Q: When your smoke detector begins to sound an alarm, what’s your first reaction?
Q: What kind of safeguards do you have in your life to alert you of dangers to your spiritual walk? (Potential answers might include: an accountability partner, daily time in the Scriptures, Scripture memorization, etc.)

Q: What temptations do the Scriptures warn us against? How are we instructed to respond to these temptations?
Week 4: *Genesis 39:6b-20*

**Book**

**Main Point:** Flee from sin and maintain your integrity no matter the consequences.

**Text Summary:** When Joseph had risen to power in Potiphar’s house, the wife of Potiphar noticed that Joseph was handsome and tried to entice him to lie with her. Joseph refused, out of respect for Potiphar and for God. She continued to pursue him day after day. One day, she grabbed him and he ran from her, leaving his garment in her hand. She told the servants of the household that Joseph had tried to seduce her. Potiphar threw Joseph into prison.

*Genesis 39:6b–12 (starting with “Now Joseph was handsome …”) [Read]*

**Talking Point 1:** Believers are called to flee from sexual immorality.

**Q: How many times did Joseph refuse the advances of Potiphar’s wife?** (We don’t know exactly how many, but it was a lot – “day after day”)

**Q: What were Joseph’s reasons for refusing her advances?**

Potiphar’s wife is painted as pretty brazen in this story. She doesn’t just ask Joseph to lie with her, she demands it (v. 7). The NIV puts an exclamation point at the end of the sentence and the NLT says, “She demanded....”

Adultery was considered a grave sin in the whole ancient Near East, not just among God’s people. In Egypt, adultery with a married woman was both a moral wrong and an actual crime. In Egypt, a married woman convicted of adultery was punished by slitting the nose, because the nose was the most conspicuous part of the face and would make her the most unattractive. The man who slept with her was punished by a thousand blows of the lash.iv

Potiphar’s wife’s actions were especially risky because of who her husband was—the captain of the bodyguard of Pharaoh, “chief of the slaughterers” (chief executioner) and overseer of the prison.v

Even though Joseph rejected her, the woman continued to pursue him and Joseph continued to say no (v. 10). The Bible doesn’t tell us what other things Joseph did besides “just say no,” but it is safe to assume that he tried to avoid being alone with her, possibly even avoided being around her at all. As persistent as Potiphar’s wife was, Joseph was just as persistent in saying no. Avoiding sin takes perseverance, commitment and strength.
The Scriptures tell us specifically to “flee from sexual immorality” because sexual sin is not only sinning against another person and God, it is also sinning against your own body (1 Cor. 6:18). Joseph showed this kind of attitude toward sin. He abstained and abstained and abstained, and then, when she cornered him, he just flat-out ran away, even though it meant leaving his garment in her hand (v. 12). Whether he thought about how that would look or not is unclear, but Joseph just knew he had to get out of there. Joseph may have lost his garment, but he kept his integrity.

Joseph’s wise handling of the situation directly contrasts with the foolish actions of the simple man in Proverbs. Solomon sees a fool walking toward the house of an adulterous woman (Prov. 7:6–9). Instead of running away like Joseph, the foolish man stays and listens to her and she leads him astray with her “smooth talk” (Prov. 7:21). Potiphar’s wife tried to talk Joseph into it every day, but he refused to listen to her (v. 10). By this, Joseph proves to be truly wise.

Q: When you find yourself in a tempting situation, what should you do?

Q: Why do you think the Bible instructs believers to “flee” from sexual immorality instead of “fight against” it?

Q: What safeguards have you placed in your life to keep you from falling to sexual temptation?

Talking Point 2: Our sin not only hurts other people; it is an offense against God.

The first time Potiphar’s wife tried to seduce Joseph, he politely said no and gave her two very legitimate reasons:

– because Potiphar trusted him and he didn’t want to break that trust (vv. 8–9a)

– because lying with her would be a sin against God (v. 9b)

Reason #1: Loyalty to Potiphar

Joseph showed great integrity in his loyalty to his master. Remember, even though he had been given a lot of authority, Joseph was still a slave. He could have been bitter toward his master; he could have seen this as a way to hurt Potiphar.

