

Choosing Sexual Purity (Joseph's Story Part 2 of 3)

Genesis 39:6b-23

August, 20, 2017

When I was a young dad, my wife and I homeschooled our kids for a few years. My wife is very intelligent, so she taught most of the classes. But, she is in fact so much smarter than me, that she once tricked me into teaching a science class. More specifically an anatomy class. To be exact, a HUMAN anatomy class. So, there I am sitting at home with 2 of our daughters going through this textbook on human anatomy. And eventually, a good science teacher has to get around to talking about the sexual parts of the human body... Sex sure can be an awkward topic. But, you know what, we still need to talk about sex. Today, I will do what I can to keep our content rated PG. I know that we have young children in the room and I want to respect that.

Sexual Purity is one of those topics that is very relevant to today's world but it can be a bit of a hot potato. Given the broad range of concerns and questions, suffice it to say that we won't be able to cover everything we'd like to in the next 25 minutes or so. That's why, I want to begin by urging you to take a look at this list of resources to consider for further study. There are a range of topics addressed including pornography, internet filters, and transgender issues.

Resources to help you pursue Sexual Purity:

And the Bride Wore White by Dannah Gresh, Moody Publishers, Chicago, IL, 2012.

Conquer DVD Series, developed by Dr. Ted and Diane Roberts, founders of www.PureDesire.org
www.CovenantEyes.com (Internet Accountability and Filtering)

Every Man's Battle by Fred Stoeker, Steve Arterburn, and Mike Yorkey, WaterBrook Press, Colorado Springs, CO, 2000. (See also *Every Young Man's Battle*)

Every Woman's Battle by Shannon Ethridge, WaterBrook Press, Colorado Springs, CO, 2003. (See also *Every Young Woman's Battle* and *Every Single Woman's Battle*)

www.NetSmartz.org is a great resource for teens and parents who want to thrive in a 24/7 "wired world."

Passion and Purity: Learning to Bring Your Love Life Under Christ's Control by Elisabeth Elliot, Revell, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002.

Preparing for Adolescence by James C. Dobson, Regal Books, Ventura, CA, 1989. (Search for other family resources by Dobson as well)

The Pursuit of Holiness by Jerry Bridges, Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, IL, 2006.

Transgender by Vaughan Roberts, The Good Book Company, 2016.

Understanding Gender Dysphoria: Navigating Transgender Issues in a Changing Culture by Mark A. Yarhouse, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL, 2015.

For today, we'll focus on part 2 of our 3-part series on Old Testament Joseph. By the way, due to our candidating weekend, we needed to shift our schedule, so we won't get to part 3 of Joseph's story until September. Last week we learned about Joseph's family; filled with jealousy which lead to bitter betrayal. That betrayal lead Joseph's brothers to sell him into slavery and he ends up being put in charge of the work in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Potiphar. Please turn your Bible to Genesis 39. Genesis 39:6b-7 tells us, "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!" We recognize the clear immorality in Mrs. Potiphar's advance, but let's also recognize that...

1. Sexual attraction is part of God's good design.

In one regard, sexual attraction is a very natural and human thing. It does us no good to pretend otherwise. All people, including Christian people, are sexual beings. As a matter of fact, God designed us to be sexual beings. Therefore, sexual attraction, in and of itself, is neither bad nor sinful.

As a youth pastor, I would occasionally have the opportunity to talk to teen guys about sexual purity. To break the ice a bit, I liked to ask them a trick question. And I've always kind of wanted to ask this to an adult group, so here it goes. Now, please don't answer this out loud. "What is the

primary sexual organ of a man?” This question usually led to a very awkward silence... Now, today, I'll give you a hint: the primary sexual organ for a man is the same as that for a woman... it's our brain. The first step in sexual activity begins in our minds, with sexual attraction. That's how God has wired us and it's part of the way that He leads men and women to come into a marriage covenant and become one flesh.

So, the reality of sexual attraction should cause us to employ the strategy of Rom. 12:2, “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”¹ God's perfect will designed sex to be good and pleasing. But we need to be so cautious about the information that we feed our minds. And this is why we need to be careful what we listen to and what we watch on TV, movies, and the Internet.

