

Winning The Battle Within

#5 in series “*Doing What We Believe*”

(A Study in the Book of James)

We are learning that in order to grow and mature in our relationship with Christ, we must learn to persevere in our trials... The term *trials* is really a big word – a big enough concept to include all sorts of test that come our way... Sometimes the trials are testings on the outside, and sometimes trials are the temptations we experience on the inside...

But really – there is a difference between a “trial” and a “temptation”... Though the same word may be used to refer to both of these experiences – and depending on which translation you read from – the same word is used for both experiences in this very chapter – but nonetheless – there is a difference! Basically, **trials** are challenges that we face both from without and within – and they do not necessarily come from – or lead to sin... **Temptation** on the other hand – is an “*enticement to evil*” and when we yield to them – they always lead to sin!

Trials can be tests sent by God, or a trial can be in the form of temptations sent by Satan and encouraged by our own fallen flesh... For the most part, verses 2-12 speak of **trials** that come from **without**. Today, we will focus on the battle with **temptation** that we experience from **within**... The trials from without are to be endured. The temptations from within are to be resisted.

James 1:13-18 (NASB)

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. ¹⁷ Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow. ¹⁸ In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.

It is this second aspect of trials – temptations on the inside – that James dealt with in this section...

We need to address the question – “What is the relationship between testings without and temptations within?”

Warren Wiersbe said – “If we are not careful, the testings on the outside may become temptations on the inside. When our circumstances are difficult, we may find ourselves complaining against God, questioning His love, and resisting His will. At this point, Satan provides us with an opportunity to escape the difficulty. This opportunity is a temptation.”

Does that not ring with truth?... We are facing some trial – something that is beyond our control – and instead of persistently seeking the Lord for His

grace to endure (2 Cor. 12:9), we begin to be tempted to take a “short-cut” – some way of relieving ourselves of the pressure of the trial – some way that really isn’t God’s way – and there enters into our mind a temptation from the enemy of our souls – to get us to compromise on God in a time of testing...

2 Cor. 12:9 (NASB) “And He has said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.’ Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.”

Paul cautioned us well to be vigilant of this kind of thinking...

2 Cor. 2:11 (NASB) “so that no advantage would be taken of us by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his schemes.”

Certainly, God does not want us to yield to temptation – and yet – let’s face it – He often will not keep us from the experience of temptation. He does not insulate or shelter His people from ever experiencing temptation – but He does equip His people with the tools necessary to be overcomers against any temptation... Let’s consider a few facts presented in our text – that will help equip us to be overcomers in our times of temptation:

1. Look Within to Evaluate The Problem

What does this evaluation look like? First –

Consider the Reality of Yearning Temptation (:14)

14 But each one is tempted... ESV – “But each person is tempted...”

All of us can testify to the truthfulness of that statement... Everyone is tempted – no one is immune...

Temptation is the common experience of every human being... We all live in a broken world – broken since the fall of man – and we are constantly bombarded by the attacks of the world, our own flesh, and the enemy of our souls – the devil...

1 Cor. 10:13 (that we will reference again at the end of the message) reveals that temptations are common to everyone – including – if not especially Christians...

Chip Ingram – “Although our sins are forgiven and we now have the power to overcome temptation, we will forever struggle with sin because we still have what the Bible calls the flesh.”

John MacArthur – **quoted an ancient writer who said – “... when we are saved, we must remember that our baptism did not drown our flesh.”** (quoted by John MacArthur – “Whose Fault is Our Temptation?”)

Everyone faces temptation... Just how facing trials that come from the outside is a test of genuine faith – so is how we face temptations that come

from the inside – a test of genuine faith...

The natural tendency we all have – is to play that blame-game for our failure to overcome temptation...

Whose to blame when we sin?... Well, ever since Genesis chapter 3, people have been blaming others – and especially blaming God. (“The woman, You gave me...”)

In his message on this passage, John MacArthur pointed to an interesting place in the Scripture where God’s people in the OT tried to blame God for their sin... It’s a bizarre – and inaccurate statement:

Isa. 63:17 (NASB) “Why, O Lord, do You cause us to stray from Your ways
And harden our heart from fearing You? Return for the sake of Your servants, the tribes of Your
heritage.”

Unbelievers – and disobedient Christians – blame anything but themselves. They excuse their sins by blaming their environment (poverty, housing, culture) – or by blaming their parents (inherited faults, lack of learning, abuse) – or by even blaming God (*“He made me like this so I cannot help it”*).

