

“Narratives for One-Anothering, Part 2: Chastity” Genesis 39

I am not a superhero. But I do have one superpower. I cut my own hair. I have not paid for a haircut for almost 20 years. Since before I was married. Some of you are thinking— yeah, we can tell.

I remember two things about those days when someone else cut my hair.

First, I remember how much I *loved* having someone else *wash* my hair. If you’ve got one of those sinks with a spot for a human neck, I will pay you to wash my hair.

Second thing: I remember a poster on the wall of the shop where I got my hair cut. It was an advertisement for a women’s hair product. But it had this woman. Blond and curly haired. And just gorgeous. She was the combination of all the elements I dreamed of. She was my dream woman.

I hated getting my hair cut. I looked forward to seeing my dream woman.

Then one day she was gone. So I went around to the garbage bin outside the salon, and there she was, next to the garbage can. Still in perfect condition. So of course I brought her home and hung her up in my bedroom, like the creepy teenager I was.

What if you do this sort of thing when you’re an adult? When you’re married? When you have children? When you are a Christian? When you’re doing ministry?

When I was in my mid-twenties and training for pastoral ministry, my professor told the class about a pastor that he knew.

This pastor didn’t have any poster on the wall of his dream girl. Instead, he *imagined* his dream girl. He looked around, and decided the features he liked. Hair color, hair style, eye color, skin tone, height, weight, figure. And he cultivated an image of his dream girl in his mind. For years.

And then one day, while he was preaching his sermon, with his wife and children in the 3rd row listening, his dream girl walked into the church and sat down.

He thought he was dreaming. How could it be the very woman he had assembled in his mind, right there in his church?

At this point in the story, my professor asked us this: “How long do you think it took for him to go to bed with her, and lose his wife, his relationship with children, his job, his ministry, and his Christian faith?”

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I don't remember the actual answer, but that wasn't the point. The point was, here's a pastor who isn't looking at pornography, isn't sleeping with the church secretary, and is a pretty happy family man. He had a dream woman kept in the secrecy of his mind. By the time she walked into his church, he was already gone.

I want you to imagine how this story in Genesis 39 might have ended if Joseph— a single man— had spent a few years walking around Palestine, and Egypt, picking a hairstyle here, a smile there, a pair of hips here, a laugh there, and had assembled his dream girl.

Maybe Potiphar's wife would have turned out to be that dream girl. Maybe she looked similar, but even better. Maybe she looked quite different.

But imagine how different this encounter with his master's wife might have been if Joseph had been in the habit of *consuming* women with his eyes. Abstracting certain physical features of different women. Cultivating his preferences. Seeing female bodies as the raw material for his possessive desires.

The text says clearly that Joseph was *sexy* (6). He had a great body. (The author uses the same description of his figure and looks as they did about Rachel, Joseph's mom, when Jacob first saw her.) Maybe Joseph would have felt a sense of entitlement. “A handsome guy like me should get to have any woman he wants.”

Or imagine if he had carried around deep bitterness against the Lord for what had happened in his life. “Lord, what kind of God lets the youngest kid in the family get sold off into slavery by his older brothers, who have always bullied him? “What kind of God lets a son get separated from his father, who loves him so much?”

If you were Joseph, it would be easy for your heart to grow cold toward your God, and to begin to look for your identity in other things: “I'll take whatever prestige, whatever passion, whatever I can get to make up for what God has put me through.”

Somehow, though, Joseph was not bitter toward the LORD, despite the trauma in his life. Somehow Joseph did not let his good looks convince him that he was entitled to any woman he might want. Joseph did not objectify women in his mind and heart like that pastor did.

Joseph was a broken man. When you read his life story, he seemed to love telling his brothers that one day he would be important and he would rule over them. He seemed to love how much his father favored him over his brothers.

And surely Joseph was broken *sexually*, too. Everyone's broken, and this brokenness impacts every area of everyone's lives— including your and my and Joseph's sexuality.

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So what is it that enabled him to stand up straight and do what was right when the pressure was on? I think our text tells us pretty clearly:

“The LORD was with him.”

Twice at the beginning of the story (2, 3) —we read that “The LORD was with him.” Plus in verse 5, we read twice that the LORD blessed Potiphar because of Joseph.

God’s has plans for Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob’s family in Palestine. But God follows the youngest of the twelve sons of Jacob down into Egypt. The LORD was with Joseph.

And then ... Potiphar’s wife (7) starts having her own fantasies about stunningly handsome Joseph. And before long, she says “come to bed with me!”

He gives her a stunning explanation of why he can’t possibly do something like that. Still, verse 10— she kept demanding it, every day!

Who knows what kind of pressure she might have put on him. “You’re my slave. Do what I say!” Maybe she threatened him. Think of how Joseph must have had to think this through, over and over. “What do I do? How do I get this to stop? Am I going to end up *dead*? Can I tell my master? Can I tell someone else? LORD, what do I do?” Did he ever think to himself, *maybe I should just do it?*

But somehow, Joseph is able to recognize that God has been with him. How could he ever leave his God and go with Potiphar’s wife instead? And that’s what he says!

You know, it says at the beginning, when things were going well, that the LORD was with Joseph. Then it says at the end, when Joseph is in prison, that the LORD was with him. But there’s no declaration from the narrator that God was “with him” during his temptation.

There are times when things are going so well that you know for sure that God is real, and that he is with you, and that he is blessing your work and your life. There are times when things are going just awful, and everything is falling apart in your life, and yet *you still* know for sure that the LORD is with you, holding on tight to you.

