

James: Where Faith Gets Real: In Temptation
Glen Elliott - September 10, 2017

Series Big Idea: James is one of the most practical books in the Bible, tackling the real life issues and struggles that all of us face: temptation, self-control, work, anger, poverty, our words, prejudice and more. The book challenges our consumeristic and complacent nature as Americans and challenges us to live out a faith that is active and makes a difference. It is a book that combines the teachings of Jesus with the wisdom of the Proverbs to show us the perfect law that gives freedom. James' whole purpose is to help us make sure our faith gets real in everyday life.

Message Big Idea: We are tempted by our desire to engage in things that look so good and promise so much but end up at best leaving us empty and at worse, damaging and destroying us and those we love. In the face of temptation we have to ask this basic question - Is what God wants for us and gives us better than what the temptation promises? This is where faith gets real. It refuses to be deceived by the hollowness of the temptations and chooses the richness of God's ways.

Main Idea: What God offers you is better than whatever is tempting you.

Main Text: James 1:13-18

Reflection/Discussion Questions:

1. Share a time when you were tempted and gave into buying something, saying something or doing something that later you realized was a really bad decision. Why was that action or decision tempting? What was the result?
2. In what areas of life are you most likely to be tempted? What are your vulnerable areas that you most often struggle with? Can you identify why that area is so vulnerable?
3. Is being tempted itself a sin? Or is it only when we give into the temptation and actually do something that it becomes a sin?
4. What are the similarities and differences between trials (James 1:2-12) and temptations (James 1:13-18)? How are both a test? How is the testing different?
5. How you define faith? How is a real living faith vital to our ability to resist temptations?

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Main Idea: What God offers you is better than whatever is tempting you.

Message:

I was checking the weather for a trip that I'm making to Ukraine on my iPhone 6. An ad popped up. It promised a free new iPhone 7. I actually rarely get these pop up ads and I had never got one with that particular weather app. So I thought it might be legitimate and proceeded to the next screen to see more. I was curious. The next screen informed me that I was one of the lucky winners of a new iPhone 7. It did say I had to pay for postage and handling which is fair and then asked me for my personal information. It was tempting. It was so dangerous! You know what would have happened. If I had given all my personal information and a credit card number for shipping and handling, I would have been another sucker for a rip off and identity theft.

That moment was the perfect picture of what temptation is. A temptation comes from someone or something that intends to harm us, but they make the offer look so good and promising. Over the centuries the Devil has become an expert at tempting us to make bad choices that will hurt us, hurt our relationship with God and damage important relationships. Folks, the Devil is not like God. He can't read our minds. But he is so experienced with our human condition, that he knows how to tempt us well.

That's where real faith comes in. Faith is trust. Do we really have faith in God or really trust God and his ways so much that we can say "no" to the temptations that are contrary to a good God? We are continuing our series from the book of James and we call this series *Where Faith Gets Real*. It is in the face of temptations that we need a real faith that will guide us well so we can say "no" to the temptations that will hurt us. We need a real faith and trust that helps us see that God's ways and what God offers is far better than what the temptation promises. James makes it so clear and that's what we are going to explore today. So here's my point: **What God offers you is better than whatever is tempting you.**

We are hit daily, even hourly by temptations. The temptation of lust come constantly through social media, TV, movies and online. There is outright porn everywhere plus a continual bombardment of immoral sexual examples. And this affects not just adults, but our kids are being exposed. We are bombarded with ads trying to get us to buy stuff we either don't need, won't serve us well or we can't afford. And the temptation of ease - can you say Amazon? Have you ever bought something that later you knew you shouldn't have bought? And the temptations just keep coming like food. It is necessary to nourish us, but it has a price when we use it for comfort. And why do today what you can put off until tomorrow = the temptation to procrastinate. And there's the temptation to tell a lie or give a partial truth to protect ourselves from rejection or to avoid a very needed and necessary hard conversation. And we are tempted to take control of our lives because we really don't trust God and his ways. I could go on and on about the temptations to worry, be anxious, seek vengeance and more.

