

How To Face Temptation

James 1:13-18

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Follow with me as we read James 1:13-18.

James says, "Let no one say when..."—notice it is "when" not "if"—"...he..."—or "she"—"...is tempted, 'I am tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires..."—or "lusts"—"...and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full grown, brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with Whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of His creatures" or "creation."

If you are going to grow as a Christian, or if you are going to mature in your spiritual walk with the Lord, there must be two things you must learn to deal with. They are, number one, trials or tests, in verses 2-12; and number two, temptations, in verses 13-18. The Christian life involves trials and temptations. You ask anyone who has walked with God any length of time, and they will whole-heartedly agree that you will face trials/tests and temptations to sin.

James says in verse 2, "My brethren, count it all joy when..."—again, not "if" but "when"—"...you fall into diverse..."—or "different"—"...temptations" or "trials or testings." The same Greek word that is translated "test" or "trial" is also translated "to tempt." The context determines what it means. So I believe that in verse 2, it is in the noun form; he's talking about trials and testings. But then in verse 13, we see a contrast. James says, "Let no one say when..."—again "when," not "if"—"...he is tempted..." The word "tempted" there is in the verb form. As you look at the context, it is an indication that James switches the subject from trials and testings to temptations.

You say, "What's the difference?" God tests us to bring out our worth. It is for our good and for His glory. But Satan, in our lusts, tempts us to bring out our worst. So God tests us to bring out our worth or value to strengthen and mature our faith, but Satan tempts us to sin and to disobey God. So James says, "Let no man say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God.'"

How closely are trials and temptations related? Very closely related, because when God allows a trial or a testing, Satan many times will come in and begin to whisper in your ear. He'll say, "God doesn't love you. You have to take things into your own hands. God's not going to provide. You have to do what you need to do to get ahead." In a time of trial, you will be tempted to doubt God; to doubt His love, to doubt that He cares about you, to doubt that He'll take care of you. So trials can quickly become a temptation, and Satan will use that to try to tempt us to doubt God and turn away from Him.

Last week we looked at trials, but in our text today, we are learning how to face temptations.

There are three things that we have to remember. Number one, you need to remember temptation's source. Verses 13-14 says, "Let no man say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires..."—or "lusts"; there's the source—"...and enticed." Again, "when" you are tempted; not "if" you are tempted.

In 1 Corinthians 10:13—another classic verse on temptation—Paul says, "There is no temptation taken you but what is common to man; but God is faithful, Who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape." But notice he says, "no temptation taken you but what is common to man." Everyone experiences temptation.

Who is responsible when we are tempted, when temptation comes? First James tells us who is not responsible. In verse 13, it does not come from God. "Let no man say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by...'—or literally, "from"—"...God." So he wants to make it perfectly clear that when we are tempted, God is not to blame. God is not the source. God is not the one who is tempting us to sin.

Why would James say that? I believe because we love to play the blame game. Someone said, "There are two errors in American history: the passing of the buffalo and the passing of the buck." I like that. Aren't we good at blaming everyone but ourselves? "It's not my fault." Passing the buck is so common. We blame our parents for our problems. "If I'm messed up, my parents are the problem. They spanked me too much. They didn't spank me enough. They wouldn't give me what I wanted. I'm tweaked because of my parents." Poor parents; they get blamed for everything. Or we blame our family. "I grew up in a dysfunctional family." I say, "Well, welcome to the club. Who didn't?" Or we blame our environment. Maybe our job. But here's the classic: our spouse. You say, "I don't believe that." Then you haven't read the book of Genesis.

Remember God said, "Adam, did you eat the fruit I told you not to eat?" What did Adam say? He didn't say, "Yes, God; You're right. I'm sorry. Please forgive me." No; he said, "The woman that You gave me..." [emphasis on You]. "God, this is Your fault. I just took a nap and woke up and found out I was married. It was You and me and the animals were hangin' out and everything was sweet. Then I woke up from a nap, and I have a wife. That's when everything started to go downhill." I'm kidding! But let's be Biblical here; okay?

I heard a cute story about a little boy in Sunday school. He heard the story of Adam falling asleep and God taking from his rib and making the wife and bringing her to the man. A couple of days later when he was coming home from school he had a side ache, and he said, "Mommy, I think I'm having a wife." At least he's listening.

But Adam said, "It's the woman You gave me, God! It's Your problem!" And when Eve ate of the fruit, God asked her, "Eve, did you do it?" She said, "The devil made me do it!" She learned that from Flip Wilson, by the way. "The devil made me do it! It's his fault!" We're always

passing the buck.

