

# How to overcome Temptations

## James 1:13

The book of James was a letter written 19 ½ centuries ago. It was from the heart of a pastor who knew his flock well. Pastor James knew the weaknesses we all face and explained how to turn them into opportunities for faithfulness. With the breath of God breathing through him, he was supernaturally inspired to explain God's plan: God wants us to endure trials leading to triumphs – Satan wants them to be temptations leading to sin.

Throughout the history of the church much has been written and spoken about overcoming temptation. A fifth-century Christian wrote,

Fly from all occasions of temptation, and if still tempted, fly further still. If there is no escape possible, then have done with running away and show a bold face and take the two-edged sword of the Spirit. Some temptations must be taken by the throat as David killed the lion; others must be stifled as David hugged the bear to death. Some you had better keep to yourselves and not give air. Shut them up as a scorpion in a bottle. Scorpions in such confinement die soon, but if allowed out for a crawl and then put back into the bottle and corked down, they will live a long while and give you trouble. Keep the cork on your temptations, and they will die of themselves.

Others have tried to overcome temptation by, in effect, denying it. Jovinian, a heretical fifth-century monk, taught that after a person was baptized he was forever free of the devil's power and from temptation. Jerome, his most outstanding opponent, wisely commented that baptism does not drown the devil.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>MacArthur, John F., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, (Chicago: Moody Press) 1983.

A German pastor who was hung for his faith<sup>2</sup> in Christ in 1945 wrote these words in a sermon on temptation: "In our members there is a slumbering inclination towards desire which is both sudden and fierce. With irresistible power desire seizes mastery over the flesh. All at once a secret, smoldering fire is kindled. The flesh burns and is in flames. It makes no difference whether it is sexual desire, or ambition, or vanity, or desire for revenge, or love of fame and power, or greed for money, or, finally, that strange desire for the beauty of the world, of nature. Joy in God is...extinguished in us and we seek all our joy in the creature. At this moment God is quite unreal to us, he loses all reality, and only desire for the creature is real; the only reality is the devil. Satan does not here fill us with hatred of God, but with forgetfulness of God.... The lust thus aroused envelops the mind and will of man in deepest darkness. The powers of clear discrimination and of decision are taken from us.... It is here that everything within me rises up against the Word of God."

Look at our text this morning: James 1:13-15 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.<sup>14</sup> But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.<sup>15</sup> Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. NKJV. There are four powerful truths tucked away in these verses:

TEMPTATION IS INEVITABLE "Let no one say when he is tempted" it isn't if but when!

GOD IS IMMUTABLE "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone"

LUST IS AVOIDABLE <sup>14</sup> But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed

SIN IS HORRIBLE <sup>15</sup> Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death

TEMPTATION is inevitable, GOD is immutable, LUST is avoidable but the consequence SIN is horrible!

In the spring of '48 a young missionary couple from Chicago named John & Betty Stam were led to the top of a hill in China. With a flash of a sword in the early morning sun the communist rebels severed the heads of this missionary couple. In the Bible of John Stam was later found these words "before each of us this day lies the platform of exposure to temptation from it leads seven glorious steps upward and

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<sup>2</sup> Swindoll, *Sensuality*, p. 10.

seven damnable steps downward..." What kept John and Betty Stam faithful even to death resisting temptation? The same thing that kept Christ.

## TEMPTATION IS INEVITABLE

Remember the 1<sup>st</sup> temptation in God's Word ? Genesis 3. Let's turn there and be reminded of Satan's 4 spiritual flaws he tries to instill in us! The Four Spiritual Flaws: Satan is in an all out attack to make you and me Think wrongly about God!

- I. SATAN'S FOUR SPIRITUAL FLAWS: (Gen. 3)
  - A. Doubt God's Word v. 3a "hath"
  - B. Doubt God's Goodness v. 3b "not eat"
  - C. Doubt God's Authority v. 4 "not die"
  - D. Doubt God's Plan v. 5 "eyes open"
- II. GOD'S FOUR SPIRITUAL LAWS:
  - A. TRUST His Word Ps 119:89 "forever settled"
  - B. REST in His Goodness Ps 73:1 " God is good"
  - C. SUBMIT to His Authority James 4:7 "Submit to God"
  - D. FOLLOW His Plan Pr. 3:5-6

Jesus began His ministry in the Mt. 4 wilderness of temptation. He ended in Lk. 23 in the Garden of temptation. In a moment we will see how He triumphed, and how we can too!

In the Lord's prayer we say "Lead us not . . ." Christ saying to us that we should ask Him: "Don't allow me to come under the sway of temptation that will overpower me and cause to sin".

"Temptation"      peiradzein    occurs 21 x New Testament here 1 x  
"temptation"      in the rest of New Testament      20 x "Test"

The Bible is full of times when tests were tragically turned into temptations and sin.

