

The Source and Course of Temptation (James 1:12-16)

Preached by Pastor Phil Layton at Gold Country Baptist Church on June 14, 2009

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¹² **Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which *the Lord* has promised to those who love Him.** ¹³ **Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone.** ¹⁴ **But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust.** ¹⁵ **Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.** ¹⁶ **Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.**

James wants these brethren he loves to not be deceived in their thinking, which leads to sin (thinking is still much the focus here). And he wants to give hope to those who have been deceived and have fallen again and again to temptations that seem too strong and who may wonder if there's any way out of this cycle of sin. There is hope if you understand temptation rightly and view God rightly, there is blessedness in v. 12 and victory (crown imagery) for those who love the Lord, and there is joy to be had in v. 2 in tough times.

Notice the term “brethren” in v. 2 (spiritual siblings, Christians). In v. 16 he adds another endearing word “*beloved* brethren” (also in v 19). It's because he loves his spiritual family he writes them using this endearing warm affectionate address for those he has a closeness and relationship with and is concerned about. He is not preaching down at them from a high and mighty place or with some unsympathetic sermonizing cliché. He is coming alongside them as a fellow brother, identifying with them in these trials.

Peter encourages his suffering brethren similarly in 1 Peter 5:7 *casting all your anxiety [care] on Him, because He cares for you ... [v. 9 adds] **knowing that** the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your **brethren** who are in the world.*

We're not in this alone. We have the care of Christ as well as Christ-like brethren around us and in the world who are going through or have gone through the same experiences and trials. Nothing overtakes us that is not common to man, or that Christ did not suffer or experience or know as He was tempted as fully man. The brotherhood and fellowship of suffering is one of the reasons why being a local part of Christ's body with brothers and sisters in Christ is so important. If we are like Christ, we are to care for those who cast their cares on us, too. When significant trials and tragedies strike a brother or sister in the Lord, the intent of James 1 is not for us to glibly quote it at them or throw at them “hey count it all joy, bro,” instead of caring for the hurting and their needs.

James 2:15-16 *If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,” and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?*

If that's true of physical needs, surely ministering to emotional and spiritual needs of brothers and sisters with love is important, too.

James will give the example of Job later in the book, and you may remember that most of the book of Job is filled up with speeches by his 3 theologian friends who were “miserable comforters” (Job 16:1-5). Job could have invented the phrase “with friends like this, who needs enemies.” It wasn’t just their lack of right theology that eventually brought the worst out of even godly Job, it was their lack of right compassion and common decency and their confidence that they knew why these bad things were happening to Job because of his sin (which was not really the case, God actually was allowing Job to be tested because of his righteousness, if you read Job 1-2 from the unseen throne of heaven). We need to be careful not to presume we know what God’s doing, in fact even with the godliest man on earth at that time, Job, God never let him know in the whole book *why* God allowed the various trials of his life. But Job in the midst of horrific tragedy and trials was able to worship God, and say “the Lord has taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord.” His faith was tested to the breaking point, but he did not give it up, he gained endurance as James 1:3 says God designs. And as v. 12 says, Job was *blessed* as he endured in trial. We sing the hymn “blessed assurance” – this is blessed endurance.

5:11 We count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord’s dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful.

Job’s friends were not always full of compassion and merciful in their speeches to him, but the Lord is with us. And even with *right* theology, our Lord models that there is a time and a place, and a right tone and way. When the Lord Jesus met Mary and Martha after their brother died, He cried. He wept with them sincerely, truly, deeply. Was Jesus always smiling every moment of every day? No. Was joy (v. 2) the only emotion our Lord expressed? No, He was also a man of sorrows and grief. One of the first things He ever preached was “Blessed are they who mourn for they shall be comforted.” We are called to mourn with those who mourn, weep with those who weep, as well as rejoice with those who rejoice (Rom. 12:15). The Bible teaches “there is a time to weep, and a time to laugh, a time to mourn, and a time to dance.” So we know that whatever James 1:2 means by “consider it all joy” will not contradict our perfect Savior’s example or other statements of Scripture. The paradox is “blessed” means deeply supremely joyful, so Jesus saying “blessed are those who mourn” = joyful are the mournful, happy are the sad? Paul’s paradox was that he could say he was “sorrowful yet always rejoicing.” The joy of James 1:2 & 12 transcends emotions.

