

STUDY NUMBER TWO - Genesis 39:1-23

INTRODUCTION:

W. Graham Scroggie in his book *Tested by Temptation* says,

"He who most closely follows God will be most closely followed by the devil. Never can we engage in any act of true surrender without exposing ourselves to the onslaught of this great foe. You have but to pursue the path of loyal obedience to the known will of God and you shall certainly have Diabolus in hot pursuit of you. Innocent and necessary wants may be the devil's levers to overturn our souls. All our bodily appetites and natural cravings should be satisfied only in the will of God and for His glory; never at the instigation of the devil or the selfish notions of the flesh."

Donald Grey Barnhouse says, "I once heard the story of the dear old colored man who lived such a life of triumph with the Lord that he was asked, 'What do you do when you are tempted?' And he answered, 'I just pray, "Lord, your property is in danger!"' And we are His property. He has redeemed us at such a price that He will take care of us; He loves us, and will bring us through."

S. Craig Glickman in his book *Knowing Christ* says,

"But one last thing must be remembered. Apart from the same help He received, we cannot imitate the victory He won. At the very beginning of the temptation account, we are informed that Christ was led and strengthened by the Holy Spirit. Only His help will complete the conditions necessary for our victory in spiritual struggles. Even Satan himself will not defeat the ones in whom the Word and the Spirit are united in a willing heart."
p.59

Gary Inrig in his book *Quality Friendship: The Risks and Rewards* says, "C. S. Lewis reminds us, Good and evil both increase at compound interest. That is why the little decisions you and I make every day are of such infinite importance. The smallest good act today is the capture of a strategic point from which a few months later you may be able to go on to victories you never dreamed of. An apparently trivial indulgence in lust or in anger today is the loss of a ridge or railway line or bridgehead from which the enemy may launch an attack otherwise impossible."

Charles Swindoll in his book *Three Steps Forward, Two Steps Back* quotes from Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his book on *Temptation* when he says:

In our members there is a slumbering inclination towards desire which is both sudden and fierce. With irresistible power desire seizes mastery over the flesh. All at once a secret, smouldering fire is kindled. The flesh burns and is in flames. It makes no difference whether it is sexual desire, or ambition, or vanity, or desire for revenge, or love of fame and power, or greed for money, or finally, that strange desire for the beauty of the world, or nature. Joy in God is...extinguished in us and we seek all our joy in the creature. At this moment God is quite unreal to us, he loses all reality, and only desire for the creature is real; the only reality is the devil. Satan does not here fill us with hatred of God, but with forgetfulness of God. And now his falsehood is added to this proof of strength. The lust thus aroused envelops the mind and will of man in deepest darkness. The powers of clear discrimination and of decision are taken from us. The questions present themselves: "Is what the flesh desires really sin in this case?" "Is it really not permitted to me, yes--expected of me, now, here, in my particular situation, to appease desire?" The tempter puts me in a privileged position as he tried to put the hungry Son of God in a privileged position. I boast of my privilege against God.

It is here that everything within me rises up against the Word of God.
p.99

(Swindoll)

Mark Antony was known as the "silver-throated orator of Rome." He was a brilliant statesman, magnificent in battle, courageous, and strong. And he was handsome. As far as personal qualities are concerned, he could have become a world ruler. But he had the very vulnerable and fatal flaw of moral weakness, so much so that on one occasion his personal tutor shouted into his face, "Oh, Marcus, oh, colossal child! Able to conquer the world, but unable to resist a temptation."

That indictment, I'm afraid, applies not just to Mark Antony, and not just to the people of the unsaved world. If the truth were known, it is applicable to many in the evangelical ranks. We all face temptation, and it is a very real fact that many do not yet know how to resist it and overcome it when it appears.
p.85

We left Joseph in our last study on his way to Egypt as a slave being sold by his brothers.

The intense hatred of the brothers for Joseph was due to the fact that their father Jacob loved him more dearly than the rest because he was a child of his old age and

the first born child to Rachel his much loved wife. They also hated him because of the preferential treatment which he received from his father in the gift of a coat which set him off as something special. They also hated him because of the dreams which he had which predicted his own superiority.

The opportunity to do something to Joseph came when Jacob his father sent Joseph on a mission to see how the brothers were doing in shepherding the flock. Upon arrival, the brothers decided first to kill him, and then Reuben intervened and suggested that they throw him into a pit. Then when the Ishmaelites came by going south to Egypt, they sold Joseph for twenty pieces of silver and lied to their father Jacob by showing him a blood-spattered coat which they had stripped from Joseph and dipped in animal blood.

This brings us now to a continuation of the biography in Genesis 39:1-23.

(Joseph: From Pit to Pinnacle by Charles R. Swindoll)

Joseph is a classic example. He embodies some of the most significant truths in all of Scripture. Although a man just like us, Joseph blazes a new trail through a jungle of mistreatment, false accusations, undeserved punishment, and gross misunderstanding. He exemplifies forgiveness, freedom from bitterness, and an unbelievably positive attitude toward those who had done him harm. From one episode to the next, you will literally shake your head in amazement. That's the way it is when mere humanity incarnates divine truth. My prayer is that this principle will not stop with Joseph.

v. 1 Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. Potiphar, an Egyptian who was one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him there.

What is going on in the life of Joseph right now reminds us of:

Philippians 2:6, 7

Who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, and being made in the likeness of men.

Joseph is only 17 years of age. He has probably never been away from home before, and now he has to face the horrible trip in the slave train to Egypt, a dry and dusty 250-mile trip overland; then once there, the trying experiences of the market, wondering who is going to be the one to purchase him as a slave; knowing that his future destiny is dependent upon having a good master.

The great comforting factor behind all this is that God is in control of everything.

I wonder if Joseph had a similar experience to his father Jacob when he spent his first night away from home in Genesis 28: beginning at v. 10

Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Haran. When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night, because the sun had set; taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head, and lay down to sleep. He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. There above it stood the Lord, and He said, "I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac; I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south; all peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land; I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."

