

Winning Against Temptation
James 1:13-17

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. ¹⁴ But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. ¹⁵ Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. ¹⁶ Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. ¹⁷ Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

James uses the same word for 'test' in vs 12 as 'temptation' in v 13-14. Why? Because every trial God intends for our temporal good – perseverance & wisdom – also includes a temptation.

Every blessing contains the opportunity for vice because sin is the derivation of good.

ILL – The person who becomes CEO can abuse that power.
The person who becomes a parent can neglect a child.
The teacher can fail to study.
The employee can be late for work.
The spouse can be neglectful.

James 3:1-2 - *Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. ² For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body.*

EX: Financial strain can cause us to doubt God's provision.
The death of a love one can challenge God's love.
Suffering often claims that God is not just.
Equal hardship on people who appear innocent and people who appear good make us think God is not fair.

v 12 – *Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.*

Remaining 'steadfast' in these trials demands that we think otherwise; that we do not entertain, much less promote, negative connotations about God.

God uses the circumstances of life to bless us, but we can take those blessings and misuse them. That's why James use the same word for trial and temptation.

As many of the Bible authors do, James is going to state his proposition in both negative and positive terms:

13 – God tempts no one - *Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.*

17 – God is unchangingly good - *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.*

First: Some Thoughts about Temptation

a) No one escapes temptation

1 Corinthians 10:13 - No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

b) We blame others for our sin

Genesis 3:11-13 - Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?"¹² The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate."

We blame others because it is so hard to admit our own sin. This was true of Adam and it's true of you and me. It's especially true of sinners.

Grace encourages and enables us to acknowledge and confess our sin

Romans 5:20 - where sin increased, grace abounded all the more

1 John 1:9 - If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.¹⁰ If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

c) Fatalism is not Christianity

A poor person cannot blame their thievery on poverty.

An alcoholic cannot blame life's pressures.

An abuser cannot blame a victim

What is your excuse for sin?

Why can we not blame life or God or others?

Galatians 5:22-23 – The fruit of the Spirit is...self-control

There is no "the devil made me do it" in Christianity.

d) God cannot be blamed for our sin

v 13 - Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one

Second: God Does Test His People

Genesis 22:1 - *After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.”* ² *He said, “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.”*

Genesis 22:12 - *“Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.”*

Don’t miss the word construct there – ‘your son, your only son...’

John 3:16 - *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.*

God tests us so that we will know what is in our hearts, so that our hearts will mature –

Every test prepares us for what God knows is coming in the future

Isaiah 28:9-10 - *To whom will he teach knowledge, and to whom will he explain the message? Those who are weaned from the milk, those taken from the breast? ¹⁰ For it is precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little.”*

Deuteronomy 8:2-6 - *And you shall remember the whole way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. ³ And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word^[a] that comes from the mouth of the LORD. ⁴ Your clothing did not wear out on you and your foot did not swell these forty years. ⁵ Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, the LORD your God disciplines you. ⁶ So you shall keep the commandments of the LORD your God by walking in his ways and by fearing him.*

God tests us for our own good. Like a parent who regularly tests a child’s ability to work around the house in preparation for life’s work or a teacher who tests a student to insure the student understands and can apply truth. God tests us for “the crown of life...”. (v 12)

Third: God Cannot Tempt People Because God Cannot Be Tempted 13

Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.

God is not susceptible to sin and since God has no desire for evil, it isn’t in God to tempt others

This is why God can't be blamed for our sin. God is holy, and holiness has no room for even the thought of sin –

Do not be deceived,

- About the root cause of your own sin
- About God's inability to tempt you to sin

What James really wants us to see is the contradiction between verses 13 and 14. In 13 God cannot tempt. In verse 14 it is our own desires that tempt us to sin.

Fourth: It's Important to Know How Temptation Works 14-15

a) Desire is neutral

The problem is not our desire. It's not even that we desire things strongly. It's really that we don't desire things strongly enough. We settle for temporal, momentary, even false, satisfactions that cannot deliver what they promise.

We exchange treasure for trash.

b) Temptation has a common path

Two metaphors:

First metaphor – **14** - *But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.*

James pictures desire as enticement and luring

1 – Desire

This can be a desire for the good but that doesn't trust God.