The reason I’m tying in the prior context to James 1:12 is not just because we always need to study the context and flow, but verse 12 itself wraps up and repeats several key terms from vs. 2-4: **Blessed** [deep joy like v. 2] is a man who **perseveres** [“endures” - v. 3-4] under **trial** [like v. 2]; for once he has been **approved** [same word translated “testing” in v. 3], he will receive the crown of life

We would usually think of someone being blessedly joyful if they *escape* trials, but God’s Word says joy is found when one *endures* trials. In fact the Greek word *endures* is the picture of patient and steadfast staying power, remaining under, rather than deciding you’re out, you want to split or quit. *Endure* is not so much the picture of patiently waiting in a doctor’s office as it is the quality that helps you finish a marathon and endure the pain when you train. In the Olympics of ancient Greece, a runner wanting to get a crown would have to go through much toil in the heat, and would have to be tested and approved, and spiritually it’s very similar:

- but v.12 is not an imperishable crown, it's an eternal crown
- and you don't *win* this crown, you *receive it* (a difference)
- this endurance and this testing does not *earn* saving grace (which is by definition, *unearned*) it *evidences* true faith (v. 3 = testing / refining term) and true enduring love of God
- it's not just one person who receives this crown, but ALL who truly love the Lord, v. 12 says, have this promise of life (this doesn't seem to speak of a super-special crown only for super-special Christians, but eternal life for all).

Jesus wore a crown of thorns when He suffered and died on a cross so that all who trust in Him will receive a heavenly crown where there is no suffering and dying ever again. Christ wore a painful crown of death so that all who love Him can wear a joyful crown of life. He endured the cross for the joy set before Him temporally so that we can glorify and enjoy Him forever.

But in the meanwhile temptation seeks to rob our joy and sin causes us to fall short of the glory of God. True believers will endure, but verses 13-16 make clear that sin is still a big struggle on earth until we receive the crown of life in heaven. Ultimate victory is secure for all God's elect children in the end, but James wants us all to experience more victory over sin and temptation now as well.

OUTLINE:

1. The Source of Temptation (v. 13)
2. The Steps of Temptation (v. 14-15)
3. The Solution to Temptation (v. 16)

The Source of Temptation (v. 13)

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"

The English words "test" and "tempt" are very closely related, not only in spelling, but in spiritual experience (like its same Greek root in v. 12 and 13 which can mean either *tempt* or *test / trial*). "Tests" include trials and external experiences which (like tests you take in school) have a good purpose in mind by the Teacher:

- challenging you to not merely listen in class but to internalize what you're learning and be able to reproduce it
- pushing you beyond what you would do if there were no tests and preparing you little-by-little for a bigger exam

But with any test, there can often be temptations as well:

- temptations to take shortcuts, to not study regularly, etc.
- temptations to cheat, and to excuse or blame your failure not on your sin, but on the teacher being too hard or unfair

Although the same Greek root word can refer to temptations or tests / trials (cf. NKJV in v. 12 and HCSB in v. 13a), the context of v. 13 is no longer an external test or trial with God's good purpose, but is a temptation with an *evil* intent, an *internal seduction* to sin:

- look at middle of v. 13 ("tempted by / to evil")

- look at v. 14 (“lust ... enticed”)
- v. 15 clearly speaks of “sin,” and v. 16 “being deceived”

God is sovereign in trials (v. 2-12) but He never solicits to sin (13). God is always sovereign and man is always responsible for his sin.

God does bring trials to His children to test their faith and grow their faith and trust, but He does not tempt any to sin (v. 13c), and we should never even think such a thought. Verse 13 implies “let no one say (even to himself, in his own mind), God is tempting me.” Don’t assume this verse doesn’t apply to you because you don’t say out loud the words “God is tempting me.” You may say it to yourself or to others in ways you may not realize.

