

Purity, Week 1

Hook



Main Point: Pursue sexual purity.

Current Event: Recently in Nebraska, a man was killed when a tree he was standing near suddenly fell, striking him. According to Dan Randall, he and his two friends were standing around, talking to each other when they heard a “pop, pop and the whole tree came down.” Unfortunately, their friend Matthew Weaver was killed when the falling branches struck him on the head. According to Nebraska State Patrol Sgt. Tim Wangler, the initial findings indicated the tree collapsed because of long-term termite damage.¹

While the tree had a strong outward appearance, it was rotten on the inside. The structural instability of this tree didn’t happen overnight, but rather slowly deteriorated as termites took up residence. Those tiny insects, over time, caused significant damage that eventually led to dire consequences.

As we talk about sexual purity over the next two weeks, it is important that we learn how to avoid small temptations. Unfortunately, we all know things, situations and even people in life

¹ http://lexch.com/townnews/botany/tree-rotted-from-termites-falls-killing-man-injuring-another/article_0c60c39a-42bf-11e6-b247-43672cbea3d7.html

that, if we do not guard against them, could lead our hearts astray. Learning to avoid these small enticements will protect our lives from potentially devastating consequences.

How do small decisions impact your progress in Christian maturity?

What are some small, positive decisions you have made that led to big, positive outcomes?

Describe a person in the Bible whose decisions to give in to small temptations led to large-scale consequences.

Purity, Week 1

Book

Main Point: Pursue sexual purity.

Genesis 39:1–6 (Read)

Sub Point: God provides for the believer's needs.

Joseph lived a life of favor, but it was far from problem-free. His father, Jacob, loved him more than any of his other 11 sons, and he gave Joseph a position of authority over his brothers. In addition to a place of honor, some commentators believe that Jacob intended to give Joseph an unequally large part of the family inheritance.² This was certainly abnormal in a culture that valued and honored the first-born son more than other siblings.

Jacob wasn't the only one with plans for Joseph. God gave the young man two visions, each communicating to Joseph that he would be elevated over the whole household of Jacob.³ The 17-year-old Joseph acted as a 17-year-old boy would—he shared the exciting news with his family. Burning with jealousy and anger, Joseph's brothers plotted against him, threw him into a well, and then sold him into slavery.

Joseph's story seems hopeless—betrayed and now enslaved, the young man's options are limited. But in a destiny-altering phrase, the Scriptures record a turning point: "The Lord was with Joseph." God refused to abandon Joseph as his brothers had. Instead, the young man was given favor, causing all of his work to succeed. Potiphar, Joseph's master and captain of the Egyptian guard, noted this supernaturally granted aptitude and placed him over all that he had. Potiphar benefited from Joseph's relationship with the Father; he had God's man in his corner and was rewarded for his choice. The results of Joseph's work put Potiphar at such ease that he relinquished concern of every matter.

Years later, Joseph would reflect on his brothers' choice and intentions: "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good" (Genesis 50:20). Joseph's life is a testament to God's provision for the faithful; time and again Joseph relied on the Lord, and time and again God provided.

² Allen P. Ross, "Genesis," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 87.

³ Ibid.

It would have been easy for someone like Joseph to feel as if God had forgotten him. But the Scriptures affirm that God knows and will provide for the needs of His children; Matthew 6:31–33 speaks to this point:

Do not worry then, saying, “What will we eat?” or “What will we drink?” or “What will we wear for clothing?” For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

Sin often enters the picture when the believer questions God’s ability or intention to provide. Jesus instructs His followers to recognize that the Father knows their needs and will meet them; this leads the believer to seek Him first. Despite sometimes dire circumstances, the believer is never left abandoned or forgotten. God sees you and will take care of you.

If you were in Joseph’s position and had been betrayed by your family, how might you have reacted? How does someone keep a hopeful attitude through betrayal and tragedy?

How does a believer who is facing disappointment battle viewing himself as a victim?

Describe a time in your life when you allowed yourself to feel victimized. How did it affect your relationship with the Lord?

Genesis 39:6–10 (Read)

Sub Point: Temptation can be fought.

As temptation does, it found Joseph. In his response to sexual advances by Potiphar’s wife, Joseph provides wisdom in how to deal with sexual temptation.

Consider others (8). Even if Potiphar’s wife was not thinking of her husband, Joseph was. The young man immediately considered the consequences that an affair would heap on to his master. Joseph considered the relationship and trust that he had cultivated with Potiphar and was not willing to destroy those things.

Recognize what’s at stake (8–9). Joseph had much to lose; God had blessed him with a life of influence and responsibility. Choosing to commit a sexual sin would have destroyed all that Joseph had. Destruction is exactly what Satan desires to sow in the lives of believers; Jesus describes the Enemy’s role in John 10:10: “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy.” Believers would do well to identify those things that would be lost to the Enemy if temptation led to sin.

Take a moment now to list out at least five things on a sheet of paper that you would lose if you participated in a sexual sin.

Know that sexual sin is a sin against God (9). Certainly if Joshua had obliged Potiphar's wife, he would have been sinning against Potiphar. But Joseph knew that his sin would ultimately be before God Himself. The same principle is true for believers today. First Corinthians 6:18–20 explains that the Christian's body is a dwelling place for the Holy Spirit, intended to be used and dedicated to the purposes of the Lord. Sexual sin, therefore, is a misappropriation of God's property (the believer's body).