Far too many of us, as Christians, are being careless about what we feed our minds. For example, Kevin DeYoung writes this, about the popular tv series, Game of Thrones:² “...many people consider it absolutely riveting--full of compelling characters, an engrossing story, and excellent acting, writing, and aesthetics. But isn't it also full of sex? Like lots and lots of incredibly graphic sex? I did a Google search for “Game of Thrones sex” and found headlines...about sex scenes you can't un-see and the best sex scenes of the series and why Game of Thrones is so committed to nudity and explicit (sometimes violent) sex... It seems to me sensuality--of a very graphic nature--is a major part of the series. And still, a good number of conservative Christians treat the series as must-see TV.”³

The real cost of entertainment is not what we're paying for our cable bill, it's what we're paying in damage to our minds and souls; it's what we're losing in terms of our own personal holiness and integrity. The fact is, we'll never have the actual Mrs. Potiphar or Mr. Potiphar invite us to come to bed with her or him. But every day, in one form or another, they come across our TV screen or our computer or smart phone screens. Self-control is one of the things that separates humans from the animal world. And God has given us self-control so that we can manage our own sexual attractions in a way that honors Him and the people around us. Clearly Mrs. Potiphar illustrates that men are not the only ones who struggle with lust. So, let's be honest about that. Let's also recognize that women are not the only ones who need to concern themselves with dressing modestly. Men should also consider modest attire that doesn't cause a sister in Christ to stumble.

Genesis 39:8-9 tells us how Joseph responded: “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?”

2. Sexual purity is part of God's good design.

Joseph rightly refuses Mrs. Potiphar's request. Sex within marriage and abstinence everywhere else are God's good design for people. If you are in a marriage relationship, you should only be having sex with your spouse. If you are not in a marriage relationship, you should be abstaining from all other sexual relationships.

Now, abstaining from sexual relationships, includes the vicarious nature of pornography. Consider Jesus' clear warning to men in Mt. 5:27-28, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” I think it's safe for us to infer that these verses equally apply to women not looking at men lustfully. There is no wiggle room here. Sexual boundaries are determined by God, not by our own whims or the whims of others nor by popular culture. Hebrews 13:4 agrees, “Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.” Sexual purity is vital to the Christian life and it is a significant part of God's plan for personal holiness.

¹ Consider Psalm 37:4.

² Also check out John Piper's article: <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/12-questions-to-ask-before-you-watch-game-of-thrones>

³ Kevin DeYoung article on the Gospel Coalition website: <https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/kevindeyoung/2017/08/08/i-dont-understand-christians-watching-game-of-thrones/>

Now, let's make sure that we are not overly simplistic or naïve, the struggle for purity is real. And, it is very difficult at times. There is a lot of complexity to this issue because of difficult realities like rape, incest, and other sexual abuse. Please don't let this sermon come across today as uncaring or hate filled. If you have experienced sexual abuse of some kind, please talk with someone this week and get the help and protection that you need from further harm. God does NOT judge us for the sinful choices and behaviors of others. You do not need to feel ashamed or dirty or unworthy because of what someone else has done. Rather, know this, you are deeply loved and valued by God. There is healing and there is a way forward for any situation.⁴ Psalm 147:3 reminds us, "He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds."

God holds those who sin against others accountable. And He also restores those who've made mistakes; those who want to repent of their poor sexual choices, to make reparations for the wrongs they've done, and to find forgiveness and cleansing for the past.

Joseph rightly calls Mrs.' Potiphar's offer, "a wicked thing" and a "sin against God." Genesis 39:12 says that Mrs. Potiphar, "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." Joseph sets us a great example: flee from sin, run toward purity today! Joseph made the right decision to resist temptation...

3. Resisting sexual temptation requires a daily strategy.

Earlier, Genesis 39:10 explains, "And though she spoke to Joseph DAY AFTER DAY, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her." This is part of what makes sexual temptation so powerful. It doesn't relent. We have to refuse it and we have to refuse to even be around it daily, sometimes minute by minute. Even the strongest resolve and the best strategies can't help us avoid being around every temptation. In fact, 1 Corinthians 10:12 warns us, "So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!" It's very foolish for any of us to think that we are impervious to sexual temptation. It's all around us and it's one of our enemy's favorite tools to dismantle our personal holiness and intimacy with God. Author F. B. Meyer gives some great advice: "Resist the first tiny thrill of temptation, lest it widen a breach big enough to admit the ocean."⁵

1 Corinthians 10:13 gives us this great hope, "No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it." One of the best tools that God provides us, for finding our way out of temptation, is accountability groups. I mentioned a list of resources on the back of the bulletin insert. Those resources include a software called Covenant Eyes which sends a weekly email to your accountability partner. It gives them a weekly list of everywhere you've been on the internet. Another resource is a DVD series called "Conquer." It's designed as a way for men to come together and help each other battle for sexual purity. We hope to start a new group soon. I'm sure there are similar resources out there for women.

Ephesians 5:3 reminds us, "But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people." In his classic book, *The Pursuit of Holiness*, Jerry Bridges says, "Make it your aim not to sin." ...I realized that deep within my heart my real aim was not to sin very much... Can you imagine a soldier going into battle with the aim of "not getting hit very much?" **That soldier won't last long and neither will we if we treat sin this way.**

Now, I wish I could conclude this sermon by telling you that resisting sexual temptation will always make your life happier. But, Joseph's story clearly illustrates that's not always the case... Genesis 39:14 tells us that Mrs. Potiphar made up a story, "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." "Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned." And frankly, men who are scorned are probably just as bad. Well, Mr. Potiphar believes the story and has Joseph put in prison. Joseph ends up getting punished for doing the right thing. Life, sometimes turns out that way. But, let's be clear, ...

⁴ Call the church office at (218) 751-8834, ext. 106 to talk with Pastor Jerry about getting help and connecting with resources.

⁵ F. B. Meyer, *Joseph: Beloved-Hated-Exalted*, Fort Washington, PA, Christian Literature Crusade, n.d., p. 34.

4. Choosing sexual purity brings God's blessing.

Genesis 39:20b-23 tells us, "But while Joseph was there in the prison, 21 the LORD was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden. 22 So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison... 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." Much like last week's sermon, instead of feeling abandoned by God, Joseph puts His trust in God and makes the best of a difficult situation. And that's what we need to do in our own situations. Some of us may be here this morning feeling a little frustrated with God. Perhaps we've been making choices for sexual purity but we don't see God's blessing. We don't see the payoff. Instead, we have found loneliness and isolation. Perhaps we feel like everyone else is out there running around enjoying sex with whomever they want, whenever they want, and God is letting them get away with it.⁶

What advantage is there in choosing sexual purity? Actually, there are many, I'll give you two:

1) *Choosing sexual purity protects us from the deceptive promises of premarital sex.* The people out there living a reckless, wild sex life are more miserable than you might think. They aren't as happy as they appear to be. They live with the ongoing fear of STDs and unplanned pregnancies. And, often enough, that fear turns into reality. What began as a promise for some "harmless fun" has now impacted their life forever.

But, more than this, even if they are fortunate enough to avoid the obvious consequences of premarital sex, with each ungodly relationship they pursue, they grow more and more empty. It is not fulfilling them the way they need it to. They find themselves running into ongoing hurt and rejection. What began as a promise for meaningful relationship and connection, has now left them more lonely and more miserable than ever. Choosing sexual purity protects us from the deceptive promises of premarital sex. Trusting God's good design for sex will benefit you for the rest of your life.

The 2nd advantage in choosing sexual purity is that...

2) *Choosing sexual purity provides us with righteous rewards.* Joseph's story is an example of God's blessing and provision for someone who made the right choice. Psalm 37:1-6 advises us, "**Do not fret because of those who are evil or be envious of those who do wrong**; for like the grass they will soon wither, like green plants they will soon die away. Trust in the LORD and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart. **Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him and he will do this: He will make your righteous reward shine like the dawn, your vindication like the noonday sun.**"

This idea of righteous rewards is proven by the testimonies of real people. Talk to a happily married Christian couple today. Find someone who has been recently married or find a couple who've been married for 40-50 years. Ask them if there is any advantage to choosing sexual purity; to trusting God's good design for sex? Ask them if they wish they'd slept around more before they got married. Ask them how meaningful it is to be in a committed marriage relationship. Ask them if it's worth it. Even if they've had some ups and downs as a couple, I think you'll find their answer encouraging.

Choosing sexual purity brings God's blessing. Brothers and sisters in Christ, let's heed the advice of 1 Corinthians 6:18-20 today: "Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body. Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?"

We are not our own; we were bought at a price. Therefore, let us honor God with our bodies." Amen.

*This sermon was preached at the Evangelical Free Church of Bemidji
on August 20, 2017 by Pastor Jerry R. A. Johnson*

⁶ 1 Peter 4:3-4 reminds us, "For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. 4 They are surprised that you do not join them in their reckless, wild living, and they heap abuse on you."