Multi-colored Grace, Part 4: God With Us in Temptation or Trials (Gen 39)

1 Peter 4:10 has some key words that tie in with Joseph's story and our study today in Gen 39: "As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God ..."

The term for steward meant a household manager, which is the role Joseph will have in Potiphar's house in Gen 39. Today's story also says Joseph was specially gifted or graced by God to serve as a steward in Potiphar's house. When the OT was translated into Greek, the word for a coat of *many colors* in Gen 37 was the same Greek word Peter uses here for *multi-colored grace* or God's *manifold grace* in all its varieties, or a grace of many colors:

- grace in some of the Bible's blackest chapters, like we saw last week
- grace for scarlet-letter sins, and grace for the darkest pits and prisons
- grace to forgive the deepest hurts of your past or upbringing, as we will see later in Joseph's story, but I think it begins in this chapter
- grace for bad dads, rape victims, and mass murderers like in Gen 34
- grace for even the worst family dramas possible, like in Gen 37-38
- grace for harlots, widows, for women used, afflicted, and mistreated, all that in Gen 37-38, plus grace as things go bad to worse in Gen 39
- it all starts with a boy in a special coat in God's multi-colored grace

1 Peter 1:6 and James 1:2 use the same colorful word for "various trials." Art Azurdia sums up Joseph's as he sets the scene: "He was abandoned early by a dying mother. He was favored harmfully by a foolish father. He was hated desperately by jealous brothers. Victimized violently, confined mercilessly, sold greedily, forsaken thoroughly. All before his 18th birthday"

Gen 39:1: Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt; and Potiphar, an Egyptian officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the bodyguard [head of secret service], bought him from the Ishmaelites, who had taken him down there.

Joseph has been stripped of his special royal robe, a long flowing robe not like the usual working man's clothes. Jacob's "prince" is now nearly naked on a slave block being sold like a piece of meat. Probably just a loin cloth is Joseph's only clothes now, he's gone from riches to rags. Buyers examining teeth and bodily health. A 17-year-old maybe looking like he hadn't done much outside work, a new lighter-skinned fresh meat is on the market. He could have gone anywhere in the African kingdom of Egypt that went down to the land of modern Sudan at this time, he could have ended up working

in a field as a slave, doing back-breaking brick-making work, like the later Hebrews in Egypt. But God's promise preserves the lad, God's providence brings him indoors near Pharaoh, and God's presence blesses him, Gen 12:3

Not just at the beginning of the chapter in the master's house, but also at the end of it in the master's prison, Joseph's greater heavenly Master is with him ²¹ But the LORD was with Joseph and extended kindness to him, and gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer... ²³ The chief jailer did not supervise anything under Joseph's charge because the LORD was with him ...

In 2 verses at the start of the section and in 2 verses at the end, we read that the LORD was with Joseph. In Hebrew writing, this is an inclusio, meaning everything included in-between has one big main point: *the Lord was with him*. In a special way, as God is with His covenant people, as the LORD in all capital letters emphasizes here with this special covenant name Yahweh, the Lord was with Joseph. This phrase is like book ends for the story or like parentheses in modern writing to show it's part of one big bracketed thought

Gen 39 isn't mainly about how to succeed in a difficult work environment (though v. 1-6 does speak to that). The main point of the chapter is not how to resist sexual temptation (though v. 7-12 are one of the best illustrations of later biblical teaching on fighting/fleeing it in Proverbs 5-7 or NT writings). It's not primarily about bad things happening to people who are doing good (though in v. 13-23 and the next chapter Joseph's story relates to that, too). The far bigger point over all those sub-points is God. God was with Joseph!

The overarching doctrine or teaching here is God's providence and presence in all of life, including work, temptation, unjust suffering, and whatever else we face. The doctrine of God's presence and providence is very practical. If you really believe God is present everywhere and presiding over everything it will make all the difference in all aspects of life. Doctrine is so practical!