I believe with all my heart—and I've thought about this Biblically and practically for many years—that the first step to gaining victory over temptation is to admit that we're the problem. I can't blame my wife. I can't blame my husband. I can't blame my family. I can't blame my circumstances. We are the problem. Surely don't blame God.

In the text in verse 13, James gives the reasons that temptation doesn't come from God. James says, "For God cannot be tempted by evil." In the Greek, it is emphatic. It starts with "God" for emphasis; "God cannot be tempted by evil." You know why? Because God is perfectly, completely holy. God is holy. If God is anything, God is a holy God. He is separate from sin. So God, Who is holy, cannot be tempted with evil. There are no needs in God either. Because God has no needs, God is not tempted.

Then notice it says, "Nor does He Himself..."—that is, "God"—"...tempt anyone." Again, it's emphatic in the Greek. Or literally it reads, "and He Himself tempts no man." So temptation does not come from God. God cannot be tempted, and neither does God tempt anyone. Sometimes people say, "I couldn't help it; God made me this way. He gave me this drive or desire. It's God-given so it's God's fault." No, it isn't. A God-given drive, taken out of God's will, is a disobedience and sin before a holy God.

Notice, though, where temptation does come from. Here's the positive, in verse 14: our own lusts. "But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed." So "we found the enemy, and the enemy is us." It's our own sinful passions.

Have you ever noticed that wherever you go, you take yourself with you? That's right. "I'm just going to move to a new town, so I won't be tempted anymore. I'm going to change my environment, and maybe then, I won't be tempted." Ha ha. Everywhere you go, you take yourself with you. You take your own lusts and your own desires and your own sinful heart.

You're not going to understand this unless you understand what the Bible teaches about the nature of mankind; that we are sinful by nature. It's called "the fall of man." When Adam and Eve sinned and disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden, they fell. Everyone born in Adam after that, which is the entire human race, is born with a sinful, fallen, human nature. We have a sinful bent. A sinful bent is primarily a rebellion against God, and it manifests itself in different ways. We're at war with God. We're at enmity with God in our unregenerated, unconverted state. So we need to have salvation, regeneration. We need to have peace with God. We need to have peace in our own hearts. Unless you understand that man is a sinful being, you won't understand the nature and source of true temptation.

The word "lust" is a neutral word; it can be a good lust or a bad lust. It depends upon the context. We can lust after God. We can desire God. The word "lust" means "desire." There are many desires that God has given that, in and of themselves, are not sinful. But outside of the will of God and against God's will for our lives, they become sinful desires. In this context,

these are sinful desires or sinful lusts. We need to understand that we are going to be sinful, and we are going to be wicked. We're going to rebel against God.

There is no mention in this entire text of the devil. You would think that in a classic passage on temptation you would find the devil mentioned predominantly. The Christian has three enemies: the world, the flesh and the devil. But the world and the devil wouldn't be a problem if it weren't for the flesh. That's the problem: I am a sinner, and I'm bent toward sin. Even a Christian can yield to his old, Adamic, sinful nature. We must take responsibility for our sins. Jesus said, "From the heart of man comes evil thoughts, adulteries and murders." So stop shifting blame, and remember that the temptation source comes from you.

If you're struggling with a sin in your life right now, the first thing you need to do is to admit that you're the problem, that you're responsible. Don't blame anyone else because you keep doing sinful things. It comes from your own desires.

Here's the second thing you need to remember: Remember temptation's course. Remember the steps that take place when you are tempted. Verses 14-15 say, "Every man is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin" or "maffin." It's a general term for all kinds of sin. He's not talking about one specific sin. It's a general, broad term for disobeying God and breaking God's commandments. "And sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death."

James gives us three steps in temptation's course. It starts with desire. "But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed." There are some terms here that you need to understand. The first is "drawn away." It's a fishing term. It was used for a fishing lure. I'm not a fisherman. I've fished a little bit, but God bless you men who like to fish, because I get bored when I fish. It's kind of boring. I think guys fish so they can go to sleep—just go to sleep and wait for something to bite on the line.

A friend took me deep-sea fishing on his own boat one time. He didn't warn me that you have to get a fishing license. I don't fish so I didn't know about that. We were way out by some island somewhere fishing, and the "ocean cops" pulled up. My friends were snorkeling and I was jigging for bait. They pulled up and asked, "Do you have a license?"

