

Defeating Temptation

James 1:13-18

Pastor Jarrett Stephens

I have loved seeing recently pictures that so many post this time of the year as their children are going back to school. It's the annual "first day of school" pics! I have loved following our staff and seeing the pics they have posted— it's just fun to see their kids growing up. With their permission here are some of our staff kids back to school pics!

- Miori family –
- Morris family –
- Mosser family –
- Comedy family -

Love it! Now, I saw some back to school pics posted online that are pretty funny. These probably express pretty accurately how many of our kids and parents feel about back to school time **(SHOW PICS)**.

Now, what I love most about these "first day of school" pics is they show how much your kids are growing up. And you keep count of them it can get pretty emotional. I've got a pastor friend of mine that takes the same pic with his son and daughter each year – check this out! **(SHOW PIC)**.

You see these pics and can see right before your eyes your kids growing up...getting older and along the way growing more mature. These cell phones today that hold pics like this are the equivalent of the old school marking the height on a door frame in your home. You can literally see the physical growth.

The question the text we are looking at today got me thinking about as I wrestled and studied it this week is, "What shows our spiritual growth? How do measure it?"

We can't capture it on camera. You can't see it by looking in a mirror. So, how do we measure whether we are growing as Christians? How do we measure whether or not we are progressing toward spiritual maturity?

This is what our text is dealing with today:

James 1:13-18 – "Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. ¹⁴ But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. ¹⁵ Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. ¹⁶ Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. ¹⁷ Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. ¹⁸ Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures."

The title of the message is: **Defeating Temptation**

Now, (v. 13-18) is a continuation of what we addressed last week. If you missed that message or miss any in this series, I really encourage you to go back online and listen because these messages build on one another.

What we said last week is that God's ultimate aim for us is maturity. This is why he sends and allows various kinds of trials to come our way in life. God uses them to push us and propel us toward spiritual growth. He is refining our faith.

James states these trials help us...form us...he actually uses the word "perfect" or "complete" us (v. 4).

If we want to know if we are growing spiritually, James gives us two ways to measure this as we move through chapter one. From last week, he writes we must endure trials joyfully (v. 2-12).

And then second way we can measure our Christian maturity is by what we read just a moment ago, and that is if we are defeating sin consistently (v. 13-18).

So, let me put these on the screen for you, just so you can see them together. I'll put it in the first person:

I know I am growing spiritually (pressing onto maturity) **when I am enduring trials joyfully and defeating temptation consistently.**

We worked out the part on enduring trials joyfully last week, let's turn our attention and focus this week to defeating temptation consistently.

Now, as it relates to trials and temptations, it's very important to understand that these are like two sides of the same coin.

In fact, in the original language the word for "trials" in (v. 2) in its noun form is the exact same word as "tempted" in (v. 13) in its verb form. The English translation actually helps us here because while it is the same word, we're talking about two different ideas.

Let me work it out like this for you. I've heard it said like this before. God sends/allows trials in our life to test us and strengthen us to stand. Satan sends temptations in our life to weaken us and cause us to fall.

Every trial we go through...and remember last week we said that every person in the room experiences trials (young/old, light skin/dark skin, rich/poor) – (v. 2) – "when" you go through trials, NOT "if" you go through trials.

Well, same goes for temptation. (v. 13) – "Let no one say WHEN he is tempted..."

Trials and temptations are a part of life. God wants to use trials as tests to strengthen us. Satan will take that trial you are in and use it to tempt you to sin against God. He wants you to fail the test that God has sent or allowed in your life.

Let's say:

- God allows a trial in your life that is a health crisis. Satan will use that trial (other side of the coin) and tempt you to question God's love for you...tempt you to doubt God's goodness.
- God sends a trial your way, and it has to do with your job. Your employer is on you. It's a toxic work environment. God is testing you to grow your patience, improve your prayer life, deepen your dependence on him, but Satan is using that same trial (other side of the coin) to tempt you to gossip about your boss, murmur with your coworkers, get angry about what's happening so you will lash out.

