




THE COMMUNITY

I Made Me Do It | TEMPTATION

What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?

James 1:13-18

In James chapter 1, “temptation” is actually a subpoint in the larger discussion of trials. But few passages are comprehensive on the subject, and these verses as well as any, provide us the truths essential for understanding the nature of temptation and how to dig-in our heels against it.

God Does Not Tempt

On this point James couldn't be any clearer. God tempts no one. “But what about the time...” No one! Ever! God does, however, place trials in our lives in order to mature our faith and develop our character. It's our sinful and rebellious hearts that transform our trials into temptations. A financial trial, for example, could easily lead to the temptation to covet, steal, print our own money, whatever.

God subjects our faith to stress-tests in order to strengthen it – dropping it from heights, four-wheeling it up inclines, gunning it on the salt-flats. But at some point, all that pounding makes us want to escape and drive off to the beach somewhere. In this way, temptation threatens to subvert and circumvent the testing process.

We Are Responsible For Our Own Sin

The emphasis of the passage is squarely on us and our role in being tempted. It's doubtless that James is aware of Satan's complicity in our temptation, but he intentionally deals him out and pokes the finger of blame in our chests. This is not for the sake of rubbing our noses in it, but to move us away from blame.

Blame can be both an excuse to give into temptation as well as a rationalization that keeps us from honest repentance. If you go back to the temptation of Adam and Eve, you'll notice the major role that blame plays in perpetuating sin: Eve blames the Serpent, Adam blames Eve and round and round it goes without anyone taking responsibility. How can we take sin seriously if someone besides us is to blame for it? We can't, and so Scripture backfills our favorite foxhole.

The Dynamics of Temptation

James uses a rather vivid hunting/fishing metaphor to describe the dynamics of temptation and sin. As a fish or animal is lured by some kind of bait, so too our

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What's the Big Idea?

Because of the gracious and unchanging character of God, believers are called to experience joy and steadfastness in the midst of trials.

What's the Problem?

In trials, we're inclined to become frustrated with our circumstances and believe that God is either against us or disinterested. We are all prone to:

- Disregard God's perspective of trials and our circumstances. (5-8)
- Look around and wish that we had it as good as the rich. (9-11)
- Allow a trial to turn into a temptation by not trusting God in the midst of it. (12-15)
- Believe trials aren't good, and therefore, God isn't good. (16-18)

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hearts are drawn to sin. Once led away, we're vulnerable and unprotected and it's just a matter of time before we wind up the main course on sin's dinner table. If that wasn't graphic or gory enough, James switches to a birthing metaphor. Conception happens when our sinful desires meet with a particular temptation. The result is not birth but a still-born: we've actually conceived death which is the offspring of sin.

Sin is alluring, sexy even. Through rather gruesome metaphors James helps us see the face beneath the veil – this is who you've dumped God for. In contrast to the process of sin and temptation (which gives birth to sin and death), in 1:18 we are encouraged to remember the process of our salvation: a new birth conceived by the Word of Truth planted in us. See that? And in the same way that temptation is an ongoing process in our lives (we are not just tempted once), so is this an ongoing process. As the Word reveals the truth about a sin in our lives, we repent and turn to Christ for forgiveness and empowerment just like we did when we first came to Christ. We do this daily: repent and believe, repent and believe.

Temptation Is Not Sin

In following James' birthing metaphor, conception doesn't take place until we sin. The reason for making this observation is that we often feel sinful simply for having been tempted. Our very thoughts can make us feel unclean and like we've failed. This can actually precipitate sin – "I've already gone this far, why not go the whole way." But being tempted is not sin – yielding to it is.

Only Good Things Come From God

Not only does God not tempt anyone but everything He does is for our good. As James puts it, "that every good and perfect gift comes from above" (16-17). In this way James brings God's care, provision and benevolence to the forefront of our thoughts and he does so for several reasons. First, sin is often an illegitimate way to meet our legitimate needs. There's nothing wrong, for example, with sexual drive and desire. The temptation, however, is to meet that desire in a sinful way such as premarital sex. Sin is self-provision and self-medication; it is a rejection of God's provisions or God's timing of those provisions.

If you go back to the Garden of Eden account, you'll note the presence of a heart of unbelief in God's goodness at the time of the first sin. Adam and Eve became convinced that God was "holding out on them" in not letting them eat of the tree. Their sin was fueled by a lack of faith in the goodness of God. And it's important to see that a part of every temptation is this seed of doubt in God's benevolence. James wants to reaffirm to us that God always knows what's best for us, always provides good and perfect gifts and is always motivated to act in our best interest.

God Provides a Means of Escape

This process of temptation is absolutely predictable. But mercifully so is God's faithfulness which doesn't change like "shifting shadows." As 1 Cor. 10:13 says, "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it."