- “God made me this way” (excusing our sin in what we do or in what we fail to do because “that’s just how I am”)
- “I can’t help it – the temptation was too strong for me to bear” (but God promises in 1 Cor. 10:31 that isn’t true)
- “It’s because of the circumstances in my life and background or what others have done or not done that I sinned” (But Who is sovereign over all those things? God)
- “It’s because of what I’ve been dealt in life I sinned” (nothing new: Adam “The woman *you gave me* handed me this fruit, that’s why I ate.” i.e., “God, I went to sleep single, ok?! You could have given me any woman you wanted, why did it have to be her?” We’re all like Adam, and God holds all of us personally individually responsible)
- Do you get angry at God when your sin has consequences?

Proverbs 19:3 (NIV) ³ *A man’s own folly ruins his life, yet his heart rages against the LORD.*

Kent Hughes writes: ‘Blaming the gods was typical of the pagan mind-set in Biblical times because their gods were capricious, vengeful, soap-opera deities who taunted and tantalized humanity. We read over and over again of Zeus and his pantheon in classical Greek writings like *The Odyssey*. Jewish believers, dispersed in various pagan cities by persecution, were not immune to this mind-set. Evidently in their misery certain of their people were saying God was tempting them to fall; that he had lost patience with them and was deliberately bringing them down. This being so, God was to blame for their sin [rabbis taught God created our evil impulse].¹

Putting the blame elsewhere is popular in our culture. Will Rogers once remarked that there are two eras in American history – “the passing of the buffalo and the passing of the buck.” Someone else has said, “To err is human; to blame it on the divine is even more human.” How true this is of all of us!”²

God is always sovereign and man is always responsible for his sin.

¹³ *Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil*

This is also different than how the Greek gods were portrayed; the male gods were tempted to sin, and some female gods themselves tempted the male gods to illicit desires, etc. But God has no inner attraction to evil; in fact, He cannot even tolerate looking at it.

Jesus as fully God therefore had no *inner* attraction desiring sin like we do, because of a sinful nature. But as fully man, Satan did tempt Him in the wilderness, and it was a real temptation, though Jesus as the God-man would not sin (and I believe *could not* sin).

The difference between His temptation and ours is explained as:

‘Jesus had no sinful desires. Temptation came only from without. We differ from Him at this point. But He did have desires. Like Him, you are tempted to fulfill even your good desires in wrong ways, at wrong times, for wrong purposes. Satan’s ploy was to appeal to the fulfillment of right desires, wrongly (Matt. 4:1ff). Christ’s temptations came from another, but they did appeal to His inner desires [He just had no sinful desires]. Our temptations come both from within and from without. You, like Jesus, have one way of resisting temptation: by countering it with the appropriate Scripture which you must choose to obey rather than the desire.’³

v. 13 “...and **He Himself** does not tempt anyone.”

The pronoun is emphatic to make the emphatic point that God does not tempt anyone ever, so don’t any of you ever be tempted to even think that for a moment! God providentially permits temptation or sin but never produces or promotes it. God’s never the direct agent of sin, or the actor carrying out sin, or sin’s author or approver. Not even temptation before it turns to sin is “of God.” In fact, the Greek grammar in this verse seems to indicate that not only is God not directly responsible, He is not even *remotely* responsible⁴ in any way shape or form with any sin or form of temptation to sin.

What about when Jesus taught His disciples to pray “*lead us not into temptation*”? What does the next sentence say? “*But deliver us from evil.*” I think that completes the whole thought – we pray for deliverance not only from sin but even temptation to sin. The force may be “don’t just deliver us from evil, but lead us *away from* even the temptation to evil.” Or “don’t let me walk in places where I am weak and may be prone to stumble in sin. Protect even my steps.”