You get the picture here. With every trial there will be temptation. God wants us strong – he uses trial to turn us into spiritual body builders. Satan wants to stunt our growth...wants to prevent our maturity...wants our spiritual muscles to atrophy – and he does this by sending temptations – often times right alongside a trial.

So, here's what we're talking about today: One of the ways we can determine whether we are growing spiritually is if we are defeating temptation consistently.

And the major point of the message today, I'll put it on the screen for you. I hope you memorize it and that it becomes a mantra to you:

To defeat temptation consistently, I must trust God continuously.

Listen: Falling to temptation, at its very root is a failing to trust God. And my job today, if I do it right is to outline for you WHY you can trust God. I'll give you three reasons.

James writes here that you can trust God because:

1. God is good

James 1:13 – “Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.”

James wants to make sure his congregation knows what the root problem concerning temptation and sin is, and it's NOT God! He gets theological before he gets practical, and he affirms the goodness of God.

As a reminder to us all here – God is holy, holy, holy! He is totally separate and completely distinct. He is one of a kind, and there is NOTHING unwholesome or sinful in him. His nature is one of sinlessness.

God has NEVER sinned, NEVER will sin and therefore cannot tempt us to sin.

Habakkuk 1:3a – “You who are of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong...”

1 John 1:5 – “This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.”

The scripture tells us God is good and does good (Psalm 119:68). One of the biggest temptations you will deal with when a trial comes your way is to doubt ...to question God’s goodness.

- If God really loved me, this would not be happening to me...
- If God really cared for me, he would deliver me out of this predicament I’m in...
- If God is good, then why is this bad thing happening in my life...

The first step in being defeated by temptation is to doubt the goodness of God.

The Church had a saying back in the day that it would affirm and repeat often: “God is good all the time...and all the time God is good!

What’s NOT good...what you can’t trust is...you ready for this? I’ll show you: IT’S YOU!
(Mirror)

The problem when it comes to temptation is NOT God...and let me tell you this...this may come as a shocker – it’s not even Satan! The problem is you...it’s me!

What James teaches here in (v. 14-16) – I’m praying that this unlocks the door for some of you today who are consistently defeated by temptation...you’ve been a Christian for a long time, but you’re not growing! I’m praying that what we talk about in this set of verses, God uses to set you free and set you on a path to spiritual maturity.

James 1:14-16 – “But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. ¹⁵ Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. ¹⁶ Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers.”

Now, if you are taking notes or write in your Bible, I want you to write down four words in the margins of your Bible or in your notebook as we go along.

This is what I refer to as: **The Process of Temptation**

The first word I want you to write down: **Desire**

(v. 14) – “But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his OWN desire.”

Now, desire in and of itself is NOT bad. The desire for love is a God-given desire. The desire to make a difference is a good desire. The desire to work and contribute a God-given, good desire. Desire in and of itself is part of being human...we have certain desires.

The problem is we have a sin nature we are born with. Theologically, it's called an imputed unrighteousness. We got it from our great, great, great grandparents, Adam and Eve.

Now, in our sin nature, there is NOTHING good! Listen to how Paul puts it in **Rom. 7:18a** – **“For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh (sin nature)...”**

Sin has so messed us up that even our desires are twisted. So, a good God-given desire to be loved can be perverted and distorted. OR we have a good, God-given legitimate desire and because of our sin nature long to meet it in an ungodly, illegitimate way.

Either way, it's not God's fault that we fall to temptation. It's not even Satan's fault. It's our fault!

Like we have to take responsibility here! The problem lies within, and until we acknowledge it – that WE are the problem (Mirror) - it's our sin nature...our flesh, we'll never get on the path of defeating temptation in a consistent way.

This is the process of temptation. It starts with our desires. And this leads to a second word I want you to write down and that is: **Deception**

Notice the language of **James 1:14** – **“But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.”**

“lured...enticed...” – these are fishing terms! Look up the synonyms for deceived and you see words like: tricked, cheated, hoodwinked, duped, misled. And this what temptation is isn't?

