



The Gifts God Gives

Real Faith.
Real Life.

LESSON

3

Week of January 22

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows (James 1:17).

Devotional

Having discussed trials and tribulations and our need for wisdom as we face them, James shifts to the subject of temptation. It is not a large shift of attention, however, because James uses the same Greek word for “temptation” as he used for “trial.” Indeed, for the believer, the awful surges of temptation that boil out of his heart can be the greatest of trials. In James 1:1–12, James is speaking of nonmoral trials as well as moral temptations, while in verse 13 he shifts to the question of moral temptations alone.

God, says James, never tempts anyone to sin. God does, of course, send trials our way, but He never directly attempts to seduce us to sin. James says that outward temptations marry with our inward corruption to produce evil fruit. Inward corruption conceives and gives birth to sin. Sin never produces life and health; after the momentary pleasure of sin, the fruit is distress and death. Sin, ultimately, comes from our own wicked hearts.

God’s gifts—including the trials He sends—are not like temptations. They are good and perfect gifts. God is like the sun, says James, the Father of all light (v. 17, compare v. 11). Candles burn out and the moon waxes and wanes, but the sun continues to shine. In the same way, God never sends anything but good to us. If we misuse His good gifts and commit sin, it is our fault alone.

The logic of James’s argument is this: For His own good reasons, God sends trials and tribulations our way (vv. 2–3). He intends these for good, that we might mature and become stable (v. 4). Our tendency, however, is to become angry and spiteful at God, using these tribulations as an excuse to sin (vv. 13–15). Then we think we can, like Adam in Genesis 3:12, blame God for our sin (v. 13). James corrects us, though, teaching that we may never blame God when we sinfully respond to trials because God stands ready to give us the gift of wisdom to go along with the gift of tribulation (v. 5). Anyone who lacks wisdom need

only ask for it. There is never any excuse for sinning in the midst of suffering. Neither is there ever any excuse for sinning.

CORAM DEO (In the Presence of God)

James focuses here on one excuse we may use to rationalize our sin. We are not only practiced sinners but practiced rationalizers. We do not hesitate to blame our environment or genetics or the sovereignty of God. Some even claim, “The devil made me do it.” Take responsibility for your sin. Only then can you truly repent.¹

Open it

1. If you were stranded on an island and had all your essential needs covered, what three non-essential items would you not want to live without?

Read it

JAMES 1:13-18

Explore it

2. What shouldn't we say when we are tempted?
3. How does James say a person is tempted?
4. What is the result of temptation?
5. What does God give us instead of temptation?

¹ Devotional from Ligonier Ministries found @ <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/the-gifts-god-gives/>

Apply it

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN TRIALS AND TEMPTATIONS

In James 1, “temptation” is the second aspect of a larger theme of trials. While the issue of temptation is as old as man and is seen throughout Scripture, there are few passages as comprehensive on the subject as James 1:13-18. Our text provides us the truths essential for understanding the nature of temptation and how to dig in our heels against it.

As one reads James 1, it is essential to distinguish between the two types of trials we face.

William Kelly observes "The Epistle then turns from our **holy** trials to our **unholy** ones, and shows their source to be, not in God, but in sinful man."²

So our application from James 1 when it comes to these two types of trials is that the former (trials) must be endured, the latter (temptations) must be resisted.

6. James reminds Christians that we will encounter two different types of struggles (trials and temptations). How are trials and temptations similar, and what common characteristics or tactics are necessary to find victory over each of them?

WHERE DOES IT COME FROM?

James 1:13: *Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil and, and He himself tempts no one.*

It’s always easy to blame God for our problems.

- “Lord, you put me in this situation.”
- “Lord, you gave me these desires.”
- “Lord, you knew I was broke.”
- “Lord, you knew I was weak in that area.”

God is never the source of your problems. Never. Don’t even go there. He doesn’t tempt people. He never puts you in a situation where you have to sin. **Never.**

² http://www.preceptaustin.org/james_113-15

On the other side of the coin it is easy for people to put all the blame of the temptations we face on the Devil. And yet there is no mention of the Devil in our text. James is quite clear that our struggle with temptation is far more an “inside job” than an attack from the outside.

11. James avoids putting the blame for temptation on Satan. Why?

To what extent is the Devil involved in our temptation?

Ephesians 6:11 says, “Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s **schemes**.”

John MacArthur writes that *methodeia* (“schemes or methods”) conveys... the idea of cleverness, crafty methods, cunning, and deception. Satan’s schemes are propagated through the evil world system over which he rules, and are carried out by his demon hosts. “**Schemes**” is all-inclusive, encompassing every sin, immoral practice, false theology, false religion, and worldly enticement.”⁴

12. What are some of the schemes the devil uses to entice people to sin?

13. How do you know when the devil is involved in temptation and it isn’t just coming from within?

⁴ John MacArthur: The MacArthur Study Bible: found @ http://www.preceptaustin.org/ephesians_611

HOW TEMPTATION GROWS WITHIN US

“But each person is tempted when he is drawn away and enticed by his own evil desires. Then after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin” (James 1:14-15a).

Notice four things from this verse:

First, the certainty of temptation – **“Each person is tempted.”** No one escapes temptation in this life. These familiar lines apply to all of us: “Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love.” No one escapes temptation.

Second, the allure of temptation – **“He is drawn away and enticed.”** James uses the image of a fisherman baiting a hook. Just as the fruit looked good to Eve, sin always looks good to us. Sin brings a certain degree of satisfaction. It must, or no one would ever sin. There is such a thing as the “pleasures of sin for a season.” In the short run, we can always justify losing our temper, telling a lie, cheating a friend, taking a shortcut, or indulging our fantasies.

Third, the individuality of temptation – **“His own evil desires.”** It’s quite true that what tempts you might not bother me at all, and what troubles me might not seem alluring to you. I’ve often thought while looking out over the fresh-faced congregation on Sunday morning that we all clean up really well. We look better on the outside than we are on the inside. If we knew the naked truth about each other, we would run screaming from the sanctuary, never to return.

Fourth, the result of temptation – **“After desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin.”** Since James uses the metaphor of birth, let me apply the truth this way. If we do not use some “spiritual birth control” in our thought life, our desires will impregnate our actions and the result will be a whole bunch of little “sin babies” running around. That’s a bizarre image, but it’s not stranger than the image James uses. We must not trifle with temptation. We can’t mess with it, play with it, or dabble in it, because temptation leads to desire that leads inevitably to sin in our lives.⁵

14. Paul says that temptations are commonplace for people. If this is the case, why are people so tentative in talking about them?

15. What good can come from talking with other believers about the temptations we struggle with?

⁵ Sermon by Ray Pritchard found @ <http://www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/dont-blame-god-for-your-problems/>

16. In explaining the road of temptation, James uses the metaphor of giving birth. In this metaphor, what do you think he means by conception?

SIN KILLS US IN THE END

“When sin is fully grown, it gives birth to death” (James 1:15b).

That’s what James means when he says that sin gives birth to death. Sin kills us. Sin kills every human relationship. Sin kills our relationship with God. There is nothing beautiful about sin. When sin is full-grown, it gives birth to the monster of death. Nothing beautiful about that.

We would all be better off if we stopped to consider the impact of our evil desires. What starts as a passing fancy becomes a settled desire becomes an overpowering impulse that leads us to foolish action that results in personal tragedy, shattered lives, hurting children, ruined careers, and broken marriages.

Worst of all, we end up separated from the God who made us.⁶

17. Take time and write a step-by-step progression of how a particular sin starts out enticing and by the end produces death. Discuss some common solutions to some common temptations that might have stopped the downward progression from continuing.

JUST SAY NO!!!

James has just given a sobering warning that **death** from **sin** could be the result if one yields to temptation by **lust**. In light of the grave danger, James introduces a life-giving command but softens it with the affectionate phrase **my beloved brethren** which clearly indicates his sincere concern for their souls. James knows that what he is warning about is deadly serious and wants to be sure they are open to hear him.

⁶ ibid

Do not be deceived – Don't allow yourself to be led astray. Don't allow yourself to wander. Don't be misled. Stop being deceived!⁷

18. James 1:16 says, “Don’t be deceived.” What have you learned in this study that would keep you from being deceived when it comes to the enticements of temptation? What will you do differently in the future?

19. What hope can we give to our fellow small group members when someone has fallen to temptations?

JAMES 1:17-18

And so we are encouraged by these words, because we understand that God will not change. He will continue to give us good gifts. He will never take back what He has given us. His rules will never change. His promise will never be forsaken. Our salvation through Christ can never be revoked or pulled out from under us. God is our benevolent Father, our unchanging Creator, and our anchor, which is firm and secure, even in a world that is changing so quickly.

20. What good gifts has God given us? How does knowing that God is the giver of good gifts help us to say no to temptation?

⁷ http://www.preceptaustin.org/james_116-18