

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, Wash,
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Genesis 39:6b-12,16-23

An Inspiring Young Man Who Said "No!"

- 1. An inspiration at times of temptation**
- 2. An inspiration at times of unjust suffering**

Hymns: 465 – 536

All Scripture quotations from the NIV

Genesis 39:6-12,16-23 –

Now Joseph was well-built and handsome, and after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, "Come to bed with me!" But he refused. "With me in charge," he told her, "my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her.

One day he went into the house to attend to his duties, and none of the household servants was inside. She caught him by his cloak and said, "Come to bed with me!" But he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house...

She kept his cloak beside her until his master came home. Then she told him this story: "That Hebrew slave you brought us came to me to make sport of me. But as soon as I screamed for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house."

When his master heard the story his wife told him, saying, "This is how your slave treated me," he burned with anger. Joseph's master took him and put him in prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined.

But while Joseph was there in the prison, the LORD was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden. So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held

in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there. The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care, because the LORD was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did.

I have a running joke with one of our church members. It has to do with the fact that they just can't say "No." It runs them into trouble because they agree to help with this project and that project and end up over-committing themselves to too many things. But the word "No" is not in their vocabulary, and the next time they're asked to help with a meal, event, or project they'll probably agree to it again.

Not being able to say "No" has run people into problems much more serious than a full schedule. Many a person has not said "No" to a temptation and has suffered deep regret and distress because of it. Today, we focus on a young man from the Old Testament who did say "No." His ability to do so serves as an inspiration to us. Let's consider: "**Joseph, An Inspiring Young Man Who Said 'No.'**" He serves as:

- 1. An inspiration at times of temptation**
- 2. An inspiration at times of unjust suffering**

1 – We read in Genesis 39: "*Now Joseph was well-built and handsome, and after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, "Come to bed with me!"*" Remember Joseph?

- He was the second-youngest son of the 12 sons of Jacob. His mother was the beautiful and beloved Rachel, whom Jacob had worked 14 years for. She later died giving birth to his brother Benjamin.
- It was only natural that, unfortunately, these two became Jacob's favorite sons. Jacob gave Joseph the special coat of many colors and treated him specially.
- Therefore, he was hated by his brothers. This was compounded by the fact that he shared his dreams of being lord over his brothers with them, prompting them to call him the "dreamer." One day they threw him into a dry cistern in the fields and then sold him to slave traders headed for Egypt.
- In Egypt he was sold on the slave market to an official named Potiphar. The Lord blessed Joseph's work in Potiphar's

house and he rose to a position of responsibility.

Then things changed. Potiphar's wife noticed that Joseph was (literally), "handsome of shape" and "handsome to look at." Today females would say he was tall, dark, and handsome. She invited him to go to bed with her.

This was a tough temptation for Joseph for a number of reasons:

- Think about the stage of life Joseph was in as a young, normal male. The fires of lust in the pulsating years of youth have tempted many a young man. It very well may be one of the most difficult temptations that young people face. Many young people would not even blink at the temptation to steal their friend's money or strike a person in the face, but the temptation to sexual sin can be very difficult.
- This temptation was heightened by the fact that it was made by an older woman who was the wife of his master. This enticement came from a high place! Joseph not only had the alluring temptation of an older woman, but a temptation that might be a stepping stone to advancement to more opportunities.
- To add to this, it was a common sin, not unknown in Egypt. We have records and stories of the lasciviousness of Egyptian wives and women. The world around Joseph did him no favors in deflecting this temptation.
- To add to this, it could have been a secret affair. Joseph was definitely far from home where he had been raised to follow God's laws. And if he played his cards right, he could have a secretive, long-running affair on his hands.
- To add to this more, we read in verse 10, *"She spoke to Joseph day after day."* This was not an isolated incident, but she came at him with repeated advances. How many times did he have to hear her and come up with the right answer? Warding off temptation for one big occasion is very possible, but how difficult when it repeatedly comes!

- Finally, it was a temptation that she brought forcefully. She put her hands on him and grabbed his clothing!

In the face of all this, Joseph refused! Why would he refuse to give in to her?

1. We read, *"With me in charge," he told her, "my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. No one is greater in this house than I am.* Joseph knew that his master had entrusted great responsibility to him. He trusted him to run the affairs of the house well. He could not violate his trust.
2. *"My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife."* This was the wife of another. Even though the 6th Commandment hadn't been given in its exact form to Moses, this is a basic law of right and wrong that Joseph knew very well. He could sin against another man by having his wife.
3. *"How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?"* Here we see the greatest reason of all that Joseph could not give in to Potiphar's wife's advances. It was a sin against his good and gracious God. The greatest reason was not that he might catch a sexually transmitted disease or that she might have an unwanted pregnancy. It was that it would be a sin against his holy God.

Here we pause for inspiration from this young man. How are our efforts at resisting temptation?

Young people, we could especially think about you today, since Joseph was a young man at that time. What temptations toward immorality are thrown your way? After all, it doesn't seem like times change much.

I have had many teens and young people ask me this question about dating and relationships: "How far can a Christian go?" They're wondering how intimate a person can get with another before they are married. How far can they go? Isn't a better question, "Why would you want to flirt with the line between right and wrong?" Why wander toward that line and go "as far as you can go?" Isn't it much better to stay away from that line in your life of purity?

Other teens and young adults don't even ask the question. They plunge right into immorality because they feel they're in love and that this feeling

trumps anything that God has to say about right and wrong.