Instead Joseph showed respect and honor to his master, as the apostle Paul commands slaves to do in the New Testament (Eph. 6:5). Paul tells slaves to obey their masters not only to win their favor, but because it would please God. He said they were to work with integrity and excellence as if they were working for the Lord (Eph. 6:6). Not that Paul is advocating slavery. In
1 Corinthians, Paul advises them to free themselves if they can (1 Cor. 7:21–22). But he is telling believers to be honorable in whatever position they find themselves.

Joseph was faithful and loyal to Potiphar even when his own wife wasn’t. Even when everyone around us is enticing us to do evil, we must stand firm.

Q: What does this tell us about how we should behave toward our superiors, even if we are in a lowly position that we hate? Even if our superiors are not good people?

Q: Why does it matter that believers do whatever job they are given to the best of their ability?

*Reason #2: Loyalty to God*

Joseph knew that adultery wasn’t just a bad thing according to Egyptian law, it was a sin against God. Joseph wasn’t saying no to Potiphar’s wife just because it was illegal, or out of fear of punishment, or even because he believed it to be immoral. But because he didn’t want to disobey God.

The Bible describes sin as not just harm against another person, but against God. When David was confronted with his own sin of adultery, he said to God, “Against You and You only have I sinned” (Ps. 51:4). Not that his sin didn’t also hurt Uriah and Bathsheba, but that, even more importantly, it damaged his relationship with God. This is why Nathan asked David when he confronted him, “Why did you despise the word of the LORD by doing what is evil in his eyes?” (2 Sam. 12:9). He didn’t say, “Why did you take Uriah’s wife from him?” Or “Why did you kill Uriah?” But, “Why did you do what was evil in God’s eyes?” Though hurting people is important, the bigger problem with sin is doing evil, disobeying God.

Q: Why does harboring unrepentant sin do to our relationship with God?

Q: If you find yourself in need of repentance after hurting someone, how should you go about it?

*Genesis 39:13-20 [Read]*

**Talking Point 3:** Even if we are faithful to God and others, we may be falsely accused of evil. What is important is that we maintain our integrity before God.

Potiphar’s wife not only tried to seduce Joseph. When he said no, she turned on him and accused him of trying to “laugh at me” (v. 17). That phrase doesn’t literally mean Joseph stood there and laughed at her; it’s a euphemism. It literally means “to make a mockery of” or make a fool of—to dishonor. To bring shame to her. In verse 14, she says he came “to laugh at us,”
meaning to bring shame to the whole household. Later she is more explicit, even though they already knew what she meant, and says, “He came in to me to lie with me” (v. 14).

By using the euphemism first, she was emphasizing the effect this situation had on Potiphar, trying to push him to get really upset about it, because of the shame brought to him and his entire household. She even tries to put some of the blame on Potiphar himself—the slave you brought here (v. 17). She also emphasizes that Joseph is a foreigner—that Hebrew slave (v. 17), exploiting a long-standing racial tension between Egyptians and foreigners from Canaan. She is really trying to make Potiphar angry.vii

Q: If someone is determined to lie about you like this, what can you do about it?

Q: How can you maintain integrity when you are being falsely accused of something?

As a slave, Joseph would have had no legal rights, so even if he had tried to defend himself to Potiphar, it wouldn’t have mattered. He would not have been given a trial. It is interesting, though, that Potiphar threw him in prison, instead of just killing him.

Some scholars suggest that it’s because Potiphar didn’t really believe the charge about Joseph. Yet, the text says he was very angry (39:19), so that is unlikely. Most likely, it is that Potiphar didn’t want to see Joseph’s talents go to waste. He wanted to punish him and keep him away from his wife, but he expected that Joseph may serve some useful purpose in the prison, which he later would. Remember, Potiphar was in charge of the prison, so he could keep Joseph close by, but keep him out of his household and away from his wife.viii

The word for prison here is “house” and the Scripture says the prison is in “the house of the captain of the guard” (Gen. 40:3), whom we know is Potiphar (39:1). Later, the text says that Joseph asked the officers of Pharaoh who were “with him in custody in his master’s house” (40:7). All of which makes it seem like the prison was some part of Potiphar’s house, though not the main part of the household where he would be around his wife. Though that doesn’t mean it was luxurious accommodations. It was referred to as “confinement” and “custody” (40:3). Also, Joseph called it “the pit” (40:15)—the same word used of the cistern into which his brothers threw him (Gen. 37). This was not a place he wanted to be.