(Has Life Given You a Lemon...Make Lemonade by Robert D. Foster)

"I am like a pelican of the wilderness: I am like an owl of the desert. I watch, and am as a sparrow alone upon the house top." (*Psalms 102:6,7*)

To feel alone is not the same as to be alone. One is feeling . . . the other fact! The facts remain . . . God is there just as much as He was with Elijah in the wilderness or the disciples down by the Sea of Galilee.

Consider David during one of his lonely hours . . . and he had plenty of them. He felt like a pelican . . . an owl . . . a sparrow! These are birds of a feather that don't flock together. They are loners. They specialize in solitude. They know nothing of "the warmth of the pack."

Consider Jacob during one of his lonely hours. He was more than circumstantially alone, he was heart lonely. Things had gone from bad to worse. He was so low there was just one way to look and that was . . . up! "And Jacob was left alone . . .

and God blessed
him there."

(cont.)

It is not the mere fact of being a pelican, an owl or a sparrow that is blessed. Not just being alone with ourselves in fruitless introspection. It is being alone with God! "Two are better than one; they come well off in all they undertake, for if one falls the other man can raise his fellow. But woe betide a lonely man who falls, with none to help him up!" (Eccle. 4:9,10)

Psalm 27:13, 14

I am still confident of this: I will see the
goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.
Wait for the Lord; be strong, and take heart;
and wait for the Lord.

His desires are granted in that he is sold into Potiphar's house. He is an Egyptian officer of the king of the land, the captain of the bodyguard. Evidently, he was responsible for carrying out the executions that were deemed necessary by the king, as well as serving as a Secret Service man whenever the Pharaoh was in public. He was head of the F.B.I.

The only problem in working for someone like this is that it is kind of scary. One mistake and whop! off with your head!

v. 2 The Lord was with Joseph and he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master.

What glorious words! "The Lord was with Joseph." This little phrase pretty well summarizes the entire life of Joseph and explains his good success. It was from the Lord's oversight and blessing upon his life that he was able to achieve the great things that were accomplished in his lifetime. Like Abraham it is "Abraham believed God"--we have in that little phrase a summary of his life, and so "and the Lord was with Joseph" summarizes his life.

Hebrews 13:5, 6

Let your way of life be free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you," so that we confidently say, "The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What shall man do to me?"

The results of the Lord being with Joseph is in the next phrase: "and he prospered."

Joshua 1:8

This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success.

Psalms 1

How blessed is the man
who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stand in the path of sinners,
nor sit in the seat of scoffers!
But his delight is in the law of the Lord,
and in His law he meditates day and night.
And he will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water,
which yields its fruit in its season,
and its leaf does not wither;
and in whatever he does, he prospers.

How can we too prosper in the work to which the Lord has called us? The answer to that is found in:

2 Chron. 16:9

For the eyes of the Lord move to and fro throughout the earth, that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His.

As the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, He is looking for the man with an obedient heart to His Word, and a submissive spirit to His

direction.

It is the longing desire of the Lord to accompany us through life. And if we want Him to be with us, we need to tell Him that we want Him to come along.

The reason for Joseph's blessing and prosperity is because of the three F's:

1. He spends time in FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD.
2. His life is characterized by FAITHFULNESS.
3. He is bringing forth FRUIT to the glory of God.

It was Jesus who said, "I am come that they might have life, and they might have it more abundantly."

As Joseph was careful to be obedient to Scripture principles, so he was prospered by the Lord.

"And he lived in the house of his Egyptian master."

This is the place of his new service and responsibility. It's a PLACE OF PREPARATION FOR THE PALACE which is ahead of him.

Yes, this is temporary. Yes, this is part of the PRUNING PROCESS. Yes, this is God at work in adversity.

God is working in the good and bad of life. He is either working at it all, or none at all.

Maybe where God has you right now is a place of preparation for what He has in mind.

The best thing to do is to trust the Lord and just be faithful and wait for Him to reveal the next stages of His will.

(*Ponder This* by Leonard Andrews)

Has not adversity
been the father
of great things?

Throughout history
some of the greatest visions
were born of trial.

Ted W. Engstrom in his book *The Pursuit of Excellence* says,

"Think, for example, of Abraham Lincoln, who was elected president of the United States in 1860. He grew upon on an isolated farm and had only one year of formal education. In those early years he was exposed to barely half a dozen books. In 1832 he lost his job and was defeated in the race for the Illinois legislature. In 1833 he failed in business. In 1834 he was elected to the state legislature but in 1835 his sweetheart died, and in 1836 he had a nervous breakdown. In 1838 he was defeated for Speaker of the House, and in 1843 he was defeated for nomination for Congress. In 1846 he was elected to Congress, but in 1848 lost the renomination. In 1849 he was rejected for a federal land officer appointment, and in 1854 he was defeated for the Senate. In 1856 he was defeated for the nomination of vice-president, and in 1858 he was again defeated for the Senate.

Many people both at home and abroad consider Lincoln to be the greatest president of all time, yet it should be remembered how many failures and defeats marked his life and how humble and unpromising his early beginnings were."

v. 3 When his master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord gave him success in everything he did,

What a glorious thing it is when our lives and deeds bear witness to the fact that the Lord is directing and working in our lives. As we concentrate on our relationship with Him, people are going to see Christ living in us.

Here we have a great attitude in a tough situation.

Joseph was a good witness to his master Potiphar by the way he worked and served.

Colossians 3:23

And whatsoever you do, do heartily as to the Lord, and not unto men.

Joseph is a good servant. He is comfortable with authority over him.

Here is an unbelieving man who is the master of Joseph witnessing what the God of the Hebrews can do in the life of a man who is walking in the ways of the Lord.

1 Peter 3:1, 2, 15

In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior.... but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to every one who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.

Matt. 5:13-16

You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how will it be made salty again? It is good for nothing any more, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do men light a lamp and put it under the peck-measure, but on the lampstand; and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

v. 4 Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household and he entrusted to his care everything he owned.

The work that is going on in Joseph's life is now preparing him for the administrative responsibilities which will be his as he rules over the land of Egypt.

The leadership opportunities are preparing him for bigger things.

It is interesting to note how God in the early days had caused Jacob to give his son administrative responsibilities and leadership to carry out over his brothers. Now Potiphar is doing the same thing because he sees Joseph as one who can be trusted and one who can be charged with a lot of responsibility and will be faithful in carrying it out.

