

A Study of the Book of James

Sermon # 2

“How to Handle Temptation”

James 1:13-18

Do you struggle with temptation? I heard of someone who said, “*I don’t struggle with temptation, I just give in to it!*” Surely that is not the answer!

But the fact is, there isn’t a day that goes by that we are not tempted in some way. Temptation comes in many forms; we are tempted not to tell the truth, to take something that does not belong to us, to take advantage of someone, to gossip, to over eat, to hold a grudge, or to withhold from the Lord that which rightfully belongs to him.

“The magazine “Discipleship Journal” asked its readers to rank the areas of greatest spiritual challenge to them. The results came back in this order: (the top 5 were)

1. Materialism
2. Pride
3. Self-centeredness
4. Laziness
5. (Tie) Anger/Bitterness and Sexual lust

The respondents also noted that temptations were more potent when they had neglected their time with God (81%) and when they were physically tired (57%).”

[R. J. Morgan. *Nelson's Complete Book of Stories, Illustrations, and Quotes* (electronic ed.) (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000)

The truth is that temptation is everywhere. What’s yours? How do you handle temptations? Do you struggle? If so, can anything be done to help you win that struggle? Is it even possible to successfully resist temptation? Well, in answer to your question, the Bible says yes!

Turn with me to the book of James chapter one, verses thirteen through eighteen.

In the first message in our series in James we learned that we are to count it all joy when we fall into trials. It is not difficult to see a connection between adversity and temptation. In the midst of adversity, we may be tempted to think or act in a sinful manner. Many people wrongly conclude that time of stress somehow justify ungodly responses.

Yet interpreting this passage is made difficult by the fact that the words for *trials* and *temptations* is the same word in the original language. But they are not the same experience. God tests us to bring out the good (vv. 1-12) and Satan tempts us to bring out the bad (vv. 13-18). While test and temptations are different experiences, they do have this in common – without proper preparation the believer will be victimized.

“Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. (14) But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. (15) Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. (16) Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. (17) 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. (18) Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.”

This morning I would like to share with three-fold warning given by James with regard to temptation.

First, Don't Be Surprised By It! (v. 13)

“Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am tempted by God”

The first step that we can take is a step of preparation. If we are going to successfully handle temptation, we must expect it. James says, "When tempted..." He did not say, "*If* tempted." We should never be surprised when we are tempted.

We need to understand several things about temptation.

First, we need to understand that temptation is universal. Everyone is tempted. If you meet someone who is never tempted by anything, there is one conclusion that you can draw about that person. He or she is dead. Only dead people aren't tempted. The moment we entered this world, we were drafted into a lifelong battle with temptation. We need to understand at the outset that as Christian soldiers there is no sin in being tempted, no one can eradicate these enticements. But we are responsible for our reactions to them.

Secondly, we need to understand that temptation is inevitable. If temptation comes to every person, which it does, then it is inevitable that it will come to us. If you're not being tempted right now, just hold on because it's coming. Temptation is not something that you get past. It has come around before and it will come around again. It is inevitable.

Third, we need to understand that temptation is personal. We all have our personal temptations. We are all vulnerable in different ways. Temptation is a personal thing. Some things that do not tempt you tempt me. And some things that do not tempt me may tempt you. And you can be sure that your temptations will be tailor made for your weaknesses.

There is no doubt that temptations will come to all of us. So we need to prepare for those moments. We need to be ready. We need to expect temptation. We should never be surprised.

To Over Come Temptation We Must Not Be Surprised by it but rather expect it and...

Second, Don't Be Confused By It!

(vv. 13-15)

The next step in handling temptation is to understand where temptation comes from. Some would argue that God is the source of temptation. The shifting of blame actually began in the Garden of Eden. Adam excused himself for his disobedience to God by saying, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree and I ate." And the woman, said, "The serpent deceived me and I ate." (Genesis 3:12-13)

Today we carry on the tradition of our first parents with very subtle reasoning, we say "*people behave the way they do because that is how God made them.*" He created them with a certain temperament and so they can't help doing what they do. So it is ultimately God's fault. That was Adam's logic also. Notice that when confronted by God for his sin, first he blamed Eve "The woman" but indirectly he blamed God "The woman whom you gave me." Man is still playing the same old blame game.

