

The Truth about Temptation

James inspired his readers in 1:1-12 to look at trials from God's perspective—to see trials not as a matter for sorrow but for joy! This is possible because God is actively and intimately involved in the countless circumstances of life to enable our faith to reach perfection and prove faith genuine and worthy of the crown of life.

In verses 13-18 James expands upon these truths, allowing us to see more of God's character as he instructs us in another area of vulnerability that is equally treacherous to our journey of faith.

Prepare Your Heart: “Thank You Father for Your continual and persistent refining work in our lives. Our desire is that You keep our hearts pure whatever the cost.”

1. **Read** James 1:13-15, then compare with James 1:2-4. What two alternate progressions of life is James describing?

Verse 13 begins a shift in terminology that is more apparent in the original Greek language. The words *testing*, *trials*, *troubles* and *temptation* come from the same Greek word group, but they have different meanings when used in the Bible.

2. a. How are temptations different from trials? (Consider carefully James 1:2-16.)

- b. How might a trial become a temptation? Can you provide an illustration?

Take time to **reread** and consider James' words in 1:13-15. These verses give us a true perception of God's nature and our nature.

3.
 - a. What fundamental truth about God's character is emphasized with clarity in verse 13? See also 1 John 1:5.

 - b. What excuse do people sometimes make for giving in to temptation (verse 13)?

 - c. What is the real source of temptations to sin (1:14)? See Romans 5:12 for background.

 - d. Describe in your own words the progression of uncontrolled sinful desire, from inception to final result, as explained by James in 1:14-15.

A Closer Look

James uses two vivid images to convey to us how sin does its work (verses 14 and 15).

The words translated "dragged away" (lured) and "enticed" (ensnared) are taken from the language of fishing. The imagery is that of a fish swimming in a straight course and then drawn off toward something that seems attractive, only to discover that the bait has a deadly hook in it.

In the second image James uses the process of childbirth to illustrate his point. The idea is that sin grows rapidly, just as an embryo grows to maturity and when it is full-grown the pregnancy must end. The irony here is that sin gives birth to death instead of life.

4. How do these word pictures speak to your heart? How do they further illuminate the truth about temptation?

5. Think about one temptation you have experienced recently. How might the realization of where sin ultimately takes us motivate you to godly living?

Pause and Reflect: When we yield to temptation now there are consequences that go on that we cannot control. There are on-going effects. We do not just live a series of isolated incidents. Choices lead to habits and habits set our character either toward or against God. Understanding these truths can help us overcome temptation.

6. Look up 2 Timothy 2:22, James 4:7-8 and 1 Corinthians 10:13 to further consider how to deal with evil desires. Write your insights below.

Keep in mind that while the initial thought to sin stems from our sinful flesh, it is not sin unless we pursue it. Jesus was tempted but He was without sin (Matthew 4:1-11).

7. Write down James 1:13-15 on a card and memorize it this week.
8. When we overcome temptation by God's grace our faith is proven to be _____.

James 1:16 is a pivotal statement in this passage that embraces both the preceding verses and those that follow. (Review James 1:13-17 with this thought in mind.)

9. What does it mean to be "deceived?"
10. What would you say was James' primary concern for his "beloved brethren" when he admonished them "not to be "deceived?" Note especially James 1:13 and 1:17.

As you recall, James' first audience was suffering severe persecution because of their faith in Christ. This was causing many of them to be disappointed and angry with God. They thought a good God would not allow such things to happen to His people! The truth that *God does not "tempt" for evil but does "test" for virtue* was not fully understood.

Read James 1:13-18 with this background in mind. Then focus your attention on verses 17-18. Mark the words "every," "good" and "perfect" in verse 17a. Contemplate the practical ramifications of this statement.

11. Paraphrase James 1:17a in your own words.

12. Consider and list some of the many good things that God gives you to enjoy!

13. James adds a glorious dimension to our understanding of God's goodness in the last phrase of verse 17. Explain why this aspect of God's character is so important.

14. What good and perfect gift from God counters the tendency to sin that makes us susceptible to temptations (verse 18)? See also John 3:3 and 1 Peter 1:3.

Make a mental note of the difference between the "birth description" in verse 15 and verse 18. Have you experienced God's ultimate gift to you—the transforming spiritual birth of verse 18?

15. James has set before us some very practical truths that we can recall and apply to our lives in the midst of struggles. Summarize how God has been speaking to you thus far. Ask God to seal these truths to your heart as you write out your thoughts before Him.