Remember how God has blessed you (9). The Lord was with Joseph and His presence was *the* contributing factor to Joseph's success. Choosing to engage in sexual sin would certainly strain Joseph's relationship with the One who had provided him the victories that he had enjoyed; choosing sin over faithfulness risks losing the blessing of being in God's will. Psalm 37:23–24 speaks to God's interaction with the obedient:

*The steps of a man are established by the Lord,
when he delights in his way;
though he fall, he shall not be cast headlong,
for the Lord upholds his hand.*

Create a plan of action (10). Creating plans for contingencies is wise; creating plans for inevitabilities is vital. The apostle Paul describes the commonality of temptation in 1 Corinthians 10:12–13

Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. 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.

Although it cloaks itself in different forms in different ages, sexual temptation has remained a constant throughout history. But just because it is persistent does not mean it is unbeatable. God is faithful and, when relied upon, provides the strength to meet and endure temptation; this process grows believers and deepens one's dependence on the Lord.

Potiphar's wife's continual pursuit of Joseph led him to develop a strategy to fight back. Instead of staring down temptation each day in the form of a conversation with Potiphar's wife, Joseph rearranged his schedule to avoid her as much as possible.

Jesus spoke of intentionality in dealing with temptations that cause one to sin in Mark 9:43–47:

And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell.

In these verses, Jesus employs hyperbole to make the point that it is better to lose the things of this world and have a right relationship with God than indulge in every temptation the world has to offer and be disconnected from the Father. In other words, whatever might divide the believer's allegiance between the world and Jesus must be identified and removed immediately. The principle stands trustworthy today; identify what leads to sin and take decisive action to remove that thing. In Joseph's case, he identified the temptation (time alone with Potiphar's wife) and removed it (refused to be in the same room with her).

Be consistent (10). The Bible records that Joseph was tempted "day after day," and "day after day" he refused to listen to the promiscuous woman. Moral failure happens in the blink of an eye; believers must develop strategies to battle temptation and implement them time and again.

Without using names, describe a time when someone you love or followed fell prey to sexual sin. What did it cost that person?

What would you risk losing if you chose to engage in sexual sin?

Describe Joseph's plan to avoid giving in to sexual sin. What are some safeguards that you have in your life to protect you from sexual temptation?

Genesis 39:11–23

Sub Point: Run from sexual immorality.

Despite Joseph's best efforts, Potiphar's wife catches him alone and makes her advance. As she has Joseph by his coat, the young man's strategy becomes extremely simple: he runs. Literally leaving his coat in the hands of his pursuer, Joseph runs.

In 1 Corinthians 6:18–20, the Scripture advocates Joseph's approach:

Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your

body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

In these verses, Paul provides a straightforward approach to dealing with sexual sin—run from it. Just as Joseph ran from Potiphar’s wife, believers today are to flee when confronted with this unique type of temptation. Although it is not the most egregious sin (Matthew 12:32), sexual immorality is treated uniquely in the Bible. Because sexual sin is different. Nothing else involves all of us, all we are, like sex does.⁴

Joseph is rewarded for his noble actions by being falsely accused of scandal and sent to prison. Once again the young man is unjustly punished, facing a bleak future and suffering as the result of the sins of others. And yet, in the story’s darkest moment, the reader happens upon a familiar phrase: “But the LORD was with Joseph.” He chose integrity, and despite the cruel actions of Potiphar’s wife, Joseph enjoyed the favor of God. Just as the Father was with Joseph in the dark pit, He would now be with Joseph in prison. Potiphar’s household may have stripped Joseph of his position and the honor of men that would accompany it, but Joseph was determined to remain true to the statutes of his God. He lost everything in order to maintain sexual purity. But Joseph knew that the embarrassment, the false accusations, even prison were all worth it.

In a culture where sex is everywhere (magazines, television, movies, even on telephones) how does someone “flee (or run) from sexual immorality”?

Why do you think the Bible treats sexual sin with such aggressiveness?

Describe some “embarrassing” steps that would help you protect your purity.

⁴ Um, Stephen T. [2015] *Preaching the Word Commentary: 1 Corinthians*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, p. 118.

Purity, Week 1

Took



Main Point: Pursue sexual purity.

Lesson Conclusion: Joseph's example provides insight for today's living. He understood that his success came from the Lord and chose to live his life in the center of God's will. Just as Joseph did, we must choose to pursue sexual purity aggressively, understanding that this is God's desire for our lives.

Challenge

Repent of sexual immorality. Prayerfully examine yourself concerning your sexual purity. Ask the Lord to bring to mind any impure thought or action that you have yet to repent of. The Lord is faithful to forgive.

Commit to glorifying God in your body. No matter past mistakes, choose today to begin to glorify God in your body. Every believer is purchased with a price, owing his complete allegiance to the Lord Jesus. Live the remainder of your days with an intentionality concerning your sexual purity, acknowledging that your body is a temple for the Holy Spirit.

Commit to developing safeguards. The best time to develop a plan to fight temptation is before you are tempted. In the safety of the classroom, in the stillness of the moment, commit to yourself and the Lord that you will establish boundaries in your life to help protect your purity. The Lord will always provide a way to avoid sin (1 Corinthians 10:12–13) but it requires that you commit to fight. Fight for your purity; fight for the purity of your family. One great tool available to assist you in your efforts to develop safeguards is an online accountability software called Covenant Eyes. This resource monitors the websites you have visited, the search terms you have used, and the YouTube videos you have watched, and lists them in an easy-to-read report that is designed to start a conversation about healthy online habits. This report is shared weekly with an accountability partner of your choosing. For more information, visit www.covenanteyes.com.