Stephen in Acts 7 comments on Gen 39 and confirms the same main point: 'The patriarchs became jealous of Joseph and sold him into Egypt. But God was with him, and rescued him from all his afflictions, and granted him favor and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh...' (v. 9-10, covering Gen 39-41)

² The LORD was with Joseph, so he became a successful man. And he was in the house of his master, the Egyptian. ³ Now his master saw that the LORD was with him ... [notice that repeated phrase 'the Lord was with him']

God with him is the point we can't miss. It's how Joseph was blessed in his time with Potiphar and with the prison warden. It's how Joseph was able to resist temptation with no one else around--he believed the doctrine of God's omnipresence--that God was with him, as he makes clear at the end of v. 10. But God is also with His people when they fail and sin, like Judah or Tamar in Gen 38. We ended last week in Matthew 1, and it celebrates God's grace toward sin in all its ugly colors, mentioning the names of Judah and Tamar in that scarlet thread of redemption in the line of Messiah, and then it says "they shall call His name Immanuel, which translated means 'God with us.'

[that's not just true of Joseph, it's true of us with Jesus] The God with Joseph in Gen 39 becomes the God with us in the gospel, for all who trust in Immanuel! That's how Matthew begins and it ends with Him saying 'surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age' (28:20 NIV).

Title: Multi-Colored Grace, Part 4: God With Us in Temptation or Trials

- 1. God With Us in Temptation (v. 1-16)
- 2. God With Us in Trials (v. 17-23)

Firstly, in the first part of the chapter we see: **God With Us in Temptation** Joseph's temptations may differ than yours, but you can apply this to other areas, too. After all Joseph went through, betrayed by brothers, I'm sure he was tempted to become a bitter man, but he becomes a better man for it. He knew God was with him, and even the unbeliever he works for will see that.

² The LORD was with Joseph, so he became a successful man. And he was in the house of his master, the Egyptian. ³ Now his master saw that the LORD was with him and how the LORD caused all that he did to prosper in his hand. ⁴ So Joseph found favor in his sight and became his personal servant; and he made him overseer over his house, and all that he owned he put in his charge. ⁵ It came about that from the time he made him overseer in his house and over all that he owned, the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house on account of Joseph; thus the LORD's blessing was upon all that he owned, in the house and in the field. ⁶ So he left everything he owned in Joseph's charge; and with him there he did not concern himself with anything except the food which he ate. Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance.

God is with Joseph to bless him, and he's even blessed physically, well-built or well-endowed is the idea of the Hebrew, a nice body and nice-looking,

good looks, and he proves to be a good worker. His master notices this in v. 3 and promotes him in v. 4 to his personal attendant and household manager and by v. 5 he's also made steward and overseer of his outside possessions. In v. 6 it's clear Joseph is his master's closest most trusted right hand man. Notice the middle of v. 5 says "the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house on account of Joseph; thus the LORD's blessing was upon all that he owned ..."

This is what God promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, other nations to be blessed through their offspring. Joseph sees part of an initial fulfillment of the promises, and a pattern where God blesses us so we'll be a blessing. But with great blessing comes great temptation (as King David found out). This successful strapping young man, who v. 6 says is easy on the eyes, catches the eyes of a desperate housewife: ⁷ It came about after these events that his master's wife looked with desire at Joseph, and she said, "Lie with me." NKJV 'cast longing eyes'; NIV 'come to bed.' Notice she's not dignified with a name, just the fact she's "his master's wife" is all we need to know. As wife to a top gun of Egypt, she's probably beautiful. ⁸ But he refused ...

