

“RED ALERT! SHIELDS UP!”  
by Rom A. Pegram (2/18/18)

At the age of 83, the great missionary statesman E. Stanley Jones was asked in what sin he felt most vulnerable to. Without hesitation he responded, “Lust.” Temptation that had plagued him as a youth was not all that far away. It was kind of like the tinted message on the side mirror of most cars, “Caution: Objects in mirror are closer than they appear.” When we look in the mirror of our past, we’re tempted to minimize the distance that separates us from poor moral choices we made and the resulting consequences that accompanied them. We say things like “Boy, have I come a long way.” But ask anyone who’s ever been held in the grips of addiction and they’ll tell you you’re *never* out of risk. Youthful lust is a tailgater; vulnerability is a constant companion...

It’s no wonder the Apostle Paul warns Timothy to ‘flee youthful lusts.’ He knew what E. Stanley Jones—even at the age of 83—was quick to point out. The power of sexual temptation is always closer than you think...

It’s not easy being a survivor in this world we’ve been placed in, is it? So, how ‘bout ‘more than a survivor?’ This past Wednesday, we officially began our Lenten series entitled ‘**More Than Survivors: What it takes to thrive spiritually.**’ Each week during Lent we’re going to hear a story about another biblical character that will help teach us truths in learning how to be ‘more than survivors’ in our world. Wednesday, we talked about Moses ... and how those who are ‘more than survivors’ are those who *practice making soul-conscious choices*—choices based on the Kingdom of God, not just on *our* little worlds... And today we look into the life of another Old Testament character that was definitely ‘more than a survivor.’ *How did he survive all that was thrown his way?* He had a plan *before* he was put in a ‘survivor’ situation ... and that plan carried him through. Let’s take a look at his story ... and his plan for survival ... right now in today’s scripture lesson (Genesis 39:1-23, NLT)...

When Joseph was taken to Egypt by the Ishmaelite traders, he was purchased by Potiphar, an Egyptian officer. Potiphar was captain of the guard for Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. <sup>2</sup> The LORD was with Joseph, so he succeeded in everything he did as he served in the home of his Egyptian master. <sup>3</sup> Potiphar noticed this and realized that the LORD was with Joseph, giving him success in everything he did. <sup>4</sup> This pleased Potiphar, so he soon made Joseph his personal attendant. He put him in charge of his entire household and everything he owned. <sup>5</sup> From the day Joseph was put in charge of his master’s household and property, the LORD began to bless Potiphar’s household for Joseph’s sake. All his household affairs ran smoothly, and his crops and livestock flourished. <sup>6</sup> So Potiphar gave Joseph complete administrative responsibility over everything he owned. With Joseph there, he didn’t worry about a thing—except what kind of food to eat! Joseph was a very handsome and well-built young man, <sup>7</sup> and Potiphar’s wife soon began to look at him lustfully. “Come and sleep with me,” she demanded. <sup>8</sup> But Joseph refused. “Look,” he told her, “my master trusts me with everything in his entire household. <sup>9</sup> No one here has more authority than I do. He has held back nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How could I do such a wicked thing? It would be a great sin against God.” <sup>10</sup> She kept putting pressure on

Joseph day after day, but he refused to sleep with her, and he kept out of her way as much as possible. <sup>11</sup> One day, however, no one else was around when he went in to do his work. <sup>12</sup> She came and grabbed him by his cloak, demanding, “Come on, sleep with me!” Joseph tore himself away, but he left his cloak in her hand as he ran from the house. <sup>13</sup> When she saw that she was holding his cloak and he had fled, <sup>14</sup> she called out to her servants. Soon all the men came running. “Look!” she said. “My husband has brought this Hebrew slave here to make fools of us! He came into my room to rape me, but I screamed. <sup>15</sup> When he heard me scream, he ran outside and got away, but he left his cloak behind with me.” <sup>16</sup> She kept the cloak with her until her husband came home. <sup>17</sup> Then she told him her story. “That Hebrew slave you’ve brought into our house tried to come in and fool around with me,” she said. <sup>18</sup> “But when I screamed, he ran outside, leaving his cloak with me!” <sup>19</sup> Potiphar was furious when he heard his wife’s story about how Joseph had treated her. <sup>20</sup> So he took Joseph and threw him into the prison where the king’s prisoners were held, and there he remained. <sup>21</sup> But the LORD was with Joseph in the prison and showed him his faithful love. And the LORD made Joseph a favorite with the prison warden. <sup>22</sup> Before long, the warden put Joseph in charge of all the other prisoners and over everything that happened in the prison.