- Abraham was tempted and failed. Abraham who incredibly listened to God when all the world around him wasn't, who followed God across the world leaving all his world behind, Abraham the father of the faithful makes it to Canaan and God gives him a "no-food test", a famine in Canaan. His choice? Trust God and see Him do something incredible or trust himself and follow his own way (temptation) and turn toward Egypt (a picture of the world) and sin! You know the story, he went DOWN to Egypt! (Genesis 12)

- The children of Israel turned a test into a sin resulting temptation. God led them from the land of their captivity and oppression. He smote the Egyptians with the greatest series of plagues since the flood. He split the Sea, He drowned the armies of Egypt, He lightened the night with a towering pillar of fire so they could see to walk, He shaded and led them in the blazing desert with a cloud of His presence. And then in the next few days they ran out of water, they had the “no-water” test. An opportunity to see God provide and further prove His loving care and divine power – trust God through the test or turn from God in temptation. Their lusts led them to sinful bitterness and wilfulness, and they sinned.

That is no God's plan. Instead His Word gives us the way out. There are three keys to help us unlock the door every time we feel we are trapped in temptation.

#### LOOK FOR GOD

*First read in Corinthians 10: 13 LOOK FOR GOD - He's there.*

The apostle Paul gives us hope in this verse of Scripture. *No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it.*

The longer you meditate on this verse, the bigger the shadow looming over it becomes. It is God who towers over this passage: *God is there all the time.* He tells us He is faithful. When we think we are alone, we are not alone. God has already measured and limited the attack upon us. He has already provided an escape route if we will only look for it and take it. If it were just us facing temptation, we would be hopelessly defeated. But God knows that already and so He is there. All the time. All the way. Every time. And He has the best way out marked for us. What a Mighty God we serve!

A father once told of his son's first serious conflict at school. His boy was being picked on by two or three bullies. They punched the youngster a time or two, pushed him over when he was riding his bike home from school, and generally made life miserable for the lad. They told him they would meet him the next morning and beat him up.

That evening the dad really worked with the boy at home. He showed him how to defend himself, passed along a few helpful techniques, and even gave him some tips on how he might try to win

them over as friends. The next morning the lad and dad prayed together knowing that the inevitable was sure to happen. With a reassuring embrace and a firm handshake, the father smiled confidently and said, "You can do it, Son. I know you'll make out all right."

Choking back the tears, the boy got on his bike and began the lonely, long ride to school. What the boy did not know was that every block he rode he was under the watchful eye of his dad...who drove his car a safe distance from his son, out of sight but ever ready to speed up and assist if the scene became too threatening. The boy thought he was alone, but he wasn't at all. The father was there all the time.

And in even greater measure, the God of the Universe has gone ahead. He has been tempted in every way like us and triumphed. He has joined us in every temptation and makes the way of victory marked and open for us. Look for God ! He is always faithful!

#### USE THE WORD

Second key: quote Scripture like Jesus! Read in Mt. 4:1-11 Use the Word (that's what Christ did). He planned and prepared. Note the 1<sup>st</sup> word Christ spoke "Man shall not . . ." this is an insight into the most powerful truth in this passage: JESUS MET AND MASTERED SATAN AS A MAN! He did not face him as gGod'sSon, that would not have been a match. Jesus met Satan with the same two, and the only two resources we have – the Word of God and the Spirit of God. If the Word of God is hidden in our hearts:

- we will say with the Psalmist (119:9-11) How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word. With my whole heart I have sought You; Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments! 11 Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You! (NKJV)
- we will say with Paul in Galatians 5:16 I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. NKJV
- we will say with John (1 John 5:18) We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him. NKJV
- we listen to Jesus who said (Revelation 1:5) and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, NKJV

So Jesus did not zap Satan with His deity, He flattened him with totally obedient humanity. Now we know Jesus had no evil desires Satan could attach to (John 14:30) "I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me. NKJV. But the real battleground of the devil is our will. Jesus had already proclaimed His life's direction as DOING THE WILL OF God and not his own (Hebrews 10:7-9) Then I said, 'Behold, I have come— In the volume of the book it is written of Me— To do Your will, O God.' " 8 Previously saying, "Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and offerings for sin You did not desire, nor had pleasure in them" (which are offered according to the law),<sup>9</sup> then He said, "Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God." He takes away the first that He may establish the second. NKJV. Doing God's will is another way of saying Walk in the Spirit.

#### RUN FROM LUST

Read in II Tim. 2:22 Run from Lust Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. NKJV

Sensuality is easily the biggest obstacle to godliness among men today and is wreaking havoc in the Church. Godliness and sensuality are mutually exclusive, and those in the grasp of sensuality can never rise to godliness while in its sweaty grip. If we are to "discipline [ourselves] for the purpose of godliness" (1 Tim. 4:7, NASB), we must begin with the discipline of purity. There has to be some holy heat, some holy sweat! The mind controlled by lust has an infinite capacity for rationalization.