So that Potiphar would not need to be cumbered down with the burdens of the home, he turned over the entire administration to Joseph with all of its responsibilities.

(Iacocca, An Autobiography by Lee Iacocca)

The Japanese worker is highly disciplined. If something's crooked, he'll straighten it. If there's a problem on the assembly line, he'll stop the line until it's fixed. These guys have a lot of pride. They see their work as a mission. You don't hear stories in Japan about workers showing up with a hangover. There's no industrial sabotage and no visible worker alienation. In fact, I once read that some Japanese companies had to fine their supervisors because so many of them insisted on working on holidays as well as on their days off. Could you imagine that happening in Michigan or Ohio?

v. 5 From the time he put him in charge of his household and of all that he owned, the Lord blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph. The blessing of the Lord was on everything Potiphar had, both in the house and in the field.

Simultaneous with Joseph's elevation in leadership, so the Lord blessed Potiphar's house, and He did it on account of Joseph.

"From the time he put him in charge of his household and of all that he owned, the Lord blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph.

This merely amplifies the previous phrase in verse 2: "The Lord was with Joseph and he prospered."

Potiphar was obviously a work-aholic and caught up in all of the details and responsibilities of his job in the administration of Pharaoh. He cannot be troubled with responsibilities on the home front.

v. 6 So he left in Joseph's care everything he had; with Joseph in charge he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate. Now Joseph was well-built and handsome,

Joseph's responsibility was for the entire household, with the exception of meal service, and this was handled by Potiphar himself.

Verse 6 also tells us that "Joseph was well-built and handsome."

The entire period of service in Potiphar's house is probably somewhere in the neighborhood of 8-10 years. When he came down to Egypt, he was seventeen years of age. So we are looking at someone who is in his mid to late twenties. Let's say he's probably 26 or 27 years of age at this time.

Young Jewish boys with their coal black hair and dark eyes and olive complexion are really handsome, and Joseph was no exception.

I can remember the first time we went to Israel and our second oldest daughter Becky went bananas in Israel with all the Israeli young men at the hotel waiting on her hand and foot.

Joseph evidently had plenty of physical work to do because his muscular body gave the impression that he was not only handsome but also well-built.

If he were living today, he would be the epitome of manhood, having spent some time at the health studio pumping iron and being careful with his diet.

v. 7 and after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, "Come to bed with me!"

Potiphar's wife evidently felt neglected and lost in the shuffle, probably because Potiphar's interest lay elsewhere, namely the job that he had with the administration.

Mrs. Potiphar also noticed that Joseph was handsome and well-built.

She invites Joseph to come into her bedroom.

It always seems that after times of unusual blessing we face the severe temptations. It is tough to have "a steady hand with a full cup."

Temptations often come with success and not during struggle.

David, as king of the land, can certainly testify to this fact.

Swindoll in his book *Three Steps Forward, Two Steps Back* says,

Defection most often comes in times of blessing and prosperity, not in times of trial.

Do you know when David sinned? At the zenith of his career. David's life could be charted like a housetop roof--up and then down. He had gone from being a shepherd boy to being the king of Israel. The people loved him; they lauded him with praise. He had never lost on the battlefield. He had expanded the kingdom of Israel to unbelievable heights.

And in this time of prosperity, David plunged to his ruin.

When testings come, we are purified; but when prosperity comes, we are vulnerable. Remember that!

p.175

It's tougher to *remain* victorious than it is to *become* victorious!

p.176

Joseph has first been tested by adversity in the experience of the pit and being sold into slavery, and now he is being tested with regard to sensuality or moral matters.

"And after a while"...In this little phrase we can catch the fact that the Lord providentially controls the events that come into our lives; and He has built a hedge about us. And before we face another experience, He has given us full opportunity to prepare for the next challenge.

Character traits are revealed by means of a crisis, and here Joseph is going to shine in all of his glory and purity.

It is by means of temptation that we see innocence transformed into virtue. We may expect temptation in days of prosperity and ease rather than in those of privation and toil. Not on the glacier slopes of the Alps but in the sunny plains of the valley. Not when the youth is climbing arduously the steep ladder of fame, but when he has entered the golden portals. Not where men frown but where they smile sweet exquisite smiles of flattery. It is there that the tempter lies in wait. Beware if thou goest armed anywhere, thou must above all go armed here. Yet, this is so hard. It is easy to keep the armor on when we cross the desolate mountain pass, struggling against the blast, afraid that any boulder may hide an assassin. It is hard to keep it buckled close when we have reached the happy valley with its sultry air. But unless we keep on there we are lost. Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation. The flesh is weak.

No thoughtful man who knows his own weaknesses can ever dare to affirm his immunity from temptation or the impossibility of his yielding. If he stand, it is only by the grace of God.

Swindoll, in commenting on James 1:14, 15 says,

Temptation that leads to sin always follows the same overall process. Verse 14 begins the process, and verse 15 carries it out. Pay close attention:

Step 1: The bait is dropped.

Step 2: The inner desire is attracted to that bait.

Step 3: Sin occurs when we yield--when we bite the bait.

Step 4: Sin results in tragic consequences--we end up hooked and fried.

I'm using these vivid and analogous terms because of James's terminology. Watch what he wrote:

"But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death." The word "entice" in verse 14 is a fishing term. When you fish, you've got to provide a bait that interests and entices a fish. Where I live, fish like shrimp. You put a juicy little shrimp on the hook and try to keep him alive so he keeps snapping and dancing, just as if he's swimming, and you cast out into the ocean. A big gulf trout cannot resist it, if he sees it. If you handle things just right, you've got a sure strike. Why? Because you have chosen a bait that interests the fish.

Here is that fish--safe, casual, doing whatever fish do. Then the bait drops. He has to reckon with it. I don't know how fish think, but they probably look and think something like, "Wow, that looks great!" And when that fish leaves his hiding place for the bait, he's as good as caught.

So are we.

