

James 1:12-18

"Keys To Overcoming Temptation"

From *tribulation* to *temptation*; that's the transition that comes into focus in this next section of scripture. *Tribulation* can build you up; *temptation* can bring you down. Tribulation can *develop* you as a believer; temptation can *destroy* you as a believer. Tribulation stems from the *outside*, temptation stems from the *inside*.

The question becomes how do I *triumph over tribulation & gain victory over temptation*? Last time we developed (as it pertains to James) the point of & how to profit *from* tribulation. Today we want to spend some time developing the nature of & gaining *victory over* temptation.

There *are* those who *get rid of* temptation by simply giving in *to* temptation. They'll seek to justify it by convincing themselves that their lives are so difficult or unfair that they're entitled to do whatever they can to make it more pleasurable or bearable. **So they allow their difficulties to give them a sense of entitlement. However you should know (as if you don't) that indulging in sin is not an appropriate means of dealing with sin in your life. When you engage in sin, you inherit the consequences that come along w/sin, which trust me, you don't want.**

Perhaps you recall the way the crew of Odysseus' ship escaped the lure of the Sirens in ancient Greek mythology, they simply plugged their ears w/wax so that they wouldn't be lured to their deaths by their songs. **However overcoming real life temptation generally takes more than simply covering our eyes or stopping our ears. We need to be equipped w/the scriptural information so that it might become practical application when we're in the midst of a tempting situation.**

In this next section James touches on the *source* of temptation, the *steps in* temptation, and the *solution for* temptation.

Vs 12

"Blessed is the man who endures temptation", sounds a lot like his Big Brother here doesn't he? We remember the "Beatitudes" found in the Sermon on the Mt. Jesus there telling us various means of receiving the blessing of God in/upon our lives. **"Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, For they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, For they shall inherit the earth."**¹ On & on Jesus went, "Blessed are those who hunger & thirst for righteousness, blessed are the merciful.."

¹ The New King James Version, 1982 (Mt 5:3-5). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Here James says, “Blessed is the man who endures temptation” “who comes out victorious on the other side of temptation”. It’s true isn’t it, it feels so good when we don’t succumb to temptation. When we don’t have to go back & apologize because we held our tongue instead of saying something stupid. When we resisted the urge to speed & then we pass a cop sitting on the side of the street checking for speeders. We think, “Yes!” Or whatever the situation may be, it brings a certain joy to gain victory over temptation.

Now on the flipside of that when we fail we feel miserable don’t we? We say something we regret, we do something we shouldn’t have & it brings shame, humiliation/embarrassment & misery. **But what a blessing it is to respond after the Spirit, to obey the conviction upon your heart & refuse to enter in to temptation, because you know God is working in your life & that’s exciting... “Thank You Lord for giving me strength in that moment to respond after the Spirit & not after the flesh.”**

James says here that not only will it make you happy now but it’ll bring reward later. “For after you’ve been approved” ... (remember we talked last week about the pottery that goes through the fire & having not cracked it’s approved for it’s intended purpose) after you’ve endured, your faith is found genuine, you “will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.” **To overcome temptation is to be happy now, & rewarded later. 1st the cross, then the crown, 1st the suffering, then the glory; that’s the way it worked for Jesus, & that’s the way it’ll work for you, & that’s the way it’ll work for me.**

To stay true *to* Jesus is to receive a crown *from* Jesus, on that Day. The crown of life. It’s the same crown He promised to those who were persecuted, going through tribulation & temptation in Smyrna. We read it in Rev 2, **“Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.”**² Notice, the Lord has promised it to those who “love” Him.

Now we might be prone to think that it would be given to those who “trust” Him, or those who “obey” Him. Yet James uses the word “love” Him. Why? Because your love *for* the Lord is the spiritual motivation for refusing to give in *to* temptation. I *love* the Lord, I don’t want to do things that aren’t pleasing *to* the Lord, or that don’t gain glory *for* the Lord. My sin placed Jesus on the cross, God forbid that I should seek to indulge myself in the things that placed the One who loved me & gave Himself for me, upon the cross.