II. STEPS OF TEMPTATION

¹⁴ *But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust [desire]*

First Step of Temptation: Desire (thoughts / feelings)

We saw in main Point #1 the source of temptation is not from God, and what’s not even mentioned anywhere in this passage is Satan, or society, or sinners who provoke us, or situations where our sin comes out. What is the source of temptation and sin? James could not be clearer: **it’s our own sinful desires within us.** It is nothing outside of us that ultimately *causes* temptation or *creates* our sin.

James 4 (NASB95) ¹ ***What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?*** ² ***You lust [same as 1:14] and do not have***

The word “lust” to the original readers was not limited to sexual visual elicit longings (cf. 1 Jn 2:15-17). The word means desire or craving, but not necessarily even a sinful desire, depending on context. The desire in 4:2 (like in 1:14) by itself may not be sinful, but the problem occurs here in v. 2 when you desire something, anything, even a good thing strongly ... and you don’t get it.

NIV: *What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it ...*

You are so fixated on what you desire (which may or may not have been sin to start w/), now your desire has become a lust or an idol when you are willing to sin to get it, or sin if you don't get it.

You may not kill, but you covet or complain or quarrel ... the cause, the culprit, the culpability is laid at "your desires that battle within you." The blame is never anywhere outside of you for sins you commit; the responsibility and guilt is yours and yours alone before God. James is telling me the buck stops here, with me. Sins of others and Satanic temptation may have been involved, but even when it was like in Genesis 3, God holds each individual one personally responsible, answerable, and accountable for his/her sin.

Mark 7:21-23 "For **from within, out of the heart of men**, proceed the **evil thoughts**, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, **deeds of coveting** and wickedness, *as well as* deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride *and* foolishness. **"All these evil things proceed from within** and defile the man."

1 Peter 2:11 exhorts Christians to abstain from fleshly lusts / sinful desires that wage war within against our soul. The battle must be fought here. James 1:14 is perhaps the clearest verse in Scripture on the source and steps of temptation within.

First step: Desire

Second step: Deception

¹⁴ *But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed* [ESV: "lured and enticed"]

That first term was a hunting and fishing term – you would of course *lure* prey out with the goal of hooking, netting, capturing, etc. Numerous ancient Greek writers used this word for drawing out a fish from its original retreat and safe place. The reason a fish can be persuaded to come out is *its inner desires are drawn* to the lure which is attractive, it appears good, and the longer the look, the better it looks. The more you look, the sooner you're hooked. The process of temptation is now in full force (desire + deception).

Eve's desire + the serpent's deception was a deadly combo:

Genesis 3:6 *When the woman **saw** that the tree was **good** for food, and that it was a delight [**pleasing**] to the eyes, and that the tree was **desirable** to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate ...*

With our sinful nature this side of Genesis 3, we already possess inner desires to sin, so the fixation quickly leads to persuasion, inner desire and outer deception soon join as the flashy lure catches our eye and we're getting closer and closer. If James was writing today, he might use the phrase "hook, line, and sinker." Once we're out there, letting ourselves be fixated by it and persuaded by it, we're not far from being in the frying pan.

The second term in James 1:14 “entice” is the related idea of catching with bait, or to trap. Both enticement and entrapment are contained in these terms. When used of animals, the delicious food hanging there persuades one to come out in the open where there is danger, not realizing the ground will give way beneath him as he nears the food, or not seeing the hidden net that will capture him and then he will be dragged away to be had for lunch by the hunter

The ancient Greek writer Philo wrote similarly: “There is no single thing that does not yield to the enticement of pleasure, and get caught and dragged along in her entangling nets.”⁵

2 Peter 2:18 uses a very similar phrase of false teachers who “entice by fleshly desires.” False teaching and false thinking are fishers of men, they hunt our hungry souls with a mirage of a meal. The reality is they want to have us for lunch! The end result is they down us and then mount us as another trophy on their mantle.

Note: Different bait and lures for different fish for each one’s own desire.

v. 14 “*his own desire*” – each fish or animal has different desires so the sportsman must design his bait or traps differently for each.