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If I haven't hit a temptation that you've actually faced in the last 24 hours, then my guess is you are either in a monastery somewhere or the power has been out for a long time and your battery on your computer or smart phone is dead. I've faced every temptation I've described here in the recent past. So I'm not just talking about you. I'll bet you have faced many or most of these and more as well!

And let's be clear right up front. Being tempted is not a sin. Jesus was tempted - Matthew chapter 4. In fact the more you are trying to follow the way of Jesus the more you'll be aware of how much you are being tempted. Being tempted is not a sin. Don't feel guilt or shame over being tempted. It is when we give into the temptation that we sin.

James is a book about practical faith, about real faith in real life. He addresses the temptations that will come to all of us all the time. So let's read James 1:13-15 (pg. 825 - NIV) - ***¹³ When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; ¹⁴ but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. ¹⁵ Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.***

Now, we might easily miss something here as we read this in English. James originally wrote in Greek and it was translated into English. What is interesting is that the word James uses that is translated "tempted" is the same word he used in verse 2 that is translated "trial." Last week we talked about trials. So if it is the same word in the original, what's the difference between a trial and a temptation? Both trials and temptations test our faith! Trials happen to us because we live in a broken world. The hard times, challenges, pain and difficulties test our faith. While God is not the author of our trial, if we look at the trial through the eyes of faith, we can see that God will use the trial to make us more like Jesus.

But often a trial becomes the source of a temptation. Trials test us big time to see if we'll trust God and his ways and refuse to buy the lie of the benefits we'll get if we do what is clearly not according to God's will.

Now what is interesting is that it is human nature in both trials and temptations to blame God. We want and even some of us expect God to keep us from both trials and temptations. It is far easier to blame God for our hard times or temptations, rather than accepting our responsibility to practice our faith. So James, right off, knows that the people he is writing to who are facing trials are also being tempted. And they are also tempted to blame God for the spiritual temptations they face.

So let's be absolutely clear. James reminds us that God is not ever tempted by evil. God is holy and there is no sin, evil or wrong in or about him. And further, he will never tempt us to do anything contrary to his ways. God will not tempt us. Never!

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So James tries to help us resist temptations by giving us what I call the **Progression of temptation** found in verses 14 and 15. The first part of the cycle is this: **1) Enticed by desire**. It is our desire that will cause us to be enticed and go after the temptation. James is using a hunting and fishing metaphor here. The worm on a fish hook or the cheese in a mouse trap is the bait to entice the animal that will trap them. And in this hunting game that the Devil plays, you and I are the “animal” being hunted and fished for. The game is full of deceit because the you never really get to benefit from the bait you desired. You grab it and it is certain death.

A temptation will always be something that entices and hooks a desire of some kind. Temptations look good. We believe it will make us feel good. It promises to make us better or even the best. It promises to give us control. It will fill our hunger, not just food hunger. It is subtly promising to replace God! Temptations always promise to be pleasurable, bring comfort and be good for us and to us and the subtle message is it will do it better than anything God can offer.

When we’ve been enticed or lured by something we want or desire, then the next thing in the progression of temptation is this: **2) Sin is conceived**. The bait has been taken. We made a decision and acted in some way to engage in or with the temptation. We are now sinning by doing something that is contrary to the way of Jesus. We have been deceived and in some way disobeyed God.

But the progression is not done yet. As we continue to sin then that allows the sin to mature. As we practice sin, we get better at it. James says that sin can become full-grown. Sin will grow in its control and damage if it is not stopped. And full-grown sin leads to **3) Death**. The death may be in this life and it may carry over into the next life. Death here is a picture of misery, destruction and ruin. This is serious! If we allow sin to grow in us, our relationship with God can be so damaged that we are in danger of spiritual death!

What I’m about to say I say often. I need to keep reminding us of this. Satan has one ultimate purpose and that is to destroy all that God created. He can’t destroy God, so he tries to destroy that which God created and loves. That which is most important to God is you and me. 1 Peter 2:8 tells us that the Devil is like a lion prowling around seeking anyone he can devour! He wants to wound us, tear us up and ultimately kill us. What started out as enticing bait turns out to be the bait that can lead to our destruction.