But then there are times when you don’t *feel* God’s presence. That’s a trial and a difficult experience all by itself. But then sometimes, when you’re in the middle of one of those seasons when you don’t feel God’s presence with you, you face some great temptation or test. That is so hard.

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The narrator *never* tells us that God was with Joseph in the middle of his season of temptation.

Whether Joseph felt God’s presence or not during this difficult time, we can’t be sure.

But what does Joseph *do*? What does he say? When temptation is staring him in the face, Joseph declares that (9), whether he feels God’s presence or not, he’s going to stand in God’s presence.

“How could I do such a wicked thing and sin against my God?” Joseph *spoke* the reality of God’s presence into his temptation.

Tim Keller has said that you can either listen to your heart, or you can *talk to your heart*.

Imagine if Joseph had listened to his heart only? Maybe his heart was saying “Where is your God now? How could an all-good and all-powerful God put you in a situation like this?” I know *my* heart has said those kinds of things to me before.

So, are you going to listen to your heart, and follow your heart? Or are you going to *preach to your heart*?

The writer of Psalm 42 and 43 preaches to his heart: “Why are you so downcast, O my soul? Put your hope in God! You will live another day and praise him.”

Joseph remembered the faithfulness of God. And he preached God’s presence and grace to his heart, to Potiphar’s wife, and into the face of his temptation and trial.

And this is what we need to do, too. Because if we listen to our heart instead of talking *to it*, we can easily justify secret sexual sins—whether it’s sleeping with someone else’s spouse, or sleeping with someone you’re not married to, or pretending to sleep with people you’re not married to in your mind through pornography or fantasies.

If you let your heart talk to you when you don’t feel God’s presence, it might tell you that you should just do what you want. The next thing you know, you don’t even WANT God’s presence. Because you can’t bear the guilt. And because you want more of what your heart wants.

What do you do if you’re already there?

If it’s not just that you don’t *feel* God’s presence and grace in your life, but you don’t even really want God’s presence, because you’re stuck in sin and guilt? You look at Joseph and think: that is not me.

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What I want you to experience tonight is this reality: Jesus is the Truer and Better Joseph.

Here’s 9 ways in which that’s a fact.

1.
Joseph was a shepherd, favored by his father, Jacob, so much so that his brothers hated him.

Jesus was God’s only Son, and God smiled on him with his favor for all eternity, and also during his earthly life, and made him to be the Good Shepherd of his whole people, Israel.

2.
Joseph had been taken down to Egypt, sold by his brothers who hated him, because he was prophesied to be the one who would rule over them.

Jesus had been taken down to Egypt, fleeing from the king who heard the prophecy that Jesus would rule all kings.

3.
Joseph is disgraced while he does the honorable thing. His clothes are stripped off of him. He does what the Lord, who was always with him, called him to do. And serves his master and his master’s wife in the process.

Jesus Christ is disgraced While doing the honorable thing. His own clothes are stripped off of him. Though he was the Lord, he does what his Father called him to do, and calls him his God. And while he does it, he gives his life to love and serve his enemies.

4.
Joseph is in a foreign land, far from home, and a long way from his Father. He thought he’d lost his father, and his father thought he was dead and gone.

Jesus is in a distant land, far from his Father. He didn’t just *think* he had lost his Father; he *actually did lose his Father*, and his Father lost *him*.

5.
Joseph, of course, was a slave. But he had been given tons of privileges! He had lots of authority, and lived very comfortably, in Egyptian luxury. He’s eating and drinking well. And *then* he is tempted.

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Jesus, by contrast, owned all wealth and prestige. But as a real man, he goes without food for 40 days in the wilderness. And it’s in that context *that* he is tempted. Jesus’ temptation was far more difficult.

6.

Potiphar left everything—his household and all his business affairs—in Joseph’s hands. He was convinced that Joseph would do all things well (6). And Joseph did.

God the Father put everything in Jesus’ hands, giving him all authority (Matt 28:18), putting everything under his feet (Eph 1:22; 1 Cor 15:27; Heb 2:8), and making him high priest over his household (Heb 3:6). And God told him to do all things well. And Jesus did.

7.

Joseph is super-handsome. Sexy even. Just like his mom, Rachel. Genesis tells us both, very explicitly.

Jesus has no outward appearance that anyone would want to sexually seduce him. And he becomes so disfigured because of all his beatings and his crucifixion that he didn’t even look human anymore.

8.

Joseph was betrayed by his brothers, who were jealous of him. They *sold* him for 230 grams of silver.

Jesus came unto his own people, and they did not receive him. One of his closest friends betrayed him for about 300 grams of silver.

9.

Over and over, the text says that the LORD was with Joseph. And the LORD was with Jesus. The Spirit sustained him throughout his ministry. And he enjoyed the Father’s smile on his words and work.

But at the cross, when Jesus needed his Father’s presence most, they were separated—because, although like Joseph, Jesus was innocent of everything he was accused of, unlike Joseph he was bearing the guilt of everything we have done.

What’s my point? I’m not trying to impress you with my Bible skills. I’m trying to impress you with *Jesus*!

My point is that Jesus is the truer and better Joseph. He doesn’t just give us an example of how to handle temptation.

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He saves us, by undergoing temptation, and living perfectly. And dying for us. And living again for us.

Ultimately, you shouldn't just look to Joseph, because you're not as holy as him.

Look to the better Joseph: Jesus.

Because he saves. And he gives you the power, by being God's presence in your life, to love him, and your neighbor, by resisting sexual temptation. Look to him, and begin to experience substantial healing from your sexual brokenness.