

Epic Tales – 3. Joseph and the Pit
Genesis 37:3-5, 17-24, 28
June 18, 2023
Pastor Tami Luckhardt

Our son Mark's first day of kindergarten is a day I will never forget. Mark, our first born, embraced many of the stereotypical traits of a first-born child; he was structured, cautious and conscientious. He was most comfortable if he knew what our plans for the day were, hour by hour, even better yet, minute by minute, if possible. And he was really worried about starting school that fall so as the first day approached, we made a plan that I would walk him to the bus stop, literally across the street from our driveway, and once he was on the bus, I would jump in my car, follow the bus to school and meet him on the curb when he got off the bus and walk him to his classroom. Well, we had all the tears you might expect, his and mine. He never looked so small and vulnerable as he did stare down at me from that bus window. "I'll meet you at school!" I jumped in the car and by the time I had driven the 5 or so miles to his school, I had stopped crying. To my surprise, when Mark got off the bus, so had he. In fact, he looked at me with a bit of disgust and embarrassment and said, "What are you doing here?" He went on to tell me that he was just fine, and I could go home now and he left me standing on the curb. It took all that I had to stay on the curb and let him go inside alone. During just a few minutes, how I parented that kid had to change because he was growing and changing.

How Jerry and I parented changed with each of our other children as well. Our daughter Elizabeth (our center child) was fiercely independent and confident. She was the child the *Strong-Willed Child* that book was written about. We had to constantly remind her of boundaries, respect, and consequences.

And then there's our youngest child, Emily, who on the other hand, has always been our peacemaker, our old soul, the one who needs a couple of close friends and even in high school really liked hanging out with mom and dad. We had to encourage her to take risks and believe in herself. Each child required me to parent in a slightly different way. And while I was far from being a perfect parent, I have no shame in changing the way I parented each child.

This week, in preparing this message, I have been reflecting on what it means to be a parent and a grandparent as we are celebrating Father's Day today. It has prompted me to consider how I changed as a parent and what have I learned along this journey of transformation.

And so today we are spending time with the Old Testament story of Joseph, his father, and his brothers. It's really a story about Joseph's family as told through Joseph's eyes. This story - that you have most likely heard or seen - is a story of transformation and reconciliation made popular in Andrew Lloyd Weber's musical, *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* that hit Broadway in 1985 and was performed here at Messiah Church by our very own Glory Players in 2017. So today, we'll spend time considering the full scope of Joseph's story, and how much there is for us to learn and apply to our lives so that we too can be transformed by it. So, let's begin at the beginning.

This story begins with Joseph's father, Jacob, also called (by God) Israel like we heard in our video scripture today. Jacob had 12 sons, but Joseph was his favorite and he made no effort to hide this. *Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons because he was born when Jacob was old. Jacob had made for him a long robe. When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of his brothers, they hated him and couldn't even talk nicely to him.* Genesis 37:3-4

You know the saying, “the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree?” Well, that apple applies here because Jacob is only parenting the way that he had been parented. He was his mother, Rebekah’s, favorite son. She showed him favoritism and gave him inside knowledge that helped him steal his brother Esau’s birthright and blessing from their father, Isaac. So by claiming and championing a favorite son only seemed natural for Jacob. It’s also interesting to note that Joseph was the son of Jacob’s favorite wife, Rachel. There are some deep roots on that family apple tree.

If you have siblings, you may know how sibling rivalries can go. They have been a part of human history since the beginning of time. In the Bible, we read about Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau, and the prodigal son. Some famous sibling rivalries that we’ve seen play out recently are between Princes William and Harry and the tennis greats Serena and Venus Williams. And if you aren’t familiar with these stories behind Puma and Adidas or Aldi’s and Trader Joe’s, well those are both stories born out of sibling rivalries. Perhaps you’ve experienced some sibling rivalry yourself.

Back to our story. As Jacob is looking for a way to bless his son, he decides to give Joseph this elaborate, long robe with long sleeves that is actually more befitting of a princess (yes, princess) than a shepherd. It is a beautiful and elaborate gift making it clear that Joseph is not merely favored but he is pampered as well. This is where the brothers’ jealousy and resentment begin to set the stage for their cruel behavior we’ll hear about a little later in our story. Here’s what happens next. Joseph has a dream....