As long as we remain obedient to the Lord, drawing our strength and our delight from Him, the evil system around us can drop all sorts of bait and it won't seriously interest us. Oh, it's there. But our Lord's Word and power are stronger and more important to us than anything out there.

But when we choose not to obey God and slip out after the bait, we're as good as gone.

v. 8 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.

Joseph refused to go along with the temptation that is presented. He said no.

It's a lot harder to say "no" after once you've said "yes" or "maybe."

Oftentimes, under stress, the wrong decision can be made, too. Esau is an illustration of this--because of his hunger he sells his birthright to Jacob for a mess of pottage.

The temptation is described in 1 John as being:

1. The lust of the flesh
2. The lust of the eyes
3. The pride of life.

For Joseph, he has the natural desires of the flesh, and with eyes he can see the attractiveness of the situation, and certainly to be in this kind of relationship with his master's wife would only minister to his own pride.

The old nature and the new nature within each of us as believers comes in conflict; and the flesh wars against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh.

It is said of Daniel, "He purposed in his heart not to defile himself with the king's meat."

It was Jesus who said, "Man shall not live by bread alone."

Joseph points up the responsibility that he has to his master, and that he is going to answer trust with trust because he has put everything in his house under Joseph's charge; that is, with the exception of his wife.

Joseph demonstrated this earlier in his responsibility to his father Jacob for the administration of Gad, Asher, Dan and Naphtali. And as a result of that, he tells his father what they have been doing.

v. 9 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?"

There are two rights being violated here in this proposal:

1. The first is the right of the husband to his own wife.
2. Secondly, the right that God has in our lives that we would walk openly and purely before Him.

Joseph is no unemotional mummy. He is a normal red-blooded young man in his late twenties. He is flattered by the woman's advances and acutely aware of his own maleness. Joseph found himself enticed, why not? Who will ever know? Nobody will get hurt. Why not get what I can? I am entitled to a little fun, too. Besides, everyone is doing it. And she asked me--she started it. I'm here in the city now, not back home where everyone knows me. I am no longer a kid from the small town. I'm part of a different culture. When in Egypt, do as the Egyptians do. This is the day of the new morality, and I'm lonely. She understands. Maybe I am more of a lover than I dare to think. Why not go ahead. It may even help my career. Besides, if anyone finds out, she'll shield me. It is really the easiest way out of the predicament. Go along just this once. Don't be a prude.

Can you believe it? She wants a little hanky panky!

She thinks I'm something else. Wow! Let's see, I've read all about what I'm supposed to do. This is going to be fun! fun! fun!

John Denver sings a song called "The Cowboy and the Lady"

The cowboy and the lady one stormy night in
Nashville, Tennessee
I'm Mogan David; she's Chablis '59
She's gay nights in Paree; I'm Grand Ole Opry,
Nashville, Tennessee.

The hardest word in any language is the simple word no, and Joseph refused to go along with Potiphar's wife.

The love of Potiphar's wife was far more dangerous than the hatred of his brothers in the previous study.

Joseph asks the ultimate question that leads to victory: "How then could I do this great evil and sin against God?"

J. Dwight Pentecost in his book *Your Adversary, The Devil* says,

"A man needs to examine not only his mind to keep it cleansed, but to examine his affections. What a man knows and loves he ultimately will obey unless that progress is interrupted by the Word of God and the Spirit of God. In 1 Samuel 15:22, Samuel reminds Saul that to obey is better than sacrifice. If a man has received a temptation to his selfish, proud, carnal nature and he begins to love it, the next step is to obey it. The affections must be purified lest we serve sin." p.136

"How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?"

(*The Rebirth of America* by The Arthur S. DeMoss Foundation)

God says, "Thou shalt not kill." Americans gave murder a new name and indifferently aborted 1,374,000 unborn babies last year (1984) alone. Many tried to camouflage sin with new terminology. God calls it drunkenness. We call it alcoholism--a social disease." God calls it "sodomy." We call it "homosexuality--gay rights, an alternate lifestyle." God calls it "perversion." We call it "pornography--adult entertainment." God calls it "immorality." We call it the "new morality." God calls it "cheating." We call it "abnormal social development." With the dissolving of absolutes, America's crime rate has spiraled, until it now costs taxpayers \$2 billion a year. A serious crime is committed every 3.5 seconds, one robbery every 83 seconds, one murder every 27 minutes. Drug addiction and alcoholism are in pandemic proportions. More than 500,000 heroin addicts live in the United States, and 43 million Americans have experimented with marijuana. The United States now has more than 9 million alcoholics. Suicide is the second largest killer of teenagers. Teenage pregnancies, incest and sexual child abuse draw national attention. More than 2 million Americans a year contract gonorrhea. Pornographic magazines

(more than 20 million a year) and books crowd the newsstands. Video-cassette stores now market the products of X-rated theatres. One out of every two marriages ends in divorce. Some 1.3 million unmarried couples now live together, according to the United States Census Bureau. The IRS has made abortion clinics "charitable" organizations, therefore exempt from taxes.

James Dobson in his book *Love Must Be Tough* says,

Before closing the chapter, a warning must be sounded. Being human and sinful and weak, we are all equipped with a remarkable ability to rationalize. Unless we consciously guard against it, when we experience marital difficulties, we'll begin to search for a way out instead of a way through. Given sufficient time in the crucible, divorce will seem our only option, our long-awaited and much-deserved utopia. And we will begin to push in that direction, at times ignoring the inner voice of God's Spirit, and at other times violating the written principles of God's Word. Either is a grievous act.

I warn all of us against such thought and actions. To carry out that carnal procedure is to short-circuit the better plan God has arranged for His people and, worse than that, is to twist the glorious grace of God into a guilt-relieving excuse for giving us what we have devised instead of accepting what He has designed.

When we look on the contemplated action as sin against God, then we are prepared for victory. This will not only hurt Potiphar and Potiphar's wife and Joseph's, because it would be a sin against his own body, but above all, that it is a sin against God. It was David who confessed, "Against thee and thee only have I sinned."

1 Cor. 10:13

No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able; but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it.