‘what one person finds as intense temptation another person may never experience as even a faint enticement, and vice-versa. Temptations are tailored to the individual, and so we as believers must never belittle a person for struggling with something we think of as inane. Instead, we must realize that each of us has particular battles nuanced specifically for us, and we need to give both grace and exhortation to one another to stand firm in times of testing. Conversely, we must always flee temptation, regardless of how “little” it may seem to us. These inner longings, James says, busily work to pull us away from the Lord.’⁶

At the end of v. 14 in the grammar, “By” (*hupo*) implies direct agency and serves to personify “his own evil desire” as the active agent of temptation. “His own” underlines the individual peculiarity of the temptation in the case of each person.’⁷

One writer called this verse “Snared by One’s Own Bait.” Another explains: ‘Desire and the object of desire combine to produce real attraction and appeal. Temptation is never simply a problem with the object of desire. Temptation entices or lures us by our own appetite or imaginative relation to the object of desire.’⁸

John Owen said it concisely: “Temptations and occasions put nothing into a man, but only draw out what was in him before.”

Adams paraphrases: “If you sin during a time of trial, don’t blame God. He sent it for your good; you misused it. You are to blame if you yield to temptation. God has no propensity to sin and He doesn’t tempt you to commit sin. Every time of trouble comes as a wall with two doors; on the one is written *God’s way of victory*, on the other *Satan’s way to defeat*. The fact that you opened the wrong door and stepped in is not God’s fault, but yours.” James explains, “The force at work within you when you turn trouble into temptation is not some foreign power that invaded you

from without; it is your own desire. That is your principal problem.” The problem is not in God; it is not in the event; it is in you. You turn the event into an occasion to satisfy some desire. The event may be innocent or sinful. But, if innocent, it becomes sinful if indulged at the wrong time, in the wrong way, or for the wrong purpose. The way James put it is that you entice yourself to sin. By allowing the outside event to stir some inner desire, you create the temptation.

The flash of the lure you thought you saw moving through the water was really in your own eye. Jesus said, if your “eye is healthy” you will not see it. It is the “evil eye” that is not “single” that causes you to see darkness rather than light (Matt. 6:22-24). The person or thing became a lure when you considered it such ... Sin of the heart [conceives when you’re] allowing your desire rather than God’s commandments to direct you.’⁹

¹⁵ Then when lust has conceived ...

The 3rd step in temptation is CONCEPTION

James switches metaphors again and this one is graphic. Desire and deception have gone to bed. The seed of sin has been sown and implanted, and impregnation has occurred. Mental intercourse has produced a life of its own as temptation runs its course. What started small will now grow to something far bigger. Seduction led to reproduction, an unexpected pregnancy that will go full-term.

The fact that this is an internal process does not mean it’s not sin yet. Jesus said when you look with lust at another, you have already committed adultery *in your heart*. That’s where it starts ...

2 Sam 11 (NASB95) ² Now when evening came David arose from his bed and walked around on the roof of the king’s house, and from the roof **he saw** a woman bathing; and the woman was **very beautiful in appearance [desire]**. ³ So **David sent and inquired about the woman [step 2 doesn’t take long]**. And one said, “Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?” ⁴ **David sent messengers and took her, and when she came to him, he lay with her [step 3] ...** ⁵ The woman **conceived**; and she sent and told David, and said, “**I am pregnant**” [step 4]

Relaxation-temptation-fixation-contemplation-meditation-self-persuasion-impregnation—gestation—devastation

Now that’s a big problem that started with a “little” desire within. Did David just “fall into” sin because of something that happened on the outside of him or what *she* did? Who or what is to blame?

Matthew 15:19 “*For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders.*”

The 4th step is GESTATION (also in v. 15)

“Then after desires has conceived, it give birth to sin” (NIV)

The gestation period of a llama? About a year. An elephant? 640 days. But in v. 15, it doesn’t take long till labor and delivery of sin.

