

Introduction



DEALING WITH TEMPTATION

The Christian life is not always easy. In fact, it is war! Unfortunately, it does not always look like war. Too often it appears on the surface like the tranquil picture of a fisherman casting his line into a cool, serene lake—but Satan is the fisherman and we’re the fish! He uses the bait of our own selfish desires to lure us into sin.

We don’t have to give in. We can stand strong in the face of temptation. How do we defend ourselves against the schemes of the devil? In these six sessions, we will consider how to deal with temptation and sin. We’ll discover how to stand our ground, avoid sin, live faithfully for God, and live lives that please Him.

I pray that by the end of our study together you will be able to identify the source of your sin, expose your idols, and learn how to be satisfied in God alone.

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SESSION 1

The Source of Temptation



QUESTION 1:

What food can you almost never say no to?

THE POINT

We have no one to blame but ourselves when we fall into sin.

THE PASSAGE

James 1:13-18

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

We all have a favorite food. We get a whiff of it, and we're looking for a fork. It's so tempting! The urge to take a bite of cake may not necessarily be a bad thing, but we're often tempted to indulge ourselves in other ways. Temptation is the ultimate "bait and switch." It promises something good, but it delivers something harmful, even deadly.

Fish discover this the hard way. As a kid, I loved fishing. I'd roll up a piece of bread on a hook, place it in the water, and watch the small fish go crazy. I'd catch the smaller fish and use them as bait to catch bigger fish. It excited me to drop the bait in the water and see if I could lure a bass to bite. Fun for me, but not for the fish.

Who lures us into sin? We may want to blame Satan ("The devil made me do it!"), but the answer is a lot closer to home. And thankfully, the solution is as close as a prayer.

James 1:13

13 Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man:

James used words that refer to trials, tests, and temptations, but in the original language, they all come from the same root word. So, when was he referring to a trial or test and when was he referring to a temptation? Context provides the answer. In the opening verses of James 1, James was clearly talking about trials (Jas. 1:1-12). Trials are difficult hardships that lead to suffering. They're called trials because they are hard to face, and yet if we are to remain faithful, we endure through them. While trials test the genuineness of our faith, God uses them as a means for our endurance. A temptation, on the other hand, leads us to do something wrong and sinful.

Trials are hard, and we tend to blame someone else for what we are going through. When we can't find someone to blame, we may even blame God. During trials, we may also be tempted to doubt God; we doubt either His goodness or His sovereignty. Not all trials are the same. Some are only an inconvenience. Others can be debilitating, like the loss of a loved one. Those who experience such loss often feel devastated. Sometimes as we work through grief, we want to question God. We remember that He is sovereign, all-powerful, and all-loving, and we may wonder: *God, since You love me, why didn't You spare me this pain? Since You can do all things, why didn't You prevent this death?*

This is where the book of James helps us. Is God letting us experience trials and difficulties in order to tempt us? The answer is no for two reasons:

1. **God is not tempted by evil.** Scripture bears this out. “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5). By nature, God is good. In His holiness and goodness, He will have nothing to do with sin and evil; therefore, evil has no pull on Him. Furthermore, everything God does is good. When He created, everything He made was good (Gen. 1:31). And because God is good and is the Creator and Source of all that is good, He cannot be tempted by evil. (James will pick up this thought again in verse 17.)
2. **God Himself doesn’t tempt anyone.** And that is good news! It’s true that God tests us to strengthen our faith. God tested Abraham to prove the genuineness of his faith (Gen. 22:1-19). In the process, Abraham was strengthened. Tests strengthen, but temptations harm. Because God is good, though, He will never lead us to sin. God aims to strengthen our faith, not destroy it. He is not an erratic, whimsical, temperamental deity who plays with our lives. He is a good God who provides the means we need to endure in faith.

Instead of looking to blame God whenever we face trials, we must remind ourselves, *God is not doing this to tempt me into sin*. He is good and wants my good as well. He is not a destroyer of faith, but a builder of faith.

QUESTION 2:

How have you seen temptation work to lead people astray?

James 1:14-15

14 But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.

15 Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.

We've already seen that the source of temptation and sin is not God. But neither is it the devil. The source is our own sinful desires. This does not mean the devil or other people can't be involved, but the desire to sin is firmly rooted in ourselves. The devil tempts us by working on those evil desires. James provided a memorable picture with fishing imagery to make his point. We're tempted when we are "drawn away of [our] own lust, and enticed." "Drawn away" means to be carried or dragged away. We might picture someone being reluctantly dragged toward his death. "Enticed" pictures being lured away by something that arouses interest. "Lust" communicates a strong longing or craving for that which is evil, bad, or forbidden.

Do you see the imagery of fishing in his words? An angler takes bait and throws it in front of some unsuspecting bass laying under a log. When the worm is dangled in front of his face, his desire is awakened, and the fish decides he would really like to eat it. So, he swims out from the safety of his log and in one giant gulp swallows the bait. It's at that point that the fish realizes he's been duped and he's no longer in control. He is being pulled against his will in the direction of the angler's boat, the net, the cooler, and ultimately the dinner table.

It would be great if we didn't have to deal with our "own lust," but consider for a moment where these desires come from. As we already noted, everything God made was good. Evil came into our world through Satan, and sin came to us through Adam. When

Adam sinned, we all sinned with him (Rom. 5:12). As a result, we have inherited Adam's sin, guilt, corruption, and condemnation (vv. 13-21). We know this is true because the penalty for sin is death—and we all die.

We sin because we are sinners by nature (Eph. 2:1-3). Jesus confirmed that “evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness” all flow from our sinful hearts (Mark 7:21-22). This is why we need new hearts.

And, yet, even as Christians with new hearts, we must continue to put off our old ways of thinking and renew our minds by putting on new ways of thinking. As the apostle Paul said, we are to “put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (Eph. 4:22-24).

When we face trials, we're tempted to act like we did before we were Christians, allowing our evil desires to arise and take control. The image James gave of temptation is our evil desires enticing us and dragging us away into sin. Those old, sinful, evil desires are like a fishing lure that dangles in front of us, and when we bite, we are pulled into sin.

In verse 15, James shifted imagery away from fishing to the delivery room to show us the course of sin. Once we “bite” the lure of our evil desires, we are dragged away. But now, that biting of the bait turns into conception. “When lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin.” But that's not the end of the process. Sin also conceives and gives birth to death.

When we allow our sinful desires to go unchecked, they entice us and drag us away into sin. We're not just burdened with our sin; we are burdened with sin's offspring: death. And we have no one to blame but ourselves. But let's remember James's aim. He wanted to encourage us to endure steadfastly under trial, which is why he wrote earlier: “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for

when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him” (v. 12).

QUESTION 3:

How would you describe the stages of temptation in your own words?

ENGAGE

Follow the progression of how a natural desire can become a sinful desire that can eventually lead to death. Describe a scenario that shows this progression and the results:

Temptation leads to sin, and sin leads to death. Temptation is serious business because of the consequences related to sinful choices we make when we give in to temptation.

How serious do you consider your temptation and sin?

Have you become complacent about particular sins? If so, name that sin or sins below, confess to God, and ask Him to help you in your struggle with the temptation to sin.

James 1:16-18

16 Do not err, my beloved brethren.

17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

18 Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

Key Words: Firstfruits (v. 18)—The firstfruits were the first portion of the harvest that was usually given to God in offering. In the New Testament, the concept may have been used to describe early Christians who were the first of many generations of believers to come.

Some might think James was introducing a new topic in verse 16, but he was returning to address the role of God in our trials and temptations. James turns our attention back to God's goodness. He had earlier come at God's goodness by looking at the negative: "God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man" (v. 13). Beginning in verse 17, James highlighted God's goodness in two positive ways.

1. **God provides all that is good.** Everything good we experience and possess is from God. Think about that for a moment. Run through all that is good in your life. There is nothing good you receive that is not from God. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above."
2. **God is unchanging.** The lights can continually be changing, casting shadows as they turn in their orbits, but the One who created them does not change. He is "the Father of lights." God is the sovereign Creator of the lights (Gen. 1:14-19), and His sovereignty and goodness reflected in creation are still present and active. We are reminded of His goodness and love through them.

To him that made great lights: for his mercy endureth for ever:
The sun to rule by day: for his mercy endureth for ever: The
moon and stars to rule by night: for his mercy endureth for
ever (Ps. 136:7-9).

QUESTION 4:

What are some of the good gifts God has given us to help face temptation?

Rather than God being the source of our temptation and giving birth to our sin, He does quite the opposite; He gives us birth “with the word of truth.” He did this—that is, our salvation is all by His grace. Salvation is one of those good gifts we receive from God. And the word of truth that gives us life is the word of truth we live in day after day. It is the word of truth by which we can stand against temptation. (In the next three sessions, we will see how Jesus used Scripture as He faced temptation.)

God brought about the new birth in us by His will and through His word in order that “we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.” The firstfruits were the initial portion of the harvest that promised a bountiful harvest to come. That’s what we are. That’s what our salvation represents. The God who is good is just getting started.

QUESTION 5:

How can our group help one another overcome temptation in our lives?

LIVE IT OUT

It's a harsh reality, but it's your own sinful desires that carry you away. How will you take responsibility for your own sin?

- ▶ **Confess.** If you blamed others or God for your sin or the fact you fall into sin, confess that to God. Admit your own responsibility and look to God to help you stand and resist the pull of sin.
- ▶ **List.** Make a list of the good things God has done or placed in your life. Add to your list any trials or difficulties God used to strengthen your faith in Him. Offer a prayer of thanks for how He has worked in your life.
- ▶ **Instruct.** Help someone you know who is struggling with temptation by sharing the truths you discovered in James 1:13-18. Don't just focus on the principle that we alone are to blame for our sin, but lift up the goodness of God who can walk with and strengthen us.