He said to them, “Listen to this dream I had. When we were binding stalks of grain in the field, my stalk got up and stood upright, while your stalks gathered around it and bowed down to my stalk.” His brothers said to him, “Will you really be our king and rule over us?” So they hated him even more because of the dreams he told them. Genesis 37:6-8

What does this dream mean? In case there is any question, Joseph gladly interprets it for his brothers. “This dream means that you will bow down to me and I will rule over you.” Can you just imagine how that sat with his brothers? No way! Dad has already cast us aside in favor of you. And now you’re telling us that you are better than us?” It’s easy to see why they’re angry, envious, and jealous.

The two emotions here seem to be jealousy and envy. **Jealousy arises when we feel like a relationship is no longer secure and we are left longing for love.** It’s easy to understand why these brothers are jealous. Their father has shown them clearly and in no uncertain terms, that he loves Joseph more than them. **And envy takes it one step further. Envy arises when people’s connection to material security, resources or recognition is challenged.** So not only are these brothers longing for love, but they are also now worried about whatever security or position in life that thought they had is now being taken from them.

So here’s a few questions for you to ponder. How have you seen jealousy and envy creep into your life? Thinking about what your current circumstances are, is there something in your life that needs healing to take place inside of you?

Joseph’s brothers, instead of asking themselves these questions, they make a plan to solve this problem themselves. They conspire together to kill Joseph but the oldest brother Ruben, has a little bit of a conscience and suggests that instead of killing him, perhaps they should just throw him in a pit. That way, he can come back later and save him. And so they do.

[Then] they sat down to eat, they looked up and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, with camels carrying sweet resin, medicinal resin, and fragrant resin on their way down to Egypt. Judah said to his brothers, "What do we gain if we kill our brother and hide his blood? Come on, let's sell him to the Ishmaelites. Let's not harm him because he's our brother; he's family." His brothers agreed. Genesis 37:25-27

As the story unfolds, we'll see that this is just the beginning of the many challenges that Joseph will face.

I want to take a minute a look at the story through the eyes of Joseph's father, Jacob, how he might have felt when his sons tell their him that his favorite son, Joseph has died. *His brothers took Joseph's robe, slaughtered a male goat, and dipped the robe in the blood. They took the long robe, brought it to their father, and said, "We found this. See if it's your son's robe or not." He recognized it and said, "It's my son's robe! A wild animal has devoured him. Joseph must have been torn to pieces!" Then Jacob tore his clothes, put a simple mourning cloth around his waist, and mourned for his son for many days. All of his sons and daughters got up to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted, telling them, "I'll go to my grave mourning for my son." And Joseph's father wept for him. Genesis 37:31-35*

As I spent time preparing this message, I found myself thinking about Jacob in ways I had not before. His beloved son has died and while we know how this story ends, Jacob is experiencing great pain and grief like never before. And I wondered what this might feel like on this Father's Day to you fathers who have lost a child. This has to be a somewhat painful and difficult day for you.

I've heard this devastating grief of losing a child described this way by a pastor who lost his young son. It is as though you are driving through a deep, dense, dark fog. And when that's happening, you must remember two things. First, keep your lights dim and go slow. And second, keep your eyes on the white lines on the edge of the road. In other words, find the lines that have served you well in the past, that somehow, somehow, even though you are in the dense fog of grief right now, you will somehow get through this. I believe those white lines represent God's love. And even though you cannot see what is right in front of you at this moment, God's love will guide you out of this place. God is present and with you, even when times are hard.

We all know about the five stages of grief (denial, anger, negotiation, depression, and acceptance-and that they don't happen in a predictable or linear fashion) but do you know about the sixth stage of grief? The world's foremost expert on grief, Dr. David Kessler has recently documented a sixth stage: finding meaning. Finding meaning presumes that there is the possibility of being able to discover something meaningful after your loss. He says, "meaning occurs in the small moments. Maybe you become a more generous person. Maybe you become a more determined person. Maybe you become a kinder person. It can be finding a way to commemorate or honor your loved one. He says, "*Loss is what happens in life. Meaning is what we make happen after loss.*"

Maybe you've recently lost a loved one or maybe some time has passed but you still find yourself in that thick fog. Maybe there's some other loss you're experiencing, loss of your health, the realization of a dream, loss of personal safety or of a relationship. If so, I encourage you to ask yourself, is there some meaning I might be able to find here. How might God be

working in my life that I cannot yet see. How can I stay focused on those white lines that will lead me to hope, healing and transformation?

As we return to our story, we see that after Joseph was thrown into the pit and sold off into slavery, he is given as a gift to Potiphar, an officer in Pharaoh's court. And while he is there, we read that the Lord was with Joseph, and he became a very successful man.