Each summer it is our experience to travel and speak in the Pacific Northwest. One of the things that destroys the beauty of the landscape is the forest fire. I hate forest fires! When we see skeletons of trees on burnt mountainsides that look like splintered toothpicks, we have a hatred for fire. So as we look on the waste of the world and on broken, ugly lives, within us ought to be built a hatred toward sin.

Someone described loving sin as like coming into your child's bedroom, finding the child dead and the snake curled up in the corner of the crib, and taking that snake and making a pet out of it.

Satan tricks us by minimizing sin. He points to the pleasures and not the pain. He tries to keep God out of the picture.

What a model this is for us all. "How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" I for whom Christ died, how could I do this great wickedness? Others call it gaiety, being a little fast, sowing wild oats. I call it sin. How could I do such a wicked thing? Many wink at it, to me it is a great sin. How can I sin against God? It seems only to concern men, but in effect, it is a personal sin against a Holy God.

v. 10 And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her.

The persistence of this temptation is with Joseph every day. "He refused to go to bed with her or even be with her."

Our nature will not respond to the solicitations which are made to it from without. We all know what happens when matches are struck on damp surfaces, and it will be thus with our temptations. The old nature which was once as inflammable as gunpowder will be deprived, so to speak, so long as the Spirit is in possession of its faculty of response, and even more, when the Spirit is in mighty power within. He will take away the very desire to yield to sin and change the old love into hate, so that we shall loathe and shudder at things which we formerly chose and enjoyed.

Swindoll in *Three Steps Forward, Two Steps Back* says,

Let me illustrate it this way. I have an attorney friend who works in conjunction with the Federal Reserve Bank in another city. His work involves numerous trips to the Federal Reserve, where stacks and stacks and stacks of paper money are kept and counted. If you've never seen it, you can't imagine it!

He made the mistake of taking me there one afternoon. We walked in together and were checked all over. (You know how thorough they are if you've ever been there.) We walked down a narrow hallway and were checked again. We were on

closed-circuit security TV cameras all the way. Behind a large section of bulletproof glass (and the construction of the building is such that you cannot get beyond the glass) are people who do nothing but count money. There were numerous stacks of crisp new hundred-dollar bills. He told me there were also stacks of thousand-dollar bills. I asked him, "How can they stand it behind there?"

(revealing something of my own depravity!)

He said, "Everything is fine if they remember their job is only to count pieces of paper. If they begin to concentrate on what those pieces of paper represent, then we have problems."

As long as they are just counting slips of printed paper, that's fine. It could be a stack of magazines or a pile of mail. But if they think, "Hey, this is a spendable hundred-dollar bill I have in my hand!" or "Man, a thousand dollars!"-- then they're in for trouble.

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The power of this temptation is seen in the fact that it is wearing on him day after day. Eve at first was strong but yielded to the second onslaught. Samson held out for awhile and then fell to the cries of a Philistine beauty by the name of Delilah, who said, "How can you say I love you and your heart is not with me."

In moral matters, the weakening of the will takes place with emotional involvement.

There is nothing wrong with being tempted. It is when we yield that we have the product of sin, which then breaks fellowship with our heavenly Father.

A number of summers ago, while I was on one of our sailing trips, I was fishing in the morning in hopes of catching some fish to feed the crew. I hooked a beautiful salmon. When I netted him on one side, I noticed he was beautiful silver, and on the other side, down close to the tail, there was a black gash. I checked with some of the local residents and they said that this salmon had escaped a seal. It was a real close call. The tragedy of the salmon's story is that the salmon escaped the seal and took the hook of my bait.

Swindoll in *Three Steps Forward, Two Steps Back*, in commenting on James 1:13, "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God,'" says,

Have you ever found yourself doing that? The classic illustration is Adam in the garden of Eden. When Adam ate of the fruit, and God came and asked, "What is it

that you have done?" do you remember what Adam said? "The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me from the tree and I ate." What was he saying? "God, You set me up! Here I was, enjoying the bounty and blessing of the garden, and along came this lady that You brought into my life. And if it hadn't been for her, I wouldn't have been tempted."

That thought is exactly what James wanted to contradict. God is not even indirectly engaged in bringing us into sin. To be sure, God certainly permits the events of our lives to take place as they do. But when we yield to the temptations that appear before us, God has had absolutely no part in that act. Instead, it is you and I who have disobeyed and given in to the temptation.

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v. 11 One day he went into the house to attend to his duties, and none of the household servants was inside.

Now the scene changes on this particular occasion. Potiphar's wife realizes this provides an opportunity to be a little bit more aggressive with this handsome, well-built young man. And so she takes the opportunity of isolation for one final thrust of herself toward him.

v. 12 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.

1 Tim. 6:11

But flee from these things, you man of God, and pursue after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness.

2 Tim. 2:22

Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue after righteousness, faith, love and peace with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.

When we face a temptation from the world, Romans 12:2 challenges us not to be conformed to this world but to be transformed from within. When we face a temptation from the devil, James 4:7 says, "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." But when we face a temptation in the flesh, the safest thing to do is to run.

Too oftentimes the tragedy of defeat in our lives is seen by the fact that we don't obey the instructions. We would rather conform to the world, flee the devil, and resist moral temptation. In the process we get whipped on all fronts and lose our witness to the world.

Therefore, the steps Joseph took are the steps we must take:

1. First, in our SPIRIT we stand crucified in the presence of the Lord.
2. Second, in our INTELLECT once and for all we settle it. No one belongs to me but my own wife and husband.
3. Third, in our WILL with decision we break and run. Then we have victory.

You can only give away your virginity once, and it is God's desire that that be given to the husband or wife of His choosing.

In the first place, though stripped of his coat, he had not been stripped of his character. See to it, young people, that no one rob you of that. Everything else may be replaced but that. He was industrious, prompt, diligent, obedient, reliable. When sent to find his brothers, he had carried out not the letter only but the spirit of his father's instructions, and did not rest until he had traced them from Shechem to Dothan. And this was the spirit of his life. He did his work not because he was obliged to do it but because God had given it to him to do and called him to do it. He read the will of God in daily round of the common task. He said to himself, as he said in after light, "God did send me hither." He felt that he was the servant, not so much of Potiphar as of the God of Abraham and Isaac.

Joseph left his garment that he might not lose his body.