Illus. Fishing lure – you've seen this before (lure). I think I have shared this with you before. I tell this to the campers at preteen camp nearly every year I preach: “Look for the hook!”

The problem is the bait looks so good...so, just play this out...let's give some real-life examples. There is a desire in you for sex...a legit desire. But our sin nature wants that desire to be met in an ungodly way. So, it's perverted...it's distorted...pornography enters in...an illicit relationship takes place. It looked good, but we're not thinking clearly...we're deceived - there's a hook!

There is a desire to be valued...to be respected...but in our sin nature, we fail to realize our worth in God and so we think it comes by our status...what we have...what we wear...but we can't afford the status we think we have to have (we're being deceived) so we take that credit card and it looks good, problem is solved – but there's a hook!

Look for the hook...you're falling to deception! More on that toward the end of the message. Third word I want you to write down in this process of temptation.

We go from desire to deception to: **Disobedience**

James 1:15 – “Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.”

Now, the timeline between desire and deception can be a long time. And let me say this, while the fault lies squarely on our shoulders of falling to temptation – there is no one else to blame, it is true that our enemy is working overtime to help move us in a direction that results in sinning against God.

Satan can't force us to disobey God, but he can lay a trap...he can put temptation in front of us!

Eph. 6 says that we are to beware of the “schemes” of the devil. A scheme is a tactical approach. You know I like my football illustrations...football season has started and what do teams do in order to be ready to play each week? They watch tape!

They want to see what a team's weaknesses are and what their tendencies are – this is Satan. He's watching tape and he knows our sin tendencies...he knows our weak spots...he knows when we are most prone to temptation.

The Enemy works us...he knows how to play with our mind...and he is patient! What he is ultimately after is your disobedience. Again, he can't make you disobey, but he can put something in front of you that's enticing...that lures you away.

Illus. Ice cream

Now, the timeline between desire to deception – it can happen over time...it's sometimes so slow, you don't even realize it! The timeline between deception and disobedience though - it happens very quickly!

Once you're deceived, disobedience (sin) is soon to follow! James puts it like it's a pregnancy here. Desire and deception come together to make an ugly baby called sin (disobedience).

And once sin is born, look at what it produces. It's the last word... the last part of the process of temptation: **Death**

Look at it again: **James 1:15 – “Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.”**

Disobedience to God...falling to temptation brings death. And don't think death in just the physical sense – sin is why physical death exists, but in the Jewish mindset, death was more of a word that described a general downward trajectory in life.

Sin...disobedience to God brings death to our relationships...death to our joy...death to our future...death to our physical, emotional and spiritual well-being.

Isn't it amazing? Sin always over-promises and under-delivers. We think that bait looks so good, we go after it, and all the sudden we're getting reeled in and fileted.

Now, as Christians we live in a positional relationship with God through Christ. Falling to temptation and sin does not remove us from the family of God, but it does bring death in the sense of separation.

Sin separates us from him...our fellowship is broken! There is ALWAYS a cost to disobedience – don't think you're going to be the one to get away with it!

THIS why James writes **James 1:16** – “**Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers.**”

Once deceived, disobedience is right around the corner...and in the words of “Wyatt Earp” and Tombstone – death and hell is coming with it!

If I had time, I'd take you to Genesis chapter three and we could see this played out in the Garden. Read it this week in your own time alone with the Lord (v. 1-13) and as you read, note the process of temptation.

You'll be able to read it and outline what we just talked about...you could write the words in the margin: Desire, Deception, Disobedience, Death.

Look at it in your own life. I'm convinced we don't think deeply about our own sin against God – think back to your last sin – doesn't matter how “small” or “big” it was...the process is the same: Desire, Deception, Disobedience, Death.

Let's go back to the statement we're working out today: **To defeat temptation consistently, I must trust God continuously.**

We said that we have to trust:

1. God is good.
2. **God wants good.**

If you think about it, this is at the root of every act of disobedience. We don't trust that God wants good for us...we think he is holding out on us.