In the study, additional time is spent in this passage, which focuses on another aspect of God's faithful in temptation: He graciously provides a means to escape. The promise of a means of escape carries some logical implications. If the all-knowing ruler of the universe provides us an exit strategy, He must know we don't have the capacity to handle what's coming our way. We need to believe Him and take whatever exit ramps He provides. Having given us fair warning about the nature of sin and temptation and about the nature and goodness of God, James tells us not to be deceived. We should not be.

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What's Our Response?

You want the group to recognize that in the midst of a trial they will likely be tempted to seek relief, distraction or comfort in some sinful way.

They should be aware of the ways in which they are most prone to be tempted.

You want them to seek and wait for His provisions, while realizing that at the core of their sin is a failure to believe in God's goodness. Sin is not just giving in to our flesh; it's turning away from God.

The good news is that God loves us. Even our trials are a reflection of His love. He will provide and care for our needs – in His time. He will also provide a means of escape from temptation, and should we fall, we have His healing and forgiveness. In this way Christ is sufficient in the midst of our temptation.

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What Are the Questions?

James 1:13-18

Launch

When you feel stressed, lonely or discouraged, in what ways are you most tempted to self-medicate yourself?

Explore

Read James 1:13-18.

1. Due to our sinful nature, the trials God provides for our growth, can also lead to temptation. What inherent temptations might accompany the following trials?

Financial difficulties
Loneliness
Academic difficulties
Peer pressure

2. How might it affect your life if you believed God was tempting you? Why would we want to (or choose to) believe that God is tempting us?

3. Why do you think James doesn't mention Satan as a factor in our temptation? What role does Satan play in temptation?

4. Who or what do you tend to blame for your sin?

5. James uses a hunting/fishing metaphor to explain how temptation entices and draws us away from safety where we're caught by sin. What is the safety we're drawn away from? What is the most effective bait for catching you in sin?

6. James also uses a birth metaphor. In this metaphor, what do you think he means by conception?

7. Why do you think he uses such graphic metaphors?

8. In 1:13 and 17, James conveys God's goodness and care for His children, because at the root of temptation can be a distrust of this truth. Read Genesis 3:1-6 and record what truths Adam and Eve were tempted to distrust.

9. It's been said that at the foundation of sin and temptation is a lack of faith in some part of God's character. Is this always true or just sometimes?

10. In what areas do you have a hard time trusting in God's goodness – that His plans are good for you and not harmful or hurtful?

Read 1 Corinthians 10:13.

11. Not only does God not tempt, but He looks to provide us a means of escape. Does that mean there are some temptations we can't handle?

12. When and how did God recently provide a means of escape for you?

13. From James' metaphors, temptation is clearly not sin. Are there temptations that make you feel guilty simply for being tempted? How does this affect you?

Apply

14. James 1:16 says, "Don't be deceived." What in the verses we've looked at would keep you from being deceived?

15. What causes you to want to blame, rationalize and not seek out God's means of escape? What do you believe sin will provide that God can't?

16. Where would you rather self-medicate and self-provide rather than wait for God's provisions?

17. In 1:18 why does James focus our attention on our new birth and the Word of Truth? How does this contrast with the cycle of sin and temptation? How are we to experience this reality daily?

NOTES:

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What Are the Answers?

1. A trial in the financial area can provide a temptation to covet, be ungrateful, even steal. Loneliness might lead to sexual temptation. Academic difficulties can lead to cheating or giving up.
2. You might want to feel more justified in sinning.
3. He wants us to take responsibility for our sin and not look to blame. Blame only provides an excuse to sin. Satan works to plant lies in our minds and undermine God's holy character.
4. Allow the group to discuss.
5. Fellowship. Intimacy with God, walking in close fellowship with God would all describe "safety."
6. Conception is the point where we give into temptation. Our desires are united to the temptation.
7. Because sin is attractive and enticing. He is showing us its ugly reality.
8. They were tempted to doubt God's care, truthfulness, provisions, instructions, and motives.
9. Allow the group to discuss.
10. Share. Allow the group to discuss.
11. It seems implied. The motivation for taking God's means of escape is knowing there really are certain situations we should not be in and don't have the capacity to handle.
12. Allow the group to discuss.
13. This is important to talk about because people can feel they've sinned just by being tempted. This can actually precipitate them sinning.
14. Allow the group to discuss.
15. Here you're looking for the group to go deep in thinking about and being honest about their motivations to sin.
16. You want the group to see the areas where they turn from God and trust and rely on worldly things to meet their needs.
17. In contrast to the dynamic of sin, we are encouraged to remember the dynamic of our salvation: a new birth conceived by the Word of Truth planted in us. Just as temptation is an ongoing cycle, so is this. As we hear the truth of our sin we repent and turn to Christ for forgiveness and empowerment just like we did when we first believed.

Memorize

God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He tempt anyone.

James 1:13



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