Not only are we all tempted, but we all sin. Sometimes we are tempted and sin and then realize it and stop. That is spiritual victory! That’s the work of faith! The sooner we realize we are sinning and stop it the more likely we are to limit the damage to us and others. And God has promised to forgive us of our sin when we confess those sins that we are aware of.

If you are addicted to porn, prescription medicine, gossip, worry or whatever; stop before it takes total control of your life and brings spiritual death. If we keep on sinning,

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James warns us that it matures. The more or longer we continue in a sin the better we get at it. We become better at doing it and hiding it. And as we learn to hide it, it actually gains even more power over us.

Now let's continue in James 1:16-18 (pg. 825 - NIV). This will lead us to the main point I'm making today - ***16 Don't be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters. 17 Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. 18 He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.***

Okay, there are lots of metaphors here - gifts, lights, shadows, birth, firstfruits. Let's see if we can pull all these ideas together. Temptations come through what looks good and glitters and makes false promises. Temptations lead to the shadow of sin and death. James is challenging us to not be deceived by "flashy" temptations. They look promising. Temptations are false fillers - they don't really satisfy. That's because they do not come from the true, trustworthy and good God. There is only one source of true good, the author of truth who shines the truth through his word - the Bible. God's light exposes what is in the shadows. We are pioneers or "firstfruits" of a people that trust the word of God and choose to live by faith. Through faith or trust in God's true word we can resist temptation.

The point is this: **What God offers you is better than whatever is tempting you.** That's real faith - trusting that what God gives and his instruction on how to live are far better than the deceitful bait that seems good but is in fact leading us to a bad place. So when we are being tempted, in faith, we ask these questions: "Is this the good that God desires for me?" "Is this really better than God and his ways?" Or, "Will I sell myself short of God's good if I take the bait?" Don't be deceived by what the world offers. It won't in the long run be good for you. It won't fill you. Temptations are a broken and twisted version of what God offers. Trust the one who truly wants the best for you in this life and in the next. Don't be deceived by the temptations to sin.

God's best starts when we decide to trust God and his ways. Faith is not something magical or weird. Here's what faith is - it is trusting that what God offers is better than what the world offers and promises. The way of Jesus is your best shot at finding a life of meaning, purpose and joy. What God offers is a path to having a real and deep relationship with the God of the universe! His ways offer the best hope of having satisfying relationships with others. He offers peace and satisfaction the world can never give. He offers the forgiveness of our sins. And what he offers is not just for this life as important as that is, but it is your only hope to be with God for eternity.

And it starts when we decide to follow Jesus. I urge you to make that decision. I urge you to carefully consider Jesus and his way. If you have questions, we want to talk to you. We have folks in a room called Starting Point or room 1 off the courtyard who would be happy to talk with you today or anytime. Resist the temptations that provide temporary and limited comfort for a love and life that never ends.

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If you've made that decision to follow Jesus, then Jesus asks us to affirm that decision in baptism. In baptism, we make a promise to follow the way of Jesus to the best of our ability all the days of our lives. We promise to give him our everything and nothing less. We declare that we are ready to live by a real faith - trusting him with our lives. Now, when we make the decision to follow Jesus, it doesn't mean the temptations will stop. The difference is we have one we follow who gives us a better alternative to the temptation.

If you are ready to make that life-long promise, we are going to have that opportunity right now. In a moment we'll sing a song. No matter where you are today on our campus, come here to the auditorium and to the door near the front by the stage to your left. There are people there to help you. We have everything you need including private dressing rooms, towels and clothes to be baptized in. You just have to make the decision to come. Don't hesitate. I am sure that the devil is tempting some of you right now not to make that decision. Resist the temptation and trust that **What God offers you is better than whatever is tempting you.** For those of you live online, talk to your host about options for being baptized. So would you stand and as we sing, if you are ready to commit to and promise to follow Jesus through baptism, come and I'll meet you by the door to my right.