Kent Hughes writes: 'Mrs. Potiphar ... was in the habit of getting what she wanted. And after all, Joseph was a slave – hence her ... demands. Actually, though it was the mistress of the house who was a slave [enslaved by sin but why wasn't Joseph?]...his hormones were at full force; so he brimmed with sexual curiosity and drive. The rationalizations were so easy and logical. No one would ever know (cf. 39:11). His family would certainly never find out ... Joseph was a slave (cf. 39:7-11). His life was not his own ... by giving in to Mrs. Potiphar's wishes, he could enhance his career ... Potiphar was gone all the time and was not meeting his wife's needs. She was entitled to a little caring affection. This would actually be the loving thing to do...who could blame him? It was in his blood. Just look at his brothers Reuben and Judah! And again, not a soul would ever know.' [but God was with him] ²

Reuben had slept with his father's concubine in chapter 35, Judah was Mr. Lust-at-First-Sight in chapter 38, his sons/grandsons Zerah and Perez were the product of his involvement with what he believed was a cult prostitute. Simeon and Levi were driven by their flesh to murder Shechemites because Dinah was treated like a prostitute (34:31), but Judah treats Tamar as one. Onan gratified his lusts while refusing his responsibilities and God killed him ... Joseph's own dad had kids with 4 women who all lived together, so there's no human explanation why the best-looking son should say no here.

His background is a fleshly driven, sexually living, messy, sinning family. If anyone could be expected to 'act out,' after all he'd been through, Joseph might be expected to. Bad examples, betrayed by his family, sold as a slave ...if anyone could blame a dysfunctional family Joseph could be tempted to. His own brothers didn't care for him, but now a powerful woman seems to. They didn't want him, now someone special does. His brothers showed ugly unloving hearts as they laid hands on him to throw him in a pit in rejection. Now promotion and acceptance are before him as a beautiful woman wants to lay hands on him to make love with him as she *throws herself at Joseph*.

As we come to v. 8, what we read is not only surprising, it's supernatural. It shouts out to us of the power of believing God is with us, as Joseph did, and how that reality governed and guarded his life. It tells us no matter our past or what our father or family was like, there's no excuse to sin we can blame. By God's grace, v. 8 he refused and said to his master's wife, "Behold, with me here, my master does not concern himself with anything in the house, and he has put all that he owns in my charge. "There is no one greater in this house than I, and he has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do this great evil and sin against God?"

Application #1: Remember God is near in temptation (v. 9b)

Her 3 words "lie with me" are answered by 62 words from Joseph, building up to the key last sentence: he understood God was with him in temptation. It would have been a sin against his master, yes, but his greater concern was a greater evil in God's sight, and ultimately he says, it's 'a sin against God.'

David recognized this in Ps 51:4 after his adultery with Bathsheba, he said to God "against You, and You only I have sinned, and done what is evil in your sight..." Yes, David sinned against man in that story, but above all, his sin was ultimately and primarily against God. His greatest concern was that it was evil in God's sight. Study Ps 51 further on remembering God is with us, and Ps 139, which reminds us God is everywhere and sees everything. Ps 145:8 reminds us "the LORD is near to all who call on Him ... in truth." He's not only present watching, He's close to help if we truly want and ask

Our kids know this from a Catechism for Boys and Girls in our devotions: Q. Can you see God? (play clip in sermon here?)

A. No, I cannot see God, but He always sees me.

Q. Can God see all things?

A. Yes, nothing can be hidden from God [Talk about how to get the audio CD and ways to use, devotions, car, etc.]³

We need to remember and really believe that God is near to us temptation... Application #2: Refuse to be near temptation if you can (v. 10)

Genesis 39:10 As she spoke to Joseph day after day [that means repeatedly, regularly, or daily] he did not listen to her to lie beside her or be with her.

Prov 5:3: 'the lips of an adulteress drip honey [that's what Potiphar's wife was constantly dripping, daily honey] And smoother than oil is her speech;

⁴ But in the end she is bitter as wormwood, Sharp as a two-edged sword.

⁵ Her feet go down to death ... ⁸ Keep your way far from her And do not go near...[that's Joseph in v.10] ²⁰ For why should you, my son, be exhilarated with an adulteress And embrace the bosom of a foreigner? ²¹ For the ways of a man are before the eyes of the LORD, And He watches all his paths.