*All-too-convenient evils*—those temptations that continually stalk us—are prevalent in our society as well. I’m reminded of the little boy who the shopkeeper noticed looking at a row of candy jars near the exit of his shop. He asked the little boy, “What are you doing, son? ‘Trying to steal some of my candy?’” “No sir,” the little boy responded. “I’m trying *not* to.”

Temptation in our lives is powerful, isn’t it (and I’m not just talking about candy, either)! *The best thing we could do* would be to remove ourselves from whatever *we know* is enticing & will get us into trouble ... especially with God. *Too often, however, we try and prove* (to ourselves, I guess) *that we can resist* while placing ourselves unnecessarily in harm’s way. So, how can we survive those times in our lives when, like that little boy, we’re ‘*trying not to*’ ... fall to temptation? Well, Joseph has the answer for us in today’s lesson. When we come face-to-face with temptation, whatever that may be for us, what do we do? How can we be ‘more than survivors’ in these situations? *I want to suggest a biblical plan, based on Joseph’s life, which should help us out.* What we need to do in these situations is to ... “Agree to FLEE.” First (acronym in sermon outline)...

**F** **EEL THE DANGER.** Joseph sensed the danger as soon as Mrs. Potiphar “took notice” of him (literally, “lifted up her eyes at” him) and made advances (v. 7). We know this because ... *he refused her on the grounds of his loyalty to Potiphar and allegiance to God* (vv. 7-10). When we end up in the middle of situations of temptation in this life, if we don’t feel any danger, we are a bit naïve and are setting ourselves up for failure ... sooner or later...

Paul Harvey shared an article entitled ‘Sin’s Peril’ about the grisly way Eskimos kill wolves. Even though it’s a bit graphic, it gives some real insights into the consuming, self-destructive nature of sin...

First, the Eskimo coats his knife blade with animal blood and allows it to freeze. Then he adds another layer of blood and another until the blade is completely concealed by frozen blood. Next the hunter fixes his knife in the ground with the blade up. When a wolf follows his sensitive nose to the source of the scent and discovers the bait, he licks it, tasting the fresh frozen blood. He begins to lick faster, more and more vigorously, lapping the blade until the keen edge is bare. Feverishly now, harder and harder, the wolf licks the blade in the Arctic night. So great becomes his craving for blood that the wolf does not notice the razor-sharp sting of the naked blade on his own tongue, nor does he recognize the instant at which his insatiable thirst is being satisfied by his own warm blood. His carnivorous appetite just craves more—until the dawn finds him dead in the snow!

Again, if we don't feel any danger in the midst of temptation, something's wrong! **We need to follow the example of Captain Kirk on *Star Trek*, who, when danger approached, called out, "Red alert! Shields up!"** (You wondered when that was coming, didn't you?) And then (here's the L)...

**L**EA**VE THE AREA.** Mrs. Potiphar pursued Joseph so relentlessly that eventually his only option was to run (vv. 9-12)! Joseph's relationship with God was *more important than his life*, wasn't it?

Author LeRoy Eims tells a story about living with rattlesnakes. He claims that, where he lives, rattlesnakes are common and that he encounters one, personally, almost every summer. He says that it's a frightening experience to see a rattlesnake coiled, looking at you, and ready to strike ... because they're lightning fast and accurate. *Eims goes on to tell his readers that he has a two-point plan for handling rattlesnakes.* What is it? **SHUN & AVOID!**

It's that simple. You don't need much insight to figure out what to do with something as dangerous as a rattlesnake! You just don't mess around with it, do you? Man ... *if only we could have just as much sense when it comes to worldly temptations in our lives!* Folks, we need to follow the example of Joseph and learn to "Leave the area!" If possible, when temptation confronts *we need to flee*—look away, get away, leave the room, drive a different route, stop an activity, change plans—even if it seems awkward or ungraceful, or causes temporary misunderstanding. *Joseph didn't leave a forwarding address for temptation ... and neither should we!* Next, comes E...