Wherever there is love there *will be* surrender, there *will be* obedience. Isn’t that what Jesus said? **“If you love Me, keep My commandments.”** (John 14:15) Ok, look at Vs 13

² The New King James Version. 1982 (Re 2:10). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Vs 13-15

Have you ever noticed how good you are at finding some *thing*, some *one* to blame for your sin other than yourself? Man I'm good at that. The ol' blame game, the ol' pass the buck routine; it's as old as is sin itself. James is confronting the blame game head on. He says, "Hey, don't be blaming God for the fact that you got yourself into sin." "Well, God allowed the trial, so really it's God's fault." Top 10 answers on the board, survey says! "X"

There they were, back in the garden, the original sin. God says, "Adam what have you done?" Well, this woman that you gave me, gave to me fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good & evil & I ate." In one sentence Adam justified himself & placed the blame on 2 different sources. He said, "Well, *presently* it's the woman's fault, but *ultimately* it's *Your* fault God, because *You* gave her to me."

Someone has said, 'To err is human; to blame it on the divine is even more human.' Of course Eve blamed the serpent, we have a natural propensity to blame God or someone or something else for our own fumbles, faults & failures. Such has been the case from the beginning. James is saying, "Hey, you & me, we are accountable for our own decisions. God is not the reason we succumb to temptation."

James says, "#1 God cannot be tempted by evil, #2 Nor can He Himself tempt anyone *with* evil." Evil/sin carries absolutely no appeal to God whatsoever, it repulses Him, He is holy. Maybe you remember when Jesus nearing the time of the cross & He said to His disciples, "I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me."³ Which is to say that there is absolutely nothing about Me that has any common ground w/him. There's nothing in Me that's like him. Now as it pertains to you & me, he has plenty in us that he can appeal *to* or cause us to war *with*. But not so w/the Lord. He Himself cannot be tempted w/evil, nor can He Himself *tempt* anyone with evil. Why? Because if you seek to solicit someone to do evil, you yourself have to have a propensity for evil, God cannot solicit you to evil, because there's nothing evil in Him.

Sometimes people wonder if there's anything God can't do. The answer is "Yes, there are several things God can't do. He can't love you any more than He does. God is love, He loves you completely, in totality, there's no room for improvement on His love because He's perfect. God can't learn anything, He's perfect, that means He already knows everything. God can't be tempted w/evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone w/evil."

When you blame God for your temptation you're in essence saying that God isn't good...

³ The New King James Version, 1982 [Jn 14:30], Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Which makes Him less than holy, less than righteous, less than perfect, in essence fallible & sinful, that's hardcore to accuse God of such things... God will never solicit you, or tempt you to do evil.

Now *Satan* will; again, there he was right there in the garden tempting Eve to go against the will of God in rebellion against the Word of God. But God will never seek to solicit you in such a way as to go against His will or in rebellion to His word. "I'm in this room by myself, if I click into this website, no one will ever know." God's not tempting you in that way, to see if you'll obey Him, or honor Him, or if you'll feed your flesh. Don't say, "Man God was really tempting me today!" No, He wasn't...

Vs 14

You see the source of temptation & the steps in temptation are found in you, not in God. We are tempted, or solicited to evil when we are "drawn away" by (notice) "our own desires" & "enticed". Several words worth considering in this Vs.

We notice that temptation is an individual thing, "Each one". What may tempt you may not appeal to me at all & visa versa, what may tempt me may not even appeal to you. "Each one" is tempted when he is "drawn away" ... James is using hunting & fishing metaphors here. The idea of "drawn away" is that of being lured out of a safe place. The deer comes out of the thicket because of a salt lick, the fish comes out of it's den (or whatever) because it sees a jig or something shiny spinning in front of it. But what lures a fish won't lure a deer, or a rabbit, or whatever. They each have their own desires, through which they're "enticed". That word "enticed" speaks of being baited.

The deer isn't thinking about crosshairs on it's heart, it's thinking about what's right in front of it. The fish isn't thinking about the hook & line that's going to reel it in & lead to it's demise, it's thinking about that worm, or that bait, that rabbit isn't thinking about being trapped, it's thinking about feeding it's flesh on those veggies or whatever. Temptation never reveals it's end game, or what will happen *ultimately*, it seeks to appeal to some inner desire that you want fulfilled *immediately*...

Satan appealed to Eve through desire, which turned to deception, which turned to disobedience. He aroused her desire, told her God was holding out on her, that she could gain wisdom instantly if she'd only yield to her own appetites and partake of the fruit. She was enticed, baited, & she bit... But did the devil make her do it? No, she chose to partake of her own volition, same w/Adam, same w/you & same w/me.

Oh, he'll seek to bait you, but he can't force you to sin, that's your choice... & mine. We have no one to blame for our sin but ourselves. We're drawn away by *our own* desires & enticed.

You see, deep w/in the heart of every man there is a thirst, this desire for fulfillment. An awareness that there has to be more to life than what we have & it creates a frustration w/in us. Jesus was referencing that thirst when He cried out at the feast saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink." John 7:37 It's a spiritual thirst, a desire for fulfillment & meaning in life that can only be quenched/satisfied in Christ.

But Satan comes along & suggests to me that I don't have to be patient nor do I have to walk the path that God has set before me in order to be fulfilled or satisfied. As a matter of fact I can have that fulfillment immediately, I can find that satisfaction instantly if I'll turn aside from God's path or cease to walk in God's ways.

When he came to Jesus that was his whole premise behind the temptation. "You've come to redeem the world, it belongs to me. God has ordained that You should suffer & die & that redemption will be made available through the cross. I'll tell You what, there's another way to get what You came here for, no need for all the pain, no need for all the suffering, just bow before me, worship me & I'll give You all the kingdoms of the earth & all their glory, right here, right now, immediately." The idea being that He could find fulfillment (get what He wanted) by turning aside from God's path/plan for His life.

& Satan seeks to use that philosophy constantly. The concept of immediate fulfillment, to different people he holds out different enticements. "You don't have to go God's way, you don't have to obey God's word, He's restricting you, He's holding you back. You can find fulfillment right here & right now, just partake of this forbidden fruit. Fulfillment is found in this relationship, adultery, fornication, just have a few drinks, smoke some weed, do this line, it's just a little meth, just a little porn, it's just one dishonest business deal..." On & on the rationale goes, but he holds it up, polishes it real good... "no need to take God's path, no need to deny yourself, no need to take up the cross, crucify your flesh or follow Jesus, just partake of this & you'll find the fulfillment you're looking for. Don't deny your flesh, indulge your flesh..."

He holds out the lure, he baits the trap, then "WHAM!" He sets the hook & we're being reeled in to our own destruction.

Have you ever stopped to think about what Paul said in Eph 5?

He said, *"And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit,"*⁴ At 1st you think, what do those 2 things have in common? It doesn't seem to add up. But think about it, what is the guy who's getting drunk really looking for? Immediate fulfillment, he's been deceived into thinking that his happiness, his fulfillment, his ability to cope w/life can be found through a few drinks. *"Just hammer these down & release the stress..."* He's seeking what the man who's filled w/the Spirit already has; fulfillment, satisfaction, peace, joy... but he's been drawn away & enticed into thinking he can find it apart from God's path, through disobeying God's word & not walking in God's ways.

Drawn away & enticed, the hook is set. Now; we talked a lot about Satan seeking to entice us but we need to note that Satan isn't brought up *at all* in the text. The devil doesn't make us do it; we're drawn away, lured out by *our own* desires, & baited.

The lure of sin is always sweet, it never displays the suffering that awaits in the end. Do you think Lot would've moved to Sodom had he known that most of his family would die as the result? Do you think David would've taken Bathsheba had he known the consequences? (Death of his friend, his child, the rape of his daughter, his kingdom divided, being driven from his kingdom, Absalom killed...) There's no sin worth it's consequence; but the bait blinds us to consequences doesn't it? But don't be deceived...

Vs 15-16

We've noted the source of temptation, it's in us. We've developed the steps of temptation, luring & baiting, drawing us away & enticing us to turn from the ways & word of God. Part of the solution for gaining victory over temptation is found right here. We must consider the results, the repercussions of our ways. Too many people don't think beyond the moment, live for now, worry about the results later... that's a recipe for disaster/destruction, it will invite/bring *ruin* into your life.

