

Way back in the day when I was a high school ministry intern at Peninsula Bible Church learning to live on \$500 a month, I was at an ATM at Wells Fargo to withdraw \$20 for gas. Living on \$500 a month was a trial for me. After working four different jobs and at the same time being a full-time student, all to pay for college, I was used to living on a budget, but \$500 was tough. It was my first big trial and test of my faith as I entered ministry. As I made my withdrawal, the ATM messed up and gave me \$60 but only subtracted \$20 from my account. Hmm, I thought to myself. No one would know that the machine just gave \$40 extra bucks! Who would know? It was almost like a cartoon, where you had an angel on one shoulder saying, "Do the right thing." And the Devil on the other shoulder saying, "Who would ever know." See, right at that time, the trial I was going through instantly became a temptation.

Last week, we were reminded in James that trials and suffering are never for nothing. That those things often produce endurance and make us mature and complete in Christ. This week James warns us that those trials we encounter can turn into something more dangerous; temptation leading to sin, which can lead to death. James moves from the idea of trials and tests to temptation. Verse 12 is the hinge that connects these verses 2-11 and verses 13-18.

**Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him (emphasis mine). v.12**

In the Greek, that word test has two meanings, and James uses it as a transition from the testing of our faith to temptation. He is indicating to us that often temptation will accompany trials. James goes on to exhort us about temptation. He wants fellow believers to understand that no one is exempt from temptation. Just like we all face various trials and tests of our faith, we also face multiple temptations. No one is immune, but our response to those temptations can lead to faithfulness or sin.

In verse 13, James is emphatic of where temptation does not come.

**When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; v. 13**

Temptation does not come from God! In fact, temptation is not in God's nature. He is good and holy, which means to be set

apart. He is set apart from evil. God does not lure us to do evil. His motives are pure, and He desires not to bring us harm. When people say, "God is tempting me!" Really what they are saying is that I gave in to sin, and I'm going to blame it on God. It's not my fault; it's God's. Scripture makes it clear that tests and trials are used by God to strengthen and mature us in our faith. God is perfecting our character in trials. As James says in verse 12, God wants us to persevere and receive the crown of life! So, where does temptation come from?

### **Temptation starts from desire.**

**But each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. vv.14-15.**

James reveals the real source of temptation - our desires. Our desires entice us. The word entice is a fishing term, meaning "to bait." I'm not into fishing, but my brother and uncle are fabulous fishermen. I'm always amazed at the huge fish they bring in! When my brother texts me a picture of his latest catch, I always ask him, "How in the world did you catch that huge fish?" His response is usually something like, "I chose a tasty lure." That phrase will preach! Temptation is like that tasty lure; something external gets dropped in our life, which entices our desires and lusts. From the beginning of man, our desires get the best of us. The lure gets dropped, a hunger stirs within us mixed with curiosity, and we are motivated by our desire to have. Adam and Eve are the perfect examples. The serpent dropped the lure, "You can be like God," and Eve took the bait - hook, line, and sinker. She bought the lie that she could know better than God, that she could be God, that she knew what was best for her and Adam. Unlike the story of Adam and Eve, James makes no mention of Satan being their source of our evil desires. The blame lies directly with us. We cannot blame God, Satan, our boss, our teachers, our family, or our friends.

Paul reminds us in Romans,

**For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good, I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Romans 7:18-19**

It's the battle between what we call the flesh (evil desires) and the Spirit. But notice the progression that leads to sin. First, it's

the desire; the tasty lure is dropped. That tasty lure is meant to trick the fish that what is offered is something other than what it is. That tasty lure is pretty and looks harmless. Once the fish is enticed away from his security, it's hooked and then dragged away, and its future is in a frying pan to be someone's dinner.

Each day we are enticed, we are dragged away by whatever temptations we battle. It starts with the thought that we know what's better for us. That life would be better if we did things our way and not God's way. Back to my ATM story, "\$40, who cares? Who is going to know? Walk away now and treat yourself to something! Maybe the trial isn't money, but you've been hurt and want to get revenge. Or you are lonely, so you do whatever it is to fit in with a group of friends. Maybe it's living with a difficult spouse, and you think that divorce or adultery is the answer. These tasty lures, these evil desires lead down the road of disobedience.

### **Temptation leads to disobedience.**

James moves from the fishing imagery to the imagery of giving birth.

**Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; v.15a.**

Facing temptation isn't experiencing sin. Sin is born when we give in to temptation. Paul reminds us in Galatians,

**"When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, your lives will produce these evil results: sexual immorality, impure thoughts, eagerness for lustful pleasure, idolatry, participation in demonic activities, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, divisions, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other kinds of sin" (Gal 5:19-21 NLT).**

Every time we face temptation, we come to a crossroads, we have to make a decision; obedience to God or disobedience. There is no in-between; it's one or the other. When those trials become temptations, how will we respond?

So after we are enticed, dragged away, and fall into temptation, what happens?

### **Temptation can produce death.**

**And sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. v.15b**

James shows that sin keeps moving forward. When we let it take root in our lives, it can lead to death. From the beginning, sin offers itself as something fun and exciting, shiny, and new. It can even promise fulfillment. Sin doesn't come along from the start and say, "Hey, want to ruin your life? Your family? Your character?" Sin lies to us, telling us that it will meet our needs, that it can't hurt us. Unchecked, sin will suck the life out of us. The sinner can no longer live out true life in the Spirit - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and

self-control (Gal. 5:22-23). Instead, they are walking in the flesh, the polar opposite of the Spirit.