I said, "Yeah," and I pulled out my driver's license.

They said, "No. A fishing license."

I said, "A fishing license?" I had visions of going to prison because I was fishing. I thought, Man, this is insane. So I got a big, fat ticket for fishing without a license. So I don't do fishing. You guys who fish, come forward after service, and I'll pray for you. It was crazy.

But this was referring to a lure. You guys who are fishermen know that lures have to be the right look, the right style, the right design to catch the right fish at the right place at the right time. They have to be very specific. So your lusts are a lure that pull you away. That's what

lures you off God's path.

Notice the second phrase is "entice." So you are drawn away, or lured, and then you are enticed. Again, enticed is a fishing term which means "to set bait." So Satan sets the bait, but the lure or the draw is your own sinful lust. The great Greek scholar A.T. Robertson said, "Snared by one's own bait." I like that. If it weren't for this sinful heart, it wouldn't be a problem.

Secondly, notice that desire leads to disobedience in the course of temptation. It starts with desire—my own lust—and then it leads to disobedience. I seize the bait. Notice verse 15. "Then when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin." This is a picture of conception. So he goes from a word picture of a lure and fishing with bait to conception in the womb. He said, "when lust has conceived." When there is conception in the womb, eventually a baby is going to be born. In this case, it cannot be aborted. Conception takes place, the child starts to grow and then a child is born. In this case, the child is stillborn, so there will be death, which is the third phase. So there is desire, then you have sin, which is disobedience.

I want to make an important point here. It is not a sin to be tempted. I know that some Bible students will disagree with me. It's okay; you can be wrong if you want to. The Bible says that Jesus was tempted. If Jesus was tempted, then it is not a sin to be tempted. "He, in all points, was tempted like we are." He was tempted by the devil in the wilderness. Satan said, "Turn these stones into bread." And He endured other temptations, because there was no sinful desire in Christ that would lure Him away. He resisted those temptations. But in this passage, we see that we are conceiving by yielding to the sin and disobeying. It is a sinful thought sometimes that can be a lure and draw us away.

So it's not a sin to be tempted, because Jesus was tempted. But let me balance that with this: Sinful thoughts cannot be entertained. We cannot allow our minds to think sinful things. They must be resisted and they must be rejected. Someone said, "You sow a thought and you reap an act. You sow an act and you reap a habit. You sow a habit and you reap a character. You sow a character and you reap a destiny." Where does it start? It starts in the mind. Some of you say, "Well, I don't do it; I just think about it." God knows what we think, so we need to have minds that are pure.

Notice the third step in the course of temptation. It is death. Verse 15 says, "And sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death." So the steps are desire, disobedience and death. We see that in the Bible when Eve was tempted by Satan in the Garden of Eden. It was good for food. She desired it, she did eat—she disobeyed—and then death came. They were separated from God.

By the way, "death" means "separation." There are three kinds of death in the Bible. There is spiritual death in which you are separated from God—everyone is born separated from God. There is physical death in which your soul and your spirit is separated from your body. The third death is eternal death in which you die and go to hell and are separated from God for all of eternity. If you die in your sins without being born again of the Spirit, then you will be separated from God for all eternity.

There is an example of one of these deaths in David when he committed adultery with Bathsheba in 2 Samuel 11. It started with desire. Remember when King David was walking on the roof of his palace? It was the time in the spring when all the armies were out making war. David was on the rooftop. It's been said, and is true, that idleness is the devil's workshop. Get your mind occupied with other things.

So David was walking around on his roof and accidentally looked over into the next courtyard and saw a beautiful woman taking a bath. Her name was Bathsheba, because she liked to bathe a lot. The Bible says that first he "saw." You can't help seeing sometimes. But you can help staring. You can help that second look. Some guys say, "I don't take a second look. I just take one long, first look." That's what the Bible says: He "saw" and then he "looked." So there is that desire. Then there was that disobedience; he "lay" with her. He committed adultery. Then, thirdly, it led to death. Uriah the Hittite, her husband, died. David murdered him. The child born to Bathsheba out of this adulterous relationship died. Death ensued.

If you want to know what death will do to your life, read Psalm 51. Read the things that David had to ask God to restore into his life after David sinned with Bathsheba. He said in Psalm 51:10, "Create in me a clean heart." Do you know that when you sin you no longer have a clean heart? In verse 12, David said, "Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation." He lost his joy in the Lord. In verse 11, he said, "Cast me not away from Thy presence, and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me." He lost his sense of the presence of God in his life. He lost his clean heart, he lost his joy, he lost his sense of the presence of God. In Psalm 32:4, when David was living with unconfessed sin, he said, "For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me; my moisture is turned into the drought of summer."