He lost his coat, but he kept his character.

Fortified by God's grace he did not fall.

Jude 24 & 25

Now unto Him who is able to guard you against stumbling, to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forevermore.

Swindoll in his book *Three Steps Forward, Two Steps Back* says,

It can be done! Look, we have made resisting temptation some mystical, unreachable, unattainable talent reserved either for the very old or the very pious. Baloney! Saying no is something all of us who belong to Christ can do. There's nothing magical about it. You simply put Jesus Christ at the helm of your life and say NO!

I think it was John Wesley who said: "Give me men who love nothing but God and hate nothing but sin." That's it precisely. The Lord will give you the power to stand up (or run) and say no when the tempter comes.

I like that! He took off. He ran like mad. She got the garment, and he (eventually) got his reward. By the way, there's a name for folks who linger and try to reason with lust: victim.

(*Joseph* by F. B. Meyer)

"Choose for us, Lord, nor let our weak preferring
Cheat us of good Thou hast for us designed:
Choose for us, Lord; Thy wisdom is unerring,
And we are fools and blind.

"Let us press on, in patient self-denial,
Accept the hardship, shrink not from the loss:
Our portion lies beyond the hour of trial,
Our crown beyond the cross."
W. H. Burleigh.

(*Joseph: From Pit to Pinnacle* by Charles R. Swindoll)

With wry cynicism, the late Irish poet Oscar Wilde wrote: "I can resist everything except temptation" and "The only way to get rid of temptation is to yield to it." Wrong, but common, counsel. Yielding to temptation is much more popular and exhilarating than resisting it. The Bible does not pass over those who yielded:

Moses, Noah, David, Samson, Gehazi, Jacob, numerous Israeli kings, even some prophets. The paths of their lives are strewn with the litter of their remorse and shame. But there is a sterling example of one who resisted its persistent, alluring offer. Although he could have cuddled lust, inhaled its heady perfume, enjoyed its warm compromise (temporarily, that is), Joseph staunchly refused. He, in fact, did more than resist. He *ran*, as the New Testament commands us to do. Let those of us who stand today take heed, lest we fall tomorrow.

This is the second time that he has been stripped of his garment:

The first in violence; and now in lust.

The first of necessity; now of choice.

The first to deceive his father; and now his master.

Matthew Henry says, "It is better to lose a good coat than a good conscience."

Piety has no longitude or latitude. The piety in Egypt is the same as the piety in Canaan.

God ultimately is the answer to our temptation.

v. 13 When she saw that he had left his cloak in her hand and had run out of the house,

v.14 she called her household servants. "Look," she said to them, "this Hebrew has been brought to us to make sport of us! He came in here to sleep with me, but I screamed.

When you hear those words, "I screamed," you just find your emotions rising up from within saying, "Uh-huh."

Intense hatred follows illicit satisfaction of passion.
The strongest motivation is satisfaction of pride.

Hell has no fury like a woman scorned.

2 Samuel 13:10ff

Then Amnon said to Tamar, "Bring the food here into my bedroom, so I may eat from your hand." And Tamar took the bread she had prepared and brought it to her brother Amnon in his bedroom. But when she took it to him to eat, he grabbed her and said, "Come to bed with me, my sister." "Don't, my brother," she said to him, "don't force me. Such a thing should not be done in Israel; don't do this wicked thing! What about me, where could I get rid of my disgrace? And what about you, you would be like one of the wicked fools in Israel. Please speak to the king, he will not keep me from being married to you." But he refused to listen to her; and since he was stronger than she, he raped her. Then Amnon hated her with intense hatred; in fact, he hated her more than he had loved her. Amnon said to her, "Get up, and get out!"

As soon as she realized that he had left his garment and gone, she made defense of herself by using the garment to prove the fact that Joseph was really trying to do something wrong in this situation.

v. 15 When he heard me scream for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house."

And now she finishes her story by pointing up the fact that when he tried to do something she screamed and then he fled.

v. 16 She kept his cloak beside her until his master came home.

v. 17 Then she told him this story: "That Hebrew slave you brought us came to me to make sport of me.

v.18 But as soon as I screamed for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house."

She waits until Potiphar comes home and then tells him the same story that she has just been sharing previously with the other servants.

v. 19 When his master heard the story his wife told him, saying, "This is how your slave treated me," he burned with anger.

Once she has shared her story with Potiphar, he becomes very angry.

v. 20 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,

v. 21 the Lord was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden.

Between the PIT and the PRISON there was only a transcient gleam of sunlight and prosperity. The sky of Joseph's life was again soon overcast, for when Potiphar heard the false but plausible statement of his wife and saw the garment in her hand which he recognized as Joseph's, his wrath flamed up. He would hear no words of explanation but thrust him at once into the state prison, of which he had the oversight and charge.

When you find yourself in the cellar of adversity, start looking around for the wine.

Boy, God, you sure have a funny way of fulfilling dreams.

Psalms 105:17, 18

And he sent a man before them: Joseph sold as a slave. They bruised his feet with shackles; his neck was put in irons.

Adultery was considered a very serious crime. The attempt at adultery involved 1,000 blows, and rape on a free Roman was still much more severe than that.

Potiphar could have killed Joseph on this occasion, but I think he must have had some questions in the back of his mind about the story of his wife. He just could not believe that Joseph was guilty in his heart of hearts.

Sensual love so suddenly changes into hatred, and now Joseph finds himself in prison. Wherever the Lord's providence leads us, His grace will sustain us. If the Lord is with us, we will always be on top of our circumstances.

We often say, "How are you doing?" And we hear the statement, "Oh, all right, under the circumstances."

God never meant for us to be "under the circumstances." Remember, He squeezes us in circumstances so His love can flow out!

2 Cor. 4:7-9

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels or cracked pots, that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves; we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed;

It would have been easy for Joseph to be bitter in this situation, but instead he became kind and tender. The more he was afflicted, the more his heart was filled with grace.

(Ponder This by Leonard Andrews)

Have you yet observed
that no one
escapes heartbreak,
loss and calamity?

These are the experiences of life
just as surely as joy,
fulfillment

and love.

