

Sermon Series: Distinct: Living Above the Norm
To be used with: Session Four: Distinct in My Relationships
Sermon Title Possibilities: A Life Purified by God
Scripture: Genesis 39:1-12

Connection with Unit Theme: To complement the small group study of *Distinct: Living Above the Norm* these sermon outlines will use similar Scripture passages to reinforce the same themes as the study regarding our relationships.

Introduction: [While holding up a glass of water, ask this question.] How important is it to you that this is pure, that it's clean, that it has no contaminants in it? Why? I assume that the reason is because you drink water in some form every day. Putting dirty, contaminated water into your body will make you sick. It can even kill you. The fact is that here in this country, we take clean water for granted. It doesn't just come that way. It has to be purified through an extensive process.

Joseph was a man who had been purified. His heart was fully devoted to God. Because of that, he was able to resist the strong temptation to add something to his life that would have contaminated him and eventually would have destroyed him.

1. A life purified by God rejoices in the gifts God has already given. (Gen. 39:8-9)

When Joseph was first approached by Potiphar's wife, the invitation that she gave him must have seemed very appealing. Joseph could have given in to the temptation based on the reality of all that he had lost. He had lost his family, his homeland, his freedom and his heritage. It would have been easy to think that he had even lost his God. He could have focused on all these things. The problem with focusing on what a person has lost is that it usually makes that person want something to replace it. And it's usually something that they're not supposed to have. But they feel a right to it, like it's something that they deserve because they didn't deserve the loss they've experienced. Or it may not even be a loss that causes a person to focus on what they can't have. Sometimes it's just a perceived loss. That's what Eve did. Instead of focusing on all that God had given her, she chose to focus on the one thing that she could not have and therefore made it the desire of her life (Gen. 3).

Joseph chose to focus on what he had rather than focusing on what he wanted or what he had lost. He had the trust of Potiphar. He had authority to do whatever he wanted in his master's household. He had his needs provided for him. No, Joseph was not where he would have liked to be. And no, life had not turned out the way that he had anticipated. But he made a choice to focus on the treasures that he did have fully recognizing that if he gave into temptation to dirty his life, he would lose those.

2. A life purified by God respects marriage even when others don't. (Gen. 39:9 – "you are his wife")

Unlike Joseph, Potiphar's wife did not recognize or value what she already had. She was married, and Joseph felt like he needed to remind her of that. He had good reason. She was propositioning him right in her husband's house. It's pretty bad when the person being invited into a relationship has to remind the one doing the inviting that this is a party that he can't be invited to!

It might seem odd that Joseph would respect marriage this much. He had grown up in an environment of four mothers and one father. In the marriage of his parents and step parents, there was a lot of manipulation and a lot of internal strife. But maybe it was exactly for this reason that he did value marriage – because he had seen such a bad example of it.

The Bible does not say what kind of a marriage Potiphar and his wife had. But whatever was going on or not going on in their marriage didn't justify the lack of respect that she had for the fact that she was married. Circumstances are not the determinant of whether or not a marriage should be valued. The fact that it exists is reason enough to value it.

God honored the perspective that Joseph had on marriage. At this point in his life, he didn't know if he was ever going to get to enjoy marriage. But God blessed him with a wife and a family. His sons eventually became the heads of two of the tribes of Israel. He had to wait...a long time, and he had to endure a lot of suffering. Those are both things that society today doesn't seem to be able to handle. It was this willingness to wait for the fulfillment of the natural desires of his heart that motivated God to bless him in the way that He did.

3. A life purified by God refuses to listen to the culture around it. (Gen. 39:10)

Joseph was attacked with the attempts of this woman to get him to do what she wanted him to do and what he would not allow himself to do. Joseph's resolve was strong. But the bombardment with the morals and messages of the culture in that house was enough to destroy the walls of protection of most any person. Had the message of Potiphar's wife been presented to him only once, it would have been relatively easy for a man like him to ignore that message. But she kept at him – day after day. She just would not leave it alone. She didn't know how to accept "No". She saw a handsome young man that appealed to her senses and she wanted him. Her voice was persistent and demanding. But Joseph had chosen a long time ago to listen to a different voice. He had heard that voice in the dreams during the night, and that voice told him that he was destined for something higher. He didn't understand it all, but he knew that God had plans for him. If he was to realize those plans, he was going to have to decide to ignore the voices of his culture and listen only to the voice of God.

4. A life purified by God recognizes that there are dangers that need to be avoided. (Gen. 39:10 – "be with her")

Temptation is like a snake. The one who plays with it eventually gets bitten. Joseph had lived in Potiphar's house for a long time. His rise to the level of authority that he had would not have happened quickly. He had been in the house long enough to know that what Potiphar's wife wanted, she eventually would gain by whatever means necessary. She was a snake not to be played with. So Joseph did everything he could not to be around her.

Avoiding her was not just about her; it was also about him. Joseph was a young, unmarried man alone in a world that was very foreign to him. He had very little opportunities for physical or emotional pleasure. This was an opportunity that was staring him in the face invading his personal space. He knew he could only hold out so long. He was weak. He didn't try to hide it from himself or anyone else. He had to take steps – small ones at first – to try and keep her at a distance and to remove the temptation from his eyes.

5. A life purified by God runs when temptation gets too strong. (Gen. 39:11-12; 2 Tim. 2:22)

If small steps don't work, then giant leaps become necessary. Potiphar's wife caught on pretty quickly that Joseph was avoiding her. It was difficult to do. She was his master's wife, and she could command him to be wherever she wanted him to be. Avoiding her might have meant that Joseph had to delegate some of his responsibilities to other people, maybe even leave some jobs undone which might have put him in some level of jeopardy with Potiphar. It was Potiphar that had first noticed the amount and quality of the work that Joseph did, so surely he would have noticed a change in Joseph's demeanor and performance. With the kind of work ethic that Joseph had, it probably bothered him that he was being forced to leave work undone or done poorly. He knew it might get him in trouble with Potiphar. But he was willing lay down that offering because he would rather offend Potiphar than offend God.

Eventually the day came when Potiphar's wife would have no more of this avoidance. She laid a trap for Joseph and tried to force him into her bed. Joseph ran. When a slave runs, it usually doesn't turn out too well for the slave. It could have easily cost him his life. Joseph was fully aware of this. But again, he was willing to pay that price. Many years later, Jesus said that if something in your life, no matter how important or needed it is to you, is leading you into sin, then it is better to totally eradicate it from your life than to keep it and have to pay the consequences (Matt. 5:29). Paul warned young Timothy to flee the desires of youth (2 Tim. 2:22) but also encouraged his readers with the realization that there is always a way to escape temptation (1 Cor. 10:13). Joseph was willing to take that escape route whatever it cost and whatever he had to amputate. It wasn't an easy road, but it was a road that had a good destination.

Conclusion: Many churches sing a popular song about God's healing. Great song. Great words. But the author was living a lie. He was addicted to pornography. Giving in to his addiction made him feel so bad that he would call in sick to work. He went through an elaborate scheme to make people believe he had cancer when his greater need was something that medicine could not touch. He would go to concerts with an oxygen tube up his nose and appeal to people for financial help with his medical bills. When people found out, they felt betrayed. How could someone who wrote songs like that be so impure? How could they ever sing that song again? The man was living a lie, and he has admitted that. But the song is still true. Jesus is our Healer, and whatever the issue that needs to be dealt with, He truly is all that you need to be purified once again.

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