Today I can't help wonder if there is some sin in your life that you need to repent of. Right now as we're talking about David's sin of adultery, maybe you're guilty of that very same sin. You'd be surprised in a congregation this size how prevalent that sin is. Maybe God brought you here today to give you this warning. "Don't be deceived. God is not mocked. Whatsoever you sow, you're going to reap." You sow to the flesh, you'll reap corruption.

Maybe God is warning you right now about the stealing you're doing or the lying you're doing or the deception that you're involved in. Or maybe the pornography or the drinking. Or maybe the drugs. God is convicting you right now. You need to repent. Don't wait until the end of this sermon. Right here, right now God knows what you're going through. God knows what your needs is, and you need to turn to God. The Bible says in 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." Why wait until the end of the sermon and run the risk that you don't repent? Repent right now and ask God to forgive you.

What are the steps? Desire, disobedience and sadly the consequence leads to death. That's what James warns them about in verse 16. "Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren."

So we need to remember the source of our temptation—our evil desires; the course of our

temptation—disobedience and death; and here's the last thing we need to remember—temptation can be conquered. The interesting thing about this passage in James in dealing with temptation is that it goes right to the very source of our temptation—our sinful desires.

Notice verses 16-18. “Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with Whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of His creatures.”

There are two keys to victory, and I want you to get them at the end of this passage. The first is remembering God's goodness. Remember that God is good. Verse 16, “Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.” James is getting right in their face and saying, “Don't be deceived. Don't be self-deceived by blaming other people. Take responsibility. Don't forget the goodness of God.” One thing that temptation does is blind us to the goodness of God. When you're being tempted, you basically just forget about God. So one of the best things you can do in a time of temptation is to think about the goodness of God. Think about the blessings of God. Think about what sin will take from you, and think about the good things God wants to give to you.

When Joseph was tempted by Mrs. Potiphar—the first cougar mentioned in the Bible, by the way. She went after Joseph and they were alone in the house. She took the subtle approach: “Joseph, let's go to bed.” Joseph was a normal young man; he had all the drives of a man his age. But listen to the words that came out of this godly man's mouth. He said, “How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?” He had a God-centered focus. “God is good. God loves me. God has a great plan for my life. He has a purpose and a design for me. Why would I disobey God? Why would I do something that is wicked and sinful and disobey God?” So Joseph turned and ran. The Bible says that “God provides the way for you to escape.” Sometimes it's your two feet. Light 'em up and smoke it out of there, man! Put on your PF Flyers and jam outta there! So Joseph started running, she grabbed his coat, accused him of rape and he went to prison. Here he did the right thing but suffered for it. Eventually God honored that and blessed that and exalted him.

I promise you—yes, I promise you—that if you obey God, if you trust God, if you do God's will, God will bless your life. If you disobey God, you will reap what you have sown. If you sow to the Spirit, you'll reap life everlasting.

Look at verse 17 with me. The way God gives is good. Every act of giving is good. What God gives is good; a perfect gift. God gives constantly. It keeps coming down. In the Greek it is in the present tense; literally “keeps coming down.”

Then also in verse 17, the God Who gives is good; “Father of lights.” I love that. This is one of those rare places in the Bible where God the Father is called the “Father of lights.” In the Bible the word “Father” means “generator” or “source.” A father of children means you generated or were the source of these children. “Those are my children.” So God is the generator or source of lights. Most Bible scholars believe—and rightfully so—that the “lights” here are the sun, the

moon and the stars. Metaphorically speaking, “lights” speak of goodness, holiness and righteousness. Darkness speaks of evil and sin. James here is actually saying, “God is good! He gave us the sun. God is good. He gave us the moon and the light and all the stars and the heavenly host.” I thank God for the sun. We would die without the sun. I thank God for the moon. I thank God for the stars. He’s the “Father of lights.”

Notice this phrase: “no variation or shadow of turning.” You know, we have solar eclipses or sun changes. We have lunar eclipses; the moon can change and be darkened. The stars will shoot and move around the sky. But God doesn’t change; “no variation or shadow of turning.” Theologians refer to this as the “immutability of God.” God is immutable, which means God doesn’t change.

