

HOW TO ENDURE TEMPTATION JAMES 1:12-15

INTRODUCTION:

Do you pray for a life that is full of happiness and spiritual fulfillment? Do you dream about coming to the end of life and receiving special recognition from your Lord? Did it ever occur to you that how you handle temptations will determine whether or not you find that happiness and how it will be with you when you stand in the presence of the Lord.

This is the great beatitude that James gives us: "Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial because when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love Him." "Blessed" could be translated "happy, or spiritually fulfilled." So, this beatitude in a capsule form gives us one of the secrets of happiness or spiritual fulfillment. "The crown of life "is something that will come at the end of life as we stand in the presence of the Lord. It may well be that "crown" and "life" are synonymous in this statement. It is probable that James means for us to understand that we will be crowned with fullness of life when we stand in the presence of the Lord at the last day. The thing that ties these two promises together is the enduring, or persevering, when we face trials.

We need to be clear about the word "trial." This is the same word that is used back in verse 2 and the same word that occurs later in verse 13. It is obvious that in verse two it is

talking about the adversities that come against the child of God. In the passage that follows it is obviously referring to the temptation to do something that is wrong. In my understanding, both aspects of the temptation or trial are included in this beatitude by James. Whether it is some adversity that has come against us or some allurement toward evil, we are still to be found steadfast, enduring, persevering through the time of testing.

My concern this morning is to learn what we can about temptation from this passage so that we can successfully endure. I want you to find life in its fullness and to know the joy of receiving the crown of life from our Lord at the close of life. I find in this passage four things that will be exceedingly helpful to you in enduring or persevering through temptation.

I. ADMIT THE SOURCE OF TEMPTATION.

Where does temptation come from? This is a critical question. It needs to be clarified in your mind if you are to ever successfully endure temptation.

1. God is not the source of temptation.

James states it so plainly. "When tempted, no one should say, 'God is tempting me' for God cannot be tempted by evil nor does he tempt anyone." Evidently, there were some early Christians inclined to see God as being the source of their temptation. They may have reasoned, I would not be tempted if God had not made me this way. I have heard people explain their anger by saying, "I was just born this way." I heard people explain

their inclination toward homosexuality by saying, "God made me this way." We need to hear this word from James! God is not the source of temptation.

By this we are to understand that God is incapable of enticing you to do something that is wrong. God in Himself is incapable of sin, and is incapable of leading someone else to commit sin. You will never be able to point the accusing finger at God and say, "You made me do it." We will have to look further for the source of temptation.

2. The devil is not the source of temptation.

At first your reaction may be to argue with this. Is not the devil the tempter? Yes, he is the tempter. It is true that the devil can present an opportunity to sin, but when you trace back the source of temptation, if you follow the logic of James, it is not the devil who is ultimately responsible for your temptation.

3. You are the source of temptation.

Listen to the inspired word of God as it is given to us by James: "But each one is tempted, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed." Nothing could be plainer than this. Temptation becomes reality only because there is in me and in your corrupted desires that lead us into sin. We must admit our part in the temptation. It is a healthy thing when I come to the place that I am ready to openly acknowledge that I am such a sinner with corrupted desires that I am capable of creating my own temptations and leading myself into sin. When I sin, it is not because the devil made me do it. It is

because of choices that I have made and desires within me to which I have responded.

We must be ready to admit the source of our temptation.

Since the source of our temptation is in us, this is the reason that our temptations have so much similarity. We are all sinners. The great Presbyterian minister, Clarence Macartney, once said, "There are temptations of the body, temptations of the mind, temptations of the spirit. Temptation is a great equalizer. It smites in youth; it smites in middle life; even the aged are not exempt from its cruel and dangerous sorrows for the gray haired saint may fall at last, the surest God a wonder approved; death only binds us fast to that bright shore of love.

Temptation is a sleepless, unwearying enemy.

II. BE AWARE OF THE COURSE OF TEMPTATION.

James gives us the course that temptation follows. If you will notice the pattern in your own life, it will always follow this course.