James quickly refutes the idea that evil comes from God, when in verse thirteen he says absolutely and categorically, "When tempted, no one should say, 'God is tempting me.' For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone." To believe that he is the source is a faulty analysis. You see, unless we understand the real source of our temptation, we will respond to it incorrectly. God is not the author of temptation, nor does He have any capacity in his holy nature that would make him vulnerable to evil.

Charles Swindoll maintains that a literal translation would be, "*Don't even remotely suggest that God has anything to do with your temptation.*"

If God is not to blame, who is? How about Satan? Is he to blame? Maybe. Some years ago comedian Flip Wilson made famous the quip, "*The Devil made me do it!*" And Satan certainly does tempt us. He tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden. So Satan does have a hand in our temptation. But often Satan gets too much credit. You see, there must be something there for Satan's temptations to be effective.

Besides declaring that each person is responsible for his own temptation, James is careful to point out that temptation is not an event, but a process. James is the only place in the Bible the process of allurements is clearly explained.

In verse fourteen James explains, "But each one is tempted by his lusts, being drawn away and seduced *by them*. (15) Then when lust has conceived, *it* brings forth sin. And sin, when it is fully formed, brings forth death."

If we don't want Satan to take advantage of you, it is vital that we understand the adversary's strategic process, what Paul calls "Satan's devices" (2 Cor. 2:11).

First, It begins with desire. James tells us that it is "each one is tempted by his lust" or "own evil desire." This is the beginning of a process that can only be described as a downward death-spiral of sin. The desire to sin is already within us. If it weren't, sin would not be attractive to us. On first glance, you

might think that sin is some sort of a magnet. But that is not true. The magnet is within you. It is your desire.

Our desires are extremely powerful. Now not all desires are wrong. Many desires keep us alive and cause us to be healthy, well adjusted human beings. But even good desires, taken to excess, can cause us great harm. The desire for food, or sexual fulfillment, or relief from pain can turn into obsessions that control our lives. Temptation begins with desire.

Secondly, It leads to deception. James tells us that because of our desire we are “dragged away and seduced” or “enticed.” The word “enticed” is a fishing term that means “to lure by bait.” And the purpose of bait is deception. If you bait your hook with a nice juicy worm, you have two purposes in mind.

The first is to lure the fish. In order to pull that fish out from its comfortable hiding place, we’ve got to find a bait that will interest it, one that it can’t resist.

The second is to hide the hook. We are enticed by sin, in part, because we do not see the consequences. The fish does not see the hook. And neither do we. But the hook is there. We are simply deceived into believing that it is not. The consequences of sin are real, but we are blinded to them by the strength of our desire. If we saw them clearly, we would without doubt make another choice.

Committing adultery or having pre-marital sex may seem pleasurable at the time; but when the marriage is ruined, and you see the kids just on weekends. In the end, the pain outweighs the pleasure.

Running around with your friends and drinking may seem like a good time. But when you see the flashing blue lights, or your car wrapped around a tree, or the tragic loss of life caused by your drinking you will see that the pleasure was not worth it.

Third, it results in disobedience. It begins with desire, leads to deception, and results in disobedience. Sin is disobedience to God. James tells us, “after sin or desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin.”(v. 15a) The two elements (the bait and the desire) join together to give birth to sin. That is bad enough, but it does not end there.

Fourth, It ends in death. “And sin, when it is fully formed, brings forth death.” (v. 15b) Even though sin sometimes brings a temporary period of pleasure, it always leads to death although this is not immediately apparent. We have all sinned and God did not strike us dead that very moment. But we must not be misled about the ultimate result of sin because of God’s mercy. Because God has not immediately judged our sin does not mean that God will not ever judge our sin. What we have been experiencing is God’s mercy.

If we continue to sin and do not respond to God’s mercy by forsaking our sins, death will follow. *“James is not referring here to physical death, for then none of us would be alive. Nor is he referring to spiritual death, for then no one could be saved. The fulfillment of our lust brings about in the believer’s life a death-like existence.”* [[Charles Swindoll. James: Practical and Authentic Living. (Fullerton, Calif., Insight for Living, 1991) p. 36]

We will die to the things of God. We will die inside.

Max Lucado in his book "No Wonder They Call Him Savior," describes this state: "Guilt creeps in on cat's paws and steal whatever joy might have flickered in our eyes. Confidence is replaced by doubt, honesty is elbowed out by rationalization. Exit peace. Enter turmoil. Just as the pleasure of indulgence ceases, the hunger for relief begins. Our vision is shortsighted and our myopic life now has but one purpose – to find release for our guilt. Or as Paul questioned for all of us, "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death." [Max Lucado. No Wonder They Call Him Savior. (Portland, Oreg: Multnomah Press, 1986). p. 139.]

In Psalm 51:12 after his sin with Bathsheba, David prayed "Lord restore unto me the joy of my salvation." Sin will rob us of our joy.

If you want to handle temptation successfully, take a good long look at it. Analyze it. Look at what is causing it. Look at where it is taking you. Look at the consequences. Look at where you will end up. If you do, you will come to one conclusion. It is not worth it.

Now you might have already come to that conclusion. And so we come to the final step in the process of dealing successfully with temptation. The battlefield for resisting being drawn away from God is in the mind. Each time we yield to temptation we believe a lie and what is worse, we start living one too.

To Overcome Temptation We Must Not Be Confused By It But Rather Understand it and...

Third, Don't Be Deceived By It!

(vv. 16-18)

The final step in the process of dealing with temptation is to reject it. James tells us in verse sixteen, "Don't be deceived, my dear brothers." In other words, don't fall for the temptation, reject it. Once you see it for what it is, get away from it. Be warned! Don't take the warning lightly. We must not take temptation lightly no matter how it appears.

The key, of course, is seeing it for what it is. We need to see that it is not good no matter how it appears. Satan does not give good gifts. On the other hand, God only gives good gifts.

Look at verse seventeen, "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."

Remember that James began by saying that God did not cause temptation to come to us. God is not the source of our temptation. Temptation is not a good thing. It is a bad thing. And God does not give bad things to us. Satan would like for temptation to look like a good thing. Don't be fooled. Reject that lie outright.

The good news is that those who are born of God can resist temptation. The good news is that you can win over temptation. Temptation doesn't have to defeat you. You have been set free by the

power of the life of Christ within you. You no longer have to be a slave to sin. You now have the power to resist and reject sinful practices.

Look at verse eighteen, "Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures." In other words, it is the new birth that provides the power for living that we need. Everything that we need is given to us through the life of Christ within us. It is that life that makes the difference.

In 2 Peter 1:3 we read: "His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue." Through our relationship with Jesus Christ, everything we need is provided to us. Everything we need to live the way we should is given to us. Nothing is withheld from us.

Insofar as temptation is concerned, we have the following promise: "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it." (1 Corinthians 10:13)

God says that he will always make a way of escape. Sometimes that way of escape is to simply run! If we find ourselves in the place of temptation we might simply need to get out of there. That may be our way of escape. Or God may give us the strength to bear up under the temptation. In any event, God will make a way.

The way to deal with temptation is not to grit our teeth and make up our minds that we will not do a certain thing. The key is to fill our minds with other things. Instead of simply resisting, we need to refocus! Since temptation begins with your inner thoughts, changing your thoughts is the key to victory.

Conclusion

So, Don't be surprised by temptation. Expect it! It comes to everyone. It will come to you. It is inevitable. Many of us pray for deliverance from some temptation, only to turn right around and expose ourselves to it again! It has been said, "To pray against temptation and yet to rush into occasions that expose you to it, is like thrusting your fingers into the fire and then praying they might not be burnt."

Don't be confused by temptation. Understand it! It may seem desirable, but it leads to deception and disobedience, and eventually death. Think about the consequences.

Don't be deceived by temptation. Stand Up to it! It may seem good, but it is not. At the beginning of the message I quoted a survey taken by "Discipleship Journal" that asked its readers to rank the areas of greatest spiritual challenge to them. The readers stated that they had found that the greatest assets in resisting temptation to be "prayer (84%), avoiding compromising situations (76%), Bible study (66%), and being accountable to someone else (52%)."[R. J. Morgan. *Nelson's Complete Book of Stories, Illustrations, and Quotes* (electronic ed.) (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000)

It may seem too strong for you, but you can resist it in the power of the Spirit, who lives in you. You are a child of God. You have been born again. Christ's life lives in you. You can win over temptation! God has given you the power.

Remember the presence of temptation is not a sin, in fact the struggle itself is proof that God is very close to us. Our sensitivity to sin is a gift of God's Holy Spirit. It is a sign of our salvation. There would be no inner battle if we were lost. It is when we can sin without remorse, with no experience of inner tension, only when sin has become easy, that we should be alarmed.