But is that true?... Our text has something to say about that –

13 Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God (or lit – “from God); for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone.

No – no one can blame God for our shortcomings...

Do not blame God for temptation... He is too holy to be tempted, and He is too loving to tempt others. God does test us – but He does not – and cannot tempt us.

There is the **Reality of Yearning Temptation**... Second –

Consider the Ruin When Yielding to Temptation

14 But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust.

John MacArthur – “The problem is not the tempter without, the problem is the traitor within.”

Pro. 19:3 (NASB)

The foolishness of man ruins his way,
And his heart rages against the Lord.

Warren Wiersbe – “A temptation is an opportunity to accomplish a good thing in a bad way, out of the will of God... We think of sin as a single act, but God sees it as a process. Adam committed one act of sin, and yet that one act brought sin, death, and judgment on the whole human race.”

James described this process of sin in four stages.

Craving Desires (:14)

The word *lust* is not limited to sexual passions – it means any kind of desire... God gave us natural / normal desires... Having those desires are not, of themselves, sinful...

Think about it – if we didn't have these desires, we could not function... Unless we felt hunger and thirst, we would never eat and drink, and we would die... Without fatigue, the body would never rest and would eventually wear out... Without the normal, God-given desire for sex – there would be no children...

The desires are not wrong... It is when we seek to satisfy these desires outside of God's will – that we get ourselves into trouble...

Eating is normal; gluttony is sin... Sleep is normal; laziness is sin... And what about sex?

Heb. 13:4 (ESV) “Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.”

These basic desires of life have been described as “the steam in the boiler that makes the machinery go”... If you simply try to turn the steam off – you have no power... If you simply let the steam go with no restraint - you have destruction... The secret is in *constant control*. These desires make great servants – but poor masters... We can indeed gain control in Jesus Christ.

Concealed Deception (:14, 16)

14 But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust.

16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.

Temptation does not announce itself by saying – “*Here I am - temptation – be warned – you are about to think, say or do something you shouldn't*”... No, temptation is more subtle in its appeal...

James uses two illustrations to prove his point:

“...**carried away**” has the idea of being “*lured*”... It is what a hunter does in baiting a trap, or a fisherman does to catch a fish...

“**and enticed**” in the original Greek means “to bait”... The hunter and the fisherman have to use bait to attract and catch their prey. No animal is

deliberately going to step into a trap and no fish will knowingly bite at a hook or swim into a net... The idea is to hide the trap and the hook.

Temptation will always present itself with deception... It offers some kind of bait that appeals to our natural desires... The bait not only attracts us, but it also hides the fact that yielding to it will bring us great harm!...

The bait keeps us from seeing the consequences of sin.

We'll be getting into the solution to this battle more next time – but in short – how do we keep from being deceived into believing the lie that temptation offers us?... Follow Jesus' example – know your Bible!...

When Jesus was tempted by Satan, He always dealt with the temptation on the basis of the Word of God... Three times Jesus said, "It is written"....

Don't allow yourself to be led astray. Don't allow yourself to be caused to be misled. Stop being deceived!... When you know the Bible, you can detect the bait and deal with it decisively. This is what it means to walk by faith and not by sight...

Carnal Defiance (:15)

15 Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.

Notice now how James takes us from the emotions (craving desires) to the intellect (concealed deception) now to the will.

James now uses a different metaphor... He changes the picture from hunting and fishing to the birth of a baby...

Desire conceives a method for taking the bait... The will approves and acts, and the result is sin... Whether we feel it or not, we are hooked and trapped. The baby is born, and just wait until it grows up!...

Listen – the Christian life is a matter of the will – not a matter of the feel...

We live by volition, not emotion...

Have you ever been one to say – “I don't feel like reading the Bible”. – or – “I don't feel like going to church today”?...

Children operate on the basis of feelings – but adults operate on the basis of the will... They act because it is right, no matter how they feel...

This explains why immature Christians easily fall so easily to temptation: they let their feelings make the decisions...

The more you exercise your will in saying a decisive “NO” to temptation – the more God will take control of your life.

Charles R. Swindoll – “When it comes to temptation, our culture offers very little motivation to resist it. More often than not, we hear the voices yelling ‘Give in! You deserve to be happy!’ Truly, yielding to temptation is much easier than resisting it. But for those who yield, the path of life is strewn with the litter of remorse and shame. Their souls

grow sick, not for longing to taste forbidden fruit but because the fruit made them sick. If we wish to avoid such soul sickness, we must resist temptation.”

