

Tackling Temptation

You might remember the story of the time Jesus was late getting to his friend Lazarus who was deathly ill... and when Jesus finally got there – Lazarus was dead. John explained in his Gospel, when Jesus finally arrived and asked to be taken to Lazarus' tomb, Jesus paused... and he wept. He stood in the pain of those around him – before providing a solution.

In fact, this was such an emotional moment, everyone who had been mourning with Lazarus' sisters, Mary and Martha, they said, "See how He loved him."

In this moment, that is what this moment is for us. Last week we talked about trials in our lives and how they have a purpose to test and prove our faith. Jesus sees how our hearts break when we struggle with trials and struggles in our lives. God never abandons us! This is time for you and I to pause in our pain. In the trials and struggles in our lives... in the trials and struggles of the communities around us.

The trials and struggles taking place in Kenosha, the family of Jacob Blake and the others who have been shot in Kenosha. The families whose lives have upended by the looting and rioting. This is the moment to pause in the pain of our nation. To weep with those who weep and mourn with those who mourn.

This topic is a minefield for Pastors. It would be easy to lean far right or far left politically, and there would be people on the side I would pick who would love what I say and I would get a bunch of AMENS. But then the people on the other side of issue would be hurt or angered. It's so easy to go to those sides.

Truth is rarely found in the extremes. **Besides, Christianity is neither the RIGHT or the LEFT or the CENTER. Christianity is a 4th option... it is countercultural!** In 1 Corinthians when Paul discussed slavery or eating meat sacrificed to idols, Paul didn't take sides. **Paul took the opportunity to challenge those with "Knowledge" to consider how their words and actions impacted others!** He emphasized that "Knowledge" is defective if it fails to build up a community of love! The Gospel is counter-cultural! It is the 4th way!

I mention this because today we are talking about temptation. Oscar Wilde, author and poet once said, **"I can resist everything but temptation."** Well that's one way to deal with temptation, but not one I'd recommend.

Temptation... or the giving in to temptation has been a serious problem down through the ages and like it or not, we all have to deal with it.

So let's turn to today's scripture, James 1:12-18 and listen to what James says about temptation.

¹² Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.

¹³ When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; ¹⁴ but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. ¹⁵ Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

¹⁶ Don't be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters. ¹⁷ Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. ¹⁸ He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.

Wouldn't you agree? Temptation is everywhere and comes in many forms. And even though we think of being tempted as being enticed to do big things like lying, stealing, murdering or committing adultery; more often than not we struggle more with temptation in the area of being impatient, stingy, jealous, greedy, gossiping or other things we may consider "lessor Sins."

In today's polarized world, **we get tempted to go to a side that fits us**, and we let our political or social preference influence our theology. While our theology is to influence our political or sociological perspective. Those who are getting angry because I'm not agreeing with their side are actually proving my point.

Last week we talked about trials in our lives and how they have a purpose to test and prove our faith. ***Well, in the same way temptations can also strengthen our faith and our spiritual muscles.*** If we never had to stand against temptations, and go to the Gospel's 4th way – we will never know our own spiritual strength. **Struggling with temptation will either bring out the best or the worst in us, and the Lord allows temptation to prove that He is real and that we can rely on God to meet our every need.**

Let's look at some basic principles James gives us about temptation to help us win the battle.

1. First, we should prepare for temptation.

If we are going to successfully handle temptation, we must expect it. Look at verse 12-13, "*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. When tempted...*" Temptation is a trial and it can't be avoided; it hits the holy man in a monastery the same as the mechanic at a truck stop.

But just because it's inevitable doesn't mean we should give up and surrender! Have a "whatever will be, will be" attitude, **to do that would be to give up the reward God has for those who endure the trials and temptations.**

Besides, when we give in to temptation; it produces guilt, shame and frustration. It causes us to doubt God's ability to give us victory over sin, and it makes it easier to sin again when temptation rears its ugly head.

But there's hope! The very fact James tells us to endure temptation proves that the Christian has the ability to overcome it. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10:13 that God will not allow us to be tempted beyond our ability to endure, this means there's always a "way of escape," God always has an alternative to temptation.

2. Next we should think about our temptations.

Ask, what is the source of my temptation? Verse 13, "*When tempted, no one should say, 'God is tempting me.' For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone;*"

God is not the source of our temptations. James tells us that temptation never comes from God. That doesn't mean the God isn't involved... God always uses our struggles against sin to help us grow stronger in faith and in life. But to believe God is the source of our temptations is wrong. You see, **unless** we understand the real **source** of our temptations, we will respond to it incorrectly.

But, as long as we take a stand against temptation, even if we fall momentarily, God uses the struggle to make us into men and women He wants us to be. But once we give up and allow the forces of sin to control our behavior, it's only a matter of time until we're swept away and our lives destroyed.

So what is the cause of temptation?

1. **Temptation begins with desire.** James tells us in **verse 14**, “*but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.*” Our selfish desires start a process that can only be described as a downward spiral of destruction. **Our desires are very powerful, but not all desires are bad.**

- Many desires keep us alive and cause us to be healthy, well adjusted people.
- **But even good desires, taken to excess can cause us great harm.**

Take the desire for food, sex, or the relief of pain can turn into obsessions that begin to control our lives. **Temptations begin with desire.**

2. **Then, Excessive desire leads to deception.** James tells us that when our desires are taken to excess, we’re dragged away or enticed. This is like **being lured by bait**. This is the *process* of temptation - here’s how it works:

a) **We can all be hooked by temptation, just like a fish is hooked by a worm on a hook.** Why? Because we’re hungry for our physical and spiritual needs to be satisfied. God provides these needs, but Satan knows how to drop that bait in front of us and lure us away from trusting in God to meet our needs.

b) **Then our inner desire is attracted to the bait.**

c) **Sin occurs when we give in to temptation.** Temptation - starts with desire, leads to deception, and results in disobedience. **Sin is disobedience to God.** James 1:15 “*Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin;*”

d) **Finally, continued temptations will lead to death.** Initially, sin brought spiritual death - we were separated from the fellowship and relationship God wants to have with us. **Sin is also responsible for physical death**, a lot of people die before their time because of their sin or the sin of others. Sin always results in “death” of some kind. The end to relationships, or dreams and goals, or self-respect, the list goes on. When sin is allowed to continue, something is always destroyed. James 1:15b “*When it is full-grown, gives birth to death.*”

So how do we get victory over temptation?

James turns now from his discussion about temptation and focuses our attention on two ways to overcome it.

1. **Victory over temptation comes by dwelling on the Good.**

In other words, victory comes when we focus on the right things. In verse 17 James tells us, *“Every good gift and every perfect present comes from heaven; it comes down from God, the Creator of the heavenly lights, who does not change or cause darkness by turning.”* Someone once wrote, “Sow a thought, reap an act. Sow an act, reap a habit, Sow a habit, reap your character. Sow your character, reap your destiny.” Our mind puts out what we put in it, so stop focusing on the temptation and focus on things of God.

2. **Victory comes through living the truth.**

In verse 18 James tells us, *“By His own will He brought us into being through the word of truth, so that we should have first place among all His creatures.”* If we want victory over temptations, we must rely on God’s Word for deliverance from the battle against temptation.

- Christians can’t win the battle against temptation just by knowing what God says. We must take the step of faith and start living through belief and obedience. **Then temptation begins to lose its grip in our lives.**

If you don’t know Jesus Christ you will never know victory in your life.

You’re doomed to failure. Ask Jesus to come to your rescue, come into your life, take you into His arms and give you the power you need.

If you are a Christian and you are continually losing to temptation, it may be time to confess your sins and forsake it. If there are offenses toward others, there is a need for forgiveness to be sought.

I have been honest with you to face your temptations head on, will you be honest enough with God to do the heart work?

Let's take a moment to reflect on the ways we stubbornly choose and live our own ways and not Gods ways, cheating ourselves of God's good and perfect ways. Cheating ourselves of God's plan and purpose.