1. Desire

Temptation begins with desire. "By his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed." And then James adds, "After desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin." It is in the fallen, corrupted nature of each human being that you will find the beginning of temptation.

Jesus our Lord enunciated this principle often in his teaching. The Pharisees wanted to deal with the outward things, but Jesus kept pointing them to the inner desires of the heart. Men commit adultery because of a corrupt desire. Persons steal because of a corrupt desire. Persons lie because of a corrupt desire within. Temptation always begins with desire.

2. Action

James describes the action of desire by likening it to the birth process. "After desire has conceived it gives birth to sin." There is no sin in the desire. Sin happens only when the desire is acted upon. The person has the desire within to do something that violates the law of God; they are confronted with an opportunity to do it. And they seize that opportunity. This is the story of temptation. It is a desire acted upon. It is a desire responded to with action.

If you are ever to endure temptation, you have to become aware of those desires to which you must not respond. Thomas A'kembis pointed this truth out in the Imitation of Christ. He wrote, "The only time to stop temptation is at the first point of recognition. If ones begins to argue and engage in hand to hand combat, temptation almost always wins the day." If temptation is to be stopped, it must be stopped when desire is confronted with an opportunity.

3. Sin.

This is the next step downward on this course of temptation. This is the way James describes it, "Then, after desire is conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full grown, gives birth to death." Sin is the next step in this course.

Do we need to understand this word sin? Do we understand how out of place in human life sin really is? Do we understand that any time we commit sin, we've acted against our own best interest? Sin is an act against the will of God. Sin is a choice of something less than God's best. Sin is always a movement that puts its self in danger.

If we are to overcome and endure temptation, we must be aware of the course that temptation follows. Any time there wells up within us a desire to do something contrary to the life that God has given us; we are already moving toward sin if we do not learn to say "no" to the desire.

III. VISUALIZE THE OUTCOME OF TEMPTATION.

Did you catch the word of James about where temptation ultimately leads? "Then, after desire is conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full grown, gives birth to death." He uses the figure of birth twice in that statement. First, there is the birth of sin. What an ugly repulsive baby! Surely this must be the ugliest child ever born — **sin!** But no, there is one that is even uglier. When sin has become fully developed in the life, it gives birth to the monster of death. Death! What an ugly, ugly, reality.

1. Death in you

When you apply this word of James and seek to understand exactly what it involves, this is where it brings you. It involves something in you dying. It is true that your sin affects others but oh, how it affects you. Every time you sin, something beautiful is replaced with something ugly in your life. Every time you sin, your potential is diminished by death. Indeed, "The wages of sin is death."

2. Death to others.

When James speaks of this ugly monster, death, a part of it is seen in the way sin affects your relationships with others. Do you remember how it affected the relationship between Adam and Eve? Before there was sin, there was perfect union, delight in each other, joy in each other! But once they have sinned against God, all of that is dead. They immediately began to hide from each other. They began to make garments from fig leaves to hide their nakedness from each other. There is no longer that free and joyous delight in each other. Something beautiful has died.

And then in the next chapter of human history, we find the two sons of these first parents torn apart. Cain kills his brother, Abel. Death! Death! The monster! It all began with desire.

3. Death to God.

This is the ultimate dimension of death. You will remember that in the experience of Adam and Eve, after they sinned, the relationship with God was dramatically affected. Here was a separation between them and God. It is the godward side of life that is most

dramatically affected when we follow the course of temptation to sin and allow sin to grow in our lives until it is fully matured.

If we would spend some time visualizing what will happen if I respond to this desire that I find within me, what will be the fruit of this action, I think we would be more inclined to say "no" to the desire. I was interested in a comment that Dallas Willard made in an address I was listening to on cassette last week. As he was talking about why God would not want to sin, he commented, "God is too smart. Why in the world would God want to sin? Committing sin is like sticking a pencil in your eye. It hurts and it hurts deeply. God knows that so He does not sin." Some of us have not learned this truth. We have not visualized where the sin would lead. Sin always leads to the death of the good and the beautiful life.