Again, knowing God is present and watching is key. He's near to help...but don't go near what tempts you, either. Proverbs 6 says if you come near the fire, it will burn your clothes or body, and even worse than touching coals is touching another man's wife (6:27-29). Avoid her form and flattery (24-25)

Proverbs 7 then describes a young man who lacks wisdom going near where temptation to immorality is, at night, a wrong place and wrong time. It's no surprise he falls because he came close to the edge of the pool where there's one waiting to grab and pull him in, but this plunge is to his death (7:7-23). So Proverbs 7:25 soberly warns his son and us "do not stray into her paths."

You can study Prov 5-7 for more and Prov 8 for how lady wisdom calls out. Your temptation may not be a Gen 39 indecent proposal by a boss, but there are temptations today in the workplace in both directions. The immoral of our world today also call out from magazine covers at stores, internet sites or searches, online or on smart phones, advertisements on TV or at the mall. The Mrs. Potiphars of today are all over movies, MTV and other media, and men and women both have unlimited and unending virtual voices saying to them "lie with me" in the fantasy world and the physical world. Wisdom is crying out to us from Prov 5-9 to listen to her and to not go near temptation.

Practically and pastorally never being alone with someone of the opposite gender, behind closed doors or with no one else nearby, men not counseling

women 1-on-1, having policies so leaders are never alone with kids, those are some of the more obvious ways to avoid temptation or even appearance to evil as a church. But in your home and private life, in whatever areas you struggle in temptation, are you refusing to be near temptation? If shopping is your vice, it's not good to walk around the mall. If gluttonous over-eating is your struggle, there's places you need to avoid. Proverbs 5 and following apply that principle to purity, with much wisdom to study, meditate, apply.

[it also applies to purity of mind and other areas of temptation]

It's good to think of how Joseph's example speaks to us today, but we need to remember the original readers and context. Moses is writing this to Israel as they prepare under Joshua to live in Canaan, a very immoral society. It's why Gen 38 is right before this, contrasting Judah's sin with Joseph's purity In 38:1 Judah leaves his family to live in the land of pagan Canaan. He goes near them and not surprisingly, ends up like them. Like the old motto "when in Rome, do as the Romans," Judah when in Canaan did as they did. But Gen 39 shows Joseph even when in Egypt, is *not* doing as the Egyptians did

J.M. Boice asks: 'Why is it that professing Christian young people go away to college and there fall into [sinning] with a boyfriend or girlfriend, which they would never have done while at home? Why will a man on a business trip do what he would probably resist doing in his hometown? Why will [churchgoers] compromise their speech and actions at parties in a way that they would not in everyday circumstances? The reason is the person's low view of God. They may profess to believe in God ... [but in reality] actually not the one, universal God of all times and places ... present everywhere.'4

Judah left home and God behind...Joseph truly believed God was with him. In contrast in 38:14-16, Judah sees a lady covered with a veil and initiates a conversation with her for paid services as a harlot. But Joseph resists a free offer initiated by Mrs. Potiphar, who's not veiled and probably beautifully and provocatively dressed, based on art of Egyptian well-to-do women. In Judah's case, he goes near where harlots sat and goes in to one instantly, but in contrast, Joseph avoids being with Potiphar's wife and resists incessant daily invitations. God with us tells us to refuse to be near temptations, #2 ...

Application #3: Run if temptation comes near to you (v. 11-16)

¹¹ Now it happened one day that he went into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the household was there inside. ¹² She caught him by his

garment, saying, "Lie with me!" And he left his garment in her hand and fled, and went outside. ¹³ When she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and had fled outside, ¹⁴ she called to the men of her household and said to them, "See, he has brought in a Hebrew to us to make sport of us; he came in to me to lie with me, and I screamed. ¹⁵ "When he heard that I raised my voice and screamed, he left his garment beside me and fled and went outside." ¹⁶ So she left his garment beside her until his master came...