He becomes a leader among the servants and Mrs. Potiphar takes notice and has plans of her own. She repeatedly approaches Joseph attempting to seduce him, but he repeatedly refuses her. Until one day, she's had enough and tells her husband that Joseph has assaulted her. Even if Potiphar believes Joseph, he has to publicly support his wife so he sends Joseph to jail. But even in jail we read that *the LORD was with Joseph and remained loyal to him. He caused the jail's commander to think highly of Joseph. Genesis 39:21*

Eventually, Joseph is released from jail so he can interpret one of Pharaoh's dreams. And he explains it this way, *Seven years of great abundance are now coming throughout the entire land of Egypt. After them, seven years of famine will appear, and all of the abundance in the land of Egypt will be forgotten. The famine will devastate the land. Genesis 41:29-30* Pharaoh can see that Joseph is a man of God and appoints him governor of his land and they make a plan to grow and store grain for the next seven years so when the famine hits, they will be able to feed their people. Well, the dream turns out to be true and there are indeed seven years of plenty but no one else, outside of Egypt, knows what is coming. So, when the famine hits, Joseph's family finds themselves with nothing to eat and they were desperate and distraught, and they traveled to Egypt in search of food. When they arrive, can you see where this is going, they enter Joseph's court and immediately, Joseph recognizes them, but he does not admit it. All the pain and hurt rushes back to him and he is not quite ready to deal with it just yet. The brothers, on the other hand, do not recognize Joseph. I mean, why would they. This was the last place they would expect to find this brother that they sold into slavery so many years ago.

There is much more to this story beginning in chapter 42 that I encourage you to read on your own. It holds up to some of Hollywood's greatest hits. But eventually, *Joseph could no longer control himself in front of all his attendants, so he declared, "Everyone, leave now!" So no one stayed with him when he revealed his identity to his brothers. He wept so loudly that the Egyptians and Pharaoh's household heard him. Joseph said to his brothers, "I'm Joseph! Is my father really still alive?" His brothers couldn't respond because they were terrified before him. Joseph said to his brothers, "Come closer to me," and they moved closer. He said, "I'm your brother Joseph! The one you sold to Egypt. Now, don't be upset and don't be angry with yourselves that you sold me here. Actually, God sent me before you to save lives. We've already had two years of famine in the land, and there are five years left without planting or harvesting. God sent me before you to make sure you'd survive and to rescue your lives in this amazing way. Genesis 45:1-7*

Joseph realizes that even in the midst of his deep, personal pain, God is using him to bring healing and reconciliation to his family.

Richard Rohr, a beloved Franciscan priest and author, writes this observation on transforming our pain. *"If we do not transform our pain, we will most assuredly transmit it, usually to those closest to us, our families, our neighbors, our co-workers, and inevitably to the most vulnerable, our children."*

Joseph has a choice here. He can choose to inflict the same pain upon his brothers like they had done to him, or he can look for a way to allow that pain to be transformative, not only in the life of his brothers but also in his life. To find a way to say, the hurt stops here. And he offers them grace and love. *You planned something bad for me, but God produced something good from it, in order to save the lives of many people, just as he's doing today. Now, don't be afraid. I will take care of you and your children.*" So he put them at ease and spoke reassuringly to them. Genesis 50:20-21

I began my message today talking about how there was no shame for me in outgrowing one parenting style and learning another. My hope for you is that - whether you are a parent or not - there's no shame in outgrowing the person you are today to become the person God is calling you to be; that as you've heard Joseph's story, you might find yourself also looking to be transformed. His story has so much to teach us about our lives. It took Joseph a long time to get to that place of reconciliation, so I say to you, go slow and give yourself the time that you need. Transformations do not usually take place overnight but what I can promise you this... just as God was with Joseph through everything he went through, God is also with you. Keep your eyes on the white lines of God's love and God will lead you to healing and transformation.

Let's pray: Gracious God, we give you thanks for the ways in which you are at work in our lives, to heal and transform us. There are so many here today who are in the midst of pain and grief and fog, but we know and trust that you are with us. I pray that we may all feel the power of your love, mercy, and grace at work in our lives even as we seek to be transformed through our pain and our grief. Amen.

Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of June 18, 2023

Weekly Prayer

Great Protector, in the midst of life's pits, you are right beside me. In the darkness and terror, you are with me. So why am I so afraid? Help me to remember that through you, I am safe and loved. Thanks be to you, God, who cares deeply for me. Amen.

