

POTIPHARS WIFE



THE WEIGHT OF WANT

Genesis 39

POTIPHARS WIFE

NAME : Potiphar's wife, name unknown, but IS said in Islamic tradition to be Zulaikha, meaning radiant, beautiful or brilliant.

ABOUT : Wife of Potiphar, a captain of the guard for Pharaoh. He purchases Joseph (son of Rachel and Jacob) as a slave after his brothers sold him.

Joseph was purchased as a slave and worked in Potiphar's house. He is very good-looking and soon catches the eye of the lady of the household. She invites him to sleep with her many times, but each time he refuses. Feeling the rejection, no doubt, she tries to force the issue, and Joseph escapes as she grasps his cloak (the second one he's had to let go of!) She knows the penalty for adultery in Egypt was to have her nose cut off, so she gets in first and accuses Joseph of trying to rape her.

Potiphar is obviously outraged, and Joseph is sent to Jail. This all works out for the good, as it's through this experience that he ends up working for the Pharaoh and saves his family in the famine.

Scripture.

⁵ From the time he put him in charge of his household and of all that he owned, the Lord blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph. The blessing of the Lord was on everything Potiphar had, both in the house and in the field. ⁶ So Potiphar left everything he had in Joseph's care; with Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate.

Now Joseph was well-built and handsome, ⁷ and after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, "Come to bed with me!"

⁸ But he refused. "With me in charge," he told her, "my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. ⁹ No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" ¹⁰ And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her.

MORE MEETS MORALITY



Desire is a complex subject; it often carries negative connotations because the story usually revolves around desires we shouldn't have, or don't want to have. Here we can see that Potiphar's wife has everything she needs but still wants more, still wants what she doesn't have. That need looks like it may all be fulfilled in Joseph for her, for male attention, to be seen, to be admired and desired, ultimately to be loved.

She thinks from her position of power that it will all come to her. But there's a higher authority for Joseph, Potiphar, and, of course, God. It would have been easy for Joseph to think, no one will ever know, that it's ok because she has some authority here. But Joseph had more integrity than that. His desire for what was right was stronger than her desire for wrong.

How we use the power and authority we have, however small, is of huge importance to the well-being of ourselves and all those around us. Doing the right thing costs, especially if we are really tempted by the opposite.

Small group questions

- 1. God has entrusted each of us with His creation, and more importantly, with each other's hearts and souls, especially our spouses and children. How do you live up to this trust?**
- 2. Do you have a story of the cost of doing the right thing?**
- 3. Who around you holds you accountable and helps you to see yourself clearly?**
- 4. How do they do this, and how hard is it to receive any correction?**

CLOAK & SNAGGER

¹¹ One day he went into the house to attend to his duties, and none of the household servants was inside. ¹² She caught him by his cloak and said, “Come to bed with me!” But he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house.

¹³ When she saw that he had left his cloak in her hand and had run out of the house, ¹⁴ she called her household servants. “Look,” she said to them, “this Hebrew has been brought to us to make sport of us! He came in here to sleep with me, but I screamed. ¹⁵ When he heard me scream for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house.”

⁶ She kept his cloak beside her until his master came home. ¹⁷ Then she told him this story: “That Hebrew slave you brought us came to me to make sport of me. ¹⁸ But as soon as I screamed for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house.”

¹⁹ When his master heard the story his wife told him, saying, “This is how your slave treated me,” he burned with anger. ²⁰ Joseph’s master took him and put him in prison, the place where the king’s prisoners were confined.

Reflection

That will be the second cloak that Joseph has lost now! Twice, he has been left exposed. Yet it’s the ones still holding the cloaks that have something to hide.

Scorned and hurt by the rejection, Potiphar’s wife turns nasty; she accuses Joseph to cope with her shame (perhaps just at the rejection) and divert the blame. This happened before in the Garden of Eden, didn’t it, only it was Adam then blaming God and Eve, “it was the woman you gave me”

Taking responsibility for our actions can make us vulnerable and expose us to the potential for negative self-judgment, as well as the loss of connection with others. Blaming someone else allows us to avoid this vulnerability and maintain a sense of control, at least for a while. But the truth will weigh on a conscience; it will be more of a prison sentence than the one Joseph served.



Small group questions

1. What do you most want to avoid?
2. Who are you when you are alone compared to a crowd or company?
3. Do you feel mostly accepted in your social circles?
4. How comfortable are you sharing your failings and fears with others?

WORKS OF MERCY - VISIT THE IMPRISONED

Joseph was imprisoned from Potiphar's wife's accusations....

***Naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.'* - Matthew 25:36**

There will be many housebound people living unseen around you.

Could you spare an hour a week to visit just one of them? Could you ask in your parish if they have a list of housebound? Or perhaps you have a neighbour who is isolated and can't get out like they used to. You may need to be vetted before being allowed to visit, but at least start the process. Can you imagine being a prisoner in your home, totally reliant on others for your every need? If your parish isn't set up for this, try Age UK or similar charities that will really appreciate your offers to volunteer some time.



FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION



Scripture

3:1 All night long on my bed

I looked for the one my heart loves;

I looked for him but did not find him.

2 I will get up now and go about the city, through its streets and squares; I will search for the one my heart loves. So I looked for him but did not find him.

7:10 I belong to my beloved, and his desire is for me.