I'm reminded of a story I've heard.

**A little banyan seed said to a palm tree one day,**

**"I am weary of being tossed about by the wind; let me lodge in your branches."**

**"Remain as long as you like," was the reply. Soon the tree forgot all about its tiny guest, but the seed did not remain idle. Immediately it began to work its roots under the bark and into the heart of the trunk itself. Finally, the tree cried out, "What are you doing?"**

**"I'm only the little seed you allowed to rest among your boughs," came the reply.**

**"Get out!" exclaimed the palm. "You've become too large and strong!"**

**"I cannot leave you now," said the banyan. "We have grown together, and I would kill you if I tore myself away." The tree tried desperately to shake itself loose but to no avail. Eventually, its graceful leaves turned brown, and its trunk wasted away; but the banyan continued to thrive until its host could no longer be found.**

Sin does that to our lives. When we let it take root and embrace it, it eventually consumes our lives. There is no such thing as "a little sin." It's like saying someone is "a little pregnant." You either are or not. The same with sin, you are either sinning or not. When we let our desires direct us even just a little bit, we are giving birth to sin, and one small step after another, we eventually give birth to death.

James has just spent time telling us of the deadly danger and progression of sin and where it leads. It can sound utterly hopeless. Guess what? Our condition can change; we don't have to be left in the grave in the all-consuming darkness of sin! Here is the good news! James gives us a command to overcome temptation.

### **A command to overcome temptation.**

**Don't be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. vv.16-17**

James doesn't leave us in the darkness of sin. He gives us a command, "Don't be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters." James wants to make sure we are listening to him. It's almost like he is pleading with us as he calls us dear brothers and sisters. He wants us to see the truth! The command is, "don't be deceived." James is reminding us of our true nature. How easily we can become enamored with that tasty lure and how easy it is for sin to entangle us, not allowing us to move forward. Let's be honest; sin is waiting for us; it's waiting to devour each of us. It's in our nature to follow after sin, to think that we know

better, that we can be our own god. Remember the words of the prophet Jeremiah? The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? That's why James reminds us, "Don't be deceived." Even our own hearts deceive us. It comes back to what path we want to follow. Do we want to follow the way that is full of life, with testing, perseverance, maturity, and being made complete or the way that is full of selfishness, desire, sin, and death?

How do we overcome temptation? You might be surprised at how simple it is. It's a reminder that God is good. We fight temptation with the goodness of God. "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows." God is good all of the time. We can trust that every good thing has come from Him, and we can believe that He is unchanging. Remember verse five? "If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you." God is generous, and He gives generously. What He gives is always good. It's perfectly good!

James calls God the Father of Lights. If we think about it, God created light, and God is light. 1 John 1:5 tells us God is light, and in him, there is no darkness. I think James is reminding us of God's purity and that He can't be tempted and doesn't tempt anyone. James goes on about the ultimate good gift to help us fight temptation.

### **A gift to overcome temptation.**

He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created. v.18

"He chose to give us birth through the word of truth..." Through Jesus, we are born again; we have a new birth; we have a new life. His death and resurrection give us a new life. The Father of Lights, who raised Jesus from the dead, raises us from the dead and give us new life. Jesus lived a perfect, sinless life, died on a cross taking on our sin, endured God's wrath, and then rose from the dead, giving us life. God spoke the word of truth into our spiritually dead lives and gave us a new life through Jesus. As Peter would say,

**"For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God." 1 Peter 1:23**

Everything we need to overcome temptation and conquer sin has been given to us through the good gifts of God, our new life in Christ. We become his "first-fruits," meaning we've been set apart, specifically belonging to God. Because of our new life, we have died to sin! It does not define us anymore. We no longer need to live in darkness. The Father of Lights has made a way for us as we battle temptation, and it's only through the good gift of His Son that we can win the battle. As we continue to be

transformed through Him, those tasty, shiny lures become dull and bland compared to the beauty of our new life in Christ.

So you are probably wondering what the outcome was to my temptation at the ATM? As I stood there with the extra money in my hands and the battle raging inside me, God brought to mind the very verse that is carved into wood in the PBC Auditorium from 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, "*You are not your own, you have been bought with a price.*"

That was such a great reminder to me that God was good, and that He would provide what I truly needed. Forty dollars was not worth what Jesus went through for me. So, I walked into Wells Fargo and told the teller that their machine was giving out extra money. The teller was stunned. I still remember her words today, "Wow, I can't believe you returned \$40. I don't know anyone who would do that." It was there that God opened a door for me to tell her why I returned the money as well as tell her of the one who gave me new life.

James describes two paths here on the road to trials and temptation. There is a path that leads to maturity, endurance, and faith through our trials or a path that leads from our trials to temptation, desire, sin, and death. James gives us the gift to having joy during our time of trials, but how we respond will lead us down one of these two paths. My prayer for you is that you ask God during your trials to lead you to maturity, endurance, and a stronger faith. The path that leads to death causes more pain.

Let me leave you with some questions. What trial in your life is starting to become a temptation? What tasty lure are you being enticed with? Have you asked God for His wisdom and help? Have you talked about it with someone who can hold you accountable?

Because of the new life God has created in us through the word of truth, we can understand and defeat temptation through Jesus so that we can live an abundant life.

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