Matthew Henry: 'It is better to lose a good coat than a good conscience.' Notice v. 12 says he flees, even as she grabs his jacket or his outer garment, i.e., he runs out in undergarments. Better to lose some dignity than purity. I remember when I was in college just a few miles from the epicenter of the Northridge quake and a guy from our dorm ran out in his underwear after it hit. He felt his life was at stake and ran for his life, much like Joseph does. Turn to 1 Corinthians 6 where I think Paul sheds light on this very story. If temptation like this comes, we're not to stick around and be strong, we're to sprint to safety. In this battlefield, 'God is looking for a few good cowards' 6

1 Cor 6:18 *Flee immorality.* Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. ¹⁹ Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that **you are not your own?** ²⁰ For you have been **bought with a price** [slave language]: therefore glorify God in your body.

Potiphar bought Joseph with a price, so his wife thought she owned Joseph. But Joseph knew he was not his own, his body belonged to the Lord and his future wife, and it's to glorify his heavenly higher Master and Redeemer. Now turn to chapter 10 for another key verse on God with us in temptation.

1 Cor 10:8 tells us not to be immoral and it says about the OT in v. 11: *Now these things happened to them as an example, and they* [OT stories, Gen 39 included] *were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.* ¹² *Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall.* ¹³ *No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.* ¹⁴ *Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.*'

Again, God with us is key in temptation. Remember He is near, and God is faithful, and won't give us a temptation His grace is not sufficient for. God

provides a way of escape, and for idolatry and immorality, it's by fleeing. If you try and stand in your strength, you'll fall. Don't stay to fight it, flee it!

Now turn to 2 Timothy 2 for one more NT application of Joseph fleeing sin. Eph 4:24 calls us to 'put off...deceitful lusts,' literally put off like a garment. We're to fling these sins from us and flee from them like a shirt with ants or bees in it. 2 Tim 2:22: "flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart."

The Greek word for "flee" here is *fugeo*, that we get fugitive from. We're to flee this temptation like a fugitive fleeing a U.S. Marshall, like Dr. Kimball fleeing Deputy Gerard, like Harrison Ford running from Tommy Lee Jones. And we are to run to Jesus, and to run with others pursuing righteousness. It starts in v. 1 being strong in the grace of Jesus. In your note sheet for further study, a Christ-centered book *Finally Free-Purity with the Power of Grace.* By grace, God with us in temptation is what Gen 39:1-16 shows us ...

For our closing point, notice also: God with us in trials (v. 17-23)

Then she spoke to him [Potiphar] with these words, "The Hebrew slave, whom you brought to us, came in to me to make sport of me; ¹⁸ and as I raised my voice and screamed, he left his garment beside me and fled outside." ¹⁹ Now when his master heard the words of his wife, which she spoke to him, saying, "This is what your slave did to me," his anger burned. ²⁰ So Joseph's master took him and put him into the jail, the place where the king's prisoners were confined; and he was there in the jail [Joseph's purity is rewarded by prison with no trial]. ²¹ But the LORD was with Joseph and extended kindness to him, and gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer. ²² The chief jailer committed to Joseph's charge all the prisoners who were in the jail; so that whatever was done there, he was responsible for it. ²³ The chief jailer did not supervise anything under Joseph's charge because the LORD was with him; and whatever he did, the LORD made to prosper.

Joseph's life is a cycle of trials where he honors his authority but bad things happen that God intends good in. One writer sums his up and down pattern of Gen 37-39 'favorite of the head of the household (Jacob, Potiphar, prison keeper) over others like himself, whether brothers, slaves, or prisoners; and he is in a position of dominance over the others, whether he is checking on his brothers for his father (37:12-14), presiding over the other slaves of Potiphar (39:4-5), or overseeing the other prisoners (39:21-23) ... The robe

and the cloak ... indicate first his elevation and then a stripping away ... and the pit/prison ... is the place where Joseph is both condemned and saved ... Additionally, the pit was a result of Joseph's rejection by his brothers, as the prison was a result of his rejection by Potiphar.'8

But God's with him. Ps 105:17 says he 'was sold as a slave. ¹⁸They afflicted his feet with fetters [prison shackles], He himself was laid in irons; ¹⁹ Until the time that his word came to pass, The word of the LORD tested him.'