Song of Songs

Reflection

The story of Israel is the story of us too, A lover (God) pursuing the heart of his beloved (us). The beloved is fickle and lapses into unfaithfulness, time and again, yet the lover stays constant, forgives endlessly, loves without measure. Protects, nourishes and embraces. The Christian call is to respond to this, to turn around after every detour, to get back up after every fall and keep seeking Him.

Questions

- 1. If you knew you could never be caught, what one thing do you think you would do?**
- 2. What is your biggest want? Dare to answer honestly and spend some time bringing it to the Lord, for Him to speak into the root of it. How does it differ from a need?**
- 3. What would it look like if the deepest desire of your soul was the Lord?**

Invite the lord into these places with His perfect love. Ask him for the grace to desire Him above all else.

TAKING IT TO PRAYER

This is a tough prayer, perhaps the toughest, as you go through pay attention to the sense of a little discomfort, or a catch in your soul, it might just be here the Lord wants to work on you

O Jesus! Meek and humble of heart, hear me.

After each petition, respond with, “Deliver me, Jesus.”

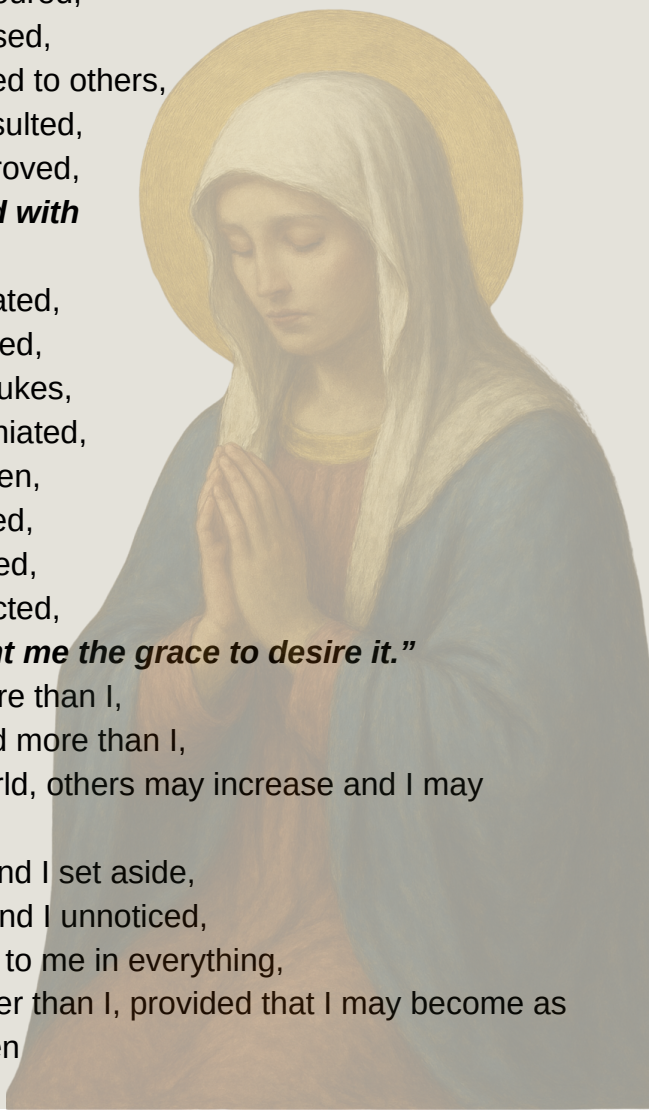
From the desire of being esteemed,
From the desire of being loved,
From the desire of being extolled,
From the desire of being honoured,
From the desire of being praised,
From the desire to be preferred to others,
From the desire of being consulted,
From the desire of being approved,

***After each petition, respond with
“Deliver me, Jesus.”***

From the fear of being humiliated,
From the fear of being despised,
From the fear of suffering rebukes,
From the fear of being calumniated,
From the fear of being forgotten,
From the fear of being ridiculed,
From the fear of being wronged,
From the fear of being suspected,

Respond with, “Jesus, grant me the grace to desire it.”

That others may be loved more than I,
That others may be esteemed more than I,
That, in the opinion of the world, others may increase and I may decrease,
That others may be chosen and I set aside,
That others may be praised and I unnoticed,
That others may be preferred to me in everything,
That others may become holier than I, provided that I may become as holy as I should. Amen



PURIFYING OUR DESIRES

There are two aspects to this, but with all of the Spiritual life, it's God who does the heavy lifting; we play a part. Even the desire to desire closeness to Him, is a beautiful start to overcoming those things that will harm us and lead us away from His grace.

Your Part

1. Self-Reflection and Honesty: Honestly examine your inner desires often to identify those that are worldly and selfish.
2. Practice detachment from material possessions, wealth, praise, and power, recognising them as potential hindrances to your spiritual life, can help you to choose wisely.
3. Develop humility, especially when given praise or responsibility, and give the credit back to God for the work He has done in you.
4. Make a conscious choice to desire God's will above all else. Sometimes it's super hard, but God will see your heart in the trying.
5. Regularly go to Confession to receive grace for spiritual battles

God's Work in You

1. Allow God to work through the circumstances and defects of your character, trusting that He can use these for your good and growth.
2. Understand that purifying our desires is a deep, transformative process that begins now and will last till we meet Him face to face in heaven..
3. Lean on God's grace and ask for His guidance and strength throughout the day as you navigate daily duties and challenges.

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