**E**X**PERIENCE GOD'S PLEASURE.** It's difficult to see any pleasure in Joseph's situation, I admit! Mrs. Potiphar turns him in to the authorities, and he finds himself the victim of an angry husband's wrath... But, remember this: ***The very moment we turn away from temptation, God is pleased!***

It's true we may not feel God's pleasure at the moment of turning away from temptation. Why? 'Partly because some attractions are harder to refuse than others. It's been said

(Franklin Jones), “What makes resisting temptation difficult for many people is that they don’t *want* to discourage it completely.”

But, folks, when we attack the temptation head on, like Joseph, sooner or later a sense of satisfaction—a *peace like no other*—will set in! Don’t ever forget ... Joseph began to experience God’s pleasure *in prison*—“... the Lord was with Joseph and blessed him, so that the jailer was pleased with him” (21). Don’t forget that *the very moment we turn away from temptation, God is pleased!* And, like Joseph, if we’re faithful and put our relationship with God first—above all else this life tosses our way, *we will Experience God’s pleasure, too!* Finally (and here’s the last E)...

**E** **STABLISH PROTECTIONS.** To be more than a survivor in *this* area of life *we must have a predetermined plan fixed in our minds so we can withstand all-too-convenient temptations that come at us!* The reason Joseph was able to withstand the temptations of Mrs. Potiphar was because he’d already worked out a plan (vv. 2-6, 8-10):

- He was committed to be loyal to Potiphar for the trust he’d placed in him...
- He recognized God’s presence and favor and was committed to serve God, no matter what...
- As Mrs. Potiphar pursued Joseph, he resolved to be with her *as little as possible*...

So, for Joseph, he was able to survive all-too-convenient temptations because he had a predetermined plan for survival ... which made all the difference in the world...

Josh McDowell’s a pretty *straight* talker when dealing with teens—talking to them about temptations they *will* face in their young lives. And he says, “**Decide what you’ll do in the backseat of the car before you ever get there ... otherwise passion, rather than common sense, rules!**”

It’s no different for big kids, folks! In a book called *Every Man’s Battle* (Arterburn and Stoeker), the authors suggest preparing for temptation in life by playing “war game simulations.” *Mentally simulate what tempts you the most in life, in advance, and set up your defenses!*

I want to end today by speaking about one of the most effective ways to protect ourselves from temptation ... and to be ‘more than survivors’ in this world we live in. One of the most effective measures we can take, folks, is the protection of ... *accountability*. It’s been said *one of the greatest reasons men get into trouble today is they don’t have to answer to anyone for their lives!* That’s why ‘small group ministry’ is so power for all of us—so important (we’ll be getting to that eventually). *It can be a matter of survival*... That’s why AA works; that’s why NA works, and so forth...

These words are from the diary of an addict:

**“Sunday, October 14:** I’m living on borrowed time. I really don’t know how long I’ll make it. I can feel my heart beat. I just wonder how long my body can take this abuse. I’m sitting at a phone booth right now, not really sure who or why to call. I know exactly what they are going to tell me. ... This is so hard. It is worse than hard—when you know this is killing you, and you keep on doing it. It’s pure hell! What’s so bad is that I try to think of all the people that love me and care for me. And, believe me, I realize it’s a lot of people. But I just can’t quit right now.”

We don’t know for sure who this entry was written by—some kind of addict, but we’re just not sure. *We do know the person who wrote these candid words eventually found the means to FLEE from his temptations and overcome them.* And based on what we know about the significant people in his life, a key factor in his recovery was the establishment of protection through *accountable* relationships. Again, that’s one reason we’ll be formally introducing ‘small group ministry’ in this church—more and more in the future. It can be a matter of survival...

Folks, we must choose to be strong & courageous in order to walk with God like we know we should. And I know this island we’ve been dropped down on is not an easy place to even consider walking with God as a way of life ... but during the very second we make that choice, the Holy Spirit starts guiding us and walking through the struggle with us—whatever it is. Even if you’ve struggled with something this past week (and feel like the preacher’s picking on you today), know the Holy Spirit wants to walk through that struggle with you every time. You’re not alone; others battle the same things, and Jesus can be relied on to not let the temperature rise higher than you can handle. Folks, today, let Jesus (as well as Joseph) show you how to FLEE! That’s what God wants for your life...