God has an godly means and end for all the desires he has given us

- Money is a good desire, but theft is wrong
- Intimacy is a good desire but inside of marriage

2 – Enticement to obtain the good in a wrong way

3 – Lured = dragged

The illustration is a fishing metaphor. The bait on a fisherman's hook entices the fish and once hooked, the fish is dragged away.

The desire to eat is a natural and God-given desire.

Second Metaphor **15** - *Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.*

James here pictures desire as conceiving and giving birth

Once sin is conceived, James says, it grows until it kills its host

You can a) resist temptation or
 b) welcome temptation

If you welcome it, embrace it, it will conceive and produce sin.

James is writing to Jewish Christians and he's employing well-known Jewish imagery

Proverbs 8:1-6 - *Does not wisdom call? Does not understanding raise her voice? On the heights beside the way, at the crossroads she takes her stand; ³ beside the gates in front of the town, at the entrance of the portals she cries aloud: "To you, O men, I call, and my cry is to the children of man. O simple ones, learn prudence; O fools, learn sense. Hear, for I will speak noble things, and from my lips will come what is right,*

Proverbs 9:13-18 - *The woman Folly is loud; she is seductive^[c] and knows nothing. ¹⁴ She sits at the door of her house; she takes a seat on the highest places of the town, ⁵ calling to those who pass by, who are going straight on their way, "Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!" And to him who lacks sense she says "Stolen water is sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant." ¹⁸ But he does not know that the dead^[d] are there, that her guests are in the depths of Sheol.*

Fifth: Rejoice in God's Plan for Us 17-1

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. ¹⁸ Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

James presents two reasons why God is not responsible for our sin: God's goodness and our depravity –

- a) God is good – *every good and perfect gift is from him*
- b) God is holy (lights)
- c) God never changes – *there is no variation or shadow due to change*
- d) God birthed us in truth – *he brought us forth by the word of truth*
- e) God intends us to be like him – *that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures*

Whereas sin believes in a lie and ends in death, God birthed us in truth that ends in heaven.

- *Desire
- *Deception
- *Design
- *Disobedience
- *Death

“It does not matter how small the sins are provided that their cumulative effect is to edge the man away from the Light and out into the Nothing. Murder is no better than cards if cards can do the trick. Indeed the safest road to Hell is the gradual one--the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts....

*- Your affectionate uncle, Screwtape.
C.S. Lewis in The Screwtape Letters*

How do we best avoid sin?

Romans 12:2 - Do not be conformed to this world,^[c] but be transformed by the renewal of your mind,

Philippians 4:8-9 - Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. ⁹ What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

Psalms 119:9-11 - How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word. ¹⁰ With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments! ¹¹ I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.

Conclusion:

1 - God has given us everything we need for abundant and eternal life.

Romans 8:32 - He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

2 – The Holy Spirit is in you to overcome sin

Hebrews 2:18 - For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

Let's take some time to contemplate temptation and confess where we have given the flesh, the world or the devil opportunity to tempt us.

Community Groups:

- 1 – Why does James use the same word for test in v 12 as temptation in vs 13-14.
- 2 – How might certain people abuse their gift, position or blessing from God?
- 3 – How do we know that God doesn't tempt us? V 13 – God tempts no one. V 17 – God is good.
- 4 – How does Romans 5:20 encourage us to confess our sin? What about 1 John 1:9?
- 5 – In 1 John 1:9, what does God promise to do when we confess our sin?
- 6 – What are some reasons God tests us?
- 7 – Explain how desire is not our problem. The problem is settling for something less than God desires for us.
- 8 – Provide some examples of desire gone wrong. How have you seen this demonstrated in your own life or the life of someone else.
- 9 – What does wisdom cry for us to learn in Proverbs 8:1-6?
- 10 – According to Proverbs 9:13-18, How is stolen water sweet and bread eaten in secret pleasant?
- 11 – Read verses 17-18. Why is God not responsible for our sin?
- 12 – Recall the 5 steps of sin detailed in the message –
- 13 – According to the quote by Lewis, why are 'small' sins more effective than 'larger' sins in harming us?
- 14 – Read Romans 12:1-2, Philippians 4:8-9 and Psalm 119:9-11 and detail how to avoid falling prey to temptation.
- 15 – How could you create a plan to diminish the power of temptation in your life?