Do you notice that everything changes? You don’t think so? When you turn 60, get your high school annuals out and look at your picture and weep. You’ve changed. I don’t even recognize myself. I went to my 25th high school reunion, and people said, “Hey, John! How are you doin’?” I thought, I don’t know who you are. When they told me, or I looked at their badge or picture, I thought, Oh, dude! Time has not been good to you. That was a thought I had to resist saying; that was a temptation. Everything changes; there’s not one thing that doesn’t change. But there is only one thing in the universe that doesn’t change: God.

I’m glad God doesn’t change. If God was good 10 million years ago, then God is good now, and He’ll be good through all eternity. God will never change. You ask, “Well, what’s His goodness have to do with temptation?” It is this: Satan tries to tempt you to go off of God’s path, but don’t do it, because God is good. God has the perfect wife, He has the perfect husband, He’ll bless your family, He’ll take care of you, He’ll provide. You have to trust Him. Maybe you’re young and single and you say, “I’ve got to find a wife,” so you go out beating the bushes looking for a wife. If you do that, you’ll find a wife who looks like she’s been beat out of a bush. (That’s my singles thing.)

Do you know that God gives the best to those who leave the choice to Him—if you let God pick your husband or wife? Then it will be perfect. God will take care of you. You have to trust Him. Don’t get impatient. Don’t follow your sinful lusts and get out of the will of God and ruin your life and dishonor God. God gives the best to those who leave the choice to Him. God is good. God loves you. You can trust God.

I don’t know what you’re being tempted to do right now. Maybe you’re tempted to give up on your marriage. God loves you. He wants to heal your marriage. Maybe you’re tempted to steal or lie or to have an affair. God loves you and He wants to bless your life. You have to trust Him.

Now here’s the second and last thing that we need to remember about the goodness of God. It is that we are God’s children. So remember that under the third and last point—temptation can be conquered—you first remember that God is good—never doubt the goodness of God—and secondly, as a Christian, you are His child. Verse 18 says, “Of His...”—that is, “God’s”—“...own will He brought us forth....” That means that you were born again by the will of God. “Brought

us forth” is a reference to being born again. This is what Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3:3. “You must be born again.” So we’ve been born again by the will of God.

We have a new birth and a new nature. I want you to notice the source of our new birth. The source is God’s own will, verse 18. “Of his own will.” It’s not the will of man or the will of flesh and blood but of the will of God that we are born again. It is the work of God by His Holy Spirit.

Also notice in verse 18 the instrument of our new birth: “the Word of truth” or “the Word of God.” I believe it is the Gospel of our salvation. We hear the good news preached about Jesus; that Jesus came from heaven, was born of the Virgin Mary, He lived a sinless life, He voluntarily died on the Cross for our sins, He was buried and rose again from the dead, and if you put your faith and trust in Jesus Christ, your sins will be forgiven and you’ll be born again and become a child of God. The instrument of that is the Gospel.

Now when you hear the Gospel, our responsibility is to believe, to put your faith in Christ. John 3:16—you’re all familiar with it—says, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever...”—here it is—“...believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life.” What do you need to do? Believe. That’s faith. “By grace you have been saved, through faith; that not of yourself. It is the gift of God...”—Faith is not the gift of God, but your salvation is the gift of God—“...lest any man should boast.” So you are saved by His own divine, sovereign will, but the instrument by which that happens is the Gospel, the Word of truth, being preached. You then exercise your faith and believe.

The purpose of our new birth is in verse 18: that we “might be a kind of first fruits of His creation.” That term may not mean a lot to us today. “What do you mean by ‘first fruits’? He wants me to be a fruitcake?” I saw a bumper sticker once that said, “God wants spiritual fruit; not religious nuts.” I like that. “Well, what is this ‘first fruits’ then?”

In the Old Testament, whenever they would reap their field at harvest time, the first ingathering of the fruit was dedicated to God; it was consecrated to God. It actually belonged to God. I believe what James is telling us in this passage is that we belong to God. The New Living translation renders it, “He chose to give birth to us by giving us His true Word. And we, out of all creation, became His prized possession.” Isn’t that great? God chose to give you new life, by believing and trusting in His Word. Then you become His chosen possession, His child. Remember the goodness of God, and remember that you are a child of God.

So why would I do this great sin against God? I’m His child. I belong to God. My body is not my own. It’s been purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ. You are a Christian; you are a child of God. God is your Father in heaven. God is holy and He says this: “Be ye holy, as I am holy.”

You can resist temptation and you can conquer temptation when you recognize the source, when you recognize the course and when you recognize how to conquer temptation. God is good and I am His child. God will help me through this time.