We don't have time to fully develop this point, and that's ok, because this trial Joseph's in will continue into the next chapter and message. But I just want us to notice God was with him in prison just as God was in prospering him at the start of the chapter. The same phrase is used in good and bad and when they go from bad to worse, the same Lord is with His people. Why do bad things happen to people who are doing what's good? Joseph won't get any help with *why* for years, but the *Who* sustains him, God is with him. Voddie Baucham says the main point of Gen 39 isn't purity, it's that 'God is present with His people even in the worst circumstances.' He writes:

'The most comforting words in this chapter are, "God was with Joseph."... The message here is not "resist sexual temptation so that you, too, can end up in prison." The message here is the providence of God! God is with his people. Joseph finds himself in slavery, away from the Land of Promise -- far from his father's house, but not beyond the Lord's reach.

As a pastor, [he continues] I've had to walk with people during some of the most difficult circumstances imaginable. During those times, it's incredibly comforting to know that we serve a God who is there! [one asks] "My son was falsely accused, and is on his way to prison. Where is God?" He's in the same place he was when Joseph was falsely accused and sent to prison. Which, by the way, is the same place he was when his only begotten Son was also falsely accused and sentenced to death! This will ... redirect our focus and remind us of our only source of hope." Amen.

We can't end without considering Jesus and His gospel. The point of Gen 39 isn't for God's people to wear 'what would Joseph do' wristbands, it's God with us, fulfilled in Immanuel, what Jesus *did do* on the cross for us. The NT repeats this phrase "God was with him" only 2x of 2 people. Acts 7:9 says of Joseph "God was with him" and Acts 10:38 says that of Jesus.

- Joseph was a suffering servant, Jesus was the great suffering Servant
- Joseph may have lacked wisdom in Gen 37 in repeatedly telling his brothers dreams of them bowing to him. But by Gen 39:4-6 Joseph

- is increasing in wisdom and favor with men. This is another parallel to Jesus, 'increasing in wisdom...and favor with men.' (Luke 2:52)
- Luke's gospel then follow Christ's increased favor with increased temptation in Luke 4, also a bold and repeated one like Gen 39:10. Heb. 4:15 says He was tempted in every way like us, so He can help us. Jesus like Joseph replied to his tempter in God-centered terms
- Jesus after His tempting says "He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners ... to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor...Today this scripture is fulfilled..." (4:18-22 NIV)
- Joseph in 39:17-18 is falsely accused with no fair trial. So was Jesus
- In v. 19b the master's wrath is stirred. Jesus satisfied our Master's
- Like Joseph in v. 20, Jesus is bound with common criminals. Ps 105 says they bruised ¹⁰ the feet of Joseph in prison. Gen 3:15 said Christ would be bruised on the heel. Gen 39:23 ends by Joseph prospering. Isaiah 53:10 prophesied Jesus the suffering servant would be bruised but then Yahweh would make his hand prosper (same Heb. phrase).

It's really marvelous how much Joseph is like Christ in his temptation and trials, and it should move us to be like Christ in ours. James and Peter say it should move us to joy in the Lord in various trials by multi-color grace. It should make us make much of Christ, Immanuel, God with us. God is near in prosperity or in prison. Let me give Paul the last word from prison, Phil 4

'Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!... The Lord is near... I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity ... I can do all things through Him who strengthens me...my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. Now to our God and Father be the glory forever and ever. Amen.' (Phil 4:4-5, 11-13, 19-20)

¹ "The Whisper of Grace in the Shout of Scandal," 10/3/2012 http://www2.masters.edu/pulpit/speakers/Dr-Art-Azurdia

² Hughes, p. ?

³ http://teachthemthefaith.com/

⁴ Boice, p. 915-16.

⁵ Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), p. 80.

⁶ Hughes, p. ?

⁷ Heath Lambert, *Finally Free*, Zondervan, 2013.
⁸ Allan Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, p. 622-23, citing Donald Seybold.
⁹ Voddie Baucham, *Joseph and the Gospel of Many Colors*, p. 65-66.
¹⁰ Ps 105:18 NIV84, compare Isaiah 53:10 NKJV.