Listen to me, God's not holding out on you! God is good and he wants only good for you. I once heard a pastor say one time, when you hear or read God say “Don't” (command - Don't do this!) – What you can read into is him saying, “Don't hurt yourself.”

The antidote to temptation is trust. Think about what we have established up to this point. We have a sin nature in us that's not good at all (internal) and we have this Enemy that wants to steal, kill and destroy us (external)...doing everything he can to weaken your faith and cause us to fall.

Our only hope is in God – trusting that he is good, wants good – don't go after the bait thinking God is holding out on you. Don't be deceived (v. 16) – this was the sin of the Garden of Eden!

It was a failure to trust God is good...Adam and Eve were convinced God was holding out on them – and you trace your sin back, you'll find this same lie...you and I fall to the same deception – “I've got to take this (whatever this is) in my hands because God is holding out on me...he's making me wait too long...he must not want good for me.”

To defeat temptation consistently, I must trust God continuously.

Trust that God is good. Trust that God wants good. And third and finally, trust:

3. God gives good.

James 1:17-18 – “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. ¹⁸ Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.”

Allow me to interpret and paraphrase what James writes here: God doesn't change. His goodness is as consistent as the sun and moon and stars. He's forever good!

He's SO good that he takes even the bad in our life and works it for good! (Rom. 8:28)

Now, as we close let me share with you very specifically WHAT he gives from above that's good and perfect and helps us specifically as it relates to defeating temptation. Here are three “good gifts” he gives.

He gives salvation – this is (v. 18) – we have been brought forth by the word of his truth – the gospel! Listen: You have ZERO ability to defeat temptation in a consistent way if you have not been saved!

THIS is where it starts! It starts with giving Jesus your life!

He gives his Holy Spirit – this is Christ in you! I could stay here ALL day! What allows your desires to conform to the desires of God? What crucifies the sin nature and allows you not to be a slave to sin anymore? It is the Holy Spirit of God in you!

We talk about living in victory over temptation consistently. There is a war raging!

Gal. 5:17 – “For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.”

So, you've got the flesh (sin nature) vs. the Spirit. They are like two big ole dogs going at it...and you know which one is going to win? The one you feed the most!

So, I say starve the flesh and feed the Spirit. I was just reading on this, this week in my time alone with the Lord. 2 Cor. 7 – we are to be holy! Separated (positional and practical!).

Rom. 13:14 – “But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.”

Illus. Roscoe Lilly – “pet sins”

You say, Pastor Jarrett, it’s hard! I know it’s hard! But you have the Holy Spirit of God in you! You don’t have to be deceived...train yourself for godliness...saturate your mind in scripture.

Temptation is coming...now to be clear: temptation is NOT sin! Jesus was tempted. We can’t stop temptation from occurring in our lives...the hook is going to be baited and Satan will be fishing often. The bait coming by is not a sin!

Martin Luther – “We cannot control what birds fly over our heads, We can only control whether they build nests in our hair.”

We’ve been given the Holy Spirit to help us say no to the bait...to help us avoid birds nesting in our hair! God promises he will always give us a way out of temptation!

1 Cor. 10:13 – “No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.”

We’ve been given salvation. We’ve been given the Holy Spirit. The third and final gift God gives to help us defeat temptation: **He gives spiritual armor**

This is Eph. 6! We’ve been given the whole armor of God to defeat temptation and sin. Our job is to put it on!

- The Helmet of salvation (the mind!)
- The Breastplate of righteousness (identity)...
- The Belt of truth (don’t live off feelings)...
- Feet fitted in readiness to share the gospel...
- The shield of faith (if it’s not of faith, it’s sin)...
- The sword of the Lord (the word of God!)...
- Praying at all times (see the hooks!)...

To defeat temptation consistently, I must trust God continuously.

We trust that he is good...that he wants good...and that he gives good – this is a true measure of spiritual growth.

Let’s pray.

Please Note: This document is not meant to be a published, cited, annotated research paper. It is simply a transcript of a spoken message, provided as a resource. Many commentaries, articles, and other sermon helps were likely studied and contributed to the forming of this message.