IV. CHOOSE TO PUT THE PLEASURE OF GOD ABOVE THE SATISFACTION OF SELFISH DESIRES.

Responding to temptation always involves a choice. It needs to involve a choice to put God in His proper place.

1. This involves a denial of the sensual desire.

Instead of allowing the desire to drag us into sin, we have an opportunity to say "no."

Dr. Joseph Stowell, the president of Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, tells about a friend who travels most of the time in doing his work. He says, "A friend of mine who often travels told me of the time when he checked into a hotel and noticed a rather nice looking

woman across the lobby. She was just standing there looking at him. He did not think much of it and went to his room. As he was unpacking there was knock at the door. He went to the door and to his surprise the same lady was standing there. She said, "How about if we have a little fun tonight?" What should he do? He was alone, no one would know, this was obviously a moment when the adversary was using God's created handiwork to bring this kingdom traveler across the line of love and loyalty to his God, luring him to serve Satan by submitting himself to the thinks of the world. Being a man of the kingdom he said, "No, thank you." He shut the door and walked back into his room." This is the choice that a man must make. This businessman chose to put the pleasure of his God above the satisfaction of a sensual desire. Such desires have to be denied in the power of the Holy Spirit.

It is fair to say that we need help in saying "no" in such circumstances. Dr. S. D. Gordon in Quiet Talks on Service tells about a Rhode Island farmer who had become a Christian late in life. It was a very dramatic conversion because his life had been rough and bad in many ways. He said that when he became a Christian, even the cat knew that some change had taken place.

The old farmer said the next morning after the change of purpose he was going down to the village a little distance from his farm. He swung along the road, happy in heart, singing softly to Himself, and thinking about the Savior. All at once he could feel the fumes coming out of a saloon ahead. He could not see the place yet, but his keen, trained, nose smelled it. The odors came out strong and gripped him.

The farmer said he was frightened and wondered how he would get by. He had never gone by that saloon without stopping before. He had always gone in, but he could not go in this time. But what could he do. That was the rub. Then he smiled, and said, "I remembered, and I said, 'Jesus, you will have to come along and help me get by. I never can by myself.'" And then in his simple, illiterate way he said, "And He come by — and we went by, and we have been going by ever since." That is the way life has to be lived. You must say "no" by the power of Jesus. In dependence upon His strength to the sensual desires.

2. This involves an acceptance of the spiritual desire.

If you are a Christian, God has put along side the sensual desire a spiritual desire. He has put a desire within you to love and to please the Lord. In the beatitude that opens this passage we were told, He will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love Him. This is the secret of enduring the temptation. God puts within you a deep desire to love Him and to do those things pleasing in His sight. It is as you cultivate this desire to love Him and please Him and act upon it, that you will find the strength to endure temptation.

Dr. E. Stanley Jones uses the ancient Greek myth to illustrate this truth. You may remember the myth from your student days. There were the Siren sisters, who upon their island sang so bewitchingly that mariners drawing near to listen had their ships dashed to pieces upon the rocks. Many tried to get by this enchanted island by various devices. One

had his ears filled with wax so he could not hear. Another had himself lashed to the mast and commanded his sailors under no condition were they to allow him to get loose. A third brought on board Orpheus, the divine musician who sang and played so wonderfully that the voices of the seductive singers were drowned out - drowned out by a sweeter song.

This is the way we will get by the island of temptation. There must be in our ears ringing the music of heaven. There must be burning in our heart the desire to love and to please the Lord. This will enable us to give a decisive "no" to the desires that would lead us to sin and would produce ugly death in our lives.

When will we get past the temptation stage in life? Not in this lifetime. The old Scottish minister, Alexander Whyte, said that the bloodhounds of Satan will follow us all the days of our lives and leave their bloody slaver on the gates of heaven as we go in. He is probably right But we do not have to succumb to temptation. God is with us to enable us to persevere and win the crown. Both a blessed life and a beautiful crown is promised to those who endure.