Temptations continue with the younger generation as some even think about living together before they're rightfully married. A variety of reasons might make them consider this:

- They are in love but aren't sure if they're ready to make a big commitment to each other.
- They want to test out whether they're compatible for marriage.
- They consider marriage just a "piece of paper" to pay for, not remembering that God has instituted marriage and we live under a government that sanctions it also.
- Financially they can save money by sharing the rent. (Although when the pastor asks if they're sharing the same bedroom, the answer usually shows there's more to the situation than money consideration)
- Also, how many haven't taken the role of bored Potiphar's wife and found a reason to commit adultery? Perhaps their spouse is gone more than they'd like. Maybe they feel they've fallen out of love. Perhaps they don't receive the love and affection they feel they deserve. So their marriage promise goes right out the window.

How different this is from, "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God!"

This inspiring lesson isn't just for the younger generation here today. It's for all of us. What temptation, 6th Commandment variety or other, are you having trouble fleeing from? What is your repeated temptation that you have to face every day? Are you running from it? Or into it? Are you on your guard? Or falling into it regularly? How have you failed?

When we realize how wretchedly we have acted, even repeatedly, then we must think about Jesus Christ and his bout with temptation in the Garden of Gethsemane. There he prayed that the cup put before him could pass from him, if it could be possible. He was tempted to abort his mission of going to the cross for the salvation of the world. But after he prayed "not my will, but yours be done," he indeed fulfilled our salvation by his suffering and death the next day. That horrible day that we call "good," Jesus defeated the powers of sin and hell and paid for your sins on the cross. You have forgiveness in him! Praise God!

May we be inspired by this young man that said "No!" May we "watch and pray" that we do not fall into temptation when it comes.

2 – Yet this is not quite the end of the story of Joseph. It's not the end, because Potiphar's wife took action. We read, "*She kept his cloak beside her until his master came home. Then she told him this story: "That Hebrew slave you brought us came to me to make sport of me. But as soon as I screamed for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house."* Potiphar's wife crafted an evil plan with the garment she had wrenched from Joseph. Her lust turned to hate and rage. She planned to lie to her husband to punish the slave who would not give her what she wanted.

We then hear, "*When his master heard the story his wife told him, saying, "This is how your slave treated me," he burned with anger. Joseph's master took him and put him in prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined.*" This is an interesting section of Scripture. Normally, a slave who made an inappropriate mockery of the master's wife would lose his life. But this did not happen. In fact, we hear that Joseph was put in the prison that housed the king's prisoners, perhaps a higher level prison than the regular prison. Whom did Potiphar's anger burn against? Did he suspect his wife's story was a bit fishy?

Regardless, this was not a pleasant situation for Joseph. He had been doing his work faithfully, yet had to bear this lie and the punishment that followed it. He was imprisoned. A bold sinner might exclaim, "Ha! Ha! That little saint! See what obeying God got you? You may as well have had your satisfaction with her!"

However, this was not the end of the story. We hear, "*But while Joseph was there in the prison, the LORD was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden. So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there. The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care, because the LORD was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did.*" The Lord had something to say about this. It's interesting that the name "LORD" is used here. Remember the significance of that name? It is the name of God that is used when his plan of grace is emphasized. He has a plan for his people's salvation that will not be thwarted! Therefore, we hear that the Lord was with Joseph in prison and elevated his status, just like he had in Potiphar's house.

That's not the end of God's plan, though. If you remember the rest of the story with Joseph, you'll remember that God brought about good through his imprisonment that was more far-reaching:

- He would use some future prisoners' dreams as a way Joseph could interpret them and meet Pharaoh.
- Pharaoh would put Joseph in charge of a program that would save much of the world from a seven-year famine.
- The Lord would benefit his people by bringing the clan down to Egypt where they could grow into a great and powerful nation.
- God would continue his plan to bring the Messiah into the world through the nation of Israel.

God brought about much good through Joseph's unjust suffering!

Once again, let's consider how this can be an inspiration to your life. Have you endured unjust suffering? What will happen when you:

- Talk to your cousin about their dirty mouth
- Confront one of our church members that you know is straying from God and from our church
- Stand up for your boss at work when other employees are ripping him down?
- Tell your friend, "I don't want to hear that; it's gossip."
- Confront your sister about her unscriptural divorce she's pursuing

Will there be repercussions? Jesus said, "*If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.*" Jesus also said, "*If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.*" You may not get thrown in prison, but you might very well bear anger, mockery, hate, and isolation.

So what will be your attitude toward such injustice? Don't forget that Jesus also said, "*Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*" (Matthew 5:10) And Peter also wrote, "*If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you... Praise God that you bear that name.*" (1 Peter 4)

May we wait patiently on the Lord as Joseph did. God will lead us through our tribulations to his throne. And as he does, may we realize that even

if we lose some of the things that the present world offers, we have treasures that will not be shaken out of our hands: Grace, forgiveness, peace, hope, and heaven. All this we have eternally through Jesus who shed his blood for us!

So do you have trouble saying "No?" Is it a word that's not in your vocabulary? Of course after looking at Joseph, we're not talking about over-committing your schedule. We're talking about temptation and ridicule. May God move us to be inspired by this young man Joseph who said "No" long ago. And may we also say no to temptation, bearing any unjust suffering that may come our way. May God help us to bear such suffering when we faithfully stand on his side. Amen.