Monday, June 19

Scripture: Genesis 37:2-5, 17b-24, 28

This is the account of Jacob's descendants. Joseph was 17 years old and tended the flock with his brothers. While he was helping the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives, Joseph told their father unflattering things about them. Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons because he was born when Jacob was old. Jacob had made for him a long robe. When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of his brothers, they hated him and couldn't even talk nicely to him. Joseph had a dream and told it to his brothers, which made them hate him even more.

The man said, "They left here. I heard them saying, 'Let's go to Dothan.'" So Joseph went after his brothers and found them in Dothan. They saw Joseph in the distance before he got close to them, and they plotted to kill him. The brothers said to each other, "Here comes the big dreamer. Come on now, let's kill him and throw him into one of the cisterns, and we'll say a wild animal devoured him. Then we will see what becomes of his dreams!" When Reuben heard what they said, he saved him from them, telling them, "Let's not take his life." Reuben said to them, "Don't spill his blood! Throw him into this desert cistern, but don't lay a hand on him." He intended to save Joseph from them and take him back to his father. When Joseph reached his brothers, they stripped off Joseph's long robe, took him, and threw him into the cistern, an empty cistern with no water in it.

When some Midianite traders passed by, they pulled Joseph up out of the cistern. They sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver, and they brought Joseph to Egypt.

Observation

Genesis 37 seemed to blend perhaps three different stories about Joseph, each giving a slightly different reason for why his brothers hated him. But the reasons weren't mutually exclusive. Family therapists know that being a "chosen child" like Joseph often skews relationships and emotional growth. The oldest brother Reuben could only think of an idea that was hardly less than leaving Joseph to die in the empty cistern. Slavery in Egypt seemed like little more than a drawn-out death sentence.

Application

Reuben and Judah had just enough moral courage to stand up to their brothers and say, "No, don't kill Joseph. We don't want blood on our hands." On the other hand, they didn't have the courage to tell Jacob, "Dad, Joseph isn't dead. We sold him to traders going to Egypt." How morally courageous are you? In what areas do you want to become braver?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, people betrayed you, but you did not allow that to knock you off course. Help me find in your love the source of strength to move beyond any pain I experience from others. Amen.

Tuesday, June 20

Scripture: Genesis 39:1-3, 6-20

When Joseph had been taken down to Egypt, Potiphar, Pharaoh's chief officer, the commander of the royal guard and an Egyptian, purchased him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there. The LORD was with Joseph, and he became a successful man and served in his Egyptian master's household. His master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD made everything he did successful.

So he handed over everything he had to Joseph and didn't pay attention to anything except the food he ate. Some time later, his master's wife became attracted to Joseph and said, "Sleep with me." He refused and said to his master's wife, "With me here, my master doesn't pay attention to anything in his household; he's put everything he has under my supervision. No one is greater than I am in this household, and he hasn't denied me anything except you, since you are his wife. How could I do this terrible thing and sin against God?" Every single day she tried to convince him, but he wouldn't agree to sleep with her or even to be with her. One day when Joseph arrived at the house to do his work, none of the household's men were there. She grabbed his garment, saying, "Lie down with me." But he left his garment in her hands and ran outside. When she realized that he had left his garment in her hands and run outside, she summoned the men of her house and said to them, "Look, my husband brought us a Hebrew to ridicule us. He came to me to lie down with me, but I screamed. When he heard me raise my voice and scream, he left his garment with me and ran outside." She kept his garment with her until Joseph's master came home, and she told him the same thing: "The Hebrew slave whom you brought to us, to ridicule me, came to me; but when I raised my voice and screamed, he left his garment with me and ran outside." When Joseph's master heard the thing that his wife told him, "This is what your servant did to me," he was incensed. Joseph's master took him and threw him in jail, the place where the king's prisoners were held.

Observation

Instead of nurturing depression and bitterness, Joseph showed such capable integrity that Potiphar, his Egyptian master, “put everything he had under Joseph’s supervision.” Yet Genesis didn’t say, “Joseph was amazing,” but rather “The LORD was with Joseph.” Alas, Joseph also greatly impressed Potiphar’s wife. He refused to betray his master’s trust and rebuffed her advances. Potiphar had no choice but to believe his wife (even if he *didn’t* believe her) and sent Joseph to prison.