As the New Testament scholar Leon Morris has written: "The man who carries on an act of impurity is not simply breaking a human code, not even sinning against the God who at some time in the past gave him the gift of the Spirit. He is sinning against the God who is present at that moment, against One who continually gives the Spirit. The impure act is an act of despite against God's good gift at the very moment it is being proffered.... This sin is seen in its true light only when it is seen as a preference for impurity rather than a Spirit who is holy."

Jonathan Edwards, one of the great preachers of early American history, once made this resolution: "*Resolved*, Never to do any thing, which I should be afraid to do if it were the last hour of my life."

TEMPTATION comes in Three Dimensions<sup>3</sup>, packaged in varied shapes, sizes, and colors...but most of them fall into one of three categories:

- 1) *Material Temptation*. This is lust for things. The things may be as large as a house or as small as a ring, as bright and dazzling as a new sports car or as dull and dusty as a two-hundred-year-old antique dresser.
- 2) *Personal Temptation*. This is lust for status. Special recognition. The status of fame, fortune, power, or authority. Having a title that makes heads turn, like "top executive" or "president" or "executive director" or even "doctor".
- 3) *Sensual Temptation*. This is lust for another person. The desire to have and enjoy the body of an individual, even though such pleasure is illegal and/or immoral.

Read in Psalm 119:9-11 How can a young man cleanse his way?

By taking heed according to Your word.

10 With my whole heart I have sought You;

Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments!

11 Your word I have hidden in my heart,

That I might not sin against You!

#428 I need Thee

#430 I must tell Jesus

#330 "Come Every Soul By Sin Oppressed"

So TEMPTATION IS INEVITABLE. BUT SECONDLY, GOD IS IMMUTABLE God's ways do not change<sup>4</sup>. IMMUTABILITY He continues to act towards sinful men in the way He does in the Bible Story.

Still He shows His freedom and Lordship by discriminating between sinners, causing some to hear the gospel while others do not hear it, and moving some of those who hear it to repentance while leaving others in their unbelief; thus teaching His saints that He owes mercy to none, and that it is entirely of His grace, not at all through their own effort, that they themselves have found life.

Still He blesses those on whom He sets His love in a way that humbles them, so that all the glory may be His alone.

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<sup>3</sup> Swindoll, *Sensuality*, p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> [Knowing God, JI Packer, p. 70-71.]

Still He hates the sins of His people, and uses all kinds of inward and outward pains and griefs to wean their hearts from compromise and disobedience.

Still He seeks the fellowship of His people, and sends them both sorrows and joys in order to detach their love from other things and attach it to Himself.

Still He teaches the believer to value His promised gifts by making him wait for them, and compelling him to pray persistently for them, before He bestows them.

So we read of Him dealing with His people in the Scripture record, and so He deals with them still. His aims and principles of action remain consistent; He does not at any time act out of character. Man's ways, we know, are pathetically inconstant- but not God's.

What does it mean that God is IMMUTABLE or changeless? Even more, how does that truth impact my life? Twenty years ago the renowned preacher J.I. Packer asked a profound question to his audience, "How can the record of God's words and deeds in Bible times, the record of His dealings with Abraham and Moses and David and the rest, help us, who have to live in the space age?"<sup>5</sup> May we add to that those who live in the fax, gigabit, fiber optic world of cellular phones, cable TV and information that doubles every five years. Presently, we accumulate more facts every year than were recorded in all of time up to 1970!

How can a 4,000 year old book from the Middle East and Europe have anything to do with the laser guided, stealth technology and biomedical ethics of the nearly twenty-first century? The answer lies in this attribute of God: IMMUTABILITY

Packer continues, "Thus it appears that the truth on which we must dwell to dispel this feeling that there is an unbridgeable gulf between the position of men in the Bible times and our own, is the truth of God's immutability."<sup>6</sup>

Look at Psalm 102:25-27 with me:

Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of thy hands. They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou

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<sup>5</sup> *Knowing God*, Downers Grove:IVP, 1973, 67-72.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p.68.



change them, and they shall be changed: But thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end. (KJV)

What are seven characteristics of the unchanging nature of God? Lets note these fixed reference points that build security and stability:

1. God's WORD does not change. Numbers 23:19 God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good? Psalm 119:89 For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven. Psalm 119:152 Concerning thy testimonies, I have known of old that thou hast founded them for ever. Isaiah 40:8 The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever." (NIV) John 10:35 If he called them `gods,' to whom the word of God came -- and the Scripture cannot be broken -- (NIV)
2. God's LIFE does not change. Psalm 90:2 Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God. (NIV) First Timothy 6:16 Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honor and power everlasting. Amen. (KJV)
3. God's CHARACTER does not change. James 1:17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. (KJV)
4. God's WAYS do not change. Isaiah 55:8-9 For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. (KJV)
5. God's PURPOSES do not change. Hebrews 6:13-18 For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself, Saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. Wherein God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: (KJV)
6. God's LOVE does not change. Jeremiah 31:3 The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an

everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.  
(KJV)

7. God's SON does not change. Hebrews 7:25 Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them. (KJV) Hebrews 13:8 Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever. (KJV)

"How can the record of God's words and deeds in Bible times, the record of His dealings with Abraham and Moses and David and the rest, help us, who have to live in the space age? It appears that the truth on which we must dwell to dispel this feeling that there is an unbridgeable gulf between the position of men in the Bible times and our own, is THE TRUTH OF GOD'S IMMUTABILITY."

LUST IS AVOIDABLE Lot *chose* to live in Sodom and could have avoided the filthy influence of the place, but many people today really have no choice and must live surrounded by the pollutions of the world. Think of the Christian slaves who had to serve godless masters, or Christian wives married to unsaved husbands, or believing children with unsaved parents. Christian employees working in offices or factories are forced to see and hear things that can easily stain the mind and heart. Peter assured his readers and us that God knows how to "be delivering the godly out of testing and temptation" (2 Peter 2:9, WUEST) so that we may live victoriously. 7

Temptation appeals to our basic natural desires. There is nothing sinful about our desires, but temptation gives us an opportunity to satisfy these desires in an evil way. It is not sin to be hungry, but it is a sin to satisfy hunger out of the will of God. This was the first temptation Satan hurled at Jesus (Matt. 4:1-4).

The two terms, "carried away" and "enticed" (James 1:14), both relate to hunting or fishing: the putting of bait in a trap or on a hook. The animal (or fish) comes along and his natural desires attract him to the bait. But in taking the bait, he gets caught in the trap, or hooked. And the end is death.

Satan baits his traps with pleasures that appeal to the old nature, the flesh. But none of his bait appeals to the new divine nature within a Christian. If a believer yields to his old nature, he will hanker for the

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7Wiersbe, Warren W., *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books) 1997.

bait, take it, and sin. But if he follows the leanings of his new nature, he will refuse the bait and obey God. "This I say then, walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh" (Gal. 5:16). Yielding to sin is the distinguishing mark of "the children of the devil" (1 John 3:10). They *profess*, or claim, one thing, but they *practice* another. Satan is a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44), and his children are like their father. "He that saith, 'I know [God], and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 John 2:4). The children of the devil try to deceive God's children into thinking that a person can be a Christian and still practice sin. "Little children, let no man deceive you; he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as He [God] is righteous" (1 John 3:7). 8

#### SIN IS HORRIBLE

W. A. Criswell writes again, "The<sup>9</sup> mystery of God is the long delay of our Lord in taking the kingdom unto Himself and in establishing righteousness in the earth. The mystery of God is seen in these thousands of years in which sin and death run riot. There is no village and there is no hamlet without its raging, and there is no human heart without its dark, black drop. There is no life without its tears and its sorrows. There is no home that ultimately does not break up, and there is no family that does not see the circle of the home dissolve in the depths of the grave. There is no life that does not end in death. The pages of history, from the time of the first murder until this present hour, are written in blood, tears and death. The mystery is the delay of God in taking the kingdom unto Himself. That is the most inexplicable mystery that mind could dream of, the mystery of the presence of evil. For these thousands of years, God has allowed Satan to wrap his vicious, slimy, filthy, cruel tentacles around human life and around this earth. Does God know it? Is He indifferent to it? Is He not able to cope with it? Oh, the mystery of the delay of God! That mystery has brought more stumbling to the faith of God's people than any other experience in all life. The infidel, the atheist, the agnostic and the unbeliever laugh and mock us, and God lets them mock and laugh. The enemies of righteousness and the enemies of all that we hold dear rise and increase in power and spread blood and darkness over the face of the earth, and we wonder where God is. Our missionaries are slain, our churches are burned to the ground, people in this earth by uncounted millions and millions are oppressed, living in despair, and God just looks. He seemingly does not intervene; He does not say anything, and He does not move. Sin just develops. It

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**8**Wiersbe, Warren W., *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books) 1997.

<sup>9</sup> "W. A. Criswell, *Expository Sermons on Relation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1961-66), p. 190. Used by permission,

goes on and on. Oh, the mystery of the delay of the Lord God! But somewhere beyond the starry sky there stands a herald angel with a trumpet in his hand, and by the decree of the Lord God Almighty, there is a day, there is an hour, there is a moment, there is an elected time when the angel shall sound and the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ."