What a wonderful privilege we have to study the Old Testament this year. The gospel stories I remember best from my childhood are those taught from the Old Testament by my Primary and youth teachers. In times of reflection and challenge, these stories have guided me and helped me make righteous decisions.

The story of Joseph who was sold into Egypt by his brothers is an Old Testament favorite. In this day of moral permissiveness, the portion of the story that speaks to Joseph’s personal morality in the face of temptation is a powerful reminder to all disciples of Christ.

In Genesis we read of how the Lord caused Joseph to prosper, and he became the ruler of Potiphar’s household. Potiphar was captain of Pharaoh’s guard and a very powerful man. After a time, Potiphar’s wife began to make seductive advances towards Joseph.

“And it came to pass after these things, that his master’s wife cast her eyes upon Joseph; and she said, Lie with me.

“But he refused, and said unto his master’s wife, Behold, my master wotteth not what is with me in the house, and he hath committed all that he hath to my hand;

“There is none greater in this house than I; neither hath he kept back any thing from me but thee, because thou art his wife: how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?”

“And it came to pass, as she spake to Joseph day by day, that he hearkened not to lie by her, or to be with her.

“And it came to pass about this time, that Joseph went into the house to do his business; and there was none of the men of the house there within.

“And she caught him by his garment, saying, Lie with me: and he left his garment in her hand, and fled, and got him out” (Genesis 39:7–12; emphasis added).

Joseph’s response is as powerful now as it was then: “How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?”

After this experience, Joseph was falsely accused and thrown into prison. However, the Lord continued to bless him because of his righteousness. He was released from prison and eventually became servant to
Pharaoh himself. This put Joseph in a position to save his own family and to have a righteous posterity.

This story has had a great influence on me throughout my life. As a teenager I faced a situation somewhat similar to Joseph’s. I had treasured up Joseph’s story in my mind, and,

comes at you in the halls of popular entertainment, on the Internet, in the movies, on television, in cheap literature, and in other ways—subtle, titillating, and difficult to resist. Peer pressure may be almost overpowering. But . . . you must not give in. You must be strong. You must take the long look ahead rather than succumbing to the present seductive temptation.”

I would add two other scriptural admonitions to the lesson we learn from Joseph’s experience in guarding against temptation and sin.

The first admonition is taken from the Book of Mormon: “Bridle all your passions.” The second is taught in the Doctrine and Covenants: “Let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly.”

“Bridle All Your Passions”

Alma’s teaching to his son Shiblon, who was beginning his mission, is instructive to each of us: “I would that ye would be diligent and temperate in all things.

“See that ye are not lifted up unto pride; yea, see that ye do not boast in your own wisdom, nor of your much strength.

“Use boldness, but not overbearance; and also see that ye bridle all your passions, that ye may be filled with love; see that ye refrain from idleness.”

like him, I fled in the face of an imminent and dangerous moral temptation. In my heart I have often thanked those teachers of my youth who taught me this wonderful lesson from the Old Testament.

“You Must Not Give In”

In our time, it may be necessary for us to run daily from the moral vices that so often confront us.

President Gordon B. Hinckley has written: “You face tremendous temptation. It
bridled and restrained as we strive to be obedient and follow the Lord’s teachings.

In an environment such as ours, which suggests we should immediately have everything we want, bridling our physical passions is mandatory if we are to draw near to the Savior and become more like Him.

“Let Virtue Garnish Thy Thoughts”

In the Doctrine and Covenants we read:

“Let thy bowels also be full of charity towards all men, and to the household of faith, and let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly; then shall thy confidence wax strong in the presence of God. . . .

“The Holy Ghost shall be thy constant companion” (D&C 121:45–46; emphasis added).

The Lord uses an interesting phrase in this passage: “Let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly.” In other words, we are to enhance our thoughts with virtue. I think of a common garnishment as an addition to a nice plate of food. The garnish adds beauty and delight to the meal, just as virtue does to our thoughts.

Virtue is a basic theme of the 13th article of faith:

“We believe in being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous, and in doing good to all men; indeed, we may say that we follow the admonition of Paul—We believe all things, we hope all things, we have endured many things, and hope to be able to endure all things. If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things.”

It has been my experience that very little occurs in the way of transgression that is not first rehearsed and debated in one’s own mind. A key to avoiding these pitfalls is to let virtue guide our thoughts and deeds always, not allowing our minds to wander into places where they should not go.

As members of the Church, we know how strongly President Hinckley feels about virtue and morality. He has written:

“Challenging though it may be, there is a way to apply traditional moral principles in our day. For some unknown reason, there is constantly appearing the false rationalization that at one time in the long-ago, virtue was easy and that now it is difficult. I would like to remind any who feel that way that there has never been a time since the Creation when the same forces were not at work that are at work today. The proposal made by Potiphar’s wife to Joseph in Egypt is no different from that faced by many men and women and youth in our day.

“The influences today may be more apparent and more seductive, but they are no more compelling. One cannot be shielded entirely from these influences. They are all about us. Our culture is saturated with them. But the same kind of self-discipline exercised by Joseph will yield the same beneficial result. Notwithstanding the so-called ‘new morality,’ notwithstanding the much-discussed changes in moral standards, there is no adequate substitute for virtue. God’s standards may be challenged everywhere throughout the world, but God has not abrogated his commandments.

“...The violation of his commandments in this, as in any other age, brings only regret, sorrow, loss of self-respect, and in many cases tragedy.”

I love President Hinckley. I sustain him as our living prophet and revelator. I witness that by following the words of the ancient and modern prophets, by fleeing temptation, by bridling our passions, and by garnishing our thoughts with virtue, we, like Joseph of Egypt, will be prospered spiritually and physically by the Lord and will enjoy the constant companionship of the Holy Ghost in our lives.

NOTES