

What habit, craving or impulse do you struggle with the most? What temptation do you have a hard time saying “No,” to? Spending too much money on a hobby? Spending too much time on things electronic? Thinking about what you said, but only after you said it?

Joe was a 4-year-old boy who was well-behaved except for one quirk – he didn’t like wearing shoes. When it was time for his first VBS, Joe’s parents told him repeatedly that when he’s at church, he has to keep his shoes on. Little Joe nodded that he understood. Joe’s parents worried the whole week of VBS about their son’s ability to resist the temptation. On the final day all the parents got to come in a half-hour before the closing devotion to look at the crafts the kids had made.

In the area where Joe and other 4-year-olds had been that week, the teachers proudly displayed their projects. It was a plaster cast of the foot prints of each child. As they walked, they looked for the set with Joe’s name on it. They never found one. Joe had made his plaster cast with his hand prints. The parents smiled at each other.

Today we are going to talk about another Joe who resisted a temptation much greater than taking off his shoes. This Joe, goes by his full name - Joseph, and came from a dysfunctional family of 12 sons. It was soap opera of sibling rivalries and jealousies, with the father letting every son know who his favorite was by giving him a special coat of many colors.

Joseph’s coat along with his crazy dreams that his brothers would one day bow down to him, pushed his brothers too far. Their jealousy and hatred wanted to kill Joseph. They didn’t, but they took his special coat, smeared goat blood all over it and led their father to believe he had been killed by a wild animal. When they had actually sold him to a traveling band of merchants headed for Egypt.

The merchants sold Joseph in Egypt to a high ranking official in Pharaoh’s cabinet. Joseph’s a teenager in a strange country, surrounded by

people speaking a strange language. The favorite son of his father was now a common slave.

At first, things weren’t too bad. Joseph gained the respect of his master and was promoted to the man in charge in Potiphar’s house. Only one thing was off limits to Joseph: Potiphar’s wife. Potiphar’s wife didn’t feel the same way. She constantly invited Joseph to sleep with her. Joseph refused and kept on refusing. He recognized temptation and used self-control to decline her offers each time.

Potiphar’s wife wasn’t used to hearing “no,” and she certainly wasn’t about to start now. One day the perfect opportunity presented itself when all the servants were gone and she was alone with Joseph. Had her constant “*sleep with me*” finally worn Joseph down? Sold into slavery by his brothers. Given up for dead by his father. He was lonely and someone was showing him attention. Would he lose his job if he continued to reject her? Would his self-control be able to withstand more of the same? Would his sinful nature argue: “*You tried your best to do the right thing. She’s the one chasing you!*”

Joseph knew the danger, that’s why he ran from the house out of the reach of her temptation. But not out of the reach of her hand as she grabbed his coat. She would use it to build her case, accusing Joseph of trying to force himself on her.

Potiphar did the only thing he could do. He had Joseph thrown in prison. Joseph may have lost his coat, his job, and his freedom but by using self-control, he kept a clean conscience with his God.

Why was Joseph so determined not to sleep with Potiphar’s wife? He actually explained that to Potiphar’s wife: “**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?**” Joseph gave 2 reasons for not sleeping with his boss’s wife. Did you catch them?

- 1) He wouldn't want to do anything that would cause his boss to be disappointed in him, or lose his trust in him.
- 2) He wouldn't just be sinning against his boss; he would be sinning against his God – the God who created him.

“How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?” Joseph knew the answer could only be: *“You can't do this. You love your God too much and your God loves you too much.”*

How do you stack up with Joseph? How is your self-control? Do you flee temptation or do you flirt with it? Do you spend more time coming up with excuses why the sin you're about to commit is “OK,” instead of using your energy to plan an escape?

Why should we run from sin when there doesn't always seem to be a benefit to it? Look at Joseph ... unjustly accused and thrown into prison for doing the right thing. What kind of justice is that? If Joseph struggled with those thoughts, we don't hear it. What we do hear is how he made the best of his situation to the best of his ability.

You might not get an “A” because you refused to cheat on a test. You may never get the nicer car or bigger house because you refused to claim more hours than you actually worked. You might not get the job you really wanted because you didn't exaggerate your resume. That's OK. Joseph still faithfully served Potiphar even though he ended up there when his brothers sold him into slavery. Joseph would again still faithfully serve even when locked up unjustly.

Joseph's brothers hated him, threw him in a pit, then sold him. For the next 17 years of his life, Joseph was either a slave or a prisoner. And yet in Genesis 39 we read these remarkable words: v.2) *The Lord was with Joseph ...* v.3) *Joseph's master saw that the LORD was with Joseph ...* v.3) *The Lord gave Joseph success in everything he did ...* v.5) *The Lord blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph. The blessing of the Lord was on everything Potiphar did ...* v.21) *The Lord was with Joseph; he showed him kindness and granted him*

favor in the eyes of the prison warden ... v.23) *The Lord was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did.*

Over and over again – 7 times (if you were counting) – we're told the Lord was with Joseph. Somehow the Lord made his presence known to Joseph and even to Potiphar. Joseph knew he wasn't alone in this strange and far-off land. Eventually, God would use Joseph's contacts in prison to elevate him to Number 2 in Egypt. Joseph had lost his coat because he ran away from temptation but in time God replaced the slave's coat with the royal coat worn by a king.

And God always has your best interests in mind. You may have to suffer for a time for doing the right thing but in the end, you will be blessed. That's God's promise.

Joseph has become a model of self-control for all of us by the way he handled this temptation. Can we be like Joseph? We sure can! Are we always like that? That depends on the temptation and our frame of mind. How often do we deal with temptation the way we deal with dessert: *“Another piece of chocolate cake? How can I resist? Another scoop of ice cream? Sure, why not?”*

While another piece of cake or another scoop of ice cream may not always be the best thing for us, but we can usually have them without doing too much harm to our bodies. But giving in to the temptation to sin is always going to be harmful for our souls.

Just as God's presence with Joseph was the motivating factor for him resisting, so it has to be for us. We're too weak to resist. In the Lord we find the real power to overcome temptation, to be self-controlled. He gives us a list of 10 ways we can be sure we're not fighting alone.

- 1) We have the power of God's Word. Use it just like Jesus did to show the devil he was wrong and God's words are right, Isn't that a reason we memorize passages, like: **"How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?"**
- 2) We have the power of prayer which leads us back to God, so we remember he's on our side.
- 3) We have that voice that tells us whether we're acting according to what we believe is right or wrong.
- 4) We have the nutrition and nourishment of the gospel in the Word and sacraments to feed our faith build up our strength.
- 5) We have examples in Scripture: Joseph and David, Paul and John.
- 6) We have the testimony of those who witnessed their faith in the face of persecution.
- 7) We have fellow Christians around us to encourage us in the fight.
- 8) We have brains to tell us when to use self-control to resist and run away, just like Joseph used his brains.
- 9) We have God's promises: **"Resist the devil and he will flee from you."** Or: **"God is faithful, he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear, but will provide a way of escape."**
- 10) We have confidence in Christ so we can sing along with Luther: *"One little word can fell him."* Even a word like "No," is all it takes to *"fell"* him.

Follow in Joseph's footsteps and make it your habit to exercise self-control and run from temptation into the loving arms of your Savior.