Application

Joseph, knowing how much Potiphar trusted him, might well have gotten some personal pleasure and kept his position at the head of the household. But he refused to betray Potiphar’s trust, and it cost him—outwardly, at least. Have you ever chosen not to do something wrong, even though you could “get away with it”? As you look back, are you glad you preserved your integrity or not? For what reasons?

Prayer

O God, free me from the desire for revenge on others. Instead, give me the moral courage to stand for what is right, especially on behalf of those who are powerless. Amen.

Wednesday, June 21

Scripture: Genesis 39:21-23, 41:9-16, 37-41

The LORD was with Joseph and remained loyal to him. He caused the jail’s commander to think highly of Joseph. The jail’s commander put all of the prisoners in the jail under Joseph’s supervision, and he was the one who determined everything that happened there. The jail’s commander paid no attention to anything under Joseph’s supervision, because the LORD was with him and made everything he did successful.

Then the chief wine steward spoke to Pharaoh: “Today I’ve just remembered my mistake. Pharaoh was angry with his servants and put me and the chief baker under arrest with the commander of the royal guard. We both dreamed one night, he and I, and each of our dreams had its own interpretation. A young Hebrew man, a servant of the commander of the royal guard, was with us. We described our dreams to him, and he interpreted our dreams for us, giving us an interpretation for each dream. His interpretations came true exactly: Pharaoh restored me to my position but hanged him.” So Pharaoh summoned Joseph, and they quickly brought him from the dungeon. He shaved, changed clothes, and appeared before Pharaoh. Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I had a dream, but no one could interpret it. Then I heard that when you hear a dream, you can interpret it.” Joseph answered Pharaoh, “It’s not me. God will give Pharaoh a favorable response.”

This advice seemed wise to Pharaoh and all his servants, and Pharaoh said to his servants, “Can we find a man with more God-given gifts than this one?” Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Since God has made all this known to you, no one is as intelligent and wise as you are. You will be in charge of my kingdom, and all my people will obey your command. Only as the enthroned king will I be greater than you.” Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Know this: I’ve given you authority over the entire land of Egypt.”

Observation

A Hebrew slave unfairly jailed by a rich Egyptian owner—how could Joseph escape that fix? God helped Joseph explain dreams for two fellow prisoners. After two years, Pharaoh’s restored steward finally remembered Joseph (still in jail) when the king had baffling dreams. Pharaoh,

impressed by Joseph's discernment, made an unexpected (no doubt shocking to ambitious Egyptian officers) choice. He freed the Hebrew and made him his chief deputy, with power over all of Egypt!

Application

Egypt's ruler said to Joseph, "I heard that when you hear a dream, you can interpret it." Joseph's answer was prompt and clear: "It's not me. God will give Pharaoh a favorable response" (41:16). Joseph could have easily taken the credit Pharaoh offered him, but his day-by-day choices before this moment had formed an honest character. What choices are you making each day to build the character God desires you to have?

Prayer

Merciful God, how powerfully Joseph exemplified the spirit of your kingdom as he saved his brothers and his Egyptian captors. Keep growing in me a capacity to embody and act out your mercy. Amen.

Thursday, June 22

Scripture: Psalm 105:16-22, 34:4-6

When God called for a famine in the land,
destroying every source of food,
he sent a man ahead of them,
who was sold as a slave: it was Joseph.
Joseph's feet hurt in his shackles;
his neck was in an iron collar,
until what he predicted actually happened,
until what the LORD had said proved him true.

The king sent for Joseph and set him free;
the ruler of many people released him.

The king made Joseph master of his house and ruler over everything he owned,
to make sure his princes acted according to his will,
and to teach wisdom to his advisors.

I sought the LORD and he answered me.

He delivered me from all my fears.

Those who look to God will shine;
their faces are never ashamed.

This suffering person cried out:

the LORD listened and saved him from every trouble.

Observation

Psalm 105 poetically recounted Israel's early history, including portions of Joseph's story as Genesis told it. Psalm 34 probably grew from a time when David, though already anointed king, still had to use all his wiles to keep jealous King Saul from killing him. Its language harked back to Joseph. It's someone who has had to cry out, a different word, used elsewhere of the Israelites crying out in Egypt. Both Psalms praised, not human ingenuity, but God's guiding providence.

Application

In "[Stone the Crows](#)" in the musical *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*, Joseph sings, "Anyone from anywhere can make it/If they get a lucky break." Neither Genesis nor

Psalms said Joseph got a “lucky break.” The Hebrew writers said the real story was that God’s people, like Joseph, needed patience to trust God’s work, which is sometimes done unseen in the background of life. Which perspective do you find more persuasive to guide your life?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, especially when things get tough, I find it hard to think beyond the current week or month. Teach me to trust in the long sweep of your work with and for your human servants, from Joseph all the way to now. Amen.

Friday, June 23

Scripture: Acts 7:9-18, 10:38

“Because the patriarchs were jealous of Joseph, they sold him into slavery in Egypt. God was with him, however, and rescued him from all his troubles. The grace and wisdom he gave Joseph were recognized by Pharaoh, king of Egypt, who appointed him ruler over Egypt and over his whole palace. A famine came upon all Egypt and Canaan, and great hardship came with it. Our ancestors had nothing to eat. When Jacob heard there was grain in Egypt, he sent our ancestors there for the first time. During their second visit, Joseph told his brothers who he was, and Pharaoh learned about Joseph’s family. Joseph sent for his father Jacob and all his relatives—seventy-five in all—and invited them to live with him. So Jacob went down to Egypt, where he and our ancestors died. Their bodies were brought back to Shechem and placed in the tomb that Abraham had purchased for a certain sum of money from Hamor’s children, who lived in Shechem. “When it was time for God to keep the promise he made to Abraham, the number of our people in Egypt had greatly expanded. But then *another king rose to power over Egypt who didn’t know anything about Joseph.*

You know about Jesus of Nazareth, whom God anointed with the Holy Spirit and endowed with power. Jesus traveled around doing good and healing everyone oppressed by the devil because God was with him.

Observation

Acts 7 tells of an energetic early Christian named Stephen on trial for his life, charged with serious religious offenses (Acts 6:13-14). His response was very much like Psalm 105 (which we read part of yesterday)—reciting the history of God and God’s people, including Joseph. “God was with him” echoed Genesis 39:2, 21, yet Joseph’s brothers rejected him (as the leaders rejected Jesus). In Acts 10, Peter shared Jesus with Roman soldiers, using that same phrase from Joseph’s story.

Application

Stephen’s defense wasn’t a set of random Bible stories. Joseph was rejected by his brothers, but God used him to become the ruler of all Pharaoh’s household. When his brothers needed food, the man they had to go to was the man they rejected. He was gracious to them and gave them what they needed. Were there already some in Stephen’s audience who saw where this was going? How did Joseph’s story point to Jesus, who fully lived out God’s presence with us?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, Daniel, David, now Joseph—all their stories were chapters of the story that led to and continues with you. Let me weave my life, too, into your great saving story. Amen.

Saturday, June 24

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 6:18-20, 2 Timothy 2:22, 1 Timothy 6:11

Avoid sexual immorality! Every sin that a person can do is committed outside the body, except those who engage in sexual immorality commit sin against their own bodies. Or don't you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you? Don't you know that you have the Holy Spirit from God, and you don't belong to yourselves? You have been bought and paid for, so honor God with your body.

Run away from adolescent cravings. Instead, pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace together with those who confess the Lord with a clean heart.

But as for you, man of God, run away from all these things. Instead, pursue righteousness, holy living, faithfulness, love, endurance, and gentleness.

Observation

The apostle Paul used one aspect of Joseph's story to shape his counsel to new Christians living in the rampantly immoral city of Corinth. "Avoid" in 1 Corinthians 6:18 was the Greek verb *pheugō*. With his extensive rabbinic Bible knowledge, Paul no doubt knew that Joseph's story used that verb. Genesis 39:12 uses *pheugō* to describe Joseph's successful escape from Potiphar's wife: "He fled out of her house" (Gen. 39:13, 15, 18). The same Greek verb occurred twice in the letters to guide the young pastor Timothy in leading his churches. In 1 Timothy 6 it did not relate to specifically sexual morality at all, but to avoiding the trap of trusting in material wealth rather than God's caring provision for our needs.

Application

Sometimes we feel as though Christian living is nothing but negative commands, a long series of "don'ts." It's important to recognize that the apostle's guidance "contains both negative and positive aspects." "Pursue" translates another strong but positive Greek verb, sometimes rendered as "strive for" or "try your best to." As you reflect on Joseph's story, how do you see his life reflecting the positive qualities in 1 Timothy 6:11, which grew from the same character that enabled him to flee from the temptation offered by his master's wife? How can you keep your life open to pursue all the good qualities God wishes to build into you?

Prayer

King Jesus, I give myself to you. Use who I am to flee from evil, but more to positively bless my circle of influence. Fulfill your promise to keep growing me as I walk with you. Amen.