(Joseph: God's Man in Egypt by Leslie Flynn)

When relating her sufferings in the Ravensbruck concentration camp in World War II, Corrie ten Boom often shows the reverse side of an embroidered bookmark which seems to be nothing but a senseless mass of tangled threads. Then she turns the bookmark to the front, where the threads spell out in a beautiful design, *God is Love*. Then she quotes,

My life is but a weaving
Between my Lord and me;
I cannot choose the colors
He worketh steadily.
Ofttimes He weaveth sorrow,
And I in foolish pride
Forget He sees the upper,
And I, the under side.

Not till the loom is silent
And the shuttles cease to fly
Shall God unroll the canvas
And explain the reason why
The dark threads are as needful
In the Weaver's skillful hand
As the threads of gold and silver
In the pattern he has planned.
--from Grant Colfax Tullar's
poem, "The Loom of Time"

(Joseph: God's Man in Egypt by Leslie Flynn)

Like Joseph, we all have our captivities; we are trapped in one way or another. Some have been invalids for years, shut in by four walls. Others have been boxed in by accident, anxiety, disappointment, loneliness, illness, hardship, financial reverse, pain, misunderstanding, tragedy, or sorrow. With Joseph, all can say on occasion, "I never thought this would happen to me. I never expected to be captive in this situation."

John Bunyan, jailed for preaching outside the established Church of England, made the best of his 12 years behind bars. Carving a flute out of the leg of

the only stool he had, he made melody, and meditated on God's Word. He also wrote the unmatched allegory, *Pilgrim's Progress*.

(*When the Hurt Won't Go Away* by Paul W. Powell)

I have said all of this to say that God never promised us rose gardens. He offers us no trouble-free existence; He does not promise us lives of continuous joy, full of success, prosperity, and good health. If by chance you are blessed with such a life now, you had better enjoy it today. Your life has no wall around it and before tomorrow Satan may well invade it and ravish it as he did in the case of Job. God not only promises us no exemptions from troubles; most often He offers us no explanations for the sufferings of life. We may cry out to God "Why?" but usually no answer is forthcoming. The very silence of God sometimes causes us to feel that He rules the world with His hands off and His mouth shut. If God grants us no exemptions and if He gives us no explanations, what should our expectations be? How does God help us? We need to know. One reason that so many people are easily disappointed and quickly disillusioned with Christian faith in times of trouble is that they have unreasonable and false expectations.

In our text we read, "But while Joseph was there in the prison, the Lord was with him."

Because the Lord was with him, "He showed him kindness and he granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden."

(*Joseph: From Pit to Pinnacle* by Charles R. Swindoll)

Where was God in all of this? He was with Joseph. He'd never left him. Genesis 39:21 tells us: "But the Lord was with Joseph and extended kindness to him, and gave him favor...." Joseph could see the hand of God in his experience; therefore, he was able to be used strategically by God in the lives of a couple of men. Comment: It's our tendency in "dungeon-like" circumstances to feel as though we've been abandoned by God. We wonder, Will You ever answer? To us the heavens seem to be brass, and that our pleas are unheard.

(*When the Hurt Won't Go Away* by Paul W. Powell)

When Oliver Cromwell lay dying, it was a stormy night. The wind howled and shook the house until it seemed as if it would fall. After a while great, old rugged Cromwell said to the loved ones about him: "Read to me from Paul's letter to the Philippians. Read that to me." They read to him and when they read that great verse, "I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me," he said: "Stop just there. That was the word that saved me. When my son, Oliver, died, that was the word that saved me. When my heart was broken, that was the word that saved me. When sorrow swept down on our home as a black vulture, that was the word that saved me. When in one short hour all my sun was hid in midnight darkness, that was the word that saved me--'I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me.'"

(When the Hurt Won't Go Away by Paul W. Powell)

Have there been times when it seemed to you that God did absolutely nothing, when He was, to use H. G. Wells' bitter phrase, "an ever-absent help in time of trouble"?

(When the Ceiling Is Zero by Robert D. Foster)

Sorrow is also not just an end in itself, it is a process. The cocoon is designed for struggle, not to kill, but in order that after the conflict there may come forth a beautiful butterfly. God takes us through difficulties so that He might bring us out on the other side to the praise of His glory!

Once again we have the statement "The Lord was with him." He was first with Joseph in Potiphar's house. Now once again he is with Joseph in the prison. He showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden.

Proverbs 16:32

He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who captures a city.

Lord, teach us self-discipline.

God has a hedge about us as His children, and each thing that is permitted in our lives is for our good and for his glory. "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy

comes in the morning."

This is only temporary, and it too shall pass. God is working it all together for good.

(*Necessary Losses* by Judith Viorst)

When we think of loss we think of the loss, through death, of people we love. But loss is a far more encompassing theme in our life. For we lose not only through death, but also by leaving and being left, by changing and letting go and moving on. And our losses include not only our separations and departures from those we love, but our conscious and unconscious losses of romantic dreams, impossible expectations, illusions of freedom and power, illusions of safety--and the loss of our own younger self, the self that thought it always would be unwrinkled and invulnerable and immortal.

These losses are a part of life--universal, unavoidable, inexorable. And these losses are necessary because we grow by losing and leaving and letting go.

In duty, Joseph was loyal.

In temptation, he was strong.

And in prison, he was faithful.

Joseph was saved from death in the pit, and now he is saved from death in Potiphar's house.

You've got to admire Joseph because he did not sit down and sullenly in sorrow feel sorry for himself.

He is making the best of his afflicted condition. He was comforted and did not moan and mourn or spend his time in writing petitions or making appeals to Potiphar. He didn't try to get a court-appointed attorney to defend himself and his rights in order to get out of prison.

v. 22 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.

What a marvelous blessing we see in the life of Joseph. In each of his experiences he is placed in a position of leadership:

1. While he is at home, he has the responsibility for the management of the shepherd operations.
2. Then in Potiphar's house he is given the responsibility of stewardship over the whole place.
3. And now in prison the warden is giving Joseph charge of the prisoners that are in the jail, and whatever was done there Joseph was responsible for it.