Remember – temptation is not sin – it is the call to battle.

Christians are called to grapple with the old flesh... We must be alert and not allow wrong thoughts and desires to take hold of our minds... When we commit sin, we must not excuse it, but put it to death and renounce it – take sides with God against it.

I like how the NKJV translates –

Phil. 2:13 (NKJV) “for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.”

and the emphasis there is on the positive “to do of His good pleasure” – not merely on the negative – avoiding sin...

If we spend our energy and focus on what God wants for us –that alone goes a long way in keeping us out of the pitfalls we stumble into with unguarded hearts and minds...

James says, “Look ahead and see where sin ends ... death!”

Consequential Death (:15)

15 Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.

Disobedience gives birth to death, not life...

19th C. American Essayist, Ralph Waldo Emerson – “Sow a thought and you reap an action; sow an act and you reap a habit; sow a habit and you reap a character; sow a character and you reap a destiny.”

Well – James says, you sow a sin and you will reap death!...

It can take years for the sin to mature, but when it does, the result will be death...

If we truly believe God’s Word and consider this outcome to our sin – it will encourage us to go to battle against the temptations that come our way...

When we study the fall of mankind in **Gen. 3** – we see these four stages unfold even then: **Craving Desire, Concealed Deception, Carnal Defiance, and Consequential Death.**

The serpent used desire to interest Eve:

(Genesis 3:5 (NASB) “For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

Is there anything wrong with gaining knowledge? Is there anything wrong with eating food? Eve saw that “the tree was good for food” (Gen. 3:6), and her desire was stirred...

Paul expressed his concern that Christians could fall into the same trap:

(2 Cor. 11:3 (NASB) “ But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.”

Satan is the deceiver, and he seeks to deceive the mind... The bait that he used with Eve was the fact that the forbidden tree was good and pleasant, and that eating of it would make her wise... She saw the bait but forgot the Lord’s warning: “**In the day that you eat from it you will surely die**” (Gen. 2:17).

Eve disobeyed God when she took the fruit of the tree and ate it... Then she shared it with her husband, and he disobeyed God... Because Adam was not deceived, but sinned with his eyes wide open – it is his sin that plunged the human race into tragedy (read Rom. 5:12–21; 1 Tim. 2:12–15).

Adam and Eve did die that day!... They died immediately in their spirit – and they died ultimately in their bodies...

(1 Corinthians 15:21-22 (NASB)

²¹ For since by a man *came* death, by a man also *came* the resurrection of the dead. ²² For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.

Everyone in Adam – that’s all of us – will die... Everyone in Christ – that’s the Christian – will be **made alive**...

The person who dies without Jesus Christ will experience eternal death, the

lake of fire (Rev. 20:11–15).

When temptation comes our way – we need to get our eyes off the bait and look ahead to see the consequences of sin: the judgment of God. “For the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23).

First - Look Within to Evaluate The Problem

2. Look Up to Appropriate The Solution

Consider the Richness Yielded by God’s Goodness (1:17)

¹⁷ Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.

Realize the Redemption Provided by God’s Grace (1:18)

¹⁸ In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.

Questions to consider in Community Group:

- **What is the difference, if any, between a “trial” and a “temptation”?**
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- **Who do people ultimately blame for the sin that occurs in their lives? Why?**

James described this process of sin in four stages – what are they? (Desire, Deception, Defiance, Death) At what point does the “temptation” actually become “sin”?

- - **Why should a Christian “know their Bible”, when it comes to dealing with temptations that come against us?**
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 - **It was said – “The Christian life is a matter of the will – not a matter of the feel... we live by volition, not emotion”. Why is this statement true, or is it? What roll should our emotions take in our Christian life?**
 - Ralph Waldo Emerson wasn’t a theologian, but much of this quote rings with truth – “Sow a thought and you reap an action; sow an act and you reap a habit; sow a habit and you reap a character; sow a character and you reap a destiny.” Yet, we need to be careful with his quote. What is wrong with it? (The answer has to do with “destiny”. What really determines one’s eternal destiny?)
 - **What truths did you hear that challenges you the most? What truths encourage you the most?**
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Questions to “stab at” in anticipation of the rest of this message:

How does focusing on God’s goodness (:17) help us to win the battle within?

How does focusing on God’s grace (:18) help us to win the battle within?