Satan seeks to convince you that to pursue the desires of your flesh will somehow yield some good, or positive result. That life is found there. Remember, "God is holding you back, you're not really living!" *But anything that seeks to entice you to walk contrary to the word of God will not yield life, only death. Remember that Satan come to steal, to kill, & to destroy (John 10:10). The one who came to kill, won't entice you to life I promise you that...*

⁴ *The New King James Version*. 1982 (Eph 5:18). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Disobedience brings death... always... always... **Romans 6:23, "For the wages of sin is death,"**

From desire, to deception, to disobedience, to death. We're moving here into the arena of the will... Desire conceives the method for taking the bait, the will approves it & acts upon it, the result is sin. The baby is born...just wait till it grows up... ☹

Christian living invokes your will, but temptation will appeal to your feelings. How often you hear believers say, "Well, I don't *feel* like reading my bible", "I don't *feel* like going to church." Since when does it matter how I "feel"? Now, children will operate on the basis of feeling, adults operate on the basis of will. Who "feels" like going to work everyday? We do what's right because it's right, regardless of how we "feel".

That's why immature believers fall prey to temptation so easily, they allow their feelings to dictate their course of action. You have to resolve in your heart/will that you are going to follow Christ & deny yourself in advance. The more you exercise your will in making a decisive decision to say "no" to temptation, the more you will discover God moving & working in your life. **Phil 2:13 "...for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure."**

Now we should state that temptation of itself is not sin. Jesus was tempted, temptation finds us all. It's when we follow after & act upon that temptation that the unholy union takes place & sin is born; & sin always brings death...

It kills relationships, destroys happiness, ruins your health; if you want the perfect picture of what sin does than look no farther than the cross. It takes that which is Perfect, Loving, full of grace & forgiveness, fillets Him, spits in His face, nails Him to a cross & leaves Him there (beaten, bloodied, & battered) to die.

"Don't be deceived..." Don't buy the lie... be it that God is the source of your struggles, or that somehow something good will come from sin in your life, that you can forsake the cross & find immediate fulfillment through forsaking the word & the ways of God... Disobedience; sin brings death, always, it's just a matter of time.

Don't be deceived, the good things, those things that work good for you & in you... those are the things that come from God. You see, because God is good, only good can issue forth from Him, notice. (Jer 29:11, I know the thoughts I think toward you says the Lord, thoughts of peace, & not of evil, to give you a future & a hope...)

Vs 17-18

God doesn't tempt you, He only gives *good* gifts, *perfect* gifts *to* you. He gave His Son *for* you, He gave new life *to* you...

So the keys to overcoming temptation are found in (A) looking *ahead*, God judges sin, think that path through, where does it lead, closer *to* God or is it rebellion *against* God, His word His ways? (B) Look *around*, see how good God has been to you. Satan is seeking to destroy your life, God has saved you, gives good gifts to you, has thoughts of peace toward you, draw near *to* Him, walk intimately *with* Him. (C) Look *within* you & realize (Vs 18) that you've been born again. The power of the Holy Spirit resides in you & no temptation has overtaken you except that which 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.

Finally (we'll see next time [Vs 21]) take in & feed on the word of God. For man shall not live (survive) on bread alone, but by every word that proceeds by the mouth of God...

We have more to say regarding Vs 17-18 but we'll save our thought for next time...

Prayer Points:

Lord You know our frame; formed & fashioned from the dust of the earth, we're so weak & we need Your power in our lives. So we pray that You might strengthen us with all might, according to Your glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; that we might give thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light.

May we walk patiently through tribulation & maintain victory over temptation & we'll give You praise in Jesus name.

God wants to work in your life, but 1st He needs to have your life. The question that confronts you then is this: does J.C. live in you? Have you turned from all your sin & given your life wholeheartedly to Him? The wages of sin is death, physically, spiritually, eternally, Jesus paid that penalty & became sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. & Now if you will turn from your sin, & trust in Him He will forgive you & make you brand new.