(Joseph by F. B. Meyer)

There is no anodyne for heart-sorrow like ministry to others. If your life is woven with the dark shades of sorrow, do not sit down to deplore in solitude your hapless lot, but arise to seek out those who are more miserable than you are, bearing them balm for their wounds and love for their heart-breaks. And if you are unable to give much practical help, you need not abandon yourself to the gratification of lonely sorrow, for you may largely help the children of bitterness by imitating Joseph in listening to their tales of woe or to their dreams of foreboding. It is a great art to be a good listener. The burdened heart longs to pour out its tale in a sympathetic ear. There is immense relief in the telling out of pain. But it cannot be hurried; it needs plenty of time; it cannot clear itself of its silt and deposits unless it is allowed leisure to stand.

(Building Life on the Promises by Robert D. Foster)

". . . I will look favorably upon that man who is humble, feels crushed in spirit, and trembles at My Word."
(Isaiah 66:2 Berkeley)

Notice the three basic qualities for which He is looking:

I will look favorably upon that man who is humble.

I will look favorably upon that man who feels crushed in spirit.

I will look favorably upon that man who trembles at My Word.

Humility. . . repentance. . . sensitiveness! For maximum effectiveness, these are the demands of God for top-flight men in His service. Tragic is the cocky, proud and arrogant "I".

This overdose of self-assurance is neutralized in a terrific statement by A. W. Tozer:

"Let the public accept a man as unusual, and he is soon tempted to accept himself as being above reproof. Soon a hard shell of impenitence covers his heart. He closes the coffin lid with these words: 'I am the foremost leader . . . I am not to be trifled with . . . my opinions are not to be questioned. If I do it, it is right!'"

v. 23 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.

How good the Lord is even in the times of our adversity. He provides the means of blessing and the means of comfort in the difficult times so that we can truly see that the Lord is going with us through the trial.

For Joseph he probably feels like the best years of his life are slipping away, and now he is spending time in prison. The iron crown of suffering precedes the golden crown of glory, and iron is entering into your soul to make it strong and brave. Sometimes we ask the question: Why give iron to the soul and then keep it from active service? Ah, that is a question which goes far to prove our glorious destiny. There must be another world somewhere, a world of glorious ministry for which we are training. There is service in the sky. It may be that God counts a human life of seventy years of suffering not too long an education for a soul that may serve him throughout eternity. It is in the prison that Joseph is fitted for the unknown life of Pharaoh's palace. And if he could have foreseen the future, he would not have wondered at the severe discipline. If only we could see all that awaits us in that palace of the great king, we should not be so surprised at certain experiences which befall us in earth's darker cells. We are being trained for service in God's home and in the upper spaces of this universe.

CONCLUSION:

What are some of the lessons that we can learn from this particular study?

LESSON #1: The Lord was with Joseph, and he became a successful man.

LESSON #2: The blessing on Potiphar's house was due to the fact that Joseph was working there.

LESSON #3: Recognize in temptation that the sin is against God.

LESSON #4: Remember God's plan:

Be not conformed to the world,
Resist the devil, and
Flee the lusts of the flesh

Maybe it would be good for us to contemplate the consequences of two who didn't flee:

Psalms 51:7-10

Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness, let the bones you have crushed rejoice. Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquity. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

Proverbs 6:27-29

Can a man scoop fire into his lap, without his clothes being burned? Can a man walk on hot coals, without his feet being scorched? So is he who sleeps with another man's wife; no one who touches her will go unpunished.

LESSON #5: When you are facing unexplainable circumstances, realize that the Lord is going with you through it, and that he has permitted it for our growth and for His glory. He has the grace to see you through (2 Cor. 12:9)

LESSON #6: God is in control of all of the circumstances and events of our lives.

LESSON #7: It is better to lose your coat and keep your character.

LESSON #8: You only give away your virginity once.

LESSON #9: It is never wrong to be tempted.

LESSON #10: Satan will point to the PLEASURES and not the PAIN of sin.

LESSON #11: Satan will minimize sin in your eyes.

(*The Seduction of Christianity* by Dave Hunt & T. A. McMahon)

Success is the name of the game today, not only out there in the world, but inside the church as well. Humility is out and self-esteem is in, even though we are urged in Scripture, "Let each esteem others better than themselves" (Philippians 2:3 KJV). It used to be common knowledge that the besetting sin of the human race was pride. Now, however, we are being told that our problem is not that we think too highly of ourselves, but too lowly, that we all have a bad self-image, and that our greatest need is to build up our self-esteem. Though Peter wrote, "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time" (1 Peter 5:6), we are being urged to "visualize" ourselves into success. Paul's inspired declaration that Christ "emptied Himself, taking the form of a bondservant...[and] humbled Himself by becoming obedient to...death on a cross" (Philippians 2:7,8) is now explained by Robert Schuller, in the context of today's success-oriented world, to mean:

Jesus knew his worth, his success fed his self-esteem.... He suffered the cross to sanctify his self-esteem. And he bore the cross to sanctify your self-esteem.
And the cross will sanctify the ego trip [emphasis in the original]!

Success and self-esteem have become so important in the church that they seem to overshadow everything else. Robert Schuller states: "A person is in hell when he has lost his self-esteem." As Christianity's "number one TV preacher," he is watched on nearly 200 TV stations each Sunday by an audience of nearly 3 million. A prolific author, his books are frequently on The New York Times best-seller list.

According to *Christianity Today*, "Schuller is now reaching more non-Christians than any other religious leader in America." Schuller's influence is enormous, and his "Gospel of Success" is being accepted and preached by increasing numbers of Christian leaders. What does Schuller find wrong with the old gospel? Although Paul wrote that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Timothy 1:15), and Christ Himself said that He came to call "sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:32), Robert Schuller writes:

I don't think anything has been done in the name of Christ and under the banner of Christianity that has proven more destructive to human personality and, hence, counterproductive to the evangelism enterprise than the often crude, uncouth, and unchristian strategy of attempting to make people aware of their lost and sinful condition.

If Moses lived today, it would not be said of him that he chose to "suffer affliction with the people of God" (Hebrews 11:25 KJV) but that he chose to "suffer wealth, success, and popularity with the people of God."