This is where our question from last week about blessing comes back. Our point last week was that if we are faithful to God, He will bless us. But in this story, Joseph is faithful to God and he gets falsely accused and thrown into prison (v. 20). Where is the blessing in that?

To an outsider, it would have looked as if God were no longer blessing Joseph. But if we peek ahead just one verse, the story is quick to tell us—“but the Lord was with Joseph...” (v. 21). We’ll get to the story of that more next week, but for now, this section is a reminder that
sometimes being faithful to God doesn’t get you the CEO position and the money and the power. It gets you falsely accused and thrown into prison. Sometimes blessing isn’t material blessing, it’s learning to lean on God in the midst of trial and suffering.

This is the lesson of Joseph’s story—that no matter what Joseph is going through, ups or downs—God is with him and working it all out for good. Even if it doesn’t look like “blessing” to us, God is using it for good—for Joseph and for the whole world. All of it is blessing.

For Joseph’s part, what is important is that he was faithful to God. No matter what was going on, no matter the consequences. Joseph continued to do what was right and God blessed him and blessed others through him. Can we do the same? No matter what is going on around us, can we focus on doing what is right, even in the midst of evil all around us? Even when we’ve been mistreated, misrepresented or misunderstood? Even when our best friends have turned against us? Even when we think we don’t deserve the treatment we are getting? Even when we can’t see a happy conclusion to the story? Or what God is doing in the middle of the storm? Can we trust in Him, that if we are faithful, He will bless us?

Q: If you were Joseph, what would you say to God after being thrown into prison for something you didn’t do?

Q: How can we keep moving forward in faith even when we experience setbacks?

Q: Have you ever seen anyone maintain his or her integrity in a very difficult situation? How did that person do it? What happened in the long run?

Q: Have can we have the strength to do the right thing no matter what?

Q: How can we have the wisdom to know what the right thing is?

Q: How will doing the right thing be what is best for us in the long run, even if it causes temporary pain and suffering?
**Week 4: Genesis 39:6b-20**

**Took**

**Main Point:** Flee from sin and maintain your integrity no matter the consequences.

When introduced to a stressful situation, you might be triggered to experience a physiological reaction, called the “fight-or-flight” response. You might begin to sweat, feel your heart pound, muscles tense and breath quicken. Almost instantaneously, you make a decision to stand and fight the threat or flee to safety.\(^{ix}\)

But when it comes to sexual immorality, there is no “fight” about it—believers are instructed to flee. Scripture teaches that we are to resist the Devil (James 4:7) but in the face of sexual immorality, we are to flee (1 Cor. 6:18). Sexual sin is unique and we, like Joseph, are to run from it.

**Teacher, lead your group in a time of individual prayer. Challenge them to:**

- Ask the Lord to raise to mind potential blind spots in which sexual temptation may be given a foothold.
- Ask the Lord to reveal any sexual immorality in your life. If needed, seek repentance.
- Pray that the Lord would help you to be above reproach in the area of sexual immorality and thereby being a powerful witness for Christ.

**CHALLENGES:**

**THINK:** *How can you resist temptation?* In what areas do you find yourself most tempted to fall? What triggers, circumstances or people pull you into temptation? How can you set up good boundaries in your life to keep you from temptation? How can you lean on God in times of temptation?

**PRAY:** *For strength and wisdom* — That God will give you the strength to stand firm, to “just say no” again and again and again. To do the right thing in the midst of temptation. That God will give you the wisdom to know what the right thing is and the wisdom to stay away from tempting situations and people.

**ACT:** *Make a plan:* Discuss with your spouse or accountability partner safeguards you might put in place to be proactive in guarding yourself from sexual sin. Consider things such as avoiding alone-time with people of the opposite gender and installing software such as Covenant Eyes on your electronic devices.\(^{x}\)
vii ESV Study Bible (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).
ix https://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/understanding-the-stress-response
x https://www.covenanteyes.com/