The conception – pregnancy – birth imagery of sin is vivid and each time I find it in scripture there are lies in this birthing room:

Psalm 7:14 (ESV) *Behold, the wicked man **conceives** evil and is **pregnant** with mischief and **gives birth to lies**.*

Job 15:35 (ESV) *They **conceive trouble** and **give birth to evil**, and their womb prepares **deceit**.*”

Isaiah 59:4-5 (ESV) ... *they speak **lies**, they **conceive mischief** and **give birth to iniquity**.⁵ They **hatch adders’ eggs**; they weave the spider’s web; he who eats their eggs dies, and from one that is crushed a viper is hatched.*

Sin hatched in the heart is now born and comes out in real life. Life begins at conception and sin begins before it comes out. It is alive and well within and comes out kicking and screaming in sinful deeds (“sin” in context here especially is outward deeds).

The 5th and final step: REPRODUCTION & DESTRUCTION

“... it gives birth to sin, and sin when it is accomplished, brings forth death”

Your translation may say “sin when it is fully-grown,” which is a good rendering. Sin personified as a child continues to grow and will become bigger than you and will destroy you if you let it have its way. “Brings forth” at the end of the verse is another term for birth – but the offspring here is not what any mother would want.

There are 3 generations presented in this metaphor of v. 14-15:

1. “lust / desire” (feminine noun in v. 14 is the mother)
2. “conceives and gives birth to sin” (the child)
3. “sin fully-grown brings forth death” (grandchild is a murderer)

The end of Jas 1:15 says the ultimate end of sin is death when it’s fully matured and fully accomplished. The wages of sin is death.

Samson followed the steps of temptation to his death. Adam and Eve (who we read about her temptation earlier) were promised death if they sinned. Spiritual death was the instant result of their sin, sin also brought forth physical death, and all their offspring who die without Christ suffer eternal death separated from God.

For King David (who we read about earlier) his sin caused the death of Uriah, and God decreed the child conceived in sin that Bathsheba was pregnant with would come forth in death, too.

James has shown us the source of temptation, the steps of temptation, but he doesn’t leave us there – he gives the solution

The steps of temptation: Desire – Deception – Conception – Gestation – Reproduction and Destruction

The SOLUTION: v. 16 ***“Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.”***

You've got to deal with it at the deception stage. Don't let your desires and thinking be deceived. If you don't get the man out at first or second it's gonna round the bases. And if you wait till later on and are trying to deal with behavior, it's too late and will only be behavior modification, outside fixes but no inside change.

What if it's already too late for you? You've sinned like David? Repent (earlier we read Psalm 51 – make that prayer your own)

We also sang earlier “grace that is greater than all our sin” – that marvelous infinite matchless grace for all who believe / repent

If you're an unbeliever? Acts 3:19

If you're a believer? 1 John 1:9

2 verses later: **2:1** *My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous;² and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins ...*

He Himself does not tempt us to sin but He Himself takes away and atones for our all our sins, and not the Jews only (original readers of James and John) but the world, Jews and Gentiles, all types and classes of people – even sinners like us, praise God. But John writes and James writes so we may not sin. Don't be deceived, my beloved brethren.

¹ *Babylonian Talmud Yoma 69b; Genesis Rabbah 9:7*. Cited in *NIGTC*, p. 83.

² Kent Hughes, *James*, p. 44.

³ Jay Adams, *A Thirst for Wholeness*, p. 34.

⁴ D. Edmund Hiebert, *James*, p. 90: ‘the use of the preposition *apo* conveys the thought of remote source, whereas the use of *hupo* would have denoted direct agency. So understood, the quoted charge does not crudely blame God as directly tempting him but charges that God, through His creative action and providential direction of affairs, is behind the situation that produced the temptation. God is responsible for bringing him into such a situation ... Under either view, the blame for the temptation is placed on God' incorrectly by the sinner.

⁵ Philo, *Husbandry* 103.

⁶ Blomberg, 71.

⁷ Hiebert, 93.

⁸ K. A. Richardson (1997). *James*. The New American Commentary, Vol. 